

Spring 2004

News & Events



SEMINOLE WARS HISTORIC FOUNDATION, INC.

The Foundation Report

2004 Board of Directors

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Army & Navy Club Hosts Discussion of Seminole Wars



Top picture: from left to right, Board members Frank and Dale Laumer, Lt. Col. Greg Moore, President Brent Weisman, and Foundation members Gerard Casale and Alcione Amos. At left: Dale Laumer talks with a young naval officer at the reception.



Washington beckoned and the Foundation answered. Through the good offices of Lt. Col. Greg Moore, members of the board traveled to the nation's capital on January 22 by invitation of the Army & Navy Club. There they met with officers and cadets of the nation's armed forces in a historic setting located just a few blocks from the White House and across the street from the Stephen Decatur house. The evening's program, part of the club's prestigious schedule of speakers forums, focused on the Foundation's mission to preserve the heritage of the Seminole wars, and featured a short presentation about the wars by Henry Sheldon and a first-person narrative of the Dade Battle by Frank Laumer in the character of Ransom Clark. The forum also provided a chance for Washington area members like Alcione Amos and Gerard Casale to get together with their Florida colleagues. This event marked the first time the Foundation has undertaken a major program outside of Florida. Board members donated signed copies of books in the monograph series to the club library.

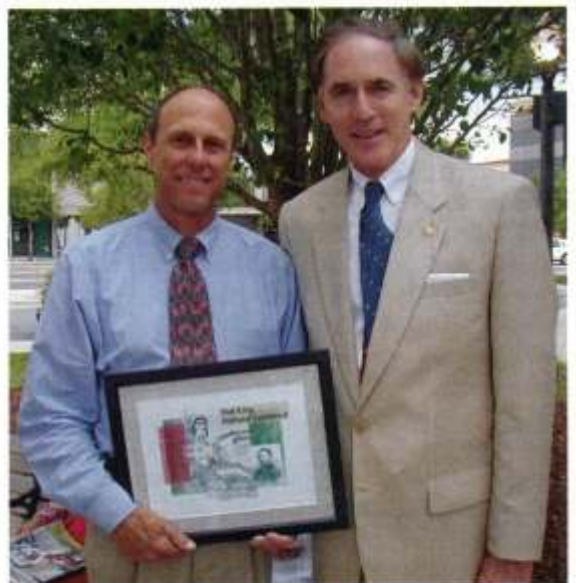
Ft. King dedicated as a National Landmark site

Ocala city-center was filled with music and fanfare on May 10 as residents, city and state officials, and representatives of the National Park Service, the Seminole tribes of Florida and Oklahoma, and the Miccosukee tribe of Florida, gathered to celebrate the recognition of Fort King as a National Historic Landmark. "When I retire from Congress, I'll remember this day as one of the highlights," Representative Cliff Stearns (R-6th Dist.) told an audience of some 200 people. A native of Ocala, Stearns led the congressional effort in Washington to see Ft. King safely through its nomination to landmark status. He was among a dozen speakers who expressed their regard and appreciation to all the people who worked to protect the site.

Three generations of McCalls, the family that owned the site through 2001, were in attendance as Mayor Gerald Ertle, City Council President Mary Sue Rich, City Manger Paul Nugent and Dr. Janet Matthews of the National Park Service recounted the sixteen year struggle to gather funding and public support to save the site for future generations. "This is the work of many hands," Dr. Matthews noted, adding that Ft. King is now one of the nation's "iconic places, a place of significance to everyone." City Manager Nugent, honored during the ceremony for his role in preserving the site, repeated his hope that it will go on to become a national park (continued on p. 3).



Mayor Ertle, Congressman Stearns, City Council President Rich, and other dignitaries look on as Dr. Janet Matthews and Tim Bemisderfer of the National Park Service and Barbara Mattick of the National Register present the plaque for the Ft. King site.



Henry Sheldon and U.S. Congressman Cliff Stearns after the dedication (with certificate awarded to the SWHF).

Gone in Body but Not in Spirit

Billy L. Cypress, 1942 — 2004



For all who knew him, Billy Cypress will be remembered as story-teller, historian, and down-to-earth visionary, a man who personified the stated mission of the Seminole Tribe of Florida's Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum: to teach and keep in the heart the truths of both past and present. His dedication to Seminole culture has enriched tribe members and non-tribal people alike.

Born on September 13, 1942, Cypress grew up as a member of the Bear Clan at a Seminole camp near Royal Palm Hammock. He earned degrees at Stetson University and Arizona State, was a major in the U.S. Army, and worked for 18 years as a specialist in education with the Bureau of Indian Affairs. A native speaker of Miccosukee, Cypress had a lifelong commitment to preserving all aspects of Seminole culture, but especially language and knowledge of the past. Much of his vision became reality in the Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum, the largest of three museums run by the Seminoles. In an interview with Charles Flowers, Cypress explained the concept of "ah-tah-thi-ki": "It's a Miccosukee word . . . As a verb, it means 'to learn.' It's like going to school. It's a place where if you don't know something, you go there to find out . . . But it's not just the past. We also like to discuss the future, too. In other words, we're not going to just stay in the past."

A veteran spokesperson for the tribe, Cypress spent much of his time away from Florida, telling people about the plans and projects the Seminoles were undertaking. He was a familiar figure, too, at the annual reenactment

of the Dade Battle, where he took the role of Halpatter Tustenuggee, or Alligator, to narrate the story of the attack that began the Second Seminole War. The Seminoles, he reminded each year's audience, were prepared to die and to shed blood to keep their homeland. A peaceful and home-spun man, Cypress nonetheless knew that young visitors at the reenactment, especially boys, could be lured into an appreciation of history by use of high drama. "Kids love to see fights," he once joked. He proved himself a great believer in public action to preserve Native American culture and heritage, something he felt required both tribal leadership and the concern and efforts of all citizens. Speaking about civic support for preserving the Miami Circle archaeological site, he commented: "It is a great thing for all citizens, including Native American, to come together like this. A lot of times Native Americans are on one side and other people are on the other side. In this particular instance everybody got . . . together and did a great thing." These sentiments governed his service to the National Museum of the American Indian, for which he was chairman of the board of trustees, and his years with the board of directors for the Seminole Wars Historic Foundation. Yet his greatest and longest-lasting achievement is the creation of the Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum at Big Cypress: "The Seminoles themselves," he said of it, "this is their place."

James W. Covington, 1917 — 2004

James Covington, renowned scholar on the Indian cultures of Florida, passed away February 26, 2004, leaving behind generations of students who are the richer for his tutelage. Covington was a Midwesterner, born in Fulton, Missouri, in 1917, and developed an early interest in the history of native America. What started as a boyhood fascination with the Plains Indians eventually expanded into an academic career of distinction in American Indian history. At first, Covington immersed himself in the study of western tribes and nations, working after World War II at Muskogee High School in Oklahoma. He went on to do his dissertation work at the University of Oklahoma on "Federal Relations with the Utes, 1848-1890." Upon moving to Florida as a professor of history at the University of Tampa in 1951, Covington conscientiously mastered a knowledge of southeastern tribes, visiting Seminole reservations, among others, and talking with tribal leaders. Soon he was producing articles and essays, and then a string of books that remain essential reading: *The British Meet the Seminoles*, *The Seminoles of Florida*, and *The Billy Bowlegs War, 1855-1858*. These joined other classic works, such as *The Story of Southwestern Florida* (1957), in establishing Covington's reputation as a pioneer of Florida history. Upon retiring as a professor in 1989, Covington remained a teacher and educator. He became an avid supporter of the Seminole Wars Historic Foundation, and was also a founding member of the Tampa Historical Society and the Tampa Bay History Center. Recognition of his contributions included the D.B. McKay Award and the Tony Pizzo Award, both for achievements in the field of history. He was serving as the County Historian for Hillsborough County at the time of his death.



Photos: Above, left, Billy Cypress as Alligator at the Dade Reenactment, 2004. Above, Dr. Covington on a research visit to Avilés, Spain. Text by James Cusick and Brent Weisman, with quotations from the Miami Herald, April 15, 2004, and from Charles Flowers interview with Billy Cypress, posted on the Web by the Seminole Tribe of Florida.

Book Reviews

Florida's Seminole Wars: 1817-1858

By Joe Knetsch

Arcadia Press, 2003

Paperback, 160 pp., illus., \$24.99

One of the difficulties of beginning a study of the Seminole wars has been a lack of books that cover the entire period of these conflicts. While there are excellent books by David and Jeanne Heidler, John Mahon, and James Covington that deal with each individual war, there was no single text that served as an introduction to the entire Seminole war experience. This deficiency has been wonderfully corrected by Dr. Joe Knetsch, one of the Foundation's most active members. *Florida's Seminole Wars* is an enjoyable introduction to Florida's defining conflict. Profusely illustrated with portraits of lesser-known leaders and historic maps, the text moves effortlessly through the many twists and turns of the Seminole wars. It is often the little known facts that make history interesting. Knetsch, a "living encyclopedia" of Seminole war facts and is not stingy with his knowledge. Unusual connections between events in Florida and throughout the rest of the nation are exposed, as are the later accomplishments of leaders who got their start serving in the wars. The text is balanced and thoughtful. If there is any drawback to this fine volume, it is that it only scratches the surface. The author has much more to tell, and we long to hear it. —John Missall

The Seminole Wars: America's Longest Indian Conflict

By John and Mary Lou Missall

University Press of Florida, 2004

Cloth, 250 pp., maps and illus., \$29.95

John and Mary Lou Missalls' long-awaited study of the Seminole wars augments an impressive surge in publications on Seminole-related topics. The Missalls tell the story of Florida's 19th-century Indian conflicts with careful attention to the motives and misgivings that forced the Seminoles into warfare with the United States. Their book reviews prevailing American attitudes about expansion and national place in the 1800s, and how these attitudes predisposed settlers to push aside native groups in pursuit of security and opportunities for themselves. Angered by a series of unacceptable treaties and by constant intrusions into their sphere of influence, leaders and warriors among the Seminoles repeatedly risked all in show-downs with settlers, militia, and the U.S. Army. In great detail, the authors follow the double-dealing that generated war, the problems of distance and communication that plagued U.S. military operations, the public debate that surrounded all three conflicts in Florida, and the intricacies of personality, both Indian and white, that affected tactics and strategy. Diagrams help illustrate the geography of hostilities. Both a history of the wars and a commentary upon them, this book is a rewarding addition to the history of U.S.—Indian relations. —James Cusick

Ft. King dedication, continued from p. 1

As early as the 1930s, he said, a local chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution purchased one acre of land on a hilltop in eastern Ocala, hoping it contained the remains of the fort. In 1987, while city planners worked on Ocala's comprehensive plan, new worries arose about whether or not the site of Ft. King could survive Marion County's burgeoning development. Concerned citizens and city officials began to seek funding for archaeological work. Pennies for Parks commenced a campaign to raise money to purchase some 80 acres of land associated with the site, and the McCall family agreed to safely retain their portion of the property until the county and state could find a way to obtain it for the public. Eventually, advocates for preservation had "truckloads of research" from several seasons of archaeological survey under Bruce Piatek and Gary Ellis, as well as the support of city and county commissioners, state officials, and Florida's congressman and senators. In 1999, Congressman Stearns succeeded in placing Ft. King on the list of nominees for landmark status, and in 2001 the site was purchased from the McCalls. In February of this year, the National Park Service announced that Ft. King, by unanimous vote of the reviewing committee, had been designated a national landmark.



Foundation board member Henry Sheldon was also an invited speaker at the dedication, summarizing Ft. King's historical importance. Noting that Ocala, like Chicago, Pittsburgh, and other cities, had its origins as a military outpost, Sheldon recounted Ft. King's origins in 1827 as part of a plan to stop whites from intruding into Indian lands.

Left: Tom Brady displays the framed certificate of appreciation he received for his support of Ft. King.

After funds to support the fort's garrison failed, and the army withdrew, Seminoles and settlers were soon fighting bitterly for control of the land. By 1835, the administration of President Andrew Jackson decided to solve Indian problems in the Southeast, not by protecting native rights to territory, but by relocating tribes to the West. The Seminoles' response was war. On December 28, 1835, as a war party wiped out two companies of American soldiers under Major Francis Dade, the young war chief Osceola killed Indian agent Wiley Thompson and others at Ft. King. It was the beginning of the seven-years of the Second Seminole War. The Indians burned Ft. King, but the army rebuilt it. Later it became the Marion County Courthouse. Local residents dismantled the fort in 1846 to get the timbers of its stockade. "The historical significance of Fort King is that it links us to our past and to our future," Sheldon concluded. "To stand on that hilltop puts us in the footsteps of Osceola and the native Americans who roamed and lived on this land for thousands of years before the Spanish, French, English, and Americans ruled it. It is a place in the modern city that links us to our wilderness past. It reminds us of difficulties faced by our young republic in maintaining justice and peace on the Frontier. It is how we got here. Here is our story on the exact spot of land where it all happened."

Among the Foundation board members attending the dedication with Sheldon were Greg Moore, James Cusick, and Blair Reeves (who received a gracious acknowledgment by Dr. Janet Matthews as the recipient of the Louise DuPont Crowninshield Award, the National Trust's highest honor for outstanding contributions to historic preservation). The ceremony concluded with a presentation of framed prints to some 50 people and organizations who helped the fort gain landmark status. The full color certificate (seen at left) depicts Osceola, Captain John T. Sprague, Abraham, and a sketch of Ft. King. Among the recipients were the Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum, the Seminole Tribe of Florida, the Seminole Tribe of Okalahoma, and the Miccosukee Tribe of Florida, the McCall Family, archaeologists Bruce Piatek and Gary Ellis, the Seminole Wars Historic Foundation, and Foundation members Tom Brady, Earl and Betty DeBary, and Billy Cypress.

—James Cusick and Henry Sheldon

June Membership Event!
Come Join Us in St. Augustine.
Tour the National Guard, Fort Marion, and Dade's Memorial

10 a.m., Saturday June 12, 2004

St. Francis Barracks

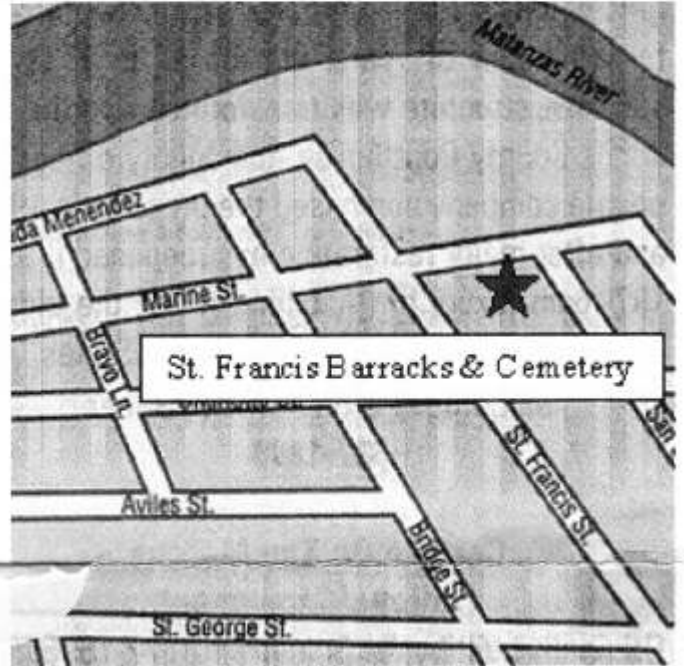
82 Marine St., St. Augustine

Info: Greg Moore at (904) 823-0362

Our next member event will take us into the world of St. Augustine during the days of the Second Seminole War. We will be visiting the Florida National Guard and cemetery as well as the Castillo de San Marcos, the place of incarceration for Osceola, Wildcat, and other Seminole leaders. We'll gather at 10 a.m. at the Officers' Club in St. Francis Barracks located one block from the bay at the southwest corner of Marine and St. Francis Streets, across from the Oldest House.

Parking will be provided in the Florida National Guard lot in front of St. Francis Barracks. After a welcome and opening remarks, we'll take a trolley to the Castillo and tour the fort. Then it's back to the Officers' Club for lunch. Lt. Col. Greg Moore, Command Historian, will guide us around the post and cemetery. Dress appropriately for outdoor summer activities.

Directions to St. Augustine—Take I-95 to the exit for State Road 16 (at the St. Augustine Outlet Mall). Go east on 16 to U.S. 1. Turn south on U.S. 1 and continue to the intersection with King Street. Turn left (east) onto King St. and head into downtown St. Augustine (past Flagler College, the Casa Monica Hotel, etc.). At the bay front, turn right onto Avenida Menéndez and continue to the dog-leg at St. Francis Street. The Barracks (below) will be right in front of you.



President's Message

Over the past several months we have had to say goodbye to two old friends. In this issue of the newsletter we mark the passing of Jim Covington and Billy Cypress. Both served as directors for ten years, and worked hard for the cause of Seminole wars historic preservation. We knew them as men of wisdom, passion, and dedication. They were our elders, and now they have moved on. We too must move forward. Preservation takes place in the present, but looks ahead to the future.

This newsletter also reports on several projects and recent accomplishments that show the Foundation's commitment to the future of the past. We can all be proud to share in these efforts. Hope to see you in St. Augustine!

Brent R. Weisman