



St. Augustine

English

In the year 1762, Spain and England being at war, Havana was captured, and so St. Augustine lost its base of supply and was completely isolated. England, seizing this opportunity for completing her boundaries and getting rid of a troublesome neighbor, signed a treaty (ratified February 10, 1763) by which Florida was ceded to Great Britain and Cuba was restored to Spain. This change of flags was excessively distasteful to the Spanish in St. Augustine, and they left, some for Mexico, and some for the West Indies. So complete was this emigration that “not more than five persons” are said to have remained, and had it not been for the efforts of the commanding officer they would have destroyed every building in the town. The Governor laid waste his fine garden, and the people, before they left, assumed to sell not only the houses in town, but the whole country to the few who remained expressly for that purpose.

During the Spanish rule the material interests of the country had not advanced. St. Augustine was a military post, depending wholly upon Cuba for her supplies, and “Serving for no other purpose but to keep all other nations from inhabiting any part of all that coast.”

The English at once began to develop the resources of the country. John Bartram of Philadelphia, Botanist to His Majesty George III, records that there were 900 buildings in the city, and that a small settlement of Germans was located where the ancient village of Tolomato had stood. The exports in 1768 amounted to 14,078 pounds sterling, and in ten years had increased to 48,236 pounds. During the year 1770 fifty schooners entered the port of St. Augustine besides several square-rigged vessels in trade with London and Liverpool. In 1771 five vessels arrived in the harbor from London, seven from New York and eleven from Charleston, and there were imported about 1,000 negroes, of whom 119 were directly from Africa. Forty thousand pounds of indigo were exported in 1772 and brought the highest price of any sold in the London market. During 1779 forty thousand barrels of naval stores were shipped, and an increase was expected for the following year. “One can hardly even now penetrate a swamp of hommock along the Atlantic coast of Florida without finding distinct traces of English cultivation and improvements made by them.” (Fairbanks.)