



John Moultrie III - Lieutenant Governor of East Florida

### Introduction

John Moultrie III was born on January 18, 1729, to John Moultrie and Lucretia Cooper in Charleston, South Carolina. He died on March 19, 1798, in Shiffnal Churchyard, Shropshire, England.

Moultrie was exceptionally bright and committed to hard work. He earned his M.D. from the University of Edinburgh at the age of twenty. His Latin dissertation on yellow fever was widely referenced around the world due to its “precise clinical descriptions.” He was also notable for being the “first native-born American to graduate in medicine from Edinburgh, which was then emerging as the leading medical school in the Western world.”<sup>2</sup>

John Moultrie was much more than a young doctor practicing in Charleston. His first wife, Dorothy Morton (nee Dry), a wealthy widow died as did their young children. He then married Elenor Austin, daughter of Charleston merchant and British Navy Captain George Austin. Captain Austin was strongly opposed to her marrying Moultrie and he never forgave her. In his Last Will, he stipulated that his wealth would be managed by trustees so that his son-in-law would never get his hands on any of the money.

Moultrie was active in South Carolina politics. He served in the South Carolina General Assembly in 1750 as a representative. He was a soldier and fought valiantly during the Anglo-Cherokee War of 1759-1761. (“Grant led an overzealous and failed attempt to assault Fort Duquesne which resulted in him being taken prisoner by the French. After held for nearly a year, he was finally released in an exchange in late 1759.”)<sup>3</sup>

Moultrie fought in numerous battles against the Cherokees, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel James Grant. Although he fought the Cherokees, he felt empathy for them and in his

---

<sup>1</sup> John Moultrie <https://prabook.com/web/john.moultrie/1055908>

<sup>2</sup> [Moultrie, John, III | South Carolina Encyclopedia \(scencyclopedia.org\)](https://www.scencyclopedia.org/entry/moultrie-john-iii) website 09/25/2024

<sup>3</sup> *New Systems, Established Traditions*: by James L. Hill. The Florida Historical Quarterly. Vol. 93, No. 2 pp 133-166

view, “the Cherokees had been bullied and pushed into open warfare by the Virginians, Carolinians, and Lyttelton's government.”<sup>4</sup> He held the rank of major.<sup>5</sup> His war years under Grant made him a man Grant trusted and led to his being appointed Lieutenant governor of East Florida.

In 1771, King George III appointed John Moultrie as Lieutenant Governor of East Florida after Governor James Grant returned to England due to ill health and to claim his substantial inheritance. Moultrie continued to serve as Lieutenant Governor under Patrick Tonyn. Like his father, Moultrie was a planter and builder and oversaw the construction of the King's Road, which extended from the St. Marys River to the New Smyrna colony in East Florida. He aligned himself with Governor Tonyn during the bitter feud with Andrew Turnbull and Chief Justice William Drayton.

Moultrie owned numerous enslaved people and large tracts of land, with his most prized estate being Bella Vista. Visitors described the homestead area of the plantation as resembling a formal British garden. As with many other plantation owners, Moultrie's wealth grew during this period. However, after the American War of Independence, he lost both his fortune and his prestige, ultimately relocating to his wife's family estate, where he spent the remainder of his life.

More of the story

In a letter dated April 19, 1771,<sup>6</sup> Andrew Turnbull informed Sir William Duncan that, despite rumors in London, he had not been appointed lieutenant governor of East Florida. Instead, Governor Grant had recommended John Moultrie for the position, fulfilling a promise made years earlier. Turnbull expressed frustration, arguing that he deserved the appointment more than Moultrie. He emphasized that while Moultrie had only brought twenty enslaved people from South Carolina, he himself had brought hundreds of laborers to the colony and relocated his family immediately. Despite his disappointment, Turnbull acknowledged that Governor Grant had been helpful and governed effectively.

In a second letter written the same day,<sup>7</sup> Turnbull urged Duncan to pressure the government to build a road from St. Augustine to Mosquito Inlet and arrange for a pilot to safely navigate ships through the inlet. He expressed further disappointment about Moultrie's recommendation for lieutenant governor, as Grant had told him that managing Smyrna and fulfilling government duties would be too much for Turnbull. Disagreeing with this assessment, Turnbull argued that the government duties would only require his presence in St. Augustine once a month and urged Duncan to use his influence in London to secure the appointment for him instead.

Turnbull suggested that if Duncan had made a stronger effort, he might have been appointed Lieutenant Governor. However, Moultrie had served with James Grant in the British Army during the Anglo-Cherokee War, during which they likely became close friends. Governor Grant

---

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> *The South Carolina historical and Genealogical Magazine*, Vol.3, No. 4 (Oct., 1902, pp 202-205

<sup>6</sup> *The James Grant Letters*, University of North Florida - Dundee City Archive

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

evidently placed far more trust in a man he had fought alongside with than in a Scottish entrepreneur he only met in 1767.

Grant had witnessed Moultrie's acquisition of many acres of land and endorsed his commitment to agricultural and commercial development in East Florida. Moultrie experimented with various crops, including sugar, rice, oranges, and indigo. His experience managing plantations with enslaved laborers, learned from his father in Charleston, contributed to his success in East Florida.

\* \* \*

Lieutenant Governor John Moultrie III's father "emigrated to Charles Town in the early part of the Eighteenth Century."<sup>8</sup> He married his first wife, Lucretia Cooper, in 1728. She was 14. She died in May of 1747 at the age of 33, leaving behind four sons, William, John, James and Thomas. After Lucretia's death, he married Elizabeth Mathewes, a widow in June of 1748 and had one son, Alexander. Elizabeth died in 1787.

The Moultrie children played significant roles during the American War of Independence, holding significant offices.<sup>9</sup> One notable family incident involves John's half-brother, Alexander Moultrie, who served as the attorney-general of South Carolina during the war. Captured by the British, Alexander was taken to St. Augustine and imprisoned at Fort Marion. Whether John, who was in St. Augustine, ever met with his half-brother during this time remains unknown, though it seems likely that John would have attempted contact.

John's oldest brother, William, born a year before him, was a Major General in the Continental Army and lived until 1805. Another brother, James, served as chief justice of East Florida before his death in 1765. Their other brother, Thomas, was a captain in the Continental Army. This family dynamic, with three of the four Moultrie brothers fighting for the Patriots while John remained steadfastly loyal to King George III, raises intriguing questions about their differing loyalties. It also adds to the fact that South Carolina had a very significant role in the formation of East Florida during the British occupation from 1763-1784.

\* \* \*

---

<sup>8</sup> *The Moultries. Part One.* The South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine, Vol. 5, No. 4 (Oct., 1904), pp. 229-260

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*