

THE EARLY HISTORY OF CLAY COUNTY

A Wilderness That Could Be Tamed

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Chapter 5

Return to Spanish Control and Unrest (1783-1821)

Page 83

Arrival and Impact of Zephaniah Kingsley

Sometime in 1803, Zephaniah Kingsley Jr. arrived and chose to settle in East Florida. Kingsley was born in Bristol, England, in 1765, and had immigrated to Charles Town, South Carolina, with his family just before the start of the American Revolution in 1775. During the Revolution his father tried to raise a company of soldiers who professed to be loyal to King George III. When local authorities found out about the plan the Kingsley family was promptly asked to leave. Kingsley's father decided to move to Nova Scotia but Kingsley Jr. returned to Charles Town and then moved to the Caribbean where he worked and lived in the Danish colony of St. Thomas.

During the end of the eighteenth century and until the time he arrived in East Florida, Kingsley became a profitable slave trader and merchant. The slave rebellion in Haiti, which started in 1791, forced many traders and merchants to conduct business in Havana, Cuba, and it is likely because of this that Kingsley decided to move to East Florida.

After finishing business in Havana, Kingsley sailed to St. Augustine and on September 24, 1803, he swore allegiance to the Spanish crown. At the time he became a Spanish citizen, Kingsley was worth 67,160 pesos.

When he arrived in St. Augustine, Kingsley began seeking land. He would eventually buy the plantation of William Pengree from his widow

Rebecca, who was unable to maintain the plantation that covered twenty-six hundred acres contained in four separate tracts. Heavily laden with debt to the Panton-Leslie Company, Rebecca had been forced to sell some of her slaves, leaving her without enough field hands to work the crops. Thus she became unable to support herself and family. Her main plantation "Laurel Grove," or "Mount Laurel," contained 1,753 ½ acres and sat on the same site that John Perceval had chosen for James Crisp's plantation during the British rule. The plantation was on a small bluff that ran parallel with the St. Johns River and included a variety of pine, oak, cypress and cedar. Although Pengree still attempted to work the plantation to support herself and her slaves, many of the fields that had once been cleared were now overgrown. Since her husband's death in 1793, Rebecca had struggled to maintain the plantation but finally sold it to Zephaniah Kingsley in 1803. At the time of William Pengree's death the plantation had thirty-eight slaves and only the Fatio Plantation, located directly east, was larger.

Page 84

The second-largest tract of land that Rebecca sold contained 626 acres and was known as "Laurel Branch," which Kingsley would later name "Spring Field." Located along present-day Doctors Lake Drive in the housing development called The Springs, Spring Field became one of Kingsley's busiest farming locations. The last two tracts of land that Rebecca sold were small. One was called "Buen Luceso," or "Good Fortune," and contained 121 acres. The smallest contained 100 acres and was called "Cooke." On November 26, 1803, under the watchful of Jose de' Zubegarreta, Rebecca Pengree and her son, Eliza Leslie, signed over the deed of the 2,600 acres to Kingsley for the sum of \$5,200, which Kingsley paid in cash.

Over the next half year, Kingsley's slaves cleared fields, planted crops and constructed buildings, while Kingsley himself planned for the future of his new plantation. After securing his slaves and instructing the overseer on his plans for Laurel Grove, Kingsley left his new acquisition

and sailed the Atlantic to acquire additional laborers. In May 1804, Kingsley sailed his ship the Laurel up the St. Johns River, stopping at San Vicente Ferrer to register twenty-one slaves from St. Thomas. Two months later, he returned from Havana with ten more. From July 1804 through November 1806, Kingsley was primarily purchasing slaves in Mozambique and Zanzibar while making a stop at Havana on his return. When he returned to Laurel Grove after this long voyage he was accompanied by three Negro females, one named Anta Majigeen Ndiaye, who would later become his wife, better known as Anna Kingsley.

When Anna arrived at Laurel Grove she had just celebrated her thirteenth birthday and was pregnant with Kingsley's child. Where and when Zephaniah and Anna were married is not known.

Page 85

Kingsley stated that he always considered Anna to be his wife and those who conducted business with Kingsley knew this to be true. Kingsley recalled that their "connubial relations took place in a Foreign land" where the marriage was "celebrated and solemonised [sic] by her native African customs." Toward the end of his life Kingsley still considered Anna his wife, although it was "never celebrated to the forms of Christian usage." He described her as a "fine, tall figure, black as jet, but very handsome. . . . very capable, and could carry on all the affairs of the plantation in my absence, as well as I could myself. She was affectionate and faithful, and I could trust her."

An English-speaking visitor to Kingsley's Laurel Grove would have found it difficult to understand the many languages they heard. The different dialects that the slaves spoke would have been heard through the fields and in the various shops that dotted Laurel Grove. Kingsley's slaves were from the Eabo, Calabari, Badie, Soo Soo, and Zinguebari tribes of Africa.

Kingsley used the topography and natural resources at Laurel Grove to his advantage. He divided his land into four distinct operations: Laurel Grove, Shipyard, Spring Field and the newly acquired Cane Field. His house of residence was situated near the St. Johns River on

a small bluff among the hardwood trees that remained at Laurel Grove. His first home, the old Pengree house, was a story and a half with a single brick fireplace and two Piazzas. After his marriage to Anna, Kingsley built a larger and finer house that was framed. Measuring thirty by thirty-five feet, it had double piazzas, two brick chimneys—one on each end of the house, each with a double fireplace—and a kitchen. It soon became one of the nicest houses on the St. Johns. Nearby was a storehouse that measured twenty-six by thirty feet, used primarily to store bulky items such as

Page 86

bushels of salt, barrels of “Jamaica spirits” and gunpowder. Later Kingsley built a larger frame house measuring thirty-six by forty feet, two stories high with a brick chimney. The roof was covered “with the best cedar shingles.”

The merchandise housed in his store was not just for the daily use of his plantation. He routinely stocked it with merchandise that other inhabitants needed and requested. At the time of its destruction during the Patriot Rebellion its contents were valued at \$2,684.50. Also on Laurel Grove were a barn (twenty-five by forty feet), a frame cotton house (thirty by forty feet), a frame carpenter’s shop (thirty by forty feet), a blacksmith’s shop, cart house, fodder house and twelve Negro houses.

Surrounding Laurel Grove was a three-rail fence that stretched for two and a half miles. The fence ran from the river, “about a mile from the point of Laurel Grove to two miles up Doctors Lake” and according to one inhabitant was “uncommonly high.” Drinking water was obtained from a well that was located near the house and lined with cypress boards. Though cotton was the primary cash crop grown at Laurel Grove, Kingsley expanded the orange grove to nine acres containing 750 mandarin orange trees.

The shipyard was located on the north bank of Doctors Lake just west of its mouth. Here, Kingsley built small vessels that could ply along the coast transporting merchandise from Savannah, Charleston or Havana. The workshop was an inexpensive building that was made of

poles placed in the ground with the sides boarded. A large steaming stove and blacksmith's shop were also located upon the premises, as were nine Negro houses. John Haydn performed the task of carpenter at the shipyard.

Spring Field was the primary farming community and was located just west of Laurel Grove, along present-day Doctors Lake Drive in Orange Park. It was here that Kingsley grew sea-island cotton, corn, peas and potatoes and raised livestock including cattle, hogs and poultry. The natural spring provided a source of power for a mill. The spring, surrounded by small sloping hills, was dammed, creating a small pond. When the water spilled over the dam it fell with enough force to turn a wheel for the mill.

Also at Spring Field were a large corn house and fifteen Negro houses. Because of Spring Field's distance from Laurel Grove, a slave named Peter managed the fifty slaves who worked there. Unlike other slaves who worked there, Peter was not new to Florida, as he had been a manager on the Sanchez plantation and it was there that he had learned the skill that made him a valuable asset to Kingsley. Laurel Grove, unlike many other plantations in the area, had Negro managers.

Lands farther west along Doctors Lake **and those around present-day Kingsley's Lake were also purchased by Kingsley.** These lands were used to supply lumber for his shipbuilding and sawmill and it was a place for his cattle to roam and graze. Black Creek was used to float logs to the St. Johns River.

[Note: Although the Legend of how Kingsley Lake was named may be more "interesting to some" I believe it was named Kingsley's Pond, and later called Kingsley Lake, due to Zephaniah Kingsley's ownership of land in this area. Kevin Hooper has information that validates this ownership.]

The last parcel of land on Doctors Lake that Kingsley purchased was called "Fuente del Alamo," or "Elm Spring." William Cain (Kane) had agreed to sell his property in 1807, but the transaction was not finalized until September 1, 1809. Cain had acquired the property via the

1790 headright rule on November 30, 1791, and his grant contained three hundred acres. By the time the deed was signed and turned over to Kingsley, Cain had died and the deed was signed by his daughters Elizabeth, Margaret and Anna, who received \$120 and “one half pipe of rum.”

To help better promote the activities that were part of daily life at Laurel Grove, Kingsley instituted a task system for the slaves. At the start of each day, tasks were assigned and when complete the slaves would be able to attend to their own gardens or domestic affairs. This usually amounted to the slaves hoeing their cornfields or fishing on the river. Many times, the slaves grew more than they could consume and sold their extra crops. Many were able to sell as many as twenty bushels of corn. There was no interference from Kingsley with the slaves’ domestic affairs, as he let them govern themselves in a manner of their own choosing, Saturdays were a

Page 88

time of excitement at Laurel Grove and Spring Field. A lighter work schedule was assigned in the morning and the remainder of the day was used as the slaves wished. Kingsley encouraged his slaves to use this time for dancing and merriment and although the slaves were unable to visit other plantations, Kingsley often invited the “decent neighboring people” to participate in the weekly festivities. Many times the slaves competed against one another in dancing and the women would compare skills in sewing and fashion.

Occasionally a slave would need to be punished, but according to Kingsley it was rare. Kingsley described his slaves as “perfectly honest, and obedient, andquite happy.” According to him, the only fear the slaves had would be that of offending Kingsley himself. If that happened he would shame them in front of others. If a more severe form of punishment was needed it was administered but was quite “light.” Kingsley did not wish to instill fear in his slaves, but rather knowledge. He wanted them to learn skills that were useful not only to his plantation but also to the slaves themselves. As an individual slave

became more knowledgeable and trustworthy they could be hired out and have the opportunity to gain extra income. As Kingsley put it,

My object was to excite their ambition and attachment by kindness; not to depress their spirits by fear and punishment....they had nothing to conceal from me, and I had no suspicion of any crimes in them to guard against. Perfect confidence, friendship and good understanding reigned between us.

More information from this book will continue with “The Patriot War”.

This book, “The Early History of Clay County, A Wilderness That Could Be Tamed” by Kevin S. Hooper and “Parade of Memories, A History of Clay County Florida” by Arch Fredric Blakey can be purchased from the Kopi-Shak in Middleburg, Amazon.com and the Middleburg Historical Society. Both are very interesting reading and are available in the Bradford and Clay county libraries.

Page 89

The Patriot War

The relative calm and economic growth that had prevailed over the last five to seven years was coming to an end. Since Spain decreed to end the immigration of Americans into the territory, the robust economy that was being built started to decline. Imports and exports were down from a high point in 1802-03, and in 1807 President Thomas Jefferson signed the Embargo Act, which prohibited American exports. Two years later the importation of slaves into the United States ceased.

The economic sanctions were directly related to the Napoleonic Wars in Europe. Great Britain became an ally of Spain (along with Portugal) and the war taxed the strength of the Spanish military. Those troops that were not key to the defense of East Florida were sent back to Spain and an even greater reliance was put upon the militia. In 1810-11 the Spanish government essentially collapsed, as the French had taken over Spain. This collapse had a ripple effect on the Americans wanting to expand the United States. Because of the lack of a central government, the governor of East Florida was left to defend

the land without the expectation of help from Europe. To make matters worse, rumors of a possible slave insurrection were circulating,

It took eight days for information about the insurrection to pass from Augusta, Georgia, to Savannah, and then to John Houston McIntosh, who was conducting business at St. Mary's. A letter was intercepted from a Negro in Green County, Georgia, that was written to a Negro in North Carolina. The letter claimed that on April 22, 1810, the Negroes in Georgia would proceed to work in the morning and then rise up and kill those whites possessing arms. As the slaves acquired more guns they expected to become stronger. The cause was for "freedom," as they had "served this cruel land long enuff [sic]."

Page 90

Upon receipt of the warning, McIntosh immediately wrote James Cashen to inform him about the potential danger. McIntosh ordered the first brigade of militia to be immediately formed and use any and all methods to guard against this evil. Upon receipt of McIntosh's letter, James Cashen forwarded the documents to Governor White and stated that he would use every means available to "guard against an evil of such magnitude."

On the twenty-fourth of April, Cashen informed Captain Nathaniel Hall and Lieutenant William Craig of the potential insurrection. The standing order from the governor was to use all "diligence...and such measures adopted as may be most likely to maintain tranquility & good order for the King, service & the general interest of this Province." Shortly there after, the officers of the militia for the district of St. Johns met. Captains Andrew Atkinson and Nathaniel Hall, along with Lieutenants Archibald Atkinson, William Craig, Ruben Hogans and William Lawrence, found that "upwards of 50 guns belonging to negroes had been repaired last year by a gun smith named Toomer, since dead, [and] that there were upwards of 100 guns besides other weapons in the hands of the negroes with the District." In addition, they believed that a mulatto man named Morris, who had arrived from Georgia, was an "active encourager of the intended insurrection." Coupled with these facts, and the perceived notion that the Negroes

were more insolent and disobedient than usual, the officer concluded that they must act quickly.

Not wishing to lose any more time, they reported to Governor White that they “considered it absolutely necessary that the arms should be taken from the Negroes,” as many had recently purchased additional guns. On April 30, orders were received and given by Captains Andrew Atkinson and Nathaniel Hall that several small detachments of men be sent to each plantation while the Negroes were at work in the fields. The militia was to search each slave quarters and confiscate all arms that were found belonging to the slaves.

On Monday, June 4, much to the astonishment of the militia, several plantation owners refused to have the Negro houses searched and in many cases, no guns were found where consent was given. It was believed by some of the officers that many of the Negroes had been informed of the surprise inspection and were able to hide their guns beforehand. However, that was not the case with George Fleming’s and Zephaniah Kingsley’s plantations.

Fleming protested to Governor White, demanding that he be compensated for the arms that were taken from his plantation. He informed the governor that the weapons were used to defend his plantation from the “savage Indians” and to drive off wild animals that happened to graze in his fields. The confiscation of eleven weapons at Kingsley’s plantation also generated protest. This time it was from one of Kingsley’s slaves.

Monday morning, June 4, was like every other day at Laurel Grove, until the militia under the command of Corporal George Morrison arrived. Upon approaching the slave Abraham and demanding that he turn over his weapons, Private George Cook was verbally assaulted. Cook, trying to maintain his military bearing and keep the situation under control, told Abraham that he was under orders from Governor White, and it was necessary to comply with the orders to remove the arms belonging to the Negroes along the St. Johns. Abraham was not impressed. He again demanded that his arms be left alone and if they were not, he would go see Lieutenant William Craig and “that if he did not give him satisfaction that he would go to Governor White

[and] would speak his mind.” Abraham became more furious as the ordeal drew on and with his adrenaline increasing he became more angry and bold. Still fuming the next morning, Abraham traveled to Private Andrew Maclean’s house where he stated that he was going to see Governor White to retrieve his gun that he did not care if the governor “sent him to the Guard House to the Fort or to the Devil.”

Two days after the militia scoured the province, they met with several other plantation owners and some slaves at the Cowford Ferry. Both Abraham and Peter were present. during the meeting, Peter demanded that his weapons be returned. When told they would not be, Peter became irritated and boldly proclaimed to all those present that “things would take a turn & that the negroes would yet have their arms.” Many of the other officers present had already been informed of the abusive language Abraham had used and, not wishing to take any more abuse or let the two hotheaded slaves get out of control, Lieutenant Craig had the men arrested and taken under guard to St. Augustine where Governor White could examine the circumstances of their arrest.

To complicate matters, Zephaniah Kingsley was absent and therefore both Abraham and Peter, during his absence, were in charge of his property. At their judicial tribunal in St. Augustine, Abraham stated it was his duty to take responsibility of the plantation and to not do such would be to fail Kingsley. Abraham stated that upon the soldiers’ arrival they had demanded “keys to all the habitations from a female slave in charge of all the interior interests of our master.” When she replied that she could not turn over the keys because she had not been ordered to do

so by Abraham or Peter, the soldiers, “broke the doors of the house of the Negroes [and destroyed] as much as it was their pleasure to trample.” Governor White was not impressed with the reasoning of both Abraham and Peter and ordered that they both receive fifty lashes and be forced to perform “labor for one month in chains of shackles.”

It should be noted that during this whole affair both Abraham and Peter had the means to freely travel and speak to the various officers of the militia. So it appears that to some extent the officers knew that the men did indeed have some limited powers when Kingsley was not present. Otherwise, at the first instant they were found away from their master's plantation without a written pass, they would have been immediately arrested.

The possibility of a slave insurrection slowly diminished in East Florida and the slaves never revolted. In all, only forty-one guns, along with a few swords were found to be in the possession of the Negroes. Because the arms were considered to be of "little value as not to be worth the expense of a sufficient guard," they were thrown into the St. Johns River. This method of destruction was agreed to be the best and most cost-effective way to dispose of the weapons.

The paranoia in East Florida was a preview of the schism that was going to explode during the next three years. Many slave owners along the St. Johns treated their slaves much differently than those along the St. Mary's. Men like Kingsley, Fleming and Fatio saw the benefits of treating their Negroes with kindness and promoting their own communities within the plantations. Many times, when the Indians did manage to capture a Negro, that individual would oftentimes make their way back to the plantation if they managed to escape. Kingsley, who was interviewed in 1842, was found puzzling to the Northerner who spoke to him. Lydia Maria Child found his mind to be a "great puzzle to [a] phrenologist." The two conversed over the logic of what Kingsley wrote in his 1828 pamphlet, *A Treatise on the Patriarchal, or Co-operative System of Society*. In his paper Kingsley argued for slavery, not prejudice—that the difference should be between slave and free, not color. The interviewer, obviously frustrated on some points that Kingsley presented, thought that it would be impossible to penetrate or change his mind and any attempt to do so would be analogous to firing "small shot at the hide of a rhinoceros."

Though Kingsley had been a slave trader, there was mutual respect between himself and those he owned. Kingsley said, "I do all I can to make them comfortable, and they love me like a father. They would do any thing on earth to please me." When asked if he felt badly about

leaving these “faithful, kind-hearted people, to the cruel chances of slavery” he replied that he did but the best we can do in this world is to balance evils judiciously.”

The United States election of 1810 sent a message to President James Madison – the United States was ready for war. The popular cry of “peace at any price” was soundly defeated as more than sixty new members of Congress were elected that year, with the majority of them against peace. President Madison had heard plans and ideas for acquiring Florida and it was apparent that the opportunity was now at hand. In January 1811, President Madison invited General George Mathews to the White House for a meeting. Mathews, who was a military officer in the American Revolution and once governor of Georgia, was excited

Page 93

about the meeting. He had, for several years, been surveying a plan for an invasion of East Florida.

Prior to this meeting, the governor of West Florida, Vincente Folch, had offered President Madison the capitulation of West Florida to the United States. Folch had no government and very few resources to defend it from the French. Soon hotly contested debates were part of everyday life in Congress. Although the president’s party held the majority, he was not guaranteed a victory on his policies. One of the newly elected members to Congress, Henry Clay, whole heartedly supported the idea of accepting West Florida and by some means trying to secure East Florida before the British.

During the meeting between President Madison and General Mathews, Mathews reiterated what was in his report that had been submitted to the State Department – that the inhabitants of East Florida wanted to become a part of the United States. Furthermore, the whole province was only defended by 250 soldiers, “the whole of which are stationed at Augusteen [sic].” Mathews reported to the president that he had personally met with five influential inhabitants of East Florida ---

John Houston McIntosh, Fernando Arrendondo, Andrew Atkinson, Justo Lopez and George Fleming --- and it was agreed by all that they would rather become part of the United States than be subjects of Napoleon Bonaparte.

Secretary of State James Monroe openly supported President Madison. Thomas Jefferson, who was now retired and had returned to Monticello, wrote to Representative John Epps, exhorting that he try to persuade his colleagues to authorize the president to take possession of East Florida. If Great Britain were to take it, “we shall never get from them but by a war,” expressed Jefferson. Jefferson, who was positive that England would seize Florida reputedly for Spain, outlined a plan for a successful United States operation. To gain control of Florida Jefferson thought:

We should take it with a declaration 1. That it is a reprisal for indemnities Spain has acknowledged due to us. 2. To keep it from falling into the hands in which it would essentially endanger our safety. 3. That in our hands it will still be held as a subject of negotiation. The leading Republican members should come to an understanding, close the doors, and determine not to separate till the vote is carried and all the secrecy you can enjoin should be aimed at until the measure is executed. The militia of Georgia will do it in a fortnight.

On January 26, General Mathews was informed that he had been appointed as a commissioner “for carrying into effect certain provisions of an act of Congress relative to the portion of the Floridas situated to the East of the river Perdido.” His instructions stated that he was to be:

Regulated by the dictates of your own judgment, on a close view and accurate knowledge of the precise state of things there, and of the real disposition of the Spanish Government, always recurring to the present instruction as the paramount rule of your proceedings. Should you discover an inclination in the Governor of East Florida, or in the existing local authority, amicably to surrender that province into the possession of the United States, you are to accept it.

In addition Mathews was promised the aid of the United States military and the sum of \$10,000, which could be drawn at a bank in New Orleans or Savannah.

President Madison, with help from Thomas Jefferson, was finally able to get authorization to take control of both East and West Florida. The Congressional bill in part read:

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America, in Congress assembled, That the President of the United States be, and he is hereby authorized, to take possession of, and occupy, all or any part of the territory lying east of the river Perdido, and south of the State of Georgia and the Mississippi territory, in case an arrangement has been, or shall be, made with the local authority of the said territory, for delivering up the possession of the same, or any part thereof, to the United States, or in the event of an attempt to occupy the said territory, or any part thereof, by any foreign government; and he may. For the purpose of taking possession, and occupying the territory aforesaid, and in order to maintain therein the authority of the United States, employ any part of the army and navy of the United States which he may deem necessary.

Mathews was eager to put his plan into motion, but from his past military experience he was smart enough to sense that the time was not yet right. Dr. James Hall, who had recently been expelled from Florida, kept Mathews informed on the current state of affairs in East Florida. Dr. Hall was well acquainted with those in power and before being expelled had had a violent argument with David Solomon Miller in the presence of Captain George Fleming and Lieutenant William Lawrence. Both Hall and Miller were soldiers in Nathaniel Hall's militia company and each was warned of the "evil consequences sometime attendant on such conduct." Dr. Hall wished that the province would be turned over to the United States.

As Mathews met with officials in Washington City and finalized his plans to invade East Florida, Lieutenant William Craig was trying to inform Governor Estrada about the current state of defense. Craig told the governor that the province between the St. Mary's and the St.

Johns Rivers was “defenseless,” and there was very little the militia could do to stop the invaders from entering and plundering it. Through his recent travels he noticed that some of the planters on the west side of the St. Johns River had proposed to erect “temporary fortifications around their houses,” or were in the process on constructing the fortifications. Zephaniah Kingsley, who had just finished construction on his new dwelling house at Laurel Grove, did not want to leave it defenseless. He had his slaves construct a cypress fence around his house and kitchen for protection and has since been able to purchase ten muskets and bayonets, six cartridge boxes, two four-pound cannons with carriage and thirty rounds for the cannons.

It took Mathews and others two months to arrange the necessary force and supplies needed for the invasion. Many of the Spanish subjects living along the St. Mary’s joined Mathew’s force and became instrumental in his plan. Mathew envisioned that a few Spanish subjects could take over the province and, once it was secured, turn it over to the American army. The few Patriot troops that crossed into Spanish territory met with no resistance. As the troops entered the farms and homes, the inhabitants were given two choices: join the Patriots and have protection or leave the territory in three days. When the Patriots invaded, George Fleming was forced to leave his

Page 95

Timber operation that had been established at Roses Bluff on the St. Mary’s River. He left six hundred feet of yellow pine lumber and 120 cords of lath wood that were destined for the firm of Hibberton & Young in Fernandina. Fleming returned to Hibernia where he worked his plantation and made plans in anticipation of the Patriots’ next move.

Gabriel Priest, who later settled along Black Creek near present-day Middleburg, was also affected by the invasion. He had for some time been employed by John McIntosh as a lumber gatherer. Priest’s two Negroes were also employed. When time permitted the three would harvest longleaf pine, and at the time of the invasion Priest had from ten to eighteen thousand feet of pine limber. Priest later claimed that all this lumber was destroyed by the invading forces, whom he was forced to

join.

The United States commander of Point Peter, Major Jacint Laval, had just finished quarreling with Mathews when he started to realize that Mathews's plan had already been put into action. Mathews had informed the Spanish commander Don Justo Lopez that he had the cooperation of several United States gunboats, and that unless he surrendered, the captains of the gunboats would commence the bombardment of Fernandina. Lopez was outgunned and had no choice, so on March 17, 1812, at 4:00 p.m., he tearfully surrendered the town to General John McIntosh and Colonel Lodowick Ashley of the Patriots. The Spanish flag was then lowered and the Patriot flag unfurled for the first time. The flag was white and bore the image of a soldier charging with bayonet fixed and the motto "Vox populi, Lex suprema" ----the voice of the people, the supreme law. The next day General Mathews, with a company of men from the rifle regiment at Point Peter, crossed the St. Mary's and accepted the town for the United States.

George Clark, who remained loyal to Spain wrote his friend O'Reilly, then living in St. Augustine, that "Amelia Island, alas my friend, is no longer ours." Clark expressed to his friend that his letter should be delivered to the governor in person. Clark informed O'Reilly that many of the inhabitants wished to defend themselves but that they had only "fifty guns, a few pistols & swords; six pieces of cannon, the largest a six pounder, a swivel, & two blunderbusses."

After their capture of Fernandina, the Patriots moved south and assembled at the Cowford Ferry, the site of present day Jacksonville. There they discussed how to proceed farther south. General Mathews and a few United States troops were also present. Between Cowford and St. Augustine resided some very influential planters and if the Patriots were unable to secure their help it could present problems. Daniel Delany, second in command of the Patriots, exhorted that "if Zephaniah Kingsley....did not come in & join the Patriots; they would burn & destroy all his property." The decision was made to proceed to Fort Picolata, and a party under the command of Daniel Jones, a Patriot, was sent to Laurel Grove to "compel him [Kingsley] to come into their camp." Rowing upriver from the Cowford Ferry, Jones and

his party met Kingsley and presented him his options ----either join or have his plantation destroyed. Reluctantly, Kingsley agreed to travel with Jones to Fort Picolata where he would spend the next several days waiting and watching the Patriots and trying to decide what he should do.

George Fleming, whose plantation Hibernia was to the south of Kingsley's, gathered his thirty slaves and rowed across the river when the Patriots arrived, fleeing to St. Augustine. Fleming, unable to remove much of his property, left it where it was and hoped for the best. His niece

Page 96

thought that he left because he feared his Negroes might be forcibly taken from his plantation. In all likelihood Edward Wanton, whom Fleming had hired to manage his plantation, was the person responsible for the evacuation of Fleming Island.

While at Picolata, General Mathews and other Patriot officers paraded in front of the recently captured inhabitants. When the United States troops arrived they, too, did the same. Throughout the night the officers made speeches and presentations to show that the "United States had determined to aid & assist the Patriots in taking possession of Florida." After all speeches were given, many of the inhabitants felt, because of the support the United States was giving the Patriots, it was safe for them to join. After all, the economic freedoms the United States had to offer were what many wanted. Even Zephaniah Kingsley agreed.

On March 26, the leaders of the Patriots wrote to Governor Estrada expressing their reasons why some of the inhabitants had revolted. The leaders wrote;

The people of East Florida having long suffered under the tyranny of an arbitrary government and being threatened that a body of merciless savages would be thrown into their country have unanimously with the exception of St. Augustine declared themselves an independent people. They have organized themselves as a military body and have taken possession of all the

country round St. Augustine. More fully to insure[sic] their liberty and independence; and to protect and defend themselves from bloody savages, they have by their constituted local authorities offered to the commissioners of the United States to cede to the United States. The province of East Florida

Page 97

Kingsley's Laurel Grove was a key strategic point along the St. Johns River. It was on the frontier of the settled part of East Florida and the only large established plantation of the west side of the river where the Patriots could feel comfortably secure. As one Patriot put it, "Laurel Grove was a valuable position as to check upon the Indians from the fact that one of the principal paths from the Indian Nation came right to there and the Indians often came to the place to trade." The United States forces also agreed that the site offered many amenities not found elsewhere. Kingsley's new dwelling house was converted into a barracks for both Patriots and United States troops and another building was used as a hospital for the sick and wounded. The military even commandeered Kingsley's boats that were at the mouth of Doctors Lake to help transport men and supplies to Picolata.

While Kingsley initially had reservations about joining the Patriots, he later threw his support to them. He even went as far as trying to secure arms and munitions for the military. Years later, when he was in his seventies, he contended that he had been forced to work with the Patriots. During George Fleming's claim proceedings, Kingsley stated, "I sometimes acted with the Patriots, & sometimes with Col. Smith of the American troops by force."

The Patriots, upon reaching the walls of St. Augustine, quickly took possession of Fort Mose, the old Negro fort located a few miles north of town, and made it their primary base of operation. General Mathews was reluctant to lay siege against the town because he had very little artillery available to him. The excitement of the war soon turned into boredom and the daily routine of mundane tasks grew tiresome. Wishing to expedite St. Augustine's surrender, the Patriot leaders wrote two letters to the influential Don Juan Blas Entralgo. In the letter, the

leaders asked that he exert his influence upon the governor and the “people of the Town and county” to unite with the Patriots and quickly end the fighting. To help make the decision easier, the leaders stated they were authorized to pay “five thousand dollars....to you or anyone that may principally and one thousand dollars each to other active persons [to] bring about the happy result of peace and present security by speedily inducing a union of St. Augustine in the happy and glorious cause.”