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Unmasked: The Author of *Narrative of a Voyage to the Spanish Main in the Ship "Two Friends"*

by PATRICK W. DOYLE

In 1819 John Miller of Burlington Arcade, Piccadilly, London, published the *Narrative of a Voyage to the Spanish Main in the Ship "Two Friends"* for an anonymous author, a young Englishman.¹ The author, calling himself the "Narrator," recounted his earlier voyages to Madeira Island, the Dutch island of St. Thomas, and Spanish East Florida. The *Narrative* paints a revealing portrait of northeast Florida during the waning years of the Second Spanish Period. In his introduction to the 1978 republication of the *Narrative* John W. Griffin posed two candidates, both named John Miller, for authorship; however, he concluded "[w]ithal the author . . . remains anonymous."² The Narrator's anonymity has persisted, but overlooked sources render his identification possible.

The knot of anonymity begins to unravel with the coincidence of a place and date: St. Augustine, Spanish East Florida, February 1818. The Narrator described his arrival in St. Augustine on the eve of Carnival 1818 and his meeting with José Coppinger, the governor and military commander of Spanish East Florida, in order to conclude "some arrangements."³ The Narrator disclosed elsewhere that he received a grant of a "considerable tract" bordering Lake George.⁴ On February 26, 1818, Coppinger granted lands near

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1. *Narrative of a Voyage to the Spanish Main in the Ship "Two Friends"; The Occupation of Amelia Island by M'Gregor, &c.—Sketches of the Province of East Florida; and Anecdotes Illustrative of the Habits and Manners of the Seminole Indians: with an Appendix, Containing a Detail of the Seminole War, and the Execution of Arbuthnot and Ambrister* (London, 1819; facsimile ed., with an introduction and index by John W. Griffin, Gainesville, 1978).
2. John W. Griffin, introduction to *Narrative*, 3.
3. *Ibid.*, 163. Ash Wednesday in 1818 was on February 4. Robert Hunt Lyman, ed., *The World Almanac and Book of Facts for 1936* (New York, 1936), 114. Accordingly, the day before Carnival was February 2, 1818.
4. *Narrative*, 125, 150.

Lake George to Joseph Freeman Rattenbury.⁵ This coincidence is the first link suggesting that the Narrator was Rattenbury.

The 1819 publication "Remarks on the Cession of the Floridas" by J. Freeman Rattenbury is the Rosetta Stone connecting the Narrator to Rattenbury.⁶ Rattenbury's authorship of the *Narrative* can be established because the works express common themes, contain identical or similar phraseology, and refer to the same arcane naval fact. Rattenbury also wrote *Edgar and Ella, a Legendary Tale of the Sixteenth Century*, which contains a poem providing a peculiar, but firm, connection between Rattenbury and the Narrator. Finally, land grant records and travel documentation solidify the Narrator's identity as Rattenbury.⁷

Presentation of the proof requires framing the *Narrative* and "Remarks" into an historical context and detailing the pertinent content of each. The *Narrative* was written when the Napoleonic wars had ended, and British veterans faced bleak economic prospects at home. At the same time the Spanish Crown, weakened by the wars and beset by rebellions in Latin America, scanted resources to East Florida, including troops.⁸ These ingredients fermented into the historical brew of the *Narrative*.

British veterans, returning home without prospect of employment, became targets of recruitment by agents of the Latin American insurgencies who promised volunteers pay and upgrades in rank. However, most promises were false, and the volunteers were soon resented by the indigenous forces.⁹ Though the Narrator never reached the Spanish Main, he was one of many who was recruited but soon disillusioned.

Spanish East Florida had already suffered the indignity of the abortive invasion of 1812 under General George Matthews, a former governor of Georgia, whom the United States government

5. United States Work Projects Administration, *Spanish Land Grants in Florida*, vol. 1, Unconfirmed Claims (Tallahassee, 1940), 262-63.

6. J. Freeman Rattenbury, "Remarks on the Cession of the Floridas to the United States of America and on the Necessity of Acquiring the Island of Cuba by Great Britain," *The Pamphleteer* 15 (London, 1819), 261-80.

7. J. F. Rattenbury, *Edgar and Ella, a Legendary Tale of the Sixteenth Century in Three Cantos and Other Poems* (London, 1822), 137-38.

8. *Narrative*, 3; L. David Norris, "José Coppinger in East Florida, 1816-1821: A Man, A Province, and a Spanish Colonial Failure" (Ph.D. diss., Southern Illinois University, 1981), 197; Charlton W. Tebeau, *A History of Florida* (Coral Gables, 1971), 103.

9. *Narrative*, 8, 47, 187.

tacitly promoted but eventually disavowed.¹⁰ The occupation of Amelia Island in 1817 and 1818 was even more humiliating for the Spanish because it was carried out by freebooters or pirates on behalf of mock governments.

On June 29, 1817, Gregor MacGregor, a Scotsman who had served under Simón Bolívar, easily seized the island with a small force of men, many of whom had been recruited from ports of the United States. MacGregor proclaimed he was "duly authorized by the constituted authorities of the Republics of Mexico, Buenos Ayres, New-Grenada and Venezuela," raised the "Patriot" flag, and declared independence of the Floridas. When promised goods, money, and men did not materialize but discontent did, MacGregor resigned on September 4, 1817, and withdrew. Military command passed to Jared Irwin, a former congressman, and the civil command passed to Ruggles Hubbard, a former sheriff from New York. Luis Aury, a French-born pirate, arrived on September 21, 1817, just after a miserable failure by Spanish troops to retake the island. Raising the flag of the Republic of Mexico, Aury assumed military command and appointed Irwin as his adjutant-general while Hubbard retained the role of civil governor.¹¹ The Narrator arrived at Amelia Island shortly thereafter; he did not like what he found.

Appreciation of the evidence establishing Rattenbury as the Narrator requires a summary of the *Narrative*. The Narrator compiled the work at the request of friends who wanted an "account of the ill-fated expedition," and his purpose in doing so was "to describe the miseries of my comrades, and our disappointments. . . ."¹² The Narrator was predisposed to leave England for personal reasons: "[t]he loss of a beloved parent and some circumstances of a painful and distressing nature over which I had neither controul or influence."¹³

The Narrator, induced by exaggerated accounts of insurgent successes in the Spanish Main reported in the *Morning Chronicle* and beguiled by agents for the Republic of Venezuela, booked passage on the schooner *Two Friends*. The ship left Portsmouth on July

10. Tebeau, *A History of Florida*, 106-107.

11. *Charleston Courier*, July 14, 1817; Griffin, introduction to *Narrative*, 12-13, 15-16. Norris, "José Coppinger," 273; Tebeau, *A History of Florida*, 111-12.

12. *Narrative*, v, 5.

13. *Ibid.*, 4.

31, 1817, with eighty passengers aboard, many of whom were army and navy veterans of the Napoleonic wars. The anticipated voyage to the Spanish Main—as was to have been directed by the Venezuelan agent upon arrival in St. Thomas—ended ingloriously at that island: the Venezuelan agent never appeared; the *Two Friends* absconded in the night.¹⁴ Unaware that MacGregor had already left, the American consul recommended that the Narrator and twenty-nine companions join MacGregor; thus encouraged, they booked passage to Amelia Island on the American schooner *Mary*.¹⁵

In late October 1817 the Narrator landed on Amelia Island; he was crestfallen to learn that MacGregor had already departed.¹⁶ The Narrator and others met Aury who expressed disappointment the *Mary* had not brought “privates as well as officers.” The Narrator quickly discovered that knavery, not gallantry, was the order of the day; he depicted Aury’s followers as “the refuse of all nations.”¹⁷

Though Aury had the island and its town, Fernandina, under his control, he was vexed by disputes between his own “French” party and the “American” party.¹⁸ The alienated residents of Fernandina, wanting to oust Aury and the French party, solicited the Narrator and others to assist them in this effort. The Narrator approached Irwin, Aury’s adjutant-general, to enlist his support, but to the Narrator’s chagrin, Irwin declined. The disgusted Narrator retreated to nearby St. Marys, Georgia, but he returned to Amelia to defend, unsuccessfully, a British officer against a charge of “treasonable practices” before a court martial convened and controlled by Aury. Following the court martial, the Narrator fought with M’Donald, an Aury supporter and a detested fellow passenger on the *Two Friends* and the *Mary*, resulting in the Narrator’s brief arrest and subsequent banishment.¹⁹

14. *Ibid.*, 5, 9, 12, 42, 48-49, 191.

15. *Ibid.*, 53-54.

16. Griffin puts the date as October 25, 1817, but the date of arrival can only be approximated. The Narrator arrived in St. Thomas on September 25, 1817. The voyage from St. Thomas to East Florida took fourteen days, but no departure date is given. Griffin, introduction to *Narrative*, 17; *Narrative*, 38, 76. A report from St. Marys dated November 1, 1817, stated that twenty-eight English officers arrived from St. Thomas. *Charleston Courier*, November 7, 1817. The Narrator related that two of the thirty adventurers on the *Mary* disembarked before arriving at Amelia. *Narrative*, 76-78.

17. *Narrative*, 78, 96.

18. Griffin, introduction to *Narrative*, 17; *Narrative*, 96-97.

19. *Narrative*, 99, 107.

The Narrator returned to St. Marys where he accepted an invitation from Coppinger, extended through the surveyor general of East Florida, to meet with the governor in St. Augustine.²⁰ In conferring with Coppinger, the Narrator volunteered to assume command of a raid to eject Aury, but Coppinger, though initially receptive, declined.²¹ Informed that Aury had learned of the Narrator's offer to assist Coppinger, the Narrator returned to St. Marys overland to avoid capture by Aury's forces. The Narrator then sailed from St. Marys to Charleston in December 1817.²²

The United States had grown impatient with the privateering and smuggling of the so-called patriots, and on December 23, 1817, United States army and naval forces, without resistance, overtook Amelia under authority of a secret act and resolution of Congress, enacted in 1811, but only disclosed shortly after the takeover.²³ In mid-January 1818, the Narrator, desiring to return to East Florida to complete "some arrangements" proposed to Coppinger on his earlier visit, accepted an offer of passage from Charleston to Amelia Island extended by Captain Kearney, the commander of the *Enterprise*, a U.S. brig of war.²⁴ Upon returning to St. Marys from Amelia, the Narrator made a second visit to St. Augustine, arriving on the evening of February 2, 1818.²⁵ After the "object of his visit" was "satisfactorily arranged," he sailed from St. Augustine to Charleston; thereafter, he proceeded "through the United States."²⁶

The negotiations between the United States and Spain over an acceptable treaty whereby the Floridas would be ceded to the United States by Spain form the backdrop to Rattenbury's "Remarks." John Quincy Adams, the Secretary of State, and Luis de Onís, the Spanish minister in Washington, negotiated the treaty, which was signed on February 22, 1819, and ratified by the United

20. *Ibid.*, 113. The royal public surveyor general was George J. F. Clark. Griffin, introduction to *Narrative*, 18; Norris, "José Coppinger," 163.

21. *Narrative*, 113, 128. The Narrator was accompanied by at least one fellow adventurer since he used plural pronouns in describing his arrival, and at the time of his departure he was accompanied by two other officers who "were equally averse with myself to fall into the power of the pirates." *Ibid.*, 116, 130.

22. *Ibid.*, 129, 146, 150.

23. Griffin, introduction to *Narrative*, 20.

24. *Ibid.*, 150.

25. See note 3 above.

26. *Narrative*, 181-82. Probable other areas visited were Georgia, the Carolinas, and the Hudson River area of New York. *Ibid.*, 156, 158, 134.

States Senate on February 24, 1819. After the Senate ratification, Adams realized that he had blundered over a provision in the treaty providing for recognition of grants made before January 24, 1818, and that two of the largest grants made in December 1817 would have been upheld. Adams had understood during the negotiations that land grants made after August 11, 1802, would be invalid.²⁷ Consequently, he maneuvered to negate these large grants.

The treaty provided a six-month period for acceptance by Spain. However, it was not until October 24, 1820, that Spain approved it. At the same time King Ferdinand, to Adams's relief, renounced the troublesome grants. Since the time set for acceptance had expired, a second ratification was required, and the Senate did so on February 19, 1821.²⁸

Rattenbury wrote "Remarks" just before and after the expiration of the initial six-month time limit for Spain's acceptance; he passionately hoped that Spain would reject the treaty. In "Remarks" Rattenbury argued against Spain's cession of the Floridas to the United States and for Spain's cession of Cuba to Great Britain should the Florida cession occur.²⁹

Rattenbury asserted that the United States wanted the Floridas as a means toward improving national security, advancing toward future naval pre-eminence, and eliminating a perceived threat to the federal system—possible separation of the western and Atlantic states. Rattenbury emphasized that the victorious enemies of Napoleon had entered into an alliance and warned the United States that a forcible seizure of the Floridas could result in war with that alliance. If there were a war, then taxation would be necessary to finance it, and there would be a disruption of agricultural exports that would fall more heavily upon the western states because of their reliance on the southern ports. The western states would then question a policy benefitting the Atlantic states at their expense. The result, he contended, would be that the western states would have to swallow the policy of the Atlantic states or secede from the Union. Rattenbury argued that the Atlantic states combined both

27. Samuel Flagg Bemis, *John Quincy Adams and the Foundations of American Foreign Policy* (New York, 1949), 334-39.

28. *Ibid.*, 338, 352.

29. "Remarks" was a republication with amendments of articles appearing in the *Morning Chronicle* in August and September 1819. "Remarks," 262.

commercial and agricultural pursuits, suited to become a maritime power, while the western states depended solely on agriculture.³⁰

Rattenbury was angry about attempts to set back the date of recognition of land grants; he vented against Adams:

[H]e demanded the abrogation of all grants made . . . subsequent to the year 1802, and the excuse offered for this infamous proposal to violate the rights of individuals, was, that in that year, the subject of cession of the Floridas had been *agitated* by the two governments.³¹

The main proof of Rattenbury's authorship of the *Narrative* is the identical or similar phraseology in the *Narrative* and "Remarks." The excerpts that follow show the unmistakable connection.

Excerpt from *Narrative*:

The bays of Appalache and Tampo, and Charlotte's harbour, on the west of this province, are admirably situated for naval stations; particularly the bay of Tampo, capable of receiving the whole of the British Navy.³²

Excerpt from "Remarks":

The latter bay [bay of Spiritu Santo] includes that of Tampo, presenting a noble and spacious harbour, completely sheltered from the influence of the north-west wind, and capable of receiving the whole of the British Navy.³³

Excerpt from *Narrative*:

To foreigners, grants of land are very liberal; a considerable tract was assigned to me on the borders of Lake St. George, one of the finest parts of the province, on the river

30. "Remarks," 263, 268-69, 271.

31. *Ibid.*, 264; emphasis in the original.

32. *Narrative*, 82-83. Curiously, Tampa is spelled correctly in the Appendix. *Ibid.*, 188 n.

33. "Remarks," 272.

St. John's, abounding with live oak, cedar, and cypress; the soil congenial to the cultivation of cotton, rice, sugar and other important products.³⁴

Excerpt from "Remarks":

[The St. John's River] passes through and is fed by several lakes, the most considerable the lake of St. George . . . the shores abounding on either side with immense forests of live oak, cedar, cypress, pine, and other valuable trees; the soil congenial to the production of cotton, rice, tobacco, coffee, sugar, and other important products. . . .³⁵

Excerpt from *Narrative*:

[Describing rice swamps] The action of the sun upon these decayed vegetable substances produces putridity, creating the miasmata so fatally and widely destructive to the white inhabitants of the states of the Carolinas and Georgia. . . . This destructive vapor does not exist in the province of East Florida, or is dissipated. . . .³⁶

Excerpt from "Remarks":

[T]he salubrity of the climate [in East Florida is] equal to any in the world, and far superior to that of the Southern States of North America, being entirely free from the pestilential miasmata which rise from the low ground of the Carolinas and Georgia, and prove so extensively destructive to their white inhabitants.³⁷

34. The reference is to Lake George identified as *Laguna San Jorge* on a survey prepared by Andres Burgevin for Rattenbury. *Spanish Land Grants*, vol.1, 263; Unconfirmed Spanish Land Grant Claims, Record Group 000599, Carton 8, Unc. R1, Document No. 5, Florida State Archives; *Narrative*, 125.

35. "Remarks," 273. The tree sequence is repeated in the *Narrative*: "the immense forests of live oak, cedar, cypress and pine" and "immense woods of live oak, cedar, cypress, and pine." *Narrative*, 81, 134.

36. *Narrative*, 156-57.

37. "Remarks," 273.

Matching phraseology of lesser significance occurs in passages describing the St. Johns River and the town and harbor of St. Augustine.³⁸

Common themes also connect the *Narrative* and "Remarks": the execution of Alexander Arbuthnot and Robert Ambrister, the internal politics of the United States, and the maritime contest between the United States and England. The words used by the Narrator and Rattenbury to express these themes are similar.

Arbuthnot and Ambrister, British nationals, were executed in West Florida on April 29, 1818, following conviction by a court martial convened by General Andrew Jackson. The *Narrative* strikes a theme of anger about this incident, characterizing it variously as "the murder of our unfortunate countrymen," a "barbarous act of a vindictive foreigner," "judicial murder," and an "atrocious murder of our unhappy countryman."³⁹ Rattenbury reprised the theme in "Remarks," stating that "the unexpiated murder of Arbuthnot and Ambrister . . . remains a foul charge against the American character, and an insult to our own" and that the hands of United States troops were "red with the blood of our murdered countrymen."⁴⁰ The Arbuthnot and Ambrister executions became a *cause celebre* in England.⁴¹ Although fiery denunciations about them alone are not persuasive in the establishment of the author's identity, the reference contributes to the task when coupled with other repeated themes.

The internal politics of the United States, namely the distinction between the Atlantic states and the western states, form a second common theme. The Narrator asserted that if the United States obtained the Floridas, then it would give the "Atlantic States . . . a decided influence over those of their western territory, uniting their destinies by a gordian knot, which the latter will never be able to sever."⁴² In "Remarks," Rattenbury averred that acquisition of the Floridas by the United States would "consolidate and strengthen the North American Union, by uniting the destinies of the Western and Atlantic states, rendering the former dependent

38. *Narrative*, 134; "Remarks," 272-73 (as to the St. Johns River); *Narrative*, 116-17; "Remarks," 272 (as to the town and harbor of St. Augustine).

39. *Narrative*, vii-viii, 196-97.

40. "Remarks," 265, 279.

41. Thomas A. Bailey, *A Diplomatic History of the American People*, 6th ed. (New York, 1958), 170.

42. *Narrative*, 82.

on the latter. . . ." Rattenbury theorized that if the United States acquired the Floridas the western states would be at the mercy of the Atlantic states because the Atlantic States would then control the sea trade routes of the agricultural products of the west.⁴³

The third common theme is the contest between the United States and England for maritime superiority. The Narrator foresaw the impending rivalry between Great Britain and the United States for naval supremacy. Given the strategic character of East Florida from its position on the Gulf Stream and proximity to the West Indies, the Narrator contended that if the United States possessed the Floridas and war occurred the British navy would be unable to protect English trade. He declared that perhaps only England could successfully contend with the United States the possession of the Floridas; he proclaimed that "[n]aval pre-eminence is our legitimate ambition. . . ." ⁴⁴ In "Remarks," Rattenbury detailed the importance of the Gulf Stream and emphasized that upon the United States' acquisition of the Floridas, English trade in the Gulf Stream and with the Island of Jamaica would face "certain destruction" in wartime.⁴⁵

The most peculiar tie between the Narrator and Rattenbury involves the thinness of the lips of caucasian Americans. The Narrator asserted that "the lips of the natives of North America are much thinner than those of Europeans."⁴⁶ In Rattenbury's argument to his poem "The Seminole Maid" he pronounced: "It is a singular, but undoubted fact, in the physiology of the people of the United States, that their lips are thinner than those of Europeans, often presenting a deformity of feature."⁴⁷

Other links connecting the Narrator to Rattenbury are a common experience and knowledge of an obscure naval matter. Rattenbury acknowledged in "Remarks" that he, too, was "intimately acquainted with the character of the Floridas, from personal observations." As earlier stated, the U.S.S. *Enterprise* under the command of Captain Kearney carried the Narrator from Charleston to Amelia Island. In "Remarks," Rattenbury revealed knowledge of the *En-*

43. "Remarks," 266, 268-69.

44. *Narrative*, 81-83.

45. "Remarks," 266.

46. *Narrative*, 165.

47. J. F. Rattenbury, argument to "The Seminole Maid," *Edgar and Ella*, 138. According to Rattenbury New Englanders were the worst afflicted by this deformity. *Ibid.*

terprise and Captain Kearney, and even the mission of the *Enterprise* following the occupation of Amelia Island.⁴⁸

The concluding evidence identifying Rattenbury as the Narrator lies in further information about the land grant and documentation of Rattenbury's departure from St. Augustine meshing with information provided by the Narrator. The extent of the land grants to the Narrator and Rattenbury correspond as do the dates. Rattenbury's grant included 25,520 acres near Lake George, large enough to qualify as the Narrator's "considerable tract" at the same location.⁴⁹ The Narrator's references to his "arrangements" or the "object" of his visit in connection with his visits to St. Augustine most probably refer to the land grant.⁵⁰

The Narrator's departure from St. Augustine at the conclusion of his second visit was by a schooner that arrived in Charleston thirty hours later.⁵¹ On Wednesday, March 4, 1818, the *Charleston Courier* reported that the schooner *Alert* had arrived from St. Augustine after a thirty-hour voyage and that among the passengers was a "Rattenburg."⁵² Despite this spelling, it is unlikely that this passenger was other than Rattenbury. This report allows the conclusion that the Narrator spent a month in St. Augustine during his second visit, ample time to arrange for the land grant.

The biographical information on Rattenbury is sketchy. The son of Joseph F. Rattenbury Sr. and Elizabeth Rattenbury, Joseph Freeman was christened at Marazion, a chapel in the parish of St. Hilary in Cornwall, England, on February 17, 1784.⁵³ Rattenbury was a descendant of the House of Hesse; his lineage is best described in his own words:

A prince of the House of Hesse Rottenburg Rhinfels about the latter end of the reign of our Henry the 8th, having had the misfortune to kill the son of the prince of Hesse Cassel, fled to England, to avoid the resentment of the

48. "Remarks," 266, 272. The Narrator was five days at sea with Kearney and received the "kindest attention from him." *Narrative*, 150. Rattenbury also mentions Aury, the takeover at Amelia, and the harbor at Amelia Island. "Remarks," 262-63, 272.

49. *Spanish Land Grants*, Vol. 1, 263.

50. *Narrative*, 129, 150, 181.

51. *Ibid.*, 181-82.

52. *Charleston Courier*, March 4, 1818.

53. Baptismal record, Parish of St. Hilary, Cornwall, England. Copy in possession of the author.

reigning family; he settled in Cornwall, where his descendants were, for several generations, considerable land proprietors, and matched with the principal families of that and the neighbouring county.⁵⁴

Little is presently known about his childhood or early manhood, but it is apparent that he received an education in the classics and learned French and Latin, and he also travelled extensively in Europe. Before 1817, he was, or sought to pursue a career as, a lawyer.⁵⁵ While Rattenbury did not affirm he had been British officer or a veteran of the Napoleonic Wars, the probabilities are that he was because he volunteered to serve in a military capacity in the cause of the insurgents, offered to lead a raid against Aury, and travelled with passengers who were veterans. Rattenbury began his voyage on the *Two Friends*, just fifty-three days after the death in Plymouth of his seventy-one-year-old Quaker father, his "beloved parent," on June 8, 1817.⁵⁶

Rattenbury was bearded, relatively thick-lipped, not physically imposing, and, at the time of the *Narrative*, in his early thirties. He was well-off for he had to pay for passages on many voyages and travel in the United States. He preferred obtaining bed and board, and he travelled with more baggage than he could carry.⁵⁷ He had a fondness for women and spirits; he even carried a supply of whiskey and Madeira wine while in Florida. These inclinations are reflected in *Edgar and Ella* in which he wrote two Anacreontic poems and one entitled "To Woman." His description in the *Narrative* of a stop at a grog shop in Cowford is particularly revealing: "[t]he night was passed in noisy mirth, drinking, and gambling, vices too prevalent."⁵⁸

Rattenbury displayed a talent for imagery in the *Narrative*. He described dolphins "sporting across our bow with the velocity of

54. J. F. Rattenbury, argument to "Edgar and Ella," *Edgar and Ella*, 3-4. The Narrator refers to the Elector of Hesse. *Narrative*, 188.

55. *Narrative*, 102.

56. *Plymouth and Dock Telegraph and Chronicle*, June 21, 1817.

57. *Ibid.*, 131-33, 137-38, 141-42, 152, 154 (bed or board); *Ibid.*, 137, 155, 157, 161 (baggage). Rattenbury made a single reference to camping and no reference to fishing or hunting though he noted the abundance of fish and game. *Ibid.*, 138, 144, 158.

58. *Ibid.*, 135.

thought." Even more picturesque is his description of crossing the St. Johns River:

The noise of the oars, as they cut their liquid way, rousing the echoes of its banks, were answered by the noisy cadence of the negroes' boat-song, amusing and beguiling our way.⁵⁹

While in Florida Rattenbury had moments of bittersweet recollection of the people and places he had left behind, also described in an imaginative way:

I wandered at the discretional pace of my horse, enjoying the woody scenery, broken at intervals by views of the Atlantic ocean, across whose waves my imagination painted those beloved friends, for whose happiness my heart constantly and fervently aspirated [*sic*]. There is a melancholy pleasure in recreating the scenes of happier days, and in visiting in idea, those haunts endeared by circumstances of early and tender attachment.⁶⁰

Rattenbury did not reveal his marital status at the time of his Florida adventure, but given his sometimes personal comments, it is reasonable to assume that, if married, he would have revealed it in some manner. Nonetheless in 1822, when Rattenbury sailed from London to New York City, he was accompanied by a wife, Anna Maria, age eighteen.⁶¹

Rattenbury was given to embellishment on occasion. Just after release from his arrest on Amelia Island, he boasted "I had accidentally a brace of loaded pistols in my pocket, which had escaped the scrutiny of my gaolers, each having a small dagger."⁶² In the argument to the poem "The Seminole Maid," he declared that in winter of 1817 he was with an armed party that encountered a Seminole

59. *Ibid.*, 74, 152-53.

60. *Ibid.*, 159-60.

61. New York, New York Index to Passenger Lists 1820-1846, Roll M 261-79, Manifest 2532, American Genealogical Lending Library, Boutiful, Utah. This source indicates that Rattenbury was thirty-five years old on April 15, 1822, but assuming his christening was in the same year as his birth, he was thirty-eight years old. This list misspells Rattenbury as "Rattenberry."

62. *Narrative*, 111.

hunting party.⁶³ If this incident occurred, it had to have been at the time of his first visit to St. Augustine. Yet, in the *Narrative* Rattenbury makes no reference to it and admitted in connection with his second visit "on my former visit . . . I had been disappointed in my desire to see some aborigines. . . ." On his second visit, the only Seminoles he encountered were in St. Augustine.⁶⁴

Rattenbury's portrayal of a young Seminole female accompanying the hunting party supposedly encountered diverged markedly from his depiction in the *Narrative*. In the argument to "The Seminole Maid" Rattenbury described a Seminole female about fourteen years old:

[She] was extremely handsome: her attire left little of nature to the imagination; she wore a short petticoat . . . the upper part of her body was entirely naked, save when her long black tresses . . . screened from intrusive glances the lovely contour of her bosom. . . .⁶⁵

Rattenbury's assessment in the *Narrative* of the young Seminole women he saw in St. Augustine was less generous: "Some of the young squaws, were tolerably agreeable, and if well washed and dressed, would not have been uninteresting. . . ."⁶⁶

Rattenbury must have been considered a person of some importance since he was offered passage on a U.S. Navy vessel and carried with him at that time letters of introduction to Colonel James Bankhead, the U.S. Army commander at Amelia. Furthermore, on his second visit to St. Augustine he was a courier of "dispatches from the Spanish minister at Washington."⁶⁷

Rattenbury was compassionate about the treatment of the Africans and seemingly opposed to slavery. He credited the Spanish for their humane treatment of "negroes" compared to the "disgraceful and morbid selfishness of the possessors of this unfortunate race in other countries." More pointedly, he observed:

63. J. F. Rattenbury, argument to "The Seminole Maid," *Edgar and Ella*, 138.

64. *Narrative*, 164.

65. Rattenbury, argument to "The Seminole Maid," *Edgar and Ella*, 138.

66. *Narrative*, 166.

67. *Ibid.*, 150, 161.

Here [in Spanish East Florida] they continue long in one family, grow up with the rising generation, partake of their sports, sympathize in their griefs, and become identified with every member of their families.⁶⁸

While expressing appreciation for kindnesses extended to him by Americans, Rattenbury was rankled that the people of the United States did not like England:

I cannot repress the expression of my regret, that their hatred to the English, as a nation, is the most fixed, and rooted of their resentments: leading them into the indulgence of feelings, upon political subjects, ungenerous and unjust.⁶⁹

He concluded this observation with the quotation "*Oderint dum metuant*" ("Let them hate, as long as they fear").⁷⁰

The land grant venture shows that Rattenbury had an entrepreneurial bent. Rattenbury discussed the land grant proposal with Coppinger during his first visit. On February 18, 1818 — during his second visit to St. Augustine — he petitioned for 100,000 acres declaring his intent to bring settlers with their families from Great Britain, Ireland and other places and "negroes from Africa." Because the enterprise entailed his going to Europe, he asked three years' time to complete the conditions; however, Coppinger allowed only 50,000 acres and two years' time.⁷¹

In 1818 or 1819 Rattenbury agreed to convey to Horatio S. Dexter an undivided 2,000 acres of the 11,000 acres near Lake George known as the Volusia tract. Within the same time period he also agreed to convey an undivided 3,500 acres of the Volusia tract to Peter Mitchell, Anthony L. Molyneux, and Ogden Day & Company.⁷²

Rattenbury undertook to recruit settlers upon his return to England. He promised 500 acres to James Riz of Liverpool and nine others, including Riz's parents, provided they would settle on his

68. *Ibid.*, 125-26.

69. *Ibid.*, 182.

70. *Ibid.*

71. *Spanish Land Grants*, vol. 1, 262.

72. *Ibid.*, 74-75, 234-35.

land. When the immigrants arrived they were prevented from settling by the Indians; consequently, they bought land at Picolata where Riz's parents died of fever. Rattenbury was accused of deceiving Riz by denying the existence of the fever; this accusation rings true given his opinion about the absence of the "miasmata" in East Florida.⁷³

James Alexander, describing himself as *apoderado* (proxy or attorney) for Rattenbury, represented Rattenbury's interest locally after his departure. His name appears in a petition to archive a plat; moreover, the land grant records show that he had acquired an interest in the Rattenbury grant. Rattenbury's land claim named the claimants as Rattenbury and "his associates, the heirs of the late James Alexander."⁷⁴ Unfortunately for Rattenbury, his land grant came just a month and a few days shy of possibly being confirmed. Claims by Rattenbury's grantees were also rejected, even though they claimed to have made improvements and to have brought slaves and livestock to the property.⁷⁵ Nevertheless, Rattenbury parlayed his experience in East Florida into representation of English peers in connection with their own claims. In 1823 he submitted claims from London for the Earl of Grosvenor, the Marquis of Hastings, Lord Rolle, Lord Templeton, and the Marquis of Waterford.⁷⁶

As previously noted, Rattenbury divulged that "painful and distressing" personal circumstances prompted his journey. The text reveals clues about the nature of those circumstances. The Narrator, in relating an example of vengeance as practiced by the Seminole Indians, expanded upon that subject:

[I]f the operation of this passion could be confined within the bounds of just retribution, its exercise might be rendered beneficial to the community, and the certainty of punishment, might deter those insidious villains, who destroy the peace of individuals and society, by blasting characters with the pestilential breath of scandal, sheltered by irresponsible situations from that punishment, their

73. *Ibid.*, 100.

74. *Ibid.*, 262; Unconfirmed Spanish Land Grant Claims, Record Group 000599, Carton 8, Unc. R1, Document No. 1.

75. *Spanish Land Grants*, vol. 1, 74-75; 234-35.

76. *Ibid.*, 156, 166, 270, 305, 336. In the claims submitted for the Marquis of Hastings and for Lord Rolle, Rattenbury is identified as an "attorney." He could have been acting under a power of attorney.

crimes deserve, but which their cowardice would have withheld them from committing, had they been otherwise circumstanced. These injuries are frequently more seriously destructive to the individual than the loss of health and property.⁷⁷

Rattenbury implies that a "villain" accused him of being involved in a scandal, but the accusation was legally privileged; the privilege concept fits his words "sheltered by irresponsible situations." Generally, a legal privilege to make an otherwise defamatory statement applies to a legally protected person or communication. For example, the privilege would apply to a statement made by a high ranking government official or in a judicial proceeding or a military communication.⁷⁸ To Rattenbury a defamatory remark protected by a privilege was a "crime" that could be avoided or punished by "prompt and just retaliation." But he concluded that because of the "depravity of human nature," individuals could not be entrusted with "the task of vengeance."⁷⁹

Rattenbury thought the press should operate as the corrective mechanism by exposing the truth about an accuser, but it could not do so because of the "doctrine that the truth of a statement cannot be admitted to repel the charge of libel," a doctrine he characterized as "at once monstrous and absurd, abhorrent to every sentiment, and repugnant to the dispensation of justice."⁸⁰ In other words, if the press printed a truthful but defamatory accusation, the press would nonetheless be subject to prosecution.

James Freeman Rattenbury, an insurance broker and merchant, of Cophall Court, London, underwent a bankruptcy in 1811. On September 7, 1811, he was required to undergo a last examination and "surrender himself, and Make a Full Disclosure of His Estate and Effects."⁸¹ It is uncertain, however, whether this was Rattenbury or his father. If it were Rattenbury, then conceivably

77. *Narrative*, 172-74.

78. *American Jurisprudence*, 2d. ed., vol. 50 (Rochester, 1995), "Libel and Slander," §273 at 538-39, §275 at 543-44, §288 at 572-73, §297 at 589-92.

79. *Narrative*, 173-74.

80. In common law criminal libel prosecutions, the maxim "the greater the truth, the greater the libel" developed based on the premise that a truthful accusation was more likely to provoke retaliation than a false one. George Chase, ed., *Commentaries on the Laws of England* by Sir William Blackstone (abridged), 4th ed. (New York, 1938), 682-83 n. 7.

81. *London Gazette*, September 3, 1811.

this was the event about which he was so disturbed, but it occurred six years before his voyage and lacks the immediacy suggested in the *Narrative*. The actual circumstances about which Rattenbury was so distressed remain an alluring mystery.

Although the specific reasons for Rattenbury's decision to publish the *Narrative* anonymously are unknown, one can consider likely motives. One motive could have been to shield himself against the charge of hypocrisy. In the *Narrative* he condemned the *Morning Chronicle* for printing misleading accounts of the insurgents and, possibly, of printing articles of "foreign manufacture."⁸² Yet, upon his return to England, Rattenbury wrote articles for the *Morning Chronicle*. Also hypocritical was his seeming condemnation of slavery, yet he proposed bringing slaves from Africa in connection with his land grant.⁸³ He also may have been reluctant to rekindle any publicity concerning the scandalous conduct referred to earlier. He might have feared that derogatory statements about the Spanish in the *Narrative* would jeopardize Spanish cooperation in the land grant affirmation process. He wrote that the Spanish considered "themselves degraded by every act in which personal labour is concerned, and averse to all bodily exertion," and he referred to the "imbecility" of Spanish commanders.⁸⁴ While a reference appears in "Remarks" about "the proverbial indolence of the Spaniards," it was not with the edge expressed in the *Narrative*.⁸⁵

In the *Narrative* Joseph Freeman Rattenbury gifted a portrait of Spanish East Florida in 1817 and 1818 that depicted Seminole Indians, agricultural practices, backwoods inhabitants, the piratical activities on Amelia Island, and the town and society of St. Augustine. Rightful recognition can now be given to him for his legacy.

82. *Narrative*, 191-92.

83. *Spanish Land Grants*, vol. 1, 262.

84. *Narrative*, 119-20, 81. This comment was not directed at Coppinger; Rattenbury had the highest regard for him.

85. "Remarks," 275.