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A FLORIDA ARTIST VIEWS THE SEMINOLES

by JAMES HUTCHINSON

1

“ESCAPE FROM FORT MARION”

Painting Size 36” X 48”

Under a flag of truce, a group of Seminoles were captured in 1837 by the U. S. Army and imprisoned in Fort Marion, named for General Francis Marion, South Carolina’s Revolutionary War hero (renamed Castillo de San Marcos in 1942) at St. Augustine, Florida. Led by the indomitable Coacoochee (Wildcat), the Indians starved themselves so that they might squeeze through a tiny window at the top of their cell, eighteen feet from the floor. With the aid of a rope made from bedding, the Indians let themselves down the outer wall of the Castillo to the marshy moat. According to legend, two of the men lost their grip and fell, one breaking his leg. Coacoochee and his warriors rejoined the Indian groups still fighting and continued the Second Seminole War for another five years.

2

“THE EXAMPLE”

Painting Size 24” X 36”

Charlie Emathla was one of the chiefs who agreed to migrate west rather than stay and fight in Florida. Osceola warned the Seminoles that he would personally destroy anyone who tried to leave. Nevertheless, Charlie sold his cattle and was returning homeward with a small party on November 26, 1835, when a larger band, under Osceola, shot him, scattered the money from the sale of the cattle over his body, and left the carcass for the vultures as an example to those who still favored removal.

3

“INDIANS CABINS”

Painting Size 25” X 40”

Long before the Seminoles began living in thatched chickees, raised platforms open to the breeze, they lived in log cabins. The

small cabin would have divided into two rooms, one for sleeping and one for cooking on an open hearth with a chimney made of sticks and clay. The upper story of the two-story cabin was also divided, the enclosed half used for storing squash and corn, the open half used as a porch.

4

“ANNIE TOMMIE”

Painting Size 22” X 28”

The remarkable Annie Tommie knew the herb combinations used to cure anything from peptic ulcers to ingrown toenails. Whites as well as Indians flocked to her camp, west of Fort Lauderdale. Though she knew all the remedies that Josie Billie used as a medicine man, she was never called a medicine woman. She restricted her efforts to physical woes. A medicine man attended not only to the body but the spirit as well.

5

“TRACKERS”

Painting Size 28” X 22”

Footprints of the man or animal have been a language full of meaning to the Seminole. They identify friend and foe, food and predator. These particular trackers, however, are not Seminoles. They are Creeks, cousins to the Seminoles, and hired by the army to track down and help exterminate their once-neighbors.

6

“DADE MASSACRE” (Final Phase)

Painting Size 72” X 108”

This shows the contrast between the white and the Seminole ways of making war. The artillery officer who succeeded Major Francis L. Dade in command would have been wiser to take cover in the trees, Indian fashion.

7

“CAUGHT IN THE OPEN”

Painting Size 30” X 42”

In the late 1830s, at the outbreak of the Seminole War, settlers were often killed or burned off their homesteads, and newcomers were frequently ambushed. The oxen-pulled two-wheeled cart was typical transportation of the time and area.

8

“CANOE BUILDING”

Painting Size 25” X 36”

Canoe building was an ancient art with the Seminoles. The cypress trees were usually felled a year before shaping began and were seasoned in the black waters of the swamp. After the exterior was shaped, the hollowing out began. With an adze the builder cut a trench between the gunwales and the inside which had to be burned out to a depth of about eight inches. Mud and green grass were packed in the trench to insulate the hull. Then hot coals were piled in the center. In this scene a young boy makes sure the fire does not burn through the mud and grass; he controls the fire by pouring water along the trench.

9

“WASH DAY”

Painting Size 25” X 36”

Now that reservation Indians have moved from their chickees into houses, they have adopted more modern laundry methods. But until 1966, on the Brighton Reservation, the wash was done in a pond near the home chickee. Children played while mother scrubbed clothes in a galvanized tub. Often after the laundry was done, the mother settled into the water and bathed in the privacy of her billowing cape.

10

“EAST OF EMOKOLEE [IMMOKALEE]”

Painting Size 48” X 25”

Many years ago, during high water in the Glades, the artist travelled by canoe to this camp. A family of eight Seminoles lived here, fishing, hunting, and working a small garden on the high land in the center of the hammock. The family was concerned that he might tell people where they lived. However, he promised them that if he referred to their home, he would only say, “They live east of Emokolee.”

11

“BRIGHTON CAMP”

Painting Size 48” X 25”

This is a camp of fifteen years ago on a slough in Brighton Reservation. It typifies the kind of camp that used to dot the Glades of Florida, and now exists only on the canvasses of artists or locked in the memory of very old men.

12

“HOLATTER MICCO” (Billy Bowlegs)

Painting Size 12” X 14”

After the capture of Osceola, and later, Coacoochee, Billy Bowlegs became the principal Seminole War chief. With eighty warriors and their women and children, Bowlegs waged guerrilla warfare against large numbers of troops. He finally surrendered, and on August 14, 1842, Washington formally announced the eight-year Seminole War over, at a cost of 1,500 U. S. soldiers' lives and \$20,000,000!

The name, Billy Bowlegs, did not indicate a physical deformity, but was probably based on his Indian name, Bolek or Boleck.