Spanish king gave American a piece of Florida

Hampton Dunn
FORT GEORGE ISLAND --- Don Juan McQueen had a lust for land. A Philadelphian by birth, he became prominent during the Revolutionary War through his friendship with big names like Washington and Jefferson and Lafayette.

McQueen started buying vast property in South Carolina and Georgia, finally became "land poor" and his creditors took back heir land and chased McQueen down to Spanish-owned Florida. There he cuddled up to the administration, which desired friendly contacts with American big-wigs. So it was in 1791 that the King of Spain bestowed on McQueen Fort George Island at the mouth of St. Johns River. His Majesty also gave the American the fancy title of "Captain of Militia and Commandant of the St. Johns and St. Marys."

The new Floridian built some tabby houses on the island, and his own residence (photo, foreground), which later became the property of another colorful figure, Zephaniah Kingsley who housed his African princess in the McQueen House.

McQueen's family remained in Georgia and he was lonely on the island. Besides that his agricultural pursuits were failures due to bad weather. Finally, in 1904, McQueen sold the island and another large plantation at Ortega to John Houston McIntosh for $28,000.

The McQueen house, built of tabby brick and with a second story of wood, is regarded as the oldest habitable house in Duval County today, according to Dena Snodgrass of Jacksonville Historical Society.