



The Foundation Report

Seminole Wars Foundation, Inc.

Spring 2009

Upcoming Spring Members' Meeting Come see an exciting new find from Ft. King!!



One of the most important functions of the Foundation is the archaeological work we are conducting at Fort Dade and that our members conduct at other Seminole War sites. In the process of these excavations numerous artifacts have been uncovered, cataloged, and preserved. Many of our members have expressed an interest in viewing these artifacts and a limited number have been shown at previous meetings. To accommodate this interest, the Board has decided to have an "Artifact Showing" for our next members' meeting, to be held on April 25, 2009, at Foundation Headquarters. The meeting will commence at 10:00 a.m.

The display should be quite impressive. Of greatest interest is a recent find from Ft. King that Gary Ellis of Gulf Archaeological Research Institute will be bringing. Because of the unique nature of this item, the city of Ocala has been keeping a lid on news about the artifact, but has graciously allowed Gary to bring it to the meeting. Gary will also be bringing several of the more important artifacts from his excavations at Fort Dade. In addition, Board member Harley Gilmore and his partner Ralph Van Blarcom of Historical Preservation, Inc. will bring portions of their extensive collection, which contains items from nearly every major Seminole War era fortification. Other members who have personal collections they would like to display are more than welcome to bring them.

Please call Headquarters at 352-583-2711 or e-mail us at info@seminolewars.us to RSVP, so that we can properly plan for food, to let us know if you have a collection you would like to bring, or for directions to Headquarters.



Reenactment Season Battle of Okeechobee

The Super Bowl wasn't the only contest taking place on the weekend of January 31 and February 1. The Second annual reenactment of the Battle of Okeechobee was held at the Okeechobee Battlefield Historic State Park in the town of Okeechobee. This is one of the state's newest parks and is not yet open to the public, its facilities still being in the planning stages. Indeed, there is no outward indication that it even is a park, and the grounds look like nothing more than 145 acres of ranch land containing a modest home and a garage. What makes this particular ranchland important is the sacred ground it stands upon, a portion of the site of the Battle of Okeechobee, which was fought on Christmas Day, 1837.

This was the largest battle of the Second Seminole War, pitting hundreds of native warriors and their black allies against a



photo by Stephanie Sturgill

force of over 800 soldiers and volunteers. The Seminoles had chosen a strong defensive position and after several hours of hard fighting, the warriors boarded canoes and withdrew to the safety of the open waters of Lake Okeechobee. The army called it a great victory and the commanding officer, Col. Zachary Taylor, became a national hero and eventually rose to the Presidency of the United States. Yet a closer examination of the facts reveals a deeper truth: The Seminoles used the battle to buy time. The horrific casualties they inflicted took half of Taylor's army out of action for weeks. This enabled the Seminole families to escape to the safety of the Everglades, where they were able to survive for the remainder of the war. Victory can be measured in more than one way.



photo by Stephanie Sturgill

On the first day of the reenactment, attendance was about 1,600 people. Sunday was slightly less. About 30-40 reenactors participated, equally divided between Seminoles, soldiers, and volunteers. Foundation Vice President John Missall gave the historical introduction to the battle and narrated the progress of the fight. Because the actual battle was so large and covered such a wide area, the reenactment depicted a pivotal moment in the battle, when the volunteers, who had been pinned down by Seminole rifle fire, joined with a company of the Fourth Infantry and charged into the heavily wooded hammock where the Seminoles were hidden. The assembled crowd enjoyed the show and came away with a better knowledge of the importance of this battle and the Seminole Wars.

Fort Foster



What better way to spend Valentine's Day than watching soldiers and Seminoles fire guns at each other? Fort Foster, located at the Hillsborough River State Park near Tampa, is one of only two fully reconstructed Seminole War era forts in Florida. The other is Fort Christmas, near Cape Canaveral. Fort Foster is situated alongside the Hillsborough River and was originally constructed in December of 1836 for the purpose of protecting the bridge over the river and as a storage depot to support operations against the Seminoles. The fort was named after Col. William S. Foster, the officer in command of the construction force. Foster was proud of his work, telling his wife Betty that it was "The best and strongest field fortification ever erected against Indians." The construction and operation of the Fort is well documented in

two of the Foundation's publications, "This Miserable Pride of a Soldier" (Col. Foster's letters and journals), and "Amidst a Storm of Bullets" the diary of Lt. Henry Prince, who was the engineer in charge of construction.

The fort was a vital link in the supply chain that allowed Gen. Thomas Jesup's forces to carry the war to the Seminoles, who were fighting to protect their homeland. The amount of ammunition stored at the fort was staggering: 50,000 rounds of ball & buckshot cartridges, 40,000 rounds worth of gunpowder and bullets, and 200 rounds for the two cannon. There was also an immense quantity of food on hand: 50,000 daily rations and 10,000 bushels of corn. If the Seminoles were going to survive, they had to somehow stop the flow of supplies into the war zone. They never could, and in the spring of 1837 many of the leading chiefs signed a "capitulation." Although the peace didn't last and the war continued for another five years, the value of the forts was evident.

On the weekend of February 14 & 15, 2009, Seminole forces once again tried to burn the bridge. Before a crowd of hundreds, the Indians set fire to the bridge and fired on the soldiers who shot at them from the safety of the fort. Finally a force of volunteers exited the fort and stormed the bridge. A cannon was rolled out and fired across the river, driving the Seminoles back. As in the past, the bridge was saved and the campaign could continue.



Big Cypress



The final event at which the Foundation set up a table this year was the Big Cypress Shootout at the Big Cypress Seminole Reservation deep in the Everglades. As usual, the event was well attended, drawing hundreds of people from southeast and southwest Florida. In addition to viewing a great reenactment, visitors were also able to tour the Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum and ride the airboats or swamp buggies at Billie Swamp Safari. Except for the threat of a thunderstorm around noon on Sunday, the weather was excellent.

Unlike other reenactments that portray specific battles, such as Dade or Okeechobee, the Big Cypress event seeks to relate the struggle of the Seminoles to remain hidden in the Everglades during the

final years of the Second Seminole War and the Third Seminole War. No longer were there any large battles to be fought. This portion of the war involved small hit and run skirmishes between relatively small forces, sometimes with only a few men on each side. The mission for the army was to locate and destroy the Seminole villages and fields, thereby forcing them to emigrate. The mission for the Seminoles was to stay hidden and avoid detection.

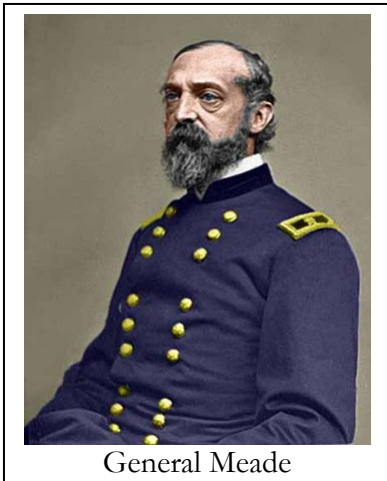


Staying hidden wasn't always possible, however. Captured Indians or slaves were often forced or hired to serve the army as scouts, leading the soldiers to concealed Seminole camps. As the army and navy marched and boated through the Everglades they mapped and surveyed the area. The scenario for this year's reenactment was a confrontation between such a survey party with its military escort and a group of Seminole warriors that comes upon them. Because this event takes place on the reservation, a large number of Seminole horsemen participate, running their mounts at full gallop past the soldiers. Also unique to this event was a considerable amount of hand-to-hand combat at the end of the battle. Winners or losers, a good time was had by all.

The Class of '35

One of the most useful sources for information on officers who served in the Seminole Wars is the "Biographical Register of the Officers and Graduates of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, N.Y." by George W. Cullum. Happily for researchers, the book has been digitized by Google and can be downloaded in its entirety to your computer. Among other things, the book lists the members of each graduating class and gives a short biographical sketch of each man. Some interesting statistics can be gleaned from a quick examination of any one of those classes.

We chose the year 1835 because it was the last class to graduate before the Second Seminole War began. These were men who entered their military career in peacetime, but were soon faced with the reality of a brutal war. There were fifty-six cadets who graduated in 1835, but six resigned their commissions before joining their regiments. Of the fifty remaining cadets, thirty saw duty in the Second Seminole War. Of those thirty men, twelve resigned their commissions either while in Florida or shortly thereafter. At first, that seems to be a high percentage, but when we look at the twenty who did not come to Florida, we find that fully half of them (10) also resigned during the same period. Two of the officers who came to Florida died in the war (Richard Henderson and John Keais, both at Dade's Battle). Only one of the graduates served in the Third Seminole War.



General Meade

Of those fifty-six graduates, nineteen became career officers. Others may have intended to, but died at an early age, so we have no way of knowing their intentions. Because West Point was the only engineering school in the nation at that time, many of those who did not stay in the army went on to become civil engineers. A significant number those graduates put their education to use during the Civil War. Sixteen fought for the Union, six for the Confederacy. Many of them were men who had resigned their commissions soon after graduating and did not make a career of the army.

Among those who did serve in the Civil War, only one became a household name. George Gordon Meade rose to the top of the Union Army and was in command at Gettysburg. He was one of those career officers, but did not spend his entire adult life in the army. After serving in Florida for much of 1836, he resigned his commission in October of that year. He came back to the army and resumed his career in May of 1842, just as the war was ending.

Loxahatchee Battlefield

Longtime Foundation member Richard Procyk has done an amazing amount of work in helping protect and preserve a very important Second Seminole War site. In January of 1838, only weeks after the Battle of Okeechobee, two engagements were fought between United States and Seminole forces near Jupiter Inlet on Florida's east coast. On January 15, a patrol led by naval Lieutenant Levin Powell stumbled across a large Seminole force and was forced to retreat with heavy losses. Nine days later these same Seminole warriors took on the main body of General Jesup's Army of the South in an indecisive contest. Both battles took place along Loxahatchee Creek in what is now Riverbend Park in Palm Beach County.

Richard has also been instrumental in locating the site of Major William Lauderdale's Tennessee Volunteer encampment near Fort Jupiter. Despite Richard's best efforts, the site was eventually lost to developers, though not before an historic marker was erected memorializing the place. Richard has now been successful in helping arrange for the placement of two additional markers at Riverbend Park, one for each of the battles fought there. Additionally, from October to April, Richard holds monthly Battlefield Walks at the park. The final one for this season will be on April 18th and will be entitled "Archaeology, History, and Historic Preservation Save a Lost Battlefield." The Park is located at 9060 Indiantown Rd., west of Jupiter.

Much of Richard's research is documented in his excellent book "Guns Across the Loxahatchee," which has just been re-issued in a revised and updated edition. Richard has generously donated five copies to the Foundation for us to sell. The cost is \$19.95, plus shipping and tax. If you would like a copy, please contact our office at 352-583-2711 or by e-mail at info@seminolewars.us.

New Jackson Walker Painting

Board of Directors member Jackson Walker is proud to announce the completion of an exciting new painting entitled "Patchwork." The painting depicts a young Seminole woman stitching together a beautiful patchwork dress on a treadle-operated sewing machine. The richly detailed painting measures an astounding twelve square feet. High quality prints will be available sometime in the near future.



"Unconquered Seminoles" Wins Award

The documentary film "Unconquered Seminoles" produced by PBS affiliate WGCU of Ft. Myers and featuring Foundation members John Missall, Tina Osceola, and Patsy West, won a prestigious 2009 "Telly" award for a locally produced documentary. The film may be viewed by visiting the website <http://www.wgcu.org/programs/untoldstories>.

President's Message

The present and future well-being of our Foundation is the responsibility of your Board of Directors. The term of service for a board member is three years. The present board consists of eighteen members, four of whom will end their term this year. If any of these directors choose not to serve an additional term, the board will soon elect others to take their places. Would you care to put your name or the name of someone you know in nomination for one of these positions?

You might think that you are not qualified to assume this type of responsibility but I think that it is fair to say that every current board member once felt that way. Please be assured that the only fundamental qualification to join us on the board is an interest in the Seminole Wars. Board members serve without pay and have no financial obligation. We do ask that you be prepared to attend board meetings four times a year. The meetings are held at our headquarters and generally run from 10:00 to 3:00, with lunch from 12:00 to 1:00. Please call or write if you have questions.

New ideas are vital to the health of any organization. If you or someone you know would like to be considered as a possible board member we ask that you write to us (by email or surface) with a few words about yourself or the person you're recommending and your or their interest in our organization.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Frank Laumer

Board of Directors

Frank Laumer (President)
John Missall (Vice President)

Samuel Smith (Secretary)
Debbie Harper (Treasurer)

Bill Dayton
Joe Knetsch
Harley Gilmore
Richard Tombrink

Ray Giron
James M. Denham
Dale Anne Laumer

John Griffin
Mary Lou Missall
William H. Edwards, Jr.

Gary Ellis
Willie Johns
Greg Moore
Jackson Walker

Editorial Box

The *Foundation Report* is published quarterly for members of the Seminole Wars Foundation, Inc. Anyone wishing to submit articles should contact Managing Editor John Missall at 11155 Rabun Gap Dr., Ft. Myers, FL 33917; 239-543-8831; or newsletter@seminolewars.us

The Seminole Wars Foundation, Inc. is a not-for-profit organization founded in 1992. Its mission is to work toward the preservation of sites important to Florida's three Seminole wars and to promote publishing and education about this time period. The main office of the Foundation is at 35247 Reynolds Ave., Dade City, FL 33523. Phone: 352-583-2974. FAX: 352-583-3486. Web: www.seminolewars.us



35247 Reynolds Ave.
Dade City, FL 33523

Ph. 352-583-2974
Fax: 352-583-3486

www.seminolewars.us