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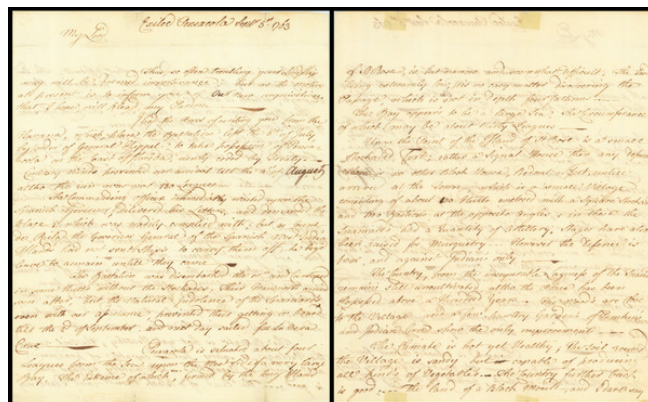
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(The First Letter From British Florida) [September 5, 1763, Autograph Letter, Signed, from Robert Campbell to John Campbell, 4th Earl of Loudoun, describing the British taking possession of Florida and the state of the settlement of Pensacola]

Stock#: 86620
Map Maker: Campbell
Date: 1763
Place: Pensacola, Florida
Color: Pen & Ink
Condition: VG
Size: 9.25 x 15 inches
Price: \$ 75,000.00



Description:

The Earliest Known English Account of Pensacola and the Earliest Known Letter from British Florida

"Exiled in Pensacola": Firsthand Account of Florida at the Time of the British Takeover in 1763

A foundational letter in the English-language history of Florida.

A detailed account of Pensacola, Florida by Robert Campbell, a British soldier who was part of the battalion sent from Havana on July 6, 1763, to take possession of Pensacola, Florida from the Spanish following the 1763 Treaty of Paris. The letter is addressed: "To The Right Honorable The Earl of Loudon" (John Campbell, 4th Earl of Loudoun). The 4th Earl of Loudoun (1705-1782) had been commander-in-chief of the British forces in America during the French and Indian War, as well as the titular Governor General of Virginia. At the time of this letter, Loudoun was back in England, having been recalled after the downfall of his patron, the Duke of Cumberland.

Robert Campbell gives an eyewitness account of the peaceful transfer of possession and the Spanish governor's inability to leave immediately for a lack of transport ships, until September 3, 1763, when they sailed for Veracruz. His description is full of fresh firsthand observations about the situation in Pensacola, including its location, navigability of the entrance to the town, existing Spanish fortifications, lack of proper provisions, and the like.

Deane R. Briggs, writing in the *Florida Postal History Journal*, describes this very document as the earliest surviving letter sent from British Florida, having been sent less than one month after Lieutenant Colonel



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Augustin Prevost assumed British control at Pensacola on August 6, 1763. The letter pre-dates the proclamation dated October 7, 1763 which divided British Florida into East Florida and West Florida, and established Pensacola as the capital of the latter colony. And certainly the official reports sent to Spain by Spanish officials in Florida, now held in the Archives of the Indies at Seville, would not qualify as private correspondence.

According to Briggs' study of early Florida postal history:

No postal history is recorded during the First Spanish Period (1513-1763)...The first recorded postal history during the British period is aptly datelined 'Exiled Pensacola Sept 5th 1763.' It was written by Robert Campbell to the Earl of London [sic] with no postal markings but docketing for receipt on "Jan 13th [i.e. 19th] 1764, London."

To clarify, the verso of one of the pages is indeed docketed in an early hand: "Robert Campbell, Pensacolla Jan 5 1763" and bears a receipt date in London in 1764: "R. January 19th 1764, London."

Please note that this letter has been requested for reproduction in the updated edition of Deane Briggs's book on early Florida postal history.

As a soldier stationed in Pensacola during the transfer of Florida to the British, Robert Campbell was able to provide important details about the condition of the settlement. He writes to John Campbell, the Earl of Loudoun, reporting that his regiment has left Havana and is now based in Pensacola, which it has taken over from the Spaniards under the 1763 Treaty of Paris. He gives a quite detailed description of the entrance to the bay, with mention of the "long island of St. Rose" upon which there was a small fort or signal house. He describes the town as "a small village consisting of about 150 Hutts enclosed with a Square stockade," and thinks that industrious settlers could make much of the area. He repeatedly describes the Spanish as lazy or indolent in their lack of interest in developing Florida's agricultural possibilities. He describes the topography, climate, soil, and local Indians.

The British battalion reportedly comprised 300 men, but had food for only three months. Nearby Mobile would eventually become the source of fresh provisions. Campbell's request for a twelve-month leave of absence would seem to be related to a matter of some concern to Colonel Prevost: the term of service of half of his men had expired and they were expecting to be discharged per the promises of General Keppel. Perhaps this is the reason for Campbell's self-styled "exile" in Pensacola.

Soon after the British takeover, most of the Spanish inhabitants of Florida were resettled in Mexico or



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other Spanish American colonies:

After the successful capture of Martinique and the fall of Morro Castle in Havana, both in 1762, the Earl of Albemarle directed Lieutenant Colonel Augustine Prevost, 3d Battalion, Royal American, or 60th Regiment, to proceed to Pensacola, Florida, for occupation by British forces... He arrived in Pensacola before the governor. In fact, he presented letters from the court of Spain to the Spanish governor, Don Diego Ortiz Parilla, and demanded and received the surrender of Fort San Miguel. The Spaniards did not leave until September, when 664 of them sailed for Veracruz, Mexico, taking with them 108 Yamasee Indians, who were Roman Catholics. Within a few days of the Spaniards' departure, 200 Choctaw and Creek Indians called on [Prevost]. Prevost had no presents to give them, but they appeared satisfied with some rum which he distributed. They left a white feather with him as a symbol of their peaceful intentions. - Rabb, Spain, Britain, and the American Revolution in Florida, 1763-1783, page 33.

According to Wilbur Siebert's study of the British takeover of Florida, one of the three earliest electoral divisions at Pensacola was known as Campbelltown:

At the time of the occupation in 1763 the English officers in command reported the population as hardly worthy of a settled government... The province was divided into three electoral districts, that of Pensacola, including all the territory east of the Perdido river except the township known as Campbelltown, which formed the second electoral district, and that of Mobile, comprising all the territory to the west of the Perdido river.

By 1765 the Board of Trade would eventually facilitate the establishment of a French Huguenot colony at Campbelltown or Campbell Town, starting with about sixty settlers who wished to apply themselves "to the culture of vines and bringing up silkworms."

A truly remarkable letter for the history of Florida, with wonderful and detailed descriptions of the settlement at Pensacola, covering the potential for settlement and agricultural development of the region, with harsh criticism of the Spanish lack of action in this regard, and including mention of interaction with 200 Native Americans in Florida.

Rarity

Letters from early in the English-language history of Florida (i.e., 1763-1783) are exceptionally rare, but this item stands alone, being the earliest such letter.



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A letter of much lesser content, sent from Pensacola in 1772, made \$100,000 at the Risvold Sale in 2010.

A complete transcript of the letter here follows:

Exiled Pensacola Septr. 5th 1763

My Lord

Thus, so often troubling your Lordship may well be deemed impertinence; but as the motive at present is to inform you of our new acquisition, that, I hope, will plead my Pardon.

I had the Honor of writing you from the Havana, which place the Battalion left the 6th of July, by order of General Keppel, to take possession of Pensacola on the coast of Florida, newly ceded by Treaty.

Contrary winds prevented our arrival till the 8th of August altho the run was not 180 Leagues.

The Commanding officer immediately waited upon the Spanish Governor, delivered his letters, - and demanded the place; which was readily complied with; but as Count de Ricla, the Governor General of the Spanish West India Islands had not sent Ships to carry them off-- he beg'd leave to remain untill they came.

The Battalion was disembarked the 10th and cantoned in some Hutts without the stockades; Their transports arrived soon after, but the Natural Indolence of the Spaniards even with our assistance, prevented their getting on board till the 2d of September-- and next day sailed for La Vera Cruz.

Pensacola is situated about four Leagues from the Sea upon the West Side of a very large Bay, the Entrance of which, formed by the long Island of St. Rose, is but narrow and somewhat difficult; The Land being extremely low, it is no easy matter discovering the Passage, which is not in depth four fathoms.

The Bay appears to be a large Sea, the Circumferance of which may be about thirty Leagues.

Upon the Point of the Island of St. Rose is a small stockaded Fort; rather a Signal House than any defence.

There is no other Block House, Redout or fort, untill arrived at the Town; which is a small Village



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consisting of about 150 Hutts enclosed with a Square Stockade, and two Bastions at the opposite angles - in these the Spaniards had a Quantity of Artillery. Stages have also been raised for Musquetry --- However the defence is poor, and against Indians only.

The Country, from insuperable Laziness of the Spaniards remains still uncultivated, altho the place has been possessed above a hundred years. The Wood are close to the Village and a few pawltry Gardens of Pumkins and Indian Corn show the only improvements.

The Climate is hot yet Healthy; The soil round the Village is sandy but capable of producing all kinds of Vegetables. The Country further back is good, --- the land of a Black Mould, and I dare say might produce all West India, and some European Fruits; but a number of years, and industrious settlers can only make a change upon the face of the Country. Stock they've none, being entirely supplied from the Mobile, which is pretty well cultivated, and produces sufficient for export.

There is near the Village upon each side a large fresh Water River navigable for canoes, which must greatly facilitate the settlement of the place.

Game of all kinds is plenty here, and the Sea supplies quantitys of fish of different sorts and good; there is also Oysters in abundance, and Turtle if there was anyone to fish them - but this the Spaniards were ignorant off.

The only use of Pensacola to the Spaniards was, in supplying their West Indies with Masts and Timber for shipping, the wood being large and good; also for a place of Banishment of their Mexican Felons.

The Indians are numerous here; we have had within these few days above two hundred of their different nations to visit us: as usual, they paid us many compliments, got their Kegs fill'd with Rum and went off, promising to see us again soon; - At their departure they assured us of their peacable intentions, and hoped none of their young men, that might come down, should be hurt by the soldiers.

Thus as far as I am capable I have endeavoured giving your Lordship a small sketch of the place, Permit me now to acquaint you of our own situation. Sent here without order from home with a Weak Battalion of three Hundred men, a half of whom are entitled to their discharge, and demand it; Six month's short allowance of Provisions, which on Survey here, scarce proves three the flower bad and bread not to be eat, abstracted from the World, and ignorant when or where we shall receive a



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Supply, our destination seems rather hard, and makes us not a little uneasy. This induces my again soliciting your Lordship to obtain me a twelve month's Leave of Absence, if the Battalion is not reduced, which at present we are ignorant off.

Begging Pardon for the Freedom I take, I have the Honor to be My Lord, Your Lordship's most devoted Humble servant. Robert Campbell

Provenance

- Charles F. Meroni Florida Collection (sold at David G. Phillips Co. auction, January 25, 1985)
- Jay Kislak; His sale, Sotheby's New York, April 26, 2022

Detailed Condition:

Autograph letter, signed. Two folded sheets of laid paper. [4] pages of manuscript text on one folded sheet, the second sheet being the address leaf. Addressed "To the Right Honorable, The Earl of Loudon." Letter retains remnants of its original wax seal. Residue of several old cello tape reinforcements to folds of address leaf, and a few similar early repairs at edges of other folds. Withal, overall condition is clean and nearly very good.