

# Florida Historical Quarterly

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Volume 56  
Number 3 *Florida Historical Quarterly, Volume  
56, Number 3*

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Article 5

1977

## Private Societies and the Maintenance of Seminole Tribal Integrity, 1899-1957

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### Recommended Citation

Kersey, Jr., Harry A. (1977) "Private Societies and the Maintenance of Seminole Tribal Integrity, 1899-1957," *Florida Historical Quarterly*. Vol. 56: No. 3, Article 5.

Available at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq/vol56/iss3/5>

## PRIVATE SOCIETIES AND THE MAINTENANCE OF SEMINOLE TRIBAL INTEGRITY, 1899-1957

by HARRY A. KERSEY, JR.\*

IN THE LAST quarter of the nineteenth century the Seminole Indians of southern Florida were a relatively independent and prosperous people. The small remnant group which remained in Florida following the Third Seminole War (1855-58), numbering fewer than 200, evaded army efforts to capture them, and they faded away into the fastness of the Everglades and Big Cypress Swamp.<sup>1</sup> For several decades they lived in virtual isolation from the outside world, venturing forth only for occasional trading visits to frontier villages such as Miami, Fort Meade, and Fort Myers. During these years they completed the last stage of an ethnoecologic adaptation to their new environment.<sup>2</sup> This was manifested by a number of notable features in their physical culture: the open-sided, thatched-roof "Chickee" was perfectly adapted to the terrain; loose fitting, light garments replaced the buckskins and heavier clothing which they had worn in North Florida; small plot subsistence farming was developed, emphasizing crops which thrived in a semi-tropical region; and the cypress dugout canoe provided a highly efficient means of transportation across the sawgrass sea of the Everglades, and could even be

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1. Colonel Gustavus Loomis to Major Irvin McDowell, March 22, 1858; Loomis to Colonel S. Cooper, May 8, 1858; Superintendent of Indian Affairs Elias Rector to Loomis, May 6, 1858; Loomis to Rector, May 7, 1858, in *House Executive Documents*, 35th Cong., 2nd sess., no. 2, *Report of the Secretary of War, December 6, 1858*, p. 241, 241-42, 242-43, 243. For additional information on attempts to contact the remnant group remaining in Florida, see Grant Foreman, *The Five Civilized Tribes* (Norman, 1934), 275; Edwin C. McReynolds, *The Seminoles* (Norman, 1957), 287.
2. Alan K. Craig and Christopher S. Peebles, "Ethnoecologic Change Among The Seminoles, 1740-1840," in H. J. Walker and W. G. Haag, volume eds., "Man and Cultural Heritage, Papers in Honor of Fred B. Kniffen," Volume V, *Geoscience and Man*, ed. Bob F. Perkins (Baton Rouge, 1974), 83-96.

fitted with sails for use on large bodies of water such as Lake Okeechobee.<sup>3</sup>

Equally functional adaptations had been made in the political and social organization of the Seminoles, who were divided linguistically between Mikasuki and Muskogee (Creek)-speaking elements.<sup>4</sup> This dichotomy had existed since the middle of the eighteenth century, when the migrating bands, which one authority calls "Proto-Seminole," began their transformation from Creek to Seminole in Florida.<sup>5</sup> Although Muskogee was the dominant language used throughout the Creek domain, many of the Lower Creek towns internally spoke a tongue known as Hitchiti. It was from the same language group as Muskogee, but they were mutually unintelligible. One of the early Hitchiti-speaking towns in Florida was called Mikasuki, and it is by that name that the language survives to this time. By 1900, most of the Muskogee speakers had settled near the northern shore of Lake Okeechobee, while the Mikasuki-speaking majority were found in the Everglades-Big Cypress Swamp region, or in camps along the lower east coast between the New River and Biscayne Bay. Although there was interaction among the groups, for all practical purposes they were distinct entities with their own socioeconomic arrangements, councils of elders, and medicine men.

The old Creek town organization, with its prescriptions for selecting political leaders (mikkos) and war leaders (tastanagis) from certain clans and moieties, had long since disappeared, a victim of the social dislocations following the Indian wars, and a new form of polity emerged.<sup>6</sup> The Seminoles in these regions formed several busk groups, each affiliated with a "medicine bundle" or collection of magic objects retained by the medicine men. The medicine bundle was a non-Creek feature of the busk which apparently originated in Florida following the Second Seminole War.<sup>7</sup> Each Seminole belonged to one of these busk

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3. Wilfred T. Neill, "Sailing Vessels of the Florida Seminole," *Florida Anthropologist*, IX (December 1956), 79-86.
  4. John R. Swanton, *Early History of the Creek Indians and Their Neighbors* (Washington, D.C., 1922), 172-73.
  5. William C. Sturtevant, "Creek into Seminole," in Eleanor Burke Leacock and Nancy Oestreich Lurie, eds., *North American Indians in Historical Perspective* (New York, 1971), 102-05.
  6. *Ibid.*, 115.
  7. William C. Sturtevant, "The Medicine Bundles and Busks of the Florida Seminole," *Florida Anthropologist*, VII (May 1954), 31-70.

groups and fell under the jurisdiction of its judicial and political council meeting. The medicine men gained greater political prominence during this period, and some became spokesmen for their group when dealing with outsiders.

Because of their isolation little was known about the Florida Seminoles until the late 1870s, when recurring complaints from settlers led the commissioner of Indian Affairs to seek information about the Indians in the state and the possibility of removing them to the Indian Territory. Accordingly, a young army officer, Lieutenant R. H. Pratt, was sent to survey the situation and make recommendations regarding the Seminoles. He visited some of the Indian camps in 1879, and made a general report on their condition.<sup>8</sup> Primarily Pratt assessed them to be an independent and resourceful people who had adapted well to their environment and were extremely unreceptive to overtures concerning removal from Florida. Furthermore, Pratt recommended that rather than cause renewed bloodshed by attempting removal, the federal government should send an agent to provide industrial training, education, and health facilities for the Seminoles with an eye to their future assimilation into the mainstream of American society. In 1880-1881 a second survey of the Seminoles was conducted for the Smithsonian Institution by the Reverend Clay MacCauley.<sup>9</sup> His was a more thorough study, extending over several months, and gave a comprehensive assessment of the skill with which the Indians had developed their abilities to survive in the wilds of the Everglades. He also accurately predicted that in the near future the Seminoles would face their greatest challenge, not from the federal government which had abandoned its removal efforts, but from the numerous settlers who would be turning to the Florida frontier in search of land.

Neither of these reports was printed and circulated until the 1880s, although they quickly came to the notice of the major Indian relief organizations of the period. It was a time when the American national conscience was beginning to demand redress for prior mistreatment of native peoples. Unfortunately, this often

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8. William C. Sturtevant, ed., "R.H. Pratt's Report on the Seminole in 1879," *Florida Anthropologist*, IX (March 1956), 1-24.

9. Clay MacCauley, "The Seminole Indians of Florida," *Fifth Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology to the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, 1883-'84* (Washington, 1887), 469-531.

culminated in congressional action such as the Dawes Act of 1887.<sup>10</sup> The group which opted to work with the Seminoles in Florida was the Womens National Indian Association, a Philadelphia-based society headed by the dynamic Amelia S. Quinton.<sup>11</sup> By 1891 the W.N.I.A. had bought 400 acres of land some forty miles southeast of Fort Myers where they established a mission station staffed by Dr. Jacob E. Brecht and his wife. The following year the United States government purchased eighty acres of the land and set up its own agency with a store, school, and sawmill as a basis for Indian industrial education. When Dr. and Mrs. Brecht moved into government service, and the W.N.I.A. could find no replacements, they turned their mission over to the Protestant Episcopal Church in 1893.<sup>12</sup> Under the direction of Bishop William C. Gray, the Episcopal Church sponsored a mission at Immokalee and subsequent locations until 1914. However, the government station ceased functioning in 1899 when the Brechts retired to private life in Fort Myers.<sup>13</sup>

By and large these early attempts to reach the Seminoles were unsuccessful when judged in light of their primary intent, i.e., to Christianize and settle them permanently into agricultural and industrial pursuits. The Seminoles accepted individuals like Dr. Brecht, but they would have nothing to do with the white man's schools, religion, or vocational training. They maintained widely scattered hammock camps, continued subsistence farming, and moved throughout the region hunting and trapping. The Indians also developed a viable trade in pelts, plumes, and hides which they sold to traders such as William Brickell at Miami, Frank Stranahan in Fort Lauderdale, or at Bill Brown's "Boat Landing"

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10. This congressional action, which simultaneously attempted to convert the tribes into yeoman farmers, while divesting them of some 40,000,000 acres of land, is detailed in Wilcomb E. Washburn, *The Assault on Indian Tribalism: The General Allotment Law (Dawes Act) of 1887* (Philadelphia, 1975); and D. S. Otis, *The Dawes Act and the Allotment of Indian Lands*, ed. Francis Paul Prucha (Norman, 1973).
  11. Francis Paul Prucha, *American Indian Policy in Crisis: Christian Reformers and the Indian, 1865-1900* (Norman, 1976), 134-38, 146-48.
  12. Harry A. Kersey and Donald E. Pulease, "Bishop William Crane Gray's Mission to the Seminole Indians in Florida, 1893-1914," *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church*, XLII (September 1973), 260.
  13. *House Executive Documents*, 56th Cong., 1st sess., no. 5, pp. 17-80. For an account of Brecht's activities after leaving the Indian service, see *Fort Myers News-Press*, May 30, 1970.

in the Big Cypress.<sup>14</sup> As long as the Seminoles had unrestricted access to the wetlands of South Florida, and the game remained both plentiful and profitable, they showed no inclination to change their traditional life style.

Within less than two decades the conditions which supported this cultural pattern had been radically altered, and the Seminole people found themselves confronting a social and economic crisis of major proportions. This was precipitated by the rapid settlement of South Florida and the collapse of their hunting-trapping economy. In 1880 the ethnographer Clay MacCauley had written, "soon a great and rapid change must take place. [The] . . . Seminole is about to enter a future unlike any past he has known."<sup>15</sup> He could not have foreseen how quickly this prophecy would be fulfilled or the devastating impact that it would have on the Seminoles. Throughout the preceding quarter century there was occasional friction between the Indians and a few white settlers, mostly over the ownership of livestock on the open range, but these disputes were resolved peacefully, and the Seminoles generally lived in harmony with the widely scattered homesteaders.<sup>16</sup> However, with the beginning of large scale drainage and development schemes, such as that of Hamilton Disston, a flood of settlers poured into the state seeking cheap land. By 1896 the Florida East Coast Railway had moved its tracks into Miami, while the Plant System offered easy access to the west coast of the state. Each arriving train seemed to bring more people who swelled the new towns that grew up along the rights-of-way. Soon farms, groves, and ranches were extending inland from both coasts.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, the newcomers had little knowledge of, or concern for, the Indian population whose land they were usurping in the process.

The Seminoles were soon displaced from many traditional campsites and hunting grounds to which they, of course, held no

14. Harry A. Kersey, Jr., *Pelts, Plumes, and Hides: White Traders among the Seminole Indians, 1870-1930* (Gainesville, 1975), passim.

15. MacCauley, "Seminole Indians of Florida," 531.

16. Kersey, *Pelts, Plumes, and Hides*, 18-20.

17. Representative studies of the efforts to settle South Florida in the last quarter of the nineteenth century are found in J. E. Dovell, "The Railroads and Public Lands of Florida, 1879-1905," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, XXXIV (January 1956), 238-48; George E. Pozzetta, "Foreign Colonies in South Florida, 1865-1910," *Tequesta*, XXXIV (1974), 45-56; Pat Dodson, "Hamilton Disston's St. Cloud Sugar Plantation, 1887-1901," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, XLIX (April 1971), 356-69.

legal title. Throughout the 1890s the resident United States Indian Agent, Dr. J. E. Brecht, fought to stave off this dispossession and to acquire large tracts of land on which the Seminoles could ultimately settle. The parcels which he obtained before the turn of the century would become the nucleus of a federal trust lands system for Seminoles during the 1920s and 1930s, but for the most part the Indians had no large expanse of territory to call their own. This process of forced relocation accelerated during the Florida land boom of the 1920s, and in desperation many Seminoles moved into "tourist villages" at Miami and adjacent coastal cities, while others turned to agricultural wage labor and lived on the land of farmers for whom they worked.<sup>18</sup> Traditional families continued to live unmolested in the remote and undesirable sections of the Everglades and Big Cypress, but were always haunted by the knowledge that they could never be safe from forced resettlement.

The second great blow to the Florida Seminoles early in the twentieth century was the rapid decline of their cash economy based on hunting and trapping. The federal Lacey Law of 1900, as well as a Florida statute of the following year, outlawed the taking of plume birds which had been a lucrative business for both white and Indian hunters. Even so, it was the New York act of 1910, passed under prodding by the National Audubon Society and allied organizations, which effectively denied plumes to the fashion industry in this country.<sup>19</sup> During the same period the drainage of the Everglades was begun by Governor Napoleon B. Broward, and this would have a tremendously adverse effect on the alligator and fur-bearing animal population of that region. Increasingly it became more difficult for hunters to take otters and alligators in profitable numbers for shipment to northern outlets. With the onset of World War I and the loss of European markets, the plume and hide trade virtually collapsed.<sup>20</sup>

Even when the market demand was reestablished in the 1920s,

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18. Roy Nash, *Survey of the Seminole Indians of Florida* (Washington, 1931), *Senate Documents*, 71st Cong., 3rd sess., no. 314, pp. 20-22. The social and economic impact of this relocation is discussed in Kersey, *Pelts, Plumes, and Hides*, 125-31.
  19. Charles M. Brookfield and Oliver Griswold, *They All Called It Tropical: True Tales of the Romantic Everglades National Park, Cape Sable, and the Florida Keys* (Miami, 1949), 69-72.
  20. Kersey, *Pelts, Plumes, and Hides*, 128-29.

Seminoles could not compete effectively with the well-organized and better-equipped white hunters. The Nash Report of 1930 might be considered the official obituary of the Indian trade in Florida, for it noted: "The Indian is a minority factor in the Florida fur trade. Although hunting is the Seminole's chief industry, he is regularly beaten at his own game by white men. . . . It is the difference between a dugout canoe and a gasoline launch. . . . White men buy better traps and take more pains in handling their pelts."<sup>21</sup> With the demise of their cash income and loss of traditional lands the Seminoles entered a long period of transition from which they would emerge as reservation dwellers with a sound agricultural-herding economic base. However that was well in the future. At the beginning of this century the prospects of the Indians in Florida were anything but bright.

The story of this increasingly impoverished and landless minority was first brought to national attention by two popular books: Minnie Moore-Willson's *The Seminoles of Florida* (1896) and Charles Coe's *Red Patriots* (1898). These works left a great deal to be desired for ethnohistorical accuracy, yet in a sense they became a rallying point for those Floridians who believed that the time had come to initiate positive action in behalf of the Indian people.<sup>22</sup> A coalition of political figures, churchmen, club-women, and influential civic leaders came together to form associations which would promote the legal rights of Seminoles, secure educational benefits, and advocate the establishment of permanent reservation lands. The geographical distribution of these associations corresponded roughly with the pattern of Seminole dispersal throughout the lower peninsula.

The earliest of these societies was the "Friends of the Florida Seminoles," founded at Kissimmee in 1899.<sup>23</sup> It numbered among its organizers Bishop Gray, who was already involved with mission work among the Seminoles; F. A. Hendry, a cattleman and

21. Nash, *Survey of the Seminole Indians of Florida*, 37-38.

22. It should be noted that Minnie Moore-Willson's *The Seminoles of Florida* (Philadelphia, 1896; various later editions), is held in low repute by some authorities on Seminole history and culture. See William C. Sturtevant, "Accomplishments and Opportunities in Florida Indian Ethology," in Charles H. Fairbanks, ed., *Florida Anthropology*, Florida Anthropological Society Publications No. 5 (Tallahassee, 1958), 20-21.

23. The origins of this society are treated in Harry A. Kersey, Jr., "The 'Friends of the Florida Seminoles' Society: 1899-1926," *Tequesta*, XXXIV (1974), 3-20.



state legislator who was a longtime friend of the Indians;<sup>24</sup> P. A. Vans Agnew, an attorney and editor of the *Kissimmee News*; Indian Agent Brecht; Senator C. A. Carson of Kissimmee; and George W. Wilson, editor of the Jacksonville *Times-Union and Citizen*. Thus the society had a broad base of support, as well as significant influence with the news media of the state. Both factors would play an important role in future activities of the group.

Although the "Friends" roster was laced with prominent names, the driving force behind the organization was James M. Willson, a Kissimmee real estate broker, and his wife, Minnie Moore-Willson. Jim Willson traveled extensively at his own expense to lend aid and support to his Indian friends, while his wife took up their cause in print. The Willson home was frequently visited by Seminoles of the Cow Creek band such as old Chief Tallahassee, Tom Tiger, and Billy Bowlegs III. Their activities were fully reported in the Kissimmee newspaper, and apparently the community formed a close attachment to the Seminoles. Therefore it was not difficult in the wake of Mrs. Willson's book to solicit support for the formation of a "Friends" society.

The event which actually triggered formal organization was the notable case of "Tom Tiger's Horse."<sup>25</sup> In 1898 a man named Hull apparently borrowed a horse from the Seminole, promising to return it in a few weeks. However, the horse was never returned, and Hull subsequently claimed to have purchased it. Tom Tiger brought his complaint to Jim Willson who attempted to act as an intermediary, but to no avail. In an effort to secure justice, the newly organized "Friends of the Florida Seminoles" pressed charges against Hull and secured a lawyer to defend the Indian's interests. When Hull was tried in the circuit court at Titusville, Tom Tiger appeared as a witness for the prosecution, and the society's lawyer assisted the state's attorney. Nevertheless, the case was thrown out due to lack of evidence—it was only the Indian's word against that of a white man. A rude sort of justice

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24. Francis Asbury Hendry of Fort Myers, a leading cattleman and state legislator, was a long-time friend of the Seminole Indians. He was elected an officer of both the "Friends of the Florida Seminoles," and the later "Seminole Indian Association."

25. The details of this legal action in behalf of a Seminole are found in Harry A. Kersey, Jr., "The Case of Tom Tiger's Horse: An Early Foray Into Indian Rights," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, LIII (January 1975), 306-18.

was achieved, though, as those present in the court room took up a collection to buy Tom Tiger another horse. Although the society was not technically successful in this case, it was significant as the first effort to defend the rights of Seminoles in the courts of Florida. Furthermore, it demonstrated that there were associations which would back their rhetoric with affirmative action in behalf of the Indian people.

The "Friends" had greater success in their efforts to secure land for the Seminoles through private purchase and by state donation. A nationwide fund solicitation during the spring and summer of 1899, which received crucial support from *Harper's Weekly*, enabled the society to purchase an eighty-acre tract in Brevard County known as "Polly Parker's Camp."<sup>26</sup> It was named for the Indian folk heroine who had escaped from federal troops removing the Seminoles to Oklahoma and had returned to her home near the Kissimmee River. This parcel of land was far too small to offer sanctuary for the Cow Creek band. No Indians settled there, and it was eventually lost for taxes in 1926.<sup>27</sup> Realizing that only a substantial grant of state land in their traditional hunting-trapping domain would be suitable for the Seminoles, the society threw its weight behind the lobbying efforts in Tallahassee for such legislation.

Minnie Moore-Willson became the leading figure in this struggle through her speeches and writing, as well as her membership in various women's organizations-although she often alienated other equally ardent supporters of the Indian cause with her ascerbic denunciations of legislative inaction and her abrasive personality. In 1915 she was reprimanded by Mrs. William S. Jennings, president of the Florida Federation of Women's Clubs, for charges she had made in the federation's publications of scandal in state government which prevented the granting of lands to the Seminole Indians.<sup>28</sup> All future statements regarding Indian matters, she was informed, should be routed through the chair-

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26. Kersey, " 'Friends of the Florida Seminoles' Society: 1899-1926," 9-11.

27. *Ibid.*

28. May Mann Jennings to Minnie Moore-Willson, May 12, 1915, Willson Papers, Otto G. Richter Library, University of Miami, Coral Gables, Florida. It is possible that one might consider the Indian Commission of the Florida Federation of Women's Clubs as a fourth society working in behalf of the Seminoles. A doctoral dissertation on May Mann Jennings is being written at the University of Florida by Linda Vance.

man of the Seminole Indian committee of which Mrs. Willson was a member. Furthermore, Mrs. Jennings made it clear that organization would in no way support unsubstantiated accusations which could only harm the Indian cause in the legislative halls of Tallahassee. There was also a fundamental difference in the approach which the two women advocated for securing land for Indians. The position expressed by Mrs. Jennings was that the legislature should be lobbied for as long as necessary to insure that only good land would be set aside, rather than an immediate appropriation of worthless acreage. Mrs. Willson, however, felt the great urgency was to have as large a tract as possible secured for Seminole use. Apparently Mrs. Jennings's rebuke did not deter Minnie Moore-Willson from pressing her pointed attacks, and in 1916 she was asked to disassociate herself from the Indian committee of the Federation.<sup>29</sup> Although she did not relinquish her committee position, in the future Mrs. Willson continued her fight for Indian lands apart from the Federation and under the auspices of the "Friends" and the national Indian Rights Association.

For fifteen frustrating years the Willsons and their supporters saw bills introduced in the biennial legislative sessions, only to be lost in one house or the other or by executive veto. Then in 1915, the society's efforts were supported by the Indian Rights Association of Philadelphia, which added its funds and the services of the able M. K. Sniffen in the fray.<sup>30</sup> That involvement, along with a growing clamor for action on the "Indian question" by the press of Florida, apparently turned the tide. The 1917 legislature passed, and Governor Sidney J. Catts signed into law, a bill establishing a 100,000-acre state Seminole reservation in Monroe County.<sup>31</sup> The governor presented the gold pen used in signing the bill to Minnie Moore-Willson as a tribute to her persistent efforts in behalf of the Seminole people.<sup>32</sup> With the establishment

29. Mrs. Frank Stranahan to Minnie Moore-Willson, December 27, 1916, Willson Papers.

30. Kersey, "Friends of the Florida Seminoles Society: 1899-1926," 14-15. For a concise exposition on the Indian Rights Association, see Prucha, *American Indian Policy in Crisis*, 138-43.

31. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, May 10, 1917.

32. *Ibid.* In a scathing editorial comment the newspaper noted that the land set aside for the Indians was outside the drainage district, thus the legislature had met its obligation by donating worthless, at least in an agricultural sense, swamp land to the Seminole. This, coupled with the

of a state reservation for the Seminoles, much of the society's *raison d'être* seemed to disappear. Throughout the years the Willsons continued to perform services for their Indian friends, but as the original members died off there were no new recruits, and the "Friends of the Florida Seminoles" faded into history.

In the same year that the "Friends" were organizing at Kissimmee, some 200 miles to the south a young teacher named Ivy Cromartie arrived at the hamlet on New River which was to be called Fort Lauderdale.<sup>33</sup> Within a year she had married the prominent trader Frank Stranahan and moved into the large combination home-trading post on the river where she would live for the next seventy years. Mrs. Stranahan befriended the Seminole families who frequented her husband's store to trade their pelts and hides. She was particularly fond of the Indian youngsters who were perpetually curious, and soon began teaching those who were interested some rudimentary reading and writing. Over the years her frequent visits to nearby camps cemented acceptance among the Seminoles. Frank Stranahan had been the foremost spokesman for the Seminoles in that region, and after he died in 1929, his wife continued the work at both the state and national level.

As chairwoman of the Florida Federation of Women's Clubs Indian committee, Ivy Stranahan played a major role in developing the policy of this influential group which lobbied prominently in the legislative halls of Tallahassee for Indian rights and other causes. Often she was at odds with Minnie Moore-Willson over the tactics which would be most effective; regretfully she attempted to persuade her to resign from the Indian committee-but to no avail.<sup>34</sup> Subsequently, the Willson group continued to steer a rather independent course in seeking state lands for the Seminoles. Mrs. Stranahan, on the other hand, while she saw some value to the establishment of a state reservation, felt that federal lands and support services would come closer to meeting

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fact that the hunting-trapping capacity of the Everglades was rapidly diminishing, seemed to vindicate Mrs. Jennings's position in holding out for the best land possible upon which to reestablish the tribe.

33. August Burghard, *Watchie Estra/Hutrie (the Little White Mother)* (Fort Lauderdale, 1968), 6; Philip J. Weidling and August Burghard, *Checked Sunshine, the Story of Fort Lauderdale, 1793-1955* (Gainesville, 1966), 21.
34. Willson to Stranahan, January 7, 1917, Willson Papers.

the immediate health, education, and housing needs of the Seminole people. To that end she worked with United States Indian Agent L. A. Spencer in opening the Dania Reservation in 1926.<sup>35</sup>

As a devout Seventh Day Adventist, Mrs. Stranahan was a temperance advocate who constantly sought to protect the Seminoles from bootleg whiskey dealers. So strong were her sentiments that Frank Stranahan refused to sell any product with an alcohol base in his store, such as vanilla extract, which the Indians might use.<sup>36</sup> The ubiquitous Mrs. Stranahan was also an ardent Audubon Society member. Thus, there was no market for plumes at the Stranahan store, and she was always on the lookout for illegal caches of plumes after federal and state laws took effect early in this century.<sup>37</sup> In all of these efforts Mrs. Stranahan often seemed to be waging a lonely struggle with only occasional support from close friends or Agent Spencer. Indeed, Mrs. Stranahan had carried on an extensive correspondence with the members of the Florida congressional delegation concerning Indian affairs. In 1930 she testified before the United States Senate Subcommittee of the Committee on Indian Affairs, where she recounted the plight of the tribe.<sup>38</sup> Her testimony touched on most of the major social and economic ills of the Indian people, especially the fact that bootlegging was still rampant and no action was being taken by local authorities to stem the flow of liquor to the Seminoles. She reported that many of the women and girls of the tribe were receptive to education, although the older people were not, and cited the fact that some attended the reservation school regularly. Nevertheless, she admitted that Indian children would have great difficulty entering public schools at that time due to their academic deficiencies and a low standard of personal hygiene. Clearly, if there was to be any promise of a better future for the Seminole youngsters there would have to be more direct assistance from the government and other sources.

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35. Nash, *Survey of the Seminole Indians of Florida*, 70.

36. Alan Craig and David McJunkin, "Stranahan's: Last of the Seminole Trading Posts," *Florida Anthropologist*, XXIV (June 1971), 45.

37. Burghard, *Watchie Estra/Hutrie*, 36-37.

38. Senate, Committee on Indian Affairs, *Survey of Conditions of the Indians in the United States, Hearings Before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Indian Affairs, United States Senate. . .*, pt. 16, March 26, 28, 31, 1930, November 6, 8, December 10, 1930, 71st Cong., 3rd sess. (Washington, 1931), 7603-14.

By 1934 a group of Christian women in several Florida cities became seriously interested in underwriting Mrs. Stranahan's efforts among the Seminoles. This loosely knit group organized as the "Friends of the Seminoles," - a name which often promoted confusion with the Kissimmee organization.<sup>39</sup> Mrs. Stranahan served alternately as its president and secretary-treasurer for many years. One of the society's first projects was to bring in a well-educated Indian woman from the West to work with the Seminole women and young girls in preventing alcoholism and immorality. The person selected was Minnie Deer, a Creek Indian who taught at Bacone College, Oklahoma. She initially stayed with Mrs. Stranahan learning about the Seminole people, then spent many months working among their camps with some success. Heartened by this venture, the society turned its attention to the education of Indian children.

The federal day school serving Seminole children on the Dania Reservation was closed in 1936 as part of a general reduction of government services during the Depression era, and the students could not attend the local public schools with any reasonable expectation of success. Thus in 1937, the federal Indian service sent a number of Seminole youngsters to the Cherokee Indian School in North Carolina. The "Friends" supported this venture by providing clothing and incidental funds for the students, and maintained correspondence to encourage them in their schooling. This prolonged effort was rewarded when two of the girls graduated from Cherokee High School in 1945.<sup>40</sup> In the years following World War II the society focused its efforts on having Seminole children admitted to the public schools near the South Florida reservations. Through all these years while Mrs. Stranahan remained a central figure in the organization, her friend and co-worker, Mrs. O. H. Abbey, became a driving force in the effort to educate Indian children.<sup>41</sup> She often accompanied them on the long bus trips to North Carolina, organized readiness programs on

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39. Harry A. Kersey, Jr., and Rochelle Kushin, "Ivy Stranahan and the 'Friends of the Seminoles,' 1899-1971," *Broward Legacy*, I (1976), 7-11. The "Friends of the Seminoles" was chartered as a Florida corporation on November 28, 1949. *Corporation Book 13*, Office of the Comptroller, Broward County Courthouse, Ft. Lauderdale, Florida.
40. Harry A. Kersey, Jr., "Educating the Seminole Indians of Florida, 1879-1969," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, XLIX (July 1970), 28, 33.
41. Lucy Heidenreich, "Dreams Come True, Education of Seminole Indians," *New River News*, XI (January 1973), 1-6.

the reservations, cajoled local school officials, and secured economic support from the Daughters of the American Revolution and other groups to underwrite Indian educational programs. As Mrs. Stranahan grew older and her health declined, it was Mrs. Abbey who often represented the "Friends of the Seminoles" at the state and national level.

During the 1950s the "Friends of the Seminoles" also turned their attention to improving living conditions on the reservations. Their funds, solicitations, and arrangements for bank financing enabled most Seminole families at the Dania Reservation to move into new houses, and significant steps in this direction were also begun on the rural reservations such as Big Cypress where a community building was paid for by the society. It appeared that the combination of improved living conditions and educational progress offered a bright future for the tribe at mid-century. Then in 1953 the Bureau of Indian Affairs announced that it would be terminating all services for the Seminoles in three years as part of a new federal policy.<sup>42</sup> The movement for "termination" of certain tribes was a misguided attempt by the Congress to free Indian peoples from the paternalism of the federal bureaucracy. Unfortunately, for many tribes like the Seminole it would have meant economic and social disaster to remove the health, education, and technical support services from them at that time. Some tribal groups such as the Klamath and Menominee were terminated and were virtually destroyed as a people. The Seminoles were fortunate that they had the strong support of the "Friends of the Seminoles," as well as other individuals and some of Florida's political leaders, to defend their interests.

On March 1-2, 1954, subcommittees of Congress held a hearing in Washington to determine whether the Seminoles should be removed from the list of tribes to be terminated. The case for continued governmental assistance was supported by witnesses from the society, Florida congressional leaders, and by a delegation of Seminoles.<sup>43</sup> Mrs. Stranahan was too ill to attend, but her

42. *Joint Hearings Before the Sub-Committee of the Committees on the Interior and Insular Affairs, Termination of Federal Supervision Over Certain Tribes of Indians, Part 8, Seminole Indians of Florida, S. 2747 and H.R. 7321, 83rd Cong., 2nd sess. (Washington, 1954), 1027-29. See also S. Lyman Tyler, A History of Indian Policy (Washington, 1973), 151-81.*

43. *Joint Hearings, Part 8, Seminole Indians of Florida, 1125-33.* For insight into these hearings and the removal of the Seminoles from the termina-

eloquent letter was entered in the proceedings and perhaps had an impact on the final outcome. In essence, she felt that at least twenty-five more years of government assistance would be needed to allow the Seminoles time to prepare for self-governance.<sup>44</sup> As it turned out, her time frame was a bit exaggerated. The Seminoles were not terminated. They then exercised an option to organize themselves formally under the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, and they received a charter from the Department of the Interior. In 1957 the Seminole Tribe of Florida, Inc., elected officers and began to represent all the Seminole people of the state.<sup>45</sup> Five years later a group of families living along Tamiami Trail formed their own Miccosukee Tribe of Indians.<sup>46</sup> Within two decades these tribes have become self-sufficient enough to handle many health, education, and welfare services formerly operated by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Tribal leaders predict they will be entirely free of most government direction by the end of the 1970s.

Ivy Stranahan received numerous accolades for her work with the Seminole people, as well as her many other civic contributions, and was a leading citizen of Fort Lauderdale until her death in 1971.<sup>47</sup> The society which she inspired continues its work of sponsoring Indian youngsters who are trying to complete their schooling and assisting the Seminole Tribe whenever possible.

Probably the least known of the three major societies assisting the Seminoles early in this century was the Seminole Indian Association, which was chartered at Fort Myers in 1913.<sup>48</sup> It was

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tion list, see Sturtevant, "Creek into Seminole," 117-20. Sturtevant participated in the hearings. His statement is found on page 1136.

44. *Ibid.*, 1130-31.

45. The extent to which the Indian people control their own affairs is spelled out in their constitutions and corporate charters. In the case of the Seminole, see United States Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, *Constitution and Bylaws of the Seminole Tribe of Florida, Ratified August 21, 1957* (Washington, 1958); and United States Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, *Corporate Charter of the Seminole Tribe of Florida, Ratified August 21, 1957* (Washington, 1958).

46. The basic operating guidelines of the Miccosukees are found in *Constitution of the Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida, ratified December 17, 1961, with amendments adopted 1964 and 1965* (Washington, 1965). For a recent study on political leadership, see R. T. King, "Clan Affiliation and Leadership Among the Twentieth-Century Florida Indians," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, LV (October 1976), 138-52.

47. Kersey, *Pelts, Plumes, and Hides*, 57.

48. W. Stanley Hanson to Dr. Hamilton Holt, September 3, 1933, postcard in possession of author.



inspired by the work of Dr. W. J. Godden, the Episcopal medical missionary who ran a hospital and trading post at the old "Boat Landing" site in the Big Cypress.<sup>49</sup> During regular visits to Fort Myers he reported on the growing distress of the Indians due to a paucity of game in the Everglades. As the situation worsened and the national market for their goods collapsed, many Seminole families suffered real hardship. Based upon these reports and the urgings of Dr. Godden, a number of influential citizens of the region formed the Association. The founding officers included Francis A. Hendry, president; C. W. Carlton, vice-president; W. Stanley Hanson, secretary; and R. A. Henderson, Sr., treasurer.<sup>50</sup> The first order of business was to memorialize Congress for direct economic assistance to the Mikasuki Seminoles of the Big Cypress.<sup>51</sup> That failing, contributions were solicited from the membership to help the most needy Indians. The following year Dr. Godden died, and the mission station was closed by the Episcopal Church. With his passing the Association lost its inspiration and focus as an organization, although individuals such as Stanley Hanson sustained a vigorous personal involvement with the Indians.

The son of a pioneer doctor in Fort Myers, Hanson had grown up hunting and trapping with the Seminoles who were frequent and welcome visitors to his father's home. He was able to speak their difficult Mikasuki language, and he regularly attended the Green Corn Dance and council meetings at the invitation of the medicine men. Whenever the Big Cypress band needed an intermediary with the outside world they often spoke through Stanley Hanson rather than government officials.<sup>52</sup> Although he dealt primarily with the Mikasuki-speaking group, Hanson was well received among the Cow Creek band which lived north of Lake

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49. The Episcopal Church had acquired this property from the trader W. H. Brown in 1908 in order to bring their work closer to the Indian camps. For an account of the Episcopal mission efforts among the Seminole at the turn of the century, see Kersey and Pullease, "Bishop William Crane Gray's Mission," 257-73.

50. "Hanson Talks on Seminoles," Fort Myers, September 9, 1933, Seminole Indian File, Florida Historical Society Library, University of South Florida Library, Tampa.

51. *Fort Myers Daily Press*, September 22, 1914.

52. *St. Petersburg Daily News*, February 15, 1927. In this instance Hanson represented the complaint of traditional Seminole leaders that no one person could be considered "chief" of the tribe-as an individual in the Fort Lauderdale area had claimed.

Okeechobee, and he included their camps in his itinerary. He often referred to them as "Cabbage Woods Indians" ostensibly because they lived in the sabal or cabbage palm region.

For two decades Hanson traveled about the state and nation at his own expense attending to the needs of his Indian friends, and, always in the name of the Seminole Indian Association, promoting their welfare. However, as the nation entered the depths of the Depression years of the 1930s, Hanson felt that interest had to be rekindled if the work was to continue. A committee was established to revitalize the Seminole Indian Association, and a reorganizational meeting was held at Tampa in September, 1933.<sup>53</sup> Only ten members of the original board of directors were still alive, and Hanson was one of but two surviving officers. A new slate of officers and directors was elected by the society, which wisely retained Hanson as its secretary.

Throughout the 1930s the Seminole Indian Association operated with great enthusiasm and a minimal budget.<sup>54</sup> Hanson covered thousands of miles each year at his own expense, speaking to educational and civic groups and drumming up economic support for the Indians. He was often accompanied to these gatherings by members of the tribe. The secretary also pursued with vigor any actions by local law officials and courts which involved Indians, and he served as liaison with the Indian agent whose office was on the east coast at the Dania Reservation. Then, too, there were always instances when sick or injured Indians had to be transported miles to a hospital in the secretary's car, and arrangements made by the Association or another agency to underwrite the medical expenses. One major goal of the Association was the promotion of a Seminole handicrafts industry, and registration of an official trade mark to protect them from cheap imported items being sold as genuine Indian articles.<sup>55</sup> To this end they supported the work of Deaconess Harriet Bedell, an Episcopal missionary, in developing a nascent cottage industry among the Seminole families living near her mission station on the Tamiami

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53. "Hanson Talks on Seminoles," 4.

54. "Annual Meeting of the Seminole Indian Association of Florida, Held in Fort Myers, Florida, July 24, 1935. From Proceedings of the Meeting as Published in *The American Eagle*, Estero, Fla.," a broadside located in the Seminole Indian File, Florida Historical Society Library.

55. *Ibid.*

Trail.<sup>56</sup> This did not imply Association endorsement of her missionizing activities.

The years of World War II brought a significant interruption of the Association's work due to curtailment of travel and a re-focusing of many members' interests. It would be difficult at best to continue after the war; many older members had died, others had moved away, and the federal government was taking a stronger role in the welfare of Seminoles. When Stanley Hanson died in 1945 it appeared to signal the demise of the Seminole Indian Association as well.<sup>57</sup> Yet, a cadre of dedicated people still remained to take up the work, although on a more limited basis. The Association, through its new secretary, Bertram Scott, was influential in lobbying against termination of the Seminoles in the 1950s.<sup>58</sup> It was primarily through his efforts that the Florida cabinet went on record in opposition to the proposed termination of the tribe. The last president of the organization, Robert Mitchell of Orlando, focused his energies in supporting the efforts of the Mikasuki-speaking Seminoles of the Big Cypress and Tamiami Trail to secure exclusive hunting and trapping rights to some 200,000 acres of land. When a group of these Indians broke away from the Seminoles to form their own Miccosukee Tribe in 1962, Mitchell became an unofficial advisor and honorary member of the tribe. His long record of Indian rights advocacy, as well as the endorsement of the Miccosukee Tribe, led to Mitchell's appointment as a member of the first State Indian Commission by Governor Claude Kirk in 1969, and, after an interregnum, his subsequent reappointment by Governor Reubin Askew.<sup>59</sup> Through his membership on this influential state commission, Mitchell carried on the tradition of involvement established by his friend Stanley Hanson and the Seminole Indian Association.

In retrospect all three of these private societies fulfilled a vital role in support of the Florida Seminoles during the first half of

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56. For an account of Deaconess Bedell's work among the Seminoles, see William Hartley and Ellen Hartley, *A Woman Set Apart* (New York, 1963), 202-75.

57. *Fort Myers News-Press*, April 5, 1945.

58. *Joint Hearings, Part 8, Seminole Indians of Florida*, 1103-13.

59. Governor Claude R. Kirk, Jr., established the Florida Commission on Indian Affairs by executive order on June 16, 1969. Governor Reubin O'D. Askew established the Governor's Council on Indian Affairs by Executive Order 74-23, on April 10, 1974.

this century. It was a period of traumatic transition from a self-sufficient life style based on subsistence farming supplemented by hunting and trapping, then uprootedness, and ultimate resettlement on federal trust lands with the establishment of a new agricultural-herding economy.<sup>60</sup> Throughout much of this ordeal the Seminole people received only minimal support from the federal Indian service, and that through a single agent who was under staffed and poorly funded. If these societies had not functioned, along with myriad local church and civic groups which also rallied to their cause, the Seminoles might not have survived the period as a people. There was a very real danger that they would be dispersed and ultimately absorbed into a growing population of urban and rural poor in South Florida.

The societies sustained the Seminoles by a variety of means: they provided legal counsel, funneled direct assistance to families and school children, promoted better housing and health care, and constantly lobbied at all levels of government for a recognition of Indian rights. Primarily, though, it was their leadership in the effort to have state and federal trust lands set aside for the Seminoles, as well as forestalling the threat of termination, which insured tribal political and economic integrity for future generations. Given the voluntary nature and limited financial resources of these organizations, their geographic separation and lack of coordination, as well as the intragroup philosophical and personality conflicts, it is unlikely that they could have accomplished more than they did in the context of the times. As it was, leaders like the Willsons, Stranahans, and Hansons often held the groups together through good times and bad on the strength of their personal efforts-and unreimbursed expenditures.

It may be argued by contemporary critics that societies such as these often fostered naive and paternalistic conceptions of the American Indian, and tended to promote "Christianizing and civilizing" to the detriment of native cultures. If so, this would only be consistent with the prevailing nineteenth-century Christian, humanitarian reform movement's emphasis on religion, education, and assimilation as an answer to the "Indian problem." To be sure, there was much that smacked of maudlin sentimentality and a surfeit of religious zeal in some pronouncements

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60. Kersey, *Pelts, Plumes, and Hides*, 125-26.

and activities of the Florida societies. However, the ranks were also filled with individuals who had spent their lives hunting, trading, and in some cases fighting with the Seminoles. Their knowledge of, and respect for, the Indian way of life had a leavening effect on the societies, and the role which they played was generally one of securing the Indian's land and rights rather than fostering assimilation. To a degree this ethos was lost as the older members passed from the scene and were replaced by newcomers who harbored a somewhat idealized version of what the Indian was supposed to become in the twentieth century. Nevertheless, when a definitive history of the Indian peoples of Florida is written, a prominent place must be accorded these societies which functioned when they were most needed.<sup>61</sup>

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61. This article is an expanded version of papers and earlier articles resulting from Dr. Kersey's continuing interest in this subject. See also, Harry A. Kersey, Jr., "The Seminole 'Uprising' of 1907," *Florida Anthropologist*, XXVII (June 1974), 49-58.