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As a veteran of Queen Anne's War, of the Tuscarora War, and of the Indian rising of 1715, John Barnwell had first-hand knowledge of the Indian and Spanish frontiers from Virginia to the neck of Florida; moreover, as the greatest planter of the Port Royal district, he had a direct interest in safeguarding the harassed southern border. His career in provincial office gave him standing as a colonial expert which the average agent, chosen from the merchant group in London, seldom possessed. In England his advice was sought by the Azilia

⁷³ Jean Buvat, *Journal de la régence*, II, 14.

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⁷⁵ *Political State of Great Britain*, XIX, 359-82, with abstract of the tract.

promoters, by the Board of Trade, and Lord Townshend, and he largely wrote the instructions to the governor of South Carolina in 1720. With Boone he frequented the lodgings of the veteran colonial official, General Francis Nicholson, soon to go out to Carolina as provisional royal governor.⁷⁶ In that company did Nicholson perhaps recall that a quarter-century earlier his had been one of the first voices raised to warn Englishmen of the danger of French encirclement?

Before the Board of Trade in August, 1720, Barnwell and Boone presented the essence of their program, proposing to check French aggression by imitating the most striking feature of their policy: 'The Method of the French,' they recalled, 'is to build Forts on their Frontiers which it wou'd be our Interest to do likewise, not only to preserve Our Trade with the Indians and their Dependance upon Us, but to preserve our Boundaries.' They also confirmed the most alarming item in the recent report of the assembly, 'that the French particularly pretend a Right to the River May [Altamaha].' 'Therefore,' they urged, 'it wou'd be more immediately necessary for Us to possess ourselves of the Mouth of that River.'⁷⁷

These proposals, with supporting arguments, were elaborated in a series of documents which the Carolina agents now filed with the Board of Trade and Secretary Townshend. They, too, prepared a set of answers to the Board's queries of 1719.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Many years later the Rev. James McSparran of Rhode Island wrote that in 1720 he was in London 'and often saw the Provincial Agents at the lodgings of my great friend and patron, General Francis Nicholson' (W. H. Dyke, *History of the Episcopal Church in Narragansett*, Appendix, p. 64). Compare Nicholson's eulogy of Barnwell, recently deceased, in *JC*, June 9, 1724. He deplored the 'great loss that his Majesty's Province in generall, and more particularly that part to the Southward, hath sustained . . . I having been an eye and ear witness of the great service he did for this country in Great Britain.'

⁷⁷ JBT, August 16, 1720.

⁷⁸ C.O. 5:358, A 7, 8; presented August 23 (see JBT), along with 'An Account of the proper places fit for Garrisons in Carolina and the absolute necessity of doing the same speedily' (ibid., A 8); a table of distances between the proposed forts (A 9); and Thomas Smith's 'A Description of Pamlico, Mobile and the Mississippi River,' dated February 22, 1719/20 (A 10), also in C.O. 5:12, no. 1. The latter, based on reports of Captain Birchall and Mr. Owen, who had recently arrived overland from the West at Smith's plantation, gave considerable detail of the French possessions on the Gulf and Mississippi. See also Historical MSS Commission, *Eleventh Report*, Appendix, part IV, pp. 254-6, for other copies in the Townshend MSS.

commander of the southern scouts. He was ordered to take possession of the Altamaha in the King's name 'for use of the Crown of Great Britain,' and if interrupted by Indians or Europeans 'to repel force by force.'³

At Port Royal Barnwell met with further discouragement. The scoutmen, during his absence in England, had lost all semblance of discipline: 'a wild idle people,' he described them, 'and continually Sotting if they can get any Rum for Trade or Money.'⁴ Yet, he added, 'they are greatly usefull for such Expeditions as these if well and Tenderly managed.' Early in July he was ready to sail southward with twenty-six of these 'hopeful fellows,' 'all drunk as beasts,' and a white sawyer with his Indian slaves. At the 'passage fort' Captain Palmeto and several other scouts were added. Barnwell, with two small boats, followed the inland passage, and on July 13 made rendezvous with the supply sloop from Beaufort in the *embouchure* of the Altamaha. Meanwhile, in that vast expanse of marshland and cypress swamps, he had selected a site for the post. Several branches of the estuary were explored before he found a considerable bluff on the north bank of the northern branch, five miles below its exit from the principal stream, and near the town occupied by the Muspaw people in 1715.⁵ There he made ready to erect the temporary fort, save for the warehouses of the traders the first English establishment in the land which became Georgia.

It was well that Barnwell had brought such seasoned frontiersmen as the Port Royal scouts. No timber could be found within three miles of Garrison Point, so he decided to build with cypress plank, four inches thick and musket-proof, instead of logs. 'This cypress,' he wrote in his journal, 'can't be got out of the Swamp without wading naked up to the waist or sometimes to the neck, which is a Terrible Slavery, especially now in the dog days, when the Musquetos are in their Vigor.' By such herculean labors was built the Altamaha Fort, a 'planked house,' or gabled blockhouse, twenty-six feet square.

³ Ibid.

⁴ S.P.G. MSS, B, V, no. 257: Barnwell to Nicholson, dated 'Garrison Point, Altamaha point, July 21, 1721.' This vivid journal of a neglected episode in the Anglo-American frontier advance has recently been printed in SCHGM, XXVII, 189-203.

⁵ C.O. Maps, Georgia 2.

There were three floors: a magazine floor, a gun-floor at six feet from the ground, with walls pierced for cannon and musket, and above a 'jetting floor to clear the sides,' with more loopholes for small arms. High in the gable a lookout window commanded a wide view of river and marsh and old Indian fields, and of St. Simon's Island to the east and southeast. On the land side the blockhouse was defended by an earthen parapet, five to six feet high, with a bastion, and surrounding palisades and a moat. Another parapet of fascines fronted the river, and the palisades were continued along the marsh on the north-west. Within this irregular triangle, in a space measuring two hundred by three hundred feet, stood several palmetto-roofed huts and barracks.⁶ Such was Altamaha Fort, or Fort King George as it was grandly named, a frontier improvisation which the King's officers mocked and reviled.⁷ Barnwell himself thought it serviceable only as a temporary shelter, until a strong fort could be constructed on St. Simon's Island to command all the mouths of the Altamaha and the sea-approach.⁸

While 'Tuscarora Jack' and his rangers were toiling in the swamps of Altamaha, at Charles Town Nicholson was persuading the assembly to advance the charges of the enterprise. As a matter of course the assembly grumbled. 'This Infant Colony,' they asserted, 'is so farr from being able to bear the Charges of making new Acquisitions to the Crown that it is scarce in a Condition to support the Garrisons already settled without his Majesty's Aid and Assistance.'⁹ But in the end they complied. In fact, within a year the province laid out nearly a thousand pounds sterling upon the Altamaha project.¹⁰ Until the independent company was fit for border service provincial troops from the colony posts were quartered at Fort King

⁶ Barnwell's Journal, *loc. cit.*; C.O. Maps, Georgia 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 8. Several of these maps and plans are reproduced in *Crown Collection*, series 41, 122, 131 f., 135 f., 137. See also P.R.O., M.P., G 13 (plan, 1726). Winsor, in *Mississippi Basin*, p. 135, incorrectly described the post as located at the mouth of the Altamaha, and has been followed by others, as Heinrich, *La Floride*, p. 158.

⁷ C.O. S 140, C 2 (enclosure).

⁸ Barnwell's Journal, *loc. cit.*; endorsed by assembly in instructions to King and Lloyd, in C.O. 5:358, A 48. See C.O. Maps, Georgia 3, for Barnwell's chart of St. Simon's harbor, September 2, 1721.

⁹ *MSA*, July 21, August 5, 11, 12, 15, 1721; February 1, 1721/2.

¹⁰ *MSA*, June 15, November 24, 1722.

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