
6-1-1984

***Juan Nepomuceno de Quesada: Governor of Spanish East Florida,
1790-1795*** by Janice Borton Miller

Jack D. L. Holmes

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/tampabayhistory>

Recommended Citation

Holmes, Jack D. L. (1984) "*Juan Nepomuceno de Quesada: Governor of Spanish East Florida, 1790-1795* by Janice Borton Miller," *Tampa Bay History*. Vol. 6 : Iss. 1 , Article 9.

Available at: <https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/tampabayhistory/vol6/iss1/9>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Open Access Journals at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Tampa Bay History by an authorized editor of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact scholarcommons@usf.edu.

achievements. An international flavor adds to this many-faceted image. It is important always to remember that Florida lies on the northern rim of a Hispanic world that reaches across the southern United States to the Pacific Ocean and down through Mexico and Central and South America. Like other cities on that rim, Tampa is a gateway to both the Hispanic and the Anglo-American worlds.

Only recently have we come to realize that the Florida Indians were more numerous and much more highly civilized than was commonly supposed. This is nowhere more evident than on the Gulf Coast of Florida. Perhaps the total disappearance of those Indians long before the state's belated modern development accounts for that oversight.

The early part of the story is told in imaginative and sweeping statements, often quite perceptive. This inevitably leads to some oversimplification and distortion, and may invite some nitpicking. Juan Ponce de Leon deserves more than the Fountain of Youth as his motivation for exploring Florida. Hernando de Soto was the first of the explorers to be primarily a gold seeker. It is to the credit of the authors that they do not claim to know where he actually landed in Florida. Tampa Bay was a most likely place. Hopefully, it will remain Florida's greatest mystery.

The Gasparilla festival best typifies the legendary aspect of Tampa's story, and the writers give it its proper place in history. One character was very real indeed, John Gomez, himself a legendary figure, who is credited with telling the story. He was a well known figure on the southwest coast a century ago.

Tampa, like Miami, waited for the railroad, aptly termed "the Messiah," to come into its own. Until the rails opened the way into the hinterland, the city's magnificent harbor had only a local and limited use. Then within a century, a modern metropolis developed. Tampa overcame a late start, and quickly transcended but never forgot its Indian, Spanish, Italian, and Cuban heritage or its romantic frontier flavor.

The final section of the book provides accounts of some of Tampa's business and cultural institutions and biographies of some of its leaders, recording information available nowhere else.

Charlton W. Tebeau

Juan Nepomuceno de Quesada: Governor of Spanish East Florida, 1790-1795. By Janice Borton Miller. Washington, D.C. 1981. University Press of America. Maps. Bibliography. Index. Pp. ix, 184. Paper. \$15.99.

Juan Nepomuceno de Quesada y Barnuevo was the second of seven Spanish governors ruling East Florida from St. Augustine between the close of the American Revolution in 1784 and American occupation in 1821. He succeeded the brilliant Vicente Manuel de Céspedes y Velasco in 1790, and apparently left office in 1795. These were critical years in world history in general and on the Spanish-American frontier in particular. The French Revolution affected Spanish defenses throughout America; it was Quesada's task to handle Florida defenses. He did so with disgruntled troops who grumbled at their lengthy pay arrears and with little support from his

direct superior, Captain-general Luis de las Casas in Havana. In addition, Quesada had to contend with the increasingly bellicose attitude of American frontiersmen greedy to occupy the fertile lands below the St. Mary's River, the international threats posed by William Augustus Bowles and his dream of creating an Indian empire in Florida, and, perhaps most critical of all, the changing economic "rules of the game" forced upon Spain as a result of the international situation.

Dr. Miller chose this topic for her doctoral dissertation at Florida State University (1974) under the direction of Professor J. Leitch Wright, world renowned authority on Anglo-Spanish rivalry in Florida. Since the dissertation is available from University microfilms, the *raison d'être* for this barely-modified version is unclear. Moreover, the subject is not adequately covered. Who was this governor, where was he born, when did he die, when did he turn over the office to his successor? These are just a few of the unanswered questions.

Rather than complain about what the author has *not* done, let us see how she has handled what she has done. Her study is hardly a step above a graduate seminar paper and pales by contrast with such recent studies of Florida as Amy Bushnell's brilliant examination of Spain's financial organization in Florida between 1565 and 1702 (*The King's Coffer*, Florida, 1981) or the study of Quesada's predecessor, *Céspedes* by Helen H. Tanner (Miami, 1963). Because Miller does not really understand Spanish administration, she assumes for Quesada extraordinary powers which he had neither in theory nor practice. In the search for free trade, for example, she assumes the settlers had some God-given right to do what they wanted, notwithstanding the monopoly over the Indian trade exercised by the firm of Panton, Leslie and Company. She spends useless time describing a situation of free trade that was only a suggestion, never a realization (pp. 66-70). In her study of educational opportunities, she cites the regulation for admitting "American Nobles" to the College of Granada without any follow-up concerning how many youngsters from Florida actually attended, who they were, how they got to Spain, whether they returned, or any concrete facts concerning the actual working of the college. (See pp. 44-45).

Perhaps the failure of this book may be attributed to the sources used. Principally, they are the East Florida Papers, consulted in microfilm form at FSU. Had the author taken the time and effort to use the P.K. Yonge Library of Florida History at the University of Florida, she could have answered many questions about Quesada's family background, his almost-chronic belly-aching, and his inability as an administrator to get along with his superiors or subordinates. While the author has used selected documents from the Archivo General de Indias, she has not really explored in depth the documentation concerning Quesada's Florida career.

If the book is so bad, how did it get published? How could so many typographical errors appear in a supposedly scholarly work? How could bibliographical references be so wrong (I can't recall who Frederick Jason Turner was, p. 173; I can find no copy of Bolton's *Spanish Borderlands* published at Norman by the University of Georgia press in 1964, *ibid.*). If the typist lacked the ñ of Spanish, why didn't an editor insert it by hand? The explanation is simple. The University Press of America has nothing to do with any university press. The quality of its books depends totally on the author; all errors are reproduced in print from the typed manuscript, which is sent "camera-ready." The binding of the paperback is so bad my review book fell apart before

I wrote this. The tragedy is that the uninformed public, seeking books on Spanish Florida, are tempted to buy this press's offerings, the quality of which, at least in Florida history, is very low.

As for Quesada, perhaps he does not need another study at all. From the information given by Miller, he was not an effective example of Spanish administration on the Florida Borderlands.

Jack D. L. Holmes

My Work among the Florida Seminoles. By James Lafayette Glenn. Orlando. 1982. University Presses of Florida. Index. Photographs. Maps. Pp. xiii, 121. \$12.00.

The 1930s was a watershed period in federal Indian policies. John Collier, a well known social reformer, was appointed Commissioner of Indian Affairs with a mandate to draft a New Deal for Indian people. For the first time in over a century, the federal government made a sincere effort to exercise its fiduciary responsibility over Indian resources within a framework designed to enable self-determination and the preservation of tribal cultures. Such reforms were urgently needed throughout Indian country, and especially by the Seminoles in south Florida who had been dislocated and pressed into desperate poverty by the land boom and everglades drainage projects of the preceding decades.

It perhaps comes as no surprise that the hoped-for results of Collier's program failed substantially to materialize. Although the reasons for this failure are complex, part of the problem stemmed from the frequent lack of reciprocal support between the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Washington and the field personnel charged with implementation. James L. Glenn's account of his tenure as agent to the Seminoles between 1931 and 1936 represents an interesting case study of the gap between reforms enacted at the federal level and the intervening political and economic realities that militated against successful outcomes at the community level. This work also represents a useful commentary on the political economy of south Florida during the era and offers particularly valuable information about the Seminoles. As the editor points out, Glenn's description of the Indians' relationship with the larger world around them indicates a much greater interdependence than is conveyed in the conventional image of everglades isolation.

This document, which is presented in the form of a long letter to Glenn's niece in Tampa, was written some ten years after he was involuntarily terminated from the Indian Service. Much of what he says has the sound of a long simmering self-vindication and an effort to document accomplishments that his superiors in Washington failed to appreciate.

Prior to his appointment, Glenn had been a minister of a church in Everglades City. This account, however, reflects more concern with the Seminoles' material deprivation and the daily injustices they were forced to bear than with the condition of their immortal souls. In many ways, the author seems like the ideal sort of civil servant to have acted as a foot soldier in Collier's crusade. Glenn was evidently hardworking, intelligent, and humane – refusing to join his predecessor in the conclusion that the Seminoles' plight was hopeless. He was completely in sympathy with policies of land restoration and economic development. It was under his direction