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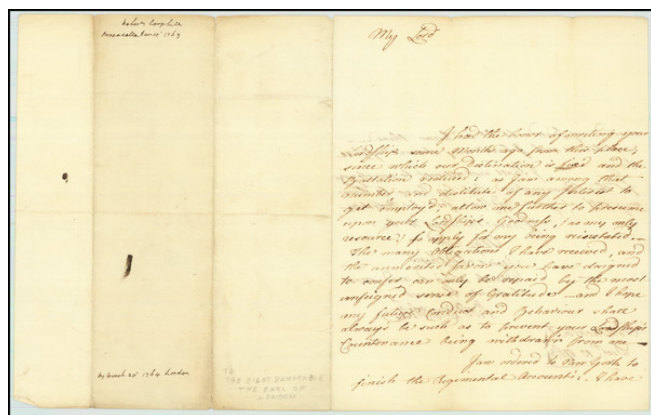
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(British Taking of Florida) [December 10, 1763 Autograph Letter, signed, from Robert Campbell to John Cambell, 4th Earl of Loudoun]

Stock#: 86623
Map Maker: Campbell
Date: 1763
Place: Pensacola, Florida
Color: Pen & Ink
Condition: VG+
Size: 15 x 9.25 inches
Price: SOLD



Description:

One of the Earliest Known Letters from British Florida by a Soldier in Pensacola in 1763

An Eyewitness at the British Taking Possession of Florida

A remarkably early letter written from Pensacola at the time of the British takeover of Florida in late 1763. Robert Campbell, a soldier with the British battalion sent to take possession of Pensacola, Florida, from the Spanish after the Treaty of Paris of 1763, writes about his unenviable situation in the far-flung outpost of the British Empire, called by some the "Graveyard for Britons" due to the swampy, fever-infested climate of British West Florida.

The letter, written from Pensacola on Dec. 10, 1763, is addressed to John Campbell, the 4th Earl of Loudoun (1705-1782) - apparently there was no relation between the two. Robert Campbell, the soldier, makes reference to his precarious financial situation in Pensacola, having been part of the reduction of the British battalion there (apparently an indication that the British did not intend to develop Pensacola at that moment). Finding no means of employment in Florida Campbell "throws himself at the feet" of Lord Loudoun, begging for relief. We know Robert Campbell had earlier (Sept. 5) requested a twelve-month leave of absence, when he was still ignorant of whether the battalion had been reduced. The present letter also mentions to His Lordship that the writer, Robert Campbell, has been ordered to New York, "to finish the Regimental Accounts."

Lord Loudoun 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.



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The British battalion at Pensacola reportedly comprised 300 men, and initially they had food for only three months. Nearby Mobile became the source of fresh provisions. At the time of the arrival of the British soldiers, the settlement consisted of a mere 150 huts enclosed with a square stockade. The British military administration at Pensacola was brought to an end in the fall of 1764, with the arrival of Governor George Johnstone on October 21.

According to the historian C. N. Howard:

Pensacola in 1763 was not the most cheerful spot in the empire for the prospective settler or the military officer upon post duty. The buildings were largely in a state of ruin and decay, and the forest closed in on the town.

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." The fate of these intrepid pioneers is not known, but recent scholarly work suggests they probably succumbed to yellow fever and dysentery. That the documentary evidence for the 1765 Campbell Town settlement is so scanty makes the present 1763 letter, written from Pensacola, all the more amazing.

An interesting historical document for British Florida, and a rare survival indeed, reflecting the precarious circumstances experienced by one of the British soldiers who participated in the British takeover of Florida in 1763.

Rarity

Letters from this early period in the English-language history of Florida (i.e., 1763-1783) are exceptionally rare in the market. The present document is among the earliest surviving letters sent from British Florida, having been written only two months following the Oct. 7, 1763 proclamation dividing British Florida into



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the separate provinces of East Florida and West Florida.

Text of the Letter

The letter is docketed on the integral blank: "Robert Campbell, Pensacolla, Dec. 10, 1763 / R. March 20, 1764 London."

The complete text of the letter is transcribed here:

My Lord

I had the honor of writing your Lordship some months ago from this place; since which our destination is fix'd and the Battalion reduced: as I am among that number, and destitute of any interest to get employ'd; allow me further to presume upon your Lordship's Goodness, / as my only resource. / to apply for my being reinstated. The many obligations I have received, and the unmerited favors you have daigned to confer, can only be repaid by the most unfeigned sense of Gratitude - and I hope my future conduct and Behaviour shall always be such as to prevent your Londship's Countenance being withdrawn from me.

I am ordered to New York to finish the Regimental Accounts: I have desired my friends to let me know there --- whither or not I have any chance of full pay. I shall not attempt to appologize for this Presumption, but beg leave to throw my self at your Lordship's feet for Protection.

I have the honor to be

My Lord

Your Lordship's

Much obliged and most Obedient Servant,

Robert Campbell.

Pensacola / Decr. 10 1763

Provenance

Charles F. Meroni Florida Collection (sold at David G. Phillips Co. auction, January 25, 1985);



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Jay Kislak;
His sale, Sotheby's New York, April 26, 2022

Detailed Condition:

Folded sheet of laid paper. 2 pages of manuscript text with integral blank intact. Usual fold creases. Clean and very good. Docketed on verso of integral blank: "Robert Campbell, Pensacolla, Dec 10, 1763. R. March 20th, 1764 London."