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SALMON P. CHASE AND CIVIL WAR POLITICS
IN FLORIDA
by OVID L. FUTCH

When Secretary of the Treasury Salmon P. Chase was seeking the 1864 Republican presidential nomination, he endeavored to build political fences wherever fortune beckoned. One such state was Florida.

The Direct Tax law of 1862 gave him an opportunity for a political footing in Florida. This act provided for the appointment of Direct Tax Commissioners who were to assess real property in insurrectionary districts, advertise the taxes due, and sell at public auction the property of delinquent owners. The Treasury Department was in charge of administering this new law, and responsibility for appointing the Direct Tax Commissioners devolved upon Chase.

Chase was no unprincipled politician who would make appointments with consideration only for personal gain and with disregard for the public interest. But he was practical enough to look for appointees who would, he hoped, competently and faithfully perform their public duties and at the same time be mindful of the interests of the Treasury Secretary. In keeping with this policy, in September 1862, he appointed as Direct Tax Commissioners of Florida: Harrison Reed, John S. Sammis, and Lyman D. Stickney. Reed was a Wisconsin editor and politician who had been in Washington about a year. Sammis was originally a northern man who was living in Florida when the war began. Leaving Jacksonville with evacuating Federal forces in April 1862, he had gone to Washington where he sought a place on the Federal government's payrolls.¹

Stickney was something of an adventurer. He had a forceful personality and was gifted with a disarming demeanor which enabled him to make a very favorable impression on Chase. A

1. *House of Representatives Executive Document*, No. 18, 38th Congress, 2nd Session, pp. 65, 72, 84, 96-98, 165.

lawyer from Vermont, he had dabbled in sundry enterprises in various parts of the country. He appeared in Tallahassee in the winter of 1861-62. There he represented himself as agent for a wealthy New Orleans company interested in developing tropical agriculture in southern Florida. He obtained from the Florida legislature a grant of two townships on condition that he establish a colony within two years. Actually, a group of poor farmers had made up a fund of three hundred dollars to finance Stickney's trip to Tallahassee to procure the grant of land. The speculator took his "colonists" to the Fort Myers region and himself formed a partnership with a Mr. Evans, a recent immigrant from Virginia, who, it was rumored, had moved to Florida to set up a base for receiving African slaves. Stickney assumed half interest in all the slaves and other property Evans owned. Evans was to receive half the future profits from Stickney's colony. Among the implements of Evans's business was an old sloop, which Stickney began operating between Key West and the mainland, trading with Confederates on the mainland and United States government officials at Key West. The military commander at Key West finally put an embargo on the sloop, and Stickney, his "colony" having disintegrated, took up his residence at the principal hotel in Key West. There he started agitating for an election to send a delegate to Congress. When the military commander informed him that no such election would be permitted, he quietly disappeared, leaving unpaid a hotel bill of \$144.² By June 1861 Stickney was in Washington, prospecting for a new place at the public trough. Seeking an appointment to the Florida Tax Commission, he made Chase believe he was a long-time resident of Florida.

Since the Tax Commission could function only in Federal-occupied territory, the first objective of Chase and his agents was to extend the control of Federal armies wherever feasible.

2. *Ibid.*; Samuel Walker to Abraham Lincoln, Apr. 2, 1864, Robert T. Lincoln Collection, Library of Congress.

From the beginning of the war Chase had encouraged military ventures which were consistent with his ideas on how the war should be conducted, and his motives were not censurable. To him, slavery was the great evil, the awful wickedness which had caused the war. Any plan to occupy rebel territory was a direct attack upon slavery, and therefore worthy. Doubtless he persuaded himself that if he were benefited politically, it was only incidental.

Accordingly Chase persistently urged extension of Federal control in Florida. When Stickney proposed to write a history of Florida for northern readers to attract immigrants to the state, Chase heartily endorsed the idea and promised to contribute a chapter.³ Were settlers swarming into Florida from the North, the work of the Tax Commissioners would be easier. The history was never published and there was no great rush of immigrants to Florida in the 1860's, but Chase's agents made a serious bid to secure for him a firm hold on the political allegiance of the state.

From the beginning Stickney was aware of the ambitions of the Secretary of the Treasury and understood that Chase expected the Florida Tax Commissioners to aid in the political reconstruction of the state. Neither would Chase object if the Treasury employees worked to advance his political fortunes. But the Tax Commissioners had a legitimate job to do in Florida. We may assume that Chase believed the men he appointed were capable and would attend to the business of the Treasury Department in a competent manner; but to his mind it was not necessary for them to neglect their duties in order to work for his political advancement. If his personal interests could be helped incidentally, well and good, but the public interest should come first.

3. L. D. Stickney to Salmon P. Chase, Nov. 13, 1865, Salmon P. Chase Letters (microfilm), P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History. Originals in Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress.

Stickney might well have been primarily an "imperialistic carpetbagger,"⁴ but he was also a Chase man, if only for selfish reasons. Furthermore, he was interested, so he asserted, in building up the state - promoting immigration, encouraging agriculture, aiding commerce, and pushing the restoration of Florida to the Union. Again his motives may have been altogether selfish. The richer Florida became, the greater the wealth awaiting exploitation. Similarly, the more influence and power Chase obtained, the greater Stickney's chances of increased awards, provided he retained the favor of his chief. Whatever the motives involved, the fact remains that there was a definite attempt to make Florida a Chase state when it came back into the Union.

Harrison Reed likewise comprehended the nature and conditions of his appointment, and he too seemed willing to play the game. But he and Stickney soon became antagonistic to each other, and one of the outstanding characteristics of the Florida Tax Commission was lack of cooperation. Reed and Stickney clashed for many reasons. For one, Reed resented Stickney's dominance of the commission. From its creation Stickney presumed to act as chairman, although his colleagues never elected him to the position and Chase had not designated him as chairman. Also, Stickney bested Reed in the contest to win first place in Chase's favor, who, impressed with Stickney's energetic bearing and swayed by his flattery, selected him as head organizer of the Chase partisans in north Florida. Is it assuming too much to suppose that Reed felt he should direct the Chase forces? He had not done badly as a politician in Wisconsin, and he was to do far better in Florida.

But Stickney overplayed his cards; his dishonesty was to catch up with him and eliminate him from the higher brackets of post-war carpetbaggers in Florida. The less colorful Reed rose to

4. See George Winston Smith, "Carpetbag Imperialism in Florida 1862-1868," *The Florida Historical Quarterly*, XXVII (Oct., 1948), pp. 99-130, (Jan., 1949), pp. 260-299.

become the state's chief executive. It seems only natural that one who possessed such ambitions and qualities should have smarted in a role subordinate to a man of Stickney's kind.

Sammis apparently was content to carry on, perhaps with the idea also of working for the cause - letting others lead. When the other two Commissioners clashed, he sided with Reed because the daring methods of the unblushing Stickney frightened him.

Stickney did not spend much time in Florida. Less than two weeks after the Commissioners arrived at Fernandina in January 1863, he left for Port Royal, South Carolina, to look after varied interests there. He accompanied the St. Marys expedition from Beaufort, stopping off at Fernandina late in January. Six or eight days later he journeyed again to the sea islands and did not visit Florida again until March 7 when he returned with an expedition for the third occupation of Jacksonville.⁵ As for the assessment of real estate, doubtless Stickney deemed such trivial business a waste of time. While in Fernandina the first time, he prepared written notices that an assessment had been made already, and asked Reed to sign them. Reed refused. They had a lengthy argument, Reed proclaiming the impropriety of giving such notices. Stickney dropped the subject and left on the next boat. Sammis and Reed then enlisted the aid of G. W. Arnott, an old resident of the town, and together they assessed the real property of Fernandina.⁶ The *New York Times* correspondent at Fernandina reported that the work of the Florida Commission was going forward at a commendable pace, and the Commission had already assessed a large amount of property which would soon be sold to loyal citizens.⁷

But Secretary Chase wanted another expedition to Jacksonville. It was essential to the success of the Florida Commission

5. *House of Representatives Executive Document*, No. 18, 38th Congress, 2nd Session, p. 14.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 30.

7. *New York Times*, Feb. 10, 1863.

and a prerequisite to the return of Florida to the ranks of loyal states. In accordance with his chiefs wishes, Stickney labored to get this expedition under way, and it was partly because of his efforts that Federal forces reoccupied Jacksonville in early March 1863.

This occupation however, like its predecessors, was destined to be short and the Federal forces withdrew from Jacksonville again March 29, but Stickney was undaunted. On May 1 he left Fernandina for Hilton Head, carrying his trunk with him. He paid a visit to the sea islands and before the end of April was in Washington bolstering Chase's morale.⁸ Chase was disheartened but far from beaten. He continued to campaign for further operations in Florida - as well as in other states which he thought might be detached from the Confederacy. Writing in May to his brother-in-law, Major B. C. Ludlow, he expressed his views: "I look at the war under both military and political aspects; and it seems to me that military occupation should immediately be followed by political reconstruction, in order to secure permanent advantages." Therefore he would select, as the theatre of operations, those sections of the Confederacy in which reconstruction would be easiest and most stable. These sections were on the Gulf. "I would take Florida, Alabama, Louisiana, and Texas, and make free states of them as rapidly as possible." He would "arm the loyal population, white and black, so as to put them into a condition of self-defense."⁹

Colonel Thomas Wentworth Higginson's colored regiment had been used in the third occupation of Jacksonville. Chase had hoped that Higginson and his black troops would be the means of establishing permanent Federal control there, from which

8. *House of Representatives Executive Document*, No. 18, 38th Congress, 2nd Session, p. 14; Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 267.

9. Chase to Maj. B. C. Ludlow, May 12, 1863, J. W. Schuckers, *The Life and Public Services of Salmon Portland Chase, United States Senator and Governor of Ohio; Secretary of the Treasury, and Chief-Justice of the United States* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1874), pp. 466-467.

place conquering armies would operate to "liberate" the interior of Florida. But Higginson's departure did not end Chase's plans to make use of negro troops in Florida. Colored regiments were being created in Massachusetts, and many leading citizens encouraged the recruiting of chocolate soldiers in the Mississippi Valley. Why not arrange to send some of these troops to Florida? Chase thought it could be managed. To a protege he wrote in mid-May: "The Florida project, which was much discouraged, seems now likely to be realized; and it is not unlikely that colored troops will be mainly relied on for its accomplishment." The first regiment from Massachusetts had already gone to Port Royal. "The second will probably follow in less than a fortnight."¹⁰

Stickney returned to Florida in August 1863 and launched a Chase propaganda campaign. He had set up a newspaper, *The Peninsula*, in Fernandina the previous February. Now he made his brother, John K. Stickney, editor of the paper. Its pages thereafter were frequently adorned with news of Chase, particularly news which put him in a favorable light. When the Secretary went to Ohio in October to vote and campaign for the Republican ticket in the state election, *The Peninsula* kept its readers informed of his movements, the great speeches he made, and the great ovations he received. Long quotations from his speeches often appeared in the columns of the paper.¹¹

L. D. Stickney's visit to Florida in August 1863 was, as usual, brief. He spent two or three days in Fernandina, went to St. Augustine and stayed a day or two, caught the next boat north, and arrived in Washington September 1. There he called on Chase to consult with him about the conduct of affairs in Florida. Military conquest was the pressing need. Stickney thought five thousand men would be enough to subdue Florida, and

10. Chase to Maj. Gen. James A. Garfield, May 14, 1863. *Ibid.*, p. 467.

11. *The Peninsula* (Fernandina), Aug. 13, 20, Oct. 29, 1863; *House of Representatives Executive Document*, No. 18, 38th Congress, 2nd Session, pp. 17, 69-70, 164, 166.

Major-General Quincy A. Gillmore, commanding the Department of the South, was friendly to the idea of a Florida campaign. Stickney hoped to get a Brigadier-General's commission for the Fernandina Commandant, Colonel Plaisted, and have him sent north to raise a brigade for use in Florida. The Tax Commissioner was very anxious that Florida should be made a separate military department, with his Beaufort friend, General Rufus Saxton, in command. Such an arrangement would make easier the work of political organization and give the Chase forces a tighter grip on the state.¹²

Harrison Reed was in Washington too, and the over-worked Treasury Secretary had to listen to the rantings of Reed and Stickney as they accused each other of dishonesty, double-dealing, and fraud. Harrison Reed's brother, Herbert, an appointee in the New York Customs House, wrote to Chase defending his brother and begging the Treasury chief not to let an innocent person be persecuted. He offered to prove that Stickney was the dishonest member of the Florida Tax Commission. For information on Stickney's activities and on Harrison Reed's character, Herbert Reed referred Chase to the three South Carolina District Tax Commissioners, William Henry Brisbane, A. D. Smith, and W. E. Wording. Brisbane was Herbert Reed's father-in-law, and Smith was Harrison Reed's brother-in-law. A week later Brisbane wrote Chase. Stickney, he said, tried to get the South Carolina Commissioners to allow two dollars per line for advertising tax sales. At that rate the bill would have been \$13,340, about seven times the amount the advertising was actually worth.¹³

Chase was hearing from Stickney, too. The latter said Reed had mishandled funds received from the sale of property in Fernandina. Stickney hinted that the political result of permit-

12. *Ibid.*, pp. 14, 151, 168.

13. Herbert Reed to Chase, Nov. 3, 1863, William Henry Brisbane to Chase, Nov. 10, 1863, Salmon P. Chase Letters.

ting Reed to remain on the Commission would be disastrous. In his place, Stickney wanted William Alsop. "His views are in perfect accord with mine."¹⁴ John S. Sammis had enough of the imbroglia and resigned and Alsop replaced him, but Reed hung tenaciously to his appointment, struggling with Stickney for favor in Chase's eyes and ascendancy on the Florida Commission.

Chase had settled on Stickney as his political organizer for north Florida, but south Florida was in a different military department, and he needed someone there to work for him. On September 5, 1863, he offered to Judge William Lawrence of Ohio, an appointment as Federal Judge at Key West, but Lawrence, after long consideration, declined the offer.¹⁵ Then Chase asked the President to give Homer G. Plantz, his private secretary, the District Attorneyship at Key West, and Lincoln granted the request.

Plantz arrived at Key West on November 21, 1863. Two days later he wrote Chase promising to observe the political situation and to determine the politics of each government official at Key West. "Any political views I could give you today," he said, "would be too crude to deserve your attention." Although his observations were not completed, on December 1 he wrote again, trying to give Chase an idea of the difficulties to be surmounted at Key West. Political apathy prevailed. None of the inhabitants were native-born; none expected to stay there permanently. Everyone wanted to make money; on one wanted to take sides on questions. Better yet, no one wanted questions to arise and force him to take sides. Everyone was loyal. From the delegate to the 1861 Florida Convention who had voted for secession, to the "Conks" who sold prize vessels in Havana and Nassau for blockade-runners - all were Union men. But no one was anti-slavery. *The New Era*, an anti-slavery paper which had been

14. L. D. Stickney to Chase, Nov. 3, 1863. *Ibid.*

15. William Lawrence to Chase, Nov. 7, 9, 1863.

published there a year previously, was suppressed by the Commandant, Colonel T. H. Goode, and the new military commander, Brigadier-General Daniel Phineas Woodbury, refused all petitions for permission to revive it. Plantz thought Key West needed a Chase military commander. Then at least one-third of the population would be Chase supporters. A perfect remedy for the situation would be a live general "with a small expedition to operate on the mainland and re-connect Key West with it, by making this the Headquarters of a Floridian Department." If troops could not be sent, a commander would help. Plantz, of course, would not be idle, whether help was sent or not. But without means of contacting other parts of Florida, and with all those in authority at Key West passive or hostile, he would have to move cautiously.¹⁶

On December 12 Plantz penned a twelve-page letter to Chase which contained the result of his analysis of the politics and politicians at Key West. He believed that "unconditional Union men" constituted one-third of the voting population. He discussed the organization of the Court, the Custom House, and the Post Office, analyzed each Federal office-holder, and told Chase how each one would vote. As for the length of his letter, he explained: "If I have occupied more of your time than the importance of the locality would seem to warrant, it is because of the interest you have long taken in Florida affairs." The young attorney congratulated Chase on his appointment of Alsop to Sammis's vacated place on the Florida Direct Tax Commission, and added: "If now we could have a general who would aid us!"¹⁷

When Stickney arrived in Washington, in September 1863, the Deputy Commissioner of Internal Revenue delivered to him a circular signed by Commissioner of Internal Revenue Joseph J. Lewis, stating that an absence of a Tax Commissioner from his de-

16. Plantz to Chase, Nov. 23, Dec. 1, 1863.

17. Plantz to Chase, Dec. 12, 1863.

partment without leave would be a cause for removal. This might have been rather unsettling to one in Stickney's position, for in a year as a Florida Tax Commissioner, he had been not more than forty-five days in Florida. But he was not perturbed. He wrote a letter to Chase and Chase wrote a note to Lewis exempting Stickney from the order.¹⁸ The Treasury head probably convinced himself as usual that such was not inconsistent with the public good.

In December Stickney began a leisurely return to Florida. As usual, he tarried awhile in the sea islands. From there he wrote to Chase of a long talk with General Gillmore, who gave his cordial assent to Stickney's proposition to make Florida "a free state and forever extinguish slavery within its borders." Gillmore was ready *and able*, he said, to redeem Florida with colored troops if the government would consent. Could Chase not influence Secretary of War Stanton to direct him to employ negro troops against Florida rebels? "The time is most favorable." Influential Floridians, he wrote, had recently deserted from prominent positions in the rebel army to the Union side. "They say they left a sinking ship. I think it very important indeed for *you* that Gen'l Gillmore be identified with the Florida conquest. He is anxious to win distinction according to the Republican programme. At the same time, I do not think the Senate ought to be in a hurry to confirm him as a Maj-General. Wait until the Delegation in Congress from Florida ask his confirmation for his services in conquering the rebels of their state." Stickney asked Chase to send a revenue cutter to be used in rounding up Unionists along the coast and the St. Johns River. It was almost indispensable, he said, in organizing a state convention and in later proceedings toward a state organization. Operations on the coast would also add largely to Treasury income.¹⁹

18. *House of Representatives Executive Document*, No. 18, 38th Congress, 2nd Session, pp. 77, 168.

19. L. D. Stickney to Chase, Dec. 11, 1863, Chase Letters.

Stickney went on to Florida, now confident of military aid in reclaiming the state from the rebels. He stayed only one day in Fernandina, then went on to St. Augustine, and staged a "Union meeting" in the district court room on December 19, 1863. This meeting was intended to lay de foundation for the Chase organization in Florida, which, by virtue of such preparation, would be ready to take full advantage of the military conquest so soon to come. The Tax Commissioner himself called the meeting to order. D. R. Dunham was chosen chairman; Calvin L. Robinson and G. N. Papy became secretaries. A Committee drew up resolutions disavowing participation in and responsibility for the rebellion, declaring null and void the action of the secession convention of 1861, asserting that Florida's first interest was the resumption of Federal relations in the Union, declaring that the state constitution should proclaim emancipation, denying rebels the franchise, and providing for reorganization of the state government by "loyal" men. Philip Fraser, Homer G. Plantz, L. D. Stickney, G. N. Papy, William C. Morrill, C. Bravo, Peter Bennett, Calvin L. Robinson, Charles Howe, D. R. Dunham, Bartolo Olivarios, and J. W. Allen were appointed a committee to enact the above measures. The meeting then resolved "that it is desirable that Delegates assemble in Convention at the City of St. Augustine, Florida, on Tuesday, March 1, to amend the State Constitution in conformity to these resolutions." The "Unionists" said nothing about how the delegates to the convention would be chosen. Stickney, Robinson, Adolph Major, and others made speeches, which *The Peninsula* hoped to print in full the following week.²⁰

With the inestimable advantage of hindsight, one may be inclined to regard the resolutions of the St. Augustine Union meeting as remarkably unrealistic. But they were more than the despairing cries of excited agitators; Chase himself had given

20. *The Peninsula* (Fernandina), Dec. 24, 1863.

them his approval prior to the meeting.²¹ Nor should one be hasty to sneer at Chase for having so little political acumen as to think such a scheme could possibly succeed. The Secretary of the Treasury had a sincere desire to see slavery stamped out in all quarters. At the same time, he earnestly sought restoration of the Union. He wanted to believe reports which told of great numbers of loyal Floridians who were eager for deliverance from rebel control. Furthermore, Florida was not Chase's primary concern, even in politics; he could not concentrate on Florida to the exclusion of other states where a much larger number of votes was at stake. And finally, Chase had a man-sized job to do, aside from worrying about military ventures and political speculations. His administration of the nation's finances through the stress of costly civil war was a huge undertaking. All things considered, it is not remarkable that Chase made a ruinous error in calculating the strength of Unionism in Florida.

Writing to Chase of the St. Augustine meeting, Plantz proudly called his chiefs attention to his own presence on the committee to arrange for a convention though he had been unable to go to the meeting.²² The disadvantage of their military situation was clear in the obstacle it presented to the work of the committee, or any effort which involved cooperation between Stickney and Plantz. Key West, Tortugas, and the west coast of Florida to Charlotte's Harbor constituted General Woodbury's command, and were included in the Department of the Gulf, commanded by General Nathaniel P. Banks. The northern part of the state and the east coast, including the Federal strongholds, Fernandina and St. Augustine, were in the Department of the South. The coast and these ports being blockaded, no private ships could communicate with them; and Fernandina and Key West being in separate departments, army and navy

21. Plantz to Chase, Jan. 12, 1864, Chase Letters.

22. *Ibid.*

transports which touched at Fernandina did not go to Key West. In order to reach Fernandina or St. Augustine from Key West, one would have to go first to Hilton Head or New York.

January 1, 1864 found Stickney the presiding officer and principal speaker at another meeting in St. Augustine. This was a negro meeting, held to celebrate the first anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation. He described the meeting to Chase and promised that in the deep south, where Chase had been most hated and his name most abused, he should have "at least one state of undoubted fidelity to your political faith." On the same day Plantz was addressing a similar meeting in Key West and the young attorney was deeply impressed by the occasion. Negroes were there from Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and the mainland of Florida. Plantz wrote Chase a report of his meeting too, with a summary of his speech, which he characterized as "radical-conservative." Many citizens of Key West denounced the meeting, but Plantz thought it had made a rallying point around which Unionism would gather and declare itself. Those who before had hesitated were now taking heart. More people were proclaiming themselves in favor of a reorganization of the state on the basis of freedom, and would not object even to negro suffrage. General Woodbury had established a school for negro children. Plantz considered the favorable trend of affairs the result of his own managerial ability and predicted checkmate for the conservatives in the near future.²³

Why should Chase not have been optimistic about Unionist sentiment in Florida, with such glowing reports coming in from his agents there? On January 7 Stickney mailed him a petition, addressed to the President and signed by "Floridians." requesting aid in ridding the state of rebels. The signers, said Stickney, were all legal voters under the old state constitution, and were

23. L. D. Stickney to Chase, Jan. 11, 1864, Plantz to Chase, Jan. 12, 1864.

eager to fight rebels on Florida soil. In every letter Stickney kept pressing Chase in regard to two things. One was the matter of a successor for Harrison Reed on the Florida Direct Tax Commission. Reed had finally relinquished his position, the resignation becoming effective December 31, 1863. Stickney wanted Major Andrew M. Sallade of Pennsylvania for the place. Further delay in appointing someone, he wrote, would impair the value of the Tax Commission. "I write this not less in your interest than in the public service." The other subject which Stickney always mentioned was the revenue cutter which he so ardently desired to have at his command. If Chase would only send one, Stickney was sure he could gather enough "legal" voters by March 1 (the day set for the St. Augustine Convention) to reorganize Florida on the basis of the President's reconstruction proclamation.²⁴ The proclamation to which Stickney referred was Lincoln's Amnesty Proclamation of December 8, 1863, which set forth the ten per cent plan of reconstruction. According to this plan, citizens were to take the oath of allegiance to the United States in order to become voters. When enough had done this to comprise ten per cent of the state's voters in 1860, Lincoln would recognize a state government of their creation.

Stickney saw General Gillmore in Fernandina on January 10. The general, on a tour of inspection, stopped to talk with the Tax Commissioner about Florida affairs and promised to cooperate in carrying out Chase measures. Next day Stickney wrote Chase, suggesting that he write to Gillmore. Then the general could be more certain that Stickney was not misrepresenting Chase's sentiments.²⁵ Meanwhile Chase was sending Treasury reports and Chase speeches to Florida for distribution. Plantz informed him that both were bearing fruit at Key West. The

24. Stickney to Chase, Jan. 7, 21, 1864.

25. Stickney to Chase, Jan. 11, 1864.

financial administration is as popular here as it is everywhere," he wrote, "and the doctrines of the speeches grow in favor."²⁶

At this stage of the Florida political game, the opposing camp began to make leisurely preparations for the approaching skirmish. Stickney had anticipated Lincoln's interest in Florida, and he was sure it would increase as the time drew nearer for restoration of the state. Characteristically, Stickney had made an effort to ingratiate himself with the President, so that he would be in line for political rewards regardless of the outcome of the contest. On December 2, 1863, just before leaving Washington for New York, the sea islands, and Florida, he addressed a letter to Lincoln. He could not let the occasion pass, he said, "to earnestly urge" the President to authorize the loyal people of Florida to organize a state government in conformity with the constitution and laws of the Untied States. Stickney urged Lincoln to let all persons of lawful age, not disqualified by crime, whose fidelity to his administration and to his proclamation of freedom was unquestioned, be voters. Then the work of restoration would be speedy and permanent. "I make this request with the sincerest conviction that it will contribute much, very much to the honor and glory of your administration."²⁷

This attempt to get Lincoln's favor had no chance of success, or even of consideration. The President was perfectly aware of Stickney's relations with Chase, and if he ever saw the Tax Commissioner's letter, he was probably either amused at its artlessness or disgusted by its asininity. But Stickney knew that Lincoln must sooner or later take some action in regard to Florida, and he was determined not to be dealt out of the game. Immediately after the St. Augustine Union meeting of December 19, 1863, he wrote a letter to John Hay, the Presidents young private secretary. Stickney pictured the St. Augustine meeting as a response to Lincoln's Amnesty Proclamation, and

26. Plantz to Chase, Jan. 12, 1864.

27. Stickney to Lincoln, Dec. 2, 1863, Robert T. Lincoln Collection.

asked Hay to come down to Florida and be the state's representative in Congress. Hay discussed the matter with Lincoln, who said he would appoint Hay "a Commissioner to go to Florida and engineer the business there." The secretary observed from the report of the St. Augustine meeting that there seemed a prospect of getting the reconstruction of Florida under way early the next spring.²⁸

Stickney's invitation to Hay was not a shot in the dark. In company with Major Orliff M. Dorman, Hay had visited in Florida that previous spring, and had called on Stickney's friend, James M. Latta, then publisher of *The Peninsula*, at Fernandina. Latta reported that the three of them had indulged in "general rejoicing and good fellowship."²⁹ Knowing of Hay's interest in Florida, Stickney was sure that if the young secretary came, he would use his influence to help keep Gillmore working on the Florida campaign.

Gillmore himself had already taken steps looking to military operations in Florida. At Stickney's urging, Gillmore, on December 15, 1863, suggested to United States General-in-Chief Henry Wager Halleck that activities in Florida would be profitable. Operating in Florida, he would recover the most valuable portion of the state, cut off a rich source of the enemy's supplies, and increase the number of his colored troops. A week later "Old Brains" replied, giving Gillmore liberty to use his own discretion in regard to operations in the Department of the South, so long as the positions already held in front of Charleston were secure. Gillmore answered that if the War Department had no objection, he would very soon occupy the west bank of the St. Johns River, and establish small depots there, preparatory to an advance west in the near future.³⁰ Be-

28. Tyler Dennett, *Lincoln and the Civil War in the Diaries and Letters of John Hay* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1939), pp. 145-146.

29. *The Peninsula* (Fernandina), Apr. 30, 1863.

30. *Senate Report*, No. 47, 38th Congress, 1st Session, p. 1.

fore Gillmore heard any more from Halleck, John Hay arrived at Beaufort with a letter of instruction from Lincoln requesting that Gillmore supervise Florida reconstruction and keep it "within the range of the late proclamation on the subject."³¹

On January 21 Stickney, who was back in Beaufort, wrote Chase that Major Hay had arrived, commissioned by the President to enroll Florida voters. Hay had told him that Lincoln was highly pleased with the St. Augustine meeting. Stickney assured Chase that Hay would cooperate with the Tax Commissioner, and they would have no difficulty in enrolling the requisite number of voters to set up a state government according to Lincoln's plan. It would be easy now, for the revenue cutter had arrived.³²

Gillmore sent Hay on to Fernandina to extend to the people of Florida an opportunity to avail themselves of the benefits of the Amnesty Proclamation. The general had decided, from the tenor of Lincoln's instructions, and from conversations with Hay, that the President intended to give him no further directions on the subject of political reconstruction in Florida. His intention was to "initiate, guide and control such measures as may be necessary . . . to restore the State of Florida to its allegiance."³³

In Key West, Plantz was becoming restless. He worried about being unable to communicate with Stickney, and fretted about being so far from the center of political movements. He feared the division of the state between two military departments would be fatal to the Chase cause. Nevertheless, he arranged a meeting for January 28 in response to the St. Augustine call of December 19. A majority of the citizens of Key West were opposed to the restoration of Florida according to the Chase

31. John G. Nicolay and John Hay (eds.), *Abraham Lincoln: Complete Works, Comprising His Speeches, Letters, State Papers, and Miscellaneous Writings* (New York: The Century Company, 1894), II, 470.

32. Stickney to Chase, Jan. 21, 1864, Chase Letters.

33. *Senate Report*, No. 47, 38th Congress, 1st Session, pp. 22, 23.

program. Plantz knew this and was apprehensive about the outcome of the meeting. But his opponents of course did not attend the meeting and the Chase resolutions passed easily. The meeting over, Plantz felt cocky again. Writing to Chase, he said that full responsibility for staging the meeting had fallen on his own shoulders. Chase could read about the meeting in the New York *Tribune*. Patting himself on the back, he assured Chase: "I have smoked the conservatives out."³⁴

Chase too was becoming restive under the strain of pending developments. Writing to Stickney on February 1, he said:

Everything is looking very well here, except that our military movements are by no means so energetic as they should be. We cannot afford the prolongation of the rebellion.

I received a letter from General Gillmore today, in which he expressed the intention to clear out Florida forthwith, so that your path to the reconstruction of a Free State, under a Free Constitution, will be plain. I wish you to write me a little oftener. I wish to be kept fully posted by you.³⁵

Stickney was too busy to write very often, but he did manage an occasional optimistic report. Invariably he insinuated that they had nothing to fear from John Hay. Maybe Lincoln had sent his secretary to thwart any attempt on Chase's part to make Florida a Chase state, but if so, Stickney thought he had Hay completely fooled. That is what Stickney wanted Chase to believe and no doubt believed himself. But Hay was not fooled. He understood Stickney's game perfectly, and had no doubt of his own ability to match wits with the Tax Commissioner. Major Hay had ample reason to be confident, for the overpowering weight of advantage lay on the side of the Lincoln forces. The resolutions of the Union meetings at St. Augustine and Key West were completely out of harmony with the idea of enrolling

34. Samuel Walker to Lincoln, Apr. 2, 1864, Robert T. Lincoln Collection; Plantz to Chase, Jan. 27, 29, 1864, Chase Letters.

35. Chase to Stickney, Feb. 1, 1864, Robert B. Warden, *An Account of the Private Life and Public Services of Salmon Portland Chase* (Cincinnati, 1874), p. 569.

voters. Hay had come to Florida to see that reconstruction was conducted according to the presidential plan. His task was not difficult. The St. Augustine Unionists fixed upon March 1 as the date for the state convention to meet, making it obvious that they had no intention of obtaining a representative expression of the people. Indeed they must not fairly consult the people; to do so would mean sacrificing control of the convention. Chase and Stickney also wanted an early date for the convention in order to be sure of getting delegates in the Republican Union National Convention at Baltimore. As a matter of fact, elections had no place in Stickney's plan for securing delegates to the state convention. Elections were troublesome and could result in undesirable delegates. Instead, he would use his revenue cutter to pick up suitable men along the coast wherever he could find them. Plantz covertly sent a vessel up the west coast from Key West for the same purpose, and hopefully asked refugees from different parts of the state, temporarily residing at Key West, if they would like to be delegates to the convention.³⁶ Hay could sit back and watch if he wanted to do so. Then when Stickney and Plantz had their state government organized, he could tell Lincoln what were the methods used and the President would refuse to recognize it.

Stickney was soon complaining to Chase of the "copperhead" movement to enroll one-tenth of the voters, with the idea of letting them elect state officers and organize a state government. Such a policy, Stickney thought, was nonsense. It would be far better, in his opinion, to "let a convention of loyal people adopt a free constitution, make all who at the time are inhabitants of the state voters, and all immigrants from the loyal states voters as soon as they shall have fixed their domicile in Florida." On such a basis, Stickney was sure he could "work out a state organization which would harmonize perfectly with Republi-

36. Samuel Walker to Lincoln, Apr. 2, 1864, Robert T. Lincoln Collection.

canism as you have advocated and acted it.“³⁷ And so he could - if no one interfered with his recruiting of delegates for the “convention of loyal people.”

As political and military plans developed, Stickney kept reassuring Chase. The Tax Commissioner wrote that he was every day becoming more firmly convinced of the ease with which Florida could be restored to the Union. If Chase would send Sallade as a successor for Reed, Stickney and Alsop would proceed at once to Key West, confident that Alsop and he could enroll eleven hundred voters “under the Union Constitution of Florida very quickly.” He had lately been occupied, he wrote, “in organizing a free state league, or if you please, a Chase league. It will work to a charm.” In his Chase league were enrolled “men whom I know, and on whom in trying times I can rely.” He felt sure General Gillmore would do all he could for the organization. “He has given me very strong evidence indeed that he is your friend, decided and active.”³⁸

The “decided and active” General Gillmore was, meanwhile, pushing preparations for military occupation of Florida. Fortified with Lincoln’s letter of instruction and Hay’s encouragement, and unrestrained by Halleck or the War Department, he organized an expedition, and in early February, 1864 reoccupied Jacksonville.

Hay and Stickney accompanied the invading troops and upon arriving in Jacksonville went to work on political reconstruction.

Hay’s first experiences in Florida left him confident he would be able to enroll the required number of voters, despite de fact that so many rebels were in the army and so many loyal people had fled to the North. He soon changed his mind. Stickney, who also had recently written of the ease with which large numbers of Florida voters could be enrolled, now advised Chase that Lincoln’s plan would fail, and Hay admitted as much.³⁹

37. Stickney to Chase, Feb. 16, 1864, Chase Letters.

38. Stickney to Chase, Feb. 5, 1864.

39. Stickney to Chase, Feb. 16, 1864.

Actually, of course, Chase's political organizer felt no regret at the failure of the ten per cent plan. He would be able to control a small convention of opportunistic "Unionists," but if voters were signed up to the extent of ten per cent of Florida's voters in 1860, the political conservatives might be so strongly represented that Stickney and his friends would have little influence in the new government. If Hay should become sufficiently discouraged to return to Washington, the Chase men could proceed with political organization according to their own inclinations.

The military reverse at Olustee on February 20 ended all serious efforts to bring Florida back in the Union before the 1864 presidential election. But Stickney and his cohorts continued to make plans for setting up a state government. Four days after the battle he wrote Chase that Major Hay was now in hearty agreement with him about the best way of restoring Florida to the Union - to call a convention which would change the state constitution to make all inhabitants of the state free, and all of those of lawful age voters. "That accomplished, by opening the ports of Fernandina, St. Augustine, and Jacksonville, removing hindrances to northern immigrants, and giving me the use of a revenue cutter or any sea-going vessel for three or four weeks, I pledge to you that Florida shall be as bright a star as shines in freedom's constellation."⁴⁰ The revenue cutter which Chase had sent refused to operate. The mechanical failure of this boat aptly symbolized the Chase machine in Florida. Built according to standard model and design, of the usual materials, it nevertheless would not function properly.

In his isolated position at Key West, Plantz paid no attention to the reverse at Olustee, but innocently continued his political machinations. Thomas J. Boynton, United States Judge for the Southern District of Florida, was critically ill, and Plantz was concerned about the succession in case of Boynton's death.

40. Stickney to Chase, Feb. 24, 1864.

Boynton himself was not radical enough for Plantz's approval, and the attorney had often mentioned to Chase the expediency of having him removed. But if Boynton should die, Plantz was sure the majority of Key West citizens would want William Marvin to replace him. He was also afraid that if Marvin came to Key West, it would spell defeat for the Chase organization there. Marvin had held the judgeship before Boynton, and was now in New York. Plantz remarked significantly to Chase that William H. Seward would doubtless like to have Marvin sent to Key West. He thought a great deal depended, so far as southern Florida was concerned, on the judge they were to have at Key West if a change occurred. The implication was that it would be calamitous if Chase's political competitor, Seward, succeeded in getting his friend, Marvin, appointed to the Key West judgeship.⁴¹

Plantz still worried about his political isolation. To visit Fernandina was impossible while he held office, and communication was so slow as to be useless. "If I were in speaking distance of Stickney, Alsop, Fraser, and other of your friends, we might work together to some purpose," wrote the frustrated attorney. As it was, he was groping in the dark, but he hoped "to hit daylight before the game is over. If I can bear a more effective hand," he added hopefully, "do let me know."⁴²

In early March Plantz was honored by a visit from Stickney. Plantz must have been very happy to have the opportunity to confer with "the old man" himself. They discussed their program for the Chase organization, and each wrote to Chase praising the other. Stickney did not bother to call at the hotel where he had stayed in the spring of 1861, and where he still owed for his lodging. He and Plantz made various recommendations for Treasury appointments in Florida. Stickney wanted a tax assessor's appointment for his brother, John. "You would have no

41. Plantz to Chase, Feb. 29, 1864.

42. *Ibid.*

more active reliable friend in Florida. He can do much for emancipation, and especially much for you."

Chase had made some suggestions to Stickney in regard to the organization of the new state government in Florida, which suggestions met Stickney's hearty concurrence. He would endeavor to carry them out. Major Hay, said Stickney, would return to Washington by the next steamer. Stickney thought he "could do much good with the President to pass a week in Washington myself. Major Hay thinks so too." Indeed the Tax Commissioner had now been in Florida what was for him an unusually long time. If Chase had no objection, he would "make a flying trip to Washington." The executive committee appointed at the St. Augustine Union meeting of December 19 would, wrote Stickney, appoint delegates from Florida to the National Republican Union Convention. The delegates were to be Stickney, Plantz, and Philip Fraser. Would they, queried Stickney, be given seats in the convention? ⁴³

In early March Secretary Chase announced his withdrawal from the presidential canvass, for he was aware of the great advantage Lincoln had over him in the contest for the nomination. After writing his letter of withdrawal, he did no active campaigning, but his Florida agents continued to work. The Secretary wrote Plantz of his withdrawal, and Plantz was despondent. "With the loss of the leader, I tremble for the cause," he wrote, "and even though the cause triumph, half the pleasure I should have personally will be gone." He still hoped the country would learn "the needs of its safety and honor in time to call for your services in spite of your withdrawal; and I shall not work less earnestly, though I may be obliged to work differently, to that end." ⁴⁴

In spite of Chase's withdrawal, Chase men were not lacking at the Republican Union National Convention which assembled

43. Stickney to Chase, Mar. 15, 1864, Plantz to Chase, Mar. 28, 1864.

44. Plantz to Chase, Mar. 28, 1864.

in Baltimore on June 7. Many Treasury employees went up from Washington. Stickney and Plantz attended, as did other Chase agents from all parts of the country. These Chase backers had no official standing at all in the convention, but they were there to do what they could. They had prepared Chase propaganda to circulate at the convention, and they could work on the official delegates and try to swing them to Chase. Almost all of the delegates had been elected under pledges - express or implied - to vote for Lincoln, but there were a few there who were supporters of the Secretary of the Treasury. They were ready to put him in nomination, hoping to start a Chase boom. But the Secretary himself had no confidence in the plan and withdrew.⁴⁵ Chase wrote Stickney that he would not accept the nomination if it were offered to him. In electing delegates to the convention, he said, the nation had expressed a preference for Lincoln. "The nomination of any other man would be justly regarded as a fraud upon the people; and I value conscious integrity of purpose far more than office, even the highest."⁴⁶

After the Baltimore Convention, a Treasury agent's investigation brought to light the unsavory details of Stickney's activities, but Stickney retained his place on the Tax Commission. When Chief Justice Chase made a tour of the South in 1865, studying conditions and building fences for 1868, Stickney rushed on board his boat to greet him as the vessel touched the wharf at Jacksonville and was taken along on the tour around the Gulf.⁴⁷ At Key West, United States District Attorney Plantz was on hand to welcome them. He showed the visitors around, gave them a first-hand analysis of the political situation in the Southern District of Florida, and discussed steps to be taken in

45. J. Grey Jewell to Chase, June 9, 1864, Chase MSS., Series I, Library of Congress.

46. Chase to Stickney, May 25, 1864, Warden, *op. cit.*, p. 595.

47. William Watson Davis, *The Civil War and Reconstruction in Florida* (New York: Columbia University, 1913), p. 352; Whitelaw Reid, *After the War: A Southern Tour* (New York, 1866), p. 163.

reconstructing the State.⁴⁸ Stickney was to have no further share in Florida's political spoils, and Chase's influence in the reconstruction of Florida was negligible. But when the Republicans took over the State government in 1868, Plantz was appointed Judge of the First Judicial District and moved to Pensacola, where he died in 1872.

The Chief Justice undertook his spring 1865 tour of Florida and the conquered South for the purpose, among other things, of advising President Johnson on a program of reconstruction. But Johnson did not accept Chase's advice. The President, new dispenser of the patronage, fell out with Chase over reconstruction policy and the trial of Jefferson Davis; and the Chase machine, deprived of sustenance, rusted and fell apart, in Florida and throughout the restored United States.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 180.