

Winter 2003

News & Events



SEMINOLE WARS HISTORIC FOUNDATION, INC.

## The Foundation Report

# Foundation Members Visit Forts Foster and Dade

The annual Fall Membership Meeting was held on November 8<sup>th</sup> at the sites of Fort Foster and Fort Dade (both located near Highway 301 north of Tampa.) These forts were erected in late 1836 by men under the command of Col. William S. Foster of the Fourth Infantry Regiment. Among other functions, they protected the army's main route of supply between Ft. Brooke and Ft. King (Ocala) and were of great strategic importance during the early phases of the Second Seminole War. Today they remind us of successful efforts to preserve the history of the Seminole wars. Fort Foster, part of the Hillsborough River State Park, has been reconstructed on the site

where it originally stood. Fort Dade, a property along the Withlacoochee River acquired by the Foundation, is currently the focus of archaeological excavations.

Members met at 9:00 a.m. in the Fort Foster parking lot and walked the route of the Fort King Road. Ralph van Biarcom, curator for the site, led them through the woods and up to the gates of the stockade. Re-enactors were on hand to explain the daily life and tasks of military personnel stationed at the fort during the war. True to the wartime realities of the 1830s, the first person to greet the



(Continued on reverse)

## The Legacy of John Mahon: [1912-2003]



The Foundation faced a great loss October 11, 2003, with the passing of Dr. John K. Mahon, a founding member of SWHF, and mentor to several generations of students and historians interested in American history. After service in World War II, Dr. Mahon was appointed as the U.S.

Army's chief of military history (1952-54), before joining the University of Florida and heading its history department. A lover of the outdoors and of the heritage of the common soldier, Mahon honed his historical writings with a storyteller's art that made his narratives come alive. His *War of 1812* and *History of the Second Seminole War* instantly gained the status of classics. Just as important, Mahon was a fountain of energy for the causes he supported. At 91, he continued serving on the Board of the SWHF, trekked the backwoods on expeditions to the IZARD Battlefield and Fort Dade, and thrilled listeners with his historical accounts. His humor and encouragement will be sorely missed. The Foundation and the Dade Battlefield Society will issue a special medallion to commemorate Dr. Mahon's lifelong contributions to scholarship and preservation. At Dr. Mahon's request, donations in his honor can also be made to SWHF and/or the Sierra Club. His remains will be interred at the National Cemetery in Bushnell at a future date. The cemetery is close to the Withlacoochee River and to the scenes and battles of which he wrote.

# Excavations at the Site of Payne's Town, Alachua County: Foundation among sponsors for graduate student's historic dig

Jane Anne Blakney-Bailey (U.F.) has resumed excavations in Payne's Prairie State Park, tracing evidence that points to the location of Payne's Town, the main colonial era polity of the Seminoles in the Alachua area. After Chief Payne's death from battle wounds in 1812, the Seminoles abandoned the town, trying to escape the dangers posed by the War of 1812. American infantry and state militias subsequently ransacked and set fire to the town to stop the Seminoles from reclaiming it.

Testing of the site has uncovered evidence for burned structures and a scatter of pottery and other artifacts over 13,000 sq. meters. This winter Blakney-Bailey will expand excavations to better define the site, part of a plan to aid the park service in managing and protecting it. Her work has garnered support from Florida's Department of State and the National Science Foundation. SWHF is also lending its support. (At right) Henry Sheldon presents Blakney-Bailey with \$500 for research.



## Membership Meeting (from p. 1)

group was a naval officer. The army frequently had to draw on naval reinforcements to cover shortages in personnel during the Second Seminole (or "Florida") War. Other re-enactors—sailors, infantrymen, the Quartermaster, even the camp laundress—spoke about the mixture of danger, hard work, and tedium troops and support staff had to endure while manning Fort Foster. Members had a chance to examine uniforms and weaponry.

After a lunch hosted by the Preservation Society of Hillshorough River State Park, members headed north on 301 to the site of Fort Dade. Chris Bell, site supervisor, gave a tour of the property and showed artifacts recovered from the most recent work at the dig.

— John & Mary Lou Missall

## President's Message

One of life's pleasures is the camaraderie that comes from being with a group of people who share a common passion. People who voluntarily come together out of mutual love of some endeavor, however lofty or mundane, energize each other. For that time spent in common purpose they transcend tempo-

rarily the limitations of the present. That is what it is like for me when I gather with the members of the Foundation. As we walk the Fort King Road, peer through the palmettos at the palisades of Fort Foster, or stand beneath the bank of the Withlacoochee River where the Fort Dade bridge had

been, we all hear voices from the past, speaking to us from a time and place that we can imagine more than truly know. Come now, join us on our journey, walk with us in the footsteps of ghosts.

— Brent Weisman

## News & Upcoming Events

**REENACTMENT OF THE DADE BATTLE:** The annual reenactment of the Dade Battle will take place at the battlefield state park, Saturday and Sunday, Jan. 3 & 4, 2004, beginning at 2 p.m. For information call the park at (352) 793-4781 or SWHF Headquarters at (352) 593-2974.

**REMINDER TO RENEW MEMBERSHIP:** If you neglected to pay your annual membership dues back in June, please don't leave us! Renewal is just \$25. Make checks payable to the Seminole Wars Historic Foundation and send to Headquarters or to Henry Sheldon, Treasurer, 11611 S.W. 89th St., Gainesville, FL 32608.

**VISIT OUR NEW WEB PAGE!** The Foundation is in Cyberspace. Please take a look at [WWW.SWHF-FOUNDATION.ORG](http://WWW.SWHF-FOUNDATION.ORG)

**FOUNDATION BOARD MEMBERS TO SPEAK IN WASHINGTON, D.C.**—at an evening of talks before the prestigious Army & Navy Club (January 22, 2004). The program, "Three Wars—41 Years of State," will cover the heritage of all three Seminole wars with slides and Power Point presentations.