

1964

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Recommended Citation

Cushman, Jr., Joseph D. (1964) "The Indian River Settlement: 1842-1849," *Florida Historical Quarterly*. Vol. 43 : No. 1 , Article 4.

Available at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq/vol43/iss1/4>

THE INDIAN RIVER SETTLEMENT: 1842-1849

by JOSEPH D. CUSHMAN, JR.

NO SECTION OF the Territory of Florida suffered more than the east coast as a result of Indian deprecations during the Seminole War. The flourishing sugar plantations of the Halifax country were reduced to charred ruins, the tiny port of New Smyrna was entirely deserted, and the infant citrus industry suffered a staggering setback just as it was beginning to show signs of prosperity. After seven years of fighting, many Floridians gravely doubted the truth of General William Worth's pontifical pronouncement that the Seminole conflict would be "officially" terminated on August 12, 1842. The settlers were alarmed at the naivete of the War Department's assumption that the remainder of the Indians would emigrate to Arkansas peacefully, and they anticipated a new Seminole outbreak if emigration was attempted by force.

The Seminoles confined themselves to an area around the western side of Lake Okeechobee and along the banks of the Caloosahatchee River in the southwestern part of the peninsula. Although United States Army authorities estimated that there remained only 120 braves capable of bearing arms, skeptical settlers felt that these figures considerably underestimated the strength of the Indian remnant. The fact that Lake Okeechobee and the Caloosahatchee occasionally inundated the fields and villages of the temporary reservation and created a food shortage which would force the Indians to the coastal areas was of small comfort to the would-be settlers of the lower peninsula.¹ As long as the Seminoles remained in Florida, fear of guerilla warfare would impede the settlement of the southern frontier. It was not surprising that most Floridians felt that the only solution to the Indian problem was to continue the war until the entire Indian remnant was forced to emigrate.

A war-weary army, an economy-minded Congress, and a

1. John T. Sprague, *The Origin, Progress, and Conclusion of the Florida War* (New York, 1848), 513. Sprague estimated that the total strength of the Indians, including women and children, was 360.

depression-ridden country had agitated for a peace settlement for several years. A majority of Americans were anxious to accept the pronouncement of General Worth that the war was over, despite the obstreperous objections of the people of Florida. Anticipating the agitation for peace and yet eager to settle and protect the peninsula, Senator Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri, enthusiastically supported by Florida's territorial delegate, David Levy, introduced in Congress a free homestead bill in January, 1840.² Benton was able to push the bill through after a stormy two years in Congress so that it became law in August, 1842, almost simultaneously with the peace proclamation. Benton's "act for the armed occupation and settlement of the unsettled part of the Peninsula of East Florida" was designed to induce arms-bearing pioneers to occupy land in the dangerous Indian areas through free land grants from the federal government. One hundred sixty acres would be given to the male head of a family or to any male over eighteen "who had made or shall, within one year from and after the passage of this act, make an actual settlement within that part of Florida situated and being south and east of the base line dividing townships nine and ten."³ This line zigzagged across the peninsula from a few miles south of St. Augustine until it struck the Gulf a few miles north of Cedar Key. The act further specified that settlers reside on their land for five years; that they erect a dwelling and cultivate a minimum of five acres; and that no settlements be made within two miles of an active military post or on lands already privately owned.⁴

Anticipating the passage of the Benton bill, the newspapers of East Florida gave glowing predictions of how that section would benefit from the legislation. The *St. Augustine News* declared that the bill would end all the Indian difficulties by bringing 50,000 settlers into the region within three years. This influx of settlers, the *News* opined, would permit East Florida to separate from West Florida at the Suwanee River and allow both sections of the territory to apply for statehood.⁵ At a later date, the *News* further predicted, the east coast because of the fertility of its soil

2. *Washington National Intelligencer*, January 9, 1840; *St. Augustine Florida Herald & Southern Democrat*, February 27, 1840.

3. *Statutes at Large*, 27th Cong., 2d Sess., 502.

4. *Ibid.*

5. *St. Augustine News*, June 25, 1842.

would become an important area for the cultivation of cotton, sugar, citrus, tobacco, vegetables, and tropical fruits. Coastal tobacco, the paper said, would be "equal to the best raised on the island of Cuba."⁶

Much favorable publicity was given throughout the country to East Florida's soil, climate, and potential for settlement. The friendly press encouraged many people to move to Florida, the majority of whom wished to settle in the central portion of the peninsula where they assumed the soil was more fertile and cotton could be more easily cultivated. In order to facilitate the issuance of land permits, a land office was established at Newnansville in Alachua County. The bulk of land permits for central Florida were issued from this office; the St. Augustine office issued permits only for the coastal area.⁷

The St. Augustine land office records indicate that there were two lines of settlement in the eastern portion of the peninsula: one followed the lower St. Johns valley from Palatka on the north to Fort Mellon (present day Sanford) on the south; the other hugged the coastal lagoons from New Smyrna on the north and extended haphazardly as far south as Biscayne Bay. The St. Augustine office issued 370 permits of which 283 were validated by the prescribed regulations under the Armed Occupation Act.⁸ The coastal settlement chart shows that there were four concentrations of settlers: the Indian River community near present day Fort Pierce, the Jupiter settlement, the Lake Worth colony, and the small group of pioneers in the Biscayne Bay area. The Indian River settlement, which extended from the Sebastian River on the north to St. Lucie Sound on the south, was the most important of the four.⁹ Some forty-six heads of families or single men fulfilled the requirements of the Benton Act.¹⁰

The St. Augustine newspapers followed the progress of the Indian River settlement with keen interest. The *News* stated in early December, 1842, that "a party of ten worthy citizens of

6. *Ibid.*, October 22, 1842.

7. Dorothy Dodd (ed.), "Letters from East Florida," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, XV (July, 1936), 52-53. Also see *St. Augustine News*, November 19, 1842.

8. *Senate Document 30*, 30th Cong., 1st Sess. See chart attached.

9. The Indian River settlement is also called the St. Lucie settlement, and the writers of the period used the names interchangeably.

10. *Senate Document 30*.

Houston County, Georgia," had arrived in St. Augustine on the way to the area.¹¹ A few weeks later another party left St. Augustine aboard the schooner *Sultana*.¹² One newspaper reported that "a party of gentlemen from Augusta, who intend to colonize an extensive tract of country on St. Lucie Sound," had put into St. Augustine to obtain land permits.¹³ The high tide of immigration was reached in late November, 1843, when the schooner *William Washington* out of Savannah arrived in St. Augustine with fifty-one prospective settlers for the Indian River area aboard.¹⁴

The early months of the colony found the settlers engaged in the usual pioneer activities of building houses and clearing land, but by February, 1844, the colonists were able to turn their attention to civic affairs. In a convention called by the community's physician, Dr. Moses Holbrook, a crude legal system was set up and provisions were made for the common defense of the colony. J. S. Herman, Mills O. Burnham, and C. L. Brayton were elected to a committee of arbitration formed to settle disputes among the settlers, and the St. Lucie Riflemen, a company of some fifty volunteers, was organized to defend the area against possible Indian attack. Jacob M. Davis was elected captain of the company while Mills Burnham and Charles Neimeyer were elected first and second lieutenants, respectively. The spiritual needs of the colony were also given consideration, and Samuel H. Peck, leader of the Augusta group, was appointed to communicate with the Reverend Mr. Hansell of Key West¹⁵ for the purpose of erecting and staffing a church for the area. Steps were also taken to prevent diseased orange trees from being brought into the settlement from St. Augustine where a citrus blight was raging. Dr. Holbrook appointed a committee to request the aid of the Honorable David Levy in Washington in importing new citrus stock from the West Indies.¹⁶ By July, 1844, civil government had evolved to such a degree that the settlers were able to elect the

11. St. Augustine News, December 3, 1842.

12. *Ibid.*, December 21, 1842.

13. St. Augustine *Florida Herald & Southern Democrat*, January 19, 1843.

14. *Ibid.*, November 28, 1843.

15. According to the *Journal of the Diocese of Florida, 1844* (Episcopal), 3, the Rev. John H. Hansell was rector of St. Paul's parish in Key West.

16. St. Augustine *Florida Herald & Southern Democrat*, March 19, 1844.

first board of county commissioners of the newly organized St. Lucie County.¹⁷

Although there was considerable experimenting with such crops as tobacco, sugar, and cotton, a primary interest in citrus production was evident from the start. The southerly location of the settlement made the trees relatively safe from the disastrous freezes and blights which damaged them in the more settled areas of North Florida. One industrious settler had stock enough to set out a thousand orange trees on his claim at the Ankona Bluff in the spring of 1845.¹⁸ Captain Mills O. Burnham, in addition to raising citrus, was reportedly the first man to raise pineapples for commercial purposes.¹⁹ Vegetables also became an important crop during this period, and their production continued through the winter of 1844-1845 without damage from frost.²⁰

The cultivation of citrus was a long term investment as it generally took about ten years before the trees produced enough fruit for profitable sales. Burnham, like many of the settlers, found it difficult to provide for his family and, casting about for an additional means of support, purchased a schooner called *The Josephine* and went into the green turtle business. As turtles abounded in the Indian River at this time, Burnham and his helpers caught many of them and "carefully tying their flippers loaded his schooner and sailed for Charleston and sold them there for export to England at a good price."²¹ Until Captain Burnham entered the wholesale turtle business, the creatures had usually been so roughly handled in shipment that many died en-route. But the ingenious captain nursed his cargo with loving care. He had small wooden pillows made for the turtles to rest their heads on, and every morning he had their eyes sponged with salt water. With such meticulous care the living cargo always arrived at its destination in good shape and found a ready market.²² So prosperous did this entrepreneur become that he was able to buy the most "pretentious house" in the settlement in

17. *Ibid.* August 20, 1844.

18. *St. Augustine News*, February 22, 1845.

19. Robert Ranson, *A Memoir of Captain Mills Olcott Burnham, A Florida Pioneer* (Tallahassee, 1926), 12. Ranson married Captain Burnham's granddaughter and knew the captain personally.

20. *St. Augustine News*, February 22, 1845.

21. Ranson, *op. cit.*, 14.

22. *Ibid.*

1845, a house that had been framed in Savannah and brought down to the settlement by schooner.²³

An idyllic picture of pioneer life on the Indian River was painted by one of the more polished settlers of the St. Lucie community:

This notable sheet of water is now constantly whitened by the sail of the emigrant in pursuit of land, and the stillness of its solitude broke [sic] by the splash of the oar and the merry songs of the boatmen. At night the camp-fires of the adventurer are kindled on its banks, preparation is made for the evening meal, and amid conversation and laughter, the toils of the day are lost in sleep. Refreshment ensues and morning finds them on their way, vigorous in frame and sanguin [sic] in spirit. . . . The land north and south of Fort Pierce are rapidly filling up - and thus far, with the exposure of boating, felling timber, planting and the thousand troubles of an emigrant's life, every man is in the enjoyment of the best of health - doctors being at a discount and forming the least useful article on the river.²⁴

For a frontier community, the St. Lucie colony was surprisingly cosmopolitan. The highly knowledgeable and refined William Henry Peck, later a settler at Courtenay on Merrit Island, recorded his recollection of the colony in a series of articles for the *Florida Star* some forty years after the area was abandoned. Young Peck arrived in early 1843, with his father, Samuel H. Peck, a former Augusta banker and cotton factor who was probably adversely affected by the Panic of 1837 and the depression which followed. William Peck was almost fourteen, the youngest of four teen-age brothers who, along with several slaves, obviously planned to help the elder Peck recoup his fortune. Samuel Peck brought a number of other colonists with him from Augusta on his schooner the *William Washington*.²⁵ Although young Peck does not make it clear, it can be assumed that the family engaged extensively in clearing land for the cultivation of citrus, in addition to operating the *William Washington* as a passenger and freight vessel. From the number of artisans and tradesmen that the elder Peck brought into the settlement, it can also be assumed that he intended to set up a boatyard and carpentry shop.

23. *Ibid.*, 9.

24. *St. Augustine News*, July 13, 1843.

25. Titusville *Florida Star*, May 5, 1887.

Young Peck gives a vivid and often tender picture of the characters who made up the colony. Daniel E. Bowen of Butler County, Alabama, is described as "the best shot and most expert hunter on the river,"²⁶ Tall, lanky, and intelligent, Bowen never failed to fulfill his sole duty of keeping the Peck party well supplied with game. Among the artisans were John Hutchinson and George Gordon, carpenters from Augusta. Hutchinson, a former slave driver, probably supervised the construction of the Peck house—the same pretentious dwelling that was later sold to Captain Burnham. The other Augustan, Gordon, was described by young Peck as "indolent" and often "afflicted with boils."²⁷

Connected with the nautical enterprises of the Peck family were a number of other artisans. James Middleton of Savannah, an active, industrious man and an excellent boat builder and sailor, probably kept the *William Washington* in repair and helped sail her from St. Lucie to the home port. He was also an inveterate practical jokester, "much liked by some but bitterly hated by his victims."²⁸ Another sailor, James Price, an Englishman from Liverpool, was obviously a great favorite of Peck's. A short, blond, fiery seaman, Price was "the best and most melodious singer of sea songs, sentimental or rollicking, in the whole world." He was usually good natured, but sometimes as "pugnacious as a game cock and usually the victor in all his pugilistic battles." His voice from his boat at night would often "shatter the stillness of the sound for miles." The awe-struck boy remembered that Price could sing louder than ten men.²⁹

The settlement's netmaker was a Swedish sailor called "Crazy Ned." Earlier in his life, he had fallen from a top mast and broke his right leg as well as his skull, an unfortunate accident which apparently reduced his mental powers to those of a half wit. Ned limped so badly that at every step it appeared that he would fall on the ground. This slight, beardless man with his ungainly gait, foreign accent, and irritable disposition was an easy prey to Middleton and his pranks.³⁰

The probate of the settlement was Cobbet, a white-haired,

26. *Ibid.*

27. *Ibid.* As shown on maps of this period Peck's Lake and Hutchinson's Island are named for these two settlers.

28. Ranson, *op. cit.*, 9.

29. Titusville *Florida Star*, May 5, 1887.

30. *Ibid.*

red-nosed Savannah cobbler. He was the only shoemaker on the river and, according to Peck, a very poor workman. Cobbett was unpleasant in appearance, "bowbacked" though not old, with a creeping, ambling walk and a florid complexion. He was famous for his nose, "the reddest nose that ever failed to ignite gunpowder," and with it Cobbett allegedly could detect the smell of brandy or whiskey a mile away. He would descend on the clearings or fields of persons serving spirits at "grogtime" with such "swift, goat-like leaps that at first all hands would rush for their rifles, fancying that fifty painted Seminoles were at his heels, eager for white scalps."³¹ More capable and industrious than Cobbett was Charles Neimeyer, an enormous, yellow-bearded German cabinet maker, who spoke "broken English with a deep, sonorous voice." Peck remembered him as "fierce in eye, but kindly tempered and brave to his very marrow."³²

Although the Indian River settlement was heavily populated with farmers and artisans, it was not entirely devoid of the professional callings. Ossian B. Hart, the lawyer of the colony, and his talented young wife settled near the inlet in a two room palmetto cabin. Peck recalls that the future Republican governor of Florida was fond of playing the violin and of reading, avocations for which a limited legal practice allowed plenty of time. The representative of the medical profession was Dr. Moses Holbrook, an eccentric and very talented physician from a distinguished Charleston family. Peck states that Dr. Holbrook had once attained great prominence in his profession in South Carolina. Polished, considerate, and tender, it was said by the settlers that his "many misfortunes over the years" had affected his once brilliant intellect. It is evident that the young boy was puzzled by what drew the doctor to the rough and primitive surroundings he had chosen for his new home. Dr. Holbrook was very old, but still tall and erect, quite bald, and always hatless. He was the only physician on the river and never failed to answer a call. He lived like a recluse in a gigantic one room log cabin "amid hundreds of volumes of valuable books," which were once part of his Charleston library. The books and an "eight keyed flute," on which he became a veritable virtuoso, were apparently his only

31. *Ibid.*

32. *Ibid.*

form of solace. Dr. Holbrook died in 1844, and was buried near his cabin on Ankona Bluff overlooking the river.³³

The colony also drew a number of settlers who were invalids, among whom were two consumptives, George Walker and William Brayton, and their families. It was hoped that the climate of the lower latitudes would improve their health. Both men were so ill on their arrival that they had to be lowered from the deck of the schooner on mattresses. Walker soon died and was buried on the bluff.³⁴ The other invalid, William Brayton, settled near old Fort Pierce and within a year was fully recovered. He took a prominent part in the civic affairs of the new community and served for several years as tax collector of St. Lucie County.³⁵

A pair of Scottish seafarers, Captains Boyd and Grant, added to the cosmopolitan flavor of the settlement. They lived together on their claim on the river and were described as industrious and helpful members of the community. The most colorful of the foreign contingent, however, was an Irishman named Manahan, a "tailor by trade and a poet by nature." He lived with his wife, a Jewess who was some sixteen years older than he. Mrs. Manahan in her younger days was considered a remarkably attractive woman, and even in middle age she retained some of her youthful beauty. The tailor-poet was a merry, imaginative, little man, deeply devoted to his wife. He was reputed to have written her a sonnet a day as proof of his affection. With the Manahans came the wife's two grown daughters by a previous marriage and their only child, Anthony, a boy of fifteen. There was also an apprentice, James Kelley, an Irish youth of sixteen, who received the brunt of terrible Hibernian oaths when he did not please his obstreperous master. Manahan was an excellent sailor and oarsman as well as a skillful tailor. Among the settlers he had a reputation for bravery and daring in the local militia, and he fancied himself as the Alexander and Napoleon of the St. Lucie colony, as well as its poet laureate. He owned a large, trained raccoon named Aristophanes who accompanied him on all his aquatic and hunting excursions up and down the river. In the big, box-like sailboat that carried them, the animal provided an appreciative

33. *Ibid.*

34. *Ibid.*

35. Tax Roll, St. Lucie County, 1847.

audience for the poet's sporadic vociferous outbursts into the realms of imagination and emotion.³⁶

Even though the inhabitants of the river settlement had unusually broad and varied backgrounds, they expressed a surprising political unity. In the election of 1845, the citizens gave sixteen votes to William D. Mosely, the Democratic candidate for governor, and only one to his Whig opponent, Richard K. Call. In the contest for congressman, the inhabitants endorsed by the same count the Democratic candidate David Levy over his Whig opponent Benjamin Putnam.³⁷ This varied group of settlers must have had many differing religious attitudes and affiliations, yet the same unity that prevailed in politics seems also to have prevailed in religious matters, for the colonists requested the services of an Episcopal clergyman - perhaps because they found the Episcopal Church, like the Democratic Party, a commodious institution.

During its first two years the Indian River settlement bustled with activity. With the help of former territorial delegate to congress, Joseph Hernandez of St. Augustine, a canal was planned connecting Mosquito Lagoon with the Indian River so that produce and mail could be shipped northward via an inland waterway.³⁸ The proposed canal was laid out by a detachment of army engineers along the route of the old Seminole War haulover, about fifteen miles northeast of the present city of Titusville,³⁹ and within a few years a primitive inland waterway was in operation.

As the colony grew in numbers, it became a port of entry and a custom house was set up at Indian River Inlet in 1843. Major William F. Russell acted as inspector of the port.⁴⁰ The shallowness of the inlet channel, combined with shifting sand bars, however, prevented large coastal vessels from making the place a regular port of call. When it appeared that the small harbor was destined to be by-passed by ships engaged in the coastal trade, the energetic settlers attempted to remedy this unfortunate

36. Titusville *Florida Star*, May 5, 1887.

37. Arthur W. Thompson, *Jacksonian Democracy on the Florida Frontier* (Gainesville, 1961), 87.

38. *St. Augustine News*, July 13, 1843.

39. *Ibid.*, November 11, 1843; March 1, 1845.

40. *Register of All Officers and Agents in the Service of the United States, 1845* (Washington, 1845), 195.

situation by constructing the first man-made ocean passage on the east coast of Florida.

Considerations other than commercial ones led the community to the great effort of making a new inlet. An enormous amount of fresh water from the St. Lucie River and other streams draining the back country was being dammed up in the river by the partially clogged Indian River Inlet, and the banks of the river were becoming infested with odious seaweed and rushes. The prevalence of fresh water, the settlers believed, was also causing various types of aquatic fowl and large quantities of salt water fish to abandon their normal habitat. Then, too, as the water became increasingly fresher it began to assume a dark and disagreeable color which, combined with the smell of the rotting seaweed along the shore, caused grave apprehensions that the area might become the breeding place of malaria and other tropical diseases.⁴¹

After pondering over these vexing problems the colonists decided to cut a passage from the Indian River to the ocean through the heaped up sand on Gilbert's Bar opposite the mouth of the St. Lucie. Their leaders believed "that the action and force of the Oceanic tides, first aided by the furious outward rush of pent up fresh water . . . would deepen, widen, and keep open the reopened bar for many years, restore the former saltiness of the sound, kill the detested and dreaded grass, call back the vanished game of land and water, and soon recreate the former value and attractions of the Indian River country."⁴²

With these happy consequences in mind, the settlers assembled by sail at Gilbert's Bar on a prearranged date in the summer of 1844. They arrived with picks, shovels, and hoes and agreed to camp on the site until the inlet was completed. The place selected for the trench was about 200 feet from the ocean at high tide, and it was necessary to excavate the line of the proposed inlet between five and six feet in depth and approximately the same measurements in width. A dike was left to retain the waters of the Indian River until the excavation was completed. For several days the men of the settlement, white and Negro, labored in the heat of the summer sun, and at night they slept in small tents on the edge of the trench. On the night before the completion of the

41. *Ibid.*, May 5, 1887.

42. *Ibid.*

the work, the settlers retired leaving two Negro slaves of the Pecks to guard the dike in shifts in the event that the wind changed and forced the swollen waters of the river into the trench. Worn out from his labours, one of the Negroes fell asleep at his post. A high wind rose from the west, pushing the waters over the dike and into the inlet. The flow of water rapidly increased into a formidable stream and, unbeknownst to the sleepers, began to undermine the banks where they had pitched their tents in a neat line. Inch by inch the force of the current quickly cut into the side of the ditch carrying the sand out to sea. Great bulks of earth began to topple into the water with crashing roars. Fortunately the noise aroused O. B. Hart, and when he investigated, he discovered to his horror, the ditch had grown to fifty yards in width and that within a few moments the entire line of tents with their occupants would collapse into the roaring current. He roused the sleepers just in time. All scrambled out of their tents, and most were able to pull their canvasses and their possessions to safety. Only Aristophanes, Manahan's pet coon perished in the deluge. Chained to a stake near his master's tent, he was enveloped by canvas and was swept out to sea. So furious was the rush of water that the trench was widened to a width of almost a half mile in two days. Samuel Peck and two companions were the first settlers to put the cut into operation. They sailed to Key West for provisions in the Peck three-sailed barge, the *Myrtis*, and returned to cross the bar in triumph. The inlet was in use until the settlement broke up in the summer of 1849.⁴³

Surprisingly cordial relations existed between the settlers and the Indians who lived in the interior, although it was the Indian menace that eventually led to the breaking up of the colony. The *St. Augustine News* described these Indians, who occasionally came to the coast to hunt and fish, as being of "friendly disposition,"⁴⁴ an observation substantiated by the recollections of the family of Mills O. Burnham. The Indians were on such good terms with Captain Burnham that they used his place as a trading post on their visits to the settlement. They particularly admired the former gunsmiths marksmanship and his ability to construct and repair firearms. The Indians were usually short of cooking utensils when they arrived from the interior and often

43. *Ibid.*, May 12, 1887.

44. *Ibid.*, September 2, 1843.

borrowed these implements from the Burnham family, always returning them spotlessly clean and with sincere, though laconic, expressions of thanks.⁴⁵

Mrs. Burnham was not at ease in the presence of the visiting Indians so, according to Robert Ranson, a close family connection, whenever it became necessary for the captain to leave the settlement on a sea voyage, he would tell his Seminole friends, "Me go away for one or two moons, my squaw no likee Indian, no Indian come round here while me gone."⁴⁶ The Seminoles were accommodating, for Mrs. Burnham recollected that as long as the captain was gone she never saw an Indian. On his return, however, the Seminoles would reappear, engage in sports of various kinds, bring presents of game, and again borrow the family cooking utensils.⁴⁷

From its beginning the Indian River settlement had grave economic difficulties which became more serious as the years passed. The slow growth of citrus fruit trees prevented the settlers from realizing an essential cash return from their considerable investments in capital and labor. There was no secondary money crop to tide them over until the orange trees matured to a bearing age. The vegetables that were grown in the settlement had no market outside the area, and neither cotton nor tobacco could be grown profitably along the river. Slow transportation prevented native tropical fruits from reaching Northern cities in a marketable condition, despite the labor that the settlers expended on the new inlet at Gilbert's Bar. As a result of this unfortunate economic situation, there was a great outflow of hard money and very little coming in. As there was no cash to pay for the services of the artisans and tradesmen of the settlement, they suffered to such an extent that many were driven into subsistence farming or were forced to move elsewhere.

The influential Pecks suffered along with the other colonists. The family was deprived of a large part of its income in 1844, when the *William Washington* went aground on a bar in Indian River Inlet. The vessel could not be freed by the settlers, but had to be towed to Key West by a wrecker.⁴⁸ The Pecks were

45. Ranson, *op. cit.*, 14.

46. *Ibid.*

47. *Ibid.*

48. St. Augustine News, January 20, 1844.

obviously unable to pay the charges necessary to repossess the schooner, and, in 1845, they were in such dire straits that the senior Peck abandoned his claim and returned to Georgia. The winter of 1845 was a bleak one. No oranges, lemons, or pineapples were bearing, and the fare of the settlers consisted of game, a few vegetables, Northern salt pork, and native pumpkins. "Life," young Peck remembered, "was a continual struggle to achieve success in elusive schemes of wealth."⁴⁹ Many like his father gave up the struggle. The Mexican War, which began in May, 1846, gave younger settlers a patriotic opportunity for leaving, and it is probable that a number later joined Samuel Peck in New Orleans, where he became a lieutenant colonel of the Sixth Regiment of Louisiana Volunteers.⁵⁰ By 1847, there were only twenty-four males over eighteen left in the settlement. Of these, only four were slaveholders who owned a total of nine slaves.⁵¹

The *coup de grace* was given the colony in July, 1849, when the settlers were attacked by Indians. Immediate news reports stated that defense of the settlement was impossible as the Indians attacked "in considerable numbers," plundering houses and firing on the colonists. A storekeeper by the name of Barker, who resided near the Sebastian River, was killed and badly mutilated. William F. Russell, deputy collector of the settlement, was shot in the arm, and his family was reported missing, as were a number of other persons, mostly female, whom it was assumed had fallen into the hands of the Indians. Settlers were forced to leave their homes and take to the river. They rendezvoused with a small schooner and came up the coast to St. Augustine, where a volunteer force was immediately organized to pursue the Indians.⁵²

Later accounts of the affair differ materially from the first reports. Mr. Russell's family and the other missing settlers arrived safely by boat in New Smyrna some days after the attack. The assault was not on a large scale but was carried out by a band of four or five Seminole outlaws who had separated entirely from the rest of the tribe.⁵³ These same Indians were also guilty of atrocities

49. Titusville *Florida Star*, May 12, 1887.

50. Ranson, *op. cit.*, 8.

51. Tax Roll, St. Lucie County, 1847.

52. Washington *National Intelligencer*, July 25, 1849.

53. *Ibid.*, July 30, 1849.

on the west coast in the vicinity of the Pease River. Governor William Mosely, not realizing one small band was responsible for both outrages, feared a general Seminole uprising and called the state militia to the colors.⁵⁴ When the misunderstanding was cleared up, the Seminole chief, Billy Bowlegs, promised to cooperate with both state and federal authorities in apprehending the criminals. On October 17, 1849, the Wiley old chief surrendered three of the murderers and "the hand of the fourth" to federal authorities near Tampa Bay, thus averting another Seminole War.⁵⁵

The economic decline of the Indian River settlement and the shock of the Indian attack was too much for the disillusioned colonists to bear. The majority of refugees refused to return to their abandoned homes, despite the fact that the War Department placed troops in the vicinity.⁵⁶ The resettlement of the region did not begin on a large scale until two decades after the Civil War.

54. *Florida House Journal*, 1850, appendix, 2.

55. *Washington National Intelligencer*, November 10, 1849.

56. Washington Thomas Brown to Captain I. A. Johns, October 20, 1849, *Governors' Letter Book*, Florida State Library, Tallahassee.