



# Rain and Storms Plague Museum Adventure

Foundation members and their hosts at the Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum had to brave thunder bursts, high winds, and sodden ground in their efforts to attend the annual Kissimmee Shootout at Big Cypress last February 4. Bad weather kept attendance low, but members, including the Marmons, the Snivelys, the Smiths, and others, gathered at Clewiston on Friday night and then drove through gathering gusts of rain to the museum the following morning. Even as they arrived, rolls of black clouds began to sweep over the Everglades from the north, and people quickly retreated into the shelter of the museum building. Within minutes, winds gusts became so dangerous that museum Executive Director Tina Osceola and her staff cleared the camp and exhibition grounds across the street, and brought everyone—visitors, vendors, and a troop of scouts—inside.

During all of this, Foundation members were in the museum library, where Bill Steele, the tribal preservation officer, discussed some of the important historical documents owned and safeguarded by the tribe. Among them were Zachary Taylor's account of the Battle of Okeechobee, written from the field, and a letter sent to the paramount chief Cowkeeper, leader of a major Seminole Town in Alachua during Florida's British Period (1763-1783).

Rain and standing water proved such a problem for the day that the Shootout event had to be cancelled, and the vendor area reopened only long enough for members to eat lunch (below). The museum remained the focus of attention, and board member Patsy West arrived in the afternoon, having forged through storm waters from Ft. Lauderdale, to show visitors around parts of the museum exhibits. In particular, she explained how the museum created its beautiful central tableau depicting dance and ball game components of the Green Corn Ceremony. A group of Cherokee Indians, attending the Shootout as re-enactors, also presented a program of Cherokee song and dance inside the museum in the afternoon.

The Foundation owes its thanks and gratitude to Tina Osceola and all the people at the museum for being such gracious hosts under trying circumstances. Ironically, board members John and Mary Lou Missall, who had to turn back from their attempt to reach Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki on Saturday, attended the second day of the Shootout under beautiful skies!



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## State of Florida agrees to purchase and preserve a portion of the Okeechobee battlefield

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A Report by Dr. Joe Knetsch

On March 29<sup>th</sup> I appeared in front of the Cabinet Aides' meeting to discuss the acquisition of the Battle of Lake Okeechobee site under the Florida Forever program. The questions were few and the presentation was short but to the point, focusing on a series of themes. The site has been on the National Trust for Historic Preservation endangered list for many years. Its significance to state and national history has always been clear. The Battle of Lake Okeechobee was one of the most important battles of the Second Seminole War, America's most costly Indian war in both men lost and money expended. It brought national recognition to Colonel (later General) Zachary Taylor who used it as a political springboard for his successful campaign to become president of the United States. Many of the most important leaders of the Seminoles and Miccosukees were involved in the battle, including Coacoochee, Abiaka and Alligator. It was also the last major battle of the Second Seminole War where both sides faced off in large numbers.

On the following Tuesday, April 4<sup>th</sup>, Foundation member and designated board member Bill Steele, spoke on behalf of the Seminole Tribe in front of the full Governor and Cabinet meeting and explained the history of the efforts that had been made to acquire this property. Representative Richard D. Macheek also appeared and stressed the importance of the site to the history and economic development of the Okeechobee area. The cause on behalf of the site also had fine support from Shawn Henderson (Executive Administrative Assistant to the Vice-Chairman of the Seminole Tribe of Florida), Hugh Macmillan (Governmental Relations Specialist with Macmillan Company) and a member of the Okeechobee City Council. Everyone is now looking forward to the day when the purchase is finalized and the property is safely in public hands. It is proposed that the Division of Recreation and Parks (Florida Park Service) manage the property in conjunction with the Archaeological and Historical Conservancy of South Florida. The cost of the project is slightly over three million dollars for approximately 145 acres.

The acquisition of the Battle of Lake Okeechobee site will add to the growing list of Seminole war sites now owned by the public. In addition to this site the following are also in the public domain: Fort Cooper, Fort Foster, Payne's Creek, the Camp Izard site, Fort Marion (Castillo San Marcos), and the Dade Battlefield. Fort King, in Ocala, is also in public ownership and on the Federal Register of historic places in Florida. The final purchase of the Okeechobee Battlefield site will provide the public with access to three of the most important battlefields of the Second Seminole War.

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## Powell's Battle and the Battle of Loxahatchee

On January 15, 2006, Foundation members Jeff and Lori Snively attended a commemoration at the battlefield site and provide this report.

On a cool and clear day, Sunday, January 15th, 2006, approximately 125 people came together in a small mostly unused park in Jupiter, Florida, to commemorate an event that had happened 168 years before. We gathered under an old oak tree in Riverbend Park to hear about Powell's Battle and the Battle of the Loxahatchee, and the role played in it by Black Seminoles.

Isa Bryant, a Black Seminole and the founder of the West Palm Beach "Black Historic Research Project" lead the commemoration. First he introduced Steve Carr, a local historian, who noted that there were more than 4000 years of archaeology and history related to Native Americans in Riverbend Park. Among that history is the Battle of Loxahatchee. Here, at the site where we gathered, the Second Seminole War came to a large village of Seminoles and Black Seminoles. For the Seminoles, surrender or capture meant deportation to Oklahoma. For the Black Seminoles it most likely meant the slave auction block. In January 1838, U.S. Navy Lieut. Levin N. Powell arrived to sweep the area and take prisoners with his force of sailors, infantry, and artillery. On January 15, his intrusion into the area led to a major skirmish.

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Isa Bryant then read an account of the skirmish. The Seminoles had the advantage of being an unseen enemy force of undetermined size. The fighting took its toll on Powell and his men and he finally gave the order to withdraw.

Richard Procyk, author of *Guns Across the Loxahatchee*, and a member of the Palm Beach Historic Resources Board, which has helped to preserve Riverbend Park from development, then recounted the entry of Major General Thomas S. Jesup in to the area with a larger force. When he arrived at the vicinity of the skirmish on January 24, 1838, the Seminoles put up a major resistance, and the Battle of Loxahatchee began. Procyk recounted the struggle, how the Seminoles made a stand first on the far side of a cypress swamp and then on the far side of a stream, at one time bringing Jesup's men to a standstill. Ultimately, Jesup moved forward with the Tennessee Volunteers, taking a wound to the face in the process, and the Seminoles retreated away from the battle, disappearing into the interior where the troops could not follow. This history, Procyk said, which played out all over Florida in the 1830s, needs to be remembered.

The commemoration ended with a short ceremony. We all stood up and formed a circle around the oak tree and Isa Bryant brought out a small Indian vase filled with water from the Loxahatchee River. He poured out the water in memory of those who had fought at this spot, saying the water "does represent the blood and tears that were shed here. This included the Seminoles, Black Seminoles, soldiers, sailors, and volunteers. Lest we never forget that." The ceremony ended with the firing of a single musket shot by Bob Enik.

Afterwards, participants broke into two groups to tour the area and see the location of the village and the area of the battle. In previous gatherings, the group has come to repeat an important theme learned from the past: "We need to always remember that we are of one race, and that is the human race."

## New Group of Second Seminole War Re-enactors Forms in Micanopy

*The following was submitted by member Tom Brady from the newsletter of the Micanopy Historical Society (February 2006, Vol. 24, No. 6):* The Micanopy Historical Society last year approved moving ahead with plans to organize a re-enactment group of the "Micanopy Regulars," a contingent of U.S. soldiers stationed at Fort Micanopy and Fort Defiance during the Second Seminole War. The support of the society, along with a grant from the Alachua County Tourist Development Agency, has enabled us to purchase

uniform items to give the company an authentic appearance. Brady and fellow re-enactor Ed Geers donned their uniforms and met with 150 seventh grade students from Chiefland on January 17 and 18, 2006. Students learned about the Second Seminole War and its impact on their area, about uniforms and equipment, and had a chance to see a musket fired.

"It is our hope," writes Brady, "to eventually grow into a larger group of soldiers, Seminoles, and pioneers. In the future we intend to drill a team, conduct musket firing demonstrations, and portray Private Joseph Sprague, who was stationed here. Our next appearance will be in the Micanopy Fourth of July parade." Brady still has a size 38R uniform available for anyone who would be interested in joining the "Regulars" and he can also provide biographical information on Private David Porter Weeks, who was stationed at Fort Micanopy. You can contact him at J.T. Brady, P.O. Box 523, Micanopy, FL 32667-0523.

### 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@uf.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. The main office of the Foundation is at 35247 Reynolds Avenue, Dade City, Fla. 33523. PHONE: (352) 583-2974 FAX: (352) 583-3486 WEB ADDRESS: <http://www.swhfoundation.org>

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## Presidents Message

I'd like to formally thank all the contributors—Joe Knetsch, Tom Brady, and Jeff and Lori Snively—for their articles in this issue of the newsletter. An important function of the *Foundation Report* is to impart information about what members are doing and what's happening around the state. I also want to express my gratitude to Board Members Tina Osceola and Patsy West for taking the time to help organize and/or to participate in our trip to Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki, weather not withstanding, and also to acknowledge the generosity of Bill Steele in taking time to talk with members and go through the rich holdings of the museum library. The Board is currently at work formulating plans for the future of the Fort Dade site and, through the efforts of Frank Laumer, is also starting a pamphlet or "short articles" series to provide you, the members, with some free original works about the Seminole Wars. As always, your support and participation in the Foundation is much appreciated.

—James Cusick

### Photo Credits:

Above: Ed Geer and Tom Brady in their roles as privates Sprague and Becker.

Below: Geer and Brady talk with a group of seventh grade students from Chiefland.

