Spring 2005
News & Events

The Foundation Report

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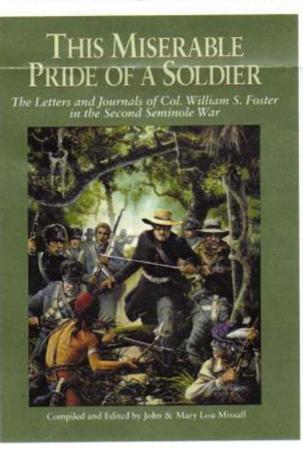
Authors Day at Headquarters

If you missed "Authors Day" this year, plan on attending next year! That's the recommendation of everyone who came to Headquarters on April 29th, 2005 when the Foundation hosted its first "Conversations with Authors." The event gave members a chance to meet and talk with Joe Knetsch (Florida's Seminole Wars 1817-1858), John and Mary Lou Missall (The Seminole Wars, America's Longest Indian Conflict), Frank Laumer (Massacre, Dade's Last Command, and Amidst a Storm of Bullets), and James Cusick (The Other War of 1812). Gathered together in the Headquarter's Library, surrounded on all side by the books of Frank and Dale Laumer and John K. Mahon, twenty attendees listened and asked questions as authors discussed their works with moderator Brent Weisman. Frank Laumer hushed the room when he told members how he had gone to upstate New York one cold winter, in company with a forensic specialist, to exhume and examine the skeleton of Ransom Clark, a veteran of the Second Seminole War who has fascinated Laumer for thirty years. Cusick discussed military tactics of the Seminoles in the War of 1812, and Knetsch and the Missalls talked about the significance of the Seminole wars in American history. "The U.S. was not willing to make a single exception to the Indian Removal Act," noted Mary Lou Missall. Scenes from the past leapt sharply to life as authors became talking versions of their own works.



Members and authors posed for a group photo in the side yard of Headquarters at the end of this year's "Authors Day." The Foundation hopes to make this an annual event, featuring a panel of new writers and new topics every Spring.

Foundation brings out the letters and operational journals of William Stanhope Foster, 4th Infantry, Second Seminole War



Two years in the making, with a cast of dozens, John and Mary Lou Missall's new work on the life of Col. William S. Foster is not quite as complicated a production "Revenge of the Sith," but it has turned them into researchers. The project began as a modest effort to edit some military journals of the Second Seminole War, blossomed into a search for the Foster family papers, and then plunged into full-scale biography. The tale of Foster's war service is an incredible one. In terse accounts he tells us of his struggle to build Fort Foster and Fort Dade, of scouting missions that took him slogging through knee-deep water, all culminating in his never-beforeseen account of the Battle of But a different Okeechobee. picture of the man emerges from his personal letters, mostly written to his wife, Betty. The Missalls have threaded them effectively throughout the narrative.

"Authors Day" Continued.

"I'm a public historian," commented Joe Knetsch as he and Brent Weisman began their discussion.

"Explain what that means," prompted Weisman.

"Basically, it means I'm always available to the public," quipped Knelsch.

And those who know Knetsch understand what he means. Besides teaching in colleges, and becoming the state's leading expert on historic land use and land grants, Dr. Knetsch, of the State Lands' Bureau of Survey and Mapping (FDEP), has also traveled up and down the state for decades, giving public talks on Florida history.

His interest in military history is well known and so when Arcadia Press approached him several year's back with a proposal to do a short overview of Florida's Seminole wars, he eagerly agreed. The problem: the book could run no longer than 160 pages, with 100 illustrations, and had to be written for the general public, with no footnotes.

Knetsch was already the author of dozens of articles on the Seminole wars and had probably delved more deeply into American military records of the period than anyone of his generation. "It's amazing to me," said Weisman, "knowing how much you know about the Seminole wars, that you could condense it into 160 clear pages."

"It was a challenge," admitted Knetsch. The hardest part of his task, he said, was learning and re-learning Seminole culture. "I knew the military history," he said. He also spent months going through repositories around the country, digging out suitable illustrations. And his research led him to reflect on the legacy of the wars in a new way—especially, he said, when he began to read the congressional claims from the families of soldiers, and realized just how many widows and orphans the conflict created.

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James Cusick focused on what was arguably the "first" First Seminole War, the struggle of King Payne and Bowleg to turn back the advance of American troops in Florida during the War of 1812. At that time, Spain still controlled the area; but this did not prevent the U.S. government (and even more the government of Georgia) from placing Florida under American military occupation. After a border intrigue turned into an invasion in March of 1812, U.S. troops and Georgia militia spent fourteen months trying to capture St. Augustine and end Spanish rule.

The Seminole towns of Alachua entered the contest in the summer of 1812, siding with the Spaniaros and raiding American camp sites and outposts along the St. Johns River. In some respects, the low-key conflict of 1812 became a proving ground for the Seminoles in their later battles with American forces.

There were some parallels with later conflicts, too. The biggest battle of the day—the running gunfight between the Seminoles and Col. Daniel Newnan's Georgians in the fall of 1812—foreshadowed the Dade Battle of 1835. History books often depict Newnan's expedition into Alachua as a bold surprise attack on the Indian towns controlled by Payne and Bowleg. Newnan's contemporaries saw it differently—as a narrowly averted disaster. Newnan's men ran into a large party of Seminoles coming east on the main trail. Although taken off guard, the warriors quickly launched an attack. They harassed the detachment for nearly two weeks as Newnan slowly retreated to the St. Johns River.

"The governor of Georgia thought Newnan was lucky to come out of that engagement alive," Cusick said. Newnan, with scarce 100 men, faced an opposing force of about 250. "But the Seminoles were low on gunpowder," Cusick said. "If they had been expecting Newnan, and ready, he would have met the same fate as Major Dade did 23 years later,"

After a break at noon for a picnic lunch, members gathered to hear Frank Laumer give the most dramatic presentation of the day as he talked about his quest to learn the history of Ransom Clark, a survivor of the 1835 Dade Battle. Laumer has written two books featuring Clark, and has portrayed him annually when he narrates the battle reenactment at Dade Battlefield State Park. Unwilling to rely on documents alone, he obtained permission to exhume Clark's skeleton in order to examine the wounds he received in 1835. During a cold winter in upstate New York, the ground near frozen, he and a medical coroner carefully excavated Clark's remains, laying them out on a table in a heated garage across from the hurial site. Right away they found evidence of a bullet hole bored cleanly through the right "What would that have meant?" Laumer wanted to know. The coroner told him Clark's arm would have been useless. There would have been no way to hold it up, and it would have slumped down across the man's chest and side. Then they looked at the healed shatter of the leg. "That would have knocked him down, it would have been impossible to put weight on it or walk," the coroner said. But of course, Clark did walk and crawl for miles to get back to Fort Brook and help.

"So when I portray Renson Clark," Laumer ceneluded, "and tell how he received his wounds, one after the other, I'm not guessing. I'm not relying on what someone has written. I've held his bones, and I've put my finger through the hole in his shoulder."

"That's the most incredible story I've ever heard," said Weisman.

"Well," said Laumer, "you have to dig deep [to portray someone]. That's what brings people to life."

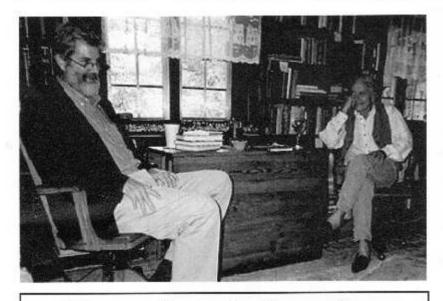
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Digging deep into research is something that John and Mary Lou Missall also understand. When Mary Lou started her M.A. thesis, she didn't know a lot about the Second Seminole War, she admits. Neither did husband John "Although I'd read history all my life, and was very interested in it, here was something that was a major event in American history, and I'd never heard of it," he told Weisman.

Now the Missalls are authors of two books about the period—one a general history of the three Seminole wars, and the other a biography of Col. William Foster, commanding officer in the 4th Infantry in the Second Seminole War, and the builder of Forts Foster and Dade.

Doing both a "big picture" work and a biography of an individual has shown the Missalls both sides of writing history. In *The Seminole Wars*, they focused on integrating the story of the Indian wars in Florida into American history. The Second Seminole War, in particular, was closely tied to overall Indian policy in the United States. "In the late 1840s, when General Jesup was here, and they decided the war was going to drag on forever, and it was best to leave the Seminoles in Florida, he sent a plan for this to the Secretary of War,' said Mary Lou. "Within weeks the Secretary wrote back saying 'No, the stated policy of the country is we will get all Seminoles out."

Research into the life of Col. Foster also took the Missalls in unexpected directions. When they saw a footnote in a Florida Historical Quarterly article, referring to Foster's descendants in Tennessee, they set out to find the family. In just a few weeks, they located not only the modern day Fosters, but also a trove of family correspondence. Their new book is enlivened with all of William S. Foster's war-time letters home from Florida to his wife Betty. "We met the family and saw his papers and personal possession," said Mary Lou, "For us, history has taken on a very personal note!"



Photos from Authors Day 2005

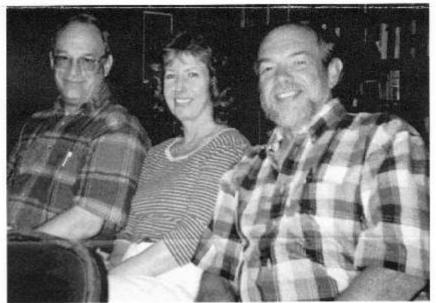


Clockwise from the top:

Brent Weisman and Frank Laumer joke with the

Randall Barnwell talks about his plans to script and direct a film about the Second Seminole War and the life of Ransom Clark. His working title is "Three Rivers." The storyline will follow three major themes: Clark's struggle to forge a military career for himself and return to the North, the Seminoles' struggle to preserve their Florida homeland, and the struggle of maroons and runaway slaves to evade capture and a return to slavery.

Joe Knetsch, Mary Lou Missall, and John Missall, featured authors, relax before the morning session at Headquarters.



Excerpts from "This Miserable Pride of a Soldier" A Foundation Monograph by John & Mary Lou Missall

From the opening of the book, the battle at Okeechobee:

It was a moment Colonel William S. Foster had prepared for during a quarter century of military service. Ahead of him the Missouri Volunteers marched slowly through the sawgrass swamp toward the waiting Seminoles hidden in a densely forested hammock. Suddenly the hammock crupted with smoke and flame as the Indians opened fire. Unable to sustain the losses, the volunteers withdrew from the field. Foster then observed the nearby Sixth Infantry take up the same line of march. Once again, the Seminoles fired into the advancing soldiers. Nearly every officer of the Sixth was cut down. As the Sixth fell back, Foster raised his sword aloft, a signal for his men in the Fourth Infantry to advance. Shouting and swearing at the top of his lungs, he led the charge toward the waiting enemy...

From Chapter 2:

On 20 February 1836 Gaines's force reached the site of Dade's battle. In an extract from a letter to his wife, Foster told of the solemn proceedings.

Dear Betty: We had, on the 20th, the proud, but deeply melancholy task of consigning to the grave the remains of our comrades in arms on the field where they fell, with all the honors of war in their most imposing form. We placed the gun, trunnion deep, in the ground at the head of the Officers' grave, all of whom I am happy to say were fully recognized. The 4th Regt., led by myself, advanced from the

center, and was headed by all the Musicians of the Artillery & Infantry. The moment was solemn and in the highest degree impressive, the silence profound . . . Seventy-seven friendly Indians looked on with unmingled astonishment. With the greatest difficulty I gave the word "March!" My heart was full for the first time in my life, be it in battle, in the field, on the march, or at halt. I was nearly unable to command the troops. A mighty effort was made & my voice rose clear & loud. The next moment my eyes filled with tears & had anyone spoken to me I could not have replied & should have wept like a child.

Reporting a battle at the Withlachoochee, April 1836

My ever Dear Wife: On the 31st March we had a very severe fight with the Indians . . . The left of the 4th Regt, was first engaged. We delivered our fire & I then ordered the men to give a tremendous cheering & to rush on the Indians at a run (not at quick time or even double quick time) & to load as they ran. This was done by the 4th Infy, in a most splendid manner. To cross over to the Indians we waded through water & soft mud three feet deep. No horse had power to get over. They all bogged down, & some were not got out for hours . . . We drove the Indians without halt 2 miles & an half. They evidently supposed we could not cross the pond, for we drove them from their fresh killed beef. We received a second fire. The troops hesitated. I cried "Boys make this damned hammock too hot for these infernal rascals." Every man fired. I then cheered as did every man & run upon the Indians.

President's Message

We are now experiencing a burst of writing and publishing on Seminole Wars topics. New information and fresh perspectives are more accessible to a wider audience than ever before, We like to think that the Foundation's efforts are in part responsible for this publication boom. Our recent "Meet the Authors" event (reported on in this issue) showcased new Seminole Wars books by Foundation authors. In their conversations, the authors told us of their formative influences. the works that had shaped and inspired their own. Many of us, it turns out, first entered the Seminole Wars through the books of John Mahon and Frank Laumer, and from there plunged into Sprague or various primary sources. It is gratifying now to see that these earlier works continue to inspire, and very exciting to see welcome new directions in Seminole Wars scholarship.



Greg Moore returns to active service

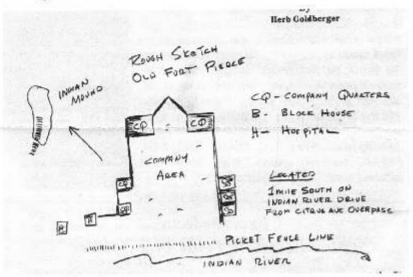


We want to let all our members know Board Member Lieut. Col. Greg Moore will be overseas for the next serving year Afghanistan, where he will be helping in military training. Greg has been an invaluable director for the SWHF, the founding editor of our newsletter, and a major link between us and military historians and institutes around the He will country. continue as an ex-oficio director while away. We know Greg will serve with honor and distinction, and we look forward to having him

2006. Until we have a mailing address you can write to Greg at this email address; gregory.alvin.moore@us.army.mil

New CD offers scanned maps and drawings of Seminole War forts and battlefields

James Gray, who worked from his Tampa-area home for years documenting the locations of Seminole war sites, has now created a series of CDs on frontier forts in Florida. Probably the most important is "Seminole Indian War Fortification Maps," a database of some 220 maps and drawings assembled primarily from plat maps, military and occasional drawings or reconstructions. Much of this material came out of Gray's research files (now housed in Special Collections at the University of South Florida Library-Tampa campus). Mr. Gray has since retired to Australia, but anyone interested in getting a price list of available CDs can contact him by mail at James Gray, 11 Corndale Street. Loganholme, Old., Australia, 4129 or by email at cracker3@optusnet.com.au.



MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL NOTICE:

If you have listed your email address with the Foundation, a notice for renewal will go out to you this summer by email. Otherwise expect a renewal reminder soon in the mail.