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THE CASE OF SOME INHABITANTS OF EAST FLORIDA \*

1767 - 1785

by BARBARA GORELY TELLER

In London, in the spring of 1823, a young clerk named Daniel, in the House of Delcroix, Perfumers, received word that Mrs. Isabella Stout, widow of Daniel Stout of Nassau in the Bahamas, had been searching the length and breadth of England for him, as he was heir to part of the estate left by his aunt, Mary Rolph Stout of Nassau. The Colonial Secretary for the Bahamas, Mr. Samuel Nesbit, had also been searching, and about the same time located young Daniel and other members of his mother's family, the Rolphs of Canterbury, who empowered Nesbit to receive their legacies.

Daniel wrote excitedly to his newly-found American Cousin Isabella offering his assistance in settling the estate and inquiring about his Aunt Mary and her family. All the tales he had been told as a boy by his mother and his uncle about his far-away aunt in the Bahama Islands came back to his mind. He also remembered the package of neatly tied letters that he had found among his mother's things. These had been left to her when her brother, his Uncle Daniel Rolph, a silk mercer in Leadenhall Street, had died in 1795. On examination these proved to be the letters written from Florida and the Bahamas by Mary Rolph Stout to her brother who had acted as her business agent in London. With the help of these papers and his own memory, young Daniel could trace back the story.

His mother, Sarah Rolph, had been born in the shadow of Canterbury Cathedral and christened there, as were all the other children of Daniel Rolph of Canterbury. Sarah's brother Daniel went up to London to enter the silk business and her sister Mary went up to London to live with her godmother,

\* The above title was suggested by a contemporaneous pamphlet: *The Case of the Inhabitants of East Florida* described in footnote 4 following.

Mrs. Eyers. It was while visiting her godmother that Mary met and married Joseph Stout of Philadelphia. He had served an apprenticeship to Dr. William Stork, an oculist by profession but also a botanist, a Member of the Royal Society, a friend of John Bartram, and an ardent promoter of the settlement of East Florida by the British.

In the Peace of 1763 East Florida had become British property. Two hundred and twenty-seven land grants were made by the Privy Council to titled noblemen, army and navy officers, and government officials, but actual settlement of the land progressed slowly. Dr. Stork visited Florida with Batram, and published *An Account of East Florida with Remarks on its future Importance to Trade and Commerce* (London, 1766). He described the climate, soil, and vegetation, and gave it glowing account of the city of St. Augustine. Other books and articles appeared with the purpose of awakening interest in the new colony and presenting East Florida as an El Dorado for every English gentleman who fancied himself as squire of broad American acres. One of the early, large grantees was John Tucker who held at least 31,000 acres on the banks of the St. Johns River.<sup>1</sup>

Soon after the marriage of Mary Rolph and Joseph Stout, Dr. Stork obtained for Stout the appointment of manager of John Tucker's estates in East Florida. About 1767 the young couple set sail adventurously for their new life in the wilds of America. St. Augustine was their first home where they had a house on George Street while the Mount Tucker place on the river was being built. Here their first son, Joseph Jr., was born. Only one Petter has survived of this period written by Joseph, after they had moved to Mount Tucker.

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1. See map of grants in the library of The Florida Historical Society.



ST AUGUSTINE  
 the CAPITAL of  
 EAST FLORIDA.

SCALE,  
 660 Feet or 1 Furlong.

The Stouf's town home was on George Street, the main center street from left to right (south to north) on this plan, which is reproduced from Wm. Stork: *A Description of East Florida*, London, 1769.

*Mount Tucker, East Florida*  
*July 24, 1769*

*Honoured Mother -*

*This comes with Our Duty to you & our kind Love to sisters and brothers hoping it will find you all in good health. I & the Little Boy are very well at present but my wife is sick and has bin now this ten days but hope she will get better sune . . . This Contrey has agreed midling well with our health as yet. Wee have bin sick but have no grate reason to complain as yet. . . Our little Boy is healthey & thrives well & is a fine Boy. We are very plasently situated on the River St. Johns. The Lands on both sides of the River belong to Mr. Tucker. We live on the East side of the River. The land is not very good. On the west side the the land is much better but not so plasent nor dry enough. I received letters from Mr. Tucker when I rec'd yours. He writes me that he has sent for 40 negroes more & 20 I have. I shall begin to make a plantation on the west side of the River when the rest of the negroes arrive. The crop that I shall make this year will be midling but much better than last year. This Contrey is plesent enough. We have litel or no winter. We have no snow nor ice and if there is a litel ice it is gone when the sun rises. Most of the Trees & fields are green all the year but the lands in general are not so good as I exspected . . . This letter I belive will come by a friend - so no more at present but our kind Love & Respects to you all from your*

*Ever Dutyfull & affectionate Son & Daughter*

*Joseph & Mary Stout*

The Stouts were not alone in the wilderness, for other holdings were being built up and cultivated.<sup>2</sup> Not far away on the St.

2. See Charles Loch Mowat: *East Florida as a British Province 1763-1784*. Univ. of California Press. 1943.

Johns River were Spaulding's trading house, Denys Rolle's "Mount Pleasant" at Rollestown,<sup>3</sup> Abraham Marshall's plantation "Satonía", James Penman's "Jericho", Francis Lovett's "Juliantown", and plantations owned by Admiral Sir Edward Hawke and Henry Strachey. Richard Oswald, famous as a peace commissioner in 1783, owned "Mount Oswald" and Captain Robert Bisset had "Mount Plenty." One of the most elaborate plantations was that of Lt. Gov. Moultrie who had built a stone mansion and pleasure grounds complete with bowling green, fish ponds, walks, and a great variety of rare trees. Small holdings were by such men also as William Drayton, James Moncrief, and Dr. Stork. Lord Egmont placed his estates on Amelia Island under the care of Stephen Egan, and Egan and the Moncrief family became close friends of the Stouts.

For ten active, pioneering years the Stouts remained at Mount Tucker. When the American Revolution broke out no more land grants were made. In 1779 the Stouts left Mount Tucker and purchased a plantation of their own on the Northwest Creek of the Matanzas River where they raised indigo. There were now four little boys in the family, Joseph, George, William and Daniel. Then the great blow fell. In 1783 the Peace of Paris gave East Florida back to the Spaniards and all the British settlers suddenly found themselves men without a country. Mary wrote about their troubles to her brother in London:

*Matanzas, East Florida*

*April 28, 1783*

*Dear Brother*

*I have at last got time to write you these few lines to let you know that wee are all in good health at present Bless*

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3. Denys Rolle was the first grantee to attempt a real settlement of his lands. He established Rollestown and peopled it with the poor of London. His philanthropic experiment failed after several years trial because he found his settlers were drawn away to the gay life at St. Augustine.

*God for it. I have omitted writing to you for some time past because we have always been alarmed with some bad thing or other from our enemies that have been on all sides of us for this long time past so I thought no news would be good news but now the worst thing that could have happened for us is come at last. We know not what to do nor where to go all our property being here and very little of it can be moved - only our few Slaves and Live Stock. When we came away from Mount Tucker the land office was shut up so that we could run no Land but were obliged to buy and pay a very great price for what we got and have been at a great expence for improvement Besides the trouble and slavery of all our formerly black and white so that we thought this being the 4th year we should certainly have made a great deal of our produce. We have been at a great expence for repairing and raising a new roof to the house in town . . . Nobody here but what are dissatisfied to the last degree. We are all very busy appraising our property according to the request of Lord Hawk's Letter to our Governor. This of ours we shall send to you. They will not come by the packet by the next ship that sails for London. You will please to make yourself acquainted at the London tavern where East Florida proprietors meet and give in the papers that will be sent you by the first ship. You must try to see Dennis Rolle if you can and tell him you are my Brother. He may perhaps be of some service to you in the affair. I should be glad if you can see him and if he comes out hear again you must write by him and if mother can see him I should be glad and return thanks for his and his Lady's kindness to me when I came to this Country. I lived next door to them when my son Joseph was born. They were the first friends met with here. Pray send your Brother word what price indigo brings at home for our last years crop lays upon our*

*hands and will fetch no price hear. . . My Dear Brother, if you should but see our plantation you would be very sory to Leave it and have such poor hopes of ever geting any thing for it. My house in town is valued at three hondred pound Sterling. The Land we live on cost us two hondred pound Sterling. It is not yet aprised nor our Stock of Catell, hogs etc. . . . Give my love to my friend Mrs. Eyre and famarly*

*You Ever Loving Sister till Death*

*Mary Stout*

The plight of the Stouts was the plight of hundreds. They had put time and energy and money into their lands but they could not brook the thought of becoming Spanish subjects. Large numbers took the first boat back to England. Others, like the Arcadians, became scattered, homeless wanderers. A pamphlet published anonymously in 1784, and now very rare, called *The Case of the Inhabitants of East Florida*<sup>4</sup> was the vent for the indignation felt by the English settlers around St. Augustine. It listed all the reasons why the inhabitants should be compensated by the Crown for the losses they had sustained. The British Government heard their cry and the Claims Committee was set up to handle the situation.

In September of 1783 Joseph wrote that he had been in New Providence in the Bahamas, where his brother lived, to look over the land there but said that he did not intend going there if he could do better elsewhere.

They had thought, he said,

*. . . of going to Novescotia but fear that it is to cold for us to bear it now we have bin so Long in this hot climett. Then other times we think of going to Carolina or Georgea*

4. *The Case of the Inhabitants of East Florida. With an Appendix, containing papers, by which all the facts stated in the case are supported.* St. Augustine, East Florida, 1784.



*but are afeard the times will not do as the Pepol do not agree among themselves yet about there government and levy very heavey taxes. Sometimes think of staying and to see how we may do with the Spaneards. . . but we are not determett of anything but stay till we hear further how it may be. We have not heard of the Definnitive treaty being signed yet. Perhaps things may take some turn yet. . .*

Apparently the great decision to leave East Florida and seek a home temporarily in New Providence was made soon after this letter was sent. They sold the house on George Street, St. Augustine, to a Spaniard, "John Sanchie" for 106.17.6 and all the rest of the property was sacrificed at very low prices to Spaniards. They sent the Schedule of property with affidavit to Daniel Rolph with power of attorney to act for them in filing their claims. This letter, personally carried by Captain Welsh, did not reach London until March 6, 1784 and Daniel carefully noted on it that he had delivered the papers to Mr. Thomas Nixon at his house No 18 New Ormond St., Queen Square and paid 2.2 subscription money to help defray expences of the Claims Committee meeting at the London Tavern.

In 1785 the Stouts had arrived in Nassau but were still undetermined where to settle permanently. In May Mr. Stout set out for Philadelphia to visit his relatives partly for his health and partly to look over the business possibilities in that city. Mary yearned to go back to England just as the Moncriefs and other Florida neighbors had done at the sad evacuation. She fully expected to take a boat back by the summer of 1786 but her husband had not returned. It was a lonely time for her. Her little son William, who had been ill for two years had died and she was worried about her husband who seemed to show signs of consumption.

Nassau, Bahamas

May 2, 1786

Dear Brother Daniel. . .

. . . Several ships have gone from this place since I wrote you pr. Cap't King but waiting for Mr. Stout I deferred it in hopes of coming and surprising you about the month of June but now I dont know what time to sett . . . I am sure we cannot make out hear neither to get money nor anything else that is good. Joseph is grown a very stout boy and stands a bad chance of ever getting an opportunity of a trade or business for at the time when he should hove been bound we were obliged to keep him at home to help his father in the plantation. George is a good boy and takes his learning very well. He is 13 years old - all most time he was out but this troble of moving and being unseteled I try to keep our selves all to gether if I can till we come to England where I hope to stay all the days of my life and see them all seteled and doing well. . ."

A brief letter followed in August but she vainly waited for an answer until December and then sat down to write again:

. . . I informed you of the arrival of Mr. Stout from Philadelphia in August last and much better than he was when he went away from hear. My self and Children are well thank God for it. Joseph is as big as you were when I left England. He has been some time with Mr. Mugg the kings attorney of this place. Am in great hopes it will be of means of putting him forward in the world. . . Litell Daniel has just learnt his letters and begins to Spell. All of them are desirous to come home to England to see theyre friends and grandmother . . . We flatter our selves with some hopes of a recovery of our loss and as there is somthing more to add to the Memorial such as the account of loss of Boats

*and all of the Shingles bought at St. Marys and left there on account of there not being room in the ship so with that and other things your brother has delivered to the gentlemen appointed hear by the Commissioners of Claims to inquire of property lost by the Cession of Florida to the King of Spain so hope with your friends in England and ours hear we shall do very well. As it is every day that the Council meets and as ours is No 20 it will not be long before we shall give you a full account of it. . . I can say no more this time but remain your*

*Ever loving Sister -*

*Mary Stout*

In the Spring of 1787 they were even more deeply involved with the problem of their claims. All thought of going back to England had been put aside as they had gone into the retail trade business in a small way. Their troubles were expounded in the letter of April 13:

*. . . Your brother has been examined and sworn before the Council. They asked him for his titels of the house but they were put in the hands of John Sanchie who bought it. These gentelmen want more proof that this house was our property. The man that was the vendu master could not be found that day but has since waited on them at difrent times but could not spare time to hear him. . . If your brothor should not get Mr. Slater to swear that the house was Mr. Stout's Right and Lawfull property you will have to go to Mr. David Yeats office. You will find it recorded in book as situated in George Street, Grants quarter [St. Augustine] . . . We broght our slaves of negro men and women and children with us here to this place. As to our Cattle, Cows and horses we broght none of them. One very fine mare was sold for eight dolars. The rest are gone - some*

*stolen, some ran away and some died so all lost to us. The hogs and fowls of difrent kinds we broght for Sea Store and got a few hear safe. Two boats and new shingles were left behind. The boats valued at 12 and shingles at 3. You will please to note the value of dolars in Florida. 4000 dolars was the sum the house and lot sold for. . . As we now expect a new governor hear we chuse to stay a while. We also expect this place to be made a free port. I have now to inform you that ever since my letter of the 23 August we have laid out some money on difrent articles to retale out again. We find it answers very well with great atenshon on my part and I have to attend the vendu every day. . .*

Two more letters followed in quick succession telling that the Claims had been completed and sent to the Board of Commissioners, that it was going to be a hot summer which was most disagreeable for Mary because her "litell way of business" kept her "always in a hurry", and begging to be informed of the current price in London of such things as, "Loaf sugar, Candles, Soap, Cheese, Butter, Starch, Blue and Habardash."

On October 5th Mary had some fresh news to tell her brother.

*. . . (Mr. Stout) has taken up Land on this island to settell a Cotten plantation with a few negros we have for the good of our Children. We intend to keep our Shop in town too for I shall not give up while I can make anything by it. Shall be in hopes of purchasing more slaves when we get paid for our losses in Florida. Cotten is the only thing to make money by in these Islands if ye can but get a good spot of ground. We have got land at the East end of Providence about 5 miles from where we live. You I supose will hear of a huricane that has hapened here on the 27 August has done a great deal of damage but thank God we were not hurt much by it all though there is a great deal of hurt*

*done the contry and shiping and some lives lost. Hope youl. have had a good Summer in England and good Crops of Corn. This Contry is better than we thought when we came here. Pepel take up land very fast and settell plantations . . .*

When Daniel Rolph received this he noted on the bottom that he had left at the East Florida Claim office the plans of two tracts of land belonging to Joseph Stout together with an old grant of land of 350 acres made to John Moor by Governor Grant in 1769 which was the property bought by Stout for 200 around 1779. Daniel wrote twice to Joseph Stout in Philadelphia where he had gone once more on business, and later of the happy news that the first payment of their claim would be in April 1789, "at the Rate of 12/2 pr ct pr annum with 3/2 pr ct Interest." This did not come true, however, for more Powers of Attorney were needed and these had to be prepared and sent back to England before Daniel could receive the payments. Mary wrote how disappointed people were in hearing how much value had been taken off their Claims; that they had built a new little house. They had tried not to draw on any of the Claims money until they were assured that Daniel had the money in hand but the arrival in Nassau of a slave ship was too good an opportunity to lose to add to their "head rights" and enable them to have a claim to 200 more acres. Mary wrote excitedly to Daniel on July 11 that they had bought "a fine boy and girl" for 66 Sterling and that he was to honor the bill when it came due.

After months of anxious waiting they heard from Daniel in October that he had actually received the first part of their payment amounting to 65.78 and accepting the bill for 66. With minds relieved, the Stouts renewed their efforts to improve their store in Nassau and their plantations. "We return you ten thousand thanks for your care and troble that you have

taken on our account," Mary wrote on April 5, 1790, begging Daniel to take 20 to pay himself.

By the next year the tide had turned and the Stouts prospered as cotton planters in the years following.

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APPENDIX

(Petition to Claims Commissioners)

TO THE COMMISSIONERS appointed by Act of Parliament to enquire into the Losses of all Such Persons who have suffered in their properties in consequence of the Cession of the Province of East Florida to the King of Spain-

The Memorial of Daniel Rolph of Leadenhall Street in the City of London Gentleman in the behalf and by virtue of a power from his Brother in Law Joseph Stout formerly of Saint Augustine in the Province of East Florida but now of Nassau in the Island of New Providence

Sheweth-That the said Joseph Stout resided many years in the Province of East Florida and was possessed of a Lot of Ground situated in George Street in the Town of Saint Augustine whereon was a good Dwelling house which in Consequence of the Cession of the Province to the Crown of Spain has been appraised and valued at 300 but that it having been put up to public Sale with other property belonging to Different Proprietors by the Provincial Vendue Master and the sum of 106.17.6 being bid for it by a Spaniard whose name is John Sanchie the Proprietor consented thereto and as your Memorialist Presumes the money was paid it should be deducted from the appraisement and that the Sum Claimed for the house to be for Lot No. 1 as expressed in the Schedule hereunto annexed 193.2.6.

That the said Joseph Stout was also Possessed of Two Tracts of Land one of 450 Acres situated on the Matanza River the other of 500 Acres near to the other both which have been appraised and are particularly described in the Schedule by No. 2 and 3.

That the said Joseph Stout had eight able young Negroes on his plantation. Sundry Cattle plantation Tools and Boats as are particularly described in No. 4 in the Schedule.

That the said Joseph Stout made Oath on the 20th September 1783 before James Hume Esquire then Chief Justice of the Province that the Articles mentioned in the Schedule were his Property and on the Same day the said Property was appraised by three Persons of fair character at the Sum Specified and to which Valuation they gave their testimony on oath before the said James Hume Esquire.

That your memorialist has not been Supplied by his Brother with any other Papers relating to the Property than what is expressed in the paper with Provincial Seal annexed which your memorialist presumes was all that he thought was necessary nor has he received any account of Sales of the Negroes nor any information to what place they are transported nor is he acquainted what became of the Cattle, Boats or Plantation Tools. Your Memorialist being thus so imperfectly informed respecting these articles He has written to his Brother for further particulars but thinks it necessary to present a Claim in the behalf of his Brother and to request permission To Lay before your board all the information he may receive in Answer to his Letters.

All which is most respectfully submitted to you  
Your Most obedient humble servant

DANIEL ROLPH

(Notations by Daniel:)

Coppied from the original Writ. by Thos. Nixon New Ormond Street Bedford Row

Wrote Joseph Stout a Copy of the above with a Request that he would send me further instructions Relating to the disposal of his Property & Particulars Relating to what became of the Negroes-Boats-Plantation Tools etc. by the HERO Captain Ranne-who sailed the beginning of Jany. 1787-the Letter was put in the Bagg at the Carolina Coffee house on Christmas day - 1786

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A SCHEDULE and Valuation of the Real & Personall Estate of Joseph Stout Planter Situated in the Town of Saint Augustine in the Province of East Florida as appears by the Original grant and Title Produced and Laid before Us

A Town Lott of Land Situated in George Street on which is a good dwelling house with convenient offices .....	300	SD
One Tract of Land Situated an the Northeast Creek on the Mantanza River Containing 450 Acres. 250 of which is good Hammock and Swamp Land of which 27 acres are Cleared and Planted. the Remainder part is pine Barren of a good quality and near Navigation. On which are Erected a dwelling house Barnese and Kitchin we Value at ...	266	
Another Tract of land Containing 500 Acres 20 of which is Swamp and the Rest good pine Barren Situated near the above Tract and being equally convenient to Navigation We Value at	130	
8 able young Negroes .....	400	
3 Head of Neat Cattle .....	12	
13 Do. of Hoggs .....	15	
2 Boats .....	8	5
Plantation Tools	3	15
		<hr/>
		1135.0.0
by Money Received for Lot No. 1		106.17.6
		<hr/>
		1028.2.6