

The Foundation Report

SUMMER - 2001



SEMINOLE WARS

HISTORIC FOUNDATION INC.

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John Mahon honored for lifetime of achievement

The highlight of this year's General Membership Meeting held on April 1, 2001 at the Laumer Estate (see related story on page 2) was a tribute to Dr. John K. Mahon; author, teacher and mentor.

John was born February 8, 1912 in Ottumwa, Iowa to a family of merchant grocers with Irish-Scotch ancestry. From the earliest days of his youth, he was filled with a sense of adventure and learning. In 1922 he joined the Boy Scouts. His experiences with Scouting, which at that time was a vigorous and challenging outdoor endeavor, instilled in him personal confidence, civic pride and environmental awareness.

He graduated from Ottumwa High School in 1931. John had always wanted to be a writer, and continued his education at Swathmore College, from which he graduated with a major in history in 1934.

His desire was to continue his education at Oxford University in England, but he was unable to obtain a scholarship and had to

return home and help manage Samuel Mahon Company, the family business in Ottumwa. This he did for eight years as the Secretary-Treasurer. In his own words, he did OK at this endeavor, but his heart was not into being a small businessman. He wanted to write, study, and teach history.

A timely interruption came with entry of the United States into World War Two. John received his induction notice and reported for active duty in September 1942. He completed basic training in Texas shortly thereafter and requested admission to Officer Candidate School. Following training as a Field Artillery officer, he was commissioned Second Lieutenant in the Army of the United States in August 1943.

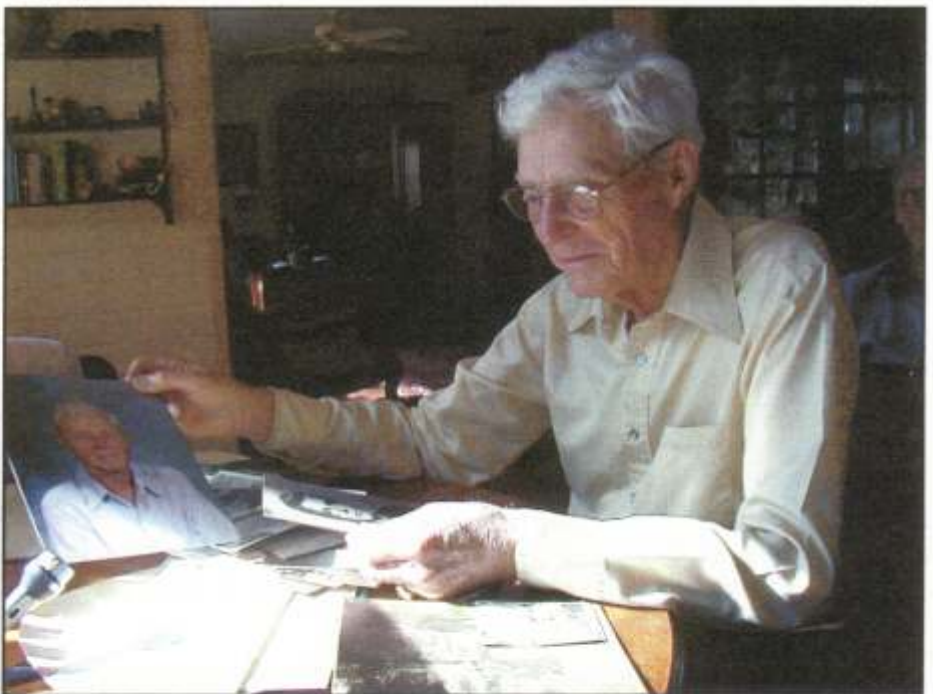
In December 1944, while assigned to the 8th Armored Division, he participated in the Ardennes Campaign and subsequent invasion of Germany. His primary assignment was as a logistics officer securing fuel and supplies to keep the tanks and armor moving. Following the surrender of Nazi Germany, he

BELOW: Dr. Mahon sorts through pictures and papers at his home.

See **MAHON** on Page 3



ORIGINAL MONUMENT AT DADE BATTLEFIELD



West Point alumni group dedicates historical marker

With members of the Seminole Tribe of Florida, Seminole Nation of Oklahoma and Poarch Band of Creek Indians joining the crowd of nearly 100 people, the West Point Society of North Florida conducted a dedication ceremony on Saturday, April 21, 2001, for an historical marker at the St. Augustine National Cemetery honoring those who perished during the Second Seminole Indian War.

U. S. Military Academy alumni sponsored the marker, in part, to honor two graduates who are

buried in the cemetery: Captain George W. Gardiner, the first commandant of cadets at West Point, and Major David Moniac, a Creek Indian and first native-American graduate of the Academy. Gardiner perished with Major Francis Dade's command on December 28, 1835, and Moniac was killed in a skirmish in the Wahoo Swamp the following year.

Descendents of David Moniac were honored guests at the ceremony as well as the color guard from the Seminole Tribe of Florida.

Foundation holds first membership meeting in April at Laumer estate

The first general membership meeting of the Seminole Wars Historic Foundation was held on Sunday, April 1, 2001 at the Laumer estate near Dade City.

More than fifty members attended the event. The theme of this first gathering was a tribute to Dr. John K. Mahon for his lifelong contributions to the study of Seminole Wars history.

Dr. Brent Weisman, President of the Foundation, opened the meeting with a brief overview of the Foundation's goals and achievements during past year. This included republication of John K. Sprague's *The Florida War* and Foundation assistance in preserving the historical sites of Fort King (see related story on page 4) and Camp Izard.

The tribute to Dr. Mahon included the reminiscences of several Foundation members and a multi-media presentation produced by board member Henry Sheldon.

Following the tribute to Dr. Mahon, the members were invited to enjoy food and refreshments, and to explore the Foundation headquarters at the 5-acre estate of the Laumer house on the Withlatchoochee River.

It is the intent of the Foundation to hold an annual as both a social and a theme event.



The wife and daughters of Terry Higdon, USMA Class of 1981, admire the State of Florida historical marker located at the St. Augustine National Cemetery.

President's Message

Preserving Florida's Seminole Wars sites is not a lost cause. Good news is coming in from across the state.

Fort King in Ocala has been safely secured in public ownership. The National Park Service is now studying the site for a National Historical Landmark designation and possible National Monument status.

A partnership between several federal agencies and Florida preservation groups is bringing the Okeechobee battlefield closer to protection.

Scholars and students are looking to the Seminole Wars with

rekindled interest. Teachers walking the Izard and Dade battlefields are discovering that Florida's Indian Wars have much to teach young Floridians about the history of our state and the larger issues of American history. Energy is high, and much good work is being done.

But there is still more that needs doing. Much more. I am very happy that you, the members of the Seminole Wars Historic Foundation, have found this noble cause worthy of your interest.

Brent Weisman, Ph.D.



Photograph by Rachel Weisman

Billy Cypress, Foundation board member, and Mary Lou Missal enjoy the grounds of the Laumer Estate.

MAHON Continued from page 1

remained in Eastern Europe as part of the peace keeping occupation force. He finally returned home in October 1945.

After the war, John found himself free and ready to return to his youth's ambition of writing and the study of history. He decided that he would write on the citizen soldier, because "that is what I was." He entered UCLA in September 1946 and graduated in June 1950 with a Ph.D. in History.

While a student, he met and married Enid Pasek. Their son, John, was born in California shortly before they began their move "back east" in 1951.

Without a job prospect, John and his family moved to Washington, D.C. He wanted to work on military history in the Nation's capital. By a combination of being in the right place at the right time, and by force of confidence, he secured a position at the Office of the Chief of Military History for the United States Army.

Between 1951 and 1954, he did research in support of his first publication in the Army Lineage Series, *Infantry Part I: Regular Army*. While working on this book, he encountered for the first time the correspondence, reports, and other records of the military officers and units of the Second Seminole War. The notes and references he compiled would be the foundation of his future works.

John left Washington, D.C. in 1954 to accept a teaching position at the University of Florida. Here, for 29 years, he taught general and military history and wrote most of his major works.

He served as chairman of the Department of History for nine years and retired from full-time active

teaching in 1982 at the age of 70.

The Second Seminole War was fought primarily in central Florida. Here, John explored the forests, rivers, and swamps that supported the 7-year guerilla war. He scouted the battlefields, military roads, and fort sites.

During summers, he continued his research in Washington. He interviewed 'cracker' Floridians and began his acquaintance with Seminoles.

His research all came together in 1967 with the publication of *The History of the Second Seminole War*. It was a masterpiece that only a scout, soldier, environmentalist, historian, and storyteller could write.

John has written three other books on American military history: *American Militia: Decade of Decision 1789 - 1800*, *The War of 1812* and *History of the Militia and National Guard*. He has authored hundreds of articles for historical journals, book introductions, newspapers, and encyclopedias. As he says, "If you are born to write, you write."

When he is not writing, John plays golf and tennis five days a week. He also hikes the trails and canoes the rivers of the Florida wilderness and volunteers his time for civic and environmental associations that he believes in, such as the Florida Historical Society, National Audubon Society, Sierra Club, and Nature Conservancy.

John is currently the Secretary of the Seminole Wars Historic Foundation, Inc.

For all of us imbued with the lore of the Florida wilderness and history of the Seminole Wars, we can think of no higher honor to know John and call him our friend.

Henry Sheldon

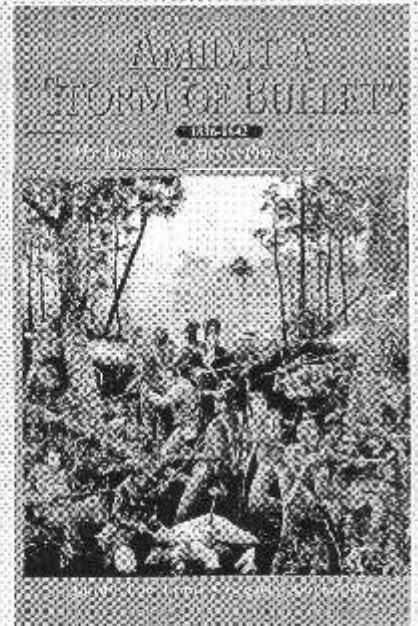
Foundation publication program

The purpose of the Seminole Wars Historic Foundation is to preserve significant sites involved in the Seminole Wars, to establish educational programs about their importance in our heritage, and to publish pertinent material relating to the wars.

Florida's Second Seminole War has perennially fascinated readers and historians alike, but the number of books that have been published on the conflict is relatively few, and most are scarce or out of print.

Amidst a Storm of Bullets, the diary of Lt. Henry Prince, a West Point graduate who served throughout Florida during the War, was the first volume published by the Foundation with the University of Tampa Press in 1998. Frank Laumer, a board member of the Foundation and author of *Dade's Last Command*, began editing this labor of love in 1979.

The volume offers the very astute observations of a young officer who was both intelligent and sensitive to all that he was seeing and experiencing. His writing, supplemented by sketches, maps and diagrams, provides a unique and priceless insight to this tragic conflict.



Mark your calendar for a return to Camp Izard!

October 27, 2001

Watch for an announcement in the mail or call the Foundation for details at 352-583-2974. The group will be limited to 100, so plan to R.S.V.P. no later than September 15.

Foundation supports effort to preserve Fort King site

Members of the Seminole Wars Historic Foundation board were among a group of concerned citizens and government officials who attended a public hearing conducted by U.S. National Park Service officials in Ocala on May 9, 2001.

The meeting, led by Tim Bemisderfer, a park service landscape architect, was called to seek input on the potential benefits of turning the 35-acre site that includes Fort King into a national park.

The Foundation has been actively engaged in the process of preserving the Fort King property for more than five years. The last key parcel of land that contained the actual fort site was

recently purchased by the city of Ocala after several spirited governmental hearings where Dr. John Mahon, Dr. Brent Weisman and other board members provided input and support.

Fort King is a very strong candidate for becoming the nation's first commemorative site uniquely dedicated to its wars with the Seminole Indians according to Bemisderfer. "If we didn't think it was going to make it we wouldn't be paying for it," Bemisderfer told panelists gathered at the Ocala Municipal Golf Course, referring to the \$40,000 the service has spent so far studying the issue.

"You're as close as you're going

to get without an official nomination. If we didn't think it was a potential (landmark) we wouldn't even be involved at this point."

Bemisderfer's team, which includes planner David Lidman and environmental specialist Jami Hammond, heard from dozens of supporters adamant about the need to recognize the one-time citadel.

Taken from an article in the Ocala Star-Banner by Bill Thompson

