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FLORIDA'S GREAT SEAL Its Historical Inaccuracies

By T. FREDERICK DAVIS

(Author of History of Jacksonville, etc.)

Since Florida became a possession of the United States there have been in use at different times at least four official seals - two in the Territorial days and two after it became a State.

The first State coat-of-arms was authorized by the Legislature in 1847. The circumstances surrounding the selection of the design are not known, but the idea evidently was to display the extensive coast line of the State and the waterways within its bounds.



Seal of 1847

The design had much to commend it. It was not overburdened with detail ; the impress was plain ; and in the absence of lettering even a school child recognized it at once as the geographical outline of Florida. This was the official seal of the State until 1868, when it was discarded by a Legislature composed principally of people who had not even a bona fide residence here. Therefore it is not surprising that the seal they provided

in its place, our present seal, should have historical inaccuracies, one of which is positively ridiculous.

SEAL OF 1868

On August 6, 1868, the Florida Legislature passed a resolution that abolished the old State seal and provided for a new one as follows:

“The size of an American silver dollar, having in the center thereof a view of the sun’s rays, over a highland, in the distance a cocoa tree, a steamboat on water, and an Indian female scattering flowers in the foreground.”



Present Seal of Florida

The actual designer of the seal is unknown, but an analysis of his product makes it plain that he had no more ability in interpreting the provisions of the resolution than the Legislature had in furnishing him historical material to work on.

THE MOUNTAIN PEAKS

The view is that of a steamboat coming in from the east, with a series of peaks in the distance. The water is plainly a river, with the highland on the north side, a circumstance favorable to the St. Johns River and Fort George Island, where the highest natural elevation on the Atlantic coast south of the New Jersey highlands exists - Mount Cornelia. But there are no mountain peaks on Fort George Island like those in the seal, nor are there any in Florida.

YO-HO-E-HE INSTEAD OF FLOWERS

Steamboats did not enter Florida's waters until after it became an American possession. The Seminoles never were friendly to the white Americans and they were especially hostile at that time (about 1830) when the first steamboat came this way. They had not forgotten the raid of Andrew Jackson upon them in West Florida just a few years before, at which time they were severely punished and their villages destroyed ; and they were even now being driven southward farther and farther from their haunts and homes. Yet the Florida seal shows an Indian of that period welcoming the arrival of the steamboat, signifying the progress of the white man, in the most sentimental fashion. An Indian's nature did not change over night and we may rest assured that the Florida Indians did not celebrate the event by scattering flowers, but, instead, found it difficult to suppress the "Yo-ho-e-he," the war whoop of the Seminoles.

AN UNCLASSIFIED SAVAGE

The Seminole Indians did not wear the head-dress illustrated in our seal. It was characteristic of tribes farther north and those of the West, and it was an insignia of distinction for the head-men and warriors exclusively. Their women did not wear it.

When the 1868 artist put the crown of eagles' feathers on his Indian female he presented Florida with an unclassified savage having the head of a warrior and the body of a squaw.

Florida is entitled to a new coat-of-arms.