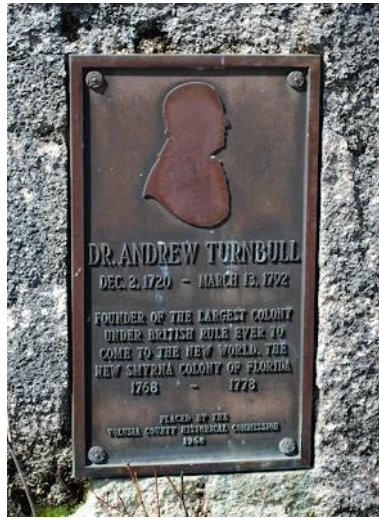


MINORCAN LIFE AT TURNBULL'S COLONY IN 1769

Robert Phillip Jones



There have been discussions about whether the Turnbull enterprise was a colony or a settlement. Some have argued that Florida itself was the colony, making New Smyrna a settlement. I disagree and have uncovered evidence, presented by Charles Loch Mowat in his 1943 book *East Florida as a British Province, 1763–1784*, that Florida was a province.

New Smyrna was a colony, according to many historians, and that designation is manifested by multiple narratives and many plaques. The plaque shown above, prominently displayed in front of the New Smyrna Beach City Hall, is concise and correct. It reads:

“Dr. Andrew Turnbull — Dec. 2, 1720 – March 13, 1792.

FOUNDER OF THE LARGEST COLONY UNDER BRITISH RULE EVER TO COME TO THE NEW WORLD.

THE NEW SMYRNA COLONY OF FLORIDA. 1768–1778.

Placed by the Volusia County Historical Commission — 1968

All of my narratives, written to shed light on the lives of real people, are dedicated to uncovering the location of the graves of the 964 Missing Minorcans buried somewhere in New Smyrna Beach, Florida. We kindly ask for your help.

* * *

Before beginning my year-by-year narratives of the Turnbull colony, I offer the following: The Governor's Official Seal, used to verify the source of official documents, provides an indisputable argument that East Florida was a province. This should make it easier for those who believe East Florida was a colony to accept the conclusions of Mowat that it was a province.

In 1769, a British colony typically exercised self-governance, with local assemblies and elected representatives managing internal affairs. In contrast, the province of East Florida was governed directly by royal appointees, such as Governor James Grant and, later, Governor Patrick Tonyn, who administered the province on behalf of the Crown without the involvement of a local elected assembly.

Charles Loch Mowat's *East Florida as a British Province, 1763–1784* defines Florida as a province in the preface on page V. The term "Florida as a province" is used throughout the 263-page book, which was published in Los Angeles on July 14, 1943.

East Florida could have been Britain's 14th colony, and West Florida its 15th colony, but instead, Britain defined Florida as a province. Mowat writes: "*It was not till October 31, 1764, that he [James Grant] was ready for his inauguration and the actual establishment of the civil government. On that day his commission as governor was published : . . . with all due Solemnity at the Head of the Garrison, by the Clerk of the Council, & Sherriff of the said Province. In the presence of the Chief Justice, The other Officers of the Crown, attended by many other Gentlemen of Distinction. The Great Guns from the Fort were fired off, and the Salute continued by three Volleys from the Troops.*"

Further proof that East Florida was a province was determined when the seal for Governor Grant was made by King George III's chief engraver, according to the specifications of the British Board of Trade.

Mowat wrote, "*In the province itself the governor's power was emphasized by his custodianship of the seal. East Florida's, which had been drawn by the king's chief engraver to the Board of Trade's specification, bore on one side a representation of a fortified town and harbor, with the legend beneath, "Moresque viris et moenia ponit," (He builds virtue and fortifications for the people) and around the circumference the inscription, "Sigillum Provinciae nostrae Floridae Orientalis," (The Seal of Our Province of East Florida, emphasis added). The reverse bore the king's arms, crown, garter, supporters, and the motto "Geo: III Dei Gratia Magnae Britanniae, Franciae et Hiberniae Rex, Fidei Defensor Brunsvici et Luneburgi Dux, Sacri Romani Imperii Archi Thesaurarius et Elector." (George III, by the Grace of God, King of Great Britain, France, and Ireland, Defender of the Faith, Duke of Brunswick and Lüneburg, Arch-Treasurer and Elector of the Holy Roman Empire.)*

If Florida had been a colony, Governor Grant's official seal—engraved by the king's engraver—would have read, "*Sigillum Coloniae Nostrae Floridae Orientalis*" (**The Seal of Our Colony of East Florida**, emphasis added).

* * *

From the time the colonists landed in the summer of 1768 until January 1, 1769, three hundred men and one hundred fifty women and children had died and were buried in the soil of what is now New Smyrna Beach, Florida. Antonio Alzina and Juan Andreu were not among the dead and, in all likelihood, knew many of the Minorcans who perished. They, along with the others, would have been struggling to recover both physically and emotionally. It is highly likely that none of the colonists had ever witnessed so many deaths in such a short period of time in their homeland.

Land was being cleared, and if there was a church—which most historians agree there was—under Catholic tradition after the accidental drowning of the Greek priest, the burials would have taken place near the church.¹ The pamphlet by Grange and Moore states the church was, "*North of the Old Fort Park.*" None of the graves have ever been found in New Smyrna Beach, and no archaeological effort has

¹Roger T. Grange Jr., and Dorothy L. Moore - *Smyrnea Settlement Archaeology & History of an 18th Century British Plantation in East Florida*. Page 16

ever been undertaken for the sole purpose of finding the graves—or even a single grave. The same pamphlet affirms: *“The burial ground has not yet been located.”*²

Life for the Minorcans in New Smyrna during 1769 would have been extremely harsh. Even though members of their families were dying during the last months of 1768, the work went on. Land had to be cleared for planting indigo and for growing the vegetables needed to sustain the colonists. What a scene that must have been for Antonio and Juan. If they worked from sunrise to sunset, they would have seen bodies being carried from the huts along the river to a burial site. They would have seen Father Camps and Father Casanovas performing the last rites. There were not enough wooden caskets for burial, so the bodies may have been wrapped in cloth—or buried with nothing around them at all.

Imagine those men and women who were able to work in the fields: cutting down trees, removing stumps, preparing land for planting indigo, and setting up the process for turning a vile-smelling weed into ‘blue gold.’³ “Indigo was known as ‘the devil’s dye’ due to the exploitation and abuse involved in its farming and processing during British rule.”⁴ Andrew Turnbull had never grown indigo himself, but he spent time with other planters, learning the process and hiring someone who was knowledgeable about cultivating indigo.

The process of making indigo for export is well-documented elsewhere. Suffice it to say, the process was difficult and may have been one reason Andrew Turnbull built his mansion four or five miles north of the main part of the colony—away from the smell and the flies. The first shipment of indigo to London was still two years away, with 2,420 pounds finally shipped on April 26, 1771.⁵

In the James Grant Papers, found at the University of North Florida and at www.minorcans.com, the complete number of deaths during the first six months is mentioned in a report by Governor Patrick Tonyn. The report details the deaths by year and sex from 1768 to December 31, 1777. One can assume that the extraordinary number of deaths would not have been reported to the newspapers, as such news would have had a negative impact on people considering migrating to East Florida.

Before addressing what was happening to the Minorcans during 1769, all the letters involving Dr. Andrew Turnbull from that year are included below. Filling in the blanks of daily life in New Smyrna is a great challenge, but this author believes there must be “flesh on the bones” of these colonists, in the hope that at least one of the graves of the 964 Minorcans buried somewhere in New Smyrna Beach will someday be found.

All of the letters with dates are from the James Grant Papers. Those cited in this narrative can be found at www.minorcans.com. Direct quotes from these letters are italicized.

² Ibid Page 11

³ [Our Objects - Indigo - Multilingual Museum](http://www.museum.manchester.ac.uk/object/indigo/) <https://multilinguallmuseum.manchester.ac.uk/object/indigo/>

⁴ Ibid

⁵ An Account of the [Indigo] Exports from the Smirnea Settlement from its first Establishment in 1768 to the first day of January 1778. [The-Letters-Of-Dr-Turnbull-pdf-SEARCHABLE.pdf](#)

PART ONE-THE LETTERS

Turnbull struggled with financial concerns throughout the entire project of establishing his colony. His worries about money began as soon as the vessels, carrying 1,403 immigrants, set sail for New Smyrna. For anyone who has ever worried about the next paycheck, the threat of eviction for not paying rent, or having the lights turned off for not paying the bill, imagine the mental stress Turnbull endured. Beyond worrying about himself and his family, he was responsible for the well-being of over a thousand people.

Turnbull wrote a letter on January 7, 1769, to the Earl of Hillsborough from Smyrnea, acknowledging that the costs of the colony were higher than he had calculated. He mentioned that the voyage from Turkey took four months, when it should have taken only fifteen days, and that three months of rain since their arrival in Smyrnea had slowed progress. His last sentence to Lord Hillsborough was a compliment to the Minorcans. It reads, *"The Banks of this River, which a few months ago were only marked by the different basking places of tygers, wolves, snakes, and alligators, are now covered with an industrious and cheerful People, for not only the vines and olives trees they have planted come on faster than in Europe, but every seed and plant yet tried come up and thrive."*

In Turnbull's letter written to Sir Willaim Duncan, from Smyrnea dated January 8, 1769, he lamented that his bills were being protested, and without bills being paid, the colony would collapse. He said, *"it meant 'famine for our people, for they can not subsist here as yet, nor can anything be removed from hence, but by Sea, and at a great expense, therefore they must perish. As to me, I feel nothing for myself, for I could live, and even amuse myself among Wild Arabs, Savages or Hotentots,⁶ if I was drove to such Retreats. It is for these People and for the total loss of all that has been laid out...that I am concerned for."*

It is obvious that Turnbull was deeply concerned that his bills would not be paid by his partners. His ego takes hold when he declares that he could even live among the Hottentots and that his only concern was for the colonists. He tells Duncan that the laborers are cheerful and that only he is worried about the future in the event his bills are not paid. His final comment reveals his awareness of the dire consequences for the Minorcans if he were imprisoned for failing to pay his debts, writing that if his credit were called into question, *"the People must starve."*

Governor James Grant, a fellow Scotsman of Turnbull, was fully supportive of Turnbull and the colony while he was in St. Augustine. On January 14, 1769, he wrote to the Earl of Hillsborough, reporting on what he called the *"Moschetto Riot,"* noting that only Carlo Forni and Guiseppi Massadoli, alias Bresiano, were *"condemned and suffered as examples to others."* The hanging of Forni and Massadoli, along with the public whipping of forty others involved in the rebellion must have left a fearful and lasting impression on the colonists. It can be assumed that the punishments imposed were embraced by the overseers, influencing how they treated the colonists from that point onward.

Turnbull's letter to Duncan from Smyrnea on January 24, 1769, was much more positive than his previous ones. He describes the wharf that was built as forty feet wide and one hundred feet long, extending into the river. He also describes the road he constructed, which was eight miles long and wide enough for carriages. The road, *"enables us to see our workers at all hours."* This letter was full of details

⁶ [Hottentot - Oxford Reference](https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095946436)

<https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095946436>

about what was being built at the colony. Although the exact locations of these facilities are not known, the great archaeological work accomplished by Grange and Moore many years ago uncovered a variety of structures. Turnbull also mentions where he was living while at the colony, noting that his family was living in St. Augustine. He writes: *“As to buildings all we have as yet is a store of forty five feet long, an Hospital of eighty, and a house thirty six feet long, in which I live with the Clerks.”*

Living where he did before his family arrived gave him daily contact with the colonists. He was proud of having every tradesman needed to make the colony a success. He added: *“I have every [thing] almost ready for two magazines of eighty foot each, and 6 houses of forty foot long each all of which I hope to have up this summer.”* He referred to the Minorcans as *“farmers,”* which they were, adding that they lived in small houses with palmetto leaves. He hoped to lodge them in better houses when possible. The Minorcans were cutting trees in preparation for planting in the spring. He wrote about having vineyards five miles north of the town and three miles to the south. This is the first time the term *“town”* is mentioned, and the main part of the colony will be referred to as *“town”* for the remainder of this narrative. Many descendants believe the church was near the town.

“Marriages go on fast among us, and I observe that most of the women grow bigg apace. The bad weather we met with on this coast before our arrival made many of our pregnant women miscarry. That loss is now in a fair way of being made good....”

The first birth on the colony was Antonio Jove. He was baptized on January 22, 1769, by Father Camps, a day after his birth. He was the son of Pedro Jove and Ana Sequi, married couple. The Godparents were Juan Colom and Maria Bandini.⁷ There are only five other Baptisms of Minorcan children in 1769 listed in the Golden Book. Other names of the Catholic parents and Godparents are: Lorenza, Torres, Etien, Selom, Pandgoni, Flura, Sans, Amandez, Troti, Pelliser, Morillo, Casanos, Vendzell, Bea, Ximenez, Capo and Clar.⁸

How sad it must have been for the women who had miscarriages during the voyage. How heartbreaking it is for any woman who desires to have a baby to experience a miscarriage. There may have been midwives on board the vessel, or perhaps an older woman who knew what needed to be done. The physical pain, mental anguish, and emotional toll only added to the extreme conditions of living on a vessel sailing slowly across the Atlantic Ocean. However, there were also births on board the vessels sailing to New Smyrna.

Many, if not most, of the Minorcans were young,⁹ and young people are naturally attracted to each other. This may have been near the time when Antonio Alzina and Catarina Moll were married by Father Camps.

Turnbull closes this letter by noting that he is searching for the best indigo makers to ensure that the indigo he grows and ships to Britain is of the highest quality, allowing him to secure the highest price for it.

⁷ *Father Pedro Camps' Golden Book of the Minorcans: Translation and Index*. Leonard J. McCown 217 West 14th Street Irving, Texas 75060-5903. 2003

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Andrew Turnbull to Sir William Duncan Port Mahon, July 11, 1767. *“Most of the People I brought here were twenty to thirty years old.”*

On February 3, 1769, Turnbull writes to Duncan that it took him five days to travel from Smyrnea to St. Augustine, highlighting how bad the road truly was. Five days to travel 70 miles meant he and those with him averaged just fourteen miles per day. That must have been a hard journey, making the narrative about Turnbull and a shipload of Minorcans walking to the colony from St. Augustine as soon as they arrived from Minorca difficult for this author to believe.

On February 18, 1769, Turnbull writes to Duncan in an attempt to dispel statements by Denys Rolle that extravagant living was taking place. Turnbull sent Duncan a bill for £2,500 Sterling for food and provisions until the new crop of food would be available in the summer. He describes living *“rather penuriously,”* saying he could not afford to host the governor and friends for dinner and wine. He adds, *“Governor Grant kept a good table to entertain newcomers and strangers because he knows they cannot find a dinner anywhere else.”*

Governor Grant was known for his elegant meals and entertainment. His Negro chef was so skilled that Grant took him back to Scotland after leaving East Florida, providing him with accommodations at Ballindalloch Castle.

Turnbull stayed in touch with Sir William Duncan more than any other person. He wrote on February 19, 1769, that a fever came upon him about twenty miles away from any shelter, but he has recovered. He told Duncan, *“seasoning to the climate has been severe on our old People and young children. The fatigue of a long voyage had weakened them too much, that they could not stand the shock of such an uncommon bad season as that of last autumn....It gave me pain, and I endeavoured to save them but could not. We have lost about 300 of them, the rest are now in health and spirits.”* In 1769, 155 men and 22 women and children on the colony.¹⁰ He told Duncan that, *“Two of the chiefs of the August mutiny at Smyrnea were executed here last month, others were reprieved under the gallows, and all the other fugitives had been returned.”*

Governor Grant was concerned about Turnbull not having enough food for the colonists, as Turnbull was reluctant to send bills to his investors. As a result, Grant noted that, *“just as I expected, finds himself at the moment very much pinched for provisions, as his supplies have not arrived exactly to the time, and he writes me that he has only Indian corn for a month at the Mosquetos.”* Turnbull’s reluctance to send bills put the Minorcans in a desperate position of being without enough food. Grant tells Hillsborough that he sent his vessel, *East Florida*, to Charles Town for a load of Indian corn.

Turnbull’s letter to Governor Grant, dated March 18, 1769, informs him that the corn had arrived and was unloaded by smaller boats to bring the much-needed food to shore. There was some discussion about using the pilot boat to bring him seed potatoes. Turnbull had ordered one hundred fifty bushels, but only twenty were aboard the Georgia vessel. He felt he could hold out for two more months as he had received a loan. He closes the letter by letting Grant know he had put four small turtles on board for him and apologized for not having larger ones.

By the 22nd of March, 1769, Grant’s letter to Duncan announced things got better as, *“A ship from Georgia brought flour, pork, and other provisions, and all of our People are in good health and spirits”* and had planted 1,000 grape vine cuttings, in addition to their other work.”

¹⁰ Governor Patrick Tonyn to Lord George Germaine, December 29, 1777. [The-Letters-Of-Dr-Turnbull-pdf-SEARCHABLE.pdf](#)

Turnbull's letter to Duncan, dated March 28, 1769, stated that a vessel bringing provisions had an accident near the colony and had to sail to another port for repairs. The inability of this vessel to unload the provisions left the colony extremely short of supplies. Once again, "*Governor Grant immediately sent the provincial schooner, the East Florida, to Charles Town for supplies.*" Turnbull said his people were busy raising crops and had planted 21,700 grapevines, with some already bearing grapes.

A letter from Duncan written December 2, 1768, had just been received insisting that a new contract be written among them, "*because of the huge sums laid out for the settlement. The new agreement would divide profits and land into shares according to the amounts the partners had contributed.*" Turnbull agreed and promised to take a lawyer with him to St. Augustine to get it done.

He then raved about how well the vines were growing, and that he wanted to create income because the financial strain was significant and had been for several years. Turnbull told Duncan, "*The sums disturb me and start me from my bed at peep of day.*" Duncan continued to push Turnbull for all copies of accounts. He closed his letter saying, "*the delays in sending the accounts resulted from the loss of the first clerk who died last month after illness from fatigue at Mahon and Gibraltar. Then the last clerk left had fever twelve times since arriving here, Turnbull said, and he had been too busy to do the accounts himself.*" I doubt this reply played well with Duncan and the other investors.

Turnbull's short letter to Duncan on May 17, 1769, was only one sentence, to wit: "*A large schooner had recently brought provisions, but already the settlement was in need of more pork, red peas, seed for planting, Indian corn, nineteen bars of iron, salt beef, twenty barrels of rice, and indigo and cotton seed.*"

Turnbull's letter to George Grenville,¹¹ dated May 30, 1769, apologized for the sums advanced in excess of £22,261 pounds. At the same time, asked for over £1,738 pounds for needed supplies for the colony, bringing the total to date of £28,000 pounds sterling. He broke down the contributions as £12,000 each for Grenville and Duncan and £4,000 from himself. He said he would have contributed more, but financial losses in Turkey hurt him. George Grenville, who served as Prime Minister of England from 1763 to 1765, died on November 13, 1770, before the first indigo from New Smyrna was exported to England.

Turnbull's letter to Governor Grant, dated May 30, 1769, is the first and only time the word Catholic is used in the letters this author has found—and it is spelled incorrectly. Turnbull writes of complaints about the New Smyrna settlers being foreigners and "*Catholicks.*" There is evidence that a tribe of Native Americans planned to attack New Smyrna because they believed the colonists were Spanish. That threat was stopped when the Creek chief and warriors were informed that the colonists were white people and British subjects. If there were additional complaints from other planters or officials, this author has not found that information.

Turnbull says, egotistically, "*I can engage to make than anything I please, and I would make them Turks tomorrow if I thought it would make them better planters for it, but this I do not intend nor to turn apostle nor act a Luther to reform them, Tho' I will answer that this will be very soon a Protestant settlement if a Clergyman is sent among them.*"

¹¹ George Grenville (1712-1770) [George Grenville | British statesman, Whig politician, fiscal reformer | Britannica](https://www.britannica.com/biography/George-Grenville)
[George Grenville, Facts, Significance, Revolution, APUSH](https://www.americanhistorycentral.com/entries/george-grenville-prime-minister/) <https://www.americanhistorycentral.com/entries/george-grenville-prime-minister/>

There was no way Turnbull, or anyone else, could make the Minorcans abandon their religion. Every oppressor who had ever conquered the island of Minorca had tried to destroy Catholicism, but to no avail. In fact, one of the main reasons some Minorcans made the journey to the New World was to escape religious oppression.

In this letter, he affirms that a Greek priest was brought with him but was drowned by accident. He expressed his desire to name any clergyman sent to the colony when he said: *"I should be sorry if a person I did not point out was named for it. An awful person might do much mischief."*

An undated June 1769 letter to Duncan expressed optimism that the provisions grown would be enough to feed the people for the coming year, but droughts caused problems, driving him to construct canals to move water to where it was needed most.

George Grenville's letter to fellow investor William Duncan, dated July 20, 1769, reveals his concerns about the financial management of their joint venture. Grenville informs Duncan that he is aware of over £1,300 sent to him from Turnbull and that he intends to put a stop to all further bills. He outlines the money he has spent over the past year and laments that additional funds might still be required, possibly for two more years.

Grenville expresses frustration, noting that he wished Turnbull had focused on cotton and indigo, which would have yielded more immediate profits. He criticizes Turnbull for his imprudence and declares that he would not advance another shilling unless a new contract is drawn up—a contract Turnbull is reportedly willing to accept. Grenville agrees to pay half of the £1,300 but refuses to contribute any additional funds.

Grenville concludes the letter by urging Duncan to act: *"Whatever is done I think you must write to him immediately to represent the great difficulties which he has already brought both upon himself and us, and to put an absolute stop to any other drafts upon us upon any accounts whatever for the future. He will then have the rest on the scrap of paper inclosed."* This financial situation plagued Turnbull before he left Minorca and was growing more difficult all the time.

Governor Grant's letter to William Knox, dated June 26, 1769, stated, in effect, that the investors were growing tired of the frequent and significant financial demands being placed on them. Turnbull was becoming anxious about the fate of his bills, considering his partners had already spent £28,000. The small contribution made by the government, Grant advised, should be used as efficiently as possible for the benefit of the colonists.

Provisions, Grant noted, should be purchased at the right time of year and at the lowest possible prices, which had not been the case so far. Turnbull often cut things too close, waited too long, and, as a result, was forced to pay whatever price was demanded—ironically worsening the very problem he was trying to solve.

The root of the problem lay in bringing too many people to New Smyrna. Transporting, feeding, and supporting 1,400 settlers far exceeded the funds originally allocated—by at least three times the agreed-upon budget. Had Lord Hillsborough not intervened, no additional funds would have been provided. Without that support, the colony would have collapsed, leaving the fate of the Minorcans uncertain.

Governor Grant wrote Turnbull on June 28, 1769, letting him know the Earl of Hillsborough *“has produced an order to me to supply your colonists to the extent of two thousand Pounds Sterling, specifying service, and drawing bills accompanied with proper vouchers to the account, upon the Treasury. This subsidy is not sufficient and yet it was obtained in consequence of my representation, though the Duke of Grafton and Lord North opposed the measure, to avoid precedents of a like nature.”*

In July, Turnbull confirmed that he found out about the £2000 subsidy but noted , *“that he was deeply disappointed that specific limits had been placed on how the subsidy could be spent.”* He also said he had been confined to bed with fever, which might have diminished his ability to simply express gratitude for the £2000 pounds sterling.

Governor Grant reported back to the Earl of Hillsborough in a July 21, 1769, letter. He affirmed that all funds from the Treasury will have proper vouchers. He reiterated that, in the beginning, the investors had agreed on £6000 pounds but were already four times over the agreed-upon total. He noted that if the investors stopped paying the bills, *“the bounty which has been allowed will not be sufficient to maintain and clothe these colonists till they can raise provisions and other produce for their own support.”* Grant felt it was his duty to inform the Earl of Hillsborough that, *“if Mr. Turnbull’s correspondents stop payment the settlement must absolutely perish for want.”* It seems likely that the Minorcans had some awareness of how precarious their situation was and how it was possible they could be stranded in the wilderness with nothing to eat other than fish and wild game -a resource that would not last for very long.

In Turnbull’s letter to Duncan, dated August 2, 1769, he wrote from St. Augustine, where he was very ill with a fever. He expressed hope that he would soon be well enough to journey to the colony. He was still angry about the specifications dictating how the £2,000 government subsidy could be spent.

Turnbull's partners continued pushing for an accounting of expenses, but he claimed the records had been sent and must have been lost along the way. He also affirmed that each of the huts on the Hillsborough River was 210 feet apart. Additionally, his partners objected to his decision to build a wharf, likely due to concerns about the cost and the time it took away from other duties.

Turnbull was strong in his response, arguing that the wharf was essential. He explained that, although he had eight masons working on it, the number of masons used at any given time was sometimes fewer. He also defended his decision to bring an indigo expert from Louisiana, noting that, *“indigo makers from South Carolina generally demanded between £40 to 50 Sterling a year for their services, [but] the New Orleans man came to New Smyrna for £5 a year. Furthermore, Turnbull believed that French indigo makers were better than Carolinians.”*

He seemed distressed by the expectations of his partners, who wanted returns on their investments before the crops could be grown, processed, and shipped to London. Turnbull told Duncan that the work was hard and may have affected his health, but that his constitution had improved since arriving in the province of East Florida.

Turnbull’s letter to Grant, dated August 31, 1769, was mostly a report on the activities of the plantations in his area. He requested that some furniture be sent to him and noted, *“Notwithstanding all the power of drought, and Egyptian swarms of worms, we shall have some thousands of bushels of peas and corn, if*

no other plague attacks us. I have planted about twenty-five acres of indigo for seed, it is all come up. Our sesamun also looks well."

He also tells the governor that Mrs. Turnbull, *"had one severe fit of a seasoning fever, but it is now quite recovered. She thinks that the fatigue of the journey from town was the cause of it, which will probably make her apprehensive of taking another jaunt."* Judging from what Turnbull says and his hope to have furniture sent to the colony, this was likely the time when Mrs. Turnbull and the children left the comforts of living in St. Augustine and moved to the colony for the remainder of her time there.

What a journey it must have been! If it took five days to make the 70-mile trip, she would have certainly been exhausted. The words Turnbull uses—*"will probably make her apprehensive of taking another jaunt"*—indicate that she would not be making the frequent trips to St. Augustine that her husband was taking.

By all indications, Mrs. Turnbull arrived in New Smyrna in August 1769, one year after the last vessel from Minorca had arrived. Mrs. Turnbull gave birth to William Duncan Turnbull on September 24, 1770, Robert James Turnbull on January 14, 1774, and John Turnbull on February 11, 1775. Janet Turnbull is listed as being born in 1775 in New Smyrna, so she was either a twin or born near the end of 1775.¹²

Grant responded to Turnbull on September 1, 1769, first by encouraging him to plan his purchases more carefully to avoid paying the highest prices. He also praised a Charles Town merchant, John Gordon, for negotiating a good price for the supplies and donating his commission as a favor to the Minorcans.

Governor Grant wrote, *"I am glad to hear that Mrs. Turnbull has got the better of the indisposition with which she was vexed upon her arrival at Mosquitoes. I beg leave to assure her of my best respects. I wish she may like the place."*

He also mentioned that Denys Rolle had eighty settlers on board a vessel, but he and the captain were in strong disagreement in England, and the vessel left for Florida without Rolle on it.

Turnbull's letter to Grant, dated September 9, 1769, is short but informative. He thanks the governor for his continued help, mentions that he will get a house ready for the clergyman when he can, and expresses hope that the clergyman would stay in St. Augustine for a couple of months until the house is ready. Turnbull also notes that his own house was not yet finished. Mrs. Turnbull and the children may have been staying in their mansion, even though work was still ongoing. He also mentions a Mrs. Fraser, who was the wife of the new clergyman.

Turnbull's letter to Duncan, dated September 24, 1769, is quite interesting. Financial shortfalls had been constant, and, in this letter, Turnbull received a bill from a Mr. Nixon demanding payment of £4,030.4 sterling, which Turnbull could not pay. Not only did Turnbull send the bill from Nixon to Duncan, asking him to pay it, but he also requested £1,500 to cover some expenses in Florida. It must be assumed that the bills were paid, as the colony continued.

Turnbull mentions a Mr. Humphrey, who had been with him since the decision to create a colony was made. Mr. Humphrey managed the colony during Turnbull's absences at the time. Humphrey later returned to London but wanted to come back and become part-owner of a new settlement. Turnbull

¹² Dr. Andrew Turnbull b. 2 Dec 1720 Scotland d. 13 Mar 1792 Charleston, South Carolina (allourkin.net)

gave him advice, including using Negroes from Guinea, as they were accustomed to the climate. He advised the owner of the settlement to start with £3,000 sterling and told him that *“two-thirds of it [should] be spent on purchasing Africans, and one-third [should] be used for supporting the settlement.”*

His specific advice was: *“that the black slaves be landed in October to raise part of the provisions for the following year. In year two, indigo cultivation could begin, along with raising provisions for year two. During year three it would be possible to make a “considerable quantity of Indigo” and use the proceeds to bring in Europeans, after the hard work of clearing the woods is over and a food supply was established and waiting.”* The Europeans he said should be *“boys and girls from seven to seventeen could be brought to take advantage of the pliability of young constitutions to climate.”*

Turnbull’s letter to Governor Grant began with him telling the governor, *“I was sorry to hear from Mr. Humphreys [line not legible] about our people being starved of hunger here, which is wide of the truth.”* That is such an educated way of calling Humphreys a liar. He then went on to detail what he was providing in food and added that Captain Bisset visited him the previous week and said, *“Our people look so healthy and well.”* Turnbull refers to the comments about the colonists being starved as *“idle reports.”* Who to believe in this instance is up to the reader. There seems to be no reason for Humphreys to lie.

Turnbull explains that Nixon wrote to him, suggesting that his letter with proposals (likely related to the new contract) had not been received. Because of this, Nixon and others seem to think that Turnbull is avoiding them or evading his responsibilities—symbolized by the phrase, *“got on their saddle horse, and am riding out of their reach.”* Essentially, they think he is deliberately trying to distance himself from the situation.

Turnbull goes on to say that they are considering taking legal action against him, possibly by seeking orders from the Lord Chancellor (a high-ranking legal authority in Britain). However, Turnbull dismisses the need for such drastic measures, stating that he has already written to them to address the situation. He reassures them that legal action is unnecessary and warns that, if they do proceed with legal measures, they will find that the English laws are fully enforced and respected in the province of Florida. Turnbull is confident in his legal standing and is prepared to defend himself if necessary.

Financial strains are again raised, as an accounting of the colony’s expenses has never been received by his investors. Turnbull reminds his investors again that the accounts were being handled by John Cutter, but because of his long sickness and death, Turnbull did not have the time to organize the accounts. He speaks of the struggles he has faced and admits where he went wrong by writing: *“I have always owned myself in the wrong for bringing so many people into the Province, but, tho’ this was more from accident than intention, I resolved to devote my whole time, intentions, and endeavours to make up for that error, and I even flatter myself of beginning to reimburse them next year.”*

He closes this letter by indicating that he had enough provisions until the middle of January, also noting, *“I have gathered in some fine corn but the worms have destroyed at least nine ears out of ten.”* All of the products were being grown by the Minorcans, and how disappointing it must have been to pick only one ear of corn out of ten on the stalk.

Grant wrote to Turnbull on October 12, 1769, detailing provisions arriving from Charles Town and expressing that the New Smyrna colony was on his mind. He also noted that he was happy to hear, *“Mrs. Turnbull is well pleased with her house and the prospect of a good garden.”*

Grant advised Turnbull not to feel hurt by the letters Mr. Nixon wrote and reminded him:

"Your investors have spent nearly twelve thousand pounds apiece. 'Tis natural for them to be anxious about so large a capital, which, from your being hurried into numbers at Mahon, has been laid out without their concurrence. Far from having a diffidence of you, they have had more confidence than most men have in the money way. You must not differ with them. You are too far embark't. I mean well in what I say. They are strangers to me. I have no connection with them. My concern is, and always has been, for you."

The governor assured Turnbull that the investors should get a return on their investment over time. He also reminded Turnbull of the frailty of human life, noting: *"We are all mortal, and if you should die, it would be the end of the colony."*

He emphasized that there was nothing to sell except the settlers, adding: *"Your settlers in a body are of value, but separate them, and instead of finding people to buy them, you could not find people to take them off your hands. And if your friends should think of proceeding to extremities—which I am convinced will not happen."*

If the Minorcans were sold, they would face enslavement. I believe the governor would not have sanctioned such an outcome.

Turnbull's letter to Grant, dated October 27, 1769, reports on the saws shipped to him and notes that it would take a few months before a new sawyer could be expected to perform at 100%.

The Earl of Hillsborough's letter to Governor Grant, dated November 4, 1769, informed the governor that King George had decided against executing George Stephanopoli, Clothia Corona, and Elia Medici, granting them a free pardon for their participation in the Forni rebellion.

Turnbull's letter to Duncan, dated November 9, 1769, informed him that his letter of August 4 had arrived on November 8, 1769, and noted, *"I am pleased that my partners realize I am willing to renegotiate the terms of our contract in order to reflect the proportions of money each partner has invested."* Duncan wanted Turnbull to spend more time planting indigo than grapevines, to which Turnbull agreed, although, *"I have already planted 21,700 vines that only cover five acres in four rows, stretching more than seven miles."*

He stated that on January 1, 1770, he would, *"put fifty men to building indigo vats and have at least twelve sets of vats at work by June next, when the first cutting of the weed will occur—sooner if the carry-over planting survives the Florida winter."* This marked the beginning of the construction of indigo processing stations.

Evidently, his rift with Humphreys was over, as he asked him to make a sketch of the plantation for Duncan. Turnbull also mentioned that he planned to count the number of colonists and provide an inventory of the cattle.

He mentioned silk production briefly, an experimental acre of cotton, and again spoke about the high quality and use of Sesamum. He also enclosed *"bills from Fraser and Richardson, St. Augustine, November 6, 1769, for '700 pairs of shoes for your people, at a price of £95.5.4½,' and another bill for £92.5.4½ for shoes previously ordered."*

Turnbull's letter to James Grant, dated November 10, 1769, informed the governor that a cargo had arrived in good condition. He also told the governor that he was going to begin building vats and that he would welcome some lessons from Grant *"about Indigo making."*

Turnbull's letter to Grant, dated November 13, 1769, discusses the difficulty of sometimes crossing the bar at the inlet. The main point was that Duncan's letter of August 4, regarding Turnbull's willingness to establish a new agreement, reassured Duncan about his investment in the colony.

Turnbull's letter to Duncan, dated November 13, 1769, mentions securing a cheaper price on shoes because he ordered 1,000 pairs. This highlights Turnbull's resourcefulness in managing essential supplies. Shoes, food, and clothing would become scarce in the coming years. He affirms that growing enough food for sustainability is difficult during the first year, using fellow plantation owners as examples. He wrote: *"Oswald, Taylor, and Elliott all will tell you that even plantations with young Negroes will not raise their own food at first. Their estates started up before ours did, and with Negroes bought at £40 Sterling each on average, yet none raised a sufficiency of food."*

The price of enslaved people at the time was £40 sterling per person. Turnbull closed his letter by noting that potatoes were well-suited for the area. Potato production has been a staple in St. Johns County since before it officially became St. Johns County. Many local Minorcans are still involved in the potato business today. Travelers heading to Palatka, Florida, by car passed through Spuds, where migrant workers once lived in shacks along the roadside during harvest time.

Grant's letter to Turnbull, dated November 15, 1769, mentions that he had sent a six-month supply of provisions for the soldiers stationed at New Smyrna, along with saws, seeds for Mrs. Turnbull, and bottles of liquor for Turnbull. He also asked Turnbull to send some turtles, noting that *"in this cold, people are glad to eat them."*

Finances are again discussed, with Grant advising Turnbull to be patient with his friends, as they had already spent a significant amount of money. Grant also mentions that he has requested a second-year bounty from the treasury.

No mention is made of Parson Fraser's personality, but Grant notes that he has stopped Fraser from going to New Smyrna. In his last sentence, Grant offers advice to Turnbull: *"He must live in a separate house. When that is ready, tell me, and I'll send him. But you must not let a man, his wife, and children into your house."*

Turnbull's letter to Grant, dated November 18, 1769, indicates that he has drawn up a new proposal on how the profits will be shared and expresses some remorse for bringing indigo makers from New Orleans. Duncan wanted to see a plan of the lands and suggested that the governor inform him of his observations at the colony. Turnbull wanted others to report on the plantation's progress but was reluctant to ask, writing: *"Your not having been here may be an objection. Penman has been here lately and Bisset frequently. They may be able to give you some information; however, I shall not mention it to them."* In this sentence, Turnbull relates that Governor Grant had never been to New Smyrna.

Turnbull informed the governor that George Grenville, the former Prime Minister and one of his investors, believed two crops could be harvested during the summer. He admitted that most of the land

was planted with grapevines and that he had ordered a barrel of indigo seeds from Charlestown, which were growing well. He also explained to the governor that Duncan mistakenly believed the £2,000 bounty was sent directly to him and could be used to buy equipment. In reality, the bounty was for provisions, with only a small portion allocated for other needs.

Turnbull stresses that he only wishes to repay his investors, expressing his feelings in writing: *"I am only ambitious at present to reimburse them the sums they have laid out, which probably will require some years. I then shall think of retiring and not [venture] out into the world again."* Turnbull's angst and worry about the money he has spent weighed heavily on his mind.

He adds that, if Rolle has anything to say against him, he should write to him directly so that he could *"have answered every article of it without troubling Your Excellency about it."*

Turnbull's letter to Grant, dated November 20, 1769, informs the governor that he received all the saws and liquor bottles and had caught five turtles. These could have been freshwater turtles or possibly gophers, as the green and loggerhead sea turtles would have laid their eggs in the summer. However, a virgin population of turtles in 1769 was likely much different from what exists today.

Parson Fraser was still under consideration. Although the letter does not specify what Turnbull heard about the parson, it was enough for him to decide to place Fraser in a separate house. He added that there was a terrible fever in the colony; all of the soldiers were ill, and three of them had died. He wrote, *"Not one in a hundred of my people [is] sick, and I have only lost one man in the past month; he died of consumption of a long standing."* Turnbull also pointed out that Fraser was plaguing him with letters and expressed that he wanted the parson to understand he was not in charge of the parson's actions but merely one of his parishioners.

Turnbull tells the governor that Jemmy Wallace is one of the best Indigo Crackers he has ever encountered, clearly trained by a skilled master. Wallace carries some of the governor's indigo in his pocket, which he *"accidentally"* remembers, takes out, breaks with his nail in sunlight, and then sniffs with a look of approval. Turnbull agreed it was excellent, but Wallace insists the governor has even better. Wallace seems thrilled to have found a bad piece of indigo at the colony and appears eager to return to town, likely to show off this inferior *"Mosquito Indigo."*

Turnbull mentions that he has kept a bit of the governor's indigo to welcome Bissett and for John Ross to inspect, noting that Ross seems able to tell by smell when the vat has been beaten enough. He expresses hope that they can use more senses in refining indigo, imagining they are ahead of the northerners in this regard.

In Turnbull's letter to Grant, dated November 24, 1769, he writes a long paragraph about peas. He also mentions that he feeds rice to the sick, but his supply is running low. Additionally, he notes that he is still purchasing indigo seeds.

In his letter dated November 30, 1769, Turnbull informs the governor that bad weather has prevented the pilot boat from landing. He also mentions that he has not been able to produce much Barilla¹³

¹³ In 1769, "barilla" specifically referred to an impure soda ash obtained by burning certain types of salt-tolerant plants, especially those that grew in coastal or saline environments. The name "barilla" comes from the Spanish word for the saltwort plants (genus *Salsola*), which were the primary plants used in the production of soda ash at the time.

because “*what DeBrahm said was a five thousand acre Barilla marsh did not have one sprig of Barilla in it.*”

Governor Grant’s letter to Turnbull, dated December 14, 1769, informed him that he could not write to Duncan about the plantation, saying: “*You reside on the spot, direct the works which are carried on. The people are constantly under your eye, and as you speak their language and are acquainted with every individual, you can now judge with some degree of precision of what may reasonably be expected from their future labor. Of course information from you to Sir William Duncan must be better found and will be more satisfactory than anything which I could pretend to say upon the subject.*”

The governor notes that Duncan is “probably alarmed” by all the money spent to create New Smyrna and that Turnbull should not be surprised. He mentioned Duncan’s anxiety and stated that, if he were to write a letter to Duncan, all he could say is: “*anxiety, application and attention have not been wanting on your part, but that you was hurried into numbers at Minorca by your zeal for colonizing and by peoples crowding unexpectedly in upon you, that the experience of the embarkations from Mahon and Gibraltar was greater than you had formed an idea of and that the subsisting such a number of people after they landed in Florida has been attended with more expense and difficulty than you foresaw or expected. To which I should add that the worst is over, that your settlers have got into health, and that Major Moultrie, Bisset, Penman and the other Mosquito planters all agree that your people of late have done wonders.*”

Governor Grant again emphasizes that Turnbull cannot transfer the Minorcans or take them to market. “*nobody would either employ **or buy them** (emphasis added). They cannot leave you as the indented Palatines do their masters all over America. And they have got so much into your debt, that I consider their servitude according to their term of agreement to be unlimited.*”

This situation was remarkable—to be so close to the failure of the colony in less than two years. For the governor to even discuss selling them is alarming. However, it is doubtful that the colonists were aware of what was happening between Turnbull and the others involved in the colony.

Grant closes this important letter by noting that the bounty obtained from King George III prevented the colonists from starving and saved the colony from collapsing in its first year. He advised the investors to request another bounty from the king.

Governor Grant’s letter to Turnbull, dated December 16, 1769, reflects Grant’s support for Turnbull. He tells Turnbull that he is free to send his letter of December 14 to Duncan to show the real state of affairs. He notes that reports by Rolle are causing Turnbull distress and advises him to first focus on obtaining provisions for the colonists, then on growing indigo and other produce. Grant also explains in detail what is happening with all the cargo, providing valuable insights into the situation.

Turnbull’s letter to Grant, dated December 23, 1769, reports that the East Florida arrived with needed cargo, and everything was unloaded despite the bad weather. He arranged for several masons to gather stones for ballast so the vessel could return to St. Augustine immediately.

The last letter available in the Dundee Archives, dated Smyrna, circa 1769, requests that the governor pay forty pounds for two voyages of the schooner Industry.

PART TWO -THE MINORCANS IN 1769

What was 1769 like for over a thousand immigrants and colonists who had just survived a 70-day voyage across the Atlantic Ocean? How can this author tell a story that was challenging even for highly trained writers who had the youth and resources to travel to the sites where Minorcan history is located? Those of us who follow these men and women of distinction rely greatly on their work. As the talented E.P. Panagopoulos wrote in his *New Smyrna—An Eighteenth Century Greek Odyssey*: He wrote, “The author of this book soon realized that the New Smyrna story could not be told in the discursive way of the trained historian.”¹⁴

If the well-educated E. P. Panagopoulos had trouble writing his Minorcan story, imagine how much this “wannabe Minorcan author” will struggle. Nevertheless, 964 Minorcans are buried somewhere in the soil of New Smyrna Beach, once part of the Turnbull colony. I want to put “flesh on the bones,” showing that these Minorcans were real people—and that their graves need to be found. What I lack in formal training, I hope to make up for with determination and dedication.

* * *

At the start of January 1, 1769, the colony, which had begun with 1,225 people on June 26, 1768, had dwindled to 775 Minorcans, many of whom were still sick from the long ocean voyage. During 1769, 155 men and 22 women and children died,¹⁵ reducing the number of Minorcans who made the trip from Minorca to 598. These two years of a high death rate brought the colony's population close to the “500 Greeks” Turnbull had originally planned to bring to America at the start of this enterprise. By the following year, only 34 men and 6 women and children died,¹⁶ suggesting that scurvy had finally run its course. It was not until 1771 that the number of births exceeded the number of deaths, according to Daniel Schafer’s citation of Patricia Griffin’s work, “*Mullet on the Beach*.”¹⁷

When the Minorcans arrived, some land had already been cleared. Hired contractors and enslaved people were building houses and facilities in the town for clerks, managers, and overseers. They were also constructing palmetto huts along the bank of the Hillsborough River, spaced 210 feet apart. Each hut included a stretch of land behind it for growing food.

The Minorcans had already endured a rebellion that resulted in severe whippings for many rebels and the execution, by hanging, of two leaders convicted by a British jury. They had also withstood the devastating impact of a major hurricane while huddled together in their small palmetto huts. Now, they were struggling to work through a cold January and an even colder February. There is no mention in any of the Dundee Archives letters of warmer clothing being provided to the Minorcans laboring in the fields.

While they were trying to survive one day at a time, Turnbull was struggling with his investors because of mounting expenses. The original total investment approved by the partners had already been exceeded. Sir William Duncan's relentless demand for accountability from Turnbull persisted from the very first year to the colony's final days. By the end of the New Smyrna colony in 1777, the investors had spent over

¹⁴ E.P. Panagopoulos, *New Smyrna-An Eighteenth Century Greek Odyssey*, Page 4 of Preface

¹⁵ Governor Patrick Tonyn to Lord George Germaine December 29, 1777. [The-Letters-Of-Dr-Turnbull-pdf-SEARCHABLE.pdf](#)

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Daniel L. Schafer-St. Augustine’s British Years 1763-1784. Page 133.

£40,000 sterling. Adjusted for inflation, £40,000 in 1800 would be approximately £4.5–£5 million in today's money (2025).¹⁸

Throughout 1769, the Minorcans were allowed to attend Mass and possibly other religious events, although no evidence of additional time allocated for church activities has been found in the letters referenced in this narrative. Father Camps and Father Casanovas diligently tended to their duties, which included hearing confessions, performing baptisms and marriages, and administering last rites. However, there were no confirmations, as only a bishop could perform confirmation rites. Conflicts within families and between families were inevitable in the colony, and the priests played an important role in resolving these disputes.

Father Camps and Father Casanovas must have felt their prayers were answered as they witnessed a steep decline in deaths among their flock. However, New Smyrna's San Pedro Parish had not yet been officially recognized by Bishop Echevarría of Cuba, who held authority over the Minorcan Catholics. Although Pope Clement XIII had approved San Pedro Parish, it took several years for the Cuban bishop to grant official recognition.

In a letter dated October 20, 1769,¹⁹ Father Camps informed the bishop that he had been appointed as the parish pastor, with Father Casanovas designated as the vicar. He requested Holy Oils and other spiritual necessities, likely including new vestments. This letter was entrusted to a Cuban commercial fisherman for delivery to the bishop after the fishing vessel anchored in New Smyrna. The fishermen were likely Catholics, and during their conversation, Father Camps probably learned the name of the Cuban bishop. Although it would take two years²⁰ to achieve full recognition, they, and the Minorcans, remained steadfast in their Catholic faith during those critical years.

In a letter written by the Bishop of Cuba on December 14, 1771, he confirms that he, *“fitted up a vessel which, under the pretext of fishing along the coast of Florida, should approach Mosquito Inlet and deliver to Dr. Pedro Campos, through safe hands, the two titles, for himself that of Parish Priest and Vicar for his companion, Pedro Casanovas—a delegation of various privileges I have considered advisable for the spiritual good of that Diocese under its dangerous constitution. A casket containing three vessels of the Holy Oil needed, and two assistants for the divine worship, all of which I offer up to the service of God.”*

* * *

Antonio Alzina and Juan Andreu were among the Minorcan colonists who witnessed the rebellion and the severe punishment that followed. They were likely sent back to work within a few days. If assigned to the fields, their tasks would have included digging up roots, cutting down trees and burning them, or preparing the ground for planting. More than likely, they were also cultivating their own gardens behind their huts to grow food. There is no mention of them in the Dundee Archive letters—or of many other Minorcans—except for the testimonies given by men who shared their stories before a judicial authority.

However, hundreds of Minorcans are mentioned in Father Camps' Golden Book, which validates that they were real people. Whatever jobs they were doing serve as examples of the experiences shared by

¹⁸ [Value of 1800 British pounds today | UK Inflation Calculator](https://www.in2013dollars.com/uk/inflation/1800) <https://www.in2013dollars.com/uk/inflation/1800>

¹⁹ [Father Pedro Camps:A True Apostle - Halsema.org](https://halsema.org/father-pedro-campsa-true-apostle/) <https://halsema.org/father-pedro-campsa-true-apostle/>

²⁰ Ibid

all. Their names are used in this story to acknowledge that they, along with everyone else in New Smyrna, were human beings worthy of historical recognition.

They could have helped build the wharf, cleared land for the eight-mile road along the Hillsborough River where the 200 huts were located, or worked on constructing the buildings in the “town.” Turnbull told his prime investor, Sir William Duncan, that the farmers were “*cutting the woods on the lands we intend to plant this spring, and we begin to burn the cut down timber the first part of next month and then we prepare the ground for planting.*”²¹ Turnbull spoke of many marriages taking place and that he observed, “*that most of the women grow big apace. The bad weather we met with on this coast before our arrival made many of our pregnant women miscarry. That loss is now in a fair way of being made good.*”²² Antonio Alzina could have started courting Catarina Moll in 1769 and they would be married soon and have twins, who died at birth of soon afterward in 1771. They had a son in 1773 who lived.²³

The number of colonist deaths in 1769 was half of what it had been during the six months following their arrival in 1768, but the death rate in 1770 would decline significantly.



Where are the graves of the 964 "Missing Minorcans"?

Laying one of them to rest at Tolomato Cemetery would finally close the circle—a poignant and deeply moving moment, where history and memory meet in quiet reverence.

²¹ Turnbull letter to Sir William Duncan, January 24, 1769. [The-Letters-Of-Dr-Turnbull-pdf-SEARCHABLE.pdf](#)

²² Ibid

²³ Father Pedro Camps' *Golden Book of the Minorcans*: Translation and Index Compiled by Leonard J. McCown