

Florida Historical Quarterly

Volume 32
Number 4 *Florida Historical Quarterly*, Vol 32,
Issue 4

Article 8

1953

Book Reviews

Florida Historical Society
membership@myfloridahistory.org



Part of the [American Studies Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

Find similar works at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq>

University of Central Florida Libraries <http://library.ucf.edu>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by STARS. It has been accepted for inclusion in Florida Historical Quarterly by an authorized editor of STARS. For more information, please contact STARS@ucf.edu.

Recommended Citation

Society, Florida Historical (1953) "Book Reviews," *Florida Historical Quarterly*. Vol. 32: No. 4, Article 8.
Available at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq/vol32/iss4/8>

Journey into Wilderness; An Army Surgeon's Account of Life in Camp and Field during the Creek and Seminole Wars, 1836-1838; by Jacob Rhett Motte, edited by James F. Sunderman. (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1953. Pp. xxxv, 326. Introduction, four pencil sketches, nine maps, notes, bibliography, index. \$6.00.)

It has been fifty or more years since the last publication of a book of Seminole War experiences written by a participant. This is the first full-length such description to be carefully edited and annotated by a competent historian (although several well-edited shorter journals and parts of journals by eye-witnesses of the Wars have been printed in this *Quarterly* and in *Tequesta*). Many readers of this review will doubtless already be familiar with Motte's journal, for Sunderman published an extract of almost three chapters in *Tequesta* (No. 10, pp. 25-33, 1950).

Motte kept a volume of field notes, now lost, from which he composed a manuscript account of his experiences for his family and friends. In 1845, he revised this somewhat with the intention of publishing it, and obtained five pencil sketches from J. R. Vinton to be used as illustrations. Basing his work on the original manuscript owned by the Florida Historical Society (a part of Dr. James A. Robertson's collection) and on the revised manuscript now owned by the St. Augustine Historical Society, Sunderman first edited the account as his M.A. thesis at the University of Florida. The final published version also contains reproductions of four of the five Vinton sketches, the originals of which are now in the collection of Dr. Mark F. Boyd.

The author, a Harvard-educated Charleston aristocrat, begins his story with his departure from Charleston in June, 1836, to report for duty as a surgeon with the troops fighting the Second Creek War in Georgia and Alabama. For the next six months we follow him in eastern Alabama and southwestern Georgia.

The Creek troubles were almost over at this time, and Motte participated in no engagements with these Indians. The major part of the book describes his experiences in Florida from January 1837, until May 1838, during the Second Seminole War. His army service took him over much of the northern part of the peninsula (the Alachua region, Jacksonville, St. Augustine, and the St. Johns), and then down the east coast via Indian River to Ft. Pierce (in the establishment of which he participated), inland to Lake Okeechobee, and then to Jupiter Inlet and down along the coast to Biscayne Bay. Here he accompanied Gen. Harney's force a short distance into the southern Everglades, and then went by boat to Fort Lauderdale, where he embarked for St. Augustine and Charleston. He ends his account with his arrival in Charleston. During almost a year and a half of campaigning in Florida, Motte participated in four engagements with the Seminole: the September 1837 capture of King Philip and others north of the present Daytona Beach, the capture of Uchee Billy and his band nearby a day or two later, a battle at Jupiter Inlet in January 1838, and a fight with Sam Jones's band near Biscayne Bay the following April. He also was present at the September 1837 surrender of Coacoochee and Blue Snake, and the famous capture of Osceola and others under a flag of truce the following month. These events do not however loom large in Motte's account; apparently more memorable to him were the difficulties and unpleasantness of day to day army service in Florida. He also seems to have found the frontiersmen of Georgia, Alabama, and Florida, and the exotic people of St. Augustine, more intriguing than the hostile or friendly Indians with whom he came in contact. Nevertheless, we get a few interesting glimpses of Indian customs and appearance, as well as very lively sketches of the manners and social affairs of the southern frontiersmen and the St. Augustine inhabitants. The disruption caused in the little settlements by the Indian wars is vividly

described, and the reader gets a good feeling of what campaigning in Florida meant to one used to the comforts of Charleston and Cambridge. Motte was interested in his natural surroundings and often paused to describe them. He found the Georgia pine woods very empty and depressing, and was not impressed with most of what he saw of Florida scenery and climate-although he recognizes that other factors were involved: "It is not astonishing that those persons who had once campaigned in Florida. . . should have shrunk from revisiting a country where they must have suffered such hardships" (p. 20). Among the spots whose natural beauties he did enjoy were Ichetucknee Springs and Key Biscayne.

This book will not be as important a source for military history as it will for social history. Most of the author's comments on the Indians do not add anything new to anthropological knowledge, although they agree with what we already know of the Creek and Seminole. Three exceptions may be mentioned: Motte's brief description of a Seminole Catfish Dance (p. 217) is, as Sunderman pointed out, the first from the Southeast. However the details he gives disagree with the modern Seminole Catfish Dance (which I have witnessed three times at Cow Creek Green Corn Dances), especially in that, according to Motte, only women sang and danced in this, dancing in place, whereas today it is performed by men and women going through rather complex figures as couples, and in this and all other modern Seminole dances only the men sing. Another interesting but all-too-brief description (p. 209) seems to refer to a calumet ceremony-if so, it is the only such record for the Seminole. Another interesting and unique comment is that the Seminole in south Florida used alligator skin moccasins to protect their feet against the sharp rocks (pp. 232, 234).

The pencil sketches accompanying the work are well done and interesting. Three are landscapes (near Fort Mellon, near

Fort Taylor, and the Cape Florida light.) The fourth (facing p. 138) is a full length portrait of Osceola, drawn in 1845 from a sketch made in 1837. According to Motte, this is "the most correct likeness ever taken of him. The face is a remarkably striking likeness, as he appeared previous to his capture" (p. 141). This may seem a bit extravagant, but of all known portraits of Osceola, the costume in this one is the least romanticized and comes closest to what one would expect from later Seminole dress, so it is reasonable to suppose that the features are also well depicted. *

The maps, which show Motte's routes and the locations he mentions, are unusually clear and attractive.

The editor's notes to the journal are very full and in general well done. Using principally primary sources, he gives useful and accurate outlines of the significance and background of the events described by Motte, and summarizes the causes and history of the Creek and Seminole Wars. Most of the places Motte visited are carefully located in terms of modern geography. As do most historians editing accounts such as this, Sunderman interrupts the narrative flow whenever the author gives the name of an officer, in order to give the reader what seems at least to this reviewer usually superfluous information on his previous and subsequent military career. Motte sprinkles his narrative with ordinary French words and phrases, all of which the editor feels obliged to translate in his notes (even "outré," "on the qui vive," "salle a manger," and "coup-d'oeil"). The explanatory comments drawn from the anthropological literature are accurate and to the point, with one rather minor exception. The editor has not unnaturally confused "Muskogee," which is another name for the language often called "Creek," and "Muskhogeian," the name of the linguistic family to which

* The same drawing is the frontispiece of Mark F. Boyd's "Florida Aflame; The Background and Onset of the Seminole War, 1835" (distributed by the Florida Board of Parks and Historic Memorials), the rest of which is reprinted from his article in this *Quarterly* (vol. 30, no. 1, 1951).

it belongs (p. 257). Most towns of the Creek Confederacy, and most of the Seminole in the 1830's, spoke Muskogee; some Creek towns, the early Seminole nucleus, and most modern Seminole speak Hitchiti (or Mikasuki, a dialect of the same language). Muskogee and Hitchiti, although not mutually intelligible, do not "bear no resemblance" (p. 257) to each other -they are closely related members of the Muskogean (Muskogean) family.

Although the literary embellishments of Motte's account will occasionally strike the modern reader as a bit overdone, his writing is lively, humorous, and very easy to read. In style the book is far above most descriptions of the Seminole Wars written by participants. The detailed annotations by Sunderman, and the maps, bibliography, and index, not only increase the value of the work as a source for historical research, but should enhance its interest for the general reader.

WILLIAM C. STURTEVANT

Yale University

Fleur de Lys and Calumet: Being the Penicaut Narrative of French Adventure in Louisiana. Translated and edited by Richebourg Gaillard McWilliams. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1953. Pp. xxxiii, 282. Maps, illustrations, bibliography, appendixes, index. \$4.00.)

The history of the Gulf region during the first quarter of the eighteenth century is closely connected with the efforts of France to colonize Canada. Despite the overwhelming misfortunes of La Salle, he alone had been the single most important figure in transplanting French civilization to the American wilderness. By 1699 the French were turning their efforts toward the Gulf coast and Iberville had been designated by the Minister of Marine and Colonies to continue the work begun by La Salle.

Among the crew on Iberville's first expedition was a young

ship's carpenter, turned chronicler, named Andre Penicaut. His narrative embraces the years 1698 to 1721, which saw the founding of Biloxi, Mobile, Natchez, New Orleans, and other early outposts in Louisiana. Penicaut took part in many exploring expeditions - as far north as the upper reaches of the Mississippi and as far south as the Rio Grande. He came to know first-hand the various Indian tribal customs, and he was a keen observer of many details of French colonial life.

Although the Penicaut manuscript has been used by scholars for more than two hundred years, Professor McWilliams has given us the first complete English translation of this rather remarkable chronicle. Perhaps it is true that Penicaut relied rather heavily on his memory and that his reporting at times is none too accurate, such as the date of building Fort Passacola (Pensacola) and his extravagant claims of great distances accomplished on foot in a comparatively short space of time. Nevertheless, Professor McWilliams has been able to point out many of these inaccuracies through painstaking documentation. Particularly noteworthy are the identifications of place names and personalities, which are a great aid to the reader in understanding the narrative.

From the point of view of the historian in search of source materials the translation is somewhat disappointing, for errors of fact have frequently gone unchallenged. However, as a chronicle of impressions rather than facts, it is rewarding. This is particularly true in interpreting many aspects of daily life in French colonial America, which may help broaden our understanding of France's influence in shaping American civilization. *Fleur de Lys and Calumet* is scholarly, done in a simple and direct style, and should be of much interest to Floridians.

CHARLES S. DAVIS

Florida State University