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## Description of East Florida

William Stork

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A Description of East-Florida: with a journal kept by John Bartram of Philadelphia, botanist to His Majesty for the Floridas: upon a journey from St. Augustine up the river St. John's, as far as the lakes: with explanatory botanical notes, illustrated with an accurate map of East-Florida, and two plans, one of St. Augustine, and the other of the Bay of Espiritu Santo (*or Tampa Bay*).

*Included here is the dedication and introduction from An Account of East-Florida: With Remark on its Future Importance to Trade and Commerce, with the long "s" altered to modern usage.*

Edited by Jared DiMaggio and Layne Farmen, University of South Florida St. Petersburg

## Further Reading

[American Philosophical Society]. "[William Stork, Description of East Florida.](#)" *Southern Nature: Scientific Views of the Colonial American South* (2001).

Stork, William. *A Description of East Florida*. London: T. Jefferies, 1769. [University of Pittsburgh Library Systems].

Dedication

To the Most Honourable Charles Marquis of Rockingham. First Lord of the Treasury, &c. &c. &c.

MY LORD,

As the commercial interests of Great-Britain are weighed by your Lordship daily, in order that they may be promoted, and a thorough knowledge of his majesty's foreign dominions is sought after, with a view to the public service, I flatter myself, that an account of a new colony, of which there is none as yet published, will have the honour of meeting with your Lordship's approbation. During my residence in East-Florida, I employed myself in acquiring a knowledge of that country: I made myself acquainted, as far as my stay there would permit, with its soil and navigable rivers, its climate and natural productions. I can assure your Lordship, that my pursuit was made agreeable by the satisfactory evidences found, both of the goodness of the soil, and the healthiness of the climate. In its climate it has the advantage of South-Carolina and Georgian; and from being nearer the sun than those colonies, will, probably, be found superior to them in the produce of rice, indigo, silk, cotton, &c. If I am partial to East-Florida, it is not for want of knowing other countries, either in Europe or America, for I have compared it with them. I suspect myself the less of this foible, because other gentlemen, who know the country, rate the advantages to be expected from this colony higher than I do. I have no views in publishing the following sheets, but the benefit and advantages Great-Britain may reap, by encouraging and promoting this young colony. And I inscribe them to your Lordship, because whatever is calculated for such a purpose, cannot fail to gain your Lordship's attention and countenance. I am, with the greatest respect,

MY LORD,

Your Lordship's most humble

And most obedient servant,

WILLIAM STORK

## INTRODUCTION

WHEN any new matter is laid before the public, there is no doubt but its reception depends not only upon the real merits of what is proposed, but in a great measure, upon the prepossessions already entertained upon that subject. The author of the following account of East-Florida, cannot but be sensible, how much his design, to make the nation acquainted with that country, is discouraged, by the prejudices, which at present prevail against it. The truth of the matter is, that this country is very little known in Europe: even the Spaniards, who from indolence, and a fear of the Indians, seldom ventured beyond the lines of St. Augustine, made themselves but little acquainted with it. Its broad sandy beach makes a disadvantageous appearance to ships that sail along this coast; and the accounts of mariners have, for this reason, represented it as barren and useless. The several concurrent accounts of the unhealthiness and infertility of West-Florida, which seem but too well founded; have had no small effect, to induce a belief in many persons, that the whole of Florida ceded to Great-Britain, is little better than a sandy desert. Prejudices once entertained, are not easily overcome; the lights offered to remove them must be strong, in order to be convincing.

The design of this work is not only to fix the attention of the ministry upon an object of great national importance; but also to point out to individuals, especially to persons of a middling fortune, to take up grants from the crown, of lands in East-Florida; where, the climate, soil, and produce considered, the lands are of no less value than in the islands of the West-Indies.

The author knows but of two persons now in England, besides himself, (they are fortunately both in parliament) who are actually acquainted with this country. One of them is the noble lord whose travels through the continent of America, have been made with so much benefit to the public. The other is Mr. Denys Rolle; who has already made a considerable settlement upon St. Juan's River, west of Augustine.

The importance of East-Florida, in a national view, depends upon these two grounds; first, its fertility, in producing such articles of commerce, as are particularly wanted by Great-Britain: secondly, upon its convenience, from its situation and other circumstances, to carry on a beneficial commerce with the Spanish settlements in time of peace; and to intercept, and cut off their trade in time of war.

As to the fertility of East-Florida, without entering into the detail of its productions, which shall be reserved for the body of the work; I here propose only to make some general remarks with reference to this head; and must intreat the reader for a while to suspend his opinion, and not take it implicitly for granted, that that part of North-America, at present so little known, which lies to the

south of Georgia, differs in its soil from the rest of the continent; or is unfit for such productions, as correspond with the nature of its climate.

In North-America we meet with every sort of climate; and in one part or other, it is capable of yielding every valuable production. If it be asked, which part of this continent is the best, the question is too general to receive a determinate answer. We know indeed, that the soil of Newfoundland is, from the nature of the climate, incapable of yielding a produce, equally valuable with cotton, indigo, or sugar. We may go further, and for the European trade, without difficulty, prefer the climate of Carolina and Georgia, to that of Canada or Nova-Scotia.

If we take a view of America, or even of the globe of the earth, we shall find the northern, even the temperate climates, which are most agreeable to live in, are the least adapted to the purposes of trade with Europe; where the climate being of the same nature, of course yields nearly the same productions. We shall see this illustrated, by comparing the produce of the two small islands of St. Christopher, and Rhode-Island, both of them well settled, and well cultivated; both fertile, and almost of the same size; the principal difference betwixt them consisting in this, that the former is situated in lat. 17. and the latter in 41. let an estimate be made of the annual exports of each; by comparing them together we discover at once the difference that is made by climate only: the exports of the former are of great value, and of the latter of very little.

Upon the continent itself we cannot but be sensible that the southern colonies, though the latest settled, and therefore the farthest from the best state of cultivation, yield more valuable articles of trade than the northern colonies; and (the number of inhabitants considered) greatly surpass them in the amount of their exports.

The colony of Georgian, which from being a barrier province, and other circumstances, had, when first settled, many disadvantages to struggle with; yet the rapid increase, which it has lately made in its exports, affords sufficient proofs that its climate is perfectly adapted to the purposes, both for European and American commerce; and fit for rice, silk, and indigo; which, sugar excepted, constitute the most valuable article of trade. In New-England, to say nothing of Canada and Nova-Scotia, where the winters are still more severe, the earth is covered with snow at least three months in the year; the rigour of the climate puts an end to all vegetation; the beasts of the field require to be sheltered from the inclemencies of the weather, and be sustained with fodder, laid by in summer: even the laborious hand of industry is in this season of the year destitute of all useful employment.

During the same period, the vegetation in Carolina and Georgian affords sufficient food for cattle; no shelter is required for them; the lakes and rivers are not frozen, and the garden vegetables contribute greatly to make a plenty of sustenance.

I have dwelt the longer upon a comparison of the northern with the southern colonies, in order that by shewing the manifest superiority of the latter, in a commercial view, no surprise may be felt at the representation given of East-Florida; in which all persons concur who know that country, and are also acquainted with the proper cultivation of it.

If we carry the eye along the eastern coast of North-America, from Hudson's-bay, down to the island of Cuba; which lies a little to the south of the Cape of Florida, as we draw nearer the sun, the southern commercial productions generally become better, and of more intrinsic worth. It is not only in sugar and indigo, that Cuba surpasses all the English settlements, lying upon the continent, but in all other productions, that depend principally upon the power of the sun. And in this respect, East-Florida hath the advantage of Carolina and Georgia, as much as Cuba has the advantage of East-Florida.

In order to judge of the produce to be expected from a fresh soil, well supplied with navigable rivers, in the climate of East-Florida, let us consider the rest of the globe, lying the same latitude, and we find Egypt, Arabia Felix, Persia, India, China, and Japan; of which China is the only country, that has a tolerable government; yet it must be acknowledged, that all of them are, or have been, famous for their riches and fertility. When we speak, as it were, proverbially, of the riches of the east, we can allude to no other country than those that have been mentioned.

As to the situation of Florida, in respect of the Spanish trade, it need only be observed, that the Spaniards are too lazy to supply themselves even with necessaries; that the Havannah, one of their richest ports, is only a few days sail from St. Augustine, and of course, is much nearer to the capes of Florida, which lie directly opposite to that celebrated harbour. The trade winds, which perpetually blow within the tropics, from east to west, render the communication betwixt the Havannah and St. Augustine always easy, as they lie, in respect to each other, north and south.

As to the situation of Florida, with a view to surprize the Spanish ships in time of war, the trade winds oblige the register ships and galleons from Carthage, Porto Bello, and Vera Cruz, the rich cargoes whereof are very well known, to return to Europe through the gulph of Florida, and to call at the port of the Havannah, in their way to Old Spain. The strong current that constantly runs from the east, between the Bahama islands and Cuba, right into the gulph of Mexico, as well as the trade winds, which blow from the same quarter, greatly embarrass ships coming from the westward to the port of the Havannah, and expose them very much to the designs of an enemy. When vessels, in their way to Europe, double the capes of Florida, they are under a necessity of keeping near to the shore, in order to take the benefit of the eddies and land breezes. When they have got round the capes, and fall in the stream of the gulph of Florida, they are carried forcibly to the northwards by the strength of that noted current. A few ships of force may easily take every loaded vessel on its way through this confined strait, which is about 50 miles wide, and somewhat more than 200 miles long; and affords to ships passing through it, but little choice in the line of their navigation.

It is easy to discern the utility of a fortified harbour near the capes; it would contribute not a little, to secure the command of the gulph of Mexico, as well as Florida; the importance whereof, I need not enlarge upon.

I have insensibly run to a much greater length in this introduction than I intended. In estimating the value of East-Florida, I have, unavoidably, counted upon what it will be when settled, not upon what it is.

I foresee its climate and produce, as well as its situation, which, with respect to the Spanish dominions, is of great moment, will one day render it a very important colony to Great Britain; yet, the town of St. Augustine excepted, this country is at present, for want of inhabitants, little better than a desert.