

A Lover, A Loyalist, A Longing Brother: Letters from John Moultrie Jr. 1761-1780

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Abstract

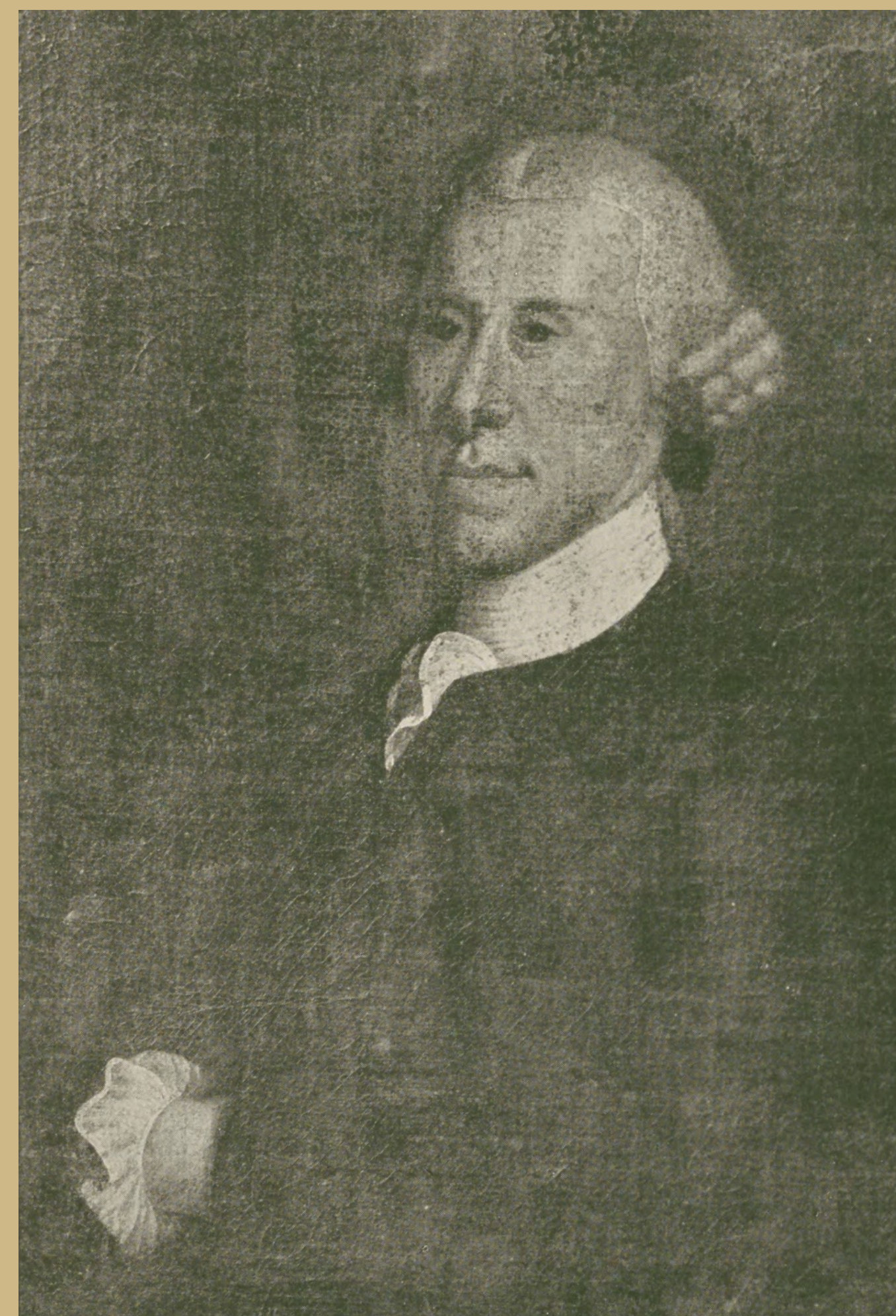
On, July 8, 1780, a condolence letter was sent from John Moultrie Jr. to Alexander Moultrie about the mournful death of their patriot brother, Thomas. This letter uncovered an overlooked narrative about how brothers on the opposite sides of war viewed their conflicting familial attachments, as brothers died for different political causes. My research intends to expand that narrative's powerful and contradictory ethos by exploring John Moultrie Jr's character in his letters from 1761-1780. Through John Moultrie Jr's earlier letters, we would be able to understand how his 1780 letter:

- Demonstrated an emotional sensitivity that fortifies personal connection.
- Reflected a persistent capacity for sympathy towards opposition.
- Honored an impressive loyalist identity that disallowed the erosion of morals.

These traits of sensitivity, sympathy, and honor defined John's values as a lover and a loyalist and ultimately protected his identity as a brother. The Revolutionary War strained but did not erase his attachment to his patriot brothers because he maintained those values forged in his romantic and political experiences. The 1780 letter showcases that family connections are still persistent even in political disagreements. It is an excellent angle into the history of people who've had to grapple with two opposing truths: political and familial. An angle still applicable to families today that are in political disharmony.

Methodology

- Initially, establishing and following a time frame of British East Florida enabled me to begin to become familiar with East Florida's colonial history. George Kotlik's *East Florida in the Revolutionary Era, 1763-1785* initiated a deeper awareness of the military, agricultural, and political struggles that British East Florida underwent. This awareness would serve as a guide for my specialization.
- From these various struggles emerged a Lieutenant Governor named John Moultrie Jr. who owned the beautiful "Bella Vista" plantation, served as St. Augustine's militia colonel, and was brother to William Moultrie, who commanded the Patriot invasion of East Florida in 1776. John's status and awkward familial connection prompted a finer look into his origins and history to unearth his psyche surrounding his family's political differences.
- This led me to secondary sources that revealed John's romance and sympathy during the Cherokee War in 1759-1761 primarily, primary letters from 1771-1772 that explained his honorable duties as Lieutenant Governor, and finally, the 1780 mournful letter to his patriot brother Alexander Moultrie about the death of their patriot brother, Thomas Moultrie, during revolutionary combat. These letters were analyzed to show John's closely held values.
- John's emphasis on his personal values varied in different contexts: from a general moral consciousness born during the Cherokee war, to acting dutifully and fairly as lieutenant governor, and prioritizing family over political differences. Taken together, an accurate account of his persona can be made to demonstrate the personal reasons people maintain to make sure family recognizes family despite their incompatible political identities.



John Moultrie Jr. President of East Florida Royal Council 1763-1771; Royal Lieutenant Governor 1771-1774; Eldest son; Steadfast Loyalist



Alexander Moultrie; Attorney General of South Carolina 1776-1792; Youngest son; Continental Patriot

Introduction

John Moultrie Jr. was born the eldest son in South Carolina in 1729 to what will become known as a historically active and politically complicated family. In 1759 he served in the Cherokee War under the command of Colonel James Grant. During the war, John wrote intensely romantic letters to an Eleanor Austin, employing rhetoric that elevated his love for Eleanor by remarking on its lovely effects on his lamentable "situation." John's propensity for sensitivity extended even to other side of the Cherokee War despite the danger Cherokee warriors posed: "I am so soon touched by the fair that the tears of a savage one damped my anger & made me feel with her." During this era, John also forged a close relationship with James Grant, sharing his feelings for Eleanor with Grant. Afterward, John was appointed by James Grant, who became the first Governor of East Florida, to serve on British East Florida's council and eventually in 1771 as Lieutenant Governor, pleasing Eleanor Austin's father who had earlier disapproved of their marriage. John's letters as Lieutenant Governor oversaw affairs with Indian trade, East Florida's agricultural development, and kept an eye on the credibility of accounts presented to him. His fair assessment of fellow Loyalist plantation owner Andrew Turnbull's professed fear of Indians was expertly demonstrated when he determined Turnbull offered contradictory accounts or "dramatically opposite" viewpoints of Indian danger. John carried this sensitivity and moral integrity into his 1780 letter about his family's political troubles and his brother's death. John's letter captured his worries about the revolutionary war and its isolating effects on their family. Even so, he stayed committed to his family's well-being: "I yet should rejoice to see you right & happy." Though John remained a staunch loyalist, the rhetorical purpose of this letter serves a dual purpose: to family and to governments.

References



"I hope you will not be angry or jealous of me for making free with the Cherokee squaw, I think it was being pretty free to drive them naked out of their beds to hide in the woods & mountain. But this among others I did without much conscience besides burning of houses, destroying fine fields gardens orchards so till the tears of the squaw first melted & made me sorry; You see by this that I am so soon touched by the fair that the tears of a savage one damped my anger, & made me feel with her" – July 10, 1761

Tho' I blamed you [for our brother's death], I yet should rejoice to see you right & happy. You have given me an opportunity of speaking freely to you. I will do it; I ought to do it. I would not say or do anything that would give any man or living creature, much less you, unnecessary any pain. – July 8, 1780

Conclusions

John's 1780 letter stretches the limits of the character traits exhibited in his Cherokee War love letters and his governing letters as Lieutenant Governor of East Florida. The exigence of the letter tests the extent of John's fortified values demonstrated through his previous letters:

- John's expressed vulnerability to Eleanor Austin shows his willingness to employ his own personal ethos to maintain his romantic attachment. He sent letters to Eleanor for almost two years without any response, detailing his uneasiness as the silence grew.
- John's capacity for empathy towards Indians during the Cherokee War established limits to the justifications assumed with the roles he holds. He was conscious that his solidier status did not justify the plain immorality that British troops exercised when burning Indian homes.
- John's letters as Lieutenant Governor were truly honorable. He received praise from the British mainland on his first year acting as Lieutenant Governor, proving his loyalty to the crown. His loyalty was also imbued with honor, correcting Turnbull's attempt to lie about Indian affairs.

John's character as it was exemplified in these letters connect to the 1780 letter because they all contribute to his response towards the death of his brother Thomas Moultrie. The letter preserves John's duty to family while also staying truthful to his political commitments. A delicate balance that was made possible because of John's sensitivity, sympathy, and honor.