

The Monopolization of Panton, Leslie & Company
and John Forbes & Company along America's
Gulf Coast Region from 1783-1817

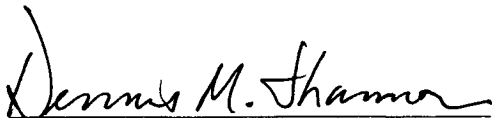
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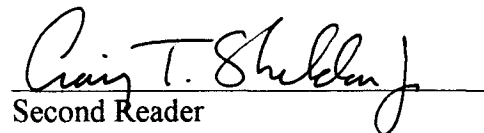
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INTRODUCTION

From 1750 to 1800, the American colonies experienced many exciting events. A multitude of significant incidents took place during this period, which would change the course of American history. Settlers and foreign troops would participate in the French and Indian War, the United States would gain its independence from Britain, and wars against many Indian tribes would spring up during these decades. While France, Spain, and Britain fought for control of American soil and Native Americans struggled to sustain their way of life, pioneering settlers who came to America for freedom now faced political unrest and potential war. This was especially true for those settlers living in the southeastern section of the present day United States.

In the midst of all the fighting, a different type of settler, one not looking for freedom, came to the colonies knowing there was money to be made. These new entrepreneurs saw a potential gold mine in the colonies, for they realized the settlers needed supplies. The territories of Georgia and the gulf coast regions of Florida and Alabama were the perfect place for some of these merchants to conduct their business. This coastal region allowed merchants to ship their goods out of the area as well as import goods from Europe with relative ease. Once the goods had reached the gulf coast, the traders would ship their merchandise up one of the many rivers in the territory. Most merchants located their trade posts along these waterways or in the large towns of Savannah, Mobile, Charleston or Pensacola. This insured that settlers and Indians alike would come to purchase goods. Trading posts were located along the rivers for easy access to the Indian villages and for shipping purposes and settlers would usually purchase their supplies in town.

Within the colonies of Georgia and South Carolina, the population could support many merchants; thus there was competition. Many colonists came to this area to set up trading firms because of the flourishing economy. Knowing the large number of settlers and Indians in the area only made for more business and profits. One company, Panton, Leslie and Company which later changed to John Forbes and Company, saw the need of the settlers in this area, however, they also had the insight to recognize that more opportunities lay with monopolizing the Indian trade.

The British trading house of Panton, Leslie and Company formed around 1783, with William Panton at the head and partners John Leslie, Thomas Forbes, William Alexander and Charles McLatchy. These merchants had been operating in South Carolina and Georgia before the outbreak of the American Revolution. When news of the United States' decision to break with the mother country was known, Panton and other Loyalists fled to East Florida for safety. When refugee Loyalists flooded into Spanish Florida, the Company began to operate as a major trading house, selling to Indians and settlers alike.¹

In the same year of the Company's establishment, the Treaty of Paris was signed which ended the American Revolution. The treaty specified that Florida was to return under the direct control of Spain. Meanwhile, hundreds of British Loyalists had moved into Florida. These Loyalists had a choice of leaving Florida or of becoming subjects of Spain. Many Loyalists moved westward but some, like William Panton, remained in Florida. Spanish domination was weak during their second occupation of

¹William S. Coker, Thomas D. Watson and J. Leitch Wright, Jr., Indian Traders of the Southeastern Spanish Borderlands, Panton, Leslie & Company and John Forbes & Company, 1783-1847 (Pensacola: University of West Florida Press, 1986), ix-15.

the territory and British influence and interests were still alive in the area.² Panton, Leslie and Company took advantage of the situation by trading with Spanish and British peoples alike.

The Panton house traded in all types of goods. Their most important items were military supplies, such as guns and powder, blankets, cloth, various drinks, glass, and metal. The house also sold a variety of luxury items such as silk, pepper, soap, china and eating utensils.³ Though physical objects were the Company's primary merchandise, the agents also traded information. In his Masters thesis, Randy Frank Nimnicht deduces that Company partner Thomas Forbes was a spy for the British government while England and Spain were at war in 1780.⁴ After the Company had a firm hold on the Indian trade along the gulf coast region of Florida, some of the Company's agents became important sources of information. Because the partners and agents of the Company were submerged in every aspect of the Indian trade, they were privy to important information about the Indians and their feelings toward many situations. The Company agents therefore knew Indian affairs and information. Many agents would give such information to the Spanish officials in Florida. Usually, the information consisted of negotiating peace treaties, trade post locations and other business. Agents thus acted as middlemen, carrying information from Indians to

²Charlton W. Tebeau, A History of Florida (Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1971), 89.

³Charles Grayson Summersell, Alabama History for Schools (Birmingham: Colonial Press, 1957), 120.

⁴Randy Frank Nimnicht, "William Panton: His Early Career on the Changing Frontier." Master's thesis, University of Florida, 1968, p. 16-17, 34-35.

government officials. By the early nineteenth century, two Company agents, brothers John and James Innerarity, collected and recorded such good intelligence data that the Company “eventually became one of the best sources the Americans had for information on the Gulf Coast.”⁵ It was along the gulf coast region that the trading house began to monopolize all trade.

How did the Panton Company achieve such success? Why did Panton, Leslie and Company obtain the monopoly over all the other trading houses in the area? What made this trading house so successful? This thesis will attempt to answer these questions about the Company. Much has been written about the Company’s history. Therefore, this thesis will not be a historical sketch of the Company but will rather focus on how and why the Company achieved prosperity in the region. Even before the Panton-Forbes house had the monopoly on the Indian trade routes along the gulf, the partners had been heavily involved in negotiations with the British government to gain control over the Indian trade in the region. In order to understand how the Company achieved such success, it is necessary to understand how the agents operated before the formation of the Company.

Before the American Revolution, Britain had control of East Florida. By 1775, Loyalists from South Carolina and Georgia were evacuating the area due to conflicts with American patriots. It was becoming dangerous for British Loyalists to remain in Savannah and Charleston with the growing support for American independence. As Loyalists started to move into Florida, the British government began planning

⁵Frank Lawrence Owsely, Jr., Struggle for the Gulf Borderlands, the Creek War and the Battle of New Orleans 1812-1815 (Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1981), 176.

strategies to counteract the independence movement. England felt it was imperative that the Indians stay loyal to the British cause. Having the southeastern Indians allied with the British gave England a better chance at winning a war against the patriots. The Indians could provide men to fight against the Americans and with the Indians allied to England, the British would have a large number of natives who knew the territory in which they would be fighting. Therefore, Governor Patrick Tonyn and Indian affairs superintendent John Stuart believed the way to secure the Indians' loyalty was to step up trade relations with them. By obtaining the Indians' loyalty it was more likely their sympathies would be with the British rather than the Americans if a revolution broke out.

During British occupation of the area, the tribes of southern Indians became dependent on European goods and they insisted that they receive these goods. With the Indians desperate for European supplies and the British needy of an American ally, the British struck a deal with the Indians. Governor Tonyn met with an Indian delegation for discussions about loyalties and a trading post location. Soon an agreement was made between the two parties. The plan had worked and the British and many of the southeastern Indians were now allied to England. During the negotiations, the need for a middleman or Indian manager came up and it was William Panton who was recommended for the job.⁶ By establishing a post, which was manned by British Loyalists, the Indian tribes would be in direct contact and under British influence.

⁶Tonyn to Earl of Dartmouth, December 18, 1775, PRO, CO, 5/556, *The Papers of Panton, Leslie and Company*. Coker, Watson and Wright, 26-27.

Having already received British approval to trade with the southern Indians in 1775 through John Stuart and Governor Tonyn, Panton was able to firmly establish relations with the Indians of the territory. Because of the early business connections with Governor Tonyn, Panton, Leslie and Company was in the running for complete control of the Indian trade in 1783. But with the transfer of Florida from British rule to Spanish domination, the future success of the Company was unknown. Now that the British government was no longer in control of East Florida, the Company had to negotiate not only with the British government but with the Spanish officials too.

The Company decided to remain in Spanish Florida and continue their trading business after the signing of the Treaty of Paris. Panton and the other partners were convinced that they could sway the Spanish government into allowing them to control the Indian trade. Through their early British political connections, their excellent skills as traders, their personal tact and a little luck, the partners of Panton, Leslie and Company succeeded where others could not. Other merchants had not developed the beneficial relationships with government officials that the partners of Panton, Leslie and Company had. These relations gave the Company a head start over many other merchants. The Spanish knew that the firm managed the Indian trade for the British and who better to manage it for the Spanish but the Panton Company. Even as the Spanish government moved to occupy Florida, they soon realized the importance of having Indian allies. Panton, Leslie and Company “hoped to argue convincingly that Spain possessed neither the resources nor the expertise to conduct the Indian trade, and that, without the Company’s support, the southern tribes would eventually be drawn into the orbit of the United States. In keeping with their expansionist practices,

the United States could be expected to incite the Indians into raiding and harassing settlements in the Floridas and Louisiana, making the Spanish position untenable.”⁷

The Panton Company did have competition when it came time to discuss the Indian trade with Spanish officials. The Mather and Strother trading firm that operated out of New Orleans also wanted the Indian trade connections. A heated competition between the two companies commenced, but the Panton house and the Spanish officials soon learned that the Indians had problems with the Mather and Strother firm. The Indians complained that Mather and Strother overcharged for merchandise and sold poor quality pelts. On the other hand, the Panton firm could undersell Mather and Strother with better quality items.⁸ It was not long before Panton, Leslie and Company won the contract to trade exclusively with the Indians of the territory.

Panton was also clever enough to insist that if the Company was to trade in Florida, it had to have access to the markets in London and be able to conduct business for some time. Because the Spanish were weak during the second occupation of Florida, they recognized their need to secure as much of the territory as possible. The Panton Company convinced them that the fastest way to accomplish this in terms of the Indians was to let them conduct the trading for them. The Company had the connections and a good reputation with the Indians, which the new Spanish officials did not. The Company had, therefore, successfully convinced the Spanish government

⁷Coker, Watson and Wright, 51.

⁸Thomas D. Watson, “Continuity in Commerce: Development of the Panton, Leslie and Company Trade Monopoly in West Florida,” Florida Historical Quarterly 54 (1975-76): 552-557.

to let a British trading house conduct business with the Indians in their territory. This British company would soon be in complete control of the Indian trade in Spanish Florida through a legal contract with the highest Spanish officials.

The new Spanish governor of Florida, Vicente Manuel de Zepedes, agreed to let the British trading house of Panton, Leslie and Company control the Indian trade. Spain knew that control over the Indian trade was essential to controlling the territory. Spain's weakness in the colonies was reflected when they let the Panton trading firm manage the Indian trade for them. During the years of Spain's occupation of Florida, the Company enjoyed great success as merchants and reaped large profits from the business. As the Company grew, Panton hired other agents to work at the Company's trading posts. One of these agents was John Forbes, younger brother of partner Thomas Forbes. John Forbes was a clever and gifted merchant who proved his worth to the Company over the years. When Panton died in 1801, the Company changed names and shifted under the direct control of John Forbes. Thus, Panton, Leslie and Company became John Forbes and Company.⁹

By 1800, the Company had grown so large it had begun the practice of accepting payment in the form of credit. Many Indians who traded regularly with the Company had now run up large debts. The Spanish government was even guilty of this practice for its debt alone amounted to over 500,000 dollars. Some customers began to settle their debts in the form of acreage and not cash, a practice that put the Company in a

⁹Coker, Watson and Wright, 226-242.

bind. The solution to the problem presented itself in the form of the United States government.¹⁰

John Forbes and the other agents of the Company thought the solution to their cash flow problems would be to sell a large tract of land to the United States for a cash sum. By 1812, the Company realized that the Americans were eventually going to control Florida. The plan seemed to be perfect. America would buy a large, important piece of land and the Panton-Forbes Company would be paid the debts it was owed. However, this plan proved to be more difficult than it seemed on paper. With major debts owed to the Company and the imminent take over of the territory by the Americans, the remaining agents knew the end of the Company was near. The powerful Panton-Forbes trading house was in its final days.¹¹

¹⁰John C. Upchurch, "Aspects of the Development and Exploration of the Forbes Purchase," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 48 (1967-1970): 117-119.

¹¹Upchurch, 118-123.

BACKGROUND OF THE COMPANY PARTNERS

The British trading house of Panton, Leslie, and Company formed about 1783 with William Panton and John Leslie as primary partners, and as full partners Thomas Forbes, Charles McLatchy and William Alexander. All the partners and associates of the Company hailed from the northeastern section of Scotland and all, except John Forbes, became involved in the American Indian trade before 1776.¹ Though some of the partners met in Charleston before the outbreak of the American Revolution, it is quite possible that some of the associates knew each other before they reached the American colonies. In fact, William Panton, Thomas Forbes and John Leslie knew each other quite well before traveling to America.

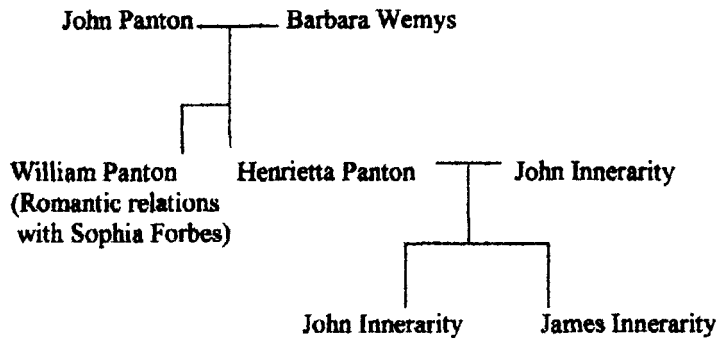
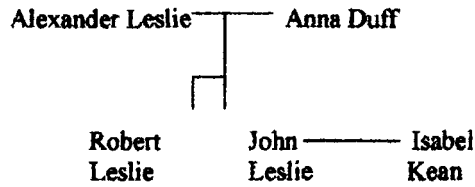
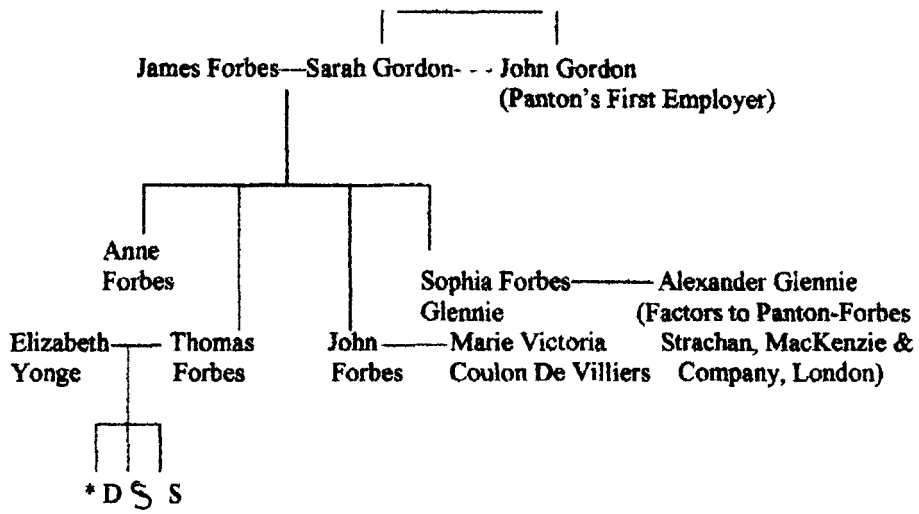
The records show that these three “British –born subjects who came to America together, resided in South Carolina and Savanna, Georgia; Panton owning land there as early as 1770. These young men, who were all related by ties of blood, were very much at home in the new land, where they mingled with the firmly established group of Scots, who, exiled for participation in the Stuart uprising, had come out (1735) in the ship *Prince of Wales* and established New Inverness on the Altamaha.”² Thus, the Company partners were associated not only through company business and friendship but also through family lines.

¹Coker, Watson and Wright, 21-23.

²Marie Taylor Greenslade, “William Panton,” Florida Historical Quarterly 14 (October 1935) : 108. Marie Taylor Greenslade is the descendant of John and James Innerarity, employees of Panton, Leslie and Company. She is the donor of the Greenslade Collection.

Table 1.1

GENEALOGY OF THE PANTON, LESLIE & COMPANY AND JOHN FORBES & COMPANY PARTNERS



*Daughters and or Sons

The Company also had several family siblings who were employed in the trading business. Thomas Forbes and John Forbes were not only Company partners but also brothers. Their sister, Sophia Forbes Glennie, was associated with John Leslie and William Panton's factors operating in London under the name of Strachan, MacKenzie and Company. The Leslie brothers, John and Robert, were also employed by the Company. John Leslie supervised the Company in East Florida while his brother Robert was an agent at the St. Marks trading post.³ William Panton's sister Henrietta married one of the Company's best agents, John Innerarity. Their sons, John and James Innerarity, had major roles in the Company business during the early 1800s.⁴ From the start, this Company was to become truly a family business.

The primary partner in Panton, Leslie and Company was, of course, William Panton. He was born around 1745 in Aberdeenshire, Scotland, to Barbara Wemys and John Panton. His parents were farmers and had at least seven children. William, however, was their only son. Little is known about his activities in Scotland, though he resided there until 1765. It is estimated that he was related to Robert Bruce.⁵ Though most of the records about his early life in Scotland were lost during a house fire in his Pensacola home in 1849, many papers still survive within the Greenslade Collection. This collection contains records with signet wax seals of the dolphin

³Samuel Proctor, ed., Eighteenth-Century Florida and the Caribbean (Gainesville: The University Presses of Florida, 1976), Entrepreneurs in the British and Spanish Floridas, 175-1821, by William S. Coker, 23.

⁴Coker, Watson and Wright, 15-24.

⁵Greenslade, "William Panton," 108.

haurient crest. The crest is directly related to the Bruce clan and the mark can also be found on much of the Panton silver. Because of his lineage, it can be assumed that Panton had his fair share of education before left for the Colonies in 1765.⁶

When Panton arrived in Charleston, he worked as a clerk for John Gordon and Company until 1772. It is no surprise that John Gordon was one of the Forbes brothers' uncles and thus helped Panton with his employment. Gordon operated his trading business in Charleston as well as Savannah and had partnerships with several different merchants. Gordon traded in a variety of merchandise such as maps, slaves and supplies. He also began trading with local Indians at least two years before Panton arrived in the colonies. It was through his employment with Gordon that William Panton learned about the trading business and acquired much of his skills as a businessman from Gordon himself.⁷

By 1785, Panton had profited greatly from his own company, Panton, Leslie and Company. William Panton was a very hospitable host to the many guests he received at his mansion in Pensacola. His guests were lavished when they visited his home for "no one of importance set foot in Pensacola without being entertained there."⁸ He was a most generous person with a good head for business. Panton was also respected by his family, friends, and business associates. He was said to be honest and highly revered by the Indians who conducted business with him.⁹

⁶Greenslade, "William Panton,"107-108.

⁷ Coker, Watson and Wright, 15-17.

⁸Greenslade, "William Panton,"112.

⁹Proctor, 33.

Though William Panton died a bachelor, he was romantically linked to Sophia Forbes, sister to Thomas and John Forbes. In a 1794 letter from Panton to John Forbes, Panton revealed that he accidentally opened another letter to Forbes from Alexander Glennie, the fiancé of Sophia. Panton read the letter and realized that Alexander and Sophia were secretly planning to be married. In this letter to John Forbes, Panton states “I have lost my chance, but there is no help for it. Give my complements to Her and desire Her to provide for me as good a Girl as herself or I will stay where I am. Let them both know that I am in the secret and that I sincerely wish them all manner of happiness.”¹⁰

Like William Panton, John Leslie was also born in Scotland. He was born in County Murry in 1751 to Anna Duff Leslie and Alexander Leslie of Balnagieth. Leslie had one sister and at least four brothers. One of Leslie’s brothers, Robert Leslie, would also become involved with the Panton Company. When Robert came to the colonies, he was soon employed by the Company and worked at the St. Marks trading post around 1792. John Leslie was to become the Company’s agent at the trading posts in East Florida.

John Leslie was romantically linked with Elizabeth Cain, whose name appears in records as Isabel Kean. Though the couple married in 1789 when Elizabeth was seventeen years old, they were separated in 1797. Elizabeth did have three children by Leslie, all girls. Unfortunately, none of the children lived past five years of age.¹¹

¹⁰Greenslade, “William Panton,”113-114.

¹¹Coker, Watson and Wright, 46-47.

Leslie's family life was a bit of a tragedy; however, he did not let this affect his business with the Company. He continued effectively to control business matters in East Florida for the Company.

Many of Leslie's contributions to the Company were in the form of his talent for political savoir-faire. After the Spanish takeover of East Florida when the British Loyalists were evacuating, Leslie stayed in St. Augustine with the Company business to protect its assets. It was then that he was appointed by Governor Patrick Tonyn to register the property grants there and supervise the transactions. Leslie also established political connections with Vizente Manuel de Zespedes, governor of East Florida during the second Spanish occupation.¹² By doing so he helped Panton, Leslie and Company obtain the added edge to win the Indian trade monopoly along the gulf coast. Though the other partners also had relations with the governor, Leslie's political connections were vital to success of the Company. John Leslie thus had a major role in the political strategies to secure more business for the Company's future.

William Alexander was another of the original partners in the Panton, Leslie trading house and was most likely from Scotland like the others. Records of him first appear in South Carolina in 1771. However, there was a record of a William Alexander living in there as early as 1741 but this may or may not be the same man. Little is known of Alexander's early life but he was a merchant in South Carolina until 1779. Not only was Alexander a merchant but he also worked as a lawyer in Florida.¹³ Records indicate that during this period he did sell supplies to government

¹²Proctor, 23-25.

¹³ Ibid. 20-21.

officials for settlers and Indians. This trade with Indians made Alexander an important agent in the Panton Company because he began trading among the Indians early on.

While in Charleston, Alexander and John Leslie went into the merchant business together in 1779. This trading establishment, which was located on the Bay, lasted until 1783, the year Panton, Leslie and Company was formed.¹⁴ Likewise in 1775, William Panton and Thomas Forbes had formed a company in South Carolina and called it Panton, Forbes and Company. They traded several items with the Indians, including gunpowder, woolen goods, leather, iron tools, silver trinkets, and many other European goods.¹⁵ Then in 1783, the two companies merged into Panton, Leslie and Company. These four men, Panton, Leslie, Alexander and Forbes, formed the original partnership of Panton, Leslie and Company.

Because there are so few records of William Alexander, it is hard to conclude just what type of person he was. John Wells, an editor of the *Bahama Gazette* in 1799, described Alexander as cheerful, respected and very hospitable.¹⁶ There are records that Alexander did marry and have a family. He left Panton, Leslie and Company around 1792, although his reasons for leaving are unknown. Alexander moved his wife Mary Cleland and their four daughters to a plantation he owned on Long Island, Bahamas. While living there, he prospered as a merchant. Because

¹⁴Proctor, 21.

¹⁵ Coker, Watson and Wright, 34-35.

¹⁶ Proctor, 22.

Alexander left the Company in its early years, he did not influence its prosperity as much as the other partners had.¹⁷

Like William Alexander, little is known about partner Charles McLatchy. It is safe to say that McLatchy was from Scotland like the others. There are records that he had illegitimate children living there while he made his home in Florida. When the two companies merged into Panton, Leslie and Company, McLatchy had been in business with William Alexander and John Leslie and came into the business as the fifth partner.¹⁸

When Panton, Leslie and Company opened for business in 1783, Charles McLatchy managed the new trading post along the Wakulla River. This trading post was set up to serve to the Creek Indians. While he managed the trading post, McLatchy had conducted negotiations with Governor Arturo O'Neill of West Florida. It was McLatchy who realized that trade with the Indians in the region was going to push the Company into a most profitable position.¹⁹ McLatchy was urged by O'Neill to sell his stock and inventory to a Spanish merchant and leave the Indian trading business to the Spanish. However, he completely disagreed and knew that Panton and the others had to help with the trade discussions. Therefore, McLatchy felt that either Leslie or Panton should resume negotiations with Governor O'Neill in Pensacola.²⁰

¹⁷Proctor, 20-22.

¹⁸Coker, Watson and Wright, 21, 43, 47.

¹⁹Ibid. 50.

²⁰Ibid. 50, 57.

The last original partner of the Panton, Leslie and Company was Thomas Forbes. Forbes was born in Scotland to Sarah Gordon Forbes and James Forbes. He was born in 1758 and died in 1808 at the age of fifty. Forbes had several siblings, a brother John who would eventually control the Company after the death of William Panton, and two sisters, Anne and Sophia.²¹ Of the four children, three would become directly associated with the Panton, Leslie Company.

Thomas Forbes came to the colonies around the same time as Panton and Leslie. Like the others, he lived in South Carolina and tried his hand at the merchant business. Forbes went into business in Charleston in the 1770s. As early as 1775, Panton and Forbes had established their own merchant business called the Panton and Forbes Company. Forbes even spent some of his time in London conducting Company trading business with other factions of the firm. During one of these trips, he secured compensation of property losses from the British government and negotiated contracts with the Panton Company's London factors, Strachan & McKenzie and Company. He was also in business with another firm, Forbes, Munro and Company, which was located in the Bahamas. Forbes made a large contribution to the Panton Company through his business ventures in the Bahamas. From Nassau, Forbes controlled the Company's cargo ships and the Company's trade business in Nassau. The Panton Company's trading business in Nassau was a large part of the Company's business and it was under the direct control of Thomas Forbes. By the

²¹Coker, Watson and Wright, 21.

time William Panton died in 1801, Thomas Forbes had become senior partner in the company.²²

Not only was Thomas Forbes a skilled merchant and attorney but he also had a successful political career. Forbes was involved in the politics during the war between Spain and Britain in 1780. In his Master's thesis, Randy Nimmicht argues that Forbes could have been a spy for the British. He apparently warned Governor Patrick Tonyn of an anticipated attack by the Spanish in Pensacola.²³ Among his other political ventures, Forbes was also elected in 1781 to serve in the colonial House of Commons. When Panton, Leslie and Company turned its attention to trade through the Bahamas, Thomas Forbes moved to Nassau and controlled the Company business there. It was under Forbes's name that the Company ships were registered. Thus, he was a most important agent there.²⁴

In July of 1789, Forbes married Elizabeth Yonge in Nassau and later had two sons and one daughter. Forbes continued to conduct business in the Bahamas, and from 1797 to 1807 he served in the Bahamian House of Assembly. He died in Nassau on February 13, 1808.²⁵ Thomas Forbes was a most significant player in the success of the Panton, Leslie Company due to his skill in politics and in business. Because of his connections with the British government, his negotiations with London trading firms, his success in controlling the Company's trade in Nassau and his skill as a

²²Proctor, 26-29.

²³ Proctor, 26.

²⁴Ibid. 27-29.

²⁵Ibid. 28.

merchant, Thomas Forbes was a true asset to the success of Panton, Leslie and Company.

When Thomas Forbes first came to the American colonies he was not alone. His younger brother John Forbes came as well. "It is known that John was born in 1769, presumably in Scotland."²⁶ Though the two brothers were ten years apart in age, Thomas being the elder, they both had an affinity for the trade business. Because Thomas had engaged in the merchant business with William Panton, John had the opportunity to learn the tricks of the trade early on in his life. When Thomas became involved in the Panton, Leslie Company in the Bahamas, John joined him there at the tender age of sixteen.

In Nassau, John held a clerkship under his older brother and it was there that he learned the trading business through first-hand experience. John would later return to Florida to work as an agent of the Company and by 1793 he was granted a full partnership in the Company. Throughout the next few years, John proved himself to be a skillful merchant and a responsible person. He helped the Company gain land and influence in the Mobile area through the Indian trade. As the Company acquired overdue debt from buyers, it was John who negotiated with the United States to help the Company collect those debts. Forbes also dealt with the Spanish officials to keep the lines of communication open during the Company's monopolization of the Indian trade in Florida. In 1804, the Panton Company fell under the control of Forbes due to the death of William Panton. Forbes then renamed the company John Forbes and

²⁶Proctor, 33.

Company.²⁷ Even as the Company changed hands, Forbes's skill as a merchant and negotiator allowed the Company to continue its prosperity.

When John Forbes took over the Panton, Leslie Company in the early 1800s, two of his partners were James and John Innerarity. The Innerarity brothers were the nephews of William Panton. John and James were both born in Scotland to John Innerarity and Henrietta Panton. Henrietta was one of William Panton's sisters.

James,

the elder brother, arrived in West Florida in 1796 while John did not come until 1802. Though the Forbes Company did not officially begin until 1804, both John and James were intricately involved in the Panton, Leslie Company.²⁸

After the death of Panton, when John Forbes inherited the firm, James took control of the management of the Mobile trading posts and property while John managed the Company's business in Pensacola. James, like the earlier partners of the Panton firm, was skilled at recognizing potential problems. During the War of 1812 when the United States was gaining the upper hand in controlling the gulf coast region, James informed John Forbes of the happenings in Mobile and felt it was imperative to claim Spanish citizenship. He likewise told his brother John to do the same. Becoming Spanish citizens had cooled the fires of the Spanish government, for the Spanish officials were nervous about the partners' loyalty. However, now that the United States was controlling West Florida, the agents had a new set of problems. Because they claimed Spanish citizenship, the partners feared the United States would

²⁷Proctor, 33-38.

²⁸Coker, Watson and Wright, 18-19.

not trust them or the firm. From his quick actions, it is obvious that James Innerarity was a smart and skillful businessman. He realized the need to secure the Company's position with the Spanish government and becoming citizens of Spain was the answer. Spain now trusted the agents in the John Forbes Company. James Innerarity was a man who understood well the strategy of continuing a profitable business.²⁹

James Innerarity's younger brother John also had an abundant talent for business. John was born in 1783 in Aberdeen Scotland. He was well educated at the University of Edinburg and was recommended by John Leslie for an assistant's job with William Panton, his uncle, when he was still a very young man. John arrived in America in 1802 when he was about nineteen years old. When first in America, he was welcomed by his brother James and soon began his job at the Panton, Leslie Company as a clerk. Though he was used to high living in Britain, he soon became accustomed to the harshness of the American settlements.³⁰

John worked as a clerk with the Company at its Pensacola location in 1807. In 1812, he was admitted into the firm as a full partner. Though his career did not go as smoothly as he had hoped, he did manage to apply himself to his fullest potential. Before the War of 1812, the Company developed a number of problems. John being high up in the Company and about to become a full partner, had to use his skill as a merchant to solve many of the dilemmas the Company now faced. Some of the Company problems were poor cargo ships that had been corroded by the salt waters of

²⁹ William S. Coker, John Forbes & Company and the War of 1812 in the Spanish Borderlands (Pensacola: The Perdido Bay Press, 1979), 65.

³⁰ Marie Taylor Greenslade, "John Innerarity, 1783-1854," Florida Historical Quarterly 9 (October 1930): 90-91.

the gulf, delayed and seized ships, debt collection from the Indians, and the ongoing political upheaval in the area by Spanish and American forces.³¹

As John Innerarity's career began to develop in America, he supplemented his education with various experiences that would help him in his work. He became knowledgeable about the law, learned nine languages and many Indian dialects. John became a great asset to the Company through his abilities as a linguist. In his private life, he managed to find time to marry Marie Victoria Coulon de Villiers, daughter of the Captain of the Region of Louisiana. The couple moved to Pensacola around 1807 and resided in William Panton's mansion.³²

When John Forbes left the firm in 1817, both John and James Innerarity suddenly became the last of the partners. James had control of the Company's assets in Mobile, while John was in charge of the stores in Pensacola. The Company had been experiencing major problems since Forbes's departure. The land the firm had acquired through the payments of Indian debts had not been surveyed and therefore the boundaries of the land were questionable. The unsurveyed land would cause considerable problems in the future. When John died in 1847, James soon decided that it was time to shut the Company down, for he was the last surviving partner. During his lifetime, John Innerarity accomplished many things. Besides his important role he played in the success of the Panton-Forbes Company, he had many other accomplishments during his life. John had the honor of becoming Vice Consul of

³¹Greenslade, "John Innerarity, 1783-1854," 91-93.

³²Ibid. 91-94.

France and he was given the Cross of the Legion of Honor in 1846.³³ John Innerarity, like the other Panton partners, was truly a talented and fortunate man.

The partners of the Panton-Forbes Company truly accomplished a mammoth endeavor. They were immigrants to a brand new country who lived the classic American dream. These Scottish born men did not start at the top of the merchant business, but rather worked their way up from the bottom and became successful. They were owners and partners of a successful business, which eventually encompassed a huge area. Each man gave the Company his individual talents that made the Panton-Forbes firm very prosperous. Though there were three different sets of partners “the members of the “old” company 1783-92, the members of the “new” company, 1792-1804, and the members of John Forbes and Company, 1804-47”, each had an important role to play as the Company developed, flourished and eventually declined.³⁴

³³Greenslade, “John Innerarity, 1783-1854,” 94.

³⁴Coker, Watson and Wright, 363.

INFLUENCING THE BRITISH

The atmosphere in the American colonies at the time William Panton, Thomas Forbes, John Leslie, William Alexander and Charles McLatchy were working as merchants was one of growing independence from England. Before these feelings of independence had developed, Britain and the Crown enjoyed a rich import and export trade with the colonies. For the British settlers, including the members of the Panton-Forbes Companies, trade in the colonies was the way to become successful and wealthy. The colonial economy was growing rapidly from 1731 to 1763 due to the enormous amounts of trading. Many colonists felt that mercantilism was the best employment they could undertake. “As the anonymous writer *Amicus Reipublicae* explains in *Trade and Commerce Inculcated*, published in Boston in 1731, it was trade that enabled colonials to distribute surplus products to British, European, and West Indian markets; to increase their profits; and to acquire in exchange, goods or items necessary for colonial economic expansion—servants, slaves, crude sugar products, agricultural implements, craftsmen’s tools— as well as European luxury manufactures.”¹ Though the members of the Panton-Forbes Company arrived in the later half of the 1760s, there was a Scottish element in the colonies that continued the growth of the trade. The partners were a part of this large influx of Scottish tradesmen and they reaped the benefits of the trade business that was begun in the early part of the century.

Early colonial trading companies, such as the Virginia Trading Company, began

¹Jack P. Green, ed. *Settlements to Society, 1607-1763* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1975), 270.

by securing a charter from the British Crown. The Charters were “given by the Crown to an individual or group, these charters defined the relationships between the colonies and the Crown, and between sponsors of the colonies and the men who actually settled them.”² By the time Panton, Leslie and Company began operating as a trading house in 1783, the provincial governor and the British officials controlled British interests in the colonies. Panton, Leslie and Company was thus given their license by the provincial governor, Governor Patrick Tonyn, to operate as merchants in the British territories.³

Before the official license was given to the Company, its individual members had gained ample experience in the trade business in South Carolina and Georgia. Each became successful as trading merchants before the American Revolution. Due to their excellence in the trading business, their political maneuvering, and their capitalist spirits, the original partners of Panton, Leslie and Company became well known throughout the area as experienced and successful merchants. And as reputations grew their profits multiplies.

The partners were all politically active and voiced their opinions about the colonies political state of affairs with regard to trade relations with Britain. The partners were all Loyalists which made breaking with England unheard-of.⁴ William Panton actively participated in a meeting in Savannah in 1775. Panton had expressed that Georgia should petition the King about the colonists’ grievances and use legal

²Green, 270.

³Tonyn to Panton, Leslie and Co., January 15, 1783, MC, Exhibit 26AA, *The Papers of Panton, Leslie & Company*.

⁴Coker, Watson and Wright, 31.



Table 3.1 Governor Patrick Tonyn. J. Leitch Wright, Jr., *Florida in the American Revolution* (Gainesville, 1975), opposite p. 96

Means for solving Georgia's problems. But many settlers at the meeting however disagreed and moved toward a break with England. Panton's Loyalist views were clearly known when the meeting adjourned.⁵ Due to their business associations with Panton, Alexander, McLatchy, Forbes and Leslie had also become known Loyalists. Because of their views, their politically active natures, and their success in the trading business, settlers loyal to American began to put the Panton members under suspicion in the 1770s.

Perhaps it was luck, combined with a sharp and clever mind, that William Panton and his Company came to dominate the gulf coast trading markets. However, it seems to be more than luck that this domination was able to begin before the start of the American Revolution and continue well into the nineteenth century. Panton began his career in the late 1760s under the guidance of John Gordon, a merchant in South Carolina and maternal uncle of the Forbes brothers. Though he worked and trained under Gordon until 1772, Panton struck out into the trading world early on his own. He had purchased 100 acres in October of 1770 along Wilson's Creek in Granville County, South Carolina.⁶ Panton and one of his associates, Philip Moore, also acquired tracts of land in Georgia's St. Matthew's Parish in 1774.⁷ The British in the

⁵ Coker, Watson and Wright, 26.

⁶Colony of South Carolina Land Grant to William Panton, October 17, 1770, SCA, Memorials, Vol. 10 p. 279 (Copy Series) *The Papers of Panton, Leslie and Company*.

⁷King of Great Britain to Philip Moore and William Panton, October – November 1774, Land Grant GSGD, Grant Book L, pp. 196-97, Official grant made to Moore and Panton in Brunswick, Georgia. *The Papers of Panton, Leslie and Company*.

Southern colonies were very interested in the purchase of land in the colonies as well as in the Florida territories. Panton, like other colonists, took advantage of this.

Another aspect of Panton's drive for success could have come from the fact that many Scotsman had an unusually high rate of personal and economic achievement at this time. Scotland was experiencing a golden age during his period. Large numbers of Scots settled in the British southern colonies possibly looking to achieve more of the success they had gained in Scotland. Charles Loch Mowat noted that much of the real estate in the Floridas was purchased by Scots. It is therefore no coincidence that all the partners of Panton, Leslie and Company were Scotsmen who had participated in this rush for success. With the rapaciousness of the Scottish peoples moving into the southern regions, many colonists became suspicious of their true intentions.⁸ This coupled with the fact that the Panton house members were all Loyalists gave the patriotic colonists cause for suspicion.

William Panton was not the only partner to purchase real estate in the southern colonies. In 1778, the Council of East Florida in St. Augustine listed many of the Loyalists who held land grants in the area and among the Loyalists names were William Panton, Thomas Forbes and William Alexander.⁹ Another speculation to this phenomena was the "manifestation of the Scottish drive for success which undergirded the golden age of Scotland (and) in some strange way the defeat of the Jacobites at Culloden had triggered the Scottish renaissance of the last half of the eighteenth

⁸Rogers, George C. Jr., "The East Florida Society of London, 1766-1767," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 57 (June 1975 – April 1976): 479-480.

⁹Council of East Florida lists and extract of letter, December 18, 1778, PRO CO 5.559, *The Papers of Panton, Leslie and Company*.

century.”¹⁰ Their growing success as trade merchants, along with the growing American independence movement, put many Scottish Loyalists at risk in patriotic America.

From the late 1760s until about 1775, the soon to be partners of Panton, Leslie and Company enjoyed a successful trade business. Records show that William Alexander delivered provisions to Lt. Governor John Moultrie so that they could be sold to the Indians.¹¹ Usually these provisions were in the form of flour, pork, rice, munitions and alcohol. Some of the general accounts of the merchants show that the Indians in East Florida were buying supplies from Panton, Forbes and Company and William Alexander from June of 1775 through June of 1776.¹² Not only were the partners serving the needs of the Indian populations but also those of the settlers. In 1777, William Alexander sold some much-needed supplies to a number of suffering settlers from Virginia and Georgia.¹³ Though the trade business was going well for the merchants, there was a fast growing hatred of British sympathizers and the partners of Panton, Leslie and Company were known Loyalists.

Panton and the other merchants soon found it increasingly dangerous to conduct business in Georgia and South Carolina in 1775. In June of that year, Thomas Forbes

¹⁰Rogers, 479.

¹¹John Moultrie to William Alexander, receipt, June 24, 1772, PRO CO 5/552, *The Papers of Panton, Leslie and Company*.

¹²General Accounts, August 16, 1776, PRO CO 5.557, *The Papers of Panton, Leslie and Company*.

¹³General Accounts, June 30, 1777, PRO CO 5.557, *The Papers of Panton, Leslie and Company*.

had sailed to London to obtain gunpowder to trade back in the colonies. While he was en route to London, the second Provincial Congress stopped all trade with England and Georgia's Council of Safety banned Panton because he was a known Loyalist.¹⁴ At this time, Panton felt he should solicit the help of Governor Patrick Tonyn. The records seem to indicate that this was the first meeting of Panton and Tonyn however, William Alexander had dealt with the Governor earlier that same month.¹⁵ From this meeting and the friendship that apparently followed, Panton and his partners were able to secure a large portion of success in the trade business in East Florida through the support of Governor Tonyn.

As the threat of revolt became more and more pronounced in the 1770s, Panton, Forbes, Leslie and Alexander began to concentrate on their trade operations in East Florida. The merchants turned their business aspirations southward because trading in Georgia and South Carolina was becoming hazardous to one's health. As the American patriots began to gain momentum for their revolutionary cause, the Panton partners seemed to become heavily involved in the Loyalist politics of the time. In July of 1775, Panton was present at the Georgia Provincial Congress meeting in Savannah. At the meeting, many settlers strongly felt that breaking with Britain would be disastrous but others felt that it was necessary. Therefore, the Loyalists decided that a petition should be drawn up and sent to the King of England listing Loyalists grievances. Panton whole-heartedly agreed and let his Loyalist opinions be known at

¹⁴Panton, to Governor Tonyn, January 18, 1776, CO 5/556, *The Papers of Panton, Leslie and Company*.

¹⁵Panton to Governor Tonyn, January 18, 1776, PRO CO 5/556, and Governor Tonyn to William Alexander, January 12, 1776, PRO CO 5/556, *The Papers of Panton, Leslie and Company*.

the meeting. The Loyalists felt that the colonies should peacefully settle all arguments with Britain, therefore making rebellion obsolete.¹⁶ However, the decision of the Congress did not favor the requests of the Loyalists. When the Provincial Congress received the draft of the petition a compromise could not be reached between the two sides. The proposed petition to the King failed in the Congress and war was imminent.¹⁷

The Panton Company partners soon had other involvements in colonial politics. Now that they were known Loyalists who had voiced their opinions in public, they decided to fight for Britain in the political arena in British East Florida. Before Panton could join the Loyalist exodus into East Florida, he needed to take his merchandise with him to trade in British territory. Therefore, in January of 1776, Panton went before the Council of Safety in Savannah to petition for the right to leave the area and to take his goods with him to sell to the Florida Indians. The Council voted not only against Panton but also detained his sailing boat.¹⁸ This no doubt angered Panton immensely and forced him to deal with the provincial governor, Patrick Tonyn. Ten days later, Panton solicited help from Tonyn to continue his trade with the Indians. Tonyn, knowing that Panton was loyal to England, agreed to help.¹⁹

¹⁶Minutes of the Georgia Provincial Congress, July 5, 1775, PRO CO 5/556, *The Papers of Panton, Leslie and Company*.

¹⁷Coker, Watson and Wright, 26.

¹⁸Council of Safety, January 8, 1776, Minutes, WP; Rev. Records, State of Georgia, Vol. I pp. 90. *The Papers of Panton, Leslie and Company*.

¹⁹Panton to Tonyn, January 18, 1776, WP; EPP; PRO CO 5/556, *The Papers of Panton, Leslie and Company*.

As the flow of Loyalist refugees came into East Florida in 1775, Governor Tonyn and John Stuart, Indian affairs superintendent, felt it was necessary to coerce the Indians in the area to the British cause. Their strategy was to use British trade merchants as middlemen and to keep the Indians dependent upon British trade items. As rumors of war began to circulate, the British felt the Indians would fight against the Americans if they were able to establish better trade relations with the Indians than the Americans could. In 1776, when it came time for Tonyn and Stuart to discuss the locations of trade outposts for the Indians, the two men both suggested that William Panton manage the trade.²⁰ Tonyn had been dealing with Panton since the start of the year and knew he could trust him as a merchant and a Loyalist.

William Panton, from his business skills, his experience with the Indian trade, and his ambition, was able to obtain written permission from the Governor of East Florida to manage the Indian trade. His persistence, his obvious Loyalist views, and his courage to fight for British rule in the colonies made him a standout against other merchants who might possibly try to gain the Indian trade for themselves. Panton succeeded where in influencing Governor Tonyn partly because he was the only merchant in East Florida who was able to get supplies into the area.²¹ His skill as a trader and his courage no doubt caught Tonyn's attention. This was to be the beginning of Panton's influence with the British officials.

After the Provincial Congress in Savannah had seized the Loyalist's property and the Council of Safety deemed Panton a danger to the American cause, Tonyn probably

²⁰Coker, Watson and Wright, 26-27.

²¹Ibid. 28.

felt that appointing Panton as manager of the Indian trade was in Britain's best interests.²² Because of their associations with William Panton, the American rebels also ostracized Thomas Forbes, John Leslie and William Alexander. However, the black-listing by the Americans only helped the merchants gain the trust of the British government when it came time to influence them in terms of controlling the Indian trade. The partners' personal and business track records were perfect in the eyes of England. William Panton's loathing for the Americans only grew after their break with Britain; therefore, Tonyn and the British felt they could trust him as their Indian trader.²³

Once Panton and the other partners fled South Carolina to British Florida, they focused their trade business on the Indians and the Loyalists. Because Panton had worked closely with Tonyn, he and his associates soon became popular with the British government, making it easier to secure the total monopoly of the Indian trade in the future by putting England's royal blessings to good use. Panton, Forbes and Alexander took great personal risks in order to solidify British support in their trade business. Thomas Forbes had been asked by Governor Tonyn in 1778 to travel to Georgia to discuss the trade of Loyalists prisoners in the province and again in 1780 he was asked to do the same in Havana. While Forbes was in Havana, he uncovered a plot by the Spanish government: the Spanish were planning to attack Pensacola and it

²²Tonyn to Earl of Dartmouth, February 16, 1776, WP; EPP; PRO CO 5/556, *The Papers of Panton, Leslie and Company*. In this letter, Tonyn appoints Panton as Indian trade manager and asks that Panton control the entire trade.

²³Council of Safety, June 19, 1776, WP; Rev. Records, State of GA, Vol. 1, p. 146-7, *The Papers of Panton, Leslie and Company*.

was Forbes who alerted Governor Tonyn.²⁴ By his courageous actions, Thomas Forbes had single-handedly gained the trust of the British. When Thomas Forbes joined Panton, Leslie and Company his very presence helped the trading firm to further their influence with the British government. William Panton also had his hand in conducting bold trading schemes inside American territory. After a bounty was put out in Georgia for his arrest on charges of treason, Panton actually had the courage to go back into Georgia after the British had won a battle in Savannah and advertise in the *Royal Gazette of Georgia* newspaper.²⁵ It was this kind of ambitious selling and courageous endeavors that made the partners of Panton, Leslie and Company triumph in trade monopolies over all other merchants.

Throughout the Revolutionary War, the partners continued to trade in Florida and inside American territory. They also continued their support for the embattled Royal Governor: "Periodically, Governor Tonyn was forced to use private vessels for the government's service, and occasionally he turned to Panton and Forbes. The company leased two armed schooners, the Polly and the George, to the government in 1777 and 1778. They received f100 for the use of the Polly and f425 for the George."²⁶ It is clear from these records that Panton and his partners reaped the benefits of the relationship which they had created with the British, for it became a situation in which both sides profited.

²⁴Coker, Watson and Wright, 36-37.

²⁵Ibid. 38.

²⁶Ibid. 36-37.

In the winter of 1778 the British won a victory in Savannah and William Panton was able to return. "By 1780, he represented Frederica and St. James parish in the Loyalist Commons House of Assembly."²⁷ Panton also sat on several committees and participated in the drafting of a thank you letter to the King of England from the Loyalists for reinstating their control in Savannah. He was part of several bill draftings, one of which was a bill drawn up that regulated auctions. Two other bills that Panton apparently worked on were an act of disqualification, which put a stop to the rebels' right to hold offices in Georgia, and an attainder act also aimed at rebels, involving confiscation and forfeiture of their property.²⁸ After his service at the assembly in Georgia, William Panton returned to his merchant business in East Florida. Panton had made a name for himself through his merchant business. By doing so he was able to enter politics and rub elbows with his loyal, future customers. Though Panton seemed to leave his political career in Georgia and focus on Company business, William Alexander and John Leslie's business and political careers were just beginning.

John Leslie and William Alexander were in the trade business together as partners in 1779. They continued to trade to the Indians in British territory as well as to the British government from 1779-1782. The two traders sold naval equipment and services to the British. They also let the navy use some of their seaworthy vessels. While William Alexander operated as an attorney for several Loyalists, John Leslie

²⁷Coker, Watson and Wright, 39.

²⁸Ibid. 39.

and Thomas Forbes took their place in the political scene.²⁹ “Thomas Forbes and John Leslie were elected to the Commons House of Assembly for East Florida in March of 1781. Presumably, Forbes and Leslie were reelected to the second assembly, which met from January 1782 until March 1784. Forbes’s introduction to political factionalism during the March 1781 assembly was to be useful in his future role in Bahamian politics.”³⁰ Thomas Forbes and William Panton also acted as attorneys for several clients in 1783 but a greater opportunity came about in the early part of the same year: the official forming of Panton, Leslie and Company.

The original partners of Panton, Leslie and Company were William Panton, John Leslie, Thomas Forbes, William Alexander and Charles McLatchy. After Governor Tonyn gave the Company an official license to trade legally in East Florida in 1783, he asked Panton and the Company if they would set up Indian trade posts along the Apalachicola River.³¹ This was an opportunity the Company could not refuse. Not only did it complement the early official Indian trade license already given to Panton by Tonyn in 1776, but it made the Company’s territory stretch further in East Florida territory. The Company now was officially given the Indian trade along the Apalachicola River. Panton, of course, agreed to Tonyn’s proposal, thus making Leslie, Panton, Forbes, Alexander and McLatchy official British Indian traders.

After the forming of the Company, the partners moved to different parts of Florida and the Caribbean in order to cover more territory for the Company business.

²⁹Coker, Watson and Wright, 39-41.

³⁰Ibid. 41.

³¹Tonyn to Panton, Leslie and Company, January 15, 1783, License, MC, Exhibit #26AA, *The Papers of Panton, Leslie and Company*.

Charles McLatchy moved to St. Johns River where the Company had located a trading post, for he was the most experienced in operating posts in that area. Thomas Forbes and William Alexander moved their part of the business into the Bahamas.

Meanwhile, Panton and Leslie settled in Florida and controlled operations in Pensacola and St. Augustine.³² With each partner at his respective station, Panton, Leslie and Company began to grow rapidly in the trading business.

The trading rights to the Apalachicola area were immensely important to merchants. It was along this river that many Creek Indians lived. This gave Panton and the Company complete rights to trade exclusively with these Indians. East Florida had a large Indian population that the merchants could do business with but it had also become a haven for Loyalists during the war. Usually, when the refugee Loyalists were evacuating Georgia and South Carolina, they would arrive in East Florida and tend to settle along the St. John's River, the St. Mary's River, and in St. Augustine. St. Augustine grew at an astonishing rate but the Loyalists were not the only people living in the area at this time. There were regular British soldiers residing in the town along with Indians, slaves and provincial troops.³³ Though the Company partners had been forced out of Georgia and South Carolina, they were able to gain more trade business in British East Florida. "Nevertheless, the problems of securing supplies, the risks of shipping, and the hazards of war made business difficult, if not unprofitable. But patronage of the firms by the government of East Florida and the direct assistance

³²Coker, Watson and Wright, 45-48.

³³Williams, Linda K., "East Florida as a Loyalist Haven," Florida Historical Quarterly 54 (June 1975- April 1976): 465.

of Governor Tonyn undoubtedly enabled them to show a profit at a time when other loyalists were completely ruined.”³⁴

With William Panton operating the trade business in Pensacola, John Leslie along the St. Marks, Charles McLatchy at St. John’s, and William Alexander and Thomas Forbes securing new venture in Nassau, Bahamas, the Company had one of the best beginnings the partners could have ever hoped for. These merchants were exceptionally good businessmen who seemed to make all the right decisions. They came to the colonies to succeed in the world of trade and the Company they formed together came to dominate the gulf coast region. Each of the original five partners brought something new into the Company. They all were level-headed, honest merchants who took care of their customers. Each had a good reputation that solidified their persons as well as their business practices. The men that came together to form this trading firm, and the partners that they would train to succeed them, took control of the gulf coast trade over all other merchant firms in the area. With their growing influence, it is little wonder that this trading firm became involved in international diplomacy, Indian affairs and the overall flow of trade in Florida and Alabama.

³⁴Coker, Watson and Wright, 43.

MONOPOLIZATION OF THE INDIAN TRADE

“One of the most prevailing ideas about the Indians in fur- trading writings holds that they were motivated almost solely by self-interest in their dealings with others.”¹ The Indians of the Southeast were very much interested in dealing with the British merchants once England took over the territory after the Treaty of Paris was signed in 1763. After the Indians had been introduced to European goods they never stopped trading for them. Usually, the tribes insisted that the European merchants build more trading posts closer to their villages so that the Indians could trade more easily with the Europeans.

Indians and European merchants had been trading since the first European contact in American. “Englishmen operating out of Charleston opened the southern Indian trade in 1685.”² Indians would trade corn, animal pelts, tobacco and bear oil while the Europeans sold the Indians sugar products, tools, blankets, guns and ammunitions, rum, household items and textiles.”³ Trade relations between the British and the Indians had been proceeding well in the southern colonies after the signing of the Treaty of Paris. Merchants and Indians enjoyed a profitable trade business for years.

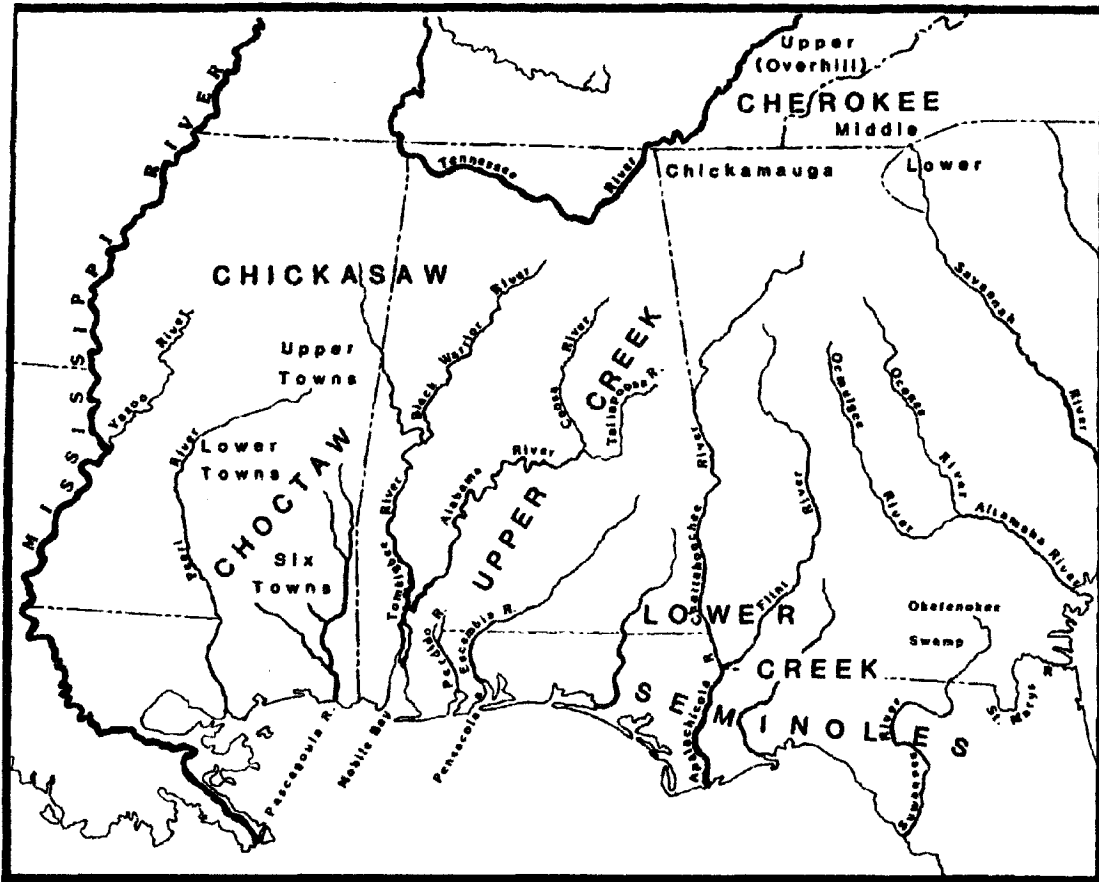
The southern territory in which the Panton partners were operating was home to a number of Indian tribes: the four main tribes there were the Creeks, Choctaws, Chickasaws and Cherokees. In 1763, as the British established control over these

¹Lewis O. Saum, The Fur Trader and the Indian (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1965), 74.

²Coker, Watson and Wright, 7.

³Coker, Watson and Wright, 7. Summersell, 120.

tribes in Georgia, South Carolina and along the gulf coast, the Indian population looked directly to the British to supply them with the goods they desired. The tribes were completely dependent on the British for guns and ammunition, which kept them subordinate to the English. "Control over the Floridas enabled Great Britain to establish an exclusive hegemony over the southern Indians. Annual distribution of presents and the availability of English goods peddled by resident traders and renegades in the Indian villages kept the tribes reasonably tractable."⁴ The partners of Panton, Leslie and Company were involved in the trade dealings with these Indian



Map 4.1 Locations of the Southern Indian Tribes. Coker, Watson and Wright, p. 6.

⁴Coker, Watson and Wright, 7.

tribes in the early days of British domination.

As the influx of Scottish entrepreneurs began to flood the southern colonies, the trading business with the Indian tribes boomed. “Economically, deerskins dominated all other peltry bartered in the southern Indian trade. The bulk of the business flowed through Charleston and Savannah in the 1760s. Deerskins exported from Georgia alone during the decade beginning in 1763 averaged more than 240,000 pounds annually.”⁵ The Scottish partners of Panton house came to Georgia and South Carolina seeking their fortunes in this lucrative business. Panton, Forbes, Alexander, Leslie and McLatchy all started in the Indian trade business during the 1760s and succeeded as trade merchants.

As the partners continued to trade with the southern Indians their experience and skill as traders grew. When these men came together to form the Panton Company, their base of operation was the Frederica store on St. Simon’s Island in Georgia. The Company soon expanded and extended its trading posts from Georgia to Florida. Canoes caring cargoes of European supplies were shipped back and forth from the different stores.⁶ As the business flourished and the partners became successful, however, the growing problem of independence threatened to stop the lucrative trade relations the British had established with the southern Indians.

When the American patriots declared independence from England, many British Loyalists spoke out against the patriots. William Panton went before the

⁵Coker, Watson and Wright, 8.

⁶Greenslade, “William Panton”, 108-109.

Provincial Congress of Georgia to protest the break from England.⁷ However, the Congress felt breaking with England was in the best interests of the colony and British Loyalists were soon forced either to join the patriots against the British or to leave the colony. Many Loyalists fled Charleston and Savannah and settled in British East Florida in the winter of 1775.

When the colonists won the War of Independence British forces withdrew from Charleston and Savannah in 1782. Not only did the British leave the territory but also the Spanish government took over Florida in 1783 after signing the treaty that ended the American Revolution. During this period, the Indian tribes became very distressed about what was to happen with the trade they had enjoyed with the British. “Creek, Cherokee, Chickasaw, and Choctaw war parties had served as British auxiliaries against both Spanish and Anglo-American forces during the American Revolution.”⁸ With the removal of allied British forces, the Indians felt that the British merchants would most likely be leaving the area with them. The Indians felt that the trade they shared with the British would also be gone once the Americans and the Spanish took over. The Indians were therefore upset about the presence of the Spanish in Florida and the control the Americans now enjoyed in Georgia and South Carolina.

Meanwhile, Panton and the other members of the Company continued to conduct trade relations with the Indians as best they could under the circumstances. “The uncertainties and shifting allegiances of the American revolutionary period

⁷Coker, Watson and Wright, 26-29.

⁸Ibid. 49.

disrupted their business and resulted in confiscation of their property and banishment of their persons because of their attachment to the British government.”⁹ The Panton partners moved their operation to St. Augustine, Mobile, Pensacola and Nassau so they could operate in a safe environment. The climate for Loyalists living in Georgia and South Carolina was not healthy. Many British Loyalists were tarred and feathered and generally harassed. Therefore, Thomas Forbes and William Alexander decided to expand the Company business into the Bahamas for easy import and export capabilities and the other members directed the trade in Florida.

Even though the Spanish technically had control of Florida again, British influence in the area was still strong. With the presence of British Loyalists and the allegiance the Indian tribes felt toward England, the Spanish government could not dominate the area. “A new and dynamic United States, surging to the Mississippi, and from its Bahamas outpost a covetous England, intrigued with the savages to turn the Spanish out, and failing that, to divert to their own nationals and treasuries a part at least of the considerable trade of the Creek and Cherokee- and to a lesser extent- Choctaw and Chickasaw Indian nations.”¹⁰ Spain knew that controlling the Indian trade was of paramount importance. They could not risk 45,000 Indians siding with the Americans.¹¹ Therefore, the rush to control the Indian trade and their allegiance in

⁹Greenslade, “William Panton”, 109.

¹⁰Brown, J. A., “Panton, Leslie and Company Indian Traders of Pensacola and St. Augustine,” Florida Historical Quarterly 37 (January 1959): 328.

¹¹Ibid. 328.

the territory was on.

The members of Panton, Leslie and Company realized what was at stake. Monopolizing the gulf coast Indian trade would permanently guarantee the life of the Company and make its members some of the richest men in the territory. Both Spain and Britain understood that whoever controlled the Indian trade controlled Florida. Spain and England also realized that their common enemy was the United States. Neither country could risk losing the allegiance of the Indians to the Americans. Therefore, Spain was willing to let the Panton Company, a known British trading firm, control the Indian trade for them, for Spain soon recognized that the Company could control the Indian trade better than they could themselves. Panton, Leslie and Company eventually won complete control over the Indian trade in Spanish Florida and dominated the trade for years. The members of this company, “due to their business sagaciousness . . . became the trading colossus of the late eighteenth century southern frontier.”¹²

Panton, Leslie and Company was not just given the monopoly on the Indian trade-- they had to work for it. Many other traders in the area, like the trading firm of Mather and Strother, were competing with the partners to share in the profits. However, Panton, Leslie and Company did eventually control the trade. The members of this Company were experienced merchants in the Indian trade. They had been in the colonies since the 1760s and were known to the Indians as honest merchants. The Indians they traded with liked the partners of the Panton Company; they called

¹²Brown, 328.

William Panton the “White King,” for they trusted him to be just and wise.¹³

As British sympathizers, the partners had an upper hand in the trade business when the British forces evacuated into Florida because they were able to supply the Loyalists with goods. On January 15, 1783, Governor Tonyn requested the Indian tribes to meet in St. Augustine to assure them that the British were going to continue supplying them with goods. It was at this meeting that Panton, Leslie and Company was given the license by the British government to continue trading with the Indians.¹⁴ Even though the Company had permission to trade with the Indians and the British Loyalists from England, they had yet to acquire the rights from the new Spanish officials. Nevertheless, the Spanish officials would soon be influenced to keep the Panton firm in control of the trade through the high praise of British government and the Panton firm themselves

Another factor that helped the Company secure the Indian trade was the tactical strategies of Thomas Forbes. Forbes and the partners knew they had the backing of the British government and the Indians themselves and used these assets to their advantage. Forbes felt it was imperative to supply the Indians with a steady flow of English supplies that were to be shipped straight into the villages. The supplies would go through one of the Company’s trading posts, which was run by a resident-trader. The resident-trader would be the merchant of which the Indians were used to dealing with. The goods would then be exchanged for furs at prices that were set by the

¹³Greenslade, “William Panton”, 113.

¹⁴Coker, Watson, and Wright, 50.

Indians.¹⁵ With the help of British officials, the firm could always receive the goods they needed from England to supply the Indians. “The company, Forbes maintained, had all the assets --credit, experience, and goodwill-- required to keep the Indians adequately supplied”¹⁶

As for the relationship with the Indians, one of the main factors in obtaining a monopoly of the Indian trade for the partners was that the Company had the help of a silent partner named Alexander McGillivray. McGillivray played an important role in securing the Company’s position among the Indians of Florida. He was a Creek chief and the son of Sehoj Marchand and Lachlan McGillivray, who had been an Indian trader in Georgia and was an acquaintance of William Panton.¹⁷ The two men were friends and no doubt brought Alexander into the business. Panton also became good friends with Alexander. In a letter from Panton to Lachlan, Panton states that “it so happened that we had an interest in serving each other which first brought us together, and the longer we were acquainted the stronger was our friendship.”¹⁸ The friendship that Panton shared with the McGillivrays’ was significant to the success of the Company.

Alexander McGillivray’s bloodline not only made him kinsmen with the Scottish partners of Panton-Leslie, but also the Chief of the Creek Nation. As a young

¹⁵Coker, Watson and Wright, 52.

¹⁶Ibid. 52.

¹⁷Thomas D. Watson, “Striving For Sovereignty: Alexander McGillivray Creek Warfare, and Diplomacy, 1783-1790,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 58 (June 1979 – April 1980): 401, Greenslade, “William Panton,” 111.

¹⁸Greenslade, “William Panton,” 114.

man he was educated in Charleston and worked for two different trading houses in Georgia. But Alexander was not interested in his work and returned to his Creek village. With the experience and education he received from the European world, McGillivray soon became the leader of his people. After Spain took control of Florida, Alexander McGillivray led the Creek Indians. The growing desperation among the Indians about the Spanish takeover of Florida and the possible halt of the Indian trade forced McGillivray to secure supplies for his people.¹⁹ He drew from his knowledge and experience as a merchant and began negotiations with new British Indian superintendent Thomas Brown, successor of John Stuart.

Meanwhile, William Panton advised Alexander that in order to secure the supplies, the Spanish government had to agree to continue the Indian trade. Panton explained that “success depended on convincing the Spaniards that the Company’s services were indispensable for keeping the Indians economically, and thus politically, free from American domination.”²⁰ Alexander agreed with Panton’s ideas. The two men cooperated and as a silent partner, Alexander was paid a one fifth share of the Company’s profits.²¹

With Alexander McGillivray’s help in securing the Indian trade in Florida, the members of Panton, Leslie and Company had an advantage over other rival trading firms in the territory. Because the Creek Indians trusted Chief McGillivray’s support

¹⁹Watson, 400-402.

²⁰Ibid. 403.

²¹Ibid. 403.

of the Company, the partners succeeded in gaining the endorsement of the Creek nation.

Through skill, experience and good relations, the members of Panton, Leslie and Company succeeded in controlling the Indian trade. By gaining the trust and support of the Creek Nation through their relationship with Alexander McGillivray, the Company had a better chance at gaining control than other trading firms. With so many Indians supporting one company, it was hard for the Spanish government to establish its own relations within the Indian trade. Spain soon realized it would have to deal with this British trading firm and this one alone.

DOMINATING THE SPANISH

In the year 1783, Panton, Leslie and Company faced a serious threat to their merchant trade business. After the American Revolution, Britain had lost control of Florida to the Spanish government. The partners of Panton, Leslie and Company had enjoyed a profitable business with the Indian tribes in the colonies of South Carolina, Georgia and in British Florida. With the end of the American Revolution, the American patriots now controlled Georgia and South Carolina, and with Florida returned to Spanish domination, the British had now been pushed out of the territory they once possessed. The partners of Panton, Leslie and Company were loyal to the British and soon the Loyalists were forced out of American territory. The firm had been operating in the large cities of South Carolina and Georgia, thus with the American's taking over the trade cities of Charleston and Savannah; the Company faced serious problems. The Spanish and the American governments were now threatening the trade the Company had enjoyed with the Indians.

The Indians coveted British merchandise, especially those items sold by Panton, Leslie and Company and the trade business they shared with them. Many Indians had preferred to trade with the Company because the partners had "seen to it that the Indians were better armed and supplied" during the American Revolution.¹ As the Spanish government began its take over the Florida territory, the officials soon understood the good relations shared between the British traders and Indians. They realized that Spanish traders would not be able to immediately take over the Indian trade, for the Indians did not trust the new rulers. Spain's officials also realized that

¹Brown, 330.

trying to control the Indian trade was going to be vital to their domination, not to mention hard to accomplish on their own. Spain could not afford thousands of Indians allying themselves with the Americans, for that would be disastrous to their attempt of control in Florida. The Spanish believed that if they let British merchants continue trading, the Indians would befriend Spain and not America.²

However, allowing a British merchant company to control the Indian trade was risky business. Many officials thought it was ridiculous to let the British control such an important political force within the territory. For example, in a letter to Jose de Galvez, the Spanish minister of the Indies, Louisiana's Spanish Governor Bernardo de Galvez stated that the Englishmen's offer to trade with the Indians is "inadmissible" and that the Spanish should make peace with the Indians on their own, therefore slowly building a relationship with them in order to begin trading together.³ Thus, the Spanish officials did not rush into the idea of letting a British company take control. At the same time, the partners of Panton, Leslie and Company understood that if they were able to monopolize the Indian trade with Spain's blessings, the future of their business would be secured. Having complete control over such a huge market would mean that all profits from the trade business would belong to the Company. Spain

²Navarro to Galvez, July 27, 1784, ANH; WP; AGI PC Leg 633, Doc. 239, Panton, Leslie and Company to Zespedes and Spanish King, July 31, 1784, AGI PC; AN; WP; Wh P; SC AGI; AGI PC; AHN; MC. *The Papers of Panton, Leslie and Company.*

³Bernardo de Galvez to Jose de Galvez, December 20, 1783, Whitaker, Documents, pp. 39-41; AGI PC, leg. 1375. *The Papers of Panton, Leslie and Company.*

even realized this for in his letter to a Spanish official in Florida, Spain's ambassador to England warned that the monopolization of the Indian trade by the English strengthened their commerce.⁴ William Panton and the other partners were clever enough to realize that they had to convince the Spanish government that not only could the Company run the Indian trade better than it could, but that the British, not the Spanish, had the merchandise that the Indians wanted.⁵

Gaining the trust of Spain was not going to be easy for Panton, Leslie and Company. However, the British Loyalists still maintained a strong presence in Florida. With hundreds of Loyalists living in the territory and thousands of Indians wanting British trade items, Spain could not take complete control of Florida. The Spanish government was weaker during its second occupation of the territory due to a deteriorating economy and several costly wars. Added to the problem were land-hungry Americans and Indians, aggravated over possible trade interruptions. The Spanish government was thus not prepared to stop the unrest in the territory.⁶ These factors, coupled with the need for Indian alliance against the Americans, eventually forced Spain to find men who could control the Indian trade. This would rectify at

⁴Marques del Campo to Conde de Floridablanca, September 5, 1786, AGI Sto. D. 2670; WP Reel 2; AHN Leg. 3885 bis., Exp. 8. *The Papers of Panton, Leslie and Company*.

⁵Navarro to Jose de Galvez, July 27, 1784, ANH; WP; AGI PC Leg 633, Doc. 239. "Writes of the Indian preference for British goods . . ." *The Papers of Panton, Leslie and Company*. Panton, Leslie and Company to Zespedes and Spanish King, July 31, 1784, AGI PC; AN; WP; Wh P; SC AGI; AGI PC; AHN; MC; GHO. "Discusses their (Panton, Leslie and Company) influence with the Indians and the convenience to the Spanish government of continuing their trade and reasons for the necessity of using English traders and goods . . ." *The Papers of Panton, Leslie and Company*.

⁶Tebeau, 89.

least one major problem the Spanish government was facing when it took control of the territory.

How the Company went about securing the complete domination of the Indian trade business from the Spanish government was based on experience, expertise and luck. Though the Company had been in the right place at the right time, the success of the partners to gain control can not be fully based upon mere luck. First, the Company needed the support of England, for it was British goods they sold to the Indians and the Company had to acquire these goods from London. Convincing the British government was not difficult: England had just lost control over a significant amount of territory on the continent and gaining any economic advantage would be better than losing all power in America.

When the British officials in the southern colonies realized that the Americans were going to win the war for independence, they wasted no time securing as much remaining power as they could in Florida. This was especially true of Governor Patrick Tonyn. As British Loyalists in Georgia and South Carolina flooded into Florida to escape the war, the southern Indians were desperate to keep their British friends in power. Governor Tonyn and Indian superintendent Thomas Brown also wanted to continue the good trade and friendship with the Creek Indians. The Indians themselves did not want to become dependent on American traders for supplies, but if the British could not supply them, the Indian leaders knew that the bulk of the Indian population would go elsewhere to secure the goods. Indian leaders did not want to trade with the Americans for many southern Indian tribes disliked the patriots because

they continually settled on Indian lands. Thus, the British and Indians were more than willing to work out a compromise.

While the British evacuation continued, Panton, Leslie and Company took over the majority of the Indian trade with the blessings of Tonyn and Brown.⁷ In the original license, Tonyn and Brown stated that they “have constituted and appointed, them, the said William Panton, William Alexander, John Leslie, Thomas Forbes, and Charles McLatchy, Indian traders for the aforesaid Creek, Cherokee, Chickasaw and Choctaw nations, giving and granting unto them these our letter of license for that purpose, with full power and authority to fix stores on the said river Appalachicola, . . .”⁸ The Company set up trading posts close to the Creek Indian villages for easy access. Trade continued to go well for the Indians and British while the evacuation continued, however when the Spanish were about to take control of the territory, Tonyn, Brown and Panton realized the trade could continue only if the Spanish permitted it. Tonyn therefore wrote a letter to the new Spanish official advising him to let the Company continue the trade.⁹ “The partners, he advised, had contributed greatly to the province’s well being through “maintaining cordial harmony and trade with the Indian nations”; he recommended granting them the trading privileges they sought.”¹⁰

⁷Patrick Tonyn to Panton, Leslie and Company, January 15, 1783, MC, Exhibit #26AA, *The Papers of Panton, Leslie, and Company*.

⁸Patrick Tonyn to Panton, Leslie and Company, January 15, 1783, MC, Exhibit #26AA, *The Papers of Panton, Leslie and Company*.

⁹Watson, 549.

¹⁰Ibid. 549, Tonyn to O’Neill, September 19, 1783, AHN Leg. 3901, Exp.5; LEF p. 190. *The Papers of Panton, Leslie and Company*.

The new Spanish governor of Florida, Vincente Manuel de Zepedes, arrived in St. Augustine on June 27, 1784 to take control of the territory. He brought with him his staff and five hundred soldiers and their families, all of whom were completely dependent upon the Spanish government for their supplies. “When his government was fully established, Zepedes had from 1,500 to 1,800 people for whom he had to provide a basic diet of flour and salt meat.”¹¹ The first people he turned to for help were those men who could supply him with provisions: British merchants.

With Tonym’s help, Panton, Leslie and Company was brought to the attention of the Spanish officials before the arrival of Zepedes. In a letter sent from Tonym to Lieutenant Colonel Arturo O’Neill, Pensacola’s Spanish military commander, Tonym recommended that the Panton, Leslie and Company be protected and supported by Spain. He stated that “the above named gentlemen (Panton, Leslie and Company) have resolved to proceed with their plan of establishing a business house in Apalachicola, which, by reason of its advantageous situation and abundant supply of goods, can be a leading factor in keeping the Indians and particularly the Creeks, from going to the northern states in search of necessities.”¹² Thus, this would prevent the Indians from trading with the Americans, the common enemy of both England and Spain. This letter gave Panton, Leslie and Company the support of the British government in continuing the Indian trade in Spanish Florida. Because England backed the Company, Spain was forced to consider seriously the possibility of

¹¹Tebeau, 90.

¹²Patrick Tonym to Arturo O’Neill, September 19, 1783, AHN Leg. 3901, Exp. 5; LEF p. 190. *The Papers of Panton, Leslie and Company*.

allowing Panton and his partners to continue their trade. However, the support of England was not enough to convince Spain to give the Company complete control.

While Tonyn was fighting for the success of Panton, Leslie and Company in America, Thomas Forbes was in London gaining support for the Company by influencing Spain's ambassador, the Marques Del Campo. Forbes pointed out to Campo that not only did the Indians prefer trading with the British but Panton, Leslie and Company was more than able to successfully manage the trade in Florida if they were allowed access to the markets in London. Another factor Forbes cleverly suggested to the Marques was that Spain did not manufacture the trade items the Indians wanted and Spain had no need for the deerskins the Indians traded with. Forbes then recommended that the Company continue trading in Florida and from locations the Indians were familiar with.¹³

After the letters were received by the Spanish officials from both Tonyn and Forbes, Spain had to make a decision. However, there was hesitation on the part of Bernardo de Galvez, the Spanish governor of Louisiana. Galvez was opposed to the idea of using British Loyalists as Indian traders. He wanted Spanish merchants to establish their own trade with the Indians, thus allowing Spanish subjects to collect the profits, not British merchants. While Galvez planned to give the Spanish Indian trader Gilberto Antonio de Maxent the Indian trade, Panton, Leslie and Company had just secured the support of Alexander McGillivray, the Chief of the Creek nation.¹⁴

¹³Thomas Forbes to Davis, Strachan and Co., September 20, 1783, AGS, Leg. 4246, Thomas Forbes to Marques del Campo, September 22, 1783, AGS, Leg. 8138; EPP; WP (6 pp.), Thomas Forbes to Marques del Campo, September 28, 1783, AGS leg. 8138; AHN Estado. Leg. 4246, *The Papers of Panton, Leslie and Company*.

¹⁴Watson, 550-551.

Swaying McGillivray to support Panton and his merchants was a decisive move against the plans of Galvez, which came at the perfect time. McGillivray, prompted by Thomas Brown and William Panton, soon met to discuss peace terms with O'Neill and ask for the protection of Spain against the Americans.¹⁵ McGillivray gave his support to the British trade system and to Panton, Leslie and Company in particular. He stated in a letter to O'Neill that "Panton, Forbes and Company (had) the only means to keep the Americans from taking all the trade of this Nation, they have already sent a great quantity of goods amongst us . . ." and that unless "the Spanish government doesn't answer our expectations, I (McGillivray) shall be very sorry that I shall be obliged to take the American offers . . ."¹⁶ O'Neill did not take long to decide that he would protect the Creeks from the Americans; however, he was not sure about the situation with Panton, Leslie and Company.

With Governor Galvez in Louisiana still hoping for the Spanish merchant Maxent to take control of the Indian trade, the Panton partners were about to have competition. This time, however, it was luck that helped the Company, for the situation with New Orleans trader Maxent soon resolved itself. Maxent was charged with smuggling and was arrested, but soon another problem arose with a trading firm called Mather and Strother. Mather and Strother had the support for the Indian trade from Estevan Miro, acting governor of Louisiana for Galvez. This situation was more complicated than the problems with Maxent and a rivalry continued between the

¹⁵Watson, 551-553.

¹⁶Alexander McGillivray to Arturo O'Neill, March 26, 1784, AHN; AGI; CM; WH. P.; ANC; EFP. *The Papers of Panton, Leslie and Company*.

companies for years. Mather and Strother were granted trading access to Spanish West Florida by Miro, while Panton Leslie and Company was granted trading access to Spanish East Florida under Governor Zespedes.¹⁷ Panton, Leslie and Company had been granted a trading license by Zespedes in June 1784.¹⁸ Panton and his partners, however, apparently ignored Miro's order that they were not supposed to trade with the Choctaw and Chickasaw Indians in Spanish West Florida.¹⁹ The Panton Company traded with whomever they saw fit and was clever enough to sell their merchandise at lower prices than the Americans, and, more importantly, than Mather and Strother.²⁰ This practice undermined both the influence of the Americans, the rival trade company and the influence of the Spanish government. It also gave more power to the partners of Panton, Leslie and Company. By ignoring Miro's order, the Company traded in East and West Florida, thus underselling Mather and Strother in their own territory and the Americans and swaying what little influence the Spanish had gained from the Indians to the Company's side. Panton and his partners were able to direct the entire trade business through these practices.

The Spanish officials and the government did not let this influence go unnoticed. The Marques del Campo had noted that the English merchant's trade with the southern Indians was making them wealthy and that the Indians were loyal to the

¹⁷Watson, 553-559.

¹⁸Helen Hornbeck Tanner, *Zespedes in East Florida, 1874-1790* (Jacksonville: University of North Florida Press, 1989), p. 57.

¹⁹Estevan Miro to William Panton, September 5, 1786, EFP Leg. 114J9, *The Papers of Panton, Leslie and Company*.

²⁰Watson, 557-559.

merchants rather than Spain.²¹ Heavier restrictions on both Panton and Mather and Strother were soon enforced. The Panton Company had some of its vessels impounded and commercial restrictions were enforced at the Company's St. Marks store. This was Miro's way of attacking the Panton firm. Because Governor Zespedes had supported Panton and the partners when he first arrived in Florida, Panton complained to him about the restrictions.²² In a letter from Panton to Zespedes, Panton threatened to leave Florida unless Zespedes removed the restrictions from the St. Marks store.²³ Both Zespedes and Miro knew they could not afford to lose the Panton Company. If they did, the Indians would give their trade to the Americans.

Panton understood the threat he made to the Spanish and he pushed to receive even more privileges than before. He wrote the Spanish officials and stated that his Company must receive exclusive rights to trade with the Choctaws and Chickasaws who resided in West Florida. If Spain agreed to his proposal, Mather and Strother would be out of the competition. Miro declined the proposal but decided to give a portion of the West Florida trade to the Company, for even he knew Spain could not afford to lose Panton.²⁴ When Panton refused the offer, Miro was infuriated. In 1788,

²¹Marques del Campo to Conde de Floridablanca, September 5, 1786, AGI Sto. D. 2670; WP Reel 2,, AHN Leg. 3885 bis., Exp 8. *The Papers of Panton, Leslie and Company*.

²²Watson, 560.

²³William Panton to Governor Zespedes, January 8, 1788, EF, Leg. 116L9, *The Papers of Panton, Leslie and Company*.

²⁴Panton to Miro, August 5, 1788, ANH, Estado, Leg. 3901, Exp. 3., *The Papers of Panton, Leslie and Company*.

the King of Spain ordered the officials in Florida to grant both Mather and Panton authorization to import supplies for one more year. This extra year would allow Spain time to figure out how to deal with the problem.²⁵

Meanwhile, Mather and Strother were having their own problems. Their imports from England had not supported the demands of the Choctaws and Chickasaws of West Florida. The Company was having financial troubles and was failing. Miro was forced to ask Panton to help. He wrote Panton in February 1789 and asked if the Company would take over the trade routes of Mather and Strother.²⁶ One month later, Spain granted both companies the right to trade with the Indian tribes and more importantly exempted the firms from import and export duties. This greatly helped Panton, Leslie and Company, but by the time the order was issued, Mather and Strother could not recover financially.²⁷ Mather and Strother had failed and left Panton, Leslie and Company ready to control the entire Indian trade. It was not long after that Panton, Leslie and Company had a tax-free monopolization over all the Indian trade in East and West Florida with the blessings of the Spanish government. The partners had achieved what all other merchants and firms had been striving for, the complete control over the gulf coast Indian trade. Panton, Leslie and Company grew in size and wealth as it continued to gain power well into the 1790s.

²⁵Watson, 562.

²⁶Miro to Panton, February 28, 1789, *The Papers of Panton, Leslie & Company*. Watson, 562.

²⁷Watson, 562-563.

BARGAINING WITH AMERICA

The influence of Panton, Leslie and Company over the Florida territory grew as the firm gained great wealth through the Indian trade and through the privileges the Company obtained from the Spanish government in 1789. The Company now controlled the East Florida trade through licenses granted by Governor Zespedes and the West Florida trade through Governor Miro, and through the failure of the Mather and Strother firm. "Panton, Leslie and Company was a major enterprise with \$80,000 in credits available through London merchants."¹ The Company was also about to become "one of the largest landowners and real estate speculators in the Southeast."² Each partner directed his share of the business whether it was from the trade outlets of Nassau, Saint Augustine, London, Mobile, Pensacola, New Orleans or Havana. The Company operated trading posts on the Apalachicola River, the Mississippi River, the St. John's and St. Mary's Rivers. The firm owned over fifteen seagoing ships and several smaller watercrafts. In Pensacola alone, the Company employed fifteen merchants who controlled \$50,000 in stocked supplies. Panton, Leslie and Company and its successors were so successful that many traders in the area looked to the partners with envy over their trade monopoly in Florida.³

Before the turn of the century, the Company enjoyed huge success. Nevertheless, the firm experienced a number of setbacks before the Company changed its name to

¹Tebeau, 96.

²Coker, Watson and Wright, xii.

³Ibid. 97.

John Forbes and Company. For instance, the Americans had been placing their own merchant traders near the Spanish and United States border in order to attract the Indians to American goods and away from the supplies offered by Panton, Leslie and Company.⁴ Another blow the firm was dealt was that one of their most prized possessions, the partnership the Company had found with Alexander McGillivray, abruptly ended. McGillivray died unexpectedly in 1793 and with his death died the Company's personal grip over the Creek Indians. The Company "lost money after Alexander McGillivray's death, but the Spanish governors, appreciating their great services, induced them to continue."⁵ William Panton had serious reservations about staying and continuing business in Florida after McGillivray's death. The Americans were encroaching near Spain's northern border and at the western border at an alarming rate, trying to take all of Florida from the Spanish. The Americans were also trying to sway the Indian trade to their direction via American merchant traders; the firm had lost McGillivray's contacts, and the Company had extended large amounts of credit to the Indians. Some Indians did not have the money to pay the Company or just did not want to pay. Either way, the debts to the firm grew and they grew with interest.⁶ This credit, which had not been paid to the firm, was mounting and causing serious cash shortages at the trading posts.

⁴Zespedes to Jose de Galvez, June 20, 1785, AHN Leg. 3901 Exp.5; AGI Sto.D. 2543 SC; LEF . . . , *The Papers of Panton, Leslie and Company*.

⁵Greenslade, "William Panton", 119.

⁶John Upchurch, "Aspects of the Development and Exploration of the Forbes Purchase," Florida Historical Quarterly 48 (June 1967-April 1970), 118.

Another problem the Company had to contend with was a trader named William Augustus Bowles. Bowles was a British Loyalist, like the Panton partners, who had operated as a merchant in the British colonies. When the British were defeated in the American Revolution, he moved from the colonies to the Bahamas along with hundreds of other Loyalists.⁷ At the same time, the Panton Company, with the help of Thomas Forbes, was becoming quite successful and rich through the Indian trade in British Florida. With the trading base at Nassau, the Forbes' brothers controlled the Company from the island. Panton, Forbes and Leslie were popular and wealthy businessmen operating in Florida and the Bahamas, which made Bowles and his followers envious of them.⁸

The Bahamas had become, with the influx of the British Loyalists, entangled with political factions. The Panton partners, having spent considerable time in the Bahamas, were part of a faction known as the Board of American Loyalists, whose members were all wealthy refugees. The political group Bowles belonged to, the Conch faction, consisted of poorer Loyalists who were against the Board of American Loyalists with regard to the monopoly the Panton house held over the Indian trade. The problem with Bowles and the Company stemmed from these political factions. Because Bowles had married a Creek woman, he had his own connections with the Indians and felt it was not fair that the Company had the monopoly on the Indian

⁷Coker, Watson and Wright, 114-115.

⁸Tebeau, 97.

trade. Bowles and his associates decided to attack Panton, Leslie and Company and break their trade monopoly to help their faction gain more support.⁹

Bowles had the backing of the Governor of the Bahamas, Lord Dunmore, who disliked the firm “because he had been forced to return a seized vessel of (the) house.”¹⁰ With Bowles’s Creek connections, he tried to supplant the control the Panton firm had on the Indian trade. He plundered the firm’s St. Mark’s trading store along with several ships and was a constant irritant to the Company. After years of trying to seize and arrest Bowles for smuggling and crimes against the Panton firm, the Spanish government finally captured him with the help of the Indians. John Forbes describes Bowles as “a perfect Vagabond, without the means of subsistence, except by Robbery, plunder, & imposture; wherein he has been too successful by the delusion he practiced upon a parcell of credulous ignorant Savages.”¹¹ After his capture, Bowles was imprisoned in Havana and died there in 1805.¹²

While the ever-present problem of William Augustus Bowles plagued the Company, the partners continually tried to collect the debt owed to the firm by the Indians. After not having much success in collecting the debts themselves and with no help from the King of Spain, the Company had decided to seek help from the United States.¹³ Asking the United States government was a big step for Loyalist William

⁹Coker, Watson and Wright, 114-115.

¹⁰Greenslade, “William Panton”, 120.

¹¹John Forbes to ?, Greenslade, “William Panton”, 121.

¹²Coker, Watson and Wright, 241-242.

¹³Upchurch, 119.

Panton, but the money was desperately needed to keep the Company solvent. Also by this time, John Forbes had become prominent in the Company and unlike his brother and the original partners, he did not harbor the hatred of the Americans. It would be wrong to think John Forbes viewed the United States as a friend, but he did not experience the problems the others had had with the American government during the Revolution. Therefore, he was more willing to deal with them.¹⁴ Forbes became the partner who first solicited the help of the United States when dealing with the collection of Indian debts.

In 1796, Forbes met with United States agent John McKee. It was McKee's job to deal with the Cherokee Indians and Forbes needed to secure the debts owed to the Company by the Cherokee and other tribes. Panton estimated two figures, \$282,445 of debt in 1797 and \$173, 141 in 1803.¹⁵ In both cases, the Indians were in serious debt to the firm. Forbes reasoned that the United States could help solve part of the firm's cash flow problem because many of the Indians who were in debt to the Company lived in U.S. territory. These Indians once lived under Spanish rule but when Spain and the United States signed the Treaty of San Lorenzo in 1795, Spain had surrendered access to the territory above the thirty-first parallel to the Americans. This made many Indians residents of America and not of Spanish Florida. Forbes and McKee's meeting was to be the first bargaining with the United States government the Company had attempted.¹⁶

¹⁴Coker, Watson, and Wright, 363-366.

¹⁵Ibid. 227.

¹⁶ Ibid. 226-231.

After the meeting, McKee assured the firm that “the U.S. government would facilitate the company’s efforts to collect its debts from those same Indians.”¹⁷ The partners realized that to secure these debts from those Indians who now lived inside American territory that they would have to bargain with American officials and devise a suitable plan. The plan was for the Indians to sell pieces of their land to the United States. Once the United States secured the land, the American government would pay the Company for the Indian debts. This way, the United States would gain more territory and the Company would receive the cash it needed. However, for this promise, the Company had to persuade those Indians to ally themselves with the United States if America ever went to war. Though war never came, McKee and the firm decided on a plan that would repay Pantón’s debts and benefit the United States. “Later developments revealed that both McKee and Pantón considered cessions of Indian lands an acceptable form of reimbursement.”¹⁸ Nevertheless, when McKee presented the plan to the American government, he had a hard time gaining immediate support from the United States. The plan would not materialize until John Forbes’s meeting with United States General Wilkinson in 1804.

Though the last few years of the eighteenth century were not as easy as earlier years had been for the Company, the partners nevertheless managed to continue the trade business successfully. The firm still controlled Indian trade in Florida and the governments of the United States and Spain had to contend with the influence the firm had in the territory. The United States had been trying for years to supplant the

¹⁷Coker, Watson and Wright, 229.

¹⁸Ibid. 229.

Company by putting in its own Indian traders close to the border to try to pull customers away from the firm.¹⁹ This tactic only pushed the Company to settle their debts faster through the sale of the land they received as payment for debt. Even with the threat of American traders, the firm was still able to hold the monopoly on the Indian trade.²⁰ There was no business, political or economical, that the Panton-Forbes Company was not involved in in this territory. Due to the Company's enormous influence, the United States had to negotiate with the Company.

During the negotiations with the United States over the debt collection of the Indians, William Panton began to talk of retiring and moving back to Scotland.²¹ Panton had come to rely on John Forbes, who was a junior partner at the time. Physically sick and weary from the Company problems, Panton sailed to Havana, seeking a better climate. He died in his sleep en route back to the Bahamas, after Spanish officials forced the ship to leave Havana. With the death of Panton on February 26, 1801, the Company changed names and was largely controlled by John Forbes, hence the Company's new name, John Forbes and Company.²²

By 1804, John Forbes and Company had lost four of the original partners. Thomas and John Forbes continued with the business under the new name of John

¹⁹ McGillivray to Zespedes, May 22, 1785, AHN Leg. 3901, Exp 5; WP Sto. D.2543, Reel 43; Zespedes to Galvez, August 22, 1785 ANH Leg. 3901, Exp 5, LEF pp. 686-687; EFF: b42 04. *The Papers of Panton, Leslie and Company*.

²⁰Upchurch, 118.

²¹Panton to John Forbes, April 26, 1800, *The Papers of Panton, Leslie and Company*, Coker, Watson and Wright, 234.

²²Coker, Watson, and Wright, 233-235.

Forbes and Company. Other partners within the firm were now given the chance to advance. Two new partners in the Forbes Company were James Innerarity and William Simpson. James's younger brother, John Innerarity, would join the Forbes Company in 1812.²³ These men would carry the old Panton house into the new century. As Coker points out, the partners of Panton, Leslie and Company based the Company's success mainly on the Indian trade. The partners of John Forbes and Company however, mostly focused their business on "collecting the debts of the Indians."²⁴ By the time Forbes took over, the business of trade had well been established and most of the fortune made.

The practice of extending credit to customers was not unknown to Panton, Leslie and Company. The firm had extended credit to a number of people, Indians and settlers alike. The Spanish government was even in debt to the Company. Indian debts began as early as the 1778, though at this time some of the payments were being made.²⁵ The British government used the Company's naval services and at times was indebted to the firm.²⁶ During the 1780s the Company was not focused on collecting the payments. However, when the firm began to have problems with the Spanish government, with Bowles, and with the Americans, they focused on collecting

²³Coker, Watson and Wright, 364.

²⁴Ibid. 364.

²⁵General Account, November 5, 1779, Debts paid to Panton, Leslie and Company from expenses from June 25, 1778 to June 24, 1779 in East Florida. PRO CO 5/559, *The Papers of Panton, Leslie and Company*.

²⁶General Account, December 7, 1780, naval expenses in East Florida, paid to Leslie, Panton, Alexander and Forbes. PRO CO 5/560 (4 pp.). *The Papers of Panton, Leslie and Company*.

those debts. After Panton died, Forbes concentrated most of his efforts on solving the problem of debt-collection. While pressuring the Indians to pay their debts seemed to work when Forbes talked with them, the money never showed up. Soon Forbes was forced to bargain with the United States.

From the American view, Florida and Louisiana were coveted both for their potential economic resources and for the land itself. When the United States purchased the Louisiana territory in April of 1803, John Leslie was told by James Monroe, envoy extraordinary to President Thomas Jefferson, that Mobile was considered to be within the boundaries of the purchase. Leslie, who was in London at the time, quickly informed the partners that the Forbes' traders operating in and around the Mobile area might need to consider becoming U.S. citizens so that the interests of the firm would be protected. The partners knew well that the Americans were not only approaching them from above, but now from the west.²⁷ The firm's Indian monopoly was eventually going to fall and the partners could see this. Forbes and the others felt it was imperative to collect the debts in case the firm collapsed in the next few years.

In order to collect the debts from the Chickasaw, Choctaw, and Cherokee nation Indians, Forbes looked to his friend, United States General Wilkinson. The two devised with a plan in 1804 that was very similar to the one Forbes had discussed with McKee. "Forbes would apply pressure on the Indians to cede land to the United States. The United States would then pay the Indians for the land. The Indians, in

²⁷Coker, 66.

turn, would use the money to pay their debts to the company.”²⁸ The plan did work and the Forbes Company received a large portion of the money that was owed it. After the plan was carried out, the Indians felt that they had overpaid.²⁹ However, the land was now under the ownership of the Americans and the title was legal. John Forbes and Company would find that after the land was cessioned, trading with the these Indians became less cordial than before because the tribes were not happy with the amount of land the United States took.³⁰

This plan with the Americans worked both for the Company and the Americans. Each obtained what they wanted: the United States received precious land and the Company received its money. This time, bargaining with the United States proved to be beneficial to the firm. While Forbes was negotiating and carrying out the plan with General Wilkinson, other members of the Company began to take similar action toward the Indians inside Spanish territory who were also indebted to the firm. By 1804, the Seminoles and Creek Indians also owed large amounts of money to the firm. The Company applied pressure to these Indians to repay their debts; however, this time the Company was going to cession the land and keep it, for these Indians lived in Spanish territory and were not subject to American jurisdiction. The Company therefore had no need to involve the United States, thus the United States was not involved in this land cession.³¹

²⁸Coker, 66.

²⁹Ibid. 61.

³⁰Ibid. 61.

³¹Ibid. 61.

In 1804, the firm planned to cede land to balance the Indian debt of the Creeks and Seminoles. This time the partners met with the Indians and an agreement was reached in May of that year. The territory they received for payment “was bounded on the west and east by the Apalachicola and Wakulla rivers respectively; by the Gulf of Mexico, including offshore islands, to the south; and by an irregular, then undefined line to the north, extending far back into the interior.”³² Even with the large tract of land the Indians ceded to the Company, Indian debts to the firm again rose during the next few years. John Forbes and Company soon found itself back in the same situation in 1811 that it had been in in 1804.

“For the next seven years West Florida was the object of conquest by filibusters” and the Americans were about to go to war in 1812.³³ Though the Forbes Company expanded into the markets of New Orleans, the trade in Pensacola was not growing. Trade was becoming a difficult and dangerous business as the United States, Spain and France fought for control of the area. The Forbes Company had in 1804, about the same time it had applied pressure to the Creek and Seminoles to pay their debts, worked with the United States to cession the Choctaw, Chickasaw and Cherokee land for payment of debts. However, in 1807 the Company was still owed monies from the Creek and Seminole Indians.

In 1811, Forbes asked the Spanish for permission to cede other tracts of land from Indians who were indebted to the Company. Spain had agreed and in January of

³²Upchurch, 119.

³³Coker, 66

1811, the Seminoles ceded three large tracts of land to the Forbes Company.³⁴ John Forbes himself received as a gift from the Seminoles an island that was about seven miles long. “The total acreage of the various grants was then unknown, but the Purchase was estimated to contain probably less, but certainly no more than one million and a half of acres.”³⁵

John Forbes and Company soon found itself to be among one of the largest landowners in the Florida territory. After the land cessions, the Forbes traders realized the relationship with their Indian customers was not as pleasant as it had been before. There was also the problem of what to do with the land they now owned. The Company had plans for the land. Forbes had wanted to sell it to speculators or settlers. But this did not come to pass, for the War of 1812 was about to begin and Indian hostilities were at an all-time-high. Nevertheless, the partners decided to sell the land to a buyer. During the war, Forbes and the others realized that the Americans were eventually going to take over the territory and run the Indian trade themselves. By 1817, the partners agreed to sell the land for a lump sum. They found a buyer in October named Colin Mitchel and Forbes applied for permission from the Spanish to sell the immense tract of land. The Spanish agreed to the sale of the land and not long after, John Forbes retired. He left James and John Innerarity to finalize the Company’s business and to close out the firm.³⁶

³⁴Upchurch, 120.

³⁵Ibid. 120.

³⁶Ibid. 121-122.

“The John Forbes Company’s Indian trade in Florida was a complicated and difficult business.”³⁷ Though Pantón, Leslie and Company experienced difficulties throughout the 1780s and 1790s, John Forbes and Company had added problems during the first decade of the new century. Forbes and his partners could see the end of the firm approaching as the Americans took more and more territory. “To the ordinary difficulties to which the merchant was generally subject were added the problems of recalcitrant Indian clients, the dislocations of the European wars, the hostility of some Spanish citizens and officials, and the attacks of the Americans.”³⁸ The firm was also experiencing a serious cash flow problem that could only be solved if it recalled the numerous debts owed to it by the Indians. The partners had to bargain with the United States for some of these debts, for the many Indians who owed the firm money lived in American territory. The bargaining worked for both the Americans and the firm in 1804. However, the firm had not seen the last of the United States government, for the land tracts that the Company came to own would be a constant problem for the Americans and the partners in the years to come.

³⁷David White, “The Forbes Company in Spanish Florida, 1801-1806” Florida Historical Quarterly 52 (1973-1974), 285.

³⁸Ibid. 285.

CONCLUSION

From 1783 to 1817 the trading firms of Panton, Leslie and Company and John Forbes and Company virtually dominated the Indian trade along the American gulf coast region. This trading firm accomplished a monopolization of the Indian trade that other merchants and even foreign governments could only wish for. Their domination of the Indian trade was vitally important to the Spanish government in the last years of the 1700s, for without the Company's help, the Indians would have supported the Americans instead of the Spanish. Even the Americans knew it would take years to sway the Indians over to their side if they tried to supplant the firm. By the time the Spanish and the Americans decided to challenge the Panton firm's Indian trade monopoly, it was too late. The Company was already firmly established among the Indian population. These countries literally could not compete with the experience and skill of the partners of Panton, Leslie and Company and John Forbes and Company.

The partners' monopolization of the Indian trade was not based on luck or just being in the right place at the right time, though at many times it seemed to be. The original partners of the Company had made it their career to understand the workings of the Indian trade business in the colonies. The partners on the whole were smart, clever businessmen. They came to the colonies searching for economic success. Using their capitalistic ideas, each partner made his living through the trading business. Each partner succeeded on his own in the merchant business before joining the Company. The five original partners, Panton, Leslie, Alexander, Forbes and McLatchy, were successful trading merchants in the British towns of Charleston and

Savannah in the 1770s. The coming together of these men could only have been beneficial to all. Each gave the Company his best and it showed in the profits and in the growth of the business.

From the beginning of its establishment in 1783, the Company was successful. It was not hard to predict that with such experienced and skilled merchants as William Panton, John Leslie, Thomas Forbes, and Charles McLatchy, such a trading firm would succeed. Through high political contacts such as Governor Patrick Tonyn and Indian Affairs Superintendents John Stuart and John Brown, along with their Loyalists views, the Company was granted a license by the British to trade with the Indians. The license itself was a confirmation by the British government and the Indians that the Panton firm was the only trading Company that could successfully trade with the Indians. The official license specifically stated that the Panton, Leslie and Company trading firm was “requested” by the Indians.¹ Panton, Leslie and Company had only been in business for fifteen days and was already given the Indian trade by the British crown. With this much success in so little time, it is no wonder the Company was meant to succeed and achieve even greater success.

It would seem that when the British were forced to evacuate into Florida following their defeat in the American Revolution, the Panton firm’s shortlived success would end. However, the partners in the Company were extraordinary businessmen and they were not about to give up what they had gained through hard work and well-placed contacts. As the Spanish began to take control of Florida, William Panton and Thomas Forbes went to work politically while the other partners

¹Patrick Tonyn to Panton, Leslie and Company, January 15, 1783, MC, Exhibit 26AA, *The Papers of Panton, Leslie and Company*.

directed the trade business. Using their skills at diplomacy and their friends in high places, the firm once again influenced the right people. Soon the Company and its partners were back in business, only this time with another government, the Spanish.

It was pure skill at commerce and knowing how to handle government officials that helped the Company win the Indian trade in East and West Florida. Panton, Leslie and Company established trading posts in six different areas along the gulf coast region of America. Their two stores in St. Augustine, stores on the Wakulla River, stores in Nassau Bahamas, and posts in Pensacola, Mobile, Picolata, San Fernando de Pupo, along the St. Mary's River and in the Chickasaw Bluffs, were established between the years of 1783 and 1790. With so many trading posts, the Company rapidly expanded and with the increased profits, the firm could not help but influence the entire Indian trade in the region.

Table 7.1 Coker, Watson and Wright, p. 365.

Store or trading post	Years of operation	Other data	Code ^b
St. Augustine	1783-1817		P-L and F
Lower Store [Spalding's]	1783-1790s?	Stokes Landing, St. Johns R.	P-L
Upper Store [Spalding's]	1783-?	Vohusia, St. Johns R.	P-L
Wakulla River	1783-1800	Near St. Marks	P-L
Nassau	1783-1821?	New Providence Island, Bahamas	P-L and F
Pensacola	1785-1830		P-L and F
Mobile	1790-1847		P-L and F
St. Marys River	1791-93	Near Kings Ferry	P-L
San Fernando de Pupo	1793-?	St. Johns R.	P-L
Picolata	1790s-1800s?	St. Johns R.	P-L and F?
Chickasaw Bluffs	1795-99	Memphis	P-L
Prospect Bluff	1804-14 and 1816-1820s?	Apalachicola R.	F
New Orleans	1807?-13		F
Fernandina	1811-15?	Amelia Island	F
Bon Secour	1813-14	Bon Secour Bay	F
San Marcos de Apalache	1816-21	St. Marks	F

a. See endleaves for locations of symbols in note b.

b. P-L = Panton, Leslie and Company ☐

F = John Forbes and Company ■

P-L and F = both companies ▲

With the expertise of the partners and its many political friends, the Company could not help but direct the Indian trade. When it came to influencing the Indians themselves, the firm had important contacts within the tribes. It was no coincidence that William Panton personally knew Alexander McGillivray, the Chief of the Creek nation. Panton and McGillivray's father Lachlan had very similar backgrounds. Lachlan McGillivray was originally from Scotland just like the all the partners of the Panton trading firm. Both men had operated as merchants in Georgia and South Carolina years before the American Revolution and knew each other through the merchant business. By making friends with Lachlan's son, Panton secured for his Company one of the greatest assets the firm had-- an aspiring leader in the Creek nation. As McGillivray rose in the ranks of the Creek nation, the Company gained the support of the Creek's new chief, Alexander himself. The Company and Creek Indians benefited greatly through Panton and McGillivray's friendship. The Company soon received complete control over the Creek nation's trading business, while the Indians received the supplies they desperately wanted. With business already booming, the Company could not have coerced a better supporter to their side than Chief Alexander McGillivray.

Business went well for the Company through the years; however, times began to grow hard just before the turn of the century. The Americans were gaining ground in their battle to secure more land. As they approached into Florida, the United States government tried to dislodge the stranglehold the Panton firm had over the Indians. Nevertheless, the firm stood strong for a few years and was able to hold off the

Americans through lower prices. It seemed that whenever the Company had solved one problem, another would come to replace it. William Bowles plagued the Company for years by burning the firm's trading posts and attacking the Company's cargo ships. As if that were not enough, the Company had to maneuver constantly to hold onto the Indian trade in Florida and finally when they had secured the entire trade, the Company found that the enormous amount of credit extended to the Indians which had never been paid was the next problem to solve. With so many problems, William Panton decided to retire and let John Forbes and the other partners take over.

In 1804, John Forbes took control of Panton, Leslie and Company and changed the Company's name to John Forbes and Company. John Forbes and the other men who had been partners in the Panton firm operated the Forbes Company similar to how the Panton firm had been operated. However, the Forbes and his partners concentrated most of his business on collecting the old debts from their many customers. Soon the firm found itself collecting the debts in the form of land. Forbes solved this problem by selling the land. Even with so many dilemmas, Forbes, along with his new partners, managed to continue trading and turn a nice profit. Forbes and his partners found time to open trade in the New Orleans area. Nevertheless, as the Indian trade declined with the war of 1812 and due the occupation of the area by the United States, the partners realized the end of the firm was near. The Americans had taken over too much territory and the Indians were defeated during the Creek War, so the Company could no longer survive solely on the Indian trade.

Why was this Company able to achieve such a stranglehold over the Indian trade during this period of history? First, Panton, Leslie and Company and John

Forbes and Company were not normal mercantile firms. What was distinctive about the partners who ran these Companies was their relationships with government officials.² They were constantly in the political arena, voicing their opinions and gaining notoriety. They began by befriending and helping out the British officials, who would in turn return the favor and help out the Company. As for their relationships with the Spanish officials, Spain knew how important the Indians loyalties were to the control of Florida. When the Spanish government realized the way to gain the Indians' trust was to supply them with British goods, the only way the Spanish could accomplish the task was to license the Panton firm. The firm was secure in the trade and could supply the Indians with what they wanted. After trying on their own, the Spanish officials realized that using the Company would be the only way to control the Indian tribes.

To help Spain decide in favor of the Panton Company, William Panton and the others coaxed officials with their friendship and gifts. "Over the years, the company entertained the right people lavishly (at least for a frontier trading firm) and saw to it that these gentlemen received gifts according to their ability to help the firm. These officials, more often than not, returned the favor by pleading the company's cause with the Spanish government, by permitting the company to evade customs regulations, and by assisting it in other ways in its never-ending feud with officious intendants."³ This is how the Company succeeded when it came to dealing with many of the government officials the partners came across.

²Coker, Watson and Wright, 367.

³Coker, Watson and Wright, 369.

The partners of Panton, Leslie and Company and John Forbes and Company were extraordinary businessmen. It was through the genius of the five original partners that the firm succeeded as the largest, most influential trading firm for the Indian trade along the gulf coast region of America. The firm was able to gain the blessings of the British government to direct the Indian trade during the 1780s. The partners also secured, through various actions, the blessings of the Spanish government during their occupation of Florida from the 1790s until the Americans took over the territory after the War of 1812. The partners were successful in trading as well as diplomacy. Their experience and skill made them among of the most coveted businessmen in the Indian trade. Thus, through hard work, skill, experience, diplomacy, contacts and gentlemen-like charm, the partners of Panton, Leslie and Company and John Forbes and Company created a monopoly over the Indian trade which they alone controlled for over twenty years.

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