



Letterpress certificate. Small tears along some fold lines.

## “THE FRAUD OF THE PRINCE OF POYAIS”

### Poyaisian Land Certificate.

#### Author

GREGOR, MacGregor

#### Publication date

April 28th, 1834.

#### Publisher

#### Publication place

London,

#### Physical description

Letterpress certificate. Small tears along some fold lines.

#### Dimensions

505 by 450mm. (20 by 17.75 inches).

#### Notes

A ‘final edition’ land grant printed for the fictional kingdom of Poyais.

Purporting to grant 500 acres of land to Hugart Sempill with a class B certificate. Parallel text in English and French attests to the “just, true, full, and faithful” copy of the original grant from the King of the Mosquito Shore to “His Excellency General Sir Gregor MacGregor” (although this text is identical to that used in the 1830 editions, without pretense of any further verification). Signed by

Macgregor and three alleged trustees of Poyaisian territory. Light offsetting from the Poyasian land crest echoes an air of authority. Claiming to be entered into 'volume one' of the Poyaisian Land Books, although land grants from four years prior had already run up to volume six.

The grant has not been taken on trust. Two clauses are underscored and ticked, demonstrating that the purchaser – a member of a long-standing noble Scottish family – required reassurance that his heirs would be entitled to the land, and that MacGregor has been granted the authority to “enact laws, establish customs” necessary for the protection and prosperity of the Republic of Poyais.

The Poyaisian Scheme (or Fraud) was the brainchild of the Scottish soldier Gregor MacGregor (1786-1845). He began his life of adventuring in Venezuela and Colombia. In 1820 he visited what is today Honduras, and claimed that while there he obtained a grant of eight million acres from George Frederick Augustus, king of the Mosquito Indians. Returning to London, Macgregor styled himself as Gregor I, prince of the independent state of Poyais. He set about publicising his fictitious state, setting up a land office in London and selling bonds to investors. The scheme began to unravel when, echoing the Darien scheme of the late seventeenth century, a group of around two hundred settlers, mostly Scots, sailed to Poyais. Discovering only a barren and inhospitable swampland, they were saved by a British rescue mission. MacGregor fled to Paris in late 1823 only to continue his activities there. After acquittal in a French fraud trial he returned to London in 1827.

In this grant, seven years after his return to London, MacGregor is once again issuing bonds for a watered down version of his Poyaisian Scheme. Despite the ignominious failure of the last Poyaisian venture, and the publication in 1823 of an account by one of the original settlers of the desolate reality of MacGregor's promised land, MacGregor continued to issue land certificates to cover his mounting debts. He was able to maintain the scheme because public disapproval focused on speculators in South American loans rather than his misrepresentation of Poyais; a pamphlet warning investors about Poyais published in 1827 makes no mention of him at all. He did not, however, manage to repeat the success of the first scheme; he was forced to issue these certificates in 1834 to pay for unredeemed securities, and two years after this document was issued, he reprinted the 'Poyaisian constitution'. This was his final, futile attempt at profiting from Poyais; two years later, after the death of his wife, he moved to Venezuela and lived out his days there.

## **Bibliography**

Lambert and Lester, *Colonial Lives Across the British Empire*; Sonneborn, *Acquisition of Florida*

## **Provenance**

**Price:** £800

**Inventory reference:** 16287