

Florida Historical Quarterly

Volume 33
Number 3 *Florida Historical Quarterly*, Vol 33,
Issue 3 and 4

Article 9

1954

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Recommended Citation

Neill, Wilfred T. (1954) "The Site of Osceola's Village," *Florida Historical Quarterly*. Vol. 33: No. 3, Article 9.
Available at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq/vol33/iss3/9>

THE SITE OF OSCEOLA'S VILLAGE IN MARION
COUNTY, FLORIDA

by WILFRED T. NEILL

Archeology is generally thought of as being concerned with prehistoric man, but the application of archeological techniques to sites of the historic period often yields valuable data. As recently as 1948, no archeological site had been found that could be attributed to Seminole Indian occupation; the Seminole Period in Florida was known from historical sources alone.¹ This situation was soon remedied. Goggin² investigated the site of Spaulding's Lower Store on the St. Johns River, recovering a large quantity of colonial artifacts, Seminole pottery, and trinkets intended for the Indian trade. Goggin *et al.*³ described a historic Indian burial, doubtless Seminole, from the Zetrouer site near Gainesville. A number of Seminole or Lower Creek sites had previously been discovered by Bullen⁴ in the Chattahoochee Valley. Seminole material was recovered by Griffin⁵ from old Fort Gadsden. A promising Seminole site, found by Julian Granberry at Winter Park,⁶ has been under investigation by John M. Goggin, who has also recovered artifacts of the Seminole Period from the vicinity of Middleburg, Clay County.⁷ In 1953 Neill⁸ located a Seminole site near Silver Springs, Florida.

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1. Goggin, J. M., "Florida Archeology - 1950." *The Florida Anthropologist*, nos. 1-2 p. 17. Gainesville, 1950.
 2. Goggin, J. M., "A Florida Indian Trading Post, circa 1763-1784." *Southern Indian Studies*, vol. 1, no. 2, 35-38. Chapel Hill. 1949.
 3. Goggin, J. M., M. E. Godwin, E. Hester, D. Prange, and R. Spangenburg, "An Historic Indian Burial, Alachua County, Florida." *The Florida Anthropologist*, nos. 1-2, 10-25. Gainesville. 1949.
 4. Bullen, R. P., "An Archeological Survey of the Chattahoochee River Valley in Florida." *Journal of the Washington Academy of Sciences*, vol. 40, no. 4, 101-125. Washington. 1950.
 5. Griffin, J. W., "An Archeologist at Fort Gadsden." *Florida Historical Quarterly*, vol. 28, no. 3, 254-261. St. Augustine 1950.
 6. Mentioned briefly by Sleight, F. W., "Seminole Site." *Florida Anthropological Society Newsletter*, no. 19, p. 1. (Place varies) 1952.
 7. Footnote in Goggin, J. M., Space and Time Perspective in Northern St. Johns Archeology, Florida." *Yale University Publications in Anthropology*, no. 47, p. 62. New Haven. 1952.
 8. Neill, W. T., "A Seminole Site in Marion County, Florida." In press.

During 1953 and 1954, Neill⁹ investigated the site of old Fort King (1827-1843), near Ocala, Florida. A portion of the site showed no evidence of habitation since the fort was abandoned. This portion yielded over 1,000 artifacts, thought to be characteristic of early American occupation in the area. These include fragments of dark green glass rum bottles, some of them with chipped edges suggesting use as scrapers; clay pipes, of a late variety with a basal spur; blue feathered edge chinaware and a much smaller quantity of green feathered edge; Staffordshire printed ware; flower-painted ware; plain white ironware; gun flints, of both European and local stone; nails of all sizes, square in cross-section and tapering gradually from head to point; musket balls and smaller lead shot; and many other artifacts in lesser quantities. Also found were faceted beads of blue glass, intended for the Seminole trade if not actually worn by the Indians; a potsherd with a brushed surface, doubtless Seminole; and two plain aboriginal sherds possibly of Seminole manufacture.¹⁰ The sutler's store at Fort King catered to the Indians as well as the whites, and so material recovered from the fort give an idea of the artifacts to be expected on local Seminole sites of the same time period.

Four or five Seminole villages were once located at no great distance from Fort King, and among them was Osceola's settlement. Earlier sources usually described Osceola's village simply as being "in a hammock near Fort King"¹¹ or "near the present site of Ocala."¹² Land grant records are more explicit.

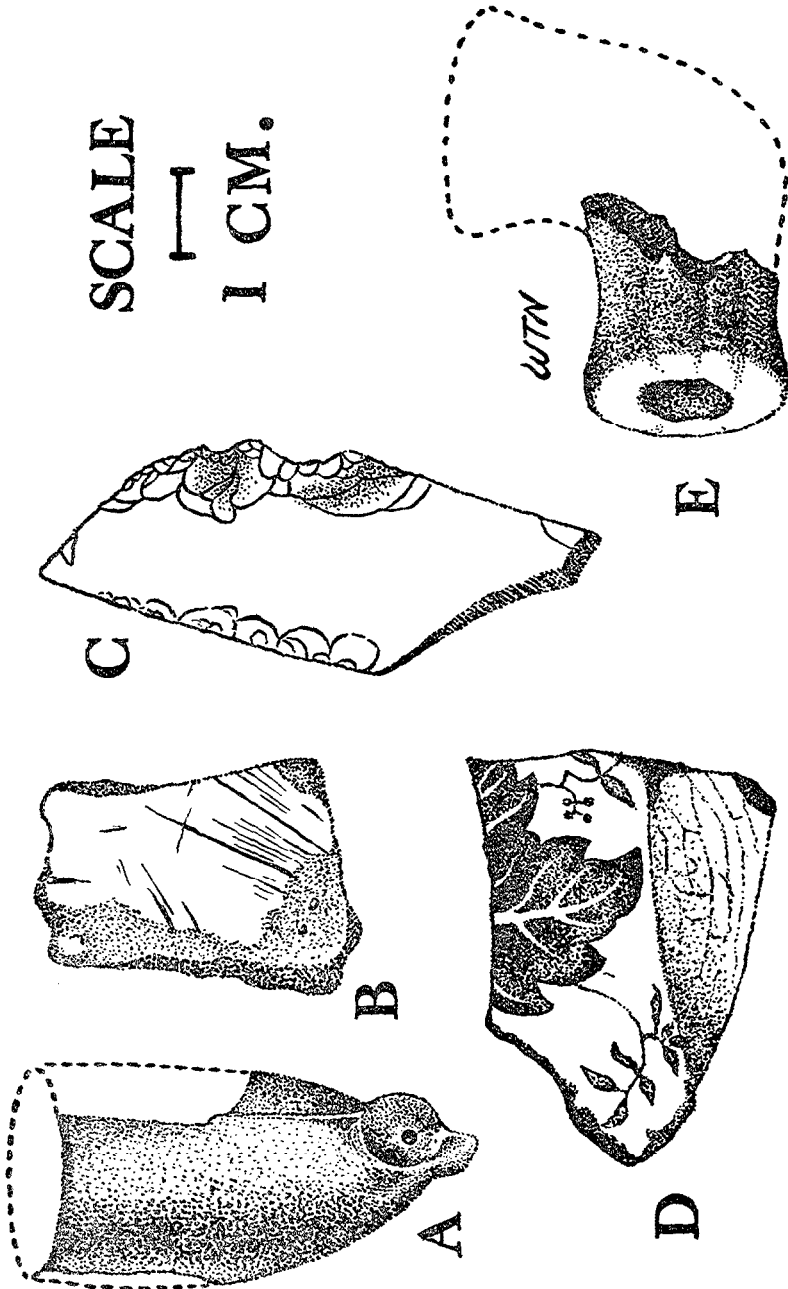
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9. Neill, W. T., "Studies at the Site of Fort King, Marion County, Florida." In press.
 10. Some Seminole pottery vessels, while still damp, were brushed with a bundle of fibers. This brushed ware is readily identified. Other Seminole vessels were plain; and small, weathered sherds of this plain ware are not so readily distinguished from certain earlier pottery types. For descriptions of Seminole pottery, see Bullen, 1950, p. 103; and Goggin, 1952, pp. 112-113.
 11. Sprague, J. T., *The Origin, Progress, and Conclusion of the Florida War, etc.* p. 101. New York, 1848.
 12. Coe, C. H., *Red Patriots: The Story of the Seminoles.* p. 29. Cincinnati. 1898.

A certain L. Funck applied for a grant which, when the area was subsequently platted in 1843, was listed as the NW $\frac{1}{4}$ Sect. 11, T 16 S, R 21 E. The location was described as being "one mile west of Osceola's town, near the land of the Reinhardt's".¹³ (One need not assume that "west" in this case meant due west; in early descriptions of property, both distances and directions were often stated in very general terms.) The Reinhardt application did not mention the Indian settlement, which in any event was not necessarily on the Reinhardt lands.¹⁴ Local tradition places Osceola's village very precisely: on what is now the John W. Edwards property, about four miles south-southwest of the Ocala city limits and seven miles southwest of Fort King. The locality is approximately one and one-half miles north of the Reinhardt lands and one mile northeast of the old Funck property.

Cutler¹⁵ stated, "The site of Osceola's Village near Ocala is now occupied by four silos and a feed lot for cattle, and is owned by. . . John L. Edwards". Ott¹⁶ commented, "Osceola had his home near Bradley's Pond, about three miles SW of Ocala". In so stating, Ott may have followed Clarke.¹⁷

Bradley's Pond still exists. The stream that feeds it has been dammed farther up, and so the pond has been considerably reduced in size. It lies on the Edwards property, and is now called "the old Bradley Pond". The bases of the silos mentioned by Cutler are still to be found, on higher ground just east of the pond.

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13. *Applications for Land under Armed Occupation Act*. Archives of Field Note Division. Tallahassee. Also see Boyd, M. F., "The Seminole War: Its Background and Onset." *Florida Historical Quarterly*, vol. 30, no. 1, p. 53, footnote. Tallahassee. 1951.
 14. Reinhardt's holdings changed hands in 1849, and the transaction was recorded in the *Marion County, Florida, Deed Record Book "Q"*, pp. 764-765. The property was described therein, but with no mention of Osceola's village.
 15. Cutler, H. G., *History of Florida, Past and Present, Historical and Biographical*. 3 vols. vol. 1, p. 543. Chicago. 1923.
 16. Ott, E. R., "Ocala Prior to 1868." *Florida Historical Society Quarterly*, vol. 6, no. 2, p. 88, footnote. St. Augustine. 1927.
 17. Clarke, J. O. D., *A Sketch of Ocala and Marion County*. Republican Press. 1891. Not seen.



Artifacts from the site of Osceola's village. A, bowl of clay pipe (outline restored). B, sherd of Seminole pottery. C, glass fragment with chipped edges, possibly used as a scraper. D, sherd of blue transfer-printed china-ware. E, "elbow" pipe of glazed clay (possible bowl outline restored).

During times of hard rain the pond may rise and overflow even its older basin. Overflow was probably much greater before damming of the stream, and it is not surprising that all traces of habitation, modern or otherwise, are to be found well up on the high ground above the pond. The surrounding country is hilly; it was once covered with a live-oak hammock, as evidenced by a few remaining copses. However, nearly all of the area has been cleared, and is periodically harrowed and plowed. It is now covered in summer with pasture grasses and corn fields. When the site was first examined in 1953, the area had been cleared to the very ground, facilitating the search for evidence of Seminole occupation. Superficial stratigraphy had been destroyed by repeated plowing, however.

Studies have scarcely begun at the site of Osceola's village; preliminary remarks are warranted only because they are especially pertinent to the present symposium. Evidently the site and its environs were inhabited by Indians long before the coming of the Seminole, for flint chips and projectile points have often been turned up by the plow. Artifacts probably attributable to the Seminole have been found more or less aligned on the high ground east of the pond, between the old silo and the present-day Edwards home. Evidence of a later, non-Seminole occupation was found near the southeastern end of the old pond basin. In one area, Seminole artifacts may have been commingled with those of the later occupation.

The Seminole portion of the site to date has yielded but 23 items: one faceted bead of blue glass; four fragments of clay pipe stems and a broken pipe bowl, (*see fig.*) A; a broken, rudely made "elbow" pipe of glazed clay, E; one sherd of aboriginal pottery with a brushed surface, B; two plain aboriginal sherds; two pieces of dark green bottle glass; one bit of pale bluish-green glass which may have been used as a scraper, C; four scraps of blue featheredge china; two fragments of blue transfer-printed ware (one shown in D); three pieces of plain

ironware; and one bit of fine white china with a floral design in red and green. This last specimen, and the elbow pipe, have no counterpart in the Fort King material. Several other artifacts, possibly Seminole, were found mixed with obviously later material where two areas of habitation appeared to overlap. Among them were a flattened, subrectangular chunk of iron, three small bits of slate,¹⁸ fragments of a stoneware jug, four pieces of plain white ironware, and a nail of the early American type.

Very few artifacts were recovered from the Seminole portion of the site, and these only after repeated visits over a period of months, during which time the whole area had been plowed. The 23 items attributed to Seminole occupation were found over an area about 500 feet long and 75 feet wide. Perhaps they had been dragged about by repeated harrowing. Alternatively, Osceola's village may have been strung out along the higher ground bordering the pond. The encampment, being very close to the American military base of Fort King, was abandoned when hostilities broke out;¹⁹ and the Indians probably left very few of their possessions behind. It is not out of the question that the deserted village was raided for "souvenirs" after Osceola had attained fame.

Of course, further work may reveal a heavier concentration of artifacts in some portion of the site. However, this is not regarded as likely, for most of the surrounding fields were carefully searched at a time when they were free of grass and weeds. Additional material may be concealed by farm buildings that border the site to the north, or by other buildings and a lawn that border it to the south. As yet, no examination has

18. A similar bit of slate was recovered from the Fort King site.

19. Writing from Fort King, Wiley Thompson (letter to Gen. George Gibson, dated Dec. 7, 1835) stated, "The Indians in this section of the nation, immediately succeeding the murder of the chief, Charley Emartla, assembled at the towns called Big Swamp and Long Swamp. On yesterday morning I received information that they have all disappeared. . . ." Big Swamp was an inappropriate name for a large hammock region southwest of Fort King, and the Big Swamp village was Osceola's. See map in Boyd, 1951, p. 28.

been made of the brushy hillsides to the west of Bradley's Pond. These do not lie on the Edwards property, and are not traditionally associated with Osceola's village.

There is a local tradition that Osceola sent smoke signals from the high hills on the eastern side of the Edwards property. This belief may have some foundation in fact. Although the Seminoles are not known to have used smoke signals, they probably built large fires at times. (At a 1953 Corn Dance, held by the Cow Creek Seminole near Fort Drum, a veritable bonfire sent a tall plume of smoke into the sky for hours; it was visible for miles around.) Quite possibly, the soldiers at Fort King and the settlers at Ocala often saw the smoke of Seminole fires.

It is not surprising that traditions of Osceola and his village should have persisted locally. Although Marion County was not officially created until 1845, there were white pioneers in the area at a considerably earlier time, and Fort King was first manned in 1827, before Osceola became an acknowledged war leader of the Seminole. Judging from the afore-mentioned Funck application, the Indian village site was a well-known landmark when the Ocala area was first settled.