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Florida Historical Society

Transcript

Ben Brotemarkle

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This is Florida Frontiers, the weekly radio magazine of the Florida Historical Society, on the web at myfloridahistory.org. I'm Ben Brotemarkle and coming up on the program, former Miss Florida Seminole and Miss Indian World Cheyenne Kippenberger.

Cheyenne Kippenberger

You may not have heard someone make a Siki history or really know anything about our people, and that's all. But now that it is on your radar, you all have an obligation and a responsibility to go and seek out and to learn those things.

Ben Brotemarkle

We'll discuss the Florida Negro Farm Cooperative Extension service and seven decades later, the Groveland Four are finally exonerated.

Connie Lester

Both farm and home extension agents served as rule social workers.

Ben Brotemarkle

And seven decades later, the Groveland four are finally exonerated. All that ahead on Florida Frontiers.

(Music Break)

Holly Baker

Cheyenne Kippenberger is a member of the Seminole Tribe of Florida. Her hometown is the Hollywood Reservation and Hollywood. She's a former Miss Florida Seminole and the First Seminole woman to hold the title of Miss Indian World. Founded in 1983, Miss Indian World is a five-day competition held in Albuquerque, NM at the annual gathering of nations. The largest Native American powwow in the world. I recently talked with Cheyenne Kippenberger about her time as Miss Indian world and her role as a cultural goodwill ambassador and advocate for her tribe.

Cheyenne Kippenberger

It's funny when people ask you about pageantry, because they ask you know is it something you've always been into? You know, you did that as a little girl and the complete and honest answer is that I was never involved in pageantry. It actually wasn't something that I ever saw myself getting into. I was with my sister one night we were hanging out in my living room, and we were just joking around, and we were talking about how our grandma always had pushed us to run in the pageant, and so my older

sister did it, my oldest but none of the last three had. And I was like you know, it'd be so funny. I was like, what if I ran for this Seminole, you know. And it legitimately started as a joke. I guess I planned to see it that night because I started thinking I'm like, what could be the most uncomfortable and like out of box thing for me to do. And Ding, Ding, Ding, why don't you run in a pageant? So, I did, I threw myself into preparation for it and I ended up having a beautiful experience running from a Florida Seminole in 2018 and ended up getting crowned probably nine months into my Miss Florida Seminole reign. I was thinking to myself, how cool would it be to be able to tell like my daughters or my granddaughters? I ran in the Miss Indian World Pageant? I wasn't even concerned with winning. I was just thinking. It's so cool to run in a pageant like that. It literally is the equivalent of like Miss Universe for mainstream pageantry. It's the biggest pageant you can do in Indian country and so and again, I threw myself into practice and I put a lot of time and energy into preparing for the new world and I just started practicing everything. And my sister and I got together, and we started creating all my dresses. And by the time I arrived in Albuquerque, you know, I was so ready to compete, I was just humped.

Holly Baker

Miss Indian World selects winners who demonstrated deep knowledge of their culture, traditions, people, and history.

Cheyenne Kippenberger

I remember the moments leading into crowning. We're all standing like in a huge circle on the arena floor at the Coliseum of the powwow. And so, they announced all the awards they announced second runner out, first runner up and they hadn't sent my name up to that point and I'm like holy, I think I have a shot at this like, I think I really do, and they're talking about the points. And he's like, I knew this Indian world comes to us representing and before he even finished the entire word. I just heard Sem, and I just started crying. I mean, I can't even explain what the emotions are in that moment. I was crying tears of joy. You know, everybody in the arena is screaming. But I could specifically hear my family behind me, and it still gives me chills. It still brings my entire family to tears. I was so incredibly proud to bring that home to my people for the first time and once my year started going, it didn't stop. I kind of like, hit the ground running. But you know, I traveled everywhere. I even got to go to New Zealand and visit with the Māori people. It was an incredible journey of connecting, educating, learning, putting yourself out there to represent your people, you know so sometimes you're having to educate people just on the fact that, you know, we're modern living people that don't live in teepees, you know, or that we all have different languages. We have different teachings, different stories, different regalia, US and so you know, I tried to talk about what our identity as native people really means outside of like a Western colonial lens, was something I really tried to challenge.

Holly Baker

Cheyenne Kippenberger was crowned as Miss Indian World in 2019. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the gathering of Nations Miss Indian World program offered to extend the title to Cheyenne Kippenberger for another year and she accepted. To commemorate her reign as Miss Indian World, Cheyenne Kippenberger wanted to do something unique, so she had her photograph taken by Shane Balkowitsch, a wet plate photographer from Bismarck, ND. Wet plate photography was first developed by Frederick Scott Archer in 1851. In recent years, there's been a small revival of the wet plate process. A wet plate photograph is made by placing a film based on a piece of glass or metal using collodion and

submerging it in a silver nitrate solution to make it light sensitive. One of Shane Balkowitsch's goals as an artist is to capture photographs of 1000 Native Americans for an ambrotype series and. In 2021, Cheyenne Kippenberger became one of the 1000 Native Americans featured in the series.

Cheyenne Kippenberger

I came across this page this one day and I was like, hey, this is so cool and that was when I went to his website and I read about the process of web plate photos and I was blown away by it because, you know, I come from a family of all different types of artists and I have uncles that have been in photography my entire life. And so, I just really appreciated the art and the time and the process behind it and my mind, I'm thinking this would be so neat to do, you know, even just as an individual. But it would be even cooler to be able to bring this Indian world to that. And so, when I just so happened to get the extension in my reign because of COVID, I told him, hey, I really want to come. I really want to do some photos as Miss Indian World, are you up for it? And he was so, so sweet and understanding, he said, if you're willing to make the journey out here from Florida, he's like I will squeeze you in when you can make it. I literally called my dad and like, hey, you want to go to North Dakota with me? So, we went on a like a random whim, and I packed up my Miss Indian World stuff, packed my favorite dresses. Shane is just this really, really kind and thoughtful person. You can just see that he genuinely cares about, you know, sharing, our people, native people and really being able to share our stories through these photos. I just loved the patience and understanding that he had and him just sitting there allowing us to share about our people and you know, coming from the South. And our history of being the unconquered Seminole Tribe of Florida, and I'm so proud of how those photos came out. You know, and I was so proud of even how my father's photo came out as well.

Holly Baker

Cheyenne Kippenberger knew she wanted to wear something special in her wet plate session with Shane Balkowitsch. So, she brought her favorite colorful traditional seminal dress.

Cheyenne Kippenberger

As a young Seminole woman, I take so much pride in my clothing and that stems from the fact that my family makes all of my clothing. My sister is the seamstress. She makes everybody's like, full, traditional outfit. She makes their modern stuff and so I always wear my things proudly because I know the time, the energy, the love, and the thought that goes into our coding and that's one of our teachings. You know, is everything that we create, but just in general as native people, there's an understanding that the feelings and the emotions and the thoughts that you have in the moments that you're creating those things, whether it's clothing, bead work, you know, moccasins, whatever it is, artwork, those all of those things get put into the thing you're creating. So, you know our clothing is medicine, our moccasins, our medicine, our beadwork is medicine because it's almost ceremony to create these things. And so, I took so much pride in the things that I wear, but that dress specifically is my absolute favorite traditional dress that I have, and it was actually made for when I ran in Miss Seminole back in 2018. And I remember telling my sister I want a dress with fire colors because that's what my Indian name translates to an English as fire. And I remember while walking around Joanne together and I was like, dang, this forest green is really pretty. Do you think that we could put the fire colors on that, and it would, and it would look good. My sister's a great eye for that. She's like, yeah, we can make it. Let's do it. And she ended up just creating this beautiful traditional dress for me and. Since 2018, it's been my

favorite dress. I've probably worn it like 600 times. It's been through mud. It's been through rain, pow wows, schools, conferences, you name it. But that dress just carries something really, really special. And you know, I love my sister for the fact that she's always adorned me in the most beautiful clothing and so bringing it wasn't even a second guess when I was packing for Bismarck, ND.

Holly Baker

For one of her wet plate photographs, Cheyenne Kippenberger wore her hair in a traditional way, elaborately shaped into a fan like style that her grandmother taught her.

Cheyenne Kippenberger

The hairstyle it was actually derived and then kind of inspired by when the settler women started coming in. They had their big bonnet hats. They were, yeah really inspired by those. And you know, our women not only are we very, very resourceful and we're fashionistas as we like to call it, our women. We have this thing where we just we always look good, our stuff matches. You know what I mean? And so we started creating these head pieces. I made mine out of cardboard and this was actually what I presented for Miss Indian World for my traditional talent on stage, but it was so neat because even though it was derived from just these hats that they saw and ended up being something that was really useful for us being from the Everglades in Florida and we were able to kind of tilt them a little bit forward and it could serve as advisor, but it was really about fashion. You know we started decorating them and adorning them with dimes, which is something that we use traditionally in our jewelry. We would be on the edge of it, or you know, it would get fancy. And I always loved it because as a little girl I saw my great-grandma Mary Tiger wear that. In a way it was to honor her, and you know, to present this really unique aspect of seminal fashion and the photo came out so beautiful. As soon as we finished it, I knew it was going to be my favorite one. I don't even think we had finished taking the other ones, but I knew it was going to be my favorite because. I feel so beautiful in that picture. It really embodied the beauty, the fashion, the appreciation, the honoring of my great grandmother. But also, it was a way to honor, like all of our women from back then, that had just created this hairstyle from, you know, seeing women come into our lands and. You know, we're going to make our own version of that, and we still are seminal women embody that same attitude today. And so it was an honoring for just all the women. I look at that photo now and it just not only does it hold such great memory. But you know, I look at it and it literally makes me smile and it makes me feel really, really proud.

Holly Baker

Through her various platforms, Cheyenne Kippenberger continues to bring awareness to the strength and resilience of her people, the Seminole Tribe of Florida.

Cheyenne Kippenberger

You know, if there's anything that I'd like for our listeners, you know, to hear from me is that you may not have heard someone make suki history or really know anything about our people, and that's all right. But now that it is on your radar, you all have an obligation and a responsibility to go and seek out and to learn those things. And I hope you all know that no matter where you go in the world, whether you're in Florida, Massachusetts, New Zealand, no matter where you go, you know there is indigenous and native people. That have inhabited those lands that are still here today, that are fighting for their rights. They're fighting for recognition, and I hope that you may be hearing some of these things will

help you question what your ally ship can look like, and I encourage you to just explore the history that is our people and know that we are modern, living, thriving people.

Holly Baker

Photographer Shane Balkowitsch recently donated wet plate number 3825 from Cheyenne Kippenberger's Ambrotype session to the Florida Historical Society's Library of Florida History and Cocoa. For Florida Frontiers, I'm Holly Baker, public history coordinator for the Florida Historical Society and archivist at the Library of Florida History and Cocoa.

(Music Break)

Ben Brotemarkle

This is Florida Frontiers, the weekly radio magazine of the Florida Historical Society. I'm Ben Brotemarkle. Visit us anytime online at myfloridahistory.org to find great books on Florida history and culture, listen to archived editions of this program, watch our public television series, Florida Frontiers, and much more. That's myfloridahistory.org.

(Music Break)

Ben Brotemarkle

Joining us now is Connie Lester, associate professor of history at the University of Central Florida, director of the RICHES Digital Archiving project and editor of the Florida Historical Quarterly. Today we'll be talking about the Florida Negro Farm Cooperative Extension service.

Connie Lester

One of the most difficult areas for research is also an area with the most information. Agricultural history is the foundation of American history. After all, most Americans were farmers until the late 19th century. The United States was not statistically an urban society until 1920, when the federal census revealed that most of the U.S. population lived in towns and cities of at least 2500 people. Of course, many of those towns were county seats and farm marketing towns. The South was not considered urban until after World War II. And Mississippi is still not an urban state that strong agrarian past means that there are archives filled with information about farming crops, agricultural markets, farm tools and machines, pesticides, herbicides and biological innovations. The information that is more difficult to uncover is the social history of farming. The lives of individual farmers and farm families. Significant planters often have collections of papers, but ordinary farmers, particularly black farmers, are less likely to be represented in the archives. There is, however, a rich source of social history in an unlikely and therefore overlooked place.

Ben Brotemarkle

And Connie, these are government reports by agricultural research. Right.

Connie Lester

Yes. In 1914, Congress enacted the Smith Lever Act, which created the Agricultural Cooperative Extension Service, a partnership between the USDA Land grant Universities and county governments to place a farm extension agent in every rural county. These agents acted as the intermediary between

farmers and agricultural researchers. They brought scientific agriculture to ordinary farmers in their county. They created test fields, held farm institutes, advised farmers on planting and marketing, and generally modernized agriculture. In 1917, Congress expanded the Extension Service to include home extension agents and the Negro Agricultural Extension Service and Home Extension Service. Not every county in Florida has a black agent. They were concentrated in the Panhandle and in the area from the border with Georgia down to Marion County. Every year, every county extension agent submitted a narrative report to the state agent at Land Grant University. The state agent compiled the information from the county reports and submitted his report to the USDA. Those county narrative reports, which are housed in the archives of land grant universities, provide a wealth of social history about individual farmers, both black and white.

Ben Brotemarkle

And Connie, you found these reports useful in your own research, right?

Connie Lester

Yes, I encountered Florida's extension narratives when I was working on an essay about black farmers in the civil rights era. The essay, titled Planting the Seeds of Racial Equality, Florida's independent Black Farmers, and the modern civil rights era, appeared in Old South, New South, or Down South Florida and the modern civil rights movement, edited by Irvin Diaz Winnsboro in 2009. Given the nature of the topic, I focused on extension reports from 1945 to 1965. The personal stories told by the Black extension agents were uplifting, a not unexpected finding since they were reporting to a white state agent that said, it is clear that the agents saw their work. As rural blacks are preparing for a new day, the report offered several insights into black rural life. First, they revealed the presence of a small core of substantial black-owned farms in each county. These farms ranged in size from 100 to 400 acres. Second, the reports revealed the social networks of churches and schools as glue that sustained rural life in a manner familiar to those who have studied the urban civil rights movement. And 3rd, the language of the report suggests that the agents recognized their work, particularly the programs that taught organization and public speaking. And those that focused on farm children were preparing the black communities for a future in which they would play a greater role in the affairs of the county and state. However, the agents were careful in their reports of these activities, perhaps concerned that whites would make the connections between the training blacks received in extension programs and the emerging civil rights movement.

Ben Brotemarkle

What else did you learn about the farmers who were reported on?

Connie Lester

As was true for white farmers, black farmers with the largest and best capitalized farms were the most enthusiastic consumers of extension programs. They experimented with new techniques, tried new crop mixes and bought modern farm machinery. The extension agents were justly proud of the results, and they photographed these farms and families. The images show substantial farmhouses, automobiles and the drive family members in the field, and farm equipment. They present a rare glimpse into the life of successful black farmers. Those same farmers appeared in the reports for other reasons as well. They provided social support for uplift, both farm and home extension agents served

as rural social workers. They provided information on relief programs, vouched for credit worthiness, and promoted health and sanitation initiatives. Tuberculosis was an endemic disease in the rural South, and county agents supported campaigns for testing for TB as part of the small group of college educated blacks in rural counties. They also served as role models for aspiring black youths. They depended on substantial black farmers to assist in their agricultural and social work. These farmers were likely to attend short courses and institutes held at FAMU and could help disseminate farm information. They were the Deacons, and Sunday school superintendents in the rural churches and could identify those families with particular needs. They were the volunteers who met with boys, corn clubs and 4H clubs to teach the next generation best farm practices, planning techniques and public speaking. Finally, in collaboration with black legal and medical professionals and black entrepreneurs, they supported the construction of Rosenwald schools and the funding of scholarships for black students heading to college. In these and other activities, they prepared their communities for a new day.

Ben Brotemarkle

These reports sound like a fascinating research tool. Thanks, Connie.

Connie Lester

You're welcome.

Ben Brotemarkle

Connie Lester is associate professor of history at the University of Central Florida, director of the RICHES Digital Archiving project, and editor of the Florida Historical Quarterly.

(Music Break)

This is Florida Frontiers. Seven decades after being falsely accused and convicted of raping a white woman, the young black men known as the Groveland Four were finally exonerated on November 22, 2020. Ernest Thomas, who was killed by a posse in 1949 before he could be charged, along with Walter Irvin, Samuel Shepherd and Charles Greenlee are all deceased. Still, their names are now cleared. Gilbert King is the Pulitzer Prize winning author of the Book, *Devil in The Grove, Thurgood Marshall, the Groveland Boys and the dawn of a New America*.

Gilbert King

Yeah, the Groveland case started in Lake County in 1949. It was on a young woman and her husband, who she was separated from at time, went out on a date to try to get their marriage back together and something happened alongside of the road. The next thing we know, she had made the claim that she had been abducted and sexually assaulted by four African Americans. This brought the Klan in, started burning down African American homes. It became a powder keg. A really big trial happened, like a little bit more than a month later involving Thurgood Marshall. So, this became a very big civil rights case focused on Central Florida at the time.

Ben Brotemarkle

The notoriously racist Sheriff Willis McCall and his followers killed Ernest Thomas and tortured the remaining suspects. Journalist Mabel Norris Reese, originally a supporter of Sheriff McCall, wrote unfavorably about the Groveland Case. Gilbert king.

Gilbert King

You know, it's interesting because she came down here. I think she wanted to buy into the community. Reporting on a lot of community news Little League scores, northerners who were coming back down to Mount Dora, and I think she was friends with the prosecutor Jesse Hunter and and helped her get into the world of Sheriff Willis McCall. And I think she was a little bit naive and sort of thought that racially that this was an idyllic place when it clearly was not. And I think the turning point for her because she covered the first trial was the shooting of the Groveland Boys in 1951, as they were waiting for the second trial, the prosecutor, Jesse Hunter, at that point said, I don't think that that was an escape attempt. I think it was deliberate. But Mabel had a lot of communications, and that was really her turning point, and I noticed if you look at her career from that moment on, and it was like November 1951, she was all about justice and justice didn't sell in those small-town newspapers. That's not what people really wanted to hear about white supremacy and so you could see as she got her courage and as she found her sort of inspiration about the things to write about, the things that really interested her. She's also facing backlash in her own community. And I thought that was a really powerful thing that she just continued to do it, knowing that it was going to hurt her pocketbook as she said.

Ben Brotemarkle

Educator and civil rights activist Harry T Moore was another supporter of the Groveland Four. Some believe his actions in the case resulted in the assassination of Moore and his wife, Harriet. Ben Greene is author of the book before his time, The Untold Story of Harry T Moore, America's first civil rights martyr.

Ben Greene

The day of a hearing. Then for the new trial, Willis McCall and his deputy went to Rayford to pick him up on the way back to Lake County claimed that the two prisoners jumped him and attacked him, and he shot him. He emptied his revolver into him. He killed Sam Shepherd, mortally, seriously, critically wounded Walter Irvin, who did survive and told a completely different story, which is that McCall just yanked him out and started shooting. At that point, Harry T Moore started calling for McCall to be removed from office, indicted for murder, the telegram thing and writing letters to the governor to the US attorney, to Thurgood Marshall, to the FBI, and then just six weeks later. He was blown up in his house, so the morning after the bombing, people immediately connected the Groveland case to the more bombing, and when the FBI agents and the local deputies worked their way through the crowd that had gathered and said, why would anyone have wanted to kill Harry Moore? Everybody immediately said Groveland.

Ben Brotemarkle

Florida Governor Ron DeSantis pardoned the Groveland four in 2019, but that proclamation still implied guilt. State Attorney Bill Gladson led the effort that finally resulted in the Groveland Four being exonerated for a crime they did not commit in 1949,

You've been listening to Florida frontiers, the weekly radio magazine of the Florida Historical Society. Please join us right here again next week. Until then find us anytime at myfloridahistory.org and on Facebook production assistance for Florida Frontiers comes from Holly Baker and Connie Lester. The program is edited by John White. Have a great week. I'm Ben Brotemarkle.

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