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OSCEOLA'S COATS?

by WILLIAM C. STURTEVANT

A surprising number of Osceola's personal possessions have survived to the present, a circumstance no doubt attributable to his fame during life and to the fact that he died in captivity. Goggin (1955; see *Bibliography* following) has located and carefully described four items of Osceola's clothing and jewelry, and has compared them with their pictorial representation in Osceola portraits. The four pieces are not only the oldest documented Seminole examples of their types, but are among the oldest dated Seminole ethnographic specimens of any kind. Hence they are important for the study of the history of Seminole material culture, as well as having historical interest due to their association with Osceola.

The well-documented objects so far located are all decorative costume accessories. As Goggin suggests (1955: 181, 185), it is likely that Osceola was buried at least partly clothed, and it seems improbable that such items as his shirt, coat, and leggings would have been removed from his body as souvenirs - as his turban, sashes, garters, and silver ornaments apparently were (Goggin, 1955:180,183). Yet there are in existence three coats purporting to have belonged to Osceola. It is my purpose here to describe and evaluate these specimens, two of which were unknown to Goggin (and to me) at the time he wrote his article for the Osceola number of this *Quarterly* (Goggin, 1955).

The first of the three (mentioned in Goggin, 1955: 182) is easily dispensed with. This is a coat now in the museum of the Moravian Historical Society in Nazareth, Pennsylvania. <sup>1</sup> The

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1. I am indebted to Mr. Walter L. Peters, of the Society, for permitting me to examine and photograph this specimen in April, 1955. John Witthoft first noticed the piece in the museum.

coat bears an old label, partly obliterated, reading "ap[praised?] \$---- [illegible] Worn by Osceola ----- [illegible] War." It is a fine, full-length coat of white-tanned buckskin, open down the front, and decorated with buckskin fringes and with floral designs embroidered with silk thread. It has cuffs and a collar of dark brown velvet, and a separate, large, fringed, trianguloid yoke or cape attached at the seam between the collar and the body of the coat. The cut might conceivably be a deviant Seminole form. But the well-executed floral designs rule out this possibility, for they are in a style and a technique completely unlike any known Seminole work. Judging by the style of these embroidered designs, the garment probably was made in the region surrounding the Great Lakes; it is certainly not Southeastern Indian. Furthermore, the label already referred to is the sole documentation for the specimen, which apparently reached the Moravian Historical Society within the last thirty years, as part of a private collection from Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.

The other two coats attributed to Osceola are of quite a different nature. They are certainly Seminole and must have been collected before 1845; the only doubt involves their attribution to Osceola. These are among the eastern North American items now or formerly in the collections of the Museum für Volkerkunde, Berlin, which are discussed in a recent monograph by Walter Krickeberg (1954). Dr. Krickeberg there briefly mentions "two of the cotton hunting shirts, which the famous chief Osceola wears in Catlin" (p. 84), but does not illustrate or describe them. Subsequent to the appearance of this work, these two specimens were located in the Kunstgutlager of Celle Castle, Celle, Lower Saxony (Krickeberg, 1955).

#### *Coat 1*

Dr. Horst Hartmann of Schloss Celle has kindly provided the photographs reproduced in plates 1 and 2, as well as some notes on the specimens. Coat 1 (plate 1; Museum für Volker-

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Plate 1. Seminole coat, Museum fur Volkerkunde Berlin IV B 247, Front side above, back side below. (Photographs courtesy Verwaltung des Kunstgutlagers, Schloss Celle.)

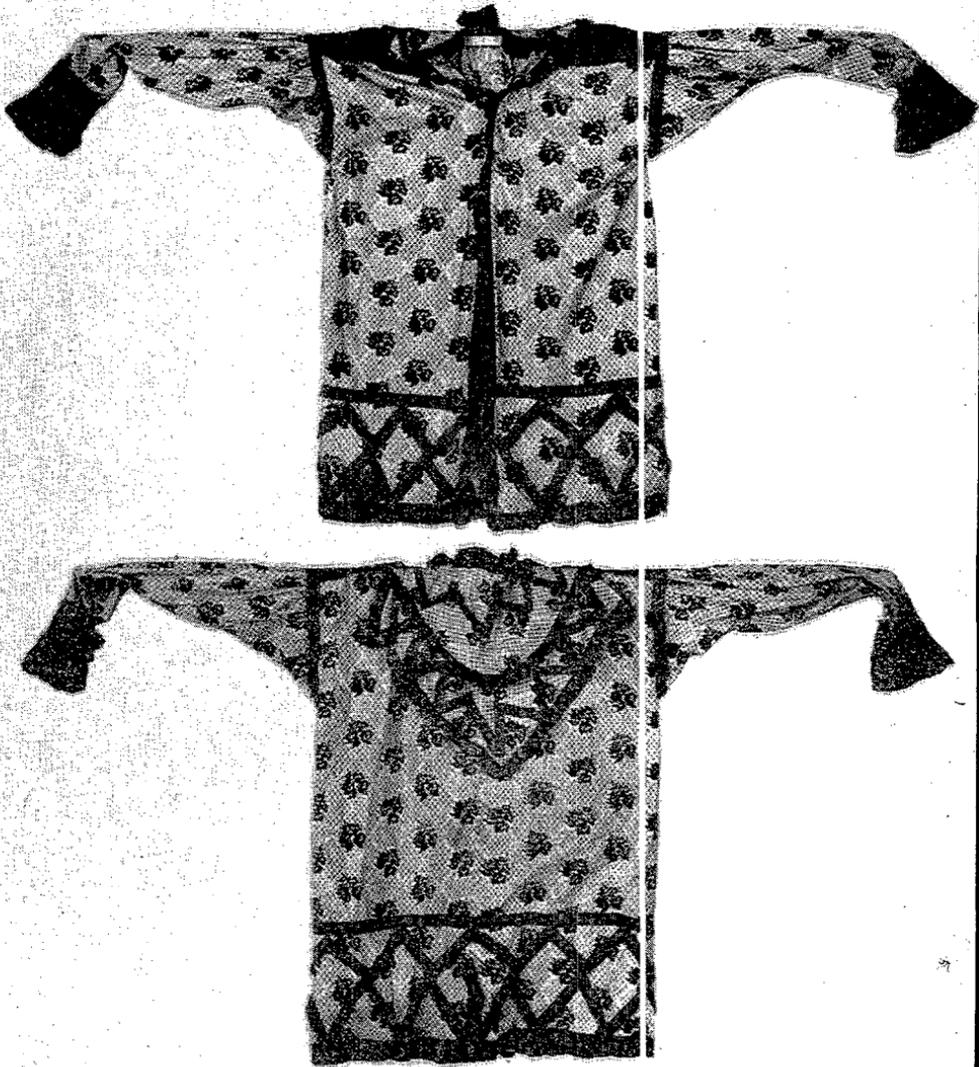


Plate 2. Seminole coat, Museum fur Volkerkunde Berlin IV B 248. Front side above, back side below. (Photographs courtesy Verwaltung des Kunstgutlagers, Schloss Celle.)

kunde number IV B 247) is about 110 cm. (44 inches) long, of cotton print, open down the front. The floral design is in gold-yellow, brown, reddish-brown, green, and blue, on a light colored (German "hell") background. The appliqued cloth strips are blue, red, and a light color ("heller Tonung") (Hartmann, 1955).

The photographs show that the sleeves are separate from the body, with gatherings at the attached cuffs and at the shoulder seams. The body is apparently of two pieces, sewn together up the back but with a short slit in the bottom of the skirt in back. There are ruffles around the bottom of the skirt, up the sides of the front opening, and in two appliqued horizontal bands and as part of two diagonal bands in the back. One horizontal band and the two diagonal bands in front have fringed lower borders, while the diagonal bands both in front and in back have fringed upper borders. The large cape-like collar attachment has two bands of ruffles, and it is sewn to the body only at the neck opening. There are extra strips sewn on the shoulders (toward the front on the left side, toward the rear on the right side), and triangular under-arm sections formed from the same piece of material as the sleeves (turned toward the back on the right sleeve, and toward the front on the left sleeve). A detail photograph of a section of the inside of the garment (not reproduced) shows that the decorative bands are appliqued onto the outside, with a simple running stitch (apparently of thread, rather than sinew).

A detailed comparison of this specimen with other Seminole coats in illustrations and museum collections would lead into a study of style changes and persistences, for which this is not the place. However, some of the more obvious resemblances and differences may be mentioned. In the first place, there can be no doubt that this specimen is Seminole. Many details

are identical with later Seminole coats. Among these are the general outline of the garment as a whole, the form and position of the ruffles and horizontal appliqued bands, the shape and size of the cape-like collar attachment, the front opening and tail slit, the small rectangular collar above the cape, the form of the cuffs, and the triangular under-arm pieces. The use of a cotton print fabric was common during the nineteenth century, judging from pictures, but was gradually replaced by solid color cotton in later times, as the familiar Seminole patchwork bands developed from decorative applique work and were added to men's coats. This patchwork technique was not in existence at the time these two specimens were collected. Unusual or unique features of the coat include the diagonal bands on front and back, the fringed edges of some appliqued strips,<sup>2</sup> and the extra inner ruffle on the body of the cape.

Thus the coat is Seminole; but how well does it agree with the coats shown in portraits of Osceola? As we shall see, the documentary evidence for the attribution of the specimen is not especially convincing, so a comparison with illustrations is reasonable. Of the known depictions of Osceola (described in Goggin, 1955), only three definitely show him wearing a coat. These three are the two portraits by Catlin, and one by Curtis, all painted during Osceola's captivity at Fort Moultrie. Only one of these is full-length, and this one is unfortunately probably the least accurate of the three.<sup>3</sup>

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2. I know of no photographs showing fringes on Seminole clothing, nor of any museum specimens other than this one which exhibit this feature. However, it was apparently not uncommon in the 1820's and 1830's, for four of the Seminole portraits and four of the Creek ones in McKenney and Hall (1933-34) show men with fringed cloth clothing. The bottom of Osceola's coat is fringed in the full-length Catlin portrait.
  3. Two other full-length portraits show Osceola wearing a coat. The print in Brownell (1855: facing p. 129; reproduced from an 1857 edition in McCarthy, 1949: facing p. 39) is derived without useful modifications from Catlin's engraving of his full-length portrait (reproduced in McCarthy, 1949: frontispiece; and in Goggin, 1955: cover). Compare now Goggin's (1955: 174) comments on the Brownell portrait. The other portrait, in oils, is by W. M. Laning

What can be seen of the print of the cloth in these three paintings in no case resembles the design shown on the photographs of the Berlin specimen (plate 1). Both the Curtis (Goggin, 1955: pl. 4) and the full-length Catlin painting (in the American Museum of Natural History, N. Y.; for a reproduction, see Stovall, 1954) show a brownish background - perhaps due to fading of the paint - with a print of white, green, and red flowers in the case of the Curtis portrait, and small dabs of red and blue with no pattern shown, in the Catlin painting. The binding or applique on the collar corners in the Curtis portrait is red. These colors can be interpreted as agreeing (taking into account fading and artistic license) with those reported by Hartmann for the Berlin specimen (see above). However, not only do the designs differ, but what few deductions can be drawn as to the cut of the portrait coats, show differences from the specimen. Ruffles on the edges are not shown, nor does Catlin show any applique stripes. The collar stripes shown by Curtis might be interpreted as representing the applied edges of the corners of the cape, which would appear in about this position - but the ruffle on the edge of the cape is not shown. The garment worn by Osceola in the full-length portrait in McKenney and Hall (1933-34: II, facing p. 360), is unlike our coat 1 in cut, color, design, and decorative additions. We may conclude that if this coat ever belonged to Osceola, he did not wear it when any of the known portraits of him were painted.

#### *Coat 2*

The other German specimen (plate 2; Museum für Volkerkunde number IV B 248) is described by Dr. Hartmann (1955) as about 80 cm. (32 inches) long, of cotton, with red and brownish-violet flowers and green leaves printed against a very light

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and is in the collection of Edgar William and Bernice Chrysler Garbisch. A small black and white reproduction was published in *Look* (August 24, 1954), XVIII, no. 17, 87. This also is apparently derived from the Catlin portrait, with modifications which add nothing to our knowledge.

colored background design of squares filled with crossing rows of smaller squares. A ruffle with a dark gold floral print on a red background, is sewn onto the bottom edge of the coat, up both sides of the opening in front, and around the edge of the cape attached to the collar. The applied design around the skirt is of red cloth, whereas the cape ("Kragen") bears a strip of blue cloth; since the outer applied zigzag on the cape seems to be of the same material as the applique on the skirt, this "blue cloth" may refer to the inner ruffle and inner applied zigzag on the cuffs and the small rectangular collar. Each shoulder has a patch of solid colored cloth, and there are bands of what may be the same material above the cuffs and at the seams joining the sleeves to the body. A detail photograph (not reproduced) shows a neatly made seam up the center of the back, with both edges turned in so that the stitching is invisible from the outside. Like coat 1, this specimen has triangular under-arm pieces; the directions in which these are folded are not evident from the photographs.

Most of the features which identified coat 1 as Seminole (see above) are present also on coat 2. Notable differences, besides the strikingly different print design, include the lack of the unusual diagonal applique bands and the fringes of coat 1, the lack of horizontal ruffles on the body of the coat, and the presence in coat 2 of zigzag and diamond applique designs on the tail and the cape. The lack of ruffles can be matched in later Seminole coats. The simple applied designs are an important feature of the coat. Their presence on a Seminole cape is not otherwise known to me, with the single exception of a portrait of Micanopy (McKenney and Hall, 1933-34: II, facing p. 336), which shows a simple zigzag line, probably applique, around the border of a very large cape. However, applique designs are common on the tails of later examples, growing progressively more complex and smaller, and changing eventually to patchwork bands. Designs in this po-

sition, probably applied, also occur on other early Seminole coats: cf. the fine portrait of Tuko-see Mathla in McKenney and Hall (1933-34: III, facing p. 82); an engraving of Nokush-adjo, a member of Billy Bowlegs' party in New Orleans in 1858 (New Orleans Correspondent, 1858: 377); and an 1852 photograph of Billy Bowlegs recently acquired by the Bureau of American Ethnology (negative number 42,913 - or perhaps 43,913).

The patterns and colors of the designs of coat 2 are more similar to the coats shown in portraits of Osceola than are those of coat 1. The design in the two Catlin portraits is very indistinct, but it appears to be a small figure print comparable to that in the present specimen. The Curtis portrait coat, with small green, red, and white flowers on a brownish ground, is comparable to the specimen's green, red, and brownish floral design on a light background. The red binding on the tips of the collar or cape, shown in this portrait, is also similar to the bindings on the cape of the specimen, which may be red or blue (see above). However, the design and the cut of the coat in the Curtis and Catlin portraits are too indistinct to permit useful comparison with any specimen. The full-length portrait in McKenney and Hall (1933-34: II, facing p. 360) shows Osceola wearing what may be a coat (although the front opening is not shown) of green cloth with a red, blue, and black small-figured print, and with red collar binding.<sup>4</sup> How-

4. These are the colors shown on the first published version of this engraving, dated 1842 (*sic*), in volume 2 of the first edition of McKenney and Hall. In the 1933-34 edition, the print is red and green, on a green background. McCarthy (1949: 32, 36) distinguishes between the 1842 portrait and a slightly different one in the 1854 and some later quarto editions of McKenney and Hall, reproducing both, and attributing the first to Charles Bird King and the second to Robert Matthew Sully. I believe that there is no evidence for either attribution, and that the differences shown by the second version are due simply to a re-engraving of the same portrait (the first version, but not the second, is initialed "T.C.D."-artist or engraver?) (cf. Goggin, 1955: 173-174). Thus it seems reasonable to utilize only the portrait in the first edition of McKenney and Hall, as the nearest approximation to the lost original.

ever, there are no background squares such as specimen IV B 248 shows, nor does the portrait coat have the large diamond applique around the tail - the latter feature being also lacking in the full-length Catlin painting.

We are forced to the same conclusion reached with coat 1: this is a Seminole specimen, but if it ever belonged to Osceola, he apparently did not wear it while posing for any known portrait.

#### *Documentation*

The importance of these two coats, both as to their possible association with Osceola and also as ethnological specimens, depends largely on the nature of the documentary evidence accompanying them - as is almost always the case with museum specimens.

The two items were purchased from Friedrich Kohler by the Prussian State in 1845, as part of a collection of 41 pieces from eastern North America - ranging from the Dakota and Upper Missouri tribes, to the Naskapi of Labrador, and the Cherokee and Seminole in the Southeast - and from Hawaii (Krickeberg, 1954: 10, 95, *et passim*). It is presumed that the collection, which includes a number of excellent and important specimens, was gathered by Kohler himself. Little is known of him, except that he was *valet de chambre* for Adolphe Fourier de Bacourt, a French ambassador to Washington (Krickeberg, 1954: 10). Bacourt was minister to Karlsruhe in 1835-1840, and then ambassador to Washington, from which he passed to the embassy in Turin in 1842 (Dreyfus et al., 1887: 1097). He was in the United States from June 19, 1840, to August 11, 1842, during which time he made trips to Philadelphia, Baltimore, New York City, Boston, Syracuse, and Niagara Falls (as well as Washington, D. C.), but apparently not further west or

south (Bacourt, 1882). His letters from America do not mention Kohler by name; there are a few passing references to his valet, only one of which gives us any clues - on one occasion, he wanted to listen to some German singers in New York (Bacourt, 1882: 120). Krickeberg (1954: 11fn) is inclined to doubt Kohler's claim to German nationality, despite his residence in Coppenbrugge, near Hameln (Hamelin), at the time of the purchase of his collection - both because his written German is exceedingly poor (as is demonstrated by his handwritten catalog in the Berlin museum), and because of his service with a French ambassador (Krickeberg, 1954: 11fn; 1955). The latter circumstance can be understood in view of Bacourt's long and pleasant stay in Germany just before coming to the United States.

Krickeberg (1954: 11fn) even ingeniously suggests that there may be some connection between Kohler and the famous French Canadian Toussaint Charbonneau (German *Kohler* and French *charbonnier* both meaning "charcoal-burner, collier"), who was a long-time resident among the Mandan and Hidatsa and served as guide and interpreter for Lewis and Clark, Prince Maximilian of Wied, and others - there are some Mandan and Hidatsa specimens in the Kohler collection. The wide geographic range of the specimens he collected suggests rather that Kohler purchased all or most of them from others, rather than getting them himself from the Indians. The fact that one specimen in the collection is labelled "War club of Kakoa," in *English* (Krickeberg, 1954: 179), would seem to contribute to this hypothesis.

Dr. Krickeberg informs me that Kohler's original list of specimens, titled "Curiosities from the Red Indians of North America," is still in the Berlin museum, and that under num-

ber nine on this list the following description appears:

Two hunting coats of the famous

Oceola, to go with his portrait.<sup>5</sup>

Krickeberg (1955) comments, "These are the two coats (really shirts) of our collection, IV B 247/8. The portrait is no longer present. . . . The question as to whether Kohler identified the shirts only by the portrait, or really collected them from the Seminole [or, one might add, got them with accompanying data from another collector], also remains open. Nevertheless, it is possible that he was in contact with the Southeastern Indians, since the interesting Cherokee pipe IV B 93 ("Altere Ethnographica" [Krickeberg, 1954] pl. 45e) belongs to his collection" (my translation). As to Kohler's phrase "to go with his portrait" ("nebst sein Portrait"), it may be noted that the specification of Catlin's painting (Krickeberg, 1954: 84; quoted above) is an addition by Krickeberg.

If we assume that Kohler was in the U.S. only during his service under Bacourt, and that he made no trips on his own during this time - both assumptions being unproven - and add to this the wide geographical provenience of the specimens and the English label on one of them, then he must have purchased them from other collectors. A possible source for the Seminole coats is indicated by Bacourt's letters: in September, 1840, Bacourt was visited in Washington by Achille Murat, who was then living in Florida, and who told him about Seminole War conditions (Bacourt, 1882: 192-194). May Kohler have gotten the coats from Murat or from a member of his entourage?

#### *Conclusion*

Coats of the type of the two German specimens are still in use among the Florida Seminole (Sturtevant, 1950-53). The

5. "Curiositet von den rhoten Indianer aus Nord-Amerika. . . . Zwey Jagd Roke von den berühmten Oceola, nebst sein Portrait" in Kohler's spelling.

Mikasuki Seminole name for them translates as "long shirt," and local whites call them "medicine man's coats" or "chief's coats." Both these English names are misleading; there are no Seminole chiefs, and the use of the coats is not restricted to medicine men. However, today the "long shirt" is purely a ceremonial garment, in the sense that it is worn only by the more influential men on special occasions such as formal meetings and occasionally during curing rites. But the use of the coat is not prescribed for anyone for any specific occasions, nor does the garment or its use have any specific ritual or religious connotations. Old photographs show that it was more commonly worn forty or fifty years ago.

I have referred to the "long shirt" as a "coat," for two reasons: the manner in which it is worn, and its distinctive form. Present usage and old depictions agree that the garment is worn as a coat, over a shirt, and I know of no specimen with tie-strings, buttons, or other means for closing the front slit.

There are three types of Seminole shirt, distinct from each other and from the coat. The modern shirt worn tucked inside trousers, with several brightly colored decorative bands of patchwork, is called simply "shirt" in Mikasuki, and is an innovation of the last twenty-five or thirty years. The "big shirt," reaching to the knees or below, with a separate waistband to which the top and the skirt are sewn, today is also decorated with patchwork bands, although it originally was not. This pattern seemingly dates from about the turn of the century. The third form, now restricted to older men of the Cow Creek band, is called "short shirt" or "straight shirt" in Mikasuki. This has long sleeves (like all men's garments), reaches to about the level of the knees, is not decorated with patchwork bands, and lacks a waist band, hanging straight from the shoulders. It is now worn either alone or tucked into trousers. The "straight shirt" appears to be the old form of male basic garment, the

normal and perhaps the only form, except for the coat, during the nineteenth century. The modem "shirt" worn inside trousers is usually slit all the way down the front (the slit always reaches at least the waist), and is shorter than the others, reaching at most to a few inches below the hips. The "big shirt" and "straight shirt" are not open all the way down the front, but only to about waist level or a few inches above. All three shirts, in distinction to the coat ("long shirt"), lack the trianguloid cape sewn to the neck, and also lack the ruffles sewn to the edges of the garment and sometimes sewn to horizontal appliqued bands. Thus the four man's garments are uniquely defined by combinations of a few features: the coat or "long shirt" has a full front opening, cape, and ruffles, and is long; the modem "shirt" is uniquely short, always has several bands of patchwork designs, is always worn with trousers, and usually has a full front opening; the "big shirt" is long, has a chest opening only, may have patchwork designs (almost always does now), and is unique in its constricted waist with skirt below; the "straight shirt" hangs straight without waist band, has a chest opening only, and never has patchwork designs. Therefore, the two German specimens are coats, not shirts, exhibiting the distinctive characteristics of "long shirts."

We have seen that it is unfortunately impossible to be sure of the attribution of the German coats to Osceola. If they did belong to him, they date from before 1838 (the year of his death); if Kohler was only in the United States as a servant of ambassador Bacourt, they date from 1842 or before; in any case, the end date is 1845, when the Prussian government purchased them from Kohler. The next oldest Seminole coat known to me is one collected in 1876, which is in the University Museum, Philadelphia (catalog number 45-15-273). There are a few specimens collected in the 1890's, and all the rest are more recent. Apparently the oldest dated shirt, one of the

"straight shirt" type, was collected in 1894 (Chicago Natural History Museum no. 167921). I know of no woman's clothing collected before the 1890's. So the two German coats, although they cannot be definitely associated with Osceola, are by far the oldest dated Seminole clothing, and their ethnological importance is not lessened by the uncertainty of the Osceola attribution.

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