

1987

Ordeal by Siege: James Bruce in Pensacola, 1780-1781

Robin F. A. Fabel

Find similar works at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq>
University of Central Florida Libraries <http://library.ucf.edu>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by STARS. It has been accepted for inclusion in Florida Historical Quarterly by an authorized editor of STARS. For more information, please contact STARS@ucf.edu.

Recommended Citation

Fabel, Robin F. A. (1987) "Ordeal by Siege: James Bruce in Pensacola, 1780-1781," *Florida Historical Quarterly*: Vol. 66 : No. 3 , Article 5.

Available at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq/vol66/iss3/5>

ORDEAL BY SIEGE: JAMES BRUCE IN PENSACOLA, 1780-1781

by ROBIN F.A. FABEL

OF the aspects of British West Florida attracting the attention of historians none surpasses the siege of Pensacola in 1781.¹ All accounts rely on the reports of combatant participants, but no historian of West Florida has evidently used or perhaps been aware of the observations of one of the many civilian observers trapped by war in Pensacola. He was James Bruce, collector of customs at Pensacola. While enduring with his countrymen the final desperate days of British rule in the province, he wrote six letters to mercantile friends in London. They provide, apart from illuminating details of economic conditions during the siege, insights into the psychology of the besieged. They contain hopes, speculations, and denunciations which have no place in official reports. Nothing is known of Bruce's origins, although his association with West Florida's "Scotch" party and his name suggest that he was a Scot. He was a warrant officer in the Royal Navy in 1758, when British land and sea forces captured the French fortress of Louisbourg on Cape Breton Island after a siege of seven weeks. By the end of the Seven Years' War when Bruce, along with the bulk of wartime servicemen, was demobilized or, to use the term then current, reduced, his naval position was "secretary to a flag officer and commander in chief."² Association with extremely senior officers, which Bruce's job would have entailed, may have made it possible for him to aspire to favors normally denied to non-commissioned personnel such as himself.

Bruce swiftly found preferment after he left the naval service. First he became the customs collector at Pensacola, the

Robin F. A. Fabel is associate professor of history, Auburn University. Bruce's letters are reprinted with permission of the New-York Historical Society.

1. James Servies, *The Siege of Pensacola, 1781: A Bibliography* (Pensacola, 1981), lists 129 printed sources and studies on the subject.
2. London, Public Record Office, CO 5/634: 142.

capital of the new British province of West Florida. Such appointments were much sought-after gifts of the crown, part of the patronage system, and invariably obtained through the intervention of the influential who usually were politicians. Second, through an order of the king in council of May 23, 1764, he was awarded a mandamus grant of 4,000 acres of free land in West Florida.³ Under the terms of the royal proclamation of 1763, the normal entitlement of disbanded non-commissioned officers who had served in the Seven Years' War was a mere 200 acres.⁴

Bruce probably obtained his mandamus grant before he left Britain. His first known appearance in West Florida was five months later as a member of the provincial council which first assembled at the instance of the new governor, George Johnstone, on October 24, 1764.⁵ Ex-warrant officer Bruce could not have plausibly aspired to be an establishment figure in class-ridden Britain. In the port of Pensacola, however, Councillor Bruce was immediately a man of consequence and, in the fullness of time, of substance also.

By 1766 Bruce was styling himself "Senior Councillor" and presiding over the council in the absence of the lieutenant governor.⁶ His seat there probably gave him more influence in the province than his customs post. At no time in the short history of British West Florida would maritime traffic choke Pensacola harbor; thus there was no great gain available to Bruce from the fees with which, from 1765, customs officials could supplement their small salaries.⁷ This was recognized by the customs commissioners in Boston who listed Pensacola as "a preventative rather than yielding" port where the cost of levying customs duties exceeded the amount collected.⁸

3. He was one of only forty-five recipients of this type of grant in the history of the province. Cecil Johnson, *British West Florida* (Berkeley, 1947; reprint ed., Hamden, CT, 1971), 120.

4. Arthur Berriedale Keith, ed., *Selected Speeches and Documents on British Colonial Policy, 1763-1917* (London, 1933), I:8.

5. Clinton N. Howard, *The British Development of West Florida, 1763-1769* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1947), 26.

6. *Ibid.*, 111.

7. Oliver M. Dickerson, *The Navigation Acts and the American Revolution* (Philadelphia, 1951; reprint ed., New York, 1963), 204.

8. PRO, Treasury 1/471, Part 8.

Bruce did not regard his collectorship as a sinecure. He is known to have fined traders who sold liquor without a license and to have dissented at length from a new provincial law which allowed the coastal vessels called droggers to escape customs inspection merely by flying a special flag. According to Bruce, the flag "tended to promote illicit practices" or, to phrase it less euphemistically, was a gift to smugglers.⁹ So strongly was he opposed that he complained to the customs commissioners in Boston. Seconding Bruce's opinion, they forwarded their objection to London where the privy council vetoed the law.¹⁰

Even though his collectorship compelled Bruce to live in Pensacola, he was zealous in acquiring land even in farflung parts of West Florida. Initially he wanted to site his 4,000 mandamus acres on Dauphin Island south of Mobile, but counterclaims to the same acres by Robert Farmar persuaded him to apply instead for a tract north of Pensacola on a brook known as Six Mile Run where Bruce and two partners planned a sawmill. The mill was never built, a failure which would give rise to a future dispute over ownership of the land intended for that purpose. Meanwhile Bruce in 1765 had acquired a good waterfront lot at the western end of Pensacola.¹¹ On it he erected a substantial building which functioned as both residence and customs house.¹² In the same year he was also granted 100 acres north-northeast of Pensacola which he described as "a valuable pen."¹³ Probably it was an animal enclosure or perhaps a headland giving onto Pensacola Bay.

Bruce was granted these lands during the governorship of George Johnstone, a fellow Scot and evidently a good friend. Johnstone left for England—ostensibly on leave, but in fact permanently—in January 1767. Bruce followed him two months later. He alleged that he had private affairs to settle and had received permission from both Johnstone and the customs commissioners to absent himself for a year from his official duties. To another Scot, George Urquhart, a subordinate customs of-

9. Robert R. Rea and Mile B. Howard, Jr., *The Minutes, Journals, and Acts of the General Assembly of British West Florida* (University, AL, 1979), 220.

10. Richard Reeves to Grey Cooper, February 12, 1771, CO5/588:213.

11. Howard, *British Development*, map opposite p. 42. Bruce owned lot 6 jointly with Sir John Lindsay.

12. T1/582:144.

13. *Ibid.*

ficer, he delegated two of his responsibilities, his customs collectorship and his Greenwich Royal Hospital treasurership.¹⁴ The hospital had been founded in 1695 for sailors who had been injured or grown old in the service of the crown. It was financed by a deduction of sixpence a month from the pay of British sailors of both the royal and merchant navies.¹⁵ Presumably Bruce's responsibility had been to collect and keep monthly sixpences from the crews of vessels paid off in Pensacola. Nothing is known of his subsequent activities in England except that he overstayed his leave, returning to West Florida only toward the end of 1769.¹⁶

With him came his wife, Isabella, to whom was born a son, Archibald Scott Bruce, two days before Christmas, 1770.¹⁷ Bruce soon clashed with the new governor, Peter Chester. Since the sawmill planned in 1765 had never been built, Bruce had no use for the 4,000 acres intended for the mill-site; the uncultivable tract was nothing but pine barren. Finding a technical discrepancy between the conditions laid down in the grant and those in the orders in council on which the grant was based, he now asked to surrender that tract and in its stead to have 4,000 fertile acres on Thompson's Creek near the Mississippi opposite Pointe Coupée.¹⁸ Chester demurred. He believed that acceding to Bruce's request would set a bad precedent. Were such exchanges allowed, other settlers, having cleared their grants of valuable timber, would surrender them and, much to their own advantage but to the detriment of the province, would move on to new grants to cut timber afresh. Councillor Philip Livingston, well-known as Chester's toady, supported his superior, but a majority of the council sided with Bruce. The governor would not yield and achieved delay by initiating the lengthy process of obtaining a decision on the matter from the plantations secretary in London.

Orders in council were but one way of obtaining land in West Florida. Pending the secretary's decision, Bruce, in 1771,

14. Records of the General Land Office, Division D, f. 44, United States National Archives, microfilm copies at the University of West Florida.

15. Peter Kemp, ed., *The Oxford Companion to Ships and the Sea* (London, 1976), 355.

16. CO5/591:120.

17. CO5/588: 140.

18. *Ibid.*, 283-85.

applied for and ultimately received 1,200 acres on the Amite River. He had to purchase 500 acres, but for the rest of it he qualified on family right, with his ten slaves boosting his entitlement.¹⁹ He supplemented this holding by purchasing 500 more acres on the Amite in May 1772.²⁰ Independently of her husband, Isabella Bruce brought 1,000 acres on Thompson's Creek in July 1772. James had managed to reserve his own disputed 4,000-acre tract on Thompson's Creek and did not abandon his (ultimately successful) hopes of gaining title to it.²¹

Bruce's most energetic agricultural efforts went into his main Amite plantation. On it were located a small but comparatively well-appointed dwelling, slave cabins, chicken coops, and corn houses. He grew corn which he ground in his own millhouse, cut timber in some quantity, and raised hogs.²² Perhaps the most lucrative activity on his plantation was growing indigo, to which 300 acres were devoted and for which he possessed the vats necessary for its processing.²³ His customs responsibilities prevented him from living there permanently. An overseer, John Rowley, took over during his absences, but Bruce contrived long stretches of residence. In December 1775, for instance, Governor Chester reported that Bruce had been at his Amite plantation since February.²⁴ His duties at the capital nevertheless made Bruce more of a Pensacolan than a country squire. He was a consistent and active member of the colony's council and ipso facto of its legislative upper house from its first meeting in 1764 until records of its meetings cease in 1780 and probably longer, except only for his leave of absence in Britain from 1767 to 1769.²⁵

A claim Bruce later made for backpay illustrates how little customs activity would have occupied him in Pensacola at the time. To carry out his duty as collector he had to hire a small boat and crew at an annual cost of £40. In theory money arising

19. Minutes, November 23, 1771, Council of British West Florida, CO5/629: 259.

20. CO5/591:183.

21. CO5/634:143.

22. Robert R. Rea, "Planters and Plantations in British West Florida," *Alabama Review* (July 1976), 224-25.

23. T1/582: 143.

24. CO5/592:221.

25. Rea and Howard, *The Minutes, Journals, and Acts of the General Assembly of British West Florida*, xxiii.

from seizures by customs officials would pay for their upkeep. In practice the annual income from fines and forfeitures was usually too small to meet even this expense. For example, in 1777 only £37.4.11 had been collected, and in 1778 only £27.6.0.²⁶

The early years of war in America saw an expansion of Bruce's land acquisitions. On November 2, 1775, he acquired 167 acres back from the Amite on which he built a small house. Improving his lands may have strained Bruce's financial resources. On April 13, 1776, he borrowed \$806 and six ryls, or perhaps its equivalent in goods, from Cadwallader Morris of Pensacola. As collateral for the debt the Bruces offered not only their main plantation on the Amite, but an additional Amite tract and eleven adult slaves and their children. Repayment was due on October 13, 1777.²⁷ On June 16, 1777, he added another 432 acres to his main plantation.²⁸ Shortly afterward the war finally came to West Florida. On February 7, 1778, James Willing's American raiders attacked Bruce's main plantation, occupied it for a month, and set it afire before leaving. Bruce estimated the material damage at £2,134.1.9. He also had to do without the annual £2,000 in income which he alleged he derived from his Amite plantation.²⁹

Misfortune persisted. In 1779 Spain declared war on Britain, and the forces of Bernardo de Gálvez took possession of the Bruces' acres on Thompson's Creek. Although Bruce had a house in the capital, he had little to support him except his salary, although his "pen" near Pensacola and hiring out his slaves may have brought in extra income. The most important man in the town was no longer the civilian governor, Peter Chester, but the military commander, General John Campbell, who had arrived in January 1779. With him he brought comparatively strong troop reinforcements, if comparison be made with the previous British garrison rather than the numbers that the Spanish were preparing to deploy to complete the conquest of West Florida.

Chester and his council continued to meet, but relations between the civil and military authorities were, not for the first

26. James Porter to the Lords of the Treasury, March 10, 1783, T1/582:139.

27. CO5/612:550-565.

28. Bruce to the Lords of the Treasury, February 15, 1783, *ibid.*, 144.

29. *Ibid.*, 143.

time in British West Florida, strained. Campbell had written an intemperate rebuke to the council which implied that the civilians of Pensacola were selfish and lazy. As a member of the committee of the council which met to answer the general's aspersions, Bruce was probably most incensed by Campbell's suggestion that, if war came to Pensacola, the best way to protect the families of the townsmen would be to entrust them to the Spanish invader. Campbell's suggestion was that Gálvez might be prepared to keep them out of harm's way aboard a ship or in a place remote from the probable scene of combat.³⁰ In rebuttal the committee insisted that to hand over women and children to the enemy was "unprecedented in any society" and rather obviously charged Campbell with timidity and callousness by its declaration that "those happy pledges of domestic felicity cannot merit too much attention from the brave and humane."³¹

Bruce's pledges of domestic felicity, his wife Isabella, ten-year old Archibald, and a younger daughter, Charlotte May, were still in Pensacola, to which the reality of a Spanish threat became very evident when, on March 13, 1780, Gálvez compelled Mobile to surrender.

Six months later, however, Pensacola was still in British hands, the Union Jack still flew over its major defense, Fort George, and James Bruce wrote the first of six letters which have survived.³² Penned on September 19, it was addressed to Clarke and Milligan, London merchants with a substantial interest in the fur trade, who were evidently personal friends of Bruce.³³

The customs collector had usefully arranged for his salary to be paid into his account with Clarke and Milligan, thus enabling him to order goods at will without his having to send payment or to receive salary through seas made perilous by war. The system did not always work. Clarke and Milligan had not supplied slave clothing and wines ordered by Bruce. The result,

30. Campbell to Council, February 24, 1780, CO5/635:281.

31. Council Committee Report of March 3, 1780, CO5/635:287.

32. James Bruce to Clarke and Milligan, September 19, 1780, November 1, 1780, February 22, 1781, February 24, 1781, April 26, 1781, and May 7, 1781, Miscellaneous Mss B, New-York Historical Society.

33. Two of their vessels loaded with skins, allegedly worth £40,000 were ready in 1777 to run the maritime gauntlet of sailing through the hostile Gulf of Mexico, even if no convoy was available, rather than have the cargo spoil in the heat of summer. CO5/155:122.

he complained, was that he had been obliged to buy these items in Pensacola, paying twice for the clothes what they had ever previously cost him and between eight and ten dollars a dozen for bottles of port, sherry, and Portuguese wine. With obvious irony, Bruce called the wine prices "moderate," but it is interesting that, in spite of inflated cost, these luxuries were still available in Pensacola at a late stage of the war. In this same letter Bruce enclosed bills of exchange for £100 from General Campbell. They were probably payment for work that Bruce's slaves performed on the town fortifications.³⁴

Bruce founded his optimism that Pensacola would be relieved on the conviction that Britain would not have lavished money as she had for nearly twenty years on West Florida if she did not intend to do whatever might prove necessary to retain the province. His further opinion was that, for future security, the government should aim at both keeping West Florida and obtaining possession of New Orleans and Louisiana too. He urged Clarke and Milligan to band with other merchant houses to lobby the ministry to make the acquisition of the neighboring Spanish province a diplomatic goal should peace talks begin. If the war should continue, provision of a separate naval command for West Florida— instead of the province being what it was in 1780, a subsidiary responsibility of the admiral in command of the Jamaica squadron— and dispatch of 2,000 regular troops would suffice, thought Bruce, to secure Louisiana. Such a conquest would benefit both planters and merchants. Without reinforcement, he warned, Pensacola would fall within six months because the local Indians were already doubting the worth of their British alliance. They had come to think that the "Great King" must have lost his strength since he had been able to recover not one acre of the land conquered by the Spanish. "If they continue much longer in this belief," wrote Bruce, "the consequences will soon be fatal."

Two months later, on November 1, 1780, when Bruce wrote once more to Clarke and Milligan, Pensacola's position had worsened. No vessels had arrived there for three months and for wine, rum, tea, and coffee the townsfolk were "in a starving situation," although there was still enough flour. In this second letter, Bruce enclosed a message for his friend Johnstone who,

34. Minutes, March 3, 1780, Council of British West Florida, CO5/635: 285.

once more in favor with the government, was now a naval commodore. Presumably Bruce's message was a plea to Johnstone to use his supposed influence to secure reinforcements for West Florida.

Bruce wrote his next letter to the London merchants on February 22, 1781. It reflects no particular alarm for the fate of Pensacola and is concerned mainly with an order for a variety of textiles, including linens, plains (a kind of flannel), Osnaburgs (coarse heavy linen fabric), clothing for his children, and a small barrel of port. That Bruce asked that either of the merchant's wives should choose his children's clothes suggests that the Brutes were on friendly terms with both the Clarke and Milligan families. For his children too he asked the Londoners to buy a lottery ticket and another two tickets for himself and a Mr. Hood.³⁵ Bruce was almost certainly alluding to the British national lottery which existed from 1705 to 1824 and which funded such projects as the building of Westminster Bridge and the British Museum.

This apparent concern with trivia at a time of crisis for Pensacola may have been made possible by a belief that Gálvez was dead. "Our inveterate foe Don G— z will no longer persecute us," wrote Bruce, "and I hope that he may be forgiven where we suppose he is now for the evils he hath brought on us." This optimism was based on mere rumor for, although later wounded, Gálvez at the time of writing was alive and active.

On February 24, Bruce wrote again to the Londoners. Evidently the vessel of Captain McMin, which was to bear his letter of February 22 to Savannah, had been delayed, giving him the chance to add to his requests. He wanted another message delivered to Johnstone, while his wife ordered for their children eight pairs of gloves made of jean, a twilled cotton cloth.³⁶

35. It is likely that this reference is to Walter Hood who had lived in West Florida since at least 1766, (CO5/613:200), owned land on the Pascagoula (CO5/614:222) and Mobile rivers (CO5/615:394) and whose original occupation was clerk and bookkeeper (CO5/613:200). However by 1773 he was assigned the more exalted description of "gentleman" in legal documents (Ibid.: 151).

36. In prewar days Thomas McMin had regularly shuttled between Savannah, Jamaica, and West Florida (*Georgia Gazette*, June 18, 1766, January 1, 1769, *South Carolina Gazette*, December 15, 1766) and occasionally voyaged to London (*Georgia Gazette*, March 18, 1768, United States National Archives, Division D).

When Bruce wrote his next letter on April 26, Pensacola's plight had changed from critical to desperate. Although the town had been under close siege by then for forty-eight days, and the rumor of Gálvez's death was known to be false, Bruce was contemptuous of the enemy. He scoffed at the Spanish thinking it necessary to supplement the investing force originally sent in March which had included over fourteen armed vessels, in addition to transports carrying 4,000 "white, black and yellow troops" and enough artillery "to attempt at least the island of Jamaica."³⁷ In April an additional eleven Spanish and four French ships of war had arrived with 2,000 reinforcements. By contrast, even if civilians and Indians were included, Pensacola's defenders numbered fewer than 2,000.³⁸

Bruce did not expect Pensacola to hold out. Admiral Sir Peter Parker at Jamaica, who had ignored repeated appeals for relief, was, in Bruce's estimate, "one of the very few unworthy sons of Neptune who have disgraced their country in the true B[-]lg style." Undoubtedly Bruce referred here to Admiral John Byng, who had failed to use his fleet effectively to break the siege of Minorca during the Seven Years' War. For his lack of enterprise Byng had been tried, convicted, and shot. Despite this unfortunate precedent, Bruce still professed hopes. He pinned them on Sir George Rodney who had recently arrived in the Indies to command the Leeward Islands squadron. Admiral Rodney, believed Bruce, "has the disinterestedness to consider that the honour of his country is more concerned in the preservation of even the most insignificant territory of His Majesty's dominions than the amassing wealth to himself."

No judgment could have been wider of the mark, for in the previous month Rodney had captured the Dutch island of St. Eustatius and had revelled in confiscating the wealth of contraband merchandise stored there.³⁹ Sir George had not and would not do anything for Pensacola. Meanwhile, wrote Bruce, "the distresses of the inhabitants are not to be described." They lived in houses located between the enemy warships in the har-

37. The yellow troops are not clearly identifiable. Possibilities are Indians, men of mixed blood, or fever-ridden Europeans.

38. J. Barton Starr, *Tories, Dons and Rebels: The American Revolution in British West Florida* (Gainesville, 1976), 192.

39. Piers Mackesy, *The War for America, 1775-1783* (Cambridge, MA, 1965), 416.

bor and the British guns of Fort George on Gage Hill. Ships and fort exchanged constant cannon fire during daylight hours. That some shot should fall short was inevitable, and extinguishing the resultant fires required vigilance. So, it appears, did the behavior of Campbell's Indian allies who robbed and otherwise acted lawlessly in Pensacola. To control both braves and fires a detachment of British soldiers was kept in the town. This deployment had to be explained to the Spanish commander for, at the request of General Campbell, Gálvez had agreed that the town buildings, as opposed to Fort George and its outworks, should be a neutral area.⁴⁰ To the ordeal of living in the town the women and children had the alternatives of fleeing to the woods outside Pensacola where they would be in the power of Indians— Bruce's use of the phrase "merciless savages" reveals what he thought of that choice— or accepting the doubtful sanctuary offered by the Spanish enemy. There is no written record of such an offer, but one may have been conveyed verbally by Alexander Dickson, a British officer whom Gálvez had captured in 1779, and who served as a liaison between the opposing camps during the Pensacola siege.⁴¹

Bruce wrote the last letter in his series to Clarke and Milligan on May 7, the day before a Spanish ball destroyed the Half-moon Redoubt and Pensacola's last hope of successful resistance. He knew that only a miracle could save the garrison. Actually a near-miracle occurred only two days before he wrote his last message. A gale had blown the Spanish fleet away from the Gulf coast and, hoped Bruce, damaged it considerably. He wished that English ships had been in the vicinity to take advantage of the Spaniards' disarray but had lost all faith in "our worthy friend Sir P[ete]r P[arke]r" and his will to spare naval support for Pensacola. The gale had not, of course, displaced the Spanish heavy artillery, and for six days eight twenty-four pounders and several large mortars pounded the fort's defenses. It seems that Bruce at last succumbed to pessimism. In his final sentence he wrote that his next letter would probably be dated from Georgia or South Carolina.

40. N. Orwin Rush, *Spain's Final Triumph over Great Britain in the Gulf of Mexico: The Battle of Pensacola, March 9 to May 8, 1791* (Tallahassee, 1966), 70-71.

41. *Ibid.*, 59-62.

Perhaps it was, but when next Bruce is heard from two years later he was in England, petitioning for backpay and compensation for his extensive property losses in West Florida. Unhappily for his fortunes, the commissioners responsible for assessing compensation for loyalist losses were uniformly niggardly. Whether he obtained the comparatively paltry sum that his claim for one year's backpay would have represented is unknown. What is known is that the commissioners rejected all Bruce's claims for what he had lost in Pensacola, which would have included slave property. Instead, they agreed to give him for the loss of his Amite estates, which Bruce alleged were worth thousands, the insulting sum of £100.⁴²

West Florida had raised James Bruce to a considerable height in political and economic power. Its conquest, of which the siege of Pensacola in 1781 was the climax, had reduced him to where he had been in 1763. Bruce's comments on the siege should be of interest to military historians. Although Bruce was a civilian, as a naval veteran with siege experience his criticisms show some strategic understanding. His omissions may be significant. It is quite possible to blame the failure to defend Pensacola on Governor Chester for inadequate preparations or on General Campbell for inept tactics. Neither is blamed in these letters. Instead Bruce placed the chief responsibility squarely on Admiral Sir Peter Parker, but he recognized too that the support of Indian allies was crucial to a successful defense. In doing so, Bruce was in line with recent analysts of the siege.⁴³ Where Bruce's letters touch on the hardships of the civilians who spurned Gálvez's gentlemanly offer, more characteristic of the eighteenth than our own century, of safety for women and children, they offer new material which should not be ignored in a social history of British West Florida, an enterprise which still awaits its author.

42. PRO Audit Office 12/99. I am grateful to Dr. Robert R. Rea for his notes on this document.

43. See Helen H. Tanner, "Pipesmoke and Muskets: Florida Intrigues of the Revolutionary Era," *Eighteenth-Century Florida and its Borderlands*, Samuel Proctor, ed. (Gainesville, 1975), 13-39; James H. O'Donnell III, "The Florida Revolutionary Frontier: Abode of the Blessed or Field of Battle?" *Eighteenth-Century Florida; Life on the Frontier*, Samuel Proctor, ed. (Gainesville, 1976), 60-74; and Michael D. Green, "The Creek Confederacy in the American Revolution: Cautious Participants," *Anglo-Spanish Confrontation on the Gulf Coast during the American Revolution*, William S. Coker and Robert R. Rea, eds. (Pensacola, 1982), 54-75.

(All of the letters retain their original spelling; punctuation has been improved, and, in some instances, added.)

Messrs. Clarke & Milligan Pensacola, 19th Septemr. 1780

I have lately been favoured with your leters of the 16th. & 30th. March last, the first mentioning that you hoped I had taken an opportunity of obviating the objections to my account made to you by Mr. Stuart. I am sorry I have not as yet received any advice from the Commissioners or the cashier respecting them, nor can I conceive any other objection than what I wrote to you of in my leter of the 17th. May; namely, that there has appeared to be a ballance in my hands for some years past, which, when we have an opportunity of transmitting our accounts for 1779 & this present year, I have no doubt of being able to account for to the satisfaction of Mr. Stuart & the board. On this head I have taken the liberty of writing the inclosed to Mr. Stuart, which I request you will deliver to him, and I hope he will have no objection of paying into your hands at least one year's sallary, as also the Comptroller's. I have left the leter open for your perusal.

I am sory I cannot join you in being perswaded that it was fortunate for me your not shipping the articles I wrote for, as I have severely felt the want of them, being oblidgeed to pay almost double the price of any former year for negro cloathing etc., and only the moderate price of eight and ten dollars for verry indiferent port, sherry & Lisbon wines per dozn.

I am glad to understand by your leter of the 30th. March that you have received a set of Gen. Campbell's bill of exchange for £100. And I doubt not but that its long ere now paid and carried to my credit with you.

I am sory that your prediction of our not receiving a reinforcement here is as yet verrified, but we are still in hopes, and I can account in no better manner for the sanguinity of my expectations in receiving a force equal to the defence and protection of this province than this; that I have alwise firmly believed that administration would not have continued to lay out so large sums on this province unless they had the strongest belief that the country was an object worthy of such expendi-

tures and of course must be protected by an adequate force. However, the protection or regaining of our lost possessions in West Florida can be no longer considered as a great object unless New Orleans and Louisiana is added to it, for without the free navigation of the Mississippi from its source to the Ballize with the entire sovereignty of the country on each side of its banks is vested in the crown of Great Britain, adieu to property in the insecure province of West Florida. This being the case beyond the possibility of a doubt, I think I cannot do myself and the community here a more acceptable service than in recommending it to you, who are so largely interested in the country, to use your utmost influence by your selves and others concerned to enforce this doctrine in the event of a peace, or if the war is to be prosecuted longer, that you will press the sending a separat naval command here and an addition of at least two thousand regular troops with which, and commanders of approved abilities, we have not the least doubt of soon being sole masters of the country again, and likewise New Orleans. I cannot help believing that a memorial of the merchts. and others concerned in London would effect either the one or the other, for you may be assured that, in the event of a peace, nothing short of the entire possession of the Mississippi on both sides will give security to either the mercantile or planting interest of any part of this country, and if the war is carried on even another spring without the proposed reinforcement, we must fall, for even our Indian allies begin to think that we scarcely belong to the Great King, or he would not suffer us to be so long in being able to drive out the Spaniards from the places they have taken from us, & if they are suffered to continue much longer in this belief, the consequences to us will soon be fatal. If any ship sails soon for this place pray send me a pipe of good old port wine such as I last had and insure it.

I am with esteem

Gentlemen your most obed. servt.

Jas. Bruce

Messrs. Clarke & Milligan

You will in a verry particular manner oblidge me by delivering the inclosed to Governor Johnstone when in town, or leave it with his brother John Johnstone Esqr. with my respectful compliments. By this opportunity you will receive a leter from me

dated 22d. Septemr. last, to which I refer. Nothing particular having hapened since then, we are still in a state of disagreable uncertainty, and no arrivals from Jamaica or elsewhere for these last three months, we are of course in a starving situation for many necessary comforts of life, such as wine, rum, sugar, tea, coffee, etc. Thank God we have plenty of flour. I am with esteem

Gentlemen

Your most obedient servant

Pensacola, 1 Novemr. 1780 Jas. Bruce

Mssrs. Clarke & Milligan

Pensacola, 22d. Febry. 1781

Having by this opportunity sent our accounts to the Commissioners up to the 5th of last month, I hope there will be no longer cause for preventing your receiving my sallary and the Comptroller's. I therefor hope you will do honor to my bill on you in favr. of Mr. James Young of Glasgow for forty pounds drawn at 30 ds. sight on the 27th Novemr. last as by my leter of advice, which I hope you have received. I must likewise request you will send me the pipe of port I wrote for on the 19th Sept. also 6 ps. blueplains & 6 ps. osnabrigs; for me personally eight pieces of linnen: 3 at 20d per yd: 3 at 2sh. per yard and 2 at 3sh. p.yd. and Mrs. Bruce requests the favor of either Mrs. Clarke or Mrs. Milligan to purchase further the enclosed list of articles for her & children.

You will see by Mr. Miller's leter to you that I am in the list of adventurers in the lottery. Mr. Hood & I are to share two betwixt us and I beg you will get them high numbers and I am determined to risque another which I request you will purchase for me in the name of my children, viz. Archd. Scot Bruce and Charlote Mary Bruce jointly, and I hope a fortunate number may turn up for them in order to compensate for these misfortunes of their father for these last two years.

I need not tell you our present situation. We flatter ourselves that our most inveterate foe, Dn. G- z, will no longer persecute us and I hope he may be forgiven, where we suppose he now is, for the evils he hath brought on us. The ships having gone a few days sooner than expected, I have not time to say more. Make my respects to Mr. Stuart and I hope he will be

satisfied with our accot. as transmitted. Our sufferings I hope will be considered.

I remain, with esteem, gentlemen,

Your most obed. servant

Jas. Bruce

Pray to omit not to procure my leave of absence, get two sch. and send via one by Charlestown & the other Jamaica.

Messrs. Clarke & Milligan

Pensacola, 24th. Februy. 1781

I request the favor of your care of the inclosed leter to my friend Govr. Johnstone, if in London. Pray deliver it and, if any of the ports, I will be oblidge to forward it.

In Mrs. Bruce's note inclosed in my leter of the 22nd inst., she omitted to mention 6 pair of gloves or mitts of colloured jean for a girl of 10 years, and two pair for a boy of the same age.

I am

Gentlemen

Your most obed servt

Jas. Bruce

Messrs. Clarke & Milligan

Pensacola, 26th. April 1781.

Inclosed I send you the fourth set of a bill of exchange drawn by Arthur Neil Esq. on the Board of Ordnance in my favor & attested by Major General John Campbell the 22d. October 1780. The third set I transmitted you via Charleston the 13 March last, which I hope came safe to your hand, and that you have recorded payment thereof for my account and, not having time to send you a copy of my leter of that date, I refer you to the original.

We have now been invested *forty-eight* days by a verry formidable fleet and army of Spain, the enemy paying us the compliment of thinking their first force insufficient, viz. 1 ship of 80 guns, 2 of 36, 2 of 20, 2 snows of 22 guns each, 1 brig of 16, six row gallaies and several other armed vessels, with transports having on board four thousand troops, whites, blak and yellow, and a train of artillery sufficient, with good officers, to attempt

at least the island of Jamaica. [They] have been reinforced some days ago by 15 sail of the line, 4 of which are French & eleven Spanish, who have landed at least two thousand troops which, from their appearance, are deemed equal to the first 4000. From this you will see how impossible it will be for our small force to hold out long. We are, however, not as *men without hope*. We are assured that our trusty friend, Sr. Pr. P- r knew of our situation even before we had the smallest apprehension ourselves; nay, he was so considerate that, like another Tantalus, he sent us the Childers brig with the woeful tidings, but at the same time, encouraged us with a hint, in the true Loyala stile, that we might expect relief when he could spare it. This is the answer we have had to our repeated representations to this worthy friend of his country for these two years past, but our hopes are that, unless the weight of his soon accumulated thousands outballances old English regard for the honor of our country, that he will add to the verry few unworthy sons of Neptune who have disgraced their country in the true B-g stile.

We have, however, hopes of a more promising aspect from a verry different quarter; namely, from that gallant and truly patriotic friend to his country, Sr. Geo. B. Rodney, who, we are assured, knows our situation and who has the disinterestedness to consider that the honor of his country is more concerned in the preservation of even the most insignificant territory of His Majesty's dominions than the amassing wealth to himself. Indeed the saving this colony and destroying the force collected against it would be a stroke of more national consequence than perhaps in this or any other war ever offered; but, if this is not effected early in the month of May 1781, we cannot flatter ourselves with other hopes than falling a sacrifice. The distresses of the inhabitants, being in this contest merely [indec.] from their particular situation, are at this time not to be described. The enemy commands the town from their shipping so that, while Fort George is attacked in front by their navy, the inhabitants are between the guns of both, and these, you know, have no respect for persons of whatever degree or denomination. Nor have we any other alt[ernative] but either trust our women & children etc. to the power of the merciless savages in the woods, or accept the genorosity of Dn. Gálvez who has offered a sanctuary to our women & children & property untill the capitulation of Fort George, if such takes place. I have only to add

that, if my worthy friend, Govr. Johnstone, is in town, you will be so good as to show him this hurried epistle.

I am with esteem, gentlemen,

Your most obed. servant,

Jas. Bruce

Messrs. Clarke & Milligan

Pensacola 7th. May 1781

Inclosed is a fifth set of a bill of exchange for one hundred pounds drawn by Arthr. Neil on the Board of Ordnance London and attested by General Campbell. I sent you on the 15 March the third set and, on the 26th. ult., the fourth set of the same, to the leters accompanying each of which I beg leave to refer you. I hope they are come to your hand & that you have received the amount for my account.

We have still English collours flying on Fort George altho we have sustained a very heavy cannonade for these six days past from eight 24 pdrs. & several large mortars. The enemy is working hard night and day to get nearer our batterys with his heavy artillery and without we have another miraculous escape there is little doubt but that so superior an army, fleet & artillery must at last carry their point. Their large fleet of 15 sail of the line, which have been riding off the harbour for some time and which brought so large a reinforcement, has been fortunately blown off the coast two days since by a gale of wind, and it's imagined they must have suffered verry considerable loss, as the wind was dead on shore, and two of them appeared yesterday all day to be aground, but by throwing their guns etc. overboard they appear this morning to be both got off. This would have been a verry fortunate circumstance provided an English fleet had been near us to have taken advantage of this disaster, but unfortunately for us we are afraid our worthy friend Sr. P- r P- r still commands on the Jamaica station. My next may be probably dated from Georgia or Carolina as I am determined to stay here but a verry short time if the event of the seige proves unfortunate.

I am Gentlemen

Your most obed. servant

Jas. Bruce