



Florida Comments

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SEMINOLE INDIANS OF FLORIDA

In few states is one as conscious of the Indians as in Florida. Many place names give evidence of their early presence -- Caloosahatchee, Waukeenah, Tallahassee, Oklawaha, Okeechobee, Choctawhatchee, Miami and hundreds more. Impressive mounds, dating back hundreds of years are found along the coasts and rivers. Today, the Indians live in the southern part of the state, interesting and exotic figures in their colorful native dress. Now formally organized into two tribes, they are descendents of the Seminoles - the "Runaways" from the Creek Nation who came into Florida from the north early in the 18th century.

HISTORY

The native population of Florida at the time of the Spanish explorers numbered approximately 10,000 Indians, divided into four major tribes. In the southwest were the Calusa, fishermen and mariners who violently opposed the advance of the white men. Along the east coast as far north as Cape Canaveral dwelt the Tegesta, a people hostile to the Spaniards, but not openly aggressive. The Timucuan of central and northeast Florida were more civilized than the Indians in the south, lived in large villages, and their language was used as a general dialect by Spanish missionaries. In the northwest lived the Apalachee, semi-civilized and powerful; their chiefs united in a strong league.

By 1569, the Spanish abandoned hope of establishing missions or forts in South Florida due to the hostility of the Indians and no permanent settlement was ever made by them in that area. In the north, the Indians proved friendlier and a chain of missions was built from St. Augustine to the region west of Tallahassee. For almost a century, the Indians lived in peace, little changed from earlier times save for the introduction of Christianity. With the settling of the Carolinas and Georgia by the English, the centuries old struggle between Spain and England was extended to the New World and for many years Florida was the scene of constant conflict. The Creek Indians of Georgia sided with the English and, beginning in 1702, made raids into Florida as far south as the Everglades, carrying hundreds of Indian captives to Charleston where they were sold as slaves. The missions and towns on the Spanish Trail across northern Florida were

destroyed. As the land was laid waste and the natives carried off, the Creek invaders took over the area and settled down. When Florida became a British Territory in 1763, the English found the Creeks firmly established and banded together in a strong confederation. They had broken with the Creek nation in Georgia and were known as the Seminoles or "Runaways." The thousands of Indians who originally lived in Florida were reduced to a few hundred, many of whom left with the Spaniards for countries to the south.

After the Revolutionary War, when Florida was again a Spanish possession, fugitive Negro slaves escaped into Florida and found refuge among the Seminoles. Friction resulted when American planters entered the Indian villages and tried to recapture the slaves. In addition, British agents deliberately inspired great animosity against the Americans among the Indians. Increasing border disturbances led to the First Seminole War (1818) when Andrew Jackson captured and held St. Marks and Pensacola for a short time. Spain, losing her power to control and protect the territory, ceded Florida to the United States by treaty in 1819 (effective 1821). At this time, the Indian population numbered approximately 5,000 persons.

Between that date and 1835 the lot of the Seminoles was an unhappy one as frequent attempts were made to move them to lands west of the Mississippi. In 1823, they were granted by the Treaty of Moultrie's Creek a reservation in north central Florida but, four years later, all Indian males were forbidden outside it without written permission. During the next few years, tension mounted and treaties were drawn, then broken, by both sides. By the Treaty of Payne's Landing, 1832, fifteen chiefs from the diverse tribes agreed to send representatives to look over the western territory and, if satisfied with the prospects, they would move their people west.

Subsequently, the Treaty was denounced by some of the signers while other Seminoles felt they had not been represented, thus were not compelled to abide by the terms. In 1835, a series of "incidents" led to open warfare between Federal troops and the Indians, the Second Seminole War. Strong resistance was offered by the tribes under their great chiefs - Osceola, Micanopy, Coacoochee, Aprieka and Alligator--but gradually they were driven back; many were captured and shipped west. The bitter struggle ended informally in 1842 when the few remaining fled to the unexplored wilderness of the Everglades and established a new way of life away from the civilization of the white man.

In 1855, a party of surveyors happened on Chief Bowleg's village in the Everglades, robbed and destroyed the Indians' gardens. Refused restitution by the surveyors, the Chief led his warriors against their camp and thus began the Third Seminole War. It lasted three years with Federal troops hunting the elusive Indians through the Glades, destroying their villages and crops. The costly conflict ended when Chief Bowlegs,

given a liberal sum by the Federal government, agreed to take his followers west. One hundred and twenty-three accompanied him; the rest refused to go and faded back into the swamp, seldom seen and generally considered a dying race. Not until 1938 did the long war officially end with the signing of a truce between the Seminoles and the United States Government. Theoretically, they are still at war with the United States having never signed a peace treaty. However, this is due more to federal law than to Seminole irreconcilability for, in 1871, Congress passed an act stating, "No Indian tribe or nation within the territory of the United States shall be acknowledged or recognized as an independent nation, tribe or power, with whom the United States may contract by treaty."

Left in peace through the years, the Seminoles have proved a resilient people. Once down to less than 300, they now number approximately 1,600 individuals. In 1911, the Federal government established the Dania Reservation, (Hollywood), 475 acres in Broward County' in 1936-37, the Brighton Reservation of 35,795 acres northwest of Lake Okeechobee and later the Big Cypress Reservation of 42,698 acres in Hendry County. In addition, Florida has set aside approximately 106,000 acres adjacent to Big Cypress in west Broward County as a State Indian Reservation. The Cross-Florida highway "Alligator Alley" is on the southern edge of Big Cypress.

THE SEMINOLES TODAY

In Florida today the Seminoles are divided into two linguistic groups--the Miccosukee (Trail Indians) and the Muskogee or Cow Creek (Reservation Indians)--and live on the three federal reservations, in camps along the Tamiami Trail, in several exhibition villages and in a few widely scattered camps. While many are adjusting to modern conditions, a few continue to live almost as their ancestors did one hundred years ago.

The center of a Seminole encampment is the cook house, a floorless structure with a palmetto roof. Here a fire is built in the ancient way with large logs placed like the spokes of a wheel, a fire glowing at the hub where a pot of bubbling sofkee (a thin gruel) is hung. The living huts or chickees, surrounding the kitchen shelter, are built of hand hewn logs, palmetto-thatched with a platform of saplings elevated a few feet above the ground. There is practically no furniture but few chickees are without a sewing machine so necessary for the making of their elaborate clothing. Agriculture once played an important part in supplying food for the family, now many items "store-bought."

The tribal dress of the Seminoles has been ascribed to many sources, from outright copying of some unnamed white style to the imitation of the colorful banded tree snail of the Everglades. However, the present style is actually a gradual development from the time when cloth was scarce and the women had to piece scraps of material together for their sewing. Through the years the bands and inserts of color have increased and become more complex. The women and girls wear the long, gaily banded skirts and plainer, cape-like blouses plus string upon string of bright beads. At birth, a baby girl is given her first string and through life she accumulates many more. A woman's hair is never covered; frequently a large "rat" after

the mode of the early 1900's is used to bolster her pompadour. The men and boys usually wear a large cowboy hat, dark trousers and shirt but, for tribal ceremonies, they too wear native costume. This consists of a gay blouse with intricate geometric design, often worn with trousers of vivid color, a bright scarf tied at the throat.

The Seminoles provide for their own basic needs in terms of food, clothing and shelter; receiving no subsidy from the government and wanting none. The greater part of their income is derived from wages earned in the harvesting of truck crops, jobs in the lumber camps and on the ranches, as mechanics and drivers on construction work. Entrance fees to exhibition villages, the sale of hides, furs and Indian handicrafts add in some measure to their economic welfare. A program of cattle raising has been encouraged by the Federal government on the Brighton and Big Cypress Reservations with marked success. Prior to 1953, the operation was run as a tribally owned herd; then Indian Cattlemen Associations were organized under a State charter for the management of the operation on each Reservation and the tribally owned cattle were sold to individual members. The present goal is for each family, wishing to participate in the program, to obtain a 150 head herd and cattle loans are being made to qualified individuals as rapidly as improved pastures become available.

Racially the Seminoles are not segregated from other residents of the State. The Federal government maintains one Indian day school on Big Cypress Reservation for children, grades one through eight; others go to public schools nearest their homes and the enrollment is practically 100%. Adult education and vocational training programs are offered plus assistance from the Florida Agricultural Extension Service. The latter includes improving family and home life, health, 4H Club activities, livestock management and improvement.

The day of the medicine man is passing as the Seminoles turn more often for aid in time of illness to the Indian Service nurse and hospital facilities in adjoining communities. It is interesting to note that the Florida Indians are among the healthiest in the nation. With the cooperation of the Bureau of Indian Affairs a housing development (Seminole Indian Estates) was built on the Dania Reservation and, at present, all residents there live in modern homes. On the Big Cypress Reservation a housing project has been laid out, the streets paved and the U.S. Public Health Service has financed a modern community water system and sewage facility. The purchase of homes is made possible by a revolving credit program offering low interest loans to eligible members. Organized recreation on the Reservations is provided at community centers and parks under the direction of full-time recreational directors.

In 1957, the Seminole Tribe of Florida was organized under a federal constitution with membership restricted to those who make formal application. It was the first officially organized tribe in the state and has an elected

eight-member Tribal Council as its governing body plus committees which handle all problems relating to tribal government, law and order, education, welfare and recreation. The Seminole Tribe of Florida, Inc., a federally chartered corporation, is the business organization of the Tribe to which the responsibility for the development and management of its resources has been delegated by the Tribal Council. It owns and operates the Seminole Okalee Indian Village and Arts and Crafts Center on the Dania Reservation.

The Miccosukee Tribe or Indians of Florida was formally organized by the adoption of a constitution in 1962. Members of this Tribe, although in many cases related by blood to members of the Seminole Tribe of Florida, have no direct connection with that organization. Membership in the Miccosukee Tribe is open to Indians of Florida Seminole blood who make formal application and it is governed by a General Tribal Council and Business Committee. For the most part, the Miccosukee Tribe live precariously along the trails and in the swamps and adhere closely to their ancient customs and traditions. A Miccosukee village is on the Tamiami Trail and a noted tourist attraction.

As citizens of the United States and Florida, the Indians are subject to the laws that control other citizens; yet special recognition is given tribal law by government enforcement agents. An exception is the Seminole Tribe of Florida who requested by resolution that the State and Counties assume civil and criminal jurisdiction over members living on the three federal reservations. This was enacted into law by the Florida Legislature in 1961, thereby protecting the Indians' lands and insuring their future welfare. The most important festival of the Seminoles is the Green Corn Dance; the date coincides with the new moon in late June or early July when the green corn ripens and lasts four or five days. The event has both a religious and civic significance and important decisions of tribal affairs are made at that time.

Exhibition villages are located in the Miami area and at Silver Springs. Here Indian life is conducted as it is lived in the Everglades. Visitors are welcome at the Reservations and native handicrafts are on sale at the Brighton and Dania Reservations. Additional information on Florida's Seminole Indians can be obtained from the Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Seminole Indian Agency, Dania.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION:

The Florida Handbook, Allen Morris; Florida, a Guide to the Southernmost State and Seminole Indians in Florida, Federal Writers Projects; Seminoles in Florida, Wyatt Blassingame and Progress Report of the Seminole Tribe of Florida (1962)

MEANING OF FLORIDA INDIAN PLACE NAMES

Alachua . . . sink hole	Okaloosa . . . black water
Alafia . . . hunting river	Oklawaha . . . muddy or boggy
Apalachicola . . place of the ruling people	Osceola . . . black Indian drink
Apopka . . . potato eating place	Okeechobee . . . big water
Apoxsee . . tomorrow	Ochopee . . . big field
Bithlo . . . canoe	Opalockee . . . big swamp
Caloosahatchee . . River of the Calusas	Pahokee . . . grassy water
Chassahowitzka . . pumpkin opening place	Palatka . . . ferry crossing
Chattahoochee . . marked stones	Panasoffkee . . . deep valley
Chuluota . . . pine island	Pennawa . . . turkey
Econfina . . . natural bridge	Seminole . . . wild man, runaway
Fenholloway . . high bridge	Sopchoppy . . . long twisted stream
Hialeah . . . prairie	Steinhatchee . . . dead man's creek
Hickpochee . . little prairie	Tallahassee . . . old town
Homosassa . . . place of peppers	Telogia . . . palmetto
Hypoluxo . . . round mound	Thonotosassa . . . place of flints
Iamonia . . . peaceful	Tohopekaliga . . . fort site
Immokalee . . . tumbling water	Tsala Apopka . . . trout eating place
Istokpoga . . . dead man	Umatilla . . . water rippling over sand
Istachatta . . . red man	Wacahoota . . . cow house or barn
Lochloosa . . . black dipper	Wausau . . . hunting place
Lokossee . . . bear	Weekiwachee . . . little spring
Loxahatchee . . . turtle creek	Welaka . . . river of lakes
Miami . . . big water	Wewahitchka . . . water view
Micanopy . . . head chief	Wetappo . . . broad stream
Miomi . . . bitter water	Wimco . . . chief water
Ocala . . . spring	Withlacoochee . . . little big water
Ochlockonee . . . yellow water	Yalaha . . . orange
Okahumpka . . . one water or pond	Yeehaw . . . wolf