

The Foundation Report

Seminole Wars Historic Foundation, Inc.

Spring 2007



Board of Directors

Frank Laumer (Pres.)
John Missall (V.P.)
Henry Sheldon (Tres.)
Samuel Smith (Sec.)

William H. Edwards, Jr.
Joe Knetsch
Dale Anne Laumer
Mary Lou Missall
Gregory Moore
Tina Osceola
Jackson Walker
Patsy West

Fort King Member's Event



Henry Sheldon addresses the attendees

Photo courtesy Dr. Sam Smith

This year's first member's event was held at the site of Fort King in Ocala on May 5th. The purpose of the event was to re-invigorate the effort to develop the site as a National Park where residents and visitors could learn the history of the founding of Ocala and the fort's importance in the Seminole Wars.

The success of the event could not have been achieved without the continued support of the City of Ocala. Mayor

Randy Ewers was in attendance, along with City Manager Paul Nugent, a long-time advocate for the preservation of the site. Special thanks must go to Astrida Trupovnieks, assistant to the city manager, who made the arrangements, brought drinks, made displays, and took care of numerous other small details. Our appreciation also goes out to Dave Pritchard, Director of Recreation and Parks, whose staff set up tents, chairs, and provided the "facilities."

The meeting was opened by President Jim Cusick, who then turned the podium over to Treasurer Henry Sheldon, who had organized the event, and has been instrumental in helping to preserve the site. Henry related the history of the site and plans for future development. A project such as this cannot be carried forward without assistance from our elected officials, and representatives from a number of Congressional offices were on hand to read letters of support from those officials. These included John A. Konkus, District Director, Office of Congressman Cliff Stearns (R), 6th District of Fla.; Jonathon W. Miller, Field Representative, Office of Congressman Ric Keller (R), 8th District of Fla.; and Kevin Doyle, N. Fla. Regional Director, Office of Sen. Mel Martinez (R).

Upon the conclusion of the speeches, archaeologist Gary Ellis of Gulf Archaeological Research Institute led the attendees on a tour of the site, pointing out the location of the outer walls, several outbuildings, and gave notes on the topography. Also on hand was member Earl DeBary, dressed in period Seminole clothing. Earl grew up in the neighborhood, presently lives across the street, and has spent much of his life exploring the site and talking to pioneers who lived in the area.



Gary Ellis discusses the archeology of the site.

Photo courtesy Dr. Sam Smith

After touring the site, the attendees traveled to the nearby Silver River State Park for lunch. The park management waived admission for our group and graciously provided a room for us to use. They also allowed us access to the Silver River Museum, which contains many artifacts from the area, including a number from Fort King. During lunch, re-enactors Tom Brady and Ed Geer of the Micanopy Regulars spoke on the Seminole War era weapons they carried and period uniforms they wore. Earl DeBary then told us about the Indian clothing that he was dressed in. Our thanks goes out to member Pamela Stafford, who helped organize the event, coordinated with the city, and arranged lunch. Finally, the Board of Directors would like to thank those members who attended the event, making it a complete success. All of you have done your part to help preserve an important Seminole War site.

Foundation Hosts Session at Annual Florida Historical Society Meeting



l. to r.: Henry Sheldon, Jackson Walker, John Missall, Mary Lou Missall, Jim Cusick, Joe Knetsch, Dale Laumer, Frank Laumer, Greg Moore.

Photo courtesy Greg Moore

There was something new at this year's meeting of the Florida Historical Society: A session hosted by our Foundation. Although our members have always attended the meetings and have presented papers to the group, this is the first time that we have taken part as an organization. Even the venue was historic. The meeting was held at the 110 year old Belleview Biltmore Hotel in Clearwater. At 9:00 am on Saturday, May 26th, Dr. Joe Knetsch opened the program, entitled "Military Lives: Officer's Experiences in the Second Seminole War."

The first speakers to be introduced by Dr. Joe were John and Mary Lou Missall, who read a paper about Col. William S. Foster, "Fighting the System While Fighting the Indians." Foster's frustrations with the army and the government bureaucracy were highlighted by excerpts from letters written to his wife from the seat of war. The next presenter was Lt. Col. Greg Moore, who delivered a paper entitled "Code of Honor:

Capt John C. Casey and the Seminoles." Capt. Casey was agent to the Florida Seminoles between the Second and Third Seminole Wars and was one of the few white men trusted by the natives. The reason: He was an honest man. The third speaker was Dr. Jim Cusick, whose paper was called "The Difficulty in this Quarter: The Life and Death of Capt. Joseph Van Swearingen in the Second Seminole War." Capt. Van Swearingen spent a number of tedious months at Fort Dade before taking part in the Battle of Okeechobee, where he was slain, along with most other officers of the Sixth Regiment of Infantry. The final presenter was Henry Sheldon, who related his own experiences in the Vietnam War to those of the officers who had served in the Seminole War.

Our session was not the only one devoted to the Seminoles and their wars with the United States. In the meeting's final session, Kevin Kokomoor from the University of South Florida presented a paper about runaway slaves and maroon blacks living among the Seminoles during the wars. Andrew K. Frank of Florida Atlantic University spoke of the Seminole attempts at cultural and political sovereignty during the wars. The final speaker was Board Member Patsy West, who delivered a paper entitled "From Hard Times to Hard Rock", which covered the tribes' changes of fortune in the past few decades. The story of how the Seminoles went from relative poverty to a multimillion dollar global corporation in the space of one generation was astounding.

Call for Volunteers

Are you tired of just reading about American history? Would you like to help contribute to the gathering of new knowledge? Are you anxious to become involved in the Foundation's work but don't know where to begin? None of us were born with the "Great American History Book" already burned in our brains, just waiting to be put on paper. It takes effort to find new facts and insights. It takes time to organize those facts and create a plausible tale. There are secrets out there waiting to be discovered, but none of them will be found until someone begins looking for them. Part of the Foundation's mission is to uncover some of the secrets of the Seminole Wars and bring them to light. To do that, we need your help. We have a lot of work to do, and none of it will get done if someone doesn't take the initiative. Here are a few examples:

- We have hundreds of pages of handwritten letters and documents. To be practical for research each of these papers needs to be put into typescript. Reading handwritten letters and reports from the past can be challenging, but it is also extremely rewarding. Indeed, this is precisely how our publication "This Miserable Pride of a Soldier" came to be. Mary Lou Missall simply asked if there were some letters she could help transcribe.
- The John K. Mahon Memorial library at the Foundation headquarters holds some 5000 books, hundreds of letters and many maps. All of this material needs to be catalogued and indexed, and every little bit of help would be appreciated. The library is a true treasure, but if it isn't properly organized, its value for research is diminished. Going through the stacks of books is a pleasure unto itself. Heaven knows what you might find of interest while helping sort it all out.
- As an example of research work that can be taken up by anyone, the work on Dade's battle has been underway for more than forty years. Dozens of leads have turned up that have not yet been pursued. On this subject and dozens of others, we can provide you with names, addresses and typical lines of inquiry that may bring astonishing new information.
- We also have more specialized needs, if someone has the specialized skills. Our pamphlet series has been well-received, but we need an editor, someone who will organize and guide the effort, so that we can produce these works on a more regular basis. We also need someone to help publicize and market the Foundation's publications. We have a fine collection of books, and we need to bring them to a wider audience.

If you are interested in helping discover some of the secrets of Seminole Wars history, call 352/583-2711 and learn how you can help. The only requirements are an interest in the Seminole Wars, and time – perhaps a few hours or the occasional day. If you are extremely lucky, you may find an interest that will fascinate you for the rest of your life.

Progress at Fort Dade



A test trench at Fort Dade

Photo Courtesy Dr. Sam Smith

On April 14th the Board of Directors met with Gary Ellis of Gulf Archaeological Research Institute, the organization we have hired to begin preliminary excavations at the site of Fort Dade, located on the Withlacoochee River, not far from Foundation headquarters. Gary is a long-time member of the Foundation and is one of a few archaeologists in the state who are intimately familiar with the location and condition of Seminole War sites in Florida.

When most of us think of archaeological digs, a vision of deep pits filled with bones and large fragments of pottery comes to mind. Nothing of the sort is to be found at Fort Dade. Because of the nature of the site, the work is much more detailed and painstaking. Fort Dade was a temporary structure; it didn't last more than a few years and was occupied even less. There were no deep founda-

tions and no long term build up of artifacts. The clues that Gary is looking for are very small and easy to miss. Yes, there is pottery, but nearly all the pieces are less than an inch across. There are also bones, but primarily from the fish that the soldiers caught in the river and dined on.

There are other small items of interest that tell us much about life in a frontier outpost. There are numerous uniform buttons, lost when the threads that attached them wore through. There are musket balls, both used and unused. There are pieces of thin glass lamp chimneys, a sign that officers had brought some of the comforts of home out to the wilderness. There are pipe bowls and pipe stems, and one can envision soldiers relaxing, enjoying an evening smoke. More than anything else, there are pieces of broken whiskey bottles, a sure sign of soldiers fighting boredom at a remote location.

The earth itself has much to tell, though it takes a trained eye to spot the clues. When Gary pointed to the ground in a test trench, most of us saw nothing but sand. Upon closer examination, however, we could see a slight difference in color and texture, a sign of clay that had been brought up from the riverbed and pounded into a floor. A darkened, circular area marked a posthole and contained the remains of a burnt timber. There is little use for a shovel in this sort of dig. Most of the work is done slowly, with a trowel and a scraper. Depths are measured in millimeters, not inches or feet. Yet with even these small clues, we have a good idea of the outline of the fort and the placement of major structures. When a detailed report is received, we'll pass the findings along to the membership. The results should be enlightening and exciting.

An Intriguing Artifact

It's one of the stranger things we've been asked to evaluate. A package was recently received from Foundation member Bill Dayton of Dade City, which contained an engraved palm boot (base of a palm frond). He had received it from an antique dealer and the item was subsequently purchased by the Dade Battlefield Society and is now in possession of the Foundation.

The boot is about a foot long with a braided leather thong that it would have hung by, perhaps from a tent post. What makes it interesting is the wording carved into the face of it: "In memorium [*sic*] of those who died at the hands of the Seminoles in the massacre of Major Dade and his men on December 28, 1835. Major Dade, Captain Gardiner, Lieutenants Mudge, Bassinger, Keais, Henderson & Frazier lost plus one hundred others. First Lieutenant George A. McCall, 4th U.S. Infantry, 4 May 1836, Camp on the Sabine, Florida War."

Is it authentic? Short of expensive carbon dating, it is impossible to know. Perhaps a botanist could determine if the boot is from a species of palm that is normally found along the Sabine River (which forms the boundary between Texas and Louisiana). A major inconsistency is that Lt. Frazier was actually Capt. (Upton S.) Fraser. In a letter to his father dated May 1 from a "Camp on the Sabine River", McCall refers three times to "Capt. Frazer." It is the last name listed on the boot, so we can speculate that McCall might have initially forgotten Fraser, then added him at the end, even though the rank was in error. He certainly wouldn't have expected anyone to notice the error almost two centuries later.



The engraved palm boot

Photo courtesy Dr. Sam Smith

William Sturtevant 1926-2007

The community of Florida Seminole friends lost one of its most important members this year with the passing of anthropologist William Sturtevant on March 2nd. Sturtevant earned his bachelor's degree from the University of California, Berkeley, in 1949, and a doctorate from Yale in 1955. During his time at Yale, Sturtevant began a life-long relationship with the Seminoles of Florida. One of his most important works was his doctoral dissertation, "The Mikasuki Seminole: Medical Beliefs and Practices", which has become a standard in the study of ethno botany and southeastern woodlands culture. Of perhaps greater importance was his testimony before Congress in 1954, where he spoke passionately against the "termination" of the Florida Seminoles as a federally recognized Indian tribe. Without his forceful testimony, there might very well be no official Seminole Tribe of Florida as we now know it.

Membership Renewals are Due

Enclosed with this quarter's newsletter you will find your 2007-2008 membership renewal form. Ours is a small organization with a big job to do and we need the support of all our members. Please don't let your membership lapse. Also, if your means will allow, please consider a generous donation to our fund program. Our work of excavation, publication, and education needs your support if it is to continue. Thank you.

Election of New Officers

At the April 14th Board of Director's meeting, elections were held for officers for the 2007-2008 fiscal year. Sadly, President Jim Cusick announced that he would not be standing for re-election. He has recently been appointed to the Board of Directors of the Florida Historical Society, and along with increased duties in his position at Special Collections at the University of Florida he has found his time stretched too thin. As many of you will remember, Jim stepped in as president when former president Brent Weisman was forced to step down due to severe illness. Jim filled the position with enthusiasm and imagination and has helped move the organization forward in more ways than his modesty will allow him to admit. The Board of Directors extends a very hearty "thank you" to Jim for all his efforts and wishes him luck at the FHS.

The new officers are:

Frank Laumer, President
John Missall, Vice President
Henry Sheldon, Treasurer
Samuel Smith, Secretary

Editorial Box

The Foundation report is published quarterly for members of the Seminole Wars Historic Foundation, Inc. Anyone wishing to submit articles should contact Managing Editor John Missall at 11155 Rabun Gap Dr., Ft. Myers, FL 33917; 239-543-8831; missall@comcast.net.

The Seminole Wars Historic Foundation, Inc. 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 Ave., Dade City, FL 33523. Phone: 352-583-2974. FAX: 352-583-3486. Web address: <http://www.swhfoundation.org>.

President's Message

This will be my last message as president of the Foundation and I want to thank all members and the directors for their constant assistance and support. Most of the successes of the past year can be attributed to other officers and members. Special recognition should go to Frank Laumer, John Missall, and Mary Lou Missall for initiating our shorter pamphlet style publications and to Henry Sheldon for reinvigorating the Foundation's support for preserving Fort King in Ocala. I am also grateful to everyone who has participated in our annual "Authors and Artists Day" event--I feel it is one of the events that helps bind us together as an organization of common interest. Hopefully we will soon see our secretary, Sam Smith, and incoming board member Greg Moore among the featured authors. They are both hard at work on research for publication.

Of course, new challenges abound for us all. Members can expect to hear a great deal during this coming year about Gary Ellis' archaeological study of the Fort Dade Site. The Foundation will be working hard to document and protect this significant historic property.

Finally, I welcome our incoming directors and hope that your time on the board will be as enjoyable and enlivening an experience as it has been for me. The Foundation will receive clear and dedicated leadership from incoming president Frank Laumer. I look forward to seeing everyone at our 2007-2008 events.

--- Jim Cusick



35247 Reynolds Ave.
Dade City, FL 33523

Ph. 352-583-2974
Fax: 352-583-3486

www.swhfoundation.org