

The Foundation Report

Seminole Wars Historic Foundation, Inc.

Winter 2008



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November Members' Meeting

On November 10, 2007, Archaeologist Gary Ellis of Gulf Archaeological Research Institute hosted a Member's Meeting at the Foundation's headquarters at the Laumer estate in Dade City for the purpose of reporting on progress at the Fort Dade site. After delivering a summation of his finds to date, Gary led the attendees over to the site, where members were shown the actual pits and trenches that Gary and his crew have dug. Upon completion of the tour of the site, members returned to headquarters for lunch and to socialize.



Gary Ellis inside one of the excavation pits.

Photo by Henry Sheldon

As Gary and his team continue their excavations, exciting new details of the fort's construction and layout emerge. The excavations have confirmed the general position of the fort, as previously determined by former Foundation President Brent Weisman, with some interesting additions in detail. A trench of some sort has been detected, either within or just outside the fort on the northwest side. The trench appears to contain significant amounts of charred wood, nails, musket balls and other military accoutrements. As far as material objects are concerned, Gary's team continues to locate musket balls and broken pieces of clear and olive colored glass normally associated with camp life. The most intriguing material finds are the numerous rusted nails and spikes, which are extremely useful in helping delineate the layout and dimensions of the various structures within the fort.

The other feature which helps delineate the fort is the presences of "fort earth." This is a compacted light clay, presumably from the nearby riverbed, that was placed on the ground within the buildings of the fort. One particularly rich spot contained several burned postholes, one of which had the unburned portion of a 10" pine post still standing vertically, underground. This same pit also contained numerous nails, spikes, and pieces of glass, all atop or within a thin layer of burnt fort earth. One of the more interesting features is a clearly visible burned plank with a large nail protruding from the end.

The crew from GARI continues its work, both on-site and in the lab, analyzing and cataloging items that have been dug up. We will keep you informed as work progresses.



Excavation pit showing the remains of a charred plank with a nail protruding from the end.

Photo by Henry Sheldon

2007 Dade Battle Re-enactment



Soldiers rush to defend the cannon at the height of the battle.

Photo by John Missall

On December 29 & 30, 2007, the annual re-enactment of Dade's Battle was held at the Dade Battlefield State Historic Park in Bushnell. The beautiful weather on Saturday no doubt contributed to what may have been record attendance at the annual event. The bleachers were packed and there were reports that the remote parking lot was overflowing. As usually happens on Sunday, the crowd was a bit smaller, but still very large. Also in attendance were many re-enactors, both soldier and Seminole, making the battle more realistic than any other such Seminole War event. On Saturdays, the battle is movingly narrated by Kent Low, portraying the "ghost" of Ransom Clark, one of the two survivors of the original battle.

On Sunday the weather was a bit cloudier, but still pleasant. This day the battle was narrated by Foundation President Frank Laumer, who brings life to the character of Ransom Clark, dressed in bloody bandages and speaking in a desperate, near-death voice. As the cannon boomed, thunder could be heard in the distance, but the heavy rains mercifully held off until the battle was over and most attendees were able to find cover.

In conjunction with the battle, Foundation Treasurer Henry Sheldon gave a talk at the breastwork in front of the park's museum, giving the history of the site and the battle that took place there. Later Saturday evening, Vice President John Missall participated in the moving candlelight ceremony honoring the soldiers who gave their lives at that place on December 28, 1835. Missall read a passage from "This Miserable Pride of a Soldier" that described the funeral that took place six weeks after the battle.



The victorious Seminoles examine the dead.

Photo by John Missall

Event Calendar

Change of Date! Fort Foster Rendezvous, February 16 & 17, 2008. Located at the Hillsborough River State Park, north of Tampa on US 301.

Big Cypress Shootout, February 23 & 24, 2008. Located at Billie Swamp Safari, on the Big Cypress Seminole Reservation, north of I-75, midway between Naples and Fort Lauderdale.

Old Florida Festival, March 1 & 2, 2008. Located at the Collier County Museum, behind the courthouse, Naples.

Fort Cooper Days, March 15 & 16, 2008, Located at Fort Cooper State Park, Inverness.

Member's Meeting at Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Seminole Museum, March 29, 2008. See article on page 4. Nearby accommodations: Billie Swamp Safari (on the reservation): 1-800-949-6101, www.seminoletribe.com/safari; Historic Clewiston Inn (Clewiston, 30-45 minutes from the reservation): 1-800-749-4466

Living History at Fort Christmas, April 5 & 6, 2008. Located at the County Park, Christmas, SR 50 between Orlando and Titusville.

New Event at Payne's Creek

A new Seminole Wars event was inaugurated on January 12 & 13, 2008, at Payne's Creek State Historic Park. Although no battle took place between the army and Seminole Warriors at the site, it was the location of one of the more infamous events in the struggle between the United States and the Florida Indians. In 1849, seven years after the conclusion of the Second Seminole War, there was still considerable tension between white settlers and the Indians. In July of that year, five renegade Indians attacked an outpost at Ft. Pierce, then moved swiftly inland and murdered two men at another trading post near the Peace River. Fearing an all out war, the government began to build a series of forts across the peninsula. At the site of the destroyed store on the Peace River, the army constructed Fort Chokolikna. Today, the location of that fort is on the grounds of the Payne's Creek Historic State Park.



Seminole encampment at Fort Chokolikna

Photo by John Missall

The much-feared war did not materialize. Chief Billy Bowlegs earnestly wanted peace with the white men, wishing only for his people to be left alone in their Everglades homes. To show good faith, he dispatched a group of warriors to apprehend the criminals. Three of the five murderers were captured and turned over to the authorities. The severed hand of a fourth was also turned in. The other man escaped. For the moment, tensions eased, troops were withdrawn, and Fort Chokolikna was abandoned.

The present site of all this activity is now a lovely park, with moss-draped oaks, hiking trails, and access to the Peace River for canoe or kayak trips. For this event, several Seminole Camps were set up, along with a soldier and his tent. The Foundation set up a table, selling our publications and relating the history of the Seminole Wars to the visitors. In future years, as the event becomes increasingly well known, the park hopes to stage a re-enactment of some nearby skirmish. For this year, the pleasant weather and interested visitors served to make the event a success.

Osceola Exhibit at the Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum

On January 27, 2008, the Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum of the Seminole Tribe will open a major exhibition on the life and times of the great war leader Osceola. The exhibit "Osceola Remembered" will focus on the many contradictions in the warrior's short life. The man who would come to symbolize the Seminole Nation and its struggle to remain in Florida was not born in Florida, was not technically a Seminole, and was not even a full-blooded Native American. He was born a Creek Indian in Alabama, the son of a white trader and an Indian woman. Driven to Florida after the Creek War of 1814, Osceola refused to be driven from his home again. More than any other man, he argued against forced removal to the Indian Territory. During the war he was an inspirational leader and was captured under a flag of truce in late 1837. Upon his death in prison at Charleston in early 1838, he became the symbol of Indian resistance, a hero to both Indians and whites.

Featured in the exhibit will be the Robert John Curtiss painting "Osceola, War Chief of the Seminoles" painted shortly before the warrior's death. Also on display will be a copy of Osceola's death mask, made by Frederick Weedon, the physician attending at the time of his passing. The exhibit will also look at how the legend of Osceola evolved and how he was seen by Americans of the time and for generations to come.

The Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum is located on the Big Cypress Seminole Reservation, fifteen miles north of I-75 (Alligator Alley) midway between Naples and Fort Lauderdale. The museum also features a one-mile nature walk and numerous other exhibits. The exhibit runs through the remainder of the year.

Foundation Board member and museum Executive Director Tina Osceola is also proud to announce that the museum has received interim accreditation from the American Association of Museums. This is an honor only the best museums receive and is evidence of the high standards practiced in the collection, conservation, and display of museum artifacts. Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki is the first tribal museum to gain this distinction.

On behalf of the museum, Tina has also made the pledge of a generous grant for the next three years to help support the Foundation's upcoming projects. The other members of the Board thank her and the tribe for their continued support.



Spring Member's Meeting to be held at the Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum

Maybe this time we won't get rained out. The Foundation held a meeting at the Museum two years ago that was more or less washed out by a truly horrendous line of thunderstorms. Still, there had been considerable interest in the meeting and the Board of Directors was determined to try again. Plans are not yet entirely finalized, but we will be holding the meeting on Saturday, March 29, 2008. Because of the driving distance, the meeting will commence at 11:00 am. The museum will provide a guide to take us through the exhibits and to show us the work being done at the conservation and curatorial building. Lunch will be provided by the Foundation. The museum also features a 1.25 mile boardwalk with a small Seminole village. We will send out a more detailed notice as the date of the event gets closer. The Museum is located south of Clewiston on SR 835 or north of I-75 near the Collier/Broward County line. See event calendar for accommodation information. **RSVP to Frank Laumer at 352-583-2711**

Awards

Foundation member Joe Crankshaw is the 2008 recipient of the Florida Historical Society's Dorothy Dodd Lifetime Achievement Award for a career of fifty years as a reporter of Florida history.

After receiving his bachelor's degree in history in 1958, Joe began work in the newspaper business, and his column "Tales of the Treasure Coast" was a long-running feature in the *Miami Herald*.

Foundation Board member Dr. Joe Knetsch received the "President's Award" from the Florida Surveying and Mapping Society at their annual education conference in Key Largo, in recognition of the numerous services and publications done on behalf of the surveying profession in Florida.

In a related note, Joe has also been elected as a "Research Associate" by the St. Augustine Historical Society. This honor is shared by only seven other outstanding scholars in the state and nation.

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

Our several Seminole Wars projects are moving on apace. Gary Ellis has continued the archaeological work at Ft. Dade and has found significant material to give us a preliminary idea of the locations of walls, blockhouses, etc. He has provided many on-site photographs of evidence which we will have on display at the next Member Meeting.

Our next book publication is planned to be a compilation of Dr. Joe Knetsch's articles dealing with the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Seminole Wars. We are projecting a publication date of Spring 2008.

Several members have responded to our plea for assistance in creating typescripts from the hundreds of pages of manuscripts in our collection and this assistance is very much appreciated. If anyone else would like to pick up copies of manuscripts, we have plenty for all.

If any of you have any knowledge of library science, we would be glad to have you contact us about initiating a cataloging of our ever-growing collection of books, maps, and pictures.

For any of you interested in actual, vital research, we have dozens of leads on people and events of the Wars that you could follow up on. We can provide you with names and addresses of potential sources as well as a form letter of inquiry. For instance, we know that Frances Gardiner, widow of Captain Gardiner (killed in Dade's battle) lived until 1892 and died in Hartford Connecticut. On the chance that their descendants (they had 2 children) might have letters or pictures relating to Captain Gardiner, it would be an extremely worthwhile pursuit for someone to seek out obituaries from the Hartford papers and go from there. We do know that their great, great, great grandson was a graduate of West Point in approximately 1960. Anyone interested?

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