

# Fort Saint Mark

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

Castillo de San Marcos  
National Monument



## British East Florida – *The 14<sup>th</sup> Colony*



### A New Power Emerges

In 1763, the Seven Years' War, the first truly world war (the French and Indian War as it was called in America) came to an end. Great Britain (and her American colonies) had won against the combined forces of France and Spain. The armies of Great Britain had conquered Canada and several French-held islands in the Caribbean. They had also stormed and occupied Havana, Cuba. This was Spain's principal seaport and administrative headquarters for much of Spanish America. Spain also lost Manila in the Spanish Philippines, a transshipment point of the wealth of Asia. The Treaty of Paris ending the war left Canada to the English, returned several Caribbean islands to the French, and traded Havana and Manila back to Spain in exchange for the province of Florida. Great Britain now controlled all of North America east of the Mississippi River. At that time, St. Augustine was still a garrison community with fewer than five hundred houses.

### Southern Migration

When Florida was officially transferred to the English, most of the Spanish residents chose to depart for Cuba. This exodus temporarily depopulated the peninsula, but Florida was on the eve of the greatest population explosion since its initial colonization 200 years earlier.

To calm Indian unrest on the frontiers, the English Crown *Proclamation of 1763* outlawed settlement west of the Appalachians. This promoted Florida as a new area of British colonization. Colonial pressure for land found a new outlet. Expansion, blocked to the west, moved south.

### Prosperity & Hope

England had a strong desire to develop Florida trade. The London Board of Trade advertised 20,000 acre lots to any group willing to enter Florida. The land, however, had to be settled within ten years with one resident per 100 acres. While the Privy Council in London granted land titles, pioneer families could gain land grants at the two colonial capitals, St. Augustine in East Florida and Pensacola in West Florida.

Former British soldiers were eligible for special grants. Each pioneer settler was given 100 acres of land and 50 acres per family member. To recruit Southerners, slavery was allowed. Under the able administration of Governor James Grant, 2,856,000 acres were granted in East Florida.

There was much to celebrate in English Florida. Indian hostilities had for the most part ended, and there had been peace in Florida for over ten years. The population of St. Augustine nearly doubled from what it was in the Spanish period. New houses were built and old Spanish houses were renovated and expanded, most notably with second stories being added (almost all construction during the Spanish occupation was single story). Commerce and trade were growing, including cattle ranching, shipping, and plantation agriculture.

Despite its youth, the colony was showing promise of becoming a flourishing and productive area. But storm clouds were brewing to the north.

### Rebellion

The French & Indian War changed the relationship between the northern colonies and their mother country. A decade of conflict over economic policy and control, beginning with the Stamp Act crisis in 1765, led to alienation among a rapidly growing population (over 2.5 million by 1776) which was increasingly of non-British origin. Florida remained a loyalist stronghold

throughout the war. Its population was newly arrived in America and had no history or experience of the growing democratic culture in the other colonies. Likewise, the colony was dependent on English trade with little internal economic growth of its own. Enraged residents of St. Augustine burned effigies in the plaza of revolutionary leaders Sam Adams and John Hancock.

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## British Stronghold

St. Augustine, as the capital of East Florida, rapidly became a military stronghold and the central command post for operations in the southern colonies. England decided to utilize Florida as a staging area for British troops assigned to the South. Florida's warm climate would acclimate British forces to the American heat, and Florida could develop supplies for the British military. The town quickly overflowed with British troops and a growing stream of loyalist refugees fleeing the fighting in

the Carolinas and Georgia. St. Augustine and Fort St. Mark (the renamed Castillo de San Marcos) were used as a supply base and a prisoner of war camp for captured rebels. Among these were three of the signers of the Declaration of Independence: Thomas Heyward, Jr., Arthur Middleton, and Edward Rutledge. South Carolina's Lieutenant Governor, Christopher Gadsden, was held in solitary confinement inside the fort's jail for 42 weeks.

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## East Florida Rangers

In addition to the British regular army, Florida locals also took up arms against the rebelling colonist. Of all the provincial troops, the East Florida Rangers were the most controversial and active. They were organized in 1776 and ultimately consisted of some 130 men, organized in four companies and engaged to serve for three years. The rangers were inhabitants of East Florida and refugees from Georgia and the Carolinas. They received their clothing, provisions, and one Shilling a day, but provided their own horses.

When the war broke out, the regular garrison troops of St. Augustine were unacquainted with the wooded terrain of Florida. Rangers were absolutely necessary for cooperating with the regular troops, supplying the town and garrison with provisions, bringing intelligence from the north, making plundering incursions into Georgia, keeping that province in constant alarm, and securing Florida settlements from attacks. Without them, the Indians would have massacred indiscriminately. The regular troops were neither sufficient nor fit for ranger work.

Parties of rangers and Indians were continually employed to patrol the frontiers and drive off cattle from Georgia. Stationed on the frontiers rather than in town, the rangers detached constant and successive scouting parties of observation, penetrated within five miles of Savannah, and even passed through the town of Augusta, Georgia.

Since they were under the control of the governor and loosely organized, the existence of the rangers aroused a constant dispute of command between military and civil authorities. In 1779, the East Florida Rangers were reorganized and reconstituted into a provincial infantry regiment by the name of King's Rangers. They were no longer considered to be attached to East Florida and might be taken into the King's service.

The Rangers used a standard uniform that consisted of hat, hunting shirt, belt, breeches, shoes, buckles, blankets, and leggings. After 1779, when they became the King's (Carolina) Rangers, the uniform was a short green coat, crimson collar and cuffs, and lapels plain green.

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## Failure & Loss

Most of the war took place far north of Florida, but cross-border raids increased. In 1779, Spain took advantage of Britain's preoccupation with the colonies and invaded. By 1781, Britain had lost West Florida to Spain. The war's unpopularity and massive expense continued until by 1784, when Britain was forced to concede American independence.

Having lost control of the majority of its colonies, Britain had little interest in keeping Florida. Now an isolated outpost, it had little

prospect of staying productive. On September 3, 1783, the Treaty of Paris was signed ending the American Revolution. In it Britain recognized the independence of the United States. Under separate treaty, England ceded Florida back to Spanish control in exchange for the Bahaman Islands.

Although Spain regained Florida, this rule was to be short lived. The newly formed United States now turned its attention to gaining control of and expanding its southern borders.

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## A New Chapter

This war for independence was a true World War during the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. The conflict extended well beyond the thirteen colonies attempting to separate from their King. France and Spain had their own interest in mind when supporting the rebelling colonials.

Also, Florida was a British colony with no intent on rebellion. The outcome of the war returned this land to Spain with no involvement of the newly formed United States.

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## A New Nation

The peace and respect America had towards Spain for helping during the rebellion only lasted so long. Events over the next forty years—unsanctioned land conquest, territorial

disagreements, declining Spanish support, and financial deals—lead Spain to sign Florida over to the United States with the Adams-Onís Treaty in 1821.