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S E M I N O L E S.

(Es-ta-chat-tee).

In ages that have long since passed away, the haughty and ferocious Seminole Indians first established their homes in Florida. They are haughty with strangers but most friendly and neighborly with their friends. They are ferocious and savage in war but peaceful and likeable people in their home surroundings, independent, self-reliant, and have a high moral standard.

Before American history furnished a record the Seminole tradition informs us, was a part of the Muskogean more familiarly known as Indians. They lived with their kinsmen in Alabama and Georgia and, as with most people, a certain element became restless and wandered away from the tribe. In the course of time the roving band arrived in Florida where they found other Indians called Ye-mars-ees and Ap-al-ach-ees. Probably the invasion of their hunting grounds by the roving Seminoles brought on a war, in any event, a war followed and in the course of time the Seminoles conquered the other Indians and, eventually absorbed them, leaving only Seminole Indians in the territory.

The name Seminole was applied by the main body of Creek Indians to designate their wandering tribesmen and the name in later years apparently became permanently attached to all Florida Indians.

These Indians have occupied their present home state under the rule of three Nations, namely; British, Spanish, and the United States.

Ponce de Leon discovered the land for Spain in 1513. The British acquired control and held it from 1763 to 1784, when Spain regained it and held it until, by the treaty of February 24, 1819, it was ceded to the United States.

The Seminoles were apparently concerned with the textile pattern or weave of the flag proclaiming the sovereignty of different nations over the land. They were chiefly concerned with their own affairs, which for a great part of the time did not include war.

Passing over a hundred years or more of recorded history, the Seminoles, when pressed by the United States troops, fought valliantly in two wars for what they consider their home land, only to leave it in the end. A glimpse of the early Seminole is furnished in an extract from an account by William Bartram written in 1773, in which he states:

"The town of Cas-co-willa which is the Capitol, contains about thirty habitations, each of which consists of two houses nearly the same size about thirty feet by twelve and twelve feet high".

He says the Indians were well provided with food and were happy and friendly.

At a much later date Captain Bell, writing to the Secretary of War on this subject, said:

"This Nation was, before the destruction of its settlements in 1812, numerous, proud and wealthy, possessing great numbers of cattle, horses, and slaves. They are honest, speak truth and are attached to the British and Americans. The Wars, however, of McIntosh (A Creek who joined the Georgia Marauders) the late desolating War with the United States, the depredations of the frontier white settlers on their settlements have destroyed their confidence." Apparently as their Seminole fathers dealt with the Indians they found in Florida, so they were in time dealt with by the white race.

An incident of the Seminole War is interesting though it is not a passage in American history to which one

may wish to point.

The celebrated Seminole Chief, Osceola, with his warriors had been opposing the United States army in the second Seminole war of 1835 and overtures of peace had been made. Osceola, with two companions, entered the American lines under a flag of truce, presumably to arrange terms of peace. They were arrested and held in Fort Marion, at St. Augustine, as prisoners of war. An opportunity to escape was accepted by his two companions but the proud Chief declined to slip away. At a later date he was taken to Fort Moultrie where he died in January, 1838. He was buried near the entrance to the Fort on Government land, his grave well marked has since been under the protection and care of the Government. *Osceola was not a Chief by heritage, nor so far as known by formal election, he took his place as a leader and acknowledged chieftain by reason of his ability as a warrior and commander during the second "Seminole War". His record may well be admired by men of strong character who in him will recognize a kindred spirit. See Handbook of American Indians.

At the close of the Second war which lasted about 8 years and cost the United States soldiers killed and \$20,000,000.00 from the viewpoint of the Indian, for liberty, which they lost, large numbers were taken to the Indian

territory and placed on a reservation where they, or their descendants are now living in Seminole County Oklahoma.

A brief description of the exodus from Florida is given by Deaconess Harriet Randolph Parkhill.

"The Indians faithfully adhered to their promises, and only desired to be left to themselves believing that the country they occupied was theirs by right- so when driven to the extremity of the everglades, and even that was invaded by armed men, they did just what any other brave and liberty loving people would do under similar circumstances-they vigorously opposed all who would drive them from their last foot hold on Florida soil. They ex-~~plained~~plified the truth; "Who would be free, themselves must strike the blow". However, from time to time many were induced to go to Indian Territory. In 1856 the last party under Billie Bowlegs (Bolock) embarked at Fort Meyers, the stern old warrior in tears. As the "Grey Cloud" steamed away and touched at Edgemont Key, a was whoop went up from the deck. Ya-ho-a-hee! As a nation in Florida destroyed, they yet left it proud and defiant.

A few escaped refused to go and remained in the everglades, a region covered by water in the rainy season with wooded Islands rising from it and the giant sawgrass between, the clear water ways being mostly narrow and dark. In the dry season the Islands became mounds in prairies of short green grass and white sand. Those that remained are a remnant of a remnant and they yet retain the physical perfection and moral virtues for which the tribe has always been noted."

Those who remained concealed their children on the hammocks in the Big Cypress Swamp and took to the everglades in dug out canoes where the soldiers could not follow. At night they stole silently back, bringing good to the children who, like quails, learned instinctively to hide when the mothers warned of impending danger. This game of hide and seek between soldiers and Seminoles went on until the soldiers being recalled left the district and the Indians moved to the Big Cypress Swamp where they went about establishing homes and clearing small fields

From this remnant of a tribe once reported as numbering 5,000, or more, has come the Seminole Indian of this day numbering 453.

It is the common practice when referring to these Indians to say their homes are in the Everglades, which is not true. A brief sketch of the Everglades will serve to show that in the native state the Glades are not a fit or desirable habitation for human beings and would naturally be shunned by any one seeking a location for a home.

South central Florida, a district approximately 40 by 100 miles, is called the everglades. Probably no part of the country is more unique and unusual than this land so well misrepresented in the minds of the people. The popular general conception, or misconception, is that the everglades are a jungle, a tropical swamp, heavily wooded, practically impenetrable and inhabited by monkeys, parrots, alligators and such. You will probably recall the illustrations in the old school books which furnished the pictured misinformation. As a matter of fact, very few trees are to be found in the whole everglade district. It is probably best described as a vast prairie morass

covered with saw grass from four to ten feet high, with small islands raising above the water level on which a few scrubby trees grow, with occasionally a pine or cabbage palm tree standing as a long sentinel in a land of intense silence and vast distance. It is the great open spaces where alligators or gators and turtles or gophers and Seminoles go only to hunt at very infrequent periods. No human being, savage, barbarous or civilized, would live in the district in its native state. Aquatic birds and reptiles claim it as home and while even some Florida people often refer to the everglades as the home district of the Seminoles, in truth the Indians live principally in the Big Cypress Swamp district in the south west part of the state. A few make their homes on the east side of the everglades near the tourist centers where they gain much of their living from posing for pictures and from trading with the winter tourists.

The Big Cypress Swamp is a district almost as large as the everglades and extending from the glades to the Gulf of Mexico. In this district are miles on miles of level sand covered in places with palmetto, pine,

live oak and many varieties of palm trees. The district is covered with a fair quality of grass and large herds of cattle graze through the seasons. There are no streams but a general course of sloughs joined, in the rainy season, forms a vast, slow moving body of water, finding its way to the gulf. In the dry season the sloughs break up into lakes, some several miles in length and the whole course is filled with cypress trees, often forming a real tropical jungle. Here are abundance of wild turkeys, deer, bob cat, some bear and panther, as well as small animals and numerous birds. This is also the home of the egret, the plumes of which are so highly prized by the milliner.

Much of this district is under water during the rainy season, but occasional islands, called hammocks, raise three or four feet above the common level and in the native state are covered with a dense growth of and hardwood trees, wild fruit, lemons, etc.. The Indians clear the timber away and make small fields where they raise vegetables and grain sufficient for their needs. It is an artistic setting for the most primitive people in America, and when one comes to know them, very likeable folks. I have sat at their camp fires and exchanged legends with them. They told me that here in their cypress swamp are the "Little People"

those little fairies who sleep all day on shady leaves and come to the openspaces to dance in the moonlight. They say some live in trees, some in the bushes and some in flowers and just at dusk if a Seminole, looking for a camping place, hears a soft whistling sound - and they claim they do- they will not camp near in fear of disturbing the "Little People" who have made their presence known. The Indians say that while they sleep the "Little People" come and take all of their troubles away and replace them with pleasant dreams.

Looking backward, interesting as it may be to one with a taste for history, is not attractive to the Seminoles of this generation. Their time is too well taken in providing the necessities for the family to permit of much study of their forefathers' life and customs. There are much the same methods pursued in gaining their livelihood as were followed by the tribe in the past hundred years or more. Hunting and gardening is the principal industry and the home life in the vastness of the swamps has been changed but little for many generations. The homes are constructed of cypress poles set in the ground supporting a ridged roof frame work; on

this is a thatched roof of palm leaves neatly laid, forming a roof excellent for turning the tropical rains, so prevalent during the wet season. The thatched roof extends over the framing to within three or four feet from the ground, forming the only side walls to the home. Extending along each side, with an open aisle in the center, is a board bench or platform on which the beds are spread, while the under side of the roof serves as a storage place for food, clothing, and other belongings; such articles are bound in some covering and suspended from the rafters. A camp consists of a number of such homes erected on a rough circular plan with a house in the center where all families come to do their cooking, a sort of individualized community kitchen. One fire serves the village and is kept smouldering, if not burning brightly, at all times. These people have a unique method for maintaining the community fire. Usually three or more logs, from 15 to 20 feet in length, are brought and ends placed together so the logs spread in shape similar to the points of a star, the fire is kindled in the center and as a log burns away the end is slowly pushed forward and this process repeated until it is consumed when it is replaced and the process continued.

Their manner of providing subsistence and clothing is adapted to their environment and crude as it may be, when measured by modern industrial methods, has answered their purpose. Their wants are few and the warm climate reduces the needs. Vegetables are produced in their small field and they are skilled in preparing them for off season use. Wild game, deer, wild turkeys, some bears and small game are plentiful in the swamp district, providing a bountiful meat supply which is supplemented by a very poor grade of semi-wild hogs. To procure coffee, sugar, flour and cloth, they must procure for barter something valued by white people. They take raw fur, bird plumes, and when of value, alligator skins, to the trading posts in exchange for their needs.

In the matter of clothing, the climate has reduced their requirements to the most simple and scanty garments. The women have a common style of their own which does not change with the seasons or the years. Their morning, afternoon and evening gown consists of a two piece garment of light weight material on which many horizontal stripes of varying colors, red, blue, green, orange, white,

etc. are sewn producing ruffled effects of rainbow hues. The skirt is a full length garment with draw string fastening. The bodice is a cape like garment with full length flowing sleeves and it has no fastening or gathering at the waist. It falls short from four to six inches of meeting the skirt. Around the neck is wound layer on layer of beads in such quantities it is almost incredible to believe one would so sacrifice comfort to style or custom. The hair is "done" in a knot on top of the head and long bangs are the permanent style.

While the women go in for decoration, the men go in for simplicity. Their costume consists of a sort of glorified night shirt, slightly gathered at the waist, and with full length flowing sleeves. This with a cloth turban constitutes their costume for all occasions in their home district. Like the womens' dresses, numerous gay colored stripes are sewed on the skirt, body and sleeves of the garment. Their daily life in the swamps makes shoes or covering for the feet undesirable and, where so much wading is to be done, the short skirt prevents wetting the clothing. If shoes were worn, the warm water and warmer air would scald

the feet so they would be inactive at frequent intervals, and that would not do when meat was needed or other duties required their attention.

This ramble has been confided principally to the Big Cypress swamp district as that is in reality the home of the home of the Florida Seminole as more than two thirds of the total number have made their homes in this district on the east coast since the close of the last Seminole war. There are three small bands living in rude villages along the east coast. These villages are located in or near the coast towns of Stuart, Fort Lauderdale and Miami. Those living east of Stuart are generally known as the Old Town Camps No. 1 and 2. The Fort Lauderdale camp is on the edge of the town and, like the Cow Creek band, is a permanent village. The camp near Miami is composed of Indians coming across the everglades from the Big Cypress Swamp to trade their valuables, furs, etc., for such supplies as they require. This camp is often a deserted village though the Indians have learned from experience it is profitable to visit here during the winter months when

extremely sympathetic tourists purchase their wares and are liberal in other ways. The combined population of the permanent East Coast villages is approximately 125 and in comparison do not measure in independence with the west coast or Main body of Seminoles. Easy money from tourists and close contact with white people - on vacation - has not improved their viewpoint of conduct or increased their industrial efforts.

They have been and are self supporting and independent. They have been slow to trust or accept in good faith, overtures made by the Federal Government. The rough treatment their people received at the hands of the soldiers developed a feeling of enmity and the way they were deceived created suspicion that has been handed down in the unrecorded form of tribal history. Considerable progress has been made by the Government in recent years in gaining their confidence and probably in a few years they will be treading the same paths of submission to the Governmental control as have other independent tribes before them.

The Indians have not made provision for their future; they do not own the fertile spots on the hammocks, where they have cleared away the forest, built their palm thatched houses and planted their gardens; legally, they are trespassing.

White people have acquired title to the land, presumably for speculative purposes and, as there is no present demand for the land, the Indians have not been disturbed. As a rail road and rock surfaced wagon road, now being constructed, penetrate the district, the owners will probably find need of the land and the Indians will probably be required to move.

Many years ago it was realized that provision should be made for these Indians and, though they offered no encouragement and refused contact with the Government, the United States Department of the Interior from 1895 to 1899 secured appropriations from Congress and purchased 23,061.72 acres of land and the President, by executive order, dated June 28, 1911, set aside 3,680 acres of public land for their use making a total of 26,741.42 acres in their home districts now held by the Government as future homes for the Seminoles.

The greatest desire of the Seminoles is Freedom. That magic wand has caused wars and that blessing has been gained by few human beings. The courageous Pilgrims braved unknown dangers in search of it. The soldiers of the Continental Army gladly gave their lives in exchange for the promise of it and so on down through history, men of all races have placed the greatest value on freedom.

While the Seminoles do not know of it a Comanche Indian warrior, War-Sah-Man, addressing Government Officials at a Comanche meeting on the western plains on October 20, 1867, voiced the chief desire of all Indians, including the Seminoles, when he so eloquently voiced the sentiment of his people. He said in part: "My heart is filled with joy when I see you here, as the brooks fill with water when the snow melts in the spring; and I feel glad, as the ponies do when the fresh grass starts in the beginning of the year. I heard of your coming when I was many sleeps away, and I made but few camps when I met you. I know that you had come to do good to me and to my people. I looked for benefits which would last forever, and so my face shines with joy as I look upon you." Such was the warrior's greeting and further on he made his plea for freedom.

"There are things which you have said to me which I do not like. They were not sweet like sugar, but bitter like gourds. You said that you wanted to put us upon a reservation, to build our houses and make us medicine lodges. I do not want them, I was born upon the prairie where the wind blew free and there was nothing to break the light of the sun. I was born where there was no inclosures and where everything drew a free breath. I want to die there and not within walls. I know every stream and every

wood between the Rio Grande and the Arkansas. I have hunted and lived over that country. I lived like my fathers before me, and like him, I lived happily."

In closing this earnest, fearless warrior described the heart breaking sacrifices, from their viewpoint, made by his people.

"Harken well to what I say. I have laid aside my lance my bow, and my shield and yet I feel safe in your presence. I have told you the truth. I have no little lies hid about me, but I don't know how it is with the Commissioners; are they as clear as I am? A long time ago this land belonged to our fathers, but when I go up to the river I see a camp of soldiers, and they are cutting my woods down or killing my buffalo. I don't like that, and when I see it my heart feels like bursting with sorrow. I have spoken."