

Summer 2005

News & Events



SEMINOLE WARS HISTORIC FOUNDATION, INC.

The Foundation Report

Tales From a Trunk

The following newspaper article from the *Albany Argus* of Albany, New York, survived as the lining paper on an old steamer trunk. Dated March 19, 1836, the piece reports on the Izard battle from February of that year, when the Seminoles trapped and surrounded the forces of Gen. Edmund Pendleton Gaines. This lengthy account gives some idea of how people around the country heard about events in Florida, and is a good example of "historical voice." It also gives us an 1830s viewpoint on a place and an event that the Foundation will be highlighting with an interpretive project. A major initiative of the Foundation, following its efforts to preserve the Izard site, is to provide a visitor's kiosk and descriptive brochures of the great contest between Gaines and Osceola. Henry Sheldon, who supplied the *Argus* piece, has also written a commentary on it (see back page).

FROM FLORIDA
[From the *New York American*]

LATE AND IMPORTANT FROM THE SEAT OF WAR.

By letters received this morning from Picolata of 2nd instant, we are pained to learn that the United States forces led by Gen. Gaines, have been unsuccessful in an attack upon the main body of the Indians situated upon the Ouithlachoochee, and after the loss of valuable lives were reduced to entrench themselves – short of ammunition and provisions – until aide could be sent to them.



Detail from a painting by Jackson Walker showing Gaines's forces at bay behind their breastwork in 1836.

Members extend their thanks to Brent Weisman for his exemplary role as president of the SWHF



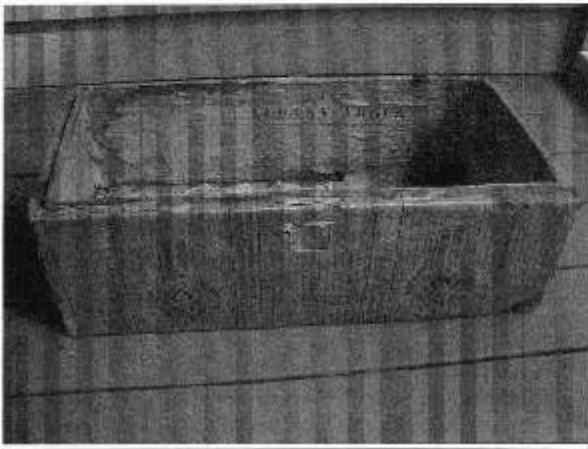
At their August 6th meeting board members reluctantly accepted the resignation of Brent Weisman as president of the Foundation. Weisman is taking time off to recuperate from surgery. As members know, the Foundation's success in recent years is due in great part to the drive and enthusiasm of his leadership. Not only was he a central player in the preservation of Fort King, Camp Izard, and Fort Dade, but he has headed the Foundation's successful application for grants, built up a series of popular member events, and inspired interest in the archaeology and history of the era of the Seminole wars among his students at USF. Happily, we can note that Weisman continues on the Board, and will be forging ahead with efforts to develop a management plan for Fort Dade and to promote the heritage and history of the Camp Izard site. James Cusick will serve as interim president until

President's Message

It was 1992 and I remember getting a phone call from John Mahon inviting me to a meeting of people interested in preserving a battlefield from the Second Seminole War. I was often on the road then and not easy to catch up with, but if there was someone who could it was John. I missed the first meeting but John and I drove together to the second. The time alone with John was worth it even if the meeting turned out to be a disappointment, but there, gathered within the Laumers's impressive stone walls, were some very impressive people with some very big ideas. Thus began one of the most interesting chapters of my life, one that wouldn't have happened had John not brought me to where I belonged. In recent years, I've said goodbye to some of my friends from the founding days of the Seminole Wars Historic Foundation. John is gone. So too are Jim Covington and Billy Cypress. Frank and Dale, by sheer good luck and blessings from on high, are still here. And we've welcomed newer friends into the fold. We all know that we sit on the shoulders of giants. Jim Cusick has now agreed to step up as President, so that I can sit down for awhile. The Foundation and our board is in the hands of good people. *Yes, very impressive people with some very big ideas. John, we're still at it.*

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brent Weisman".

Tales from a Trunk, cont.



Above: The trunk lined with the *Argus*. Donated to the Foundation by member Lyle Wolding.

The particulars, as far as ascertained, may be thus summarily stated: Gen. Gaines left Tampa Bay with 1140 men, and reached Fort King on the 22nd February, taking with him only enough subsistence to last to that place. There he called upon General Clinch for 14,000 rations, but only 10,000 could be furnished, and those had been just placed there by order of Gen. Scott, for the support of a battalion of Georgia foot then on the march to Fort King. Thus insufficiently provisioned, he made a dash for the Outhlachooshee, near Gen. Clinch's former battleground, where he truly believed the main body of the enemy were. He arrived on the west bank of the river on Saturday evening, 27th.

The Indians on the opposite bank immediately opened a fire on him, which was continued all Sunday from each side, neither party crossing. At 6 o'clock on Sunday evening, Gen. Gaines sent an express to Gen. Clinch stating his situation, and calling for more ammunition and provisions. His loss up to that time was two volunteers from Louisiana killed, and ten regulars and volunteers wounded; among the latter, were Lt. Izard of the dragoons, dangerously. On Monday morning the 29th, about 10 o'clock, while Gen. Gaines was preparing means to cross the river, he was attacked on three sides of his camp, the Indians keeping up a vigorous assault for about two hours, frequently approaching very near his entrenchment. They were finally repulsed, with, as is supposed, considerable loss.

The loss to Gen. Gaines's command was one sergeant killed, and ten regulars and twenty volunteers wounded – among the regulars Duncan. The force of the Indians was estimated at 1,600. Gen. Gaines was entrenching himself, and acting on the defensive, having made no sortie. He called loudly for more force, ammunition, and provisions. His situation is a very critical one, and he may be compelled to retreat upon Fort King a distance of 30 miles, at the hazard of great loss – for no timely relief can reach him. Captain Hitchcock is with him in the capacity of adjutant general, and nearly half his force is regulars.

The South Carolina mounted regiment has not yet appeared. They must, however, be there in a day or two. Six days previous, one company of the Georgia mounted men arrived opposite Picolata, but they refused, with the exception of about twenty, to be mustered into service, and of course, could not be received, and had gone home. Four other companies had just arrived, whether with better intentions than the others was not yet known. But without the

command had not arrived, nor Captain Wharton. Captain Elmore's company of S.C. volunteers, from Columbia, and Saunders company, were at Volusia for the purpose of establishing a large depot, in which they succeeded admirably. Col. Brisbane's regiment will be at Volusia in a few days, and thence join forces from here on their march to the Outhlachooshee. Elmore's company is an honor to South Carolina: it is comprised of young gentlemen of the greatest respectability, from Columbia.

There are straggling parties of the enemy all over the country. A party of several were seen near Volusia, and a party of about twenty-five were seen by some Negroes 25 miles above this, two days ago. Fresh tracks were also seen this morning, on the road between this and St. Augustine. It is also supposed there is a body of several hundred southeast of Tampa, on Pease Creek. Thus far our information extends.

The conduct of Gen. Gaines in this matter must subject him, we apprehend, to a heavy responsibility. In going to Florida at all, he violated his duty, for he was under orders to proceed with the 6th regiment of Infantry from Jefferson Barracks to the frontiers of Mexico. When in Florida, he became necessarily subject to Gen. Scott, who was specially directed to take charge of the war there – and should not have moved one foot without the order of that commander – this seems plain and incontrovertible. But Gen. Gaines, anxious, we cannot but apprehend, to forestall, Gen. Scott, between whom and himself, it is known, an old grudge exists, marched from a well provisioned fort, Tampa Bay, upon one that had long been beleaguered and cut off from supplies, Fort King – with only just enough provisions to sustain him on the march. This was a first and capital fault. Arrived there, and doubtless made aware of the plan of campaign arranged by Gen. Scott – (which is understood to be that of completely isolating and surrounding the Indians, and thus compelling them to an unconditional surrender) – Gen. Gaines called upon the commandant of Fort King for rations to enable him to make an immediate and independent attack on the Indians. A portion only of what he called for could be given, and this out of stores provided in advance by Gen. Scott, for a sustaining force then marching upon Fort King. – This was a second grievous fault, for its effects, might, and we fear will be so to derange the combinations of the commanding generals as to cause fatal delays in the campaign. Thus scantily supplied, however, Gen. Gaines marched to attack the Indians, on or near the old battle ground, and of course, therefore, knowing that the river was unfordable. – Yet he marched on, without boats or pontoons, and as might be expected, found the Indians, flushed with former success, ready to oppose his crossing, and was himself reduced, after two days skirmishing, to entrench himself and act on the defensive, until he could receive reinforcements and supplies or until famine and the enemy should compel him to a perilous – it may become an impractical – retreat. Twelve hundred troops, of which one half are regulars, reduced by a band of 1500 savages, to act on the defensive! And perhaps finally to seek safety in flight!! What a fearful responsibility does not this entail upon the officer who led them into such a dilemma!

Our forebodings as to the fate of the whole corps are, we confess most discouraging. The conduct of the Georgia mounted men refusing to be mustered, will, if imitated deprive the army of an essential force. The condition of Gen. Clinch's command was such that he could not supply either provisions or reinforcements to Gen. Gaines – and such is understood to be the want of means of transportation for supplies, that it may be feared none can be placed early enough within reach of General Gaines. Meantime the season is advancing, which more than thousands of troops will fight on the Indian side – and when our force can only keep the field at the cost of innumerable lives, sacrificed not in battle, but in the hospital. It is probable that these accounts had reached Washington, and induced, as it is rumored, the immediate departure for the scene of war, of the Commander-in-chief, Gen. Macomb.

[Additional correspondence of the *Charleston Courier*]
St. Augustine, March 5th

You are aware that Gaines approached within 4 or 5 miles of Camp King – took eight days provisions, and returned to the Outhlachooshee, for the purpose of discovering whether any Indians were on the prowl. On arriving at that stream, his passage was disputed by a body of savages, amounting, it is surmised, to fifteen hundred – a fight commenced across the river which, although narrow, is deep and rapid – and continued two days, neither party gaining any material advantage.

“Nobody’s Hero:” Frank Laumer authors new fictional work on the life of Private Ransom Clark

Members are well-acquainted with Frank Laumer from his books Dade’s Last Command and Amidst a Storm of Bullets, and from his annual role as narrator Ransom Clark at the reenactment of the Dade Battle. Laumer has written historical works about Clark, one of two soldiers who survived the deadly opening to the Second Seminole War, but now he is working on a novel. “I’ve taken everything I know about him from my research,” he commented. “and then I’m filling in the gaps with fiction to connect all the facts.” The following is an excerpt. Two soldiers, Privates Ransom Clark and Edwin DeCoursey, have evaded the Seminoles after Dade’s Battle and are making their way back to Ft. Brooke. DeCoursey has a wound in one arm, Clark has three major wounds, one in his right hip, a bullet through his right shoulder and a bullet in his right lung.

Midmorning came. The sun was bright through the green needles of the pines, the sky clear, a breeze out of the west. A flicker of color ahead, a quarter mile away. Just a flash. “Clark! Something up there!” DeCoursey grabbed at Clark’s left arm. “I saw something. Red. There!” He pointed. Clark dropped so fast DeCoursey thought for an instant he had fallen. “Down! Down!” Clark was grabbing the ground with one hand, pushing out of the road toward the right with his bare left foot. “Down God damn it! Got to get cover. Seminole.”

DeCoursey stood. He could see the red headband of a Seminole now, a moment later the man came in sight around the next curve ahead, a rifle in his hand. His sudden scream made birds fly. There was no time, no chance of escape. The warrior had kicked his pony into a gallop, leaning over his neck, screaming his challenge. A moment longer DeCoursey paused. He seemed to see the Indian from a long distance, galloping, galloping. A glance showed him Clark was already out of sight, rustling away, under and through the palmetto. The sand was pocked and scuffed where his toes had dug for purchase. DeCoursey instantly brushed the ground with his smooth soled boot, left, right, left, right, shielding the movement from the oncoming Seminole by turning his left side to him, trying to distract his eye by jerking a canteen into the air as though it were a weapon. Beyond the road Clark’s path was lost in the thick duff. DeCoursey turned, ran north on the road a dozen steps, veered to his right and plunged into the woods, palmettos crashing and rattling behind him.

Clark pawed his way forward, pushing as best he could, pulling with his left hand, palmetto stems slicing his fingers like a fine-toothed saw blade. With every thrust he swiped his hand across his other sleeve but he knew that he would still leave drops of blood along his path. He could do nothing about that. He tried to push against palmetto roots or small trees with his foot in order not to leave ridges in the duff. Ten, twenty, thirty feet perhaps he had got west of the road. He reached the thickest palmetto clump in his path, pulled into it, rolled onto his back, grabbed dead fronds that broke easily, tried to cover himself. He was gasping, blood and saliva almost choking him. Suddenly from a distance a shout, a rifle shot. He put a final frond across his face, his left hand under his leg lest his pale skin of his hand give him away. He lay still, trying to slow his breathing, the pounding in his heart.

The Seminole was searching for him. He could hear the careful steps of the horse as the man quartered back and forth, searching for sign. The horse passed a dozen feet away, moved on, came back beyond Clark’s head. The horse was blowing quietly, the man soundless. Clark could picture him leaning over the pony’s shoulder, staring down, looking for his trail. Again he came near, close enough for Clark to see the horse’s legs, the Seminole’s left foot nudging the pony’s belly. The bare foot, the legging, were splashed with blood. Closer. Closer. Slowly, slowly, he began to withdraw his right hand from his coat. If he sees me, got to stand, try to fight. His hand came loose, the rattle of the Seminole woman’s bracelet loud. He held his breath.

Continued from previous page:

The third day General Gaines retired, and threw up a breast work after which he advanced to the river with two hundred men, recommenced the skirmish, and then retreated with a hope of deceiving his enemy and decoying them into an ambush. After dark on the same day, the entire body of Indians, now largely reinforced by the arrival of scattering squads, crossed the river and had the bravery to attack him in his trenches. The stratagem was successful – the cannon opened up upon them, and played with such effect that it is presumed three hundred Indians and Negroes were killed. I say presumed, as it is not shown whether that number were destroyed in the single engagement, or in the entire encounter. When the cannon opened, the savages began a “terrible howling,” and no wonder, for I am told that all the trace chains belonging to the wagons were used instead of balls, and literally mowed them down like grass beneath the scythe. Two of our officers were wounded in the engagement – one of whom, it is understood, has since died. Gaines has since sent to Clinch for provisions, but afterwards countermanded the order, as the Indians would capture the wagons. He is understood to be surrounded. His provisions must be gone and unless a reinforcement has been sent by Scott, the

Editorial Box

The Foundation Report is published four times per year for members of the Seminole Wars Historic Foundation, Inc. Anyone wishing to submit articles should contact the Managing Editor, James Cusick, at #222, 1500 N.W. 16th Ave., Gainesville, FL, 32605 or by phone (352-392-9075, ext. 306) or email (jgcusick@ull.edu).

The Seminole Wars Historic Foundation is a not-for-profit organization founded in 1992. Its mission is to work toward the preservation of sites important to Florida’s three Seminole wars and to promote publishing and education about this time period.

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Commentary on "Tales from a Trunk"
By Henry A. Sheldon

One hundred seventy years ago (1835) the 'Florida War' erupted against the Seminole Indians in the wilderness of Florida. For all practical purposes, the war was on the 'other side of the world' to most people living in the United States. It took the better part of a month to get news from the front lines to the settled cities of the northeast.

The *Albany Argus* article is a good example of how people got their news, and of its impact. The article summarizes events of the battle and siege at Camp Izard, taking the reader through Feb 29, 1836. Although the siege was long over by the March 19th date when the *Argus* ran its piece, New York readers still had no idea of the outcome. Read the article as if you were living in 1836, seeing the news for the first time with all your neighbors.

The article can be divided into three parts. The first part summarizes the opening events of the siege at Camp Izard through 29 Feb. based on Gaines's dispatch to Clinch of that date. The siege lasted another 6 days ending on March 6th, 1836 when Clinch's relief force arrived at the breastwork.

The second part is an editorial in which the correspondent, an adherent of General Winfield Scott, express his doubts about General Gaines (Scott's rival in Florida) and condemns him for falling into a trap. He accuses Gaines of betraying Scott by trying to create an independent command in Florida, and of gross negligence in mounting a field campaign without orders or sufficient supplies. These charges were eventually repeated before a military court of inquire in Frederick, Maryland in November 1836. The outcome was that both officers were allowed to vent their hatred for each other and were then sent back to duty. The country had bigger problems and could not afford the loss of either of its best fighting generals.

The third part, a comment from South Carolina, reflects state animosities in the antebellum South. South Carolina contributors accuse the Georgia militia of cowardice and insubordination by refusing to fight. Meanwhile the South Carolina militia is described as brave and heroic, comprised of 'young gentlemen of the greatest respectability.'

The article also draws attention to military tactics of the adolescent U.S. Army, in particular the use of artillery in a guerilla wilderness war. Two months earlier, artillery saw its first use in the Second Seminole War. Maj. Dade's command tried to break a Seminole ambush by discharging their field piece into the attackers. The ploy did not work—the Seminoles annihilated two companies of soldiers, and the cannon ended up at the bottom of a pond.

However, on the banks of the Withlachoocce, Gaines's use of artillery may have contributed to checking the Seminoles. Up to the Izard siege, Seminole warriors had not lost a battle. Black Point, Dade's Battle, the strike against Fort King, Clinch's first Battle of the Withlachoocce, raids against sugar plantations—all were Seminole victories.

But at Camp Izard, the Army finally made a stand and held. The question of whether or not artillery made a difference jumps out at you from this newspaper article. The supplementary comment from Charleston suggests that the cannon saved the day by firing wagon trace chain at the charging Indians. To my knowledge, there is no other such account of Gaines firing trace chains with his 8-pounder. There is nothing to this effect in Hitchcock's official report. Nothing in Prince's diary. Nothing in Sprague. If this article can be trusted, then the use of chain appears to have been an afterthought, perhaps even a desperate tactic.

For military historians, the article shows how much we have yet to learn about basic facts of the "Florida War." Did artillery win this battle? If so, the army drew no lesson from it. After Izard and possibly Scott's grand envelopment of the Cove of the Withlachoocce, there is no evidence that artillery was ever again involved in offensive operations of the Second Seminole War. There was no artillery at Okeechobee and none at Loxahatchee, the only other large pitched battles of the war. For the rest of the war, artillery's role was primarily to defend river crossings on the military roads and to protect forts and bridges.

The Seminole Wars Historic Foundation, Inc. (SWHF) manages the Camp Izard Battlefield under a lease agreement with the Southwest Florida Water Management District. Grants from the State of Florida, the Seminole Tribe of Florida, and the Donner Foundation made it possible to determine the location of Gaines's breastwork and command center through archaeology. This was done in partnership with Gary Ellis and the Gulf Archaeological Research Institute. The Donner Foundation has also funded interpretative work on the site. We gratefully acknowledge the generosity of these friends of the SWHF.