

Seminoles and Other Settlers

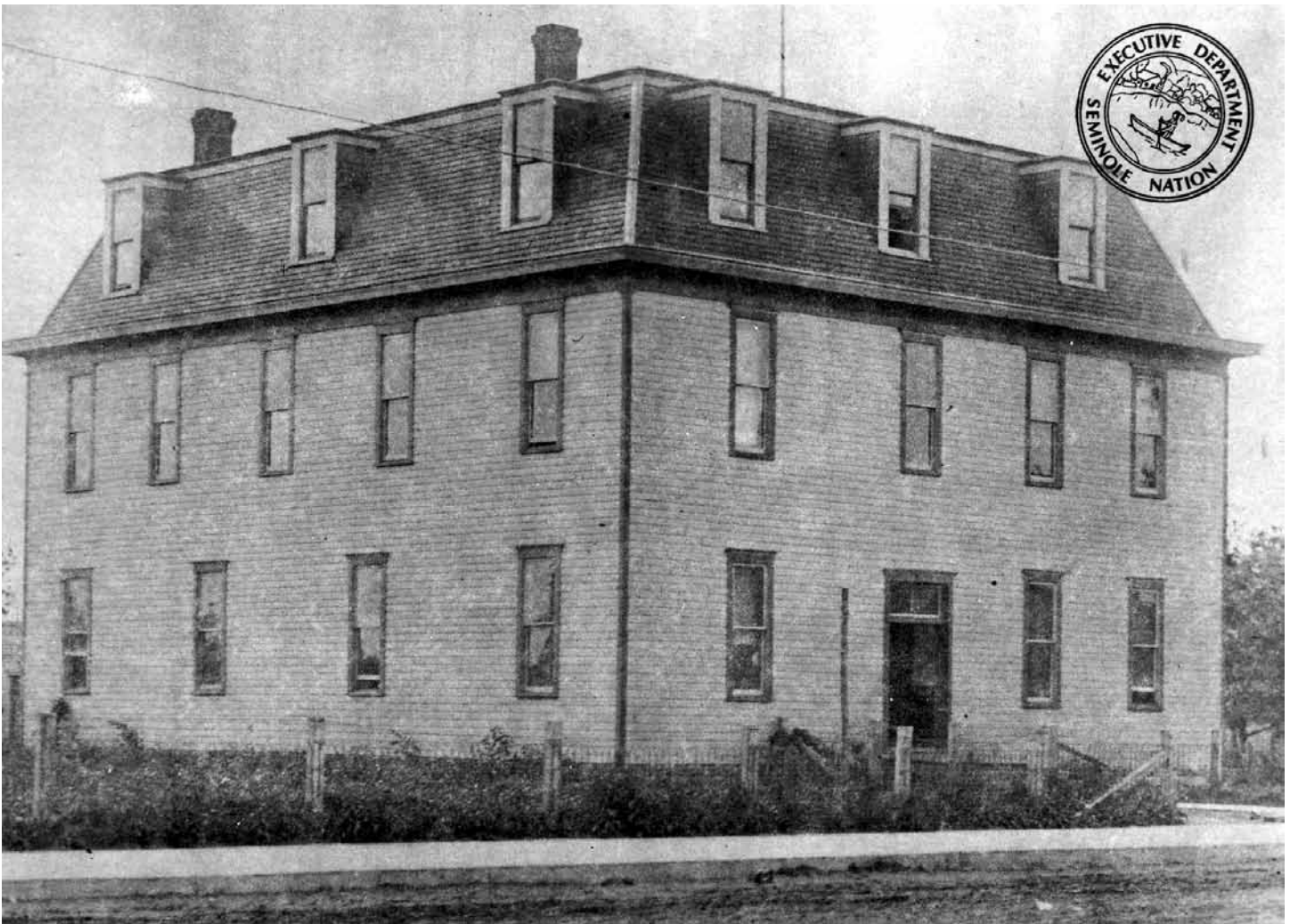
THE SEMINOLES, relatives of the Creeks, and originally called the Oconee tribe, were first called Seminoles by British agent John Stuart in Florida in about 1762. They had been a part of the Creek Nation, which in fact was a confederacy. Oconee was only one faction of that confederacy.

The Seminoles moved south and severed all connections with the Creek tribes in Georgia and Alabama. They became a separate tribe with its own government and its own leaders. By the early nineteenth *century*, they even had separate ruling powers. Florida was under the rule of Spain, while Alabama and Georgia were in the United States. Both had previously been ruled by England.

FIRST SEMINOLE WAR. The first Seminole War was a *skirmish*, or a brief fight, and an excuse for Andrew Jackson to march on Pensacola, the Spanish seat of government. The Spanish governor fled, and in 1819 Spain *ceded* Florida to the United States. No treaty was ever signed ending the First Seminole War. The Indians were uncertain of their relationship with the new government.

TREATY OF CAMP MOULTRIE. Many slaves had fled into Florida during its Spanish reign, and white Georgians *demand*ed their return. Some of them lived with the Seminoles. When American commissioners or former slave owners ventured into Florida to look for the runaways, both slaves and Seminoles retreated further into the interior. Thus, the Seminoles became well-acquainted with the dangerous area today known as the Everglades, a mysterious swampland in the lower Florida peninsula.

Government officials tried to remove the Seminoles to the West or to attach them to the Creek tribe. Seminoles *vigorous*ly opposed both ideas. In 1823, the United States Government succeeded in making the first signed agreement, the Treaty of Camp Moultrie, with the Seminoles. Whether by trickery or bribery, the tribe agreed to move to a *reserva-tion* south of Tampa Bay. They *ceded* their tribal lands to move to this swampy location. They further promised to keep runaway slaves out of their area. In return, they were to receive livestock, farming equipment,



and annuities for twenty years. The Seminoles thought this meant that the treaty was in effect for at least twenty years and that they would be certain that the *reservation* was theirs for that length of time.

Rather than being solved, however, the runaway slave problem became worse. Further, the land given the Seminoles was not suitable for agriculture, and a drought worsened conditions. The Seminoles had to violate the boundaries of the treaty to keep from starving. Whites continually forced their way into the *reservation* to look for slaves, often mistreating the Indians and the African Americans and capturing blacks who had previously been free and born of free parents.

REMOVAL DEMANDED. When Andrew Jackson was elected President, the *demand* for removal was stepped up. It included the Seminoles, even though the land they occupied was pronounced by the government as unfit for cultivation.

In addition, the government was *demanding* that the Seminoles be attached to the Creek tribe and moved with them. This was even more

*Seminole Capitol
located in Wewoka.*



Osceola

unacceptable to the Seminoles. In the first place, the Creeks had often teamed with the whites to fight the Seminoles — either by choice or by intimidation. In the second place, Creeks had been involved in slave raids in Seminole camps, and the Seminoles greatly resented that. The Seminole/slave relationship was a close one. Not only did Seminole slaves fear transfer to new masters, but their masters feared it for them.

TREATY AT PAYNE’S LANDING. In 1832, Colonel James Gadsden met with the Seminoles at Payne’s Landing, and a treaty for removal was signed. Today, no one knows what methods were used to bring about the signing of the treaty. Chief Micanopy said later that his mark had been *forged*. Chief Charley Emathla claimed they were forced to sign. It is known that the Seminoles were starving and the government promised to give them food if they would sign the treaty. A condition of the treaty was that the government would pay annuities to the Creek tribe — so only by joining that tribe could the Seminoles collect the monies promised them.

The Seminoles made a condition of their own — a scouting party of Seminoles would explore the western land and report on it and on the attitudes of the Creeks. The majority of the tribe had to approve conditions before the Seminoles would move. If they agreed, then the other conditions of the treaty would be fulfilled. Otherwise, the treaty was void.

The treaty, signed in 1832, was to become effective in 1833 with the first of three removals. However, the United States Congress didn’t ratify the treaty until 1834, so the Seminoles felt that they should not be bound by its terms. The United States Government had not been bound by their own terms, but they insisted that the Seminoles should conform to the terms of the treaty.

TREATY OF FORT GIBSON. Furthermore, the exploring party was sent west, and they did not like what they found. The land was satisfactory, but they objected to being moved so near the western tribes, who they claimed “stole horses.” Nevertheless, the exploring party signed the Treaty of Fort Gibson, agreeing that the Seminole tribe would move to the western part of the Creek Nation. Once again, persuasion methods are not known. It has been suggested that the government officials may have even threatened not to escort the party back to Florida. Some Seminole leaders claimed to have thought they were signing a document which merely stated that they had found the land satisfactory. The most significant point of the treaty was that it changed the wording from the Payne’s

Landing Treaty. The new treaty indicated that only the exploring party had to approve of the new land, not the majority of the tribe.

When the Seminoles in Florida heard of the new treaty, they rejected it. They considered the Payne's Landing Treaty void, and they considered the Treaty of Camp Moultrie effective until 1843. They had no intentions of moving from the *reservation* until that date. However, when tribal leaders called for a general council to discuss the Fort Gibson Treaty, the government agent told them the matter was "out of his hands." He said the agreement was signed and effective and its terms must be carried out. In other words, the Seminoles had to move to the West.

OSCEOLA AND THE GREAT SEMINOLE WAR. By April, 1835, the Seminoles were still *staunchly* refusing to prepare for removal. They vowed they would stay in Florida. Colonel Duncan L. Clinch advised them that the government would use force to move them, if necessary. Indian agent Wiley Thompson tried to oust leaders who refused removal. It is said that Osceola, though not a chief and therefore not entitled to speak, moved to the front of the room, thrust his knife through the agreement paper, and said to Thompson, "That is your heart and my work!"

Osceola became more powerful and more opposed to removal. He and Thompson became dire enemies. While Thompson made arrangements for Seminole removal, Osceola and the Seminoles made plans to remain, by force if necessary. In December, 1835, Osceola's band began their active resistance and launched the Second (or Great) Seminole War. They made two surprise attacks on companies of soldiers, ambushing them on the trail, annihilating troops, and then disappearing into the woodlands as though they had never been there. During the second attack, Osceola killed and scalped Thompson, giving the blood-curdling war-whoop for which he later became famous.

After a third attack on December 31, Osceola dictated a message to Colonel Clinch:

You have guns and so do we; you have powder and lead and so do we; you have men and so have we; your men will fight, and so will ours until the last drop of the Seminoles' blood has moistened the dust of his hunting ground.

In March, 1836, Jumper, a Seminole warrior, and Osceola asked for a meeting with the army, expressing sentiments that enough men had died

and enough blood had been shed. Captain Ethan Allen Hitchcock, who believed in their sincerity, met with the Seminoles and made headway toward declaring peace. Just as the meeting was ended, however, Colonel Clinch's men arrived to "aid" the troops "trapped" by the Seminoles. They attacked the Indians and peace negotiations halted.



In the summer of 1837, Brigadier General Thomas S. Jesup was sent to Florida to stop the Great Seminole War. Several times Jesup violated truce flags and arrested Seminole leaders who had gathered to talk peace. Seminoles were rounded up in small bands and forcibly moved to the West, but they still fought.

In May, 1841, Colonel William J. Worth was transferred to Florida and ordered to subdue the Seminole tribe. He engaged in less warfare and more destruction than had other commanders, destroying Seminole crops, cabins, and supply caches. Osceola was dead — he died in prison from malaria in 1838 — and the most *formidable* Seminole leader, Wild Cat, was captured by Worth. By February, 1842, Worth estimated that only 300 Seminoles were left in Florida, and he recommended that they

be allowed to stay there. The government declined and Worth continued the war until August, when the government declared it ended.

THE TRAGEDY OF THE SEMINOLES. An 1844 *census* declared that there were 3,136 Seminoles in Indian Territory. There is no record of how many remained in Florida, but most of those who were removed were moved forcibly, captured by the army and transferred in chains to their new homes. In the Seminole removal, more than 40 percent of their number died; 1,500 soldiers were killed and many others crippled.

The Seminoles were given a portion of the Creek lands, and they were at first under Creek rule. Like the Chickasaws, however, they were a



*Early Ranch in No
Man's Land*

proud and independent people. After a number of years, they effected an agreement whereby they could establish their own government and rule themselves. This occurred in 1856.

Meanwhile, in Florida, the murder of a white man started the Third Seminole War in 1849. Removal cries were heard again, and the war lasted until 1859 when government officials finally abandoned the efforts to drive the last remaining Seminoles from the Everglades. Thus, the government fought the Florida Seminoles from 1835 to 1859 over a piece of land that most white people didn't want — but neither did they want the Indians to have it. The cost to the government for removing the Semi-

noles, not counting lives lost, was \$6,500 per Indian — a real fortune at that time, and far more than the assessed value of the Florida swamps in which they lived.

PROGRESS IN THE WEST. The spirit of the Indians, though temporarily subdued, revived to push them toward new accomplishments in the West. Four of the Five *Civilized* Tribes adopted new written constitutions similar to that of the United States. The Seminoles, though working with the same form of government, did not commit that form to writing. Schools and churches were built, and farms and businesses *established*. Life in the West became much like life in the East had been for many of

the removed Indians. They continued their lives and many of them prospered, but none of them ever forgot the ordeal and the suffering of the Trail of Tears.



WESTERN MOVEMENT. The Five *Civilized* Tribes were not the only Indians to be removed to Indian Territory. Many western tribes were given land there in exchange for the land they had previously called home. Some of them had claimed Indian territorial lands as their hunting grounds for decades. They found themselves without hunting grounds because the United States Government had given the land where they previously hunted to other tribes.

Western tribes stopped fighting each other and began fighting the white man with great vigor.

They found their country invaded by long wagon trains of settlers and supplies, and larger and more *numerous* units of soldiers patrolling their homelands. The frontier constantly came closer and closer, bringing more and more white poachers into their area.

The greatest disadvantage the Indians faced was what appeared to be an unlimited population of whites. Their own numbers were limited and grew smaller every year. As they tired of fighting, small groups of Kiowas, Southern Cheyennes, and Comanches signed peace treaties and moved into the land designated for them — Indian Territory. Other Plains tribes began forming *alliances* to protect themselves from the onslaught of white settlement.

Two events escalated the westward movement of whites — the Mexican War of 1846-1848 and the discovery of gold in California in 1848. Both of these events brought whites across Indian country. One group crossed on its way to war, the other on its way to dreams of fortune. All of the Five *Civilized* Tribes had effective police forces who patrolled their own borders, thus also protecting the borders of the United States. But they were unable to control the constant illegal traffic of liquor. Nor could they *evict* all of the lawless people who chose to hide from their own government by slipping into Indian Territory.

NO MAN'S LAND. The most lawless area of the region, however, was attached neither to the United States nor to Indian Territory. It was No Man's Land, now the panhandle of the state of Oklahoma. When boundaries of Texas were fixed at the close of the Mexican War, the Texas Panhandle claimed *Parallel* 36°30' as its northernmost border. The 70° between Texas and the 37th *Parallel* was unclaimed by any state, and the federal government was so enmeshed in the slavery *controversy* that no one noticed this orphaned area. For many years, the only people in No Man's Land were travelers — traders going to and from Santa Fe, Indians following the buffalo herds, gold-seekers on their way to the West Coast, or settlers on their way to Oregon.

After the Civil War and the vanishing of the buffalo herds, large cattle ranches were *established*, and a few troops were in the area, but no large *influx* of settlers was destined to move there until the 1880s. Until then, there was little law in No Man's Land, for no state law reigned over it and there was no immediate cause to exercise federal law. It became a haven for outlaws. Those who could tolerate the *arid* barrenness of the land *established* their headquarters in that district, safe from the hands of territorial lawmen who would have arrested them.

Until the Civil War, however, Indian Territory itself was the home of removed southeastern Indians, a few western tribes who had tired of fighting for their homelands,

troops and traders, and a few poaching settlers who had edged their way quietly inside Indian country. There were also the government agents and other government workers. They provided various services to the Indians and worked to fulfill the agreements made by the government in the removal treaties.

THE APPROACHING WAR. As the slavery *controversy* worsened in the eastern part of the nation, the Indian tribes began to fear that another white man's war would invade tribal life. The Indians had long since learned that, regardless of how hard they tried, they could not remain neutral in a white man's war. White men would not allow them that privilege.

Like the whites, most Indians did not own slaves. There were several thousand slaves in Indian Territory, but they were owned by a small number of Indian planters. Even then, the majority of slaveholders owned only one or two slaves, while a few owned hundreds. The same conditions existed in the southern states among the whites.

There were slaves in the territory, however, and the growing conflict over slavery most definitely would affect the Indians. Once again, they were to be penalized because of a white man's war.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How did the issue of slavery play a role in the *demands* to remove the Seminoles?
2. Explain the separation of the Seminoles from the Creeks and conclude with an explanation of why the Seminoles rejected the government's idea of rejoining the two tribes for removal.
3. Describe Osceola's leadership and tell how he died.
4. What were the provisions of the Treaty of Camp Moultrie?
5. What was the Treaty of Fort Gibson?
6. Briefly describe the removal of the Seminoles.
7. Describe "No Man's Land" by telling where it was and what happened there.