

1974

## Florida Seminoles: 1900-1920

James W. Covington



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 Article 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](mailto:STARS@ucf.edu).

---

### Recommended Citation

Covington, James W. (1974) "Florida Seminoles: 1900-1920," *Florida Historical Quarterly*. Vol. 53 : No. 2 , Article 6.

Available at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq/vol53/iss2/6>

## FLORIDA SEMINOLES: 1900-1920

by JAMES W. COVINGTON\*

**T**HE FLORIDA SEMINOLES at the beginning of the twentieth century enjoyed a relatively good life. The more than 500 Indians were able to roam freely throughout a 20,000 square mile area situated in the lower part of the peninsula and lying mostly between the settled portions of the east and west coasts of Florida. Since the total population in this wilderness area including Indians, squatters, hunters, and trappers did not number more than 600 persons, there was room for all concerned.<sup>1</sup> The Seminoles supported themselves by otter, plume, and alligator hunting, and they traded these feathers, hides, and skins for "necessary" products of civilization at one or more of the available half-dozen trading posts. The Seminoles did not depend upon the government for either food or education. They were relatively healthy, and they sought no aid at all from religious groups, the state or national governments, nor from individuals.

The Indians did not camp in one locality throughout the year but moved about according to the season. Most of them lived on hammock land in the Big Cypress Swamp and Everglades during most of the year, but in the summer they moved to the pine forests. During the hunting season, parties of six to eight men went out to obtain alligator hides which they sold for between seventy cents and \$1.15 each and otter skins which sold for \$5.00 to \$7.50.<sup>2</sup>

The visits of the Indians to the trading stores constituted one of the high points of their year. During the winter large groups numbering from fifty to 100 persons would come in from the Big Cypress Swamp to trade at Frank Stranahan's store on the New River at Fort Lauderdale. Families would camp along a nearby slough, remaining usually from four days to a week be-

---

\* Mr. Covington is professor of history at the University of Tampa.

1. Special Agent Lorenzo Creel to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, March 29, 1911, 27957-1911 Letters Received, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Letter Group 75, National Archives. Hereinafter referred to as BIA.
2. Irenaeus Trout, "Notes concerning the Seminoles," n.d., received March 6, 1909, 17682-1909 BIA.

fore returning to Big Cypress. Those who lived in areas not so distant remained for a shorter time since they could return more easily.<sup>3</sup> In 1910, Water Turkey and his family and relatives came to trade by an unusual route. They travelled from the Everglades into Lake Okeechobee and Lake Hicpochee, thence along the Caloosahatchee River to La Belle where they obtained passage on a steamboat to Fort Myers. There the Indians sold their hides for cash, and returned to La Belle by steamboat where they purchased their supplies.<sup>4</sup> It was estimated that the distance from camp near Chokoloskee to Fort Myers and back was 250 miles. Others came shorter distances to Fort Myers in their own boats propelled by sails.

Although they still depended upon venison, turkey, and other game for food, the Seminoles obtained the rest of their diet— rice, corn meal, canned milk, lard, canned peaches, coffee, and tinned meats— from the traders. They also obtained pots and pans, shot-guns and rifles, iron or steel traps, salt for preservation of hides, calico, felt hats, vests, jewelry, kerosene, axes, saws, and nails.<sup>5</sup> The hand-operated sewing machines which began appearing at the turn of the century brought about changes in both male and female attire. Men's shirts extended several inches below the knees, and buckskin leggings were cast aside by some men in favor of trousers. The women enlarged the small cape which was attached to their blouse, and the sleeves of the blouse were gradually shortened.<sup>6</sup>

The consumption of hard liquor had been a consistent problem among the Seminoles throughout their history. According to one observer, Indians were allowed to drink and act disorderly in the southeastern Florida towns for, if such "disgraceful scenes of drunkenness and brutality among both Indian men and women" were prohibited, the Indians would carry their business elsewhere.<sup>7</sup> When they could not obtain whiskey at Fort Lauder-

3. Alan Craig and David McJunkin, "Stranahan's: Last of the Seminole Trading Posts," *Florida Anthropologist*, XXIV (June 1971), 48.

4. Creel to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, December 15, 1910, 99716-1910 BIA. A picture of a canoe with a sail can be seen in Frances Densmore, *Seminole Music*, Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 161 (Washington, 1956), plate 14C.

5. Craig and McJunkin, "Stranahan's," 49.

6. Hilda J. Davis, "The History of Seminole Clothing and its Multi-Colored Designs," *American Anthropologist*, LVII (October 1955), 975.

7. U. S. Indian Inspector Charles F. Nesler to Secretary of the Interior Ethan A. Hitchcock, February 23, 1904, filed with 176F2-1909 BIA.

dale, the Seminoles would travel by train to West Palm Beach where they could purchase a supply at Zapps.<sup>8</sup> One witness reported that a blend of red pepper, one quart of whiskey, and a drop of cocaine, made in the black section of Miami, was most popular with the Indians. When groups visited Miami, Fort Lauderdale, and West Palm Beach, usually at least one Indian stayed sober to protect his friends, but most of the others drank as much as they wanted.

A special Indian agent was informed by the traders that the liquor traffic could be curtailed by a vigorous prosecution of dealers in the towns extending along the Florida East Coast Railroad from Fort Pierce to Cutler during the period from December to May when the Seminoles came in to do their trading. This traffic did not exist to the same degree in Lee County since Lee was a dry county. The Seminoles living in the Big Cypress Swamp area who, for one reason or another were unable to go into town, purchased or manufactured a local liquor known as corn beer made from syrup and corn. Several Indians were said to have died from drinking too much of this concoction. That there was a liquor problem was obvious, but it did not seem to bother either whites or the Indians very much.

There was much concern about the condition of the Indians, and how they should adapt to white man's ways. Several organizations like the Indian Citizenship Committee of Boston, the National Indian Defense Association, and the Indian Rights Association were formed during the latter part of the nineteenth century to promote Indian welfare. The Women's National Indian Association, a Philadelphia-based organization, became interested in the long-neglected Florida Seminoles and proposed a plan to assist them. In March 1891 the group acquired 400 acres and hired Dr. and Mrs. Jacob E. Brecht to oversee the project. Shortly afterwards, the organization transferred eighty acres of the tract to the federal government, and Brecht was hired by the Office of Indian Affairs as an industrial teacher. He established a school, sawmill, and store at the site, but the Indians, distrusting the motives of the federal official, refused to enroll their children in the one-room school taught by Mrs. Brecht. They were also reluctant to patronize the sawmill or the

---

8. Craig and McJunkin, "Stanahan's," 48.

store. Finally in 1900 the employment of Brecht was terminated, and he and his wife moved to Fort Myers to make their home.

The eighty-acre tract owned by the government was sold, and the only permanent government effort at this time was the purchase of land for a reservation. It began in 1894 and continued for six years; the total amount acquired was approximately 23,000 acres. This land, consisting of scattered tracts, was situated about seventy-five miles south and east of Fort Myers and extended to the Everglades.<sup>9</sup> The Seminoles were not particularly interested in the acquisition of land for their benefit, preferring to roam in an area which was constantly being reduced by the inroads of real estate speculators. By 1904 two white traders, W. R. Wilkerson and William H. Brown, had established posts on the land, and the Seminoles occasionally visited the places, but their nearest camps were situated thirty miles south of the federal holdings.<sup>10</sup>

Since it had been the custom of the National Women's Indian Association to make contact with an Indian tribe and then relinquish their work to a religious group, the organization donated the remainder of its land and the few buildings to the Missionary Jurisdiction of Southern Florida, Protestant Episcopal Church. Before the church accepted the tract Bishop William Crane Gray inspected the property. He travelled from Orlando to Punta Gorda by train, then by boat to Fort Myers, and finally forty miles by pony cart to the "Allen Place" as the site was known. He found a dwelling, school house, and stables.

Bishop Gray had been inspired by the work of Bishop Henry Benjamin Whipple among the Indians of the midwest, and he believed that his diocese could also do creditable missionary work.<sup>11</sup> Advised by Whipple, Gray attended the Lake Mohonk Conference where he learned much, but he did not announce

---

9. For an account of the work done by Dr. Jacob E. Brecht and the acquisition of land, see James W. Covington, "Federal and State Relations with the Florida Seminoles, 1875-1901," *Tequesta*, XXXII (1972), 17-27. A picture of Brecht appears opposite p. 230 in Charles H. Coe, *Red Patriots: The Story of the Seminoles* (Cincinnati, 1898; facsimile edition, Gainesville, 1974).

10. Nesler to Hitchcock, February 23 1904, filed with 176F2-1909 BIA.

11. Bishop Henry Benjamin Whipple (1822-1901) of the Protestant Episcopal Church acted as a leading reformer of United States Indian policy. Active among the Sioux and Chippewa, Whipple earned the Indian name "Straight Tongue." See Grace Lee Nute, "Henry Benjamin Whipple," *Dictionary of American Biography*, XX (1936), 68-69.

his plans for the Seminoles.<sup>12</sup> Perhaps he should have conferred with persons who had worked among the Indians, for he faced serious obstacles in South Florida: the mobility of the Indians prevented effective missionary work based upon a permanent central point for operations; few Seminoles knew English, and none of the Episcopal group were trained in the Indian language; no missionary group had been successful in converting even one Florida Seminole; and except for a few traders and settlers, the Seminoles mistrusted virtually all whites and preferred to retreat deeper into the wilderness rather than take a stand against the white man.

When the missionaries arrived, the "Allen Place" was changed. The dwelling became known as Immokalee, and Christ Church was erected nearby.<sup>13</sup> To start the venture on a festive note, a beef and pork barbeque was held July 4, 1896, with the Indian guests showing their appreciation by singing songs they had learned in English. The next day the first services were held in Christ Church, and Rose Brown, the daughter of one of the best known traders, was confirmed.<sup>14</sup> Although the Reverend and Mrs. Gibbs, the missionaries, worked faithfully at Immokalee, few Seminoles regularly visited the place, and it became evident that a change of mission sites was needed.

Since William H. Brown's trading post at Boat Landing, the head of canoe navigation on the western edge of the Everglades, was a more popular place for the Seminoles, the mission in 1898 was moved forty miles to a section of land situated three miles away. Bishop Gray placed a cypress beam across a palmetto tree and fashioned a crude cross which marked the site of the new venture. After singing religious songs and offering prayers, the missionary christened the outpost Everglade Cross. Everglades Lodge, to serve as a housing unit for the missionaries, was

- 
12. Bishop Gray to Albert Smiley, proprietor of Lake Mohonk Hotel, October 9, 1908, 74485-1908 BIA. The Lake Mohonk Conference, started in 1883 by Albert Smiley, was "an unofficial co-ordinating agency for the reformers." Federal officials, congressmen, and reformers attended the four day sessions held at Lake Mohonk, New York, and recommended policies which usually became those of the Office of Indian Affairs. William T. Hagan, *American Indians* (Chicago, 1961), 124.
  13. Charlton W. Tebeau, *Florida's Last Frontier: The History of Collier County* (Coral Gables, 1957), 72.
  14. Harriet Randolph Parkhill, *The Mission to the Seminoles in the Everglades of Florida* (Orlando, 1909), 9-10.

erected. A store, hospital, and out-buildings were constructed, and corn, potatoes, bananas, and citrus were planted.<sup>15</sup> The Reverend and Mrs. Gibbs usually spent part of the year at Immokalee and the remainder at Everglades Lodge, moving from one outpost to the other by means of horse and buggy. Although Everglade Cross was located only three miles from a major Seminole center of trade, few Indians ventured to the mission. In an April 27, 1903, visit to Everglade Cross, Bishop Gray spoke to a congregation composed of only fourteen persons.

In 1905, W. J. Godden, an elderly English pharmacist, volunteered to spend the rest of his life in service to the Indians. His request was speedily accepted, and within a short time Godden was serving sick Seminoles. The epidemic which brought his acceptance by the Seminoles was an outbreak of measles followed by pneumonia. Godden had little or no help from anyone, but he was able to take care of the twenty-seven patients, giving them their medicine and preparing their meals. Only two Indians died as a result of their "carelessness."<sup>16</sup> According to Bishop Gray, "the Indians were at last convinced that some white men did not come to them merely for what they could make out of them."<sup>17</sup>

In December 1907, Reverend Irenaeus Trout, a missionary stationed at Punta Gorda and Fort Myers, was placed in charge of the missionary work for the Seminoles. He showed some skill in learning the Seminole dialects and in cultivating friendship with the Indians. After the Seminoles reputedly had decided in a council held in June 1908 that it would be proper for them to attend Christian services and be baptized, some gains in missionary activities were noted. In October 1908, Ho-tul-ca-hat-sic, a leading Seminole who belonged to the Tiger clan, was baptized; on August 4, 1909, Charlie Osceola, an important medicine man, was also baptized. By March 1910 Godden reported to Gray that the services at Immokalee were being well attended and that two communicants were holding Sunday School services. Godden also noted that some Indians were using a tooth brush

15. Tebeau, *Florida's Last Frontier*, 72. William H. Brown, a former British sailor, established his store first at Immokalee, and then moved to Boat Landing in 1896, where he purchased a trading post which had been located there by Wilson.

16. Parkhill, *Mission*, 12.

17. Gray to Smiley, October 9, 1908, 74485-1908 BIA.

regularly and that most men possessed at least one suit of white man's clothing.

In February 1909, William H. Brown announced his retirement to a homestead forty miles away, and he agreed to sell his store at Boat Landing to the missionaries. Brown offered Bishop Gray the house, store, stable, six yoke of oxen, and wagons at a price between \$1,500 and \$2,000. Gray agreed to the bargain, and he borrowed the money to purchase the property.<sup>18</sup> The store was converted into a chapel and recreation center. When not in use the altar and organ were hidden by a canvas curtain which also served as a screen for the showing of magic lantern pictures.<sup>19</sup> Another building was erected at Boat Landing in July 1909 to serve as a store and home for Dr. Godden, and a hospital was scheduled to be erected the following year.

Godden dedicated himself to serving the Indians. When it appeared that a person that he considered unsuitable might be named resident missionary, he offered the services of his brother, a priest in England, to recruit someone from that country. The Indians living south of Lake Okeechobee were living mostly in an area in the northeastern corner of Monroe County, a section of high hammock islands surrounded by the marshy waters of the Everglades and a plentiful supply of alligators. The Indians hunted in other areas but used the reserve when hides were not available elsewhere. Dr. Godden proposed on June 13, 1910, that the federal Indian reserve be extended to include the northwest section of Monroe County and that most of the old reserve be returned to the government to be reassigned. The new reserve would include an area sixty miles long and eighteen miles wide in an area remote from white settlement. So that the Boat Landing Mission would not be by-passed in the plans, an eight mile canoe canal leading from the mission to the reservation was proposed.

Despite the optimistic picture presented by Indian leaders and the Seminoles attending church services, there were indications of probable failure in letters from Boat Landing. One observer noted: "a few Indians have united with the church, but progress in this direction is necessarily very slow, as actual con-

---

18. *Ibid.*

19. Tebeau, *Florida's Last Frontier*, 73.



tact with the Indians is so irregular, although the work is in the hands of noble, devoted and self-sacrificing men, who are spending their lives in this work and are receiving only a bare subsistence."<sup>20</sup> On June 11, 1910, Godden reported that he was \$130 short of the amount needed to move the hospital from Everglade Cross to Boat Landing; and, in addition, he regretted "to say that business had been very slack in the store this spring and we have really not been paying expenses."<sup>21</sup> In 1911, Lorenzo S. Creel, special agent to the Florida Seminoles, made a detailed examination of Boat Landing and found the location, "being difficult to access, extremely unhealthy and remote from the nearest Indian camp . . . it is a most forlorn, dreary and unattractive spot and I believe it will grow more and more unhealthful as the Everglade region is dug up and disturbed."<sup>22</sup>

Since Boat Landing was situated on property acquired for the Indians, the missionaries actually were squatters and needed legal protection for their work. Because of the failure of the Brecht venture, federal officials were reluctant to initiate another program like it, and they were eager to encourage the Episcopal Seminole Indian Mission in its work. Secretary of the Interior Ethan A. Hitchcock summarized the situation in a letter written in 1904: "It is deemed unwise for the Government to contemplate any further purchases of land for these Indians or to attempt to aid them in any way at the present time, owing to their fear and lack of confidence in State and National Government on account of past injustices."<sup>23</sup> After Bishop Gray had disclosed the situation faced by the mission, Commissioner of Indian Affairs Robert G. Valentine promised that the mission site would be reserved for the church organization.<sup>24</sup> Finally on July 13, 1910, Section 15, Township 485, R34 E was set aside for the mission.<sup>25</sup> Gray answered the award letter with "thanks, God's

---

20. Creel to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, March 20, 1911, 24816-1911 BIA.

21. Godden to Gray, June 11, 1910, 51288-1910 BIA.

22. Extract from Report of March 29, 1911, on conditions among the Seminole Indians of Florida, attached to letter from Walter L. Fisher, Secretary of the Interior, to President William Taft, June 15, 1911, 20817-1909 BIA.

23. Hitchcock to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, February 27, 1904, 14019-1904 BIA.

24. Valentine to Gray, May 25, 1910, 51288-1910 BIA.

25. Charles F. Hauke, Second Assistant Commissioner of Indian Affairs, to Gray, July 20, 1910, 51288-1910 BIA.

blessing from every effort.”<sup>26</sup> At this time, a store, chapel, and hospital were being erected at Boat Landing.

Although Boat Landing seemed ideal as a place to establish good relationships with the Seminoles, it had limitations. With the gradual lowering of the water table by drainage, fewer Seminoles were able to visit the place by canoe. A hurricane which swept through southern Florida in 1910 wrecked the hospital, and it was recommended that it be rebuilt at another site.<sup>27</sup> Godden studied the situation and requested permission from Bishop Gray to move to a site near Everglade Post Office.<sup>28</sup>

A trading post had been established on Allen River (now Barron River) by George W. Storter, Jr., in 1892 at Everglade Post Office. The post— a rough building with a dirt floor, crude shelves, and open screen front— was simple, but the Indians liked Storter and his methods. Sometimes he allowed them to sleep on the floor of the post. Impressed by the number of Seminoles who visited Everglade and their obvious liking for the place, Special Agent Lorenzo Creel recommended in March 1911, that twenty-eight acres at Everglade be purchased and set aside for them. He suggested that the Indians could use the two small shacks already on the land for shelter when they came to trade at Everglade.<sup>29</sup>

The mission administrators realized that the trading store and hospital were only one step in a process which needed to be adjusted several times to account for the changing way of life of the Seminoles. In 1909, the Reverend Irenaeus Trout, the Seminole Missionary, proposed a three-point program: the 640 acres controlled by the church should be fenced, cleared and cultivated by the Indians; two open buildings should be provided, one to store furs and hides and to be used as a church and school and the second to be equipped with sewing machines where the women could be instructed in the art of sewing; and houses should be erected for the physician, missionary and families, overnight

---

26. Gray to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, July 29, 1910, 62518-1910 BIA.

27. Creel to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, January 27, 1911, filed with 24816-1911 BIA.

28. *Ibid.*, March 20, 1911, 24816-1911 BIA.

29. *Ibid.* For details of the Storter store see Robert L. Storter, *Seventy-Seven Years in Everglades-Chokoloskee-Naples* (n.p., 1972), 19-23. At this time there was Ted Smallwood's store at Chokoloskee and Charley Tigertail had a store located in the Everglades. Tebeau, *Florida's Last Frontier*, 55, 101-04.

visitors, and the laborers. To pay for the program, Reverend Trout appealed for funds to be sent in care of a Punta Gorda post-office box.<sup>30</sup> Due to the lack of success in raising funds, the gradual movement of the Seminoles to more southern points, and the destruction caused by the October 1910 hurricane, Trout's plan failed.

By 1911 Bishop Gray was thinking in terms of a 300,000 acre reservation and was applying pressure in Washington and Tallahassee.<sup>31</sup> In March 1911 he inspected the Ten Thousand Island area looking for a suitable mission site, but he failed to find one. He appeared to be considering a site fifty miles from Everglade at the head of Shark River.<sup>32</sup> Finally, in 1913, Special Agent Creel wrote that lack of patronage and high waters had forced Godden from his post. Creel held great respect for Godden's work among the Indians in the Everglades and said "although it is a forlorn hope, he is to be encouraged."<sup>33</sup>

A letter dated March 1914 from the commissioner of Indian Affairs informed the secretary of interior that Bishop Gray had surrendered the 640-acre tract the previous September, since it was too low and swampy for missionary work. In return he wanted a grazing permit to raise hogs on 720 acres and the use of 120 acres for the mission.<sup>34</sup> Several days later the Department of Interior approved the request.<sup>35</sup>

The Seminole Indian mission seemed doomed when Bishop Gray resigned in October 1913, and Bishop Richard Mann was placed in charge. One of Mann's first acts was to travel by automobile from Orlando to Everglade Cross in March 1914, where he announced that he was investigating business affairs in that

---

30. Printed proposal with letter of Ireneus Trout to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, March 1909, 17682-1909 BIA.

31. *Weekly Fort Myers Press*, June 29, 1911.

32. Creel to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, April 1, 1911, 28896-1911 BIA. During the final years of its existence, the pharmacy operated by Godden was moved to a site near old Fort Shackleford.

33. Creel to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, March 11, 1913, 37093-1913 BIA.

34. Commissioner of Indian Affairs to Secretary of the Interior, March 5, 1914, filed with 101916-1915 BIA. In September 1913 Bishop Gray had requested the use of Sections 29 and 32 as an experimental farm and Sections 29, 30, 31, and 32 for grazing rights. Special Commissioner Lucien A. Spencer to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, September 15, 1913, 111683-1913 BIA.

35. Note from Secretary of Interior, March 9, 1914, filed with 101916-1915 BIA.

part of the diocese.<sup>36</sup> Before Bishop Mann took any action concerning the mission, the matter was settled in an unexpected manner. On September 29, 1914, Dr. Godden was found dead in his bed. The body was carried to Fort Myers for burial.<sup>37</sup> The body of Mrs. Mary Poole Hillard, the wife of a teamster who died in June, was also carried the eighty miles to Fort Myers and was not buried at Everglade Cross. Perhaps the mission site was so isolated that it was not deemed suitable for burial plots. The mission was closed after Godden's death and Episcopal missionary efforts ceased for nearly two decades.

In contrast to the efforts of the Episcopalians, a different technique was employed by the Baptist church. In 1907, Andrew J. Brown, a Baptist minister from Wewoka, Oklahoma, and brother of the principal chief of the Oklahoma Seminoles, visited all of the larger Indian camps in Florida hoping to establish a missionary base. Accompanied by W. F. Joseph, another Seminole Baptist minister, Brown tried to stimulate interest in his faith among Seminoles throughout Florida. With the exception of the Seminoles living east of Lake Okeechobee, he met a lukewarm reception.<sup>38</sup>

Two years later, another missionary was sent to Florida by several Baptist churches in Oklahoma, but since the Seminoles had scattered, the missionary was only able to contact six persons.<sup>39</sup> The Bureau of Indian Affairs had not been informed in advance about the 1911 visit, and one administrator wrote to John F. Brown, the leading Seminole in Oklahoma, explaining that Washington should have been told in order to insure cooperation between the government and religious organizations.<sup>40</sup> The missionary, George Washington, a full-blood Oklahoma Seminole from Wewoka, Oklahoma, his wife, and three children, received a cordial welcome, and they decided to remain in Florida. Washington found employment at Bowers Brothers, and he

---

36. *Fort Myers Daily Press*, March 23, 1914.

37. *Fort Myers Press*, October 2, 1914. In early September 1914, when Godden gave a talk to a group in Fort Myers, he claimed that the Seminoles were in a critical situation due to the disruption of fur markets by the outbreak of World War I and the virtual extinction of fur-bearing animals. *Fort Myers Press*, September 22, 1914.

38. A picture of the missionary-party can be found opposite p. 177 in Edwin C. McReynolds, *The Seminoles* (Norman, 1957).

39. John F. Brown to Hauke, March 24, 1911, 26789-1911 BIA.

40. Hauke to Brown, March 17, 1911, filed with 26789-1911 BIA.

opened a mission station at Bowers Store, twelve miles east of Lake Okeechobee and twenty miles west of Fort Lauderdale.<sup>41</sup> All religious services were conducted in the Indian language.

Andrew Brown returned to Florida twice again in 1912 with a group composed of three other ministers, their wives, and Brown's wife, sister, granddaughter, and niece. The group traveled by train from Wewoka to Fort Pierce via Memphis, Birmingham, and Jacksonville.<sup>42</sup> Unfortunately the Florida Seminoles regarded the visitors as whites and tended to reject them. Still Florida was regarded as a fertile missionary site. In 1912 twenty-six Baptist churches known as the Creek, Seminole, and Wichita Baptist Association decided to sponsor the missionary project and began to send missionaries regularly to Florida during the next thirty years.<sup>43</sup>

Federal efforts with the Seminoles were as unsuccessful as the Episcopalian and Baptist missions had been. In the period from 1894-1900 some 23,000 acres of land were purchased at a cost of \$13,308.52 for the use of the Seminoles, and the tract became the nucleus for the Big Cypress reservation. These were the lands that the Indians were encamped on at the time of purchase. The Indian office employee, Dr. Jacob Brecht, who selected the land, knew very little about Florida soils or agriculture, and he was not successful in his duties as Indian agent.

It was not until 1911 that special agent Lorenzo Creel was directed to inspect the real estate which had been acquired a dozen years earlier. Creel found the major part of the land "low, wet prairie with a very few small, low islands scattered over it. The soil is sandy and infertile, sour and unproductive."<sup>44</sup> Soon

- 
41. Creel to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, March 20, 1911, 24816-1911 BIA. These efforts failed, for in 1931 there were no Seminoles attending church, no buildings, and no missionaries. See footnote 24, William C. Sturtevant, "A Seminole Personal Document," *Tequesta*, XVI (1956), 75.
  42. James O. Buswell, "Florida Seminole Religious Ritual: Resistance and Change" (Ph.D. dissertation, St. Louis University, 1972), 257.
  43. *Ibid.*, 259-60.
  44. Creel to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, March 29, 1911, 27957-1911 BIA. Andrew J. Duncan, brother-in-law of President William McKinley, visited the Florida Seminoles and made a report concerning them in 1898. He recommended that 300,000 acres be purchased for them by the government and set aside as a reservation. In addition, he recommended that certain lands frequented by these Indians be withdrawn from inclusion within the Swamp and Overflowed Land Act provision. Coe, *Red Patriots*, 254-56. The only part of Duncan's recommendations carried out was the acquisition of the twelve forty-acre tracts near Dania.

after the property was purchased, the Indians moved out of the area. In 1911 no Indians were living there, and Creel recommended that no special effort be made to induce them to return.<sup>45</sup> The area was not suitable as a reservation since thirty-three sections of land were scattered in five adjacent townships and only twenty-five sections were contiguous in Township 48, Range 34. Eventually adjustments would have to be made so that there was a contiguous tract. Since the Indians were using the land only occasionally for hunting purposes and were living farther south, some persons encouraged Congress to release and sell the property. In fact Dr. Jacob Brecht, who had purchased the lands and was now residing at Fort Myers, was urged to use his influence to have the government open the area for settlement, but he refused to cooperate with such schemes. Misfortune continued to plague the land acquisition when Lee County seized part of it for non-payment of taxes and started selling the tax certificates.<sup>46</sup> Such action was deemed illegal, and it was stopped.

On November 22, 1907, a federally-owned tract of 520 acres was withdrawn from settlement and held for the use of the Indians.<sup>47</sup> Situated near the town of Dania on the lower east coast of Florida, it was amply covered with pine trees, and most of the area seemed suitable for farming. Although the land had been held in reserve by the government, J. M. Bryan, Jr. moved onto a forty-acre tract, planted grapefruit and orange trees, erected a house and outbuildings, and considered the property to be his.<sup>48</sup> In addition, Bryan and an uncle planted twenty-five to thirty acres of tomatoes on adjacent tracts of lands. Although the Indians had resided on or near the place which they called "old city" for many years, and it was illegal to fence government land, Bryan had political influence. His brother would shortly be sworn in as United States Senator from Florida.<sup>49</sup> After failing

- 
45. Creel to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, March 29, 1911, 27957-1911 BIA.
  46. Hauke to E. E. Watson, Deputy Clerk of Lee County, Florida, February 18, 1911, filed with 27957-1911 BIA. The same situation occurred in Dade County in 1913. Spencer to Commissioner of Indian Affairs. September 18, 1913, 113468-1913 BIA.
  47. Interior Departmental Order of November 27, 1907 as cited in Hauke to Commissioner of the General Land Office, April 6, 1911, no file number-1911 BIA.
  48. Creel to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, March 9, 1911, 24175-1911 BIA.
  49. Inspector Frank Churchill to Secretary of the Interior, April 29, 1909, 33652-1911 BIA. In February 1911 Nathan P. Bryan was selected by the

to obtain the land from the state, Bryan sought the aid of Congress and purchased the forty acres for \$50.00. On March 4, 1909, Congress agreed that Bryan had made substantial improvements on the forty acres, and he was given title to the land.<sup>50</sup> Perhaps in compensation for such action, Congress, on April 4, 1910, passed an act appropriating \$15,000 to aid the Indians, and followed this with the Indian Appropriation Act the next year providing an additional \$10,000.<sup>51</sup>

As a result of the increase in federal funding, Lucien A. Spencer, an Episcopal minister, was appointed special commissioner for the Florida Seminoles in 1913, a position he held until 1930. Spencer had no regular office, and his charges were scattered throughout southern Florida. The only Indian on the east coast who had given up hunting to turn to full-time agriculture was Willie John, and Spencer tried to advise him.

Gradually settlers in the area between Fort Lauderdale and Fort Pierce began to crowd the Indians on all sides, seizing camp sites and garden plots as they were cleared knowing that the Indians had no legal title to the land. In September 1914, Spencer sent an urgent appeal to Washington for \$1,250 to start a Seminole agricultural program. What was needed, according to Spencer, were an Indian man and wife versed in the Muskogee dialect who could instruct the male Indians in Florida agricultural methods and the women in housewife activities.<sup>52</sup> Nothing came at the time of Spencer's request.

World War I had some effects on the Seminoles and their life style. Loss of the European markets affected the price of alligator skins and animal pelts. As game became more scarce, the Indians began to plant more crops. They added to their holdings of ponies, cattle, and hogs, but the animals were not fenced in, and sometimes they were stolen. Accordingly, most Indians kept only those animals that could be secured near their homes.<sup>53</sup>

---

Florida legislature to serve as United States Senator. Charlton W. Tebeau, *A History of Florida* (Coral Gables, 1971), 334.

50. U. S., *Statutes at Large*, 38, 1632. This land included NW/4 NE/4 Sec 1 T 518R 418.
51. U. S., *Statutes at Large*, 38, 274. The land at Dania was reserved for the Indians by Executive Order 1379 signed by William H. Taft on June 28, 1911. U. S., Works Progress Administration, *Historical Records Survey, Presidential Executive Orders*, I (New York, 1944), 122.
52. Annual Narrative Report, 1914, written by Special Commissioner Lucien A. Spencer to Commissioner of Indian Affairs. Hereinafter cited ANR.
53. ANR, 1917, BIA.

Some Floridians believed that the state should donate land for the use of the Seminoles. Accordingly, L. A. Hendry, representative from Lee County, introduced a bill in 1913 calling for 206,000 acres to be set aside as a reservation. The measure passed the house and senate with only one negative vote, but was vetoed by Governor Park Trammel. In 1915 a similar measure was proposed by A. M. Wilson from Manatee County, but he was never able to bring it onto the floor for a vote. In the spring of 1917 Mathew K. Sniffen, secretary of the Indian Rights Association, helped Representative Wilson to draft a new bill which set aside 99,200 acres in Monroe County for the Indians. Lucien Spencer and Sniffen met with Governor Sidney Catts on March 31, 1917, and worked out a proposal which was acceptable to the governor. The bill, which established an approximately 100,000-acre reservation in Monroe County, passed both houses by unanimous vote and was signed by Catts. It was intended that eventually this state reservation land would be given to the federal government.<sup>54</sup>

In the fall of 1918 an industrial station was established in the western reservation area where the Indians were paid to cut posts, build houses, erect fences, cultivate fields, and haul supplies. It was placed in charge of a white man who had lived among the Seminoles and knew their language.

Previously the Indians had depended upon their own medicine men, the services offered by the missionaries, or the Miami City Hospital when they were ill, but in 1918 the Indian Service began providing medical treatment. Physicians at Fort Myers, Stuart, Palm Beach, Fort Lauderdale, and Lemon City were available to treat any Seminole who needed attention. Nearly \$1,000 was spent by the government in this work.<sup>55</sup> In 1920 Dr. O. S. Phillips, special physician, United States Indian Service, made a health survey of the Indians, and reported that they were in better health than any tribe he had visited. The major disease was hookworm, and Phillips listed sixteen cases. Phillips also saw the need for a dentist. He found twenty-two cases of influenza, sixteen of malaria, three of bronchitis, and none of venereal dis-

---

54. *Ibid.*; *General Acts and Resolutions Adopted by the Legislature of Florida at its Sixteenth Regular Session, (April 3 to June 1, 1917) Under the Constitution of A.D. 1885* (Tallahassee, 1917), 131.

55. ANR, 1919, BIA.



ease. The excellent health of the Indians was believed due to their outdoor life and great amount of physical exercise. In July 1920 the wife of Ben Frank Tommy consented to have a white doctor in attendance at the birth of her first child. Prior to this time, Seminole women retired to an isolated spot with no attendants and gave birth.

Agency headquarters were opened in a rented one-room office at Fort Myers, but it was hoped that it could be transferred to a federal building which was planned. Fort Myers was selected as the agency headquarters for it had mail and telegraph services. The agent and clerk lived in Fort Myers, and a laborer was stationed at the reservation where the tract was being enclosed by fencing and where houses and outbuildings were going up.<sup>56</sup>

For the first time in many years Seminoles were being charged with violating certain federal and local laws. On May 6, 1919, Willie Willie, a Big Cypress Indian, was arrested when he was found with the plumage of migratory birds. Earlier, on April 19, 1920, Lake Wilson, a Cow Creek, had been arrested on the same charge. Both men pleaded guilty and were fined—Willie \$5.00 and Wilson \$10.00. In March 1920, Ingram Charley was arrested in Fort Myers and charged with drunkenness. He pleaded guilty and was fined \$5.00.<sup>57</sup>

In 1920 the Florida Seminoles still retained much of their independence from the whites and successfully resisted attempts to place them on a reservation, efforts to educate them, and the desires of the various Christian sects to convert them. When one Seminole was asked why he resisted education, he replied: "As soon as an Indian learns to read and write, he learns to lie."<sup>58</sup> Still, six boys and girls had enrolled in a public school in 1917 with food and clothing provided for them, but within a month they withdrew. The Episcopalian missionary efforts did not succeed, and the Baptist endeavors were not much better. Only a few Indians lived on the land which the federal government had provided; the rest preferred to roam at their own discretion. But this independence was ending. Wild life was being depleted rapidly by settlement and hunting, and real estate developers were pushing the Indians into the reservation areas. Arrests for

56. ANR, 1920, BIA.

57. *Ibid.*

58. ANR, 1913, BIA.

violations of federal and state law indicated that no longer were the Indians inhabitants of an unsupervised and uncontrolled area. The white man's world was rapidly encroaching upon their freedom and independence.