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A visit to Florida in the early part of the
Century

In the year 1817 by Mr. Wm McChure, a geologist of Philadelphia,
A Scientific party was formed, to visit Florida while it was
yet a Spanish possession. ~~His associates were~~
Mr. McChure Geologist, Mr. Thomas Say Entomologist; Mr. George Ord,
and Mr. Titian R. Peale Ornithologists.

Mr Ord and Mr Peale, then quite young, left Philadelphia 25th
December, 1817, in the usual sailing vessel for Savannah, where they were
to join Mr. McChure and Mr. Say. At Savannah Mr. Geo. Sumner,
hearing of Mr. Peale's arrival called upon him immediately and
guided them to all places of interest in the city and surrounding ^{they then} ~~area~~
Mr. Cramer, noted for his zeal in Entomology and Botany, came to see
them also. These gentlemen made the time pass most pleasantly, while
waiting for the rest of the party. Walking with them one day, they acci-
dentally met Mr. Say, who had arrived the night before in a steam-
boat from Charleston. He conducted them to Mr. McChure - all
delighted to meet - and eager for the trip.

While Mr. McChure, the business man of the party - having gotten
it up - was engaging a vessel and laying in stores, Mr. Ord and
Mr. Peale made good use of their time, hunting in the neighborhood,
and getting many birds, which Mr. Peale preserved, and left with Mr.
Cramer until their return.

When the people learned their object - as Naturalists, to visit their

country and learn its resources - ^{boats were very hospitably} at once offered ~~their boats~~, but Mr
McClure ^{already} invariably declined, saying they had chartered a vessel.

On leaving the city the Merchants and Planters sent them letters to
every Island along the coast of Georgia. Having learned their route,
they ^{also} sent word to their friends, to offer every facility to the party. This
intended kindness, proved a great annoyance ^{for}, at every place they approach
ed, invitations were sent them to come and visit. Mr McClure ^{invariably} sent
^{answers} word always, that they were on a trip that did not admit of visiting and
that they ^{were only} ^{equipped} ^{prepared} for what they had to do.

Being ready they set sail, ^{they had engaged help besides the four} ^{scientists} ~~the ship containing all told, eight persons~~
~~the four gentlemen~~ three sailors and Mr McClure's servant. They
landed at Great-Warraw island, and began shooting, to the great alarm
of the inhabitants, who armed themselves with all possible speed, thinking
they were outlawed negroes shooting their cattle. Mr. Peale shot here
among other things, a large Baldhead Eagle. At Osaban island, he
got the large Crow-blackbird (breake) for the first time and was delighted
with the bird - shortly after Mr Ord shot another.

They were charmed with Blackbend island, on which they landed. The
interior was covered with beautiful groves of live Oak, and abounded with
Deer, that fed on the acorns. On its banks, were immense sand hills,
giving fine effect to the ^{rich} ^{dark} green, ^{glossy} foliage of the live Oak.
The waters of the inlet, were filled with multitudes of beautiful Medusae
and other ^{Luciferous} animals, ~~these~~ ^{their} phosphoric light-giving brilliancy to
the waters - ^{adding} ^{which} ^{closed} ~~and~~ ^{to their evening,} - the days ~~being~~ ^{always} crowded

with enjoyment, from their various and numerous collections.

They landed on the north end of Cumberland island and went into the interior to hunt Deer. As they were sailing around the island ^{they} got aground, and the people sent a pilot to them (though they had one on board) and insisted on their coming on shore. Finding ^{fast} the vessel ~~fast~~ in the sand, at nearly high tide, ^{and knowing that as the} ~~to avoid being on the~~ waters receded the vessel would be on her beam ends so that ~~beam ends, so that~~ they could not stand upright on deck ~~as they~~ knew they would be when the water receded ^{they} accepted the invitation.

They were taken first to Mrs. St. Simons's, by whom they were hospitably entertained, and ^{with} ~~from~~ ^{visit Mrs. Shaw at} thence to the celebrated Mansion built by Gen. Greene of Revolutionary fame - a perfect castle in dimensions - but most singular in effect - being built of concrete, ^{made of} oyster shells put into a box ^{intended} of the thickness of the walls, ^{with} plaster poured in and let stand until ^{hard} ~~formed~~ ^{thus gradually} gradually. The house was made, forming a most substantial dwelling. The walls being very thick, took a long while to make, especially with the slow slave labour, and getting impatient, they used it without plastering the interior ~~as was the custom~~. ^{of course,} The effect was incongruous - almost ludicrous, ~~when~~ sitting in the vast Hall in which they dined - on elegant imported furniture, at a most sumptuous table, ^{they saw, when they} ~~it looked up, and~~ ^{seemed quite a} ~~was a perfect~~ ^{as} ~~paradise~~ ^{with} hedges formed of Lemon, groves of Orange trees, roses and other flowers in full bloom, though it was January. From the top of the house they had a view of Amelia island, the Sea and the ^{mainland} ~~main~~ at the

same time, forming a magnificent ^{view} sight. Mr Shaw was a most
 courteous host. With the usual Southern habit, a negro was assigned
 to each one immediately on their arrival. Mrs Shaw daughter of
 Gen. Greene, was a lady of great intelligence and cultivation, well fitted
 to dispense the refined hospitalities of her luxurious and most beautiful
 home. Mr Deale saw here a painting of Sully's, a copy of ^{the} father's
 likeness of Gen. Greene ^{by his father} G. W. Deale ^{who} was the only one who painted the
 General from life. Their vessel being in readiness next day, they took
 leave of Mr Shaw and family. ~~The vessel being in readiness~~ - having enjoyed their improved visit to
 the utmost. They passed in front of Fernandina, ^{they saw at anchor} opposite which the
 United States Squadron ^{consisting of} ~~was anchored~~ the John Adams, Saranac,
 Prometheus and other smaller vessels, ~~and~~ ^{they} reached St Mary's in the
 afternoon. Mr McChase and Jay went ashore, Mr Ord and Mr Deale
~~preferred remaining on board.~~ ^{Though it} rained all the next day. ~~In the~~
~~morning~~ the Lieut. Governor of East Florida came on board and offered
 any service in his power. ~~They were detained by continued rain at~~
 St Mary's, ^{but} and on the third of February ^{they} sailed for Fernandina - which
 they found half deserted and ^{the inhabitants of} the other half almost in a state of starvation.
~~It was composed of houses one and two stories high.~~ ^{None of the} ^{were more than} They visited the
 grave yard, if it might be called one, just out of the suburbs of the town.
~~This is not peculiar to St Mary's~~ ^{according to Spanish custom} Every grave had its cross at the head - if it ^{were}
 but a stick split; another placed in it crosswise and ^{both} lashed together with an
 old suspender. There seemed to have been great mortality - helped no
 doubt by "Patriot" knives ^{for} the attention of the Fillibusters of that day ^{having}

been turned towards
~~directed to~~ Florida, they had taken possession of Amelia's island, under the
 name of Patriots - ~~which they professed to be~~, and threatening to release the
 country from Spanish rule, had gone even to the gates of St Augustine,
 not more than six months before. ^{off that time} ~~In sailing about~~, tracks of Deer were
 found within half a mile of the town. They measured one of ^{the} many
^{lying} ~~Medusa~~ on the shore - ^{found to be} it was two feet in diameter, ^{and} ~~on~~ entering St-
 John's river ^{seeing} ~~saw~~ great numbers of Porpoises. ^{were seen} The next day ^{their party} sailed thirty
 miles up the river ^{among the variety of birds}, ^{some} ~~saw~~ Fishing Pelicans and
 Whooping Cranes, ^{they} anchored nearly opposite the plantation of Mr Richards on
 the west side of the river where they got a little ^{Egret} ~~Shore~~ (Shorey Heron.) They
 sailed up the river to Cowford, delivered their letters - and soon left; find-
 ing it a miserable place, of but a few huts and the half of them without
 roofs or inhabitants. ^{ing} ~~Reported~~ the vessel, ~~and~~ they sailed along the
 river, found the clay bluff well timbered with Pine, Live Oak, Bay-
 Laurel (*Magnolia grandiflora*) and various other trees. Along the banks ^{were} ~~are~~
 a few plantations, many of them deserted or burned. They landed on one
 that belonged to Mr Craig of Savannah, ^{and} ~~there~~ ^{saw} the finest grove of Oranges
 they had yet met with - upwards of five hundred trees, many of them
 almost breaking with their load of fruit. The river was about four miles
 wide and ^{the} water quite fresh. The next day having a fair wind that blew
 almost a gale, ^{they} ~~reached~~ fort Picolata, which they found in ruins. They
 hunted all day without seeing anyone, until near night ^{when} two countrymen
 came along; hearing the guns they came to see who fired them. From
 them they learned that; that was the nearest point to St Augustine - whither

it was determined to go next day, one of the ^{men} ^{having been} ~~being~~ engaged as guide -
 to report themselves and present their Passport.

Mr Mc Clure ^{who the} was author of the first work on Geology in the United States - wishing to visit Florida to study its formation, ^{had} ^{whether} he doubted if he would be allowed to go on account of ^{constant} ^{from the north} ~~constant~~ making upon it, and ^{on} ^{that} applying to the Spanish Consul in Philadelphia for a passport - ^{was told} ~~that~~ ~~that~~ he had no authority, but would write to Spain about it. The answer was a royal passport for Mr Mc Clure and party. ^{armed} with this, he had organized his small expedition ~~formed his party~~ - but now shrank from presenting it, on account of the twenty three miles it was necessary to go, through a country entirely unprovided with accommodations of any kind. The rest of the gentlemen ^{however} undertook to do it; starting immediately after breakfast, Mr Mc Clure remaining in the sloop.

They passed through Pine barrens and Swamps, frequently up to their middle in water, the whole twenty three miles, and saw no vestige of habitation nor a single inhabitant. They arrived at the gates of the city about sundown and were obliged to enter in this ^{soiled condition} ~~dirty~~ state, to the Governor's house, which consisted of two stories, the first containing ^{the offices and} the Guard-house, into which they were shown, ~~and the offices~~ - In the second were the Governor's private apartments, ^{of the Governor} who chanced to be entertaining two British Officers that day, and the attendant no doubt when he announced that some strangers sought audience, represented that they were travellers of little consideration judging from their appearance - as he continued at dinner, leaving the gentlemen in the guard room, where

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He was ~~born in England~~ but raised in ^{Spain} Is this name correct? It does
their ^{of Irish family} ~~being~~ not seem like a Spanish name.
impatience ~~was~~ not lessened by the sound of enjoyment reaching them from
above. After a while Gov. Coppinger (afterwards Gov. Gen. of Cuba) sent for
them, and they were ushered, in their ^{travels, garments} ~~poor, disordered~~ condition, into the
convivial hall, where the guests were still seated. The Governor, probably
amused by the interruption, from such unattractive visitors, haughtily
demanded their ^{business} ~~business~~, while his guests looked patronisingly on ^{them as}
~~still~~ ^{stood there} left standing. When the passport was handed him, the effect was
magical. As soon as he saw the royal seal and signature, he exclaimed
"from the ^{King} ~~Queen~~," and was completely astounded, rising immediately
and bowing ^{low} with many apologies for this detention, ^{he} urged them to sit at
dinner - which of course they declined - ^{but as} he insisted on their taking wine
with him, ~~that~~ they consented to. He was profuse in his offers to serve
them, bowing low all the time, as did everyone - following his example
guests and all. They told him all they wanted, was to find lodgings
that they might retire to, and get rid of the load of soil the unusual travel
had laden them with, and ^{make themselves} ~~be~~ comfortable for the night - ~~they would~~
~~come and see him in the morning.~~ Immediately persons were sent in
different directions, but no quarters could be found - until the British
officers said, at their boarding house they might possibly be accommodated
and sending, they got rooms for the party. After calling ^{next day} on the Governor
~~next day~~ - ~~where~~ they found, was much beloved by the people - they
returned to the vessel, and sailing ^{on} anchored ⁱⁿ at an eastern branch of
the St John's river and landed on a plantation just deserted, where they
hunted some time with ^{very great} ~~excellent~~ success. Landed ^{ing} again the next

^{they} morning ~~and~~ shot as many Partridges as they wanted before breakfast.
^{They then} afterwards went ashore with a ~~spade~~ to dig at an Indian mound situated in
 the middle of a plain ^{neighboring} in the neighborhood. It was 90 ft in circumference and
 9 or 10 ft high. They dug about 7 ft in the centre of it - found three flint spear
 heads, a stone hatchet, a copper rod sharp at both ends, and a large Conch
 shell of a species that is not found on the coast of America and is probably extinct -
 also some lumps of red paint. They sailed ^{within the day} along the river landing at
 various plantations, generally deserted - gathering specimens of many kinds
~~always~~ of birds ^{&c} until they came to Pablo Creek where they hunted in the
 canoe. Mr Mc Clellan and Mr Day went up the creek to a plantation, to
 get information ^{and} found from the jealousy of the Spaniards they would be
 unable to go further south. ^{They} therefore contented themselves with coasting the
 St John's river. The next morning Mr Deale shot a very fine white
 Pelican, and prepared it the following day, it weighed eighteen pounds.
 They hunted ^{also} on North Beach ^{and from} the north end of Fort George island
 where ^{is} a high range of hills covered with Live Oak, ^{they enjoyed} the prospect from
 the hill was the finest they had seen in Florida, ^{a wide expanse of} could see a great dis-
 tance at sea, besides ^{the nearer} most of the islands, lakes and lagoons. ^{Another fine} landed at
 St John's Bluff the highest point ^{of land} they had seen, the view from the top
 was very fine, commanding the whole country. It was here the town of
 St John was to be built, ^{however was to be seen} nothing remained but two poor huts. ^{After}
^{have} sailed along ^{came to anchor} at the mouth of a creek just below Cow Ford, and about
 next day Mr Day and Mr Deale proceeded up the creek in a boat, ^{and about}
 miles up ^{found} came across the nest of an Alligator. It was in a marsh about six feet
 from the water - 3 ft high and 4 in diameter - the eggs about the centre. ~~The~~

Next day went up another branch of the river, saw numbers of Alligators. They ~~continued~~ ^{at} coasting for some days and then sailed for Dislata where they arrived about noon. Mr Peale made a drawing of the fort. The next morning ^{they} set out with ~~Wanton~~ their Guide (whom they had kept with them) to St Augustine to hunt; had not been out long when they shot a fine Buck, and wounded three others, also a large male squirrel, and saw a Black Wolf, but did not get a shot at it; returned to get dogs to hunt the wounded Deer. Mr Ord having brought his dogs with him, ^{there} they found among the several modes of hunting Deer the people practiced is one they call fire hunting ^{which is} done at night. The hunter has a wallet slung on his back filled with Pine knots or light wood, and a frying pan on his shoulder on which he makes a fire, the wood in the wallet is to feed it. Thus equipped he walks through the haunts of the Deer. At sight of the fire they stand still and look at it; their eyes reflect the light strongly, which makes the hunter's mark - ~~who rarely misses~~. If only wounded they are hunted the next day with dogs.

The party sailed from Dislata down the river. On ~~wednesday~~ ^{after} coming to anchor at the mouth of Pottsburgh Creek, Mr Ord and Mr Peale ascended in the canoe several miles, ^{stopping} at a plantation and dining on Parakeets - which they saw in great numbers. Going up the creek Mr Peale shot ^{an} alligator in the head ^{with a ball} of an alligator, cut ^{its} throat and laid ^{it} down on ^{its} back on the bank - coming back in the evening it had so far recovered life as to turn itself, and run in the marsh some distance. He fired another ^{long} ball into its head, and took it on board the vessel alive! It was 8 ft 11 inches,

At night they harpooned fish by fire light. ^{early} They sailed the next day, and long after dark came to anchor off St John Bluff, in the morning ^{they} heard the roar of Alligators for the first time - ^{and} sailing again anchored near the mouth of the river. Mr Ord and Mr Deale spent the day in the canoe hunting Pelicans. The next day ^{going} ~~sailed~~ off again at day break, ^{they} and were surprised at the great quantity of Medusae cast on the shore. It was ^{indeed} immense. ^{estimated} that in one place for half a mile the ground was completely ^{with them} hidden. They thought a half mile could be walked over ⁱⁿ without touching ground.

Mr Mc Clure not wishing to go to sea again, concluded to go to Amelia island in a boat that was ready to go, & Mr Jay accompanied him.

Mr Deale sunk a barrel in the sand to shoot Pelicans from, Mr Ord in the mean time was fishing, and caught sixteen Sheeps Head of about seven and ^{to} eight pounds ^{each}. The equinoctial storm coming, they were obliged to run up the river several miles for a harbor. When the storm abated they sailed down the Beach, ^{but} saw few marine animals, and went in among the ^{ponds} ~~sand~~ ^{of the sand hills} in the interior hunting ducks. They amused themselves for some time with the Porpoises, ^{these} young at this season ^{being} ~~just~~ ^{and are} about a foot and a half long, they carry them on their pectoral fins, ^{and are} ~~seen~~ ^{something} with them in their mouths. They frequently saw Porpoise's with Medusa in their mouths, but whether they ate - or only played with them could not tell. In the evening ^{they} saw several flocks of Snowy Herons, flying north, among them were a number of ash colored Herons. After cruising about for several days, with great success, they crossed the bar, and in a short time bade adieu to St John's river. ~~Immediately after they crossed~~ the bar the wind shifted to N. W. and blowing directly ahead, drove them

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~~A sudden~~ ~~with a still~~ ~~made them~~
out to sea and left them in a calm, rolling sea, both becoming very sea
sick and wishing they were back in St. Thomas - but wishing was of no
avail, for they soon drifted out of sight of land, and ^{they} were becalmed and
becalmed at the same time. The next ^{day} ~~night~~ ^{they} came in sight of Amelia
island, and the wind, rising from N. E., soon ran in and came to anchor
off Fernandina about ten o'clock - not finding Mr. McChure and Say
here - and learning they had gone to St. Mary's, sailed for that place at
change of tide and arrived before night. Found Mr. McChure and
Say anxiously awaiting their arrival. Mr. Ord too, was getting uneasy
about his business at home and took passage in a vessel that was to sail at
twelve next day - the day after at sunrise the other gentlemen sailed in
their sloop from St. Mary's and came to anchor at the south end of Cumbe-
land island. ~~before night~~ They visited the Shaw family - then sailed before
noon, and reached little Cumberland island before night. They cruised
among the islands, visiting those they had been at before, and making ac-
quaintance with those they had passed in going up the Altamaha to
Darien - making collections everywhere.

On arriving at Savannah they found a great change, whole rows of stores
and houses were going up - some of the latter were built of "labbey" a composition
of oyster shells, lime & sand, cast in mould - the same as "Dunginones" the
residence of the Shaws on Cumberland island. They tried to get a pilot for
the islands between Savannah and Charleston, but failed. Mr. McChure
decided to go in the steamboat, and the two other gentlemen by sea, in the Rambler,
a sailing vessel. Both left early next ^{morning} ~~day~~ and reached Charleston in the

afternoon of the second day. They left Charleston 16 of April.

Florida being a new field gave great delight to the explorers - who with their small vessel thoroughly searched its streams, shores, and swamps, for products of their different branches of science - in all of which, they made large collections, and spent a most enjoyable and delightful winter.

L. Peale

Soon after they turned their faces towards the north, and arrived safely at home, enriched with abundant collections in their several departments and having enjoyed immensely their winter trip to Florida.