

# RESEARCH IN THE SPANISH BORDERLANDS: ALABAMA

*Jack D. L. Holmes, University of Alabama in Birmingham*

WHEN ONE EXAMINES THE RESEARCH AND WRITING ON SPANISH COLONIAL ALABAMA, 1780–1813, it is possible to conclude that this area has received the least emphasis of all Spanish Borderlands. This is unfortunate because there are tens of thousands of original sources extant. As the director of a University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa research project, which began in 1966, Holmes collected some 20,000 pages of documents from Sevilla and Simancas on microfilm. The so-called "Holmes Collection" has been copied for several libraries in the Southeast, including Alabama, Auburn, Florida, West Florida and Tulane universities. A brief description of the twenty-nine reels appears in Coker and Holmes (1971).

Early nineteenth-century historians such as Pickett (1851) and Hamilton (1897), suffered from the dearth of Spanish sources, and their conclusions are often colored by a one-sided approach to the Spanish dominion. Owsley (1955, 1958) has studied Pickett as a historian and Alabama planter, and Marshall (1961) did his master's thesis on Hamilton's place in historical literature.

Subsequent studies of the Spanish period do little to correct the pioneer failures by Pickett and Hamilton. Jenkins (1959) wrote about Alabama forts but failed to use Spanish sources. Gallalee (1965) wrote on the Alabama portion of Andrew Ellicott's boundary line, but did not consult Spanish sources or even utilize the riches of the U.S. National Archives. Professors have been reluctant to have their students engage in research on Spanish Alabama, as pointed out by Jones in his 1969 study.

Brantley (1947), however, wrote an admirable study of early St. Stephens, Alabama, and the late director of the State Department of Archives for Alabama, Peter A. Brannon (1930) did the same, as well as publishing the valuable memoir by George Strother Gaines (1964). The present director of the Alabama State Department of Archives, Milo B. Howard, has shown an avid interest in publishing materials on early Alabama.

Holmes is continuing his long-range research on Spanish Alabama. Preliminary findings have been published on Forts San Esteban de Tombeché (1965f) and Stoddart (1964a), Spanish post commandants (1966e), genealogical lists and references (1968c), census of settlers (1966g) and the Choctaws (1968h), and a survey article in German (1968b) over the American expansion into Alabama. He has read papers on the Tensaw post (1968i) and the surrender of Fort Carlota at Mobile to the American forces in 1813 (1969a).

David White (1972), a former student of Holmes, selected an Alabama topic during the late Spanish period for his doctoral dissertation and combined research in

## RESEARCH IN SPANISH ALABAMA

the United States with that in Spain in his study of the important mercantile firm of John Forbes and Company. Herman Wesley Odom, Jr. (1972), one of Coker's students, is writing his M. A. thesis on Captain Cayetano Pérez and the fall of Mobile to General James Wilkinson in 1813, based primarily upon the manuscript material in the Holmes Collection.

Text-book authors must wait for additional research in the Spanish archives so as to avoid the lacunae in this period found in such books as Summersell (1961) and Brewer (1872). For young scholars, intent on making a name for themselves in a relatively-virgin field, Spanish Alabama offers innumerable challenges.