

Summer/Fall 2004

News & Events



SEMINOLE WARS HISTORIC FOUNDATION, INC.

The Foundation Report

Summer/Fall 2004

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USF Libraries hosts Panel on the Second Seminole War

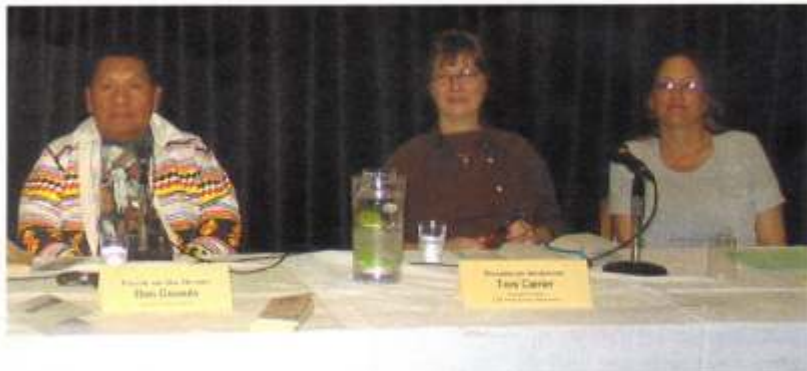
Tampa, Oct. 1, 2004: An audience of sixty crowded into the Government Documents Room at the University of South Florida Library to see one of the library's prize possessions—the journals of Capt. Mervine P. Mix. Capt. Mix, an American naval commander, was stationed off the coast of Florida during the Second Seminole War. His account of his experiences, acquired for USF's Department of Special Collections in 2002, is the only known description of the conflict written by a naval officer. A team of university scholars, headed by Gayle Penner, librarian and archivist, transcribed the journals and recently published selections in the *Florida Historical Quarterly* (Fall 2003). The gala reception provided the public with a chance to view Mix's 167-year-old writings, and to ask questions of a panel of discussants brought together to talk about the significance of the Seminole wars in American history. It was a lively discussion, in which panelists shared reflections about history and its meaning. (cont. on p. 3)



Brent Weisman, president and board member with the SWHF, served as moderator for the panel.

Gayle Penner, archivist, USF, and James Cusick, curator of Florida History, UF, helped kick-off a discussion of the Mervine Mix journals and the Second Seminole War.

Don Osceola, Seminole Tribe of Florida, and Toni Carrier and Christine Bell, graduates students in the Anthropology Department, USF, spoke on the ways tribal members, ethnologists, and archaeologists view the past. Photos courtesy of Mark Greenberg, Florida Studies Center.



St Augustine, the Castillo, and the National Guard Headquarters

Foundation members get a glimpse into the Era of the Second Seminole War at the nation's Oldest City. (Story on p. 3)



The heat was on: Members of the Seminole Wars Historic Foundation braved summer temperatures to tour the Castillo, see the chamber from which Coocoochee made his daring escape, and follow guide and host Lieut. Col. Greg Moore through National Guard Headquarters and the cemetery housing the Dade monument. The Foundation extends its thanks to the Florida National Guard for its generosity in sponsoring this event.

Fort King Speech by Henry Sheldon included in the Congressional Record

From the Congressional Record, September 8, 2004 (Extensions),
Pages E1537-E1538

FORT KING

HON. CLIFF STEARNS of Florida in the House of Representatives,
Tuesday, September 7, 2004

Mr. STEARNS. Mr. Speaker, on Monday, May 10, 2004 Fort King of Ocala, Florida was designated as a national historic landmark in front of 200 guests at the downtown square in Ocala, Florida. Many speakers were present and told of the underlying significance of Fort King, where Osceola fought against the United States, as a key fort in a chapter of American history, the Second Seminole War from 1835-1842. Henry Sheldon, an engineer of Gainesville, Florida, who is a member of the Seminole Wars Historic Foundation, was one of the speakers that evening. Below is his brief account of the historical significance of Fort King:

The Historical Significance of Fort King Fort King Ceremony, May 10, 2004

(By Henry A. Sheldon)

Imagine standing at this spot in Florida two hundred years ago. Before you would be an immense forest, unbroken except by rivers, prairies, and lakes. It was said that if a squirrel could leap the rivers, it could walk on the tree tops from St. Augustine to Texas. The sounds were those of the forest—the wind in the pines, the dying crash of a 500 year old mammoth oak, the cry of a hawk in the clouds, or the scream of a panther at the edge of the hammock.

For thousands of years native Americans passed by this spot in pursuit of deer and buffalo. Maybe a hunter sat right where you stand catching his breath as the pursuit continued. Maybe a town stood here. Maybe there were cook fires and children playing over there. The people were dressed in deerskins. Then one day a different sound was heard in the forest. It was the sound of wagons, and horses and men shouting orders. "Pull up, veer to the left of that big pine, keep the wagons moving." They were soldiers, heading that way—East, toward the giant Silver Spring. They were dressed in blue and white and carried flintlock muskets similar to those used in the French and Indian War, the American Revolution, and the War of 1812. They had orders to build a fort.

They were looking for a hilltop, near water. They found such a spot 3 miles east of here on the first high ground west of the Silver Spring. Now the sound was of axes and the great pines on the hill began to fall to be used for the walls and blockhouses of the fort. The year was 1827. The fort was similar to wilderness forts constructed by the French and the English during the 1600's and 1700's. It was the same type of picket fort constructed by George Washington at Fort Necessity in 1754. It was similar to the British Fort William Henry captured by the Marquis De Montcalm in the siege of 1757 and memorialized in James Fenimore Cooper's *Last of the Mohicans*. Like Fort Leavenworth in Kansas, Fort Sill in Oklahoma, and Fort Laramie in Wyoming, Fort King advanced the frontier. Many of these frontier forts became our cities. Fort Pontchartrain became Detroit, Fort Dearborn became Chicago, Fort Pitt became Pittsburgh, Fort Brooke became Tampa, and Fort King became Ocala.

For 15 years (1827-42) Fort King was to be a main stage in the heroic and tragic saga of the advance of the American Frontier in Florida. It was constructed to administrate the Treaty of Moultrie Creek which relocated the Seminoles to central Florida. Fort King was to promote law and order in the wilderness by protecting the Seminoles from trespassing settlers and adventurers. Initially, Fort King and the Indian Agency were viewed positively by the Seminoles. As Coahajo said to Gad Humphreys, the Indian Agent in Jan. 1829, "This house was built for us, so that when we had

any difficulty, we might come here and settle it." It represented the 'Great Father's' (i.e., the U.S. President's) commitment to them for their safety and well being. Chief John Hicks said to Gad Humphreys "We know that the Great Father's power is great, and he can do with us as he chooses; but we hope that his justice is as great as his power." They trusted the Great Father and his Indian Agents. To the Seminoles, Fort King was a symbol of hope.

But the Great Father could not stop the overwhelming advance of the white settlers, the whisky peddlers, and the slave hunters. Two years after being constructed, Fort King was abandoned due to budget cuts from the recession of 1829. The Seminoles were left without the soldiers to protect them from marauding whites. Justice lapsed. The government reduced their annuity. The Seminoles could not buy corn. They began to starve. Captain John Sprague wrote: "The Indian, exasperated by repeated wrongs, was reckless of the future—indeed, cared but little of results. Revenge, ever sweet to him, whatever may be the consequences, was all he sought."

Fort King stood empty for 3 years (1829-32), but the Seminoles did not disturb it. The Seminoles waited for the return of the soldiers to protect them under the terms of the Treaty of Moultrie Creek. However, in May 1832, the Great Father (Andrew Jackson) made them sign a new treaty at Paynes Landing on the Oklawaha River. In June 1832, one month after the signing of the Treaty of Paynes Landing, the soldiers returned. Fort King was re-garrisoned. But now the Seminoles were told that they must leave Florida entirely and forever. Instead of a symbol of freedom, hope and justice, Fort King and its soldiers became a symbol of hate and oppression.

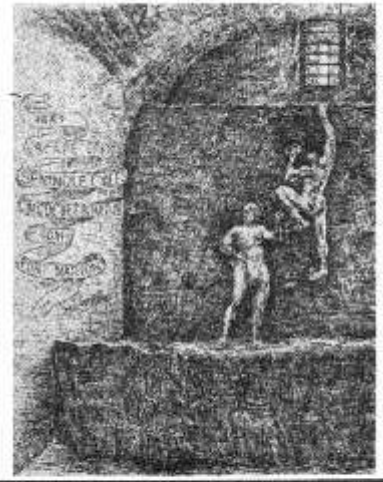
On to the stage came a new Seminole—His name was Osceola. His first appearance to the world was at Fort King in October 1834. Here, the defiant young war chief rejected the U.S. orders to leave Florida and threatened war unless the Seminoles were left alone. There was no trust left. Then came the fateful day of Dec. 28, 1835. That morning 40 miles to the south along the Fort King Road, the Seminoles ambushed and annihilated two companies of U.S. Army regulars in route to Fort King. That afternoon, Osceola shot and killed the Indian Agent Wiley Thompson outside the walls of Fort King. The Second Seminole War had begun. During the seven year guerilla war that followed, every major general and every regiment of the U.S. Army was stationed at or passed through Fort King. Here stood the Generals: Gaines, Scott, Clinch, Jesup, Taylor, and Armistead. Here stood the junior officers Worth, Johnson, Prince, Bragg, Meade, and Pemberton—men who would gain fame in the Mexican and Civil Wars. And here stood the enlisted men: Bemrose, Clarke, and hundreds of others who served in the Florida War.

Following the initial series of engagements, most of which the Seminoles won, U.S. forces withdrew from the interior of Florida abandoning Fort King in May 1836. The Seminoles stood victorious. At this zenith of their success and hopes, the Seminoles burned the hated Fort King to the ground. But it would be a short-lived victory. The Army returned a year later and rebuilt Fort King. It would be garrisoned throughout the remaining 5 years of the war and from here the Army of the South would direct dragoon and infantry units in unrelenting search and destroy missions against the Seminoles. When it ended in 1842, most of the Seminoles had been killed or captured and relocated to Indian Territory in Oklahoma. These native Americans constitute the Seminole Nation of today. An unconquered and defiant few withdrew to the vastness of the Florida Everglades and survived to the present as the Seminole Tribe of Florida. In March 1843, Fort King was abandoned by the U.S. Army for the last time and transferred to the people of Marion County. The Fort was used as the county's first courthouse and public building.

(cont. on back page)

St. Augustine and the Heritage of the Seminole Wars

The Board and membership of the Seminole Wars Historic Foundation would like to extend their thanks to Lieut. Col. Greg Moore and the military officers and personnel of the Florida National Guard Headquarters in St. Augustine for inviting them to tour the historic Saint Francis Barracks during a summer visit to St. Augustine. Our group went to the Castillo de San Marcos (Fort Marion) to view the corner chamber from which Coacoochee (Wildcat) and other Seminoles escaped imprisonment in 1837 (see image at right). Lunch and refreshments at Headquarters was followed by a guided tour through the museum, and a chance to see the works of Jackson Walker (depicting the Pedro Menéndez de Avilés landing of 1565 and the Battle of Fort Mose of 1740). Then we took a tour of remembrance through the St. Augustine National Cemetery to see the memorials erected to the soldiers who died in the Dade Battle.



Panel at USE, from p. 1

Mark Greenberg, director of USF's Florida Studies Center, graciously asked the Seminole Wars Historic Foundation, Inc., to participate in the event, and introduced the panel (see photos). Each panelist, in response to questions from Weisman and the audience, spoke about how the past became vivid to them. Penner began by acquainting listeners with the history of the Mix journals, handed down through several generations of families in Maine, and eventually to the USE library. Mix was about 50 when he arrived in Tampa in April 1836 in command of the *U.S.S. Concord*, an 18-gun sloop with a crew complement of 200 sailors and 33 marines. Slated for patrol duty in the Gulf, he instead found himself engulfed in the growing hostilities of the "Florida War." "The Seminoles," he reported to Commodore A.J. Dallas "could never again be on friendly terms with the 'pale faces' who had attempted to take their country from them." Other panelists, digging into research and oral histories, evoked other striking images of the era.

Don Osceola, of the Seminole Tribe of Florida, recalled stories that have been passed down in his family from grandparents to grandchildren. In one famous incident, he said, a group of Seminole warriors begin drinking and quarreling at their village, and the women of the village decided to hide their firearms. They did it to prevent shootings arising from arguments, but when a contingent of soldiers suddenly attacked the village, the fight was desperate, the Seminole men fighting to hold off attackers while searching for the missing guns. Events of a long ago conflict still touch him. Osceola said, because he served as a U.S. Marine in Viet Nam and knows what a war zone is like. "When I go to the Dade Battle reenactment, I understand the Seminole warriors, but I also understand the soldiers." Today's Seminoles, he added, should remember "that people struggled hard to keep their lives in Florida, and that should not be taken for granted."

Toni Carrier, who studies trade and smuggling in early Florida, spoke about the 1820s in Florida, and gave the audience a vivid description of what it was like for Dr. William Simmons to come into a Seminole town at night, following his guide. "It's after dark," she said, "they don't know the way, they find a well-traveled trail, and he meets dozens of people coming and going at 11 o'clock at night." Christine Bell, archaeologist at the Fort Dade site, talked about what a frontier fort looked like. Typically people conjure up images of Fort Foster with its classic stockade defense work. But Fort Dade may prove different. Its builder, Col. William S. Foster, indicated that he used breastwork construction at the fort, because available timber was too small for making an effective palisade. Bell hopes to confirm this by discovering the archaeological footprint of the fort.

At the reception, Mark Greenberg and Derrie Perez, dean of the USE library system, thanked USE, the Seminole Wars Historic Foundation, and all participants for making the afternoon a success. The event was videotaped.

Activity Report: Tallahassee

By Joe Knetsch

Foundation board members are not the only people constantly working on behalf of the heritage of the Seminole wars period. Here, at the request of Brent Weisman, one of our distinguished members, Dr. Joe Knetsch, gives a brief report on his involvement with various projects. We hope all members will keep newsletter readers informed about their efforts—(James Cusick, editor).

From the desk of Dr. Joe:

Interest in the Seminole wars throughout Florida is reaching an all time high. On September 21, 2004, I spoke to the Historical Society of Bay County on "The Unknown Conflict: The Creek-Seminole War in West Florida, 1835-1848." The turnout was wonderful and the house almost full. More than fifty people attended and almost everyone had further questions at the end of the presentation. Very few in the audience knew of the extent of the war in the western portion of the state and fewer tied it into the conflict with the Creeks in Alabama. At least three of the audience were descendants of the Creeks and had some interesting tidbits to share. I encouraged each one to look further into this conflict and suggested the Missalls's volume (*The Seminole Wars, America's Longest Indian Conflict*) as well as my own as beginning points.

Archaeology is active, too. I have assisted Archaeological Consultants, Inc. of Sarasota in helping to locate the remains of Fort Hamer (on the Manatee River) and Fort Doane, which may be within the boundaries of the new Ave Maria University property. As I find relevant information on Fort Dade I send it to our colleague Christine Bell who continues to work on this important site. Recently I have shared information concerning Fort Duval "near the mouth of the

Suwannee River," with Gary Ellis of the Gulf Archaeological Research Institute and Evonne Cline, president of the Dixie County Historical Society. I continue to work with Margo Schwadron of the Southeast Archaeological Center looking into the eastern Everglades for the site of Fort Henry (Henri on some maps) not far from Chaikika's Hammock. This ongoing work on the part of people around the state indicates the value and interest in sites that were pivotal to Florida's history.

Dr. Joe Knetsch is well-known for his talks and articles on the history of Florida, particularly as it pertains to pioneering, settlement, and land use. Based at the Bureau of Survey & Mapping, State Lands, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, he is the sitting historian for the Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund, and an avid and active member of the Seminole Wars Historic Foundation. His book *Florida's Seminole Wars, 1817-1858* was published in 2003 and other recent published works include "Tragedy in Charlotte Harbor: The Impact of the Second Seminole War" ("Connections," Boca Grande Historical Society, Spring 2004) and "... being continually in apprehension of an attack from the Indians: Tampa Bay in Early 1836." The latter, co-authored with Pamela Gibson of the Manatee County Public Library, appeared in the 2003 edition of the *Sunland Tribune*, the publication of the Tampa Bay Historical Society. An additional work on Fort Drane, delivered at the annual conference of the Council on America's Military Past, has been submitted for publication in its journal.



Conclusion: Sheldon on Fort King

In 1846, it was dismantled by the citizens of Marion county for its lumber. The great pines had done their job.

Hated and loved, Fort King was the stuff that dreams are made of. To the pioneers, it represented America in the wilderness. It was to these people—the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution of the United States, The Bill of Rights, and freedom and democracy as we knew it. To the Seminoles—this fort was first a symbol of justice and goodwill and then a symbol of arrogance, intolerance, and persecution. Hated and loved—In the end, Fort King is us.

The historical significance of Fort King is that it links us to our past and to our future. To stand on that hilltop puts us in the footsteps of Osceola and the native Americans who roamed and lived on this land for thousands of years before the Spanish, French, English, and Americans ruled it. It is a place in the modern city that links us to our wilderness past. It reminds us of the difficulties faced by our young republic in maintaining justice and peace on the Frontier. It is how we got here. Here is our story on the exact spot of land where it all happened. The lesson learned from Fort King is our need to assimilate and accept people of other cultures who in the final analysis value being American as much as we. Can we become a better people? The fact that we stand here as friends with the Seminoles, the very people we oppressed at the start of our State, is a testament that we can. Fort King is a place of hope.

President's Message

Why are the Seminole wars important to us today? That is the question we are challenged to answer every time we step before an audience. To a large degree, everything we read and study about the wars should be bringing us closer to the answer. This quest should give meaning and purpose to the hours we put in pouring over faded maps, deciphering the idiosyncratic cursive spellings of long forgotten diarists, or sweating in the sun-bleached cow pastures sifting for the broken fragments of former lives. Not satisfied with the facile, or the quick and easy, we push on, compelled to bridge that divide separating those people of long ago from our own life experience. How far have we come? Are we there yet? Will we ever be able to say, "yes, finally, we understand." Maybe, or maybe not. But one thing is for sure. We are on a journey. Thank you for joining us. Read this issue of the Foundation's newsletter and judge for yourself if we're getting closer.

Brent R. Weisman

Coming Next Issue:

Preview John and Mary Lou Missalls' new book on Col. William S. Foster, the building of Forts Foster and Dade, and the Battle of Okeechobee

From the files of James Gray— examples of Seminole War forts, roads, and maps, assembled for use on CD

VISIT US!

At the Dade Battle Reenactment

Saturday January 1 and Sunday January 2, 2005

We'll have a table/kiosk near the museum.

Historic State Park Info: 352-793-4781