

**THE LEGACY OF THE
AMERICAN REVOLUTION
TO THE BRITISH WEST INDIES
AND BAHAMAS, PP. 3 - 49**

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The legacy of the American Revolution to the British West Indies and Bahamas, pp. 3 - 49 by
Wilbur H. Siebert

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The
Legacy of the American Revolution
to the
British West Indies and Bahamas

A Chapter out of the History of the
American Loyalists

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The Legacy of the American Revolution to the British West Indies and Bahamas

A Chapter out of the History of the
American Loyalists

I. The Loyalists in East Florida

From the beginning of the Revolutionary War, East Florida served as a retreat for loyalist refugees from the Carolinas and Georgia. As early as 1776, Lieutenant-Colonel Thomas Brown, himself a fugitive from Savannah, formed a regiment, in whole or in part, of these refugees, which he called the East Florida Rangers. This he supplemented in the spring of 1778, by engaging three hundred and fifty men from the same colonies to defend the frontiers of the peninsula. These men were organized at first into a regiment known as the South Carolina Royalists under the command of Colonel Innes, and the next year were re-organized as a regiment of infantry under the title of the King's Rangers.¹ They formed part of the English force in East Florida, as recounted by a deserter on his arrival at Charleston in the early summer of the same year, a force which, he said, also included eight hundred regular troops, one hundred Florida Rangers, one hundred and fifty provincial militia, and two hundred Indians.² All told Colonel Brown enlisted as many as twelve hundred men, if we may credit his own statement in a letter to Sir Guy Carleton, and of these he proudly asserted that five hundred were killed in the course of the constant and distant service in which he and his men were engaged throughout the War.³ Doubtless most of his recruits were gathered in Georgia and the Carolinas, where he conducted his campaigns.

1. *Report on the Am. Mss. in the Roy. Inst. of G. Brit.*, III, 322, 323; McCall, *History of Georgia*, 72.

2. McCall, *History of Georgia*, 421.

3. *Report on the Am. Mss. in the Roy. Inst. of G. Brit.*, III, 323.

The loyalist element in East Florida was greatly increased by the evacuations of Savannah and Charleston. The former event occurred in July, 1782, 7,000 persons being turned adrift between the twelfth and twenty-fifth of that month. This host was made up of twelve hundred British regulars and loyalists, five hundred women and children, three hundred Indians, and five thousand negroes. Three months later, Patrick Tonyn, governor of East Florida, wrote Carleton that the number of settlers in his province previous to the surrender of Georgia was "about a thousand and near three thousand blacks," that the militia numbered about three hundred, and that some five hundred of the negroes might be entrusted with arms. "The Refugees from Georgia," he said, "are about fifteen hundred whites and a thousand negroes; there are a few respectable families but they consist chiefly of backwoodsmen who are intolerably indolent; perhaps about four hundred may be found fit to bear arms, but their appearance is against them, their families are in distress, and they are exceedingly dissatisfied. The provincial corps no doubt may be completed from them."¹

Prompt measures were taken to alleviate the condition of these people and to ascertain fully their number. Already, Colonel Brown was engaged in pointing out lands to them and establishing them in settlements on the St. John's River, and Brigadier-General Archibald McArthur, who was in command in East Florida, soon designated a committee of four of the principal refugees—Colonels Ball and Cassells for the Carolinas and Colonels Tattnell and Douglas for Georgia to take a census of them and to superintend the distribution of provisions among them. By the end of October, their numbers were not yet fully ascertained, for not all had been able to land on account of the bad weather and the dangerous bar in the harbor of St. Augustine.² Meanwhile, an inspector of refugees seemed a necessity, and John Winniett was appointed to that office. His first report covered arrivals from July to the thirteenth of November, 1782, exclusive of those

1. *Report on the Am. Miss. in the Roy. Inst. of G. Brit.*, III, 163, 164
2. *Ibid.*, 140, 192.