



PATRICK TONYN - GOVERNOR OF EAST FLORIDA 1774-1784  
by Robert Phillip Jones

Col. Patrick Tonyn (1725-1804) arrived in St. Augustine in March 1774<sup>1</sup> as the newly appointed governor of British East Florida and was tasked with managing a diverse and divided province. As a staunchly loyal British official, Tonyn quickly found his leadership tested by the challenges of governing a multi-ethnic, multi-racial society, all while safeguarding British subjects amid escalating unrest in the 13 American colonies.

Just months earlier in December of 1773, the Boston Tea Party had ignited tensions. Adding fuel to the fire were the punitive Intolerable Acts of 1774,<sup>2</sup> which closed the port of Boston, dismantled the Massachusetts government and required colonial governments to provide housing and supplies for British troops stationed in America.

The crisis in Massachusetts, though distant, threatened East Florida's fragile stability. Jim Picuch wrote in the *Journal of the American Revolution*:

*Upon Tonyn's arrival, he found the small province to be on a solid economic footing. Of East Florida's approximately three thousand non-Indian inhabitants, about one half were African American slaves. Most of the slaves labored on plantations along the St. Marys and St. Johns Rivers, while another thousand or so indentured servants from Europe, mostly Roman Catholic Minorcans, worked on Andrew Turnbull's plantation at New Smyrna, south of St. Augustine.*

Tonyn possessed an unwavering loyalty to the Crown, and his military experience gave him the ability to confront any challenge head-on. As the American Revolution soon swept through the colonies, he emerged as a steadfast defender of British interests in East Florida. He was called upon to defend the province and ensure the survival of thousands of Loyalists fleeing persecution in the rebellious colonies. With food and supplies often running low and tensions mounting as the population surged, Tonyn had to balance military strategy with humanitarian efforts.

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<sup>1</sup> [Patrick Tonyn: Britain's Most Effective Revolutionary-Era Royal Governor - Journal of the American Revolution](https://allthingsliberty.com/2018/03/patrick-tonyn-britains-most-effective-revolutionary-era-royal-governor/)  
<https://allthingsliberty.com/2018/03/patrick-tonyn-britains-most-effective-revolutionary-era-royal-governor/>

<sup>2</sup> [Intolerable Acts, Summary, Facts, Significance, APUSH](https://www.americanhistorycentral.com/entries/intolerable-acts-1774/)  
<https://www.americanhistorycentral.com/entries/intolerable-acts-1774/>

Under his leadership, East Florida became a refuge for as many as 15,000 Loyalists — men, women, and children — who looked to him for protection, shelter, and sustenance. The once quiet province was transformed with camps springing up in and around St. Augustine, and the threat of attack was omnipresent. Lawlessness was rampant in the St. Marys River region, spurred by Patriots from just across the river in Georgia.

Even before Britain lost the war and East Florida was overflowing with refugees, thievery and rampage was everywhere in the wilderness between St. Augustine and St. Marys River.

*The prevalence of banditry and horse stealing made it necessary late in October for Tonyn to form two troops of horse, and give them orders to protect the persons and property of the inhabitants from the operations of several gangs of thieves, one of these gangs being led by Daniel McGirth.*<sup>3</sup>

Tonyn's resilience was severely tested when the American Revolution ended. Under the Treaty of Paris signed in 1783, England ceded East Florida to Spain. In his final year as governor, Tonyn faced the enormous task of managing the orderly evacuation of British Loyalists from the province, many of whom had trusted him with their safety for years.

The once bustling Loyalist camps near St. Augustine became staging grounds for a hasty departure. Ships crowded Matanzas Bay, and families packed what they could carry. Deadlines were set, then amended, as confusion and uncertainty loomed. Tonyn's determination never wavered, but perhaps for the first time, he felt the sting of the Crown's decision to abandon its loyal subjects in Florida. Still, he managed the safe relocation of thousands of Loyalist families, even as Spanish authorities waited to fully reclaim the territory.

Despite the challenges, Tonyn remained steadfast, demonstrating his unyielding loyalty and remarkable leadership by maintaining order and coordinating the complex logistics of resettling so many people. He boarded the final British vessel only after ensuring that every last British subject was on board — a fitting exclamation point to a job well done.

Wrote Dr. Roger C. Smith in the first sentence of his thesis, *The Façade of Unity: British East Florida's War for Independence* (August 2008): "On Nov. 19, 1785, with the wind finally in its sails, the HMS *Cyrus* put the coast of East Florida to her stern and carried the last remnants of a weary but loyal colony back to England — though not necessarily back home."

The last sentences in the first paragraph of Smith's thesis read, "On this day, 'the last British evacuation vessel in all of North America sailed with the loyal refugees of a long and bitter humiliation at the hands of uncivilized allies and unnatural colonists [who] are ungrateful to British designs,' The author of these words was Major General Patrick Tonyn, governor of East Florida — Great Britain's last colony in what is now the United States."

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<sup>3</sup> EAST FLORIDA AS A REFUGE OF SOUTHERN LOYALISTS, 1774-1785 By Wilbur H. Siebert

Patrick George Tonyn was born on Nov. 28, 1725, in the historic border town of Berwick-upon-Tweed,<sup>4</sup> strategically located between England and Scotland. As the eldest of six children, he was raised alongside three brothers and two sisters. A brother, Rev. Charles William Tonyn (1732–1805), became a respected figure in the Church of England. His youngest brother, John Columbine Tonyn, was a cavalry commandant with the East India Company in Madras, India.

Tonyn's other brother, Capt. George A. Tonyn, is profiled at [swanbournehistory.co.uk](http://swanbournehistory.co.uk):

*He was captain of the British ship H.M.S. Brune, which, on 23rd October 1762, engaged the French frigate L'Oiseau, commanded by Capitaine De Modene. Capt. Tonyn achieved a great victory by capturing the French vessel and taking over 180 prisoners. George had taken part in the capture of Quebec with General Wolfe during the Seven Years' War. He was appointed commander of His Majesty's Squadron off East Africa in 1768.*<sup>5</sup>

One of Patrick's sisters, Juliana, married Francis Levett,<sup>6</sup> a connection that tied the Tonyn family to another prominent household. After the War of Independence, Levett's son eventually returned to Georgia where his slaves planted the first Sea Island cotton in America.<sup>7</sup> Although the name of Patrick's other sister remains unknown, the Tonyn family stayed closely bonded over the years. Patrick's leadership and steadfast loyalty to the British Crown ultimately elevated him to become the most distinguished member of the family.

Tonyn entered the British Army at the age of 18 or 19, receiving a commission as a cornet (the equivalent of a second lieutenant) in the 6th Inniskilling Dragoons in 1743. His early military career was marked by his participation in the War of the Austrian Succession (1740–1748), where he fought in key battles such as the Battle of Dettingen (1743), the last time a British monarch led troops in the field, and the brutal Battle of Fontenoy (1745), where British and allied forces faced heavy losses against the French. These experiences in close combat helped to forge Tonyn's resolve and sharpen his tactical abilities.

*Tonyn was from a distinguished military family. His father, Charles Tonyn, was a Colonel in the 6th Inniskillen Dragoons. Patrick Tonyn became a captain in the 6th Dragoons in 1751, with which regiment he served in Germany in 1758 during the Seven Years War where, in 1759, the regiment fought at Minden and Wetter with great distinction. Tonyn was made lieutenant-colonel of the 104th regiment in 1761.*<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> [Patrick Tonyn - Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patrick_Tonyn#:~:text=%EE%80%80Patrick%20Tonyn%EE%80%81%20was%20born%20in%20Berwick-upon-Tweed)

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patrick\\_Tonyn#:~:text=%EE%80%80Patrick%20Tonyn%EE%80%81%20was%20born%20in%20Berwick-upon-Tweed](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patrick_Tonyn#:~:text=%EE%80%80Patrick%20Tonyn%EE%80%81%20was%20born%20in%20Berwick-upon-Tweed)

<sup>5</sup> [The Tonyn Brothers - Swanbourne Links to Africa and Florida - swanbournehistory.co.uk](https://www.swanbournehistory.co.uk/charles-william-tonyn-vicar-of-swanbourne-1760-1767/)

<https://www.swanbournehistory.co.uk/charles-william-tonyn-vicar-of-swanbourne-1760-1767/>

<sup>6</sup> [Francis Levett - Alchetron, The Free Social Encyclopedia](https://alchetron.com/Francis-Levett) <https://alchetron.com/Francis-Levett>

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

<sup>8</sup> [Patrick Tonyn: Britain's Most Effective Revolutionary-Era Royal Governor - Journal of the American Revolution](https://allthingsliberty.com/2018/03/patrick-tonyn-britains-most-effective-revolutionary-era-royal-governor/)  
<https://allthingsliberty.com/2018/03/patrick-tonyn-britains-most-effective-revolutionary-era-royal-governor/>

The British Dragoons of this era were remarkable. Originally functioning as mounted infantry, they rode to the battlefield, dismounted, and fought the enemy on foot. Tonyn's fighting skills must have been exceptional for him to have survived so many battles.

Tonyn's leadership continued to evolve during the Seven Years' War (1756–1763), a global conflict in which Britain engaged in an intense struggle against France and its allies. Serving in Germany alongside the British forces allied with Frederick the Great of Prussia, Tonyn distinguished himself through his valor and tactical ability. This experience likely provided him with valuable insights into the intricacies of European military strategy and diplomacy. His performance on the battlefield showcased his competence and potential, establishing him as a promising leader within the British Army.

This role exposed him to the challenges of military administration, experience that would later prove invaluable when he was tasked with governing the province of East Florida. Tonyn's military service instilled in him a sense of discipline, resilience, and strategic thinking — qualities that defined his leadership in the turbulent years that followed.

*When the American Revolution broke out, East Florida, a British colony since 1763, supported the mother country and offered refuge to those in other American colonies who were loyal to the crown. East Florida became a loyalist haven when George III ordered Governor Patrick Tonyn to issue a proclamation in November 1775 inviting them to come to St. Augustine.*<sup>9</sup>

Tonyn's military experience and leadership, combined with his ability to maintain East Florida as a British stronghold during the Revolutionary War, solidified his reputation as a skilled military officer and colonial administrator. His efforts to protect the province and its Loyalist population, despite the turbulent political environment, earned him both respect and recognition within British government circles. After his tenure as governor ended, Tonyn retired from active service, but he remained influential. In recognition of his distinguished service, he was promoted to the rank of major general in 1783, a testament to his military prowess and loyalty to the Crown.

## GOVERNOR PATRICK TONYN'S LEGACY

Gov. Patrick Tonyn has often been unfairly blamed for the failure of the New Smyrna colony by writers sympathetic to Dr. Andrew Turnbull, who, with his financial backers, founded the ill-fated Minorcan colony. Critics argue that Tonyn's leadership hastened the colony's demise, but this assessment overlooks the grim realities that preceded Tonyn's arrival. By the time he assumed office in 1774, the New Smyrna colony had already endured six grueling years of hardship.

The Minorcan colonists had suffered through a devastating rebellion, a hurricane that obliterated most of their flimsy palmetto huts, a lack of food and clothing, and several years of poor indigo yields — the crop that was supposed to provide the colony's economic foundation. Nearly 700 colonists had tragically died since their arrival in June 1768. Their graves are now hidden somewhere beneath the soil of New Smyrna Beach, Florida, the land that was once the Turnbull

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<sup>9</sup> *East Florida as a Loyalist Haven*, Linda K. Williams – 1975 – Page 1

colony.<sup>10</sup> Gov. Tonyn had nothing to do with these catastrophes that led to the failure of the colony.

These insurmountable challenges had left the colony on the brink of collapse well before Tonyn's arrival. Turnbull's ambitious plans were already faltering financially by the time eight ships left Gibraltar in 1768, faltering so badly, he indicated he might consider "selling of the People if any were found to be given."<sup>11</sup>

To place the blame for the colony's failure at Tonyn's feet ignores these stark facts. While it is true that he took over a troubled province, blaming him for the Turnbull colony's downfall is not only inaccurate but deeply unfair. Tonyn inherited a situation that had been irreparably damaged by mismanagement and misfortune long before his governorship. His critics fail to recognize the full scope of the disaster that was already unfolding in New Smyrna, much less an impending war that changed the course of history forever.

When Patrick Tonyn arrived in East Florida, William Drayton Sr. had already served as chief justice for nearly a decade, having been appointed in 1765. During those nine years, Drayton had built strong political alliances with influential figures in the colony including "Andrew Turnbull, Gen. Augustine Prevost, officers of the Sixtieth Regiment, and several local merchants," according to historian J. Leitch Wright Jr.<sup>12</sup> These relationships made Drayton a powerful figure, and Tonyn, early on, came to see him as a potential threat. Tonyn removed Drayton from his post twice. The first time, Drayton convinced his powerful friends in London to reinstate him, but not after his removal the second time.

Tonyn accused Drayton of treasonous correspondence with a family relative in South Carolina, who, in Wright's words, was "an outspoken South Carolina rebel." But Tonyn's suspicions went beyond family ties. Drayton had increasingly aligned himself with colonial elites who were dissatisfied with British rule and sympathetic to the growing revolutionary cause in the American colonies. Tonyn viewed Drayton's alliances, especially with figures like Andrew Turnbull, as part of a broader faction that sought to undermine his authority and, potentially, the Crown's.

Despite Tonyn's accusations, Drayton's powerful connections protected him from immediate removal. However, the tension between the two men reflected the growing divide within the province, itself, as revolutionary sentiment began to spread even among those who had initially supported British rule. Drayton's correspondence with his relative in South Carolina may have been the final straw for Tonyn, but it was Drayton's broader sympathies for the American patriot cause that ultimately shaped his fate.

On top of everything else Patrick Tonyn had to manage, he arrived in St. Augustine less than three months after the Boston Tea Party.

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<sup>10</sup> *A Minorcan Mystery*-Robert P. Jones

<sup>11</sup> [The-Letters-Of-Dr-Turnbull-pdf-SEARCHABLE.pdf](https://minorcans.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/The-Letters-Of-Dr-Turnbull-pdf-SEARCHABLE.pdf)-April 7, 1768.

<https://minorcans.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/The-Letters-Of-Dr-Turnbull-pdf-SEARCHABLE.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> *British in St. Augustine* J. Leitch Wright, Jr.

East Florida was not the 14th colony of Great Britain, nor was it filled with revolutionaries seeking independence. In a letter to the Earl of Dartmouth, the secretary of state for the American Department, Tonyn explained that if all the tea had been sent to St. Augustine, the merchants there would have willingly paid the tax, allowing the tea to be distributed to the other colonies. This was his view of the Boston Tea Party in Massachusetts.

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At 49 years of age, Tonyn enthusiastically stepped into his new role as governor of East Florida on March 1, 1774. Having distinguished himself in military campaigns such as the War of the Austrian Succession and the Seven Years' War, Tonyn brought with him a reputation for discipline and unwavering loyalty to the Crown — qualities that likely influenced King George III's decision to appoint him. His years in the field had shaped a leader who valued order and obedience, traits he intended to instill in East Florida.

However, Tonyn quickly discovered that East Florida was not a battlefield he was used to, and his firm, military-style governance drew criticism from local elites, many of whom were accustomed to exercising their own authority. Some bristled under his strict rule, resisting what they saw as heavy-handed leadership. Despite the challenges, Tonyn remained committed to maintaining British control in a province that was increasingly caught in the rising tide of the American revolution.

The Crown granted Patrick Tonyn 20,000 acres of land in East Florida in 1767, the same time that wealthy British men including Andrew Turnbull and Sir William Duncan received their land grants. There is no historical evidence suggesting Tonyn and Turnbull had any prior acquaintance before Tonyn's appointment as governor in 1774. However, historians find that the two became rivals soon after Tonyn's arrival, as the governor grew concerned about the conditions at Turnbull's New Smyrna colony based on the "applications" he had read from the Minorcan colonists.

One of Tonyn's most far-reaching positions was his support for the Minorcan Catholics. He allowed them to create a community in St. Augustine that remains strong and proud to this day.

Tonyn, in a long letter to Lord George Germaine, laid out reasons for freeing the Minorcans from the Turnbull yoke. But even after offering them freedom in St. Augustine, he felt their loyalty might be more for the Patriots than the Loyalists. Rasico points out that their loyalty was suspect even before they fled to St. Augustine in 1777.<sup>13</sup>

Tonyn had many issues to deal with in addition to keeping East Florida safe for the fleeing loyalists. One incident caused the entire Minorcan community distress.

The Minorcans had been in St. Augustine for three years when one night a group of British soldiers, led by Ensign John Manning, broke into a Minorcan couple's home and demanded grog and food. They left but shortly returned to the house. The soldiers, intoxicated and hungry for sex, dragged the Minorcan couple to their fort. Held at bayonet point, the husband could only

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<sup>13</sup> *The Minorcans of Florida-Their History, Language and Culture*. Philip D. Rasico-Page 64

look on in horror as Manning raped his wife. Her screams echoed through the fort's stone walls, but no one came to stop the soldiers.

The couple reported the rape, and the civil authorities found Manning guilty. Before he could be sentenced, Manning killed himself with his pistol.

The suicide did little to quell the soldiers' anger. Instead, it inflamed their resentment, driving them to return to the Minorcans' house and tear it down board by board and brick by brick. The Minorcan community must have felt they were subject again to the cruel overseers at the colony.

Tonyn wanted the guilty soldiers identified, but the commanding officer warned him that assembling the troops might only spark more unrest. Fearing rebellion, Tonyn abandoned the idea, and whether the soldiers were ever punished remains unknown.

A document in the case says, "The said Manning then took her up and held her upon his bed, the deponent, calling upon her husband for assistance and crying out murder, and threatened to murder this deponent unless she consented to his having carnal knowledge of her body. And the deponent further sayeth that by the threats and force, and the soldier being kept at the door, the said Manning against the will of this deponent, ravished and carnally had knowledge of her body."<sup>14</sup>

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Tonyn restored Catholicism to a city that had not seen a Catholic priest nor a Mass since the Spanish evacuated to Cuba in 1763. Restoring Catholicism wasn't part of Tonyn's agenda, but it became the outcome nonetheless. The old faith had been absent so long that even its memory had begun to fade — until Tonyn's unexpected intervention brought it back like a candle lit in a long-abandoned chapel.

Michael V. Gannon eloquently writes, "The first Spanish period of Florida (1565-1763) came to an end. And one year later no more than eight Catholics, all laymen, could be found anywhere on the peninsular."<sup>15</sup> For fourteen years, the faith that had first taken root in America in 1565 was absent from St. Augustine, leaving a religious void in the city's cultural identity. Tonyn's decision not only restored the city's founding legacy but laid the groundwork for the possible integration of Minorcan Catholic refugees into British society, thus stabilizing the province. Though they were free, the Minorcans found themselves in a liminal space — not enslaved, but not quite accepted either, their status only a hair's breadth above that of the Free Blacks.

Catholicism had returned to the site where it had first been established over two centuries before. "When Turnbull reneged on his promise of freedom at the end of the workers' indenture, Father Camps called attention to the Scottish physician's injustice. Camps and the Minorcans gained the sympathy of the English attorney general in St. Augustine and were given free passage to the 'Ancient City' in July 1777."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> *The Minorcans of Florida-Their History, Language and Culture*. Philip D. Rasico-Pages 64-65

<sup>15</sup> *The Cross in the Sand*- Michael V. Gannon. Page 83

<sup>16</sup> [Catholicism in Florida | St. Mary of the Lakes Catholic Church](https://www.stmaryofthelakesparish.org/history-of-catholicism-in-florida)

<https://www.stmaryofthelakesparish.org/history-of-catholicism-in-florida>

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## PATRICK TONYN'S CHIEF ADVERSARY-ANDREW TURNBULL

Dr. Andrew Turnbull, along with his family and entourage, arrived in Charlestown on their way to St. Augustine on Nov. 5, 1766, as documented in numerous historical accounts.<sup>17</sup> The Turnbull's arrived in St. Augustine on Nov. 18, 1766, and told Sir William Duncan, "My family and our artificers are in good health and spirits, though finding a home and making it fit to live in has taken up much of my time."<sup>18</sup> (In 18th century colonial settings, artificers often included: carpenters, blacksmiths, masons, shipwrights, gunsmiths, and engineers.) Turnbull, with substantial assistance from his fellow Scotsman, Governor Grant, established comfortable accommodations for his wife and children in St. Augustine.

In March 1767, Turnbull set out with the goal of recruiting 500 Greeks for his planned colony. He arrived in Paris on May 6, 1767.<sup>19</sup> However, his efforts were greatly hindered by the political and logistical obstacles posed by the Ottoman Empire. Greece did not exist as a country, but Greek culture was dominant in many of the territories where Greeks lived throughout Asia Minor and across the entire Levant. Undeterred, Turnbull expanded his search across the Mediterranean, turning to Italy, the Peloponnese and Minorca to gather the people for his colony.

By the spring of 1768, after almost a year and a half away from his family, Turnbull had successfully recruited 1,403 men, women, and children as indentured laborers, far surpassing his initial target of 500 Greeks. The group was diverse, consisting of over 100 Italians, several hundred Greeks, a few Corsicans and the majority from Minorca. These colonists boarded eight vessels at the Port of Mahon, Minorca, and set sail for East Florida from Gibraltar on April 18, 1768.<sup>20</sup> Despite the hardships of their 70-day voyage, including cramped, overcrowded conditions, scarce supplies, burials at sea, and the ever-present threat of disease, they still represented the largest European colony transported to America during the colonial era.<sup>21</sup> The future of Turnbull's ambitious agricultural colony now depended on their resilience and his capacity to navigate the daunting challenges that awaited them.

Turnbull's ambition to establish a profitable colony in East Florida was driven purely by financial gain, not any sense of altruism. His goal was to export indigo and other commodities to England, creating enormous wealth for himself and his partners, all of whom were well-connected British leaders. As a Scottish entrepreneur with influential friends, Turnbull saw the opportunity to capitalize on East Florida's fertile land as one he could not pass up. His ambitious enterprise might have succeeded were it not for a combination of crippling obstacles, especially the cost of creating a British colony.

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<sup>17</sup> Andrew Turnbull to Sir William Duncan, Charlestown, South Carolina, November 15, 1766-James Grant Papers

<sup>18</sup> Andrew Turnbull to Sir William Duncan St. Augustine, November 26, 1766-Dundee City Archive-James Grant Papers

<sup>19</sup> [The Peopling Plan – Florida History Online](#)-Dundee City Archive

<sup>20</sup> Andrew Turnbull to Sir William Duncan, Gibraltar, April 18, 1768 [The-Letters-Of-Dr-Turnbull-pdf-SEARCHABLE.pdf](#)

<sup>21</sup> [Smvrnéa: Dr. Andrew Turnbull and the Mediterranean Settlement – Florida History Online](#)



Turnbull's deep and constant financial difficulties started well before his ships reached St. Augustine. In the letter he wrote to Duncan on April 7, 1768, he acknowledged, "As our expenses already exceed the sum agreed on to be laid out in this Scheme for the reasons I gave in former letters, it will give me some uneasiness until I have Mr. Grenville's and your approbation for what I have done."

At the outset of this venture, Turnbull's several-times-great-granddaughter wrote in her book, *Dr. Turnbull and the New Smyrna Colony*, "The grants were to be operated for a period of seven years at a shared expense not exceeding £9,000 pounds sterling." Over the life of the colony, 43,283<sup>22</sup> pounds of indigo were produced. The establishment of the Minorcan colony came at a cost of £40,000 pounds sterling. Ultimately, the expense equated to £1 pound sterling for every pound of indigo produced. While other goods were also cultivated and exported to Great Britain, the promise of indigo production was a key motivation behind the effort to build a financially sustainable colony.

In fact, just before departing from Port Mahon in 1768, Turnbull was so concerned about costs that he wrote to Sir William Duncan, proposing a drastic measure: selling half of the Minorcans to other East Florida planters. In this same April 7, 1768 letter to Duncan, Turnbull cited the reason for that consideration: "That I may dispose of our super numerary hundreds to reimburse you for what has been drawn for extraordinary [expenses]." <sup>23</sup> The mere fact that Turnbull expressed the idea of selling the unsuspecting Minorcans' contract was similar to the practice of selling slaves. It became even more apparent that Turnbull intended to use them as laborers for up to 14 years, far beyond the terms agreed upon in their signed indentured servant contracts or verbal agreements.

After their arrival in New Smyrna, the colonists faced relentless hardships, from violent storms and oppressive heat to the constant fear of Indian attacks, that several times ravaged their crops and made survival a daily struggle. Many were forced to live in fragile palmetto huts, spaced about 200 feet apart along an 8-mile stretch of the Hillsborough River, which offered little protection from the harsh environment.

Inadequate food supplies aboard the vessels led to malnutrition, while funding for the colony frequently fell short of meeting the immense demands of establishing the new colony. To make matters worse, the rugged, mosquito-infested landscape rendered agricultural work not only exhausting but perilously dangerous. It was during these first six months that 300 adults and 150 children died,<sup>24</sup> leaving their loved ones in total despair and sadness.

Turnbull's reliance on slave-trained overseers to manage the Minorcans while he was frequently absent only worsened the situation. The overseers' brutal treatment of the indentured laborers, confirmed by sworn statements, combined with Turnbull's inadequate oversight, sowed discontent among the Minorcans. Compounding the problem, Turnbull left much of the day-to-day management in the hands of his very young nephew, also named Andrew Turnbull,

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<sup>22</sup> *The Minorcans of Florida-Their History, Language and Culture*. Philip D. Rasico Page 41

<sup>23</sup> Andrew Turnbull to Sir William Duncan Gibraltar, April 7, 1768 [The-Letters-Of-Dr-Turnbull-pdf-SEARCHABLE.pdf](#)

<sup>24</sup> *Mullet on the Beach*-Pat Griffin. Page 36

whose inexperience further undermined the colony's fragile condition. The colony's eventual failure was not due to a lack of ambition, but rather to a combination of lack of funds, mismanagement, cruelty, and harsh environmental conditions that no amount of entrepreneurial vision could overcome. Turnbull's extended absences contributed to the problems.

Governor Tonyn played no role in the relentless financial difficulties Turnbull faced. He had nothing to do with Turnbull's decision to bring 1,403 colonists across the Atlantic Ocean when plans had only been made to accommodate 500 Greeks. Nor was Tonyn responsible for the failure of the crops, which left the Minorcans with limited food and scant clothing during several harsh years.

A vivid understanding of the colony's dire conditions in the fall of 1770 emerges from Governor Grant's letter to Lord Hillsborough, in which he states: "But at present they are destitute of every convenience, they are ill clothed, many of them almost naked, and are obliged to live in small huts put up in a hurry to shelter them from the weather upon their first arrival. Doctor Turnbull has neither money nor credit to supply them with clothes, and has not the necessary tools and materials to build houses for them."<sup>25</sup> These issues are well-documented to have existed long before Tonyn's arrival. It is both unfair and inaccurate to place the blame for the failure of the New Smyrna colony on Tonyn.

The conditions described by Grant existed four years before Tonyn assumed office, making it not just unreasonable but a significant distortion of the truth to hold him accountable for the colony's failure. By the time Tonyn became governor in 1774, the colony was already teetering on the edge of collapse due to a lack of resources, poor planning, and Turnbull's extended absences.

Following the departure of Gov. Grant in 1771, Turnbull sought to leverage his position as the developer of the New Smyrna colony by asking his influential partner, Sir William Duncan, to help him secure the position of East Florida lieutenant governor. Turnbull believed the added authority would allow him to better protect his colony from potential uprisings or raids, while also giving him more political control over the entire province.

However, his bid was unsuccessful, as the king decided to retain John Moultrie as lieutenant governor and appointed Patrick Tonyn governor in 1773. *The South Carolina Gazette and County Journal* published a one-sentence announcement: "We learn from St. Augustine that Governor Grant has resigned that Government, and Colonel Tonyn is appointed in his room."<sup>26</sup> One writer suspected that Tonyn had been offered the governorship in 1763 but was unable to accept it at the time.

Turnbull's frustration over his failed bid for political power contributed to growing tensions with both Moultrie and Tonyn. These tensions escalated after the courts and Tonyn sided with the Minorcans in their grievances against Turnbull, which centered on the brutal working conditions and mistreatment they were enduring at the New Smyrna colony. As unrest grew, Tonyn's support for the Minorcans played a critical role in their decision to abandon the colony and

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<sup>25</sup> James Grant to the Earl of Hillsborough St. Augustine, September 1, 1770  
[The-Letters-Of-Dr-Turnbull-pdf-SEARCHABLE.pdf](#)

<sup>26</sup> *The South-Carolina Gazette; and Country Journal* (Charleston, South Carolina) · Tue, Jun 1, 1773 · Page 2

resettle in St. Augustine. Their mass departure would ultimately spell the end of Turnbull's ambitious colonial enterprise, marking a significant turning point in East Florida and St. Augustine's history.

The reasons behind King George III's decision to retain John Moultrie as lieutenant governor of East Florida are not known for certain. He may have been influenced by the recommendation of former governor Grant. Moultrie, a veteran of the British Army who served as a lieutenant during the French and Indian War, had proven himself not only in battle but also in governance. Between 1771 and 1774, Moultrie acted as governor of East Florida during Grant's absence, skillfully managing the affairs and maintaining stability during a period of political transition. His administrative experience and steady leadership in Grant's absence made him an attractive candidate for the role of lieutenant governor.

In contrast, Andrew Turnbull, while an experienced naval surgeon and the ambitious founder of the New Smyrna colony, lacked significant administrative experience in managing a British province. His background as a medical officer in the British Royal Navy may have given him valuable knowledge in health and logistics, but it likely did not prepare him for the complex political and socio-economic management required to serve as lieutenant governor of East Florida.

Grant's influence in this decision played a critical role. As a respected figure both in East Florida and Britain, his endorsement of Moultrie would have carried significant weight. Grant's military skills and his successful tenure as governor earned him the trust of the British government, and his recommendation likely reflected his confidence in Moultrie's ability to continue the policies he had put in place. By retaining Moultrie, the British government may have sought to ensure continuity and stability, particularly given the growing unrest in the American colonies during the early 1770s. This unrest made Spain very interested in what was happening in Florida, and the 13 colonies, so much so that they utilized their Cuban fishermen as information-gathering agents.<sup>27</sup>

Cuba had been fishing off the coast of Florida for centuries before the 1763 Treaty of Paris transferred Florida to British control. It was only logical that these commercial fishermen would be part of Spain's effort to collect information. Spain was aware that unrest in the 13 colonies intensified each time Great Britain implemented trade policies that harmed colonial merchants or imposed new taxes, the primary grievance of the American colonists for years.

Through these commercial fishing connections, Father Pedro Camps eventually gained recognition from the Cuban Bishop, who sent him Holy Oils and other essential supplies for the parish. However, Governor Grant later seized a Cuban fishing vessel and discovered documents related to British military forces and other sensitive information. Several authors<sup>28</sup> claim that two fishermen and a priest were executed for their involvement in the network.

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<sup>27</sup> *The Minorcans of Florida-Their History, Language and Culture*. Philip D. Rasico

<sup>28</sup> *Dr. Andrew Turnbull and the New Smyrna Colony – Caritta Corse Doggett and Loyalist in East Florida 1774 to 1785*, Vol. 1 Wilbur Henry Siebert Page 6

East Florida, a relatively young and strategically important British province, needed steady leadership to avoid falling subject to the kind of revolutionary sentiment spreading throughout the northern colonies. Moultrie, who had proven his administrative capability as acting governor in Grant's absence, represented a stable choice for the Crown, one that would help maintain order in a time of uncertainty. Given these considerations, the British government likely saw Moultrie's retention as a safeguard against potential upheaval, ensuring that East Florida remained a loyal and stable province in the face of increasing rebellion elsewhere in the American colonies. Moultrie's reputation among his superiors in Great Britain was not something Turnbull would have considered. He just wanted to be lieutenant governor.

In a 1772 letter to Sir William Duncan, Turnbull expressed his frustration at not securing the position, writing, "You might have obtained the governorship of the province for me, I mean [Lieutenant] Governor, if you had asked for it, for Lord Hillsborough told me he wanted to do you a service but as you didn't ask him, he gave in to Grant's solicitation."<sup>29</sup> Turnbull's disappointment is clear, as he believed that with Duncan's influence, the role could have been his. Lord Hillsborough, then secretary of state for the Colonies, had hinted that he was open to helping Duncan, but ultimately deferred to Grant, who evidently supported John Moultrie.

Despite his disappointment, Turnbull was careful not to let the situation damage his relationship with Duncan, reassuring him, "Carrying my own people away will be done with as much regard for your interest as possible. I mean only to secure myself not to hurt you. Nothing can ever induce me to any meanness of that kind."<sup>30</sup> This diplomatic language shows Turnbull's awareness of the delicate balance between his personal ambitions and his financial partnerships. As tensions grew in East Florida, particularly with the Minorcans in his New Smyrna colony, Turnbull needed to safeguard his own position while maintaining the support of his influential partners.

Turnbull's failed bid for the lieutenant governorship must have deepened his frustrations, as his relationship with Governor Patrick Tonyn became increasingly strained. The political landscape in East Florida was shifting, and Turnbull's inability to gain political power left him vulnerable to the growing unrest among the Minorcans.

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Mrs. Turnbull and her children had been living in St. Augustine since 1766, comfortably positioned in the upper echelons of British society under the patronage of Grant, a fellow Scotsman like her husband. The Turnbull's became part of a well-established British social circle that included prominent individuals and families in the colony. Mrs. Turnbull's social standing played a key role in maintaining her family's influence during her husband's long absences.

By the time Patrick Tonyn arrived in 1774, this elite circle had already formed its alliances and traditions, leaving little room for newcomers to challenge their status. The social order of British

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<sup>29</sup> Andrew Turnbull to Sir William Duncan London, April 6, 1772 [The-Letters-Of-Dr-Turnbull-pdf-SEARCHABLE.pdf](#)

<sup>30</sup> Ibid

society was rigid. Unless a person had the proper pedigree, he or she could not dine with Governor Grant and his weekly, sometimes daily, guests.

Whether Tonyn was accepted by this segment of the community remains uncertain. Some writers suggest that Tonyn was snubbed by St. Augustine's privileged class, possibly due to their strong loyalties to Grant and Turnbull. If true, this exclusion would have helped shape Tonyn's sentiments toward the established British society, particularly as he navigated the political tensions among himself, Andrew Turnbull, and Chief Justice Drayton. Tonyn's background as a career military officer, rather than a well-connected socialite, may have set him apart from the established privileged, deepening his sense of separation.

Life was far more challenging for Mrs. Turnbull after her family moved to the New Smyrna colony, far removed from the social activities she once enjoyed in St. Augustine, where she dined regularly at Governor Grant's residence. Though there may have been other women of her social standing on nearby plantations with whom she could occasionally visit, her days were undoubtedly consumed by the demands of raising her children and managing the household. The relative isolation of the plantation, coupled with her husband's frequent absences, added to the weight of her responsibilities. Andrew Turnbull was fully aware of the hardship when he wrote Duncan saying, "My family agreed to live [at Smyrnéa] with me as exiles from every convenience and amusement."<sup>31</sup>

During her years in New Smyrna, Mrs. Turnbull gave birth to three children: William Duncan, born in 1773, Robert James on January 14, 1774, and John on February 11, 1775. These three youngest children joined their older siblings, Nichol (15), Maria Gracia (12), Jenny (11), and Margaret (9), at the family's mansion. However, the joys of motherhood were tempered by profound sorrow, as Mrs. Turnbull had tragically lost four children before the family's move to St. Augustine: Jane in 1756 at 1½ years old, Katherine in 1758 at 4 months, Helen in 1763 at 7 months, and Flora in 1766 at 5 months. The emotional weight of these losses must have been heavy, even as she welcomed new life into the world.

The challenges of life at the colony would have been compounded by the isolation and the harsh realities of frontier life. Managing a large household and caring for seven children must have been overwhelming. The natural beauty of the area could not compensate for the dangers and difficulties that came with it — whether it was the unpredictable weather, the remote location, the fear of an Indian attack, or the lack of a strong social network.

Still, through all of these hardships, Mrs. Turnbull's resilience was undeniable. She remained the backbone of her family, managing her household and raising her children despite the emotional toll of loss and the challenges of life in a distant colony. Her quiet strength, often overlooked in the grander historical narratives, was a testament to the fortitude required of women in colonial America.

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<sup>31</sup> Andrew Turnbull to Sir William Duncan St. Augustine, February 15, 1771  
[The-Letters-Of-Dr-Turnbull-pdf-SEARCHABLE.pdf](#)

Several accounts mention her involvement and active participation in the church where Father Camps served as pastor. Father Michael J. Curley, in his dissertation *Church and State in the Spanish Floridas (1783-1822)*, states that Mrs. Turnbull was Catholic, though this claim has not been substantiated by other sources.

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There has been a great deal of speculation about whether Patrick Tonyn was married. However, parish records from 1745, found in *Clandestine Marriages in London*, document the marriage of “Patrick Tonyn of Elsbury in Buckinghamshire, Gentleman and Bart., and Miss Mary Willing of Red Lyon Street, Holborn, in the County of Middlesex.” While this record suggests that Tonyn married early in his life, some writers propose that Mrs. Tonyn was not warmly received by British society in St. Augustine, possibly due to her perceived lower social status.

If Mrs. Tonyn did not come from a wealthy or well-connected family, this could explain why she might have been snubbed by the colony’s elite, if that happened. In British colonial circles, lineage and connections were often key to social acceptance. The barrier separating “us” from “them” was impenetrable.

One speculative report further deepens the mystery. It suggests that Andrew Turnbull refused to allow his wife to return a social call from Mrs. Tonyn. In the rigid world of 18th century colonial etiquette, such a refusal would have been seen as a grave social slight, potentially adding fuel to the personal and political tensions between Tonyn and Turnbull. Whether this incident actually occurred or not, the rumor itself hints at how social exclusion may have fed into broader conflicts in East Florida. Others speculate that Mrs. Tonyn may have died before Patrick Tonyn became governor, which would explain her absence from historical records during his tenure.

Also, it was not uncommon for British military men like Tonyn to leave their wives in England when venturing into dangerous or unsettled territories. If Mrs. Tonyn had indeed remained in England while her husband governed in St. Augustine, this could have isolated Tonyn from the social life of the colony, affecting his ability to build alliances among the local elite. Ultimately, the truth about Mrs. Tonyn remains elusive, but her potential presence — or absence — casts a shadow over Tonyn’s personal and political life in East Florida.

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In a November 1770 letter to Sir William Duncan, Turnbull wrote, “I hired Charles DeLaire to survey the plantation, paying him a fee of £20 Sterling. DeLaire measured the cultivated land, and two copies of his survey are enclosed in a box along with samples of indigo. You will see that we have 970 acres cleared and under cultivation.”<sup>32</sup> While this was a significant amount of land, its productivity depended on whether enough Minorcans were healthy enough to work it.

In mid-May of 1774, Governor Tonyn, along with Frederick Mulcaster and others, embarked on a trip to the New Smyrna colony. The governor was aware of the growing discontent among the

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<sup>32</sup> Andrew Turnbull to Sir William Duncan Smyrnéa, November 12, 1770  
[The-Letters-Of-Dr-Turnbull-pdf-SEARCHABLE.pdf](#)

Minorcans, who had been facing harsh working conditions and neglect under Turnbull's management. During his visit, Tonyn took the time to listen to the Minorcans' complaints but ultimately recommended "obedience to the People," a temporary measure likely intended to diffuse tensions.

Mulcaster, who accompanied Tonyn, made a stark observation, writing that "the Dr.'s fields were in bad order at present, not the least appearance of a crop."<sup>33</sup> The poor state of the fields underscored the broader failures of Turnbull's agricultural project, which had struggled to produce sufficient crops to sustain the colony. This agricultural failure was not just a reflection of environmental challenges, but also of the mismanagement that had plagued the colony for years. For the Minorcans, it meant ongoing hardship, as they faced both inadequate food and difficult labor conditions.

Interestingly, it seems that Turnbull did not learn of Tonyn's impending visit until two or three days before the governor's entourage arrived. Whether this short notice created tension is unclear, but Turnbull's surprise at the visit may have reflected his anxiety about the state of the colony.

It is probable that Tonyn stayed more than a day, given the long journey, and he was likely offered good accommodations in the 'village,' which consisted of 31 buildings, including a church and a windmill. However, it is possible that Tonyn dined and lodged at the Turnbull mansion, four or five miles to the north, well away from the stench of indigo processing, where Mrs. Turnbull and her children had lived since relocating from St. Augustine several years earlier.

Tonyn's observations during this visit may have planted the seeds for his later support of the Minorcans. Although he recommended "obedience of the people" during this visit, the poor conditions and the complaints of the Minorcans likely remained on his mind. As tensions in the colony grew, and Turnbull and Drayton's allegiance became questionable, Tonyn was led to take a more active role in addressing the sworn grievances of the Minorcans, contributing to the collapsing of the New Smyrna colony.

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Acting on East Florida's most pressing challenges, Tonyn wrote in his first report to his superiors about the growing threat of conflict with the local Creek and Seminole tribes. British settlers, mostly from Georgia and South Carolina, had been steadily encroaching on Indigenous lands, sparking tension as they sought to claim free resources and land.

The Proclamation of 1763 had designated certain areas of East Florida for exclusive Native American use, but the influx of settlers in the years following the American colonies' expansion into the South made enforcement difficult. The Proclamation's boundaries were increasingly ignored, and local colonial authorities struggled to maintain control as settlers pushed deeper into Indigenous territory.

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<sup>33</sup> Frederick George Mulcaster to James Grant St. Augustine, May 14, 1774  
[The-Letters-Of-Dr-Turnbull-pdf-SEARCHABLE.pdf](#)

The Creek and Seminole tribes, with a long history of resisting colonial encroachment, were not passive in the face of British expansion. They had organized raids, defended their lands through strategic alliances, and made clear their opposition to further settler intrusion. Tonyn's reports reflected his growing concern that these tensions could erupt into open conflict, which would destabilize the province at a critical time. He viewed the individual families of settlers from neighboring colonies as an unpredictable, unmanageable element, driven by competition for land that had belonged to the Native Americans for thousands of years.

Tonyn's strategy for managing this escalating situation was complicated by the settlers' disregard for the law and his limited ability to enforce the Proclamation in the frontier regions. He considered advocating for stricter enforcement of the Proclamation to prevent further encroachment, but he also understood that this might antagonize the very settlers he had invited, who were bolstering East Florida's population and economy. The balance between protecting indigenous lands and managing colonial expansion would define much of Tonyn's early governorship, as he sought to avert a war with the Creek and Seminole tribes that would have devastating consequences for East Florida.

*According to the letters patent issued in October, 1763, by which the government of East Florida was erected, a council was provided for the colony. This board was to consist of twelve men, of whom two were to be the chief justice of the province and the surveyor general of customs for the southern district.*<sup>34</sup>

It must have been a difficult situation for Governor Tonyn working with men he believed were not as loyal to the Crown as he felt they should be.

As if dealing with the threat of a potential Native American uprising and troubling news from London about the 13 colonies' impending revolution weren't enough, Governor Tonyn soon uncovered a possible conspiracy involving Chief Justice William Drayton, Dr. Andrew Turnbull and Jonathan Bryan, a Georgia patriot. Governor Wright of Georgia worked with Governor Tonyn concerning the Bryan affair and intimated in a letter to Tonyn that "certain gentlemen of high station in East Florida involved with Bryan and the East Florida Council learned from another letter that either Drayton or Turnbull was willing to pay £500 for securing royal approval."<sup>35</sup> It appeared that dissent had reached the colony's leadership as well.

Tonyn was not the only one to notice the growing unrest. Reverend John Forbes, concerned about the shifting loyalties within East Florida's elite, wrote a warning to former governor Grant on Dec. 28, 1774: "Mr. Drayton has gained control of the Doctor and some others to the side of liberty. The others are as you left us. These two gentlemen were not made for quiet."<sup>36</sup>

Drayton, who had served as chief justice of East Florida since 1765, had developed sympathies for the cause of liberty taking root in the colonies. It appears that he had drawn Turnbull, still reeling from his troubles with the Minorcans, insufficient funds and his disputes with Tonyn, into

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<sup>34</sup> *Loyalist in East Florida 1774 to 1785*, Vol. 1 Wilbur Henry Siebert Page 4

<sup>35</sup> *Loyalist in East Florida 1774 to 1785*, Vol. 1 Wilbur Henry Siebert Page 14

<sup>36</sup> The Reverend John Forbes to James Grant St. Augustine, December 28, 1774

[The-Letters-Of-Dr-Turnbull-pdf-SEARCHABLE.pdf](#)



his orbit. An argument about their loyalties could be made from the fact that after the war, both Turnbull and Drayton were welcomed by the citizens of Charleston, South Carolina.

The full extent of the conspiracy remains unclear, but it seems that Drayton and Turnbull were agitating for change, possibly in favor of greater self-governance or aligning with the revolutionary cause. Their alliance represented a dangerous breach in the colony's leadership, as Drayton wielded judicial power and Turnbull maintained considerable influence through his New Smyrna colony. Their opposition to Tonyn's leadership raised the specter of internal unrest in what was supposed to be a loyalist stronghold.

Tonyn's discovery of this possible conspiracy would have only deepened the divisions within East Florida's leadership. Already suspicious of Turnbull due to the Minorcan grievances and the poor state of the New Smyrna colony, Tonyn now had to contend with the unsettling possibility that revolutionary sympathies had spread among the colony's elite. While Tonyn acted swiftly to gather information, the question remained: Could he neutralize this threat before it destabilized East Florida, a province that stood on the edge of both external and internal conflict?

Drayton and Turnbull were attempting to help former Georgia Council member Jonathan Bryan acquire between four and five million acres of land in northern East Florida, land that had been reserved for Native Americans under the Proclamation of 1763. This illegal scheme, if successful, would have not only violated British law, but also further destabilized relations with the Creek and Seminole tribes, who were already wary of British encroachment. Tonyn, upon learning of the conspiracy, issued a warrant for Bryan's arrest. However, Bryan, having been tipped off, fled to Georgia before Tonyn's men could apprehend him.

The plot didn't stop with Jonathan Bryan. Tonyn suspected deeper involvement from prominent figures in East Florida and filed charges against Andrew Turnbull and Chief Justice William Drayton, accusing them of being "disloyal to the Crown." Their disloyalty was not only tied to their involvement in the land scheme but also reflected their growing opposition to Tonyn's policies, which they saw as too rigid and protective of British interests at the expense of local leaders. Fearing arrest and imprisonment, both men managed to evade capture. Turnbull and Drayton fled to England in March 1776,<sup>37</sup> hoping to clear their names and secure political support.

By the time Turnbull returned, his New Smyrna colony had changed dramatically. The Minorcans, long disillusioned by the harsh conditions and mistreatment, had fled to St. Augustine under the protection and freedom offered by Governor Tonyn. Turnbull's control over his colony had finally collapsed. After the governor signed the order releasing the Minorcans from their contracts, "attorneys for the colony released the Minorcans en masse, gave them each four quarts of corn and four days to get out."<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> *The Minorcans of Florida-Their History, Language and Culture*. Philip D. Rasico-Page 50

<sup>38</sup> *The Cross in the Sand*. Michael V. Gannon Page 88

Though Father Camps, the spiritual leader of the Minorcans, was initially unable to leave with his congregation, he was eventually granted permission and reestablished his parish in St. Augustine. In November 1777, Catholicism returned to its rightful place in St. Augustine.

His relocation symbolized the end of the Turnbull colony and the beginning of the Minorcans' newfound freedom in St. Augustine. The move marked not just a physical relocation, but the end of nine years of hardship for the Minorcans, who had endured difficult conditions under Turnbull's rule. Now, under Tonyn's protection, they could begin to rebuild their lives.

The Avero House, where Father Pedro Camps first conducted Catholic services, is now part of the St. Photios Greek Orthodox National Shrine in St. Augustine. Located on St. George Street, this house holds great historical significance, not just for the Greeks but particularly for the Minorcan Catholics, as it was the sacred spot where Father Camps celebrated Mass for the Minorcans until Father Haslett arrived and moved the church to a bigger place.

Father Camps' entry in his "Golden Book" reads, "On the 9th day of November 1777, the church of San Pedro was translated from the settlement of Mosquito to the city of Saint Augustine, with the same colony of Mahonese Minorcans which was established in the said settlement, and the same parish priest and Missionary Apostolic, Dr. Dn. Pedro Camps. (Dr. Pedro Camps, Parish Priest.)"

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*When the American Revolution broke out, East Florida, a British colony since 1763, supported the mother country and offered refuge to those in other American colonies who were loyal to the crown. East Florida became a loyalist haven when George III ordered Governor Patrick Tonyn to issue a proclamation in November 1775 inviting them to come to St. Augustine.<sup>39</sup>*

This statement underscores the pivotal role St. Augustine played as both a military and civilian refuge during the American Revolutionary War, illustrating how political decisions were shaped by rapidly changing events. The king's order placed Governor Tonyn in the position of not only protecting those already in the province but also safeguarding and providing food and shelter for an influx of Loyalist refugees he likely could not have anticipated. By the end of 1783, East Florida's population increased to 15,000, a number that would have seemed unimaginable previously. The vast majority were in St. Augustine where protection was at the highest level although one report indicates some of the Loyalists lived as far away as 50 miles.

When Governor Tonyn received his orders from the king in 1775, he was already preparing East Florida and its capital, St. Augustine, for what he felt would be an attack from Continental troops supported by the Georgia Militia. They did plan to invade East Florida in an early campaign known as the Florida Expedition of 1776. They were unsuccessful due to a strong British military presence, natural barriers such as swamps, and the lack of proper preparations.

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<sup>39</sup> *East Florida as a Loyalist Haven* Linda K. Williams – 1975 – Page 1  
<https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq/vol54/iss4/6/#:~:text=East%20Florida%20became%20a%20loyalist%20haven%20when%20George,1775%20inviting%20them%20to%20come%20to%20St.%20Augustine.>

There were major issues between the army and the militia about the command structure that added to the failed attempt to capture East Florida. The Battle of Thomas Creek<sup>40</sup> stopped the Patriots' momentum. As historian and former Congressman Charles E. Bennett, the man who sponsored legislation to add "In God We Trust" to U.S. currency, writes, "The battle was significant in that it decisively ended the optimistically planned Patriot campaign of 1777 to liberate Florida from the British."

This battle is also known as the Thomas Creek Massacre. After the British captured over 30 prisoners, "The Muscogee were reported to kill a number of the captives in cold blood afterward, in revenge for the death of a member of their own tribe in an earlier skirmish."<sup>41</sup>

During the soldiers' march south, they were constantly harassed by Lt. Colonel Brown's Florida Rangers. One can only imagine how fierce Brown was in battle. He had good reason to fight with all his might.

*Thomas Brown had his skull fractured by the butt end of a rifle, was tied to a tree while Sons of Liberty beat him remorselessly, scalped three times, they scorched his skin with fire, stripped him naked and poured boiling tar over him, pooling into his boot that scalded his foot and incinerated two toes. Lastly, he was feathered and paraded through the streets of Augusta. How he survived is nothing short of a miracle.*

Brown's unyielding hatred for the Georgia Patriots drove him and his Florida Rangers to commit ruthless and barbaric acts during their raids, leaving a trail of terror and destruction in their wake. Turnbull castigated "Bloody Colonel Brown for his scalping of 'rebel' women and children along the Georgia border." Reading about the horrors that unfolded in the wilderness of Georgia and East Florida is very difficult. Raids by both sides against defenseless settlers were often carried out by men devoid of conscience or compassion. Both sides bear responsibility for the killing and maiming of unarmed people.

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Governor Tonyn faced considerable criticism, largely due to his strained relationships with Andrew Turnbull and William Drayton — tensions that persisted throughout his tenure as governor. However it can be pointed out that Tonyn kept East Florida under British rule, defended East Florida successfully against multiple rebel invasions, kept good relations with the Native Americans and gave the Minorcans their freedom from the New Smyrna colony.

Both Turnbull and Drayton had enjoyed the full support of Tonyn's predecessor, Governor James Grant, but that favor disappeared abruptly when Tonyn assumed office on March 1, 1774. Tonyn's governing style was unpopular among the colonial elite, and his reluctance to establish a Council of Citizens for East Florida remained a persistent source of frustration for many. There is also a story suggesting that Mrs. Turnbull failed to return a social call from Mrs. Tonyn, sparking rumors of a past romance between Andrew Turnbull and Mrs. Tonyn. However, this author

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<sup>40</sup> [Battle of Thomas Creek | American Revolutionary War](https://revolutionarywar.us/year-1777/battle-thomas-creek/)  
<https://revolutionarywar.us/year-1777/battle-thomas-creek/>

<sup>41</sup> Ibid

believes that Mrs. Tonyn was not of Scottish origin and doubts that Mrs. Tonyn even came to St. Augustine.

As mentioned previously, there was a secretive land deal proposed by Georgian Jonathan Bryan involving millions of acres of Native American land. Bryan was part of the ruling class in Georgia and from 1736 until he died in 1788, he owned over 32,000 acres and over 250 slaves. Tonyn suspected Andrew Turnbull and Chief Justice Drayton were part of Bryan's plan, making him suspect that Drayton and Turnbull were leaning to the side of liberty. Although Tonyn ultimately had nothing more than circumstantial evidence against Turnbull and Drayton, both stayed in America after the war and were welcomed by the Patriots. Turnbull was highly regarded in Charleston, while Drayton, in 1789, went on to serve as "an associate justice of the state's Supreme Court, a judge of the United States District Court for South Carolina."

Governor Tonyn, in addition to daily briefings on what was happening with his troops, had to maintain a satisfactory relationship with the Native American tribes loyal to the British. The motives for Native Americans fighting for either the British or the Americans were varied, but it can be stated that they had one thing in common: Europeans had stolen (and continued to steal) Native American land since 1565.

Some tribes, such as the Creeks, Seminoles, and Cherokees, sided with the British due to long-established trade relationships and familiarity with British political leaders. They believed their chances of preserving their lands were better under British rule, rather than facing the relentless expansion of the United States, which sought to open vast new territories to hundreds of thousands of settlers. Unbeknownst to the Native Americans, President Andrew Jackson would later force them on a brutal journey westward, marking the beginning of one of the largest land seizures in American history — the Trail of Tears — and initiating generations of state and federal governmental efforts to dismantle Native Americans culture and destroy their heritage.

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Tonyn's tenure as the governor of East Florida from 1774 to 1784 was defined by significant challenges and key successes that positioned him as both a controversial and vital figure in the province's history. His leadership during the American Revolutionary War was marked by his unwavering loyalty to the British crown and his determination to protect East Florida from the incursions of American Patriots.

When King George III ordered Tonyn to open St. Augustine as a refuge for Loyalists in 1775, Tonyn not only followed through with this proclamation but also played a central role in managing the influx of refugees. By the end of the war, East Florida's population had surged due to the arrival of Loyalists, particularly in St. Augustine, illustrating Tonyn's ability to handle an overwhelming situation.

Tonyn's success in repelling multiple Patriot invasions, most notably the failed Florida Expedition of 1776, stands as one of his greatest military achievements. Natural barriers, disease, and disorganization among the Patriot forces played a part in their failure, but it was Tonyn's

collaboration with Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Brown and the Florida Rangers that ultimately thwarted the Continental Army's advances.

Brown, with his personal vendetta against the Patriots stemming from his brutal torture at their hands, was a relentless force, conducting raids that terrorized settlers along the Georgia border. These raids, though barbaric, contributed to the defense of East Florida and were instrumental in stopping Patriot momentum.

Despite his military successes, Tonyn faced sharp criticism for his strained relationships with influential figures like Andrew Turnbull and William Drayton. These tensions, compounded by rumors of personal disputes, marred Tonyn's governorship and led to longstanding enmity.

The proof that Turnbull and Drayton were involved in a secret land deal and potentially sympathizing with the Patriots only further exacerbated their conflicts. Ultimately, both men chose to remain in America after the war, with Turnbull becoming highly regarded in Charleston and Drayton rising to prominence in South Carolina's judicial system.

Tonyn's relationships with Native American tribes were equally complex. Loyal to the British due to their long-standing trade relations and hopes of preserving their lands, tribes such as the Creeks, Seminoles, and Cherokees fought alongside the British during the war. Tonyn had to navigate these alliances carefully, ensuring their continued loyalty while managing the tensions that arose from centuries of European encroachment on Native lands.

Tragically, despite their loyalty to the crown, Native American hopes of securing their lands under British rule were dashed after the British defeat. The relentless American expansion that followed, culminating in the Trail of Tears,<sup>42</sup> resulted in one of the largest land seizures and most devastating genocides in U.S. history.

Governor Patrick Tonyn's legacy is one of military competence and political controversy. Though criticized for his conflicts with colonial elites and his management of local affairs, his role in defending East Florida from rebel invasions and maintaining British rule in the province is undeniable. His ability to navigate the turbulent landscape of war, refugee crises, and delicate alliances with Native American tribes reveals a governor whose actions were pivotal during one of the most challenging periods in East Florida's history.

After years of hardship during the Turnbull era, Governor Tonyn's decision to bring the Minorcans to St. Augustine, whatever his reasons, gave them the hope of a new beginning. All of us who have ever loved a Minorcan will be eternally grateful.

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<sup>42</sup> [Trail of Tears: Definition, Date & Cherokee Nation | HISTORY](https://www.history.com/topics/native-american-history/trail-of-tears)  
<https://www.history.com/topics/native-american-history/trail-of-tears>