The Seminole Nation, Part II

Why There was a Seminole War

Seminole chiefs were reluctant to discuss the possibility of a treaty between themselves and the United States. When Fort Moultrie was designated as the objective place where they could discuss a treaty, the most important Seminole chiefs were not in attendance at that meeting, and yet the negotiations went forward.

In spite of the Seminole Nation not being properly represented, the treaty of Fort Moultrie was signed on Sept. 18, 1823 and the introduction was written as follows:

"Treaty of peace and friendship made and concluded between **William P. Duval**, **James Gadsden** and **Bernard Segui**, commissioners on the part of the United States, and certain chiefs and warriors of the Florida tribes of Indians."

Captain John Sprague recorded as objectively as he could his mixed emotions in his history of the Second Seminole War. He could see both sides, but at times he is strangely aligned with the Seminole rights of ownership of their land in Florida. He could see the political maneuvering behind the scenes of the treaty, and called it by its name: economic greed.

Sprague included the treaty in his history.

Article 1 and 3 of the treaty discussed how the chiefs and warriors were asking for the protection of the United States government, and would dwell within the land boundaries called for by the treaty (Article 2).

For moving them from their land and the expense that would cost them, the treaty said that each Indian would be given rations of corn, meat and salt for 12 months and give them a financial sum of not more than $20,000 to help in that move.

Thirty-two chiefs and warriors made their mark on the treaty with Duval, Gadsden and Segui. They trusted **Col. Gad Humpreys**, who was their agent, and interpreter **Stephen Richards** with the details of that actual settlement.

The treaty was ratified on Jan. 2, 1824 writes Sprague.

Sprague writes, "This treaty threw around the Florida Indians a net from which there was no escape. Their destiny, their happiness, and prosperity were now in the hands of the people. Upon cession of Florida, they claimed the entire country, and so far as Spain interfered, they possessed it. Now, they were within limits, and manding their prompt compliance with the stipulations of the treaty, and if they persisted in disobeying there was an instrument in existence justifying their expulsion or destruction…The Indian, discouraged in his endeavors to add to the happiness of his people, revolts — desolates the frontier, murders the unprotected. When the president of the United States is called upon again by the state authorities, to quell the outbreak by regular troops, and enforce treaty stipulations, which results after years of rapine and murder, in the expulsion of the Indians."

Gov. Eaton, says Sprague, wrote a letter to the secretary of war March 8, 1935 from Tallahassee:

"I have received your letter relative to the removal of the Seminole Indians under the provisions of the treaty of 1832, but which was not ratified until 1834. I pray you, does not this circumstance raise a doubt whether by strict rule the treaty can be considered to be valid and binding? Our Indian compacts must be construed and be controlled by the rules which civilized people practice; because in all our actions with them we have put the treaty-making machinery in operation precisely in the same way, and to the same extent, that is employed with the civilized powers of Europe. Were these people willing voluntarily to move (though seems not to be the case), the whole difficulty would be removed and no evil could arise."

The government viewed the treaty and continuing conversations with the Seminole Indians with some hesitation, guilt, but perversely "sticks to their guns," and tries to rid themselves of the problems which now faced them — the revolt of the Seminole Nation again.

The Seminole Council had ruled that whoever sold their property prior to their removal from their land would be put to death. When **Charley E. Mathlar** sold his cattle, he ran for protection to Fort Brooke, he was detained by Oseola — acting as a voluntary agent of the Council — and put to death.

"It was designed to attack the post, when most of the command were absent on fatigue duty… on the afternoon of the 28th (of December 1837) **Gen. Thomson**, accompanied by **Lieut. Constantine Smith**, was taking his accustomed walk, smoking a cigar, and participating in conversation. The afternoon being pleasant, their walk was extended toward the sutler's store, about one mile from the post. Just as they reached the crest of the hill, in full view of the fort, they received the fire of the enemy, secreted within 30 feet of the road. Both expired instantly upon the spot. The Indians rushed out amidst fiendish whoops and yells, their knives glistening in the air, when a desperate struggle ensued for the first trophy in the contest so long anticipated, and now so deplorably commenced. The scalps of these victims to their revenge were cut into small pieces, to satisfy the craving appetites of all…"

The first blow was struck. In 1957, the Florida Quadricentennial Commission was created to call attention to the 400-year history of Florida from 1565 to 1965. Sarasota resident **John Fite Robertson** was one of the 15 directors on that Commission. In cooperation with the University of Florida Press, the Commission reprinted 12 rare or semi-rare books. One of them — the 1848 edition of the Floridiana Facsimile Series: the Origin, Progress, and Conclusion of the Florida War by Brevet Captain John T. Sprague, 8th regiment of the U.S. infantry, was reprinted. From that book printed in 1964 is a portion of that history found in that reprint you have enjoyed.