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FLORIDA SEMINOLES AND THE CENSUS OF 1900

by HARRY A. KERSEY, JR.

ONE of the most persistent problems confronting historians dealing with the Seminole Indians in Florida during the late-nineteenth century has been a paucity of reliable population data. In the first four decades of the modern tribal era, the years following cessation of the Third Seminole War in 1858, there was only one attempt at a comprehensive account of Florida Seminoles. That was a survey conducted in the winter of 1880-1881 by Clay MacCauley for the Smithsonian Institution, which yielded what has become the generally accepted base line population figures. He found 208 Seminoles residing in the state, the unhappy remnant of a tribe that had once numbered over 5,000 before the wars and removal to the West.¹

From time to time other observers had visited certain Seminole camps in Florida and produced accounts which, for the most part, varied greatly in their accuracy and conclusions regarding the Seminole population. The most widely used of these reports are Ober (1872), Pratt (1879), Wilson (1880), Brecht (1892-99), and Duncan (1898).² With the possible exception of Pratt, none

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1. Clay MacCauley, "The Seminole Indians of Florida," *Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of American Ethnology, Fifth Annual Report, 1883-1884* (Washington, 1887).
2. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century there were a limited number of reports published on the Seminole Indians of Florida. Among the most useful and informative were: Fredrick A. Ober, "Ten Days with the Seminoles," *Appleton's Journal of Literature, Science and Art*, 14 (July-August 1875), 142-44, 171-71; U. S. Congress, Senate, *Message From the President of the United States Transmitting a Letter of the Secretary of the Interior Relative to Land upon Which to Locate Seminole Indians* [This contains both R. H. Pratt's report on the Seminoles in 1879, and A. M. Wilson's letters on his work as special agent to the Seminoles in 1887.] Exec. Doc. 139, 50th Cong., 1st sess., 1888, 1-15; James A. Henshall, *Camping and Cruising in Florida* (Cincinnati, 1888), passim; Charles B. Cory, *Hunting and Fishing in Florida, including a key to the water birds known to occur in the state* (Boston, 1896; Reprint ed., New York, 1970); U. S. Congress, House of Representatives, *Report of the*

of these approached the comprehensiveness of MacCauley's work in identifying population distribution. Thus by the turn of the twentieth century little more was known than that the Seminoles were separated sociopolitically and linguistically into three distinct groups, occupying areas north of Lake Okeechobee, in the Big Cypress Swamp, and along the southeast coast from New River to Biscayne Bay. The lack of systematic gathering and reporting of accurate population figures on the Seminoles has made it difficult to develop a complete historical picture of the growth or decline rate of the bands in those regional dispersements.

Unfortunately, the federal census apparatus was of limited usefulness when it came to identifying the Indian population in Florida. Of the five federal censuses conducted between 1860 and 1900, only two appear to yield reasonably accurate approximations of the Seminole population based on what is known of how the enumerations were conducted and reported. It is necessary to dismiss immediately the 1860 census report that there was but one Indian in Florida.³ This gross error may be attributed to a combination of factors. First, following so closely the conclusion of hostilities with the Indians, there was probably no serious effort to penetrate the Everglades wilderness to enumerate them. Also, since the 1860 census was the first to differentiate Indians from other classes of citizens, there were no doubt problems in handling the data effectively in Washington. Nevertheless, by the 1870 census the Indian population in Florida had unaccountably doubled, as two were reported.⁴ There was, however, a dutiful bureaucratic notation that this count corrected the error of the previous decennial count. Again in this census the official federal figures were greatly at variance with what was known to have been the case by those living on the Florida frontier; there were cer-

Commissioner of Indian Affairs [contains the report of Dr. J. E. Brecht, Indian agent at Immokalee, for the year 1897. Brecht submitted annual reports from 1892 to 1899, with estimates of Seminole population.] Exec. Doc. 5, 55th Cong., 2nd sess., 1897, 125-27; U. S. Department of the Interior, "Report of A. J. Duncan, United States Indian Inspector, to the Honorable Secretary of the Interior, in regard to the reservation of lands for the use of the Seminole Indians of Florida," *Annual Reports of the Department of the Interior for the fiscal year ended June 30, 1898*, Vol. I, cc-ccxxxviii.

3. U. S. Congress, Senate, *Preliminary Report of the Eighth Census, 1860*, 37th Cong., 2nd sess., 1862, 134.
4. U. S. Census Office, *Ninth Census, Volume I—The Statistics of the Population of the United States* (Washington, 1872), 8.

tainly more than two Seminoles hunting, trapping, and running livestock on the open prairie.

The 1880 enumeration of Indians in Florida became a tangled affair. The tenth census tabulations show only 144 Indians in the state, and although not identified as to tribe, all were located in Brevard, Manatee, Monroe, and Polk counties— the known habitat of the Seminoles.⁵ Because this figure was at such variance with the 208 reported by MacCauley in the same year, further investigation was called for. An examination of the enumerators' schedules for Florida counties yielded startling results. In June 1880, a regular enumerator, J. B. Bowen, had visited the Indian camps of Brevard County, which he identified as a "Portion of the tribe of Seminole Indians, not taxed, West of the St. Johns River."⁶ Further research revealed that Clay MacCauley had prepared schedules for Manatee, Monroe, Polk, and Dade counties, signing himself as acting special agent for the census.⁷ The assumption is that these delayed enumerations, which could have been made no earlier than six months after the regular census was concluded, were accepted through the efforts of Major J. W. Powell, head of the Bureau of American Ethnology at the Smithsonian Institution. Powell also functioned as head of the United States Census, Indian Division, for 1880.⁸

From the foregoing one would expect the census count to correspond with MacCauley's figure of 208, but such was not the

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5. U. S. Census Office, *Statistics of the Population of the United States at the Tenth Census (June 1, 1880)* (Washington, 1883), 394.
 6. U. S. Census Office, *Tenth Census of the United States, 1880* (Washington, National Archives Microfilm T9-126), "Schedule I— Inhabitants West of St. Johns River in the County of Brevard, State of Florida, Enumerated by me on the [blank] day of June, 1880. Page No. 13., Supervisor's Dist. No. 18; Enumeration Dist. No. 14."
 7. U. S. Census Office, *Tenth Census of the United States, 1880* "Schedule I— Inhabitants at Miami River Settlement, in the County of Dade, State of Florida, Enumerated by me in the month of January, 1881. [form presented as altered by enumerator] Page No. 5, Enumeration Dist. No. 25." This sheet also contains the band written notation "The Indians upon this sheet were enumerated by Clay MacCauley, Special Agent of this office, being a portion of the enumeration of the Seminole Indians remaining in Florida. Gen. [Amassa H.] Walker [director of the census] decides that these Indians are to be included as part of the Constitutional Population of the State and this schedule is therefore inserted as pages 5 and 6 of Enumeration District No. 25, the Miami River Settlement being situated in this district. [signed] G. W. Seaton, Chief Clerk."
 8. U. S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Twenty Censuses: Population and Housing Questions, 1790-1980* (Washington, 1979), 23.

case. In Brevard County the enumerator Bowen had listed fifteen Seminoles, while MacCauley found but twelve.⁹ In Manatee, Monroe, and Polk counties the tabulation showed fewer Seminoles by four than MacCauley had enumerated. Why? Apparently the results were altered slightly by omitting the blacks living among the Seminoles, even though the schedule called for counting non-Indians who had been adopted into tribes. Most disconcerting of all, however, was the inexplicable omission of the Dade County schedules from the tabulation, as they comprised the second largest concentration of Seminoles in the state according to MacCauley.¹⁰ Allowing that the regular census enumeration of Brevard County Seminoles was correct, and that MacCauley's figures for the other four settlements stand minus the black members, the 1880 census still lists too few Seminoles by sixty, or some twenty-nine per cent of the population. This is a sizable error with such a finite group, particularly if one is trying to establish a viable genealogy. Fortunately in this case, MacCauley's report to the Smithsonian, as well as his extant enumeration schedules, provided valuable comparative data; such would not always be the case, as shall be seen. For example, there is no readily available information on how Florida Indians were enumerated in the 1890 census. It is known only that 171 were found, primarily in Brevard and Dade counties, with just one listed for Lee and Monroe counties which encompassed the Big Cypress Swamp region.¹¹

Perhaps just as significant as these disparities in population figures was the lack of any additional information on the Florida Indians emanating from the censuses through 1890. Although a special schedule had been prepared for enumerating the United States Indian population in 1880, it was not utilized by either MacCauley or Bowen in Brevard County. An expanded schedule would be employed again in 1900, with subsequent major enumerations in 1910 and 1930.¹² Thus, any social, economic, or linguistic information on the Seminoles came primarily from

9. MacCauley, "The Seminole Indians of Florida," 478.

10. Ibid.

11. U. S. Census Office, *Twelfth Census of the United States taken in the year 1900—Population, Part I* (Washington, 1901), 532-33.

12. U. S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930—The Indian Population of the United States and Alaska* (Washington, 1937), 1. See also, *Twenty Censuses*, 26, 38-39.

non-census related accounts. To the extent that MacCauley's report can be considered related to the census of 1880, however tangentially, it did flesh out the sterile figures with an account of the Seminole culture. It would be another twenty years before a census enumerator performed a similar function by leaving a written account to supplement the data.

The federal census of 1900 was the first in which a special agent was appointed to enumerate the Seminole Indians of Florida. This was primarily due to the efforts of John M. Cheney, supervisor of the census for the second district of Florida.¹³ Cheney, an attorney from Orlando and a prominent figure in state Republican party politics, was an ardent outdoor sportsman with a keen interest in the Seminoles. He was convinced that before any significant federal or state assistance could be rendered to the increasingly impoverished Indians, an accurate picture of their number and condition would have to be ascertained. This would require the services of unique individuals who were familiar with both the Seminoles and the terrain of South Florida, and were willing to undertake such an arduous assignment. In two telegrams dated May 31 and June 1, 1900, the director of the census, W. C. Merriam, informed Cheney that the "Enumerator for Seminole Indians will be allowed all time necessary to complete enumeration," and "Compensation special agents for Seminole Indians will be five dollars per day and actual and necessary travelling expenses. Wire names so appointments can be made."¹⁴

Apparently Cheney's initial choice for Seminole enumerator was Bishop William Crane Gray, head of the Episcopal Missionary Jurisdiction of Southern Florida.¹⁵ Bishop Gray had established the first permanent mission stations at Immokalee and Glades Cross deep in the Big Cypress Swamp, and he was knowledgeable about the Seminole situation. However, he knew neither

13. William F. Blackman, *History of Orange County, Florida, Narrative and Biographical* (DeLand, 1927; Reprint ed., Chuluota, 1973), 37-38.

14. W. C. Merriam to John M. Cheney (telegrams), May 31, June 1, 1900, John M. Cheney Collection, in possession of D. A. Cheney, Orlando, Florida (hereinafter cited as JMCC).

15. For an extended discussion of the Episcopal mission effort among the Seminoles see Harry A. Kersey, Jr., 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), 257-73.

the language nor the territory well enough to work alone. Therefore he contacted J. Otto Fries, the county surveyor in Brevard County, and solicited his assistance. Fries initially declined to serve on the grounds that, although he knew the territory as well as anyone, he did not know the Indians or their language. He, in turn, recommended Archibald A. Hendry for the job. "He is," Fries wrote, "well posted in the language, quite familiar with the Indians, knows the whole country; is honest sober and truthfull."¹⁶ At this point Bishop Gray removed himself from consideration, and the enumerator's position was proffered to Fries, with A. A. Hendry to serve as his assistant. On June 5, 1900, Fries accepted the conditions of employment and proposed to have the task completed within fifty days. It would soon become apparent that he was unduly optimistic.

The choice of J. Otto Fries to conduct the enumeration was an excellent one, in that he brought to the undertaking a rare combination of education, experience, integrity, and articulateness. A native of Sweden who had immigrated to Florida in 1871, Fries was a college graduate trained in geology and civil engineering.¹⁷ He initially settled on a homestead in the Orlando area and soon became county surveyor for Orange County. Over the years he also worked as a timber cruiser and came to know the vast unsettled wilderness of south Florida. After the freeze of 1895-1896, Fries relocated to Brevard County, settling in Titusville and assuming the position of county surveyor. His cohort in the census venture, Archibald A. Hendry, was the antithesis of Fries in education and training, but brought an invaluable knowledge of the Seminoles and frontier conditions to their work. Fries described him to Cheney as "a genuine cracker, born and raised near Fort Pierce; has hunted with and among the Indians since his young age and talks their language well. He is undoubtedly the best man I could get."¹⁸ Together these two would

16. John Otto Fries to Bishop William Crane Gray, May 26, 1900, JMCC.

17. Kena Fries, *Orlando in the Long Long Ago and Now* (Orlando, 1938), 105-07.

18. Fries to Cheney, July 1, 1900, JMCC. Actually, Fries was mistaken in some of his information concerning A. A. Hendry, especially when he wrote that "Mr. Hendry is no relation to the representative [Francis A. Hendry of Fort Myers]." Indeed, the famous cattleman and Indian fighter for whom Hendry County is named was the great uncle of Fries's companion. Also, A. A. Hendry was born in Hillsborough County in 1858, moving with his family to a homestead west of Fort Pierce in 1872.

traverse the pine flats and swamplands of Florida during the high water and sweltering heat of mid-summer, visiting all known Indian camps from north of Lake Okeechobee to Shark River in the Ten Thousand Islands.

In addition to the basic items on the special Indian census form for 1900, Fries compiled his own commentaries on the living conditions and social relationships of the Seminoles whom they visited.¹⁹ This was submitted with his enumeration schedules and acknowledged by the Bureau of the Census office in Washington, but unaccountably has been lost to posterity.²⁰ Fortunately, however, Fries maintained a steady correspondence with Cheney from June through October 1900, in which he detailed the difficulties that he and Hendry encountered, as well as some views on the Indian condition of that day. This correspondence has recently been made available to researchers by the Cheney family and provides an additional dimension to our knowledge of the Seminoles at the turn of the century. Five of these letters have been selected for inclusion here to give both the flavor of the enumerators' experiences, as well as some specific data on the Seminole camps which they visited.

Fries planned to initiate the enumeration with the Cow Creek band of Seminoles living north of Lake Okeechobee beginning early in July, a time selected to coincide with their annual celebration of the Green Corn Dance when most of the scattered camps would come together in one location. Leaving Fort Pierce

Although he had no formal schooling, young Hendry possessed an extensive knowledge of the Florida back country and Indians, and was renowned as a guide and interpreter. In 1900 he married Amy Ann Cone, and in 1903 their only child, a son, was born in Fort Pierce. Hendry continued in the cattle business well into this century, finally selling his registered brand and 15,000 head of cattle to Joe Bowers, the well known Seminole trader at Indian Town. A. A. Hendry died at Fort Pierce in 1945. (This biographical data was obtained in an interview with Archibald A. Hendry, Jr., Jensen Beach, March 25, 1980.)

19. *Twelfth Census of the United States. Schedule No. 1—Population. Indian Population. Sheets A and B.* Copies supplied to the author by Census History Staff, Bureau of the Census, January 2, 1980. Instructions to the enumerators are also found in U. S. Department of the Interior, Census Office, *Twelfth Census of the United States, June 1, 1900, Instructions to Enumerators* (Washington, 1900), 41-42.
20. W. C. Hunt to Cheney, October 5, 1900, JMCC. In this communication Hunt, chief statistician for population, noted, "I take pleasure in returning to you herewith, the explanatory notes of Mr. J. Otto Fries, special agent for Seminole Indians, concerning the details of his trip through the Everglades of Florida."

on July 6 and travelling by horse-drawn wagon, the census takers spent the next ten days among the Seminoles. The following letter was written by Fries while camped on Cowbone Creek in the western reaches of Brevard County.²¹

Cowbone Camp, Fla., July 9th 1900

J. M. Cheney, Esq

Supervisor of Census

Orlando

Sir

We, Arch. Hendry and I, left Fort Pierce last Friday early and travelled to night at Camp Cypress; next day continued our trip and arrived here about noon Saturday. The "Green Corn dance" was just about to end, but I found here about 60 Cow Creek Indians assembled. With the help of Hendry I succeeded well enough, and saved at least 2 or 3 days travelling in hunting them up.

I knew well before and was advised by people who know the Indians very well, that it would not do to let them suspicion any thing [*sic*] about out business, as they are very shay of all that has any thing [*sic*] to do with the U.S. Government. I succeeded to get their number [and] their property (as they always carry with them all their belongings, especially animals (except hogs) when they travel.) Arch. Hendry knew all the grown men by name; but the greatest difficulty is to get their ages, as they do not themselves know that, and often give one age and next day another. I think that I got their ages near enough for all purposes. I know I got their children right enough but the names of the children are impossible to get, by the reason that most of them never name their children; if any white man happens to go along and name them, they may keep that name or change it as they please, when they become grown. Rather than take anything uncertain I take down only a son or daughter in my list.

We finish here to day [*sic*] and I go this afternoon to an Indian camp 8 miles from Fort Pierce:²² to morrow [*sic*] we start

21. This site is located on the western edge of S. Lucie County, which was formed from Brevard County in 1905.

22. This probably was meant to be Fort Drum.

for Okeechobee and Indian City.²³ If all goes well we will reach Fort Lauderdale about Monday the 16th. I expect to finish up the East side about the 25th or 26th depending on the weather.

Here is a great deal of water in the woods, where most of our travelling is done. For 15 solid miles not less than 2 feet of water. We had to walk it all to save our horse.

Although the trip is very rough, I like it. I hope to get their total number *about* correct; but as I stated above names of children and ages will either be missing or somewhat uncertain.

Respectfully
J. O. Fries

Address: Fort Lauderdale until the 25th

Returning to Fort Pierce around noon on July 15th, the exhausted Fries and Hendry caught the evening train for Fort Lauderdale. The settlement on New River was to be their starting point in enumerating the Seminole camps on the eastern side of the Everglades. Before pushing off into the wilderness Fries notified Cheney of the sites he planned to visit.

Fort Lauderdale, Fla., July 16 1900

J. M. Cheney
Supervisor of Census 2nd District
Orlando

Sir

We arrived here yesterday evening and have to day [*sic*] made all preparations for our trip to the Everglades, starting to morrow [*sic*] morning very early. We must have two boats and one pilot and man to row us, it will cost \$3.50 per day. Our trip will be more extended than we first expected, owing to the scattered camps of the Indians; we will have to go to Arch Creek²⁴ and Little River,²⁵ coming out at Miami; we start in at New River,²⁶

23. This probably was meant to be Indian Town.

24. Arch Creek enters the north end of Biscayne Bay, and was named for a natural rock formation several miles from its mouth.

25. Little River is a waterway in northern Dade County. It enters Biscayne Bay at a point midway between the Miami River and Arch Creek.

26. New River is a major flowage from the Everglades basin which penetrates the coastal ridge at Fort Lauderdale. Originally the river's course was southeastward until it emptied into the Atlantic Ocean at a point several miles south of the present man-made inlet.

first, visiting Pine Island²⁷ and Long Key.²⁸

You will probably not hear from us anything before middle of next week, as we will not be able to send any message in the meantime.

I have to day [*sic*] made such good preparations that I hope the best results.

Yours very respectfully
J. O. Fries

It took the Fries party a full five days of hard travelling to cover the twenty-five miles from Fort Lauderdale to Miami, diverting often to find the secluded Indian camps in the wetlands west of the coastal ridge. When they emerged at Miami the ever conscientious Fries notified Cheney of both his success and impending problems in enumerating the Seminoles on the western side of the Glades.

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27. Pine Island is located in Secs. 17, 18, 19, 20, T. 50 S., R. 41 E. in Broward County. It was often mentioned in accounts of the Second Seminole War as a major Indian encampment, and was the site of one engagement in that campaign. George E. Buker, *Swamp Sailors* (Gainesville, 1975), 65-66, 120 (map), 130 (map); Jacob Rhett Motte, *Journey into Wilderness, An Army Surgeon's Account of Life in Camp and Field During the Creek and Seminole Wars, 1836-1838*; James F. Sunderman, ed. (Gainesville, 1963), 235, 305-06. Pine Island was still a primary Seminole settlement at the turn of the century, and had been visited by whites a number of times prior to 1900. William C. Sturtevant, "A Seminole Personal Document," *Tequesta* XVI (1956), 57-59. This site is located approximately four miles northwest of the Hollywood Seminole Reservation.
28. Long Key is located in Secs. 23, 24, 25, 26, T. 50 S., R. 40 E. in Broward County. During the Second Seminole War this group of seven hammock islands was the home of the Seminole leaders Ārepika (Sam Jones) and the Prophet. See John T. Sprague, *The Origin, Progress and Conclusion of the Florida War* (New York, 1848; facsimile ed., Gainesville, 1964), 382-84; Buker, *Swamp Sailors*, 120, 130. In 1898 this site and nearby Pine Island were visited by A. J. Duncan, U. S. Indian inspector, while seeking federal lands upon which to settle the Seminoles. He had the two hammock groups, as well as other known Indian settlements in the area, surveyed by J. O. Fries, acting examiner of surveys for the General Land Office. In his report Duncan unaccountably gave legal descriptions of Pine Island and Long Key which are at variance with their actual locations; moreover, he noted that Long Key was "... located about 4 miles southeast of Pine Island ..." while Fries reported that it was "... about 2 miles west of Pine Island." *A. J. Duncan's Report*, cxxi, ccxxxvii. The important point, however, is that J. O. Fries was quite familiar with the location of Seminole camps along the lower southeast coast of Florida well in advance of the 1900 census.

Miami, Fla., July 21st 1900

J. M. Cheney Esq
 Supervisor Census
 Orlando

Sir

We have just come in from the Everglades after a very hard and rough trip to this place and intend to leave to night [*sic*] again if the weather permits. We go from here to Arch Creek and Cypress Creek, where there are two or three families to look after.²⁹ I have so far succeeded very well, at least to find the number of people and their ages and names but their birth days [*sic*] is impossible to get at, because the Indians do not count their time in months and days, like we do, therefore, they do not know anything about dates; all that must be left blank. I have so far found more people, than people expected or believed.

We will probably be back to Lauderdale next Wednesday and Thursday to Fort Pierce; wherefrom we will forward our papers to you.

It would be of no use to go out at once to the West side of the Everglades, as the Indians are now hunting and hard to find. I propose to leave Titusville on August 7th for Lauderdale. I have made arrangements for two boats and men to handle them and pilot us across. The cost will be \$4.50 per day. We can cross in four days right to the place where the Indians are. Should we go around to Orlando, Tampa and Fort Myers, thence by team about 75 miles, it would cost a great deal more, and we should anyhow be compelled to hire boats to take us along the Indian villages, spaced over 75 miles along the shores of the Indian River.³⁰ From there it will be necessary to go to Shark River near Cape Sable, where a large settlement of Indians recently has been made. I hope you will authorize this cost and let me know as soon

29. Cypress Creek is located north of the New River in present day Broward County. It is unlikely that this was the waterway to which Fries was referring, since it lies well north of his route. Possibly he meant Snake Creek, or the Oleta River as it is now known, where Seminole camps were known to have existed around the turn of the century, Sturtevant, "A Seminole Personal Document," 67, 75.

30. Indian River referred to here was apparently the name given a waterway in the southwest portion of the state, and is not to be confused with the larger east coast waterway. It is possible that Fries was alluding to the flowage of the Everglades which ran about this distance on the west side.

as possible, because the man wishes to build new boats if he is employed.

You will probably receive this letter on Monday, and if you will write me, a letter mailed to Fort Lauderdale will meet me there Wednesday. If you have not already sent the blank sub vouchers, please do so at once, also the information if we can draw our pay for Sundays, as we have to work as hard as any other days on them.

Our trip has been very rough, but we have suffered less from insects than we expected.

Yours very respectfully
J. O. Fries

On August 10, 1900, J. O. Fries left Fort Lauderdale on the final and most arduous phase of his census work. His party was making a direct crossing of the Everglades, still a wild and virtually trackless wilderness known only to the Seminoles and a few white traders. Apparently there was some trepidation at the prospect of such an undertaking, for Fries wrote to Cheney on the eve of their departure: "We are in good health, ready to start and in good hope, although we have received many discouraging advices. I will telegraph to you as often as it will be possible for me to get a message to nearest office. If you receive any from me, you would do me a great favor by forwarding the news to my family, as they have been badly scared by numerous reports of snakes, high water, etc."³¹ The next time that Fries wrote it was from one of the most desolate spots on the Florida peninsula.

Big Cypress, Aug 20th 1900
5 miles East of Fort Shackelford³²

Hon. J. M. Cheney
Supervisor of Census 2nd district

Sir

After a long and tedious trip across the Everglades we at last arrived here yesterday. On the way we met a few Indians, whom we examined. The low water caused this slow trip, but I am sure

31. Fries to Cheney, August 9, 1900, JMCC.

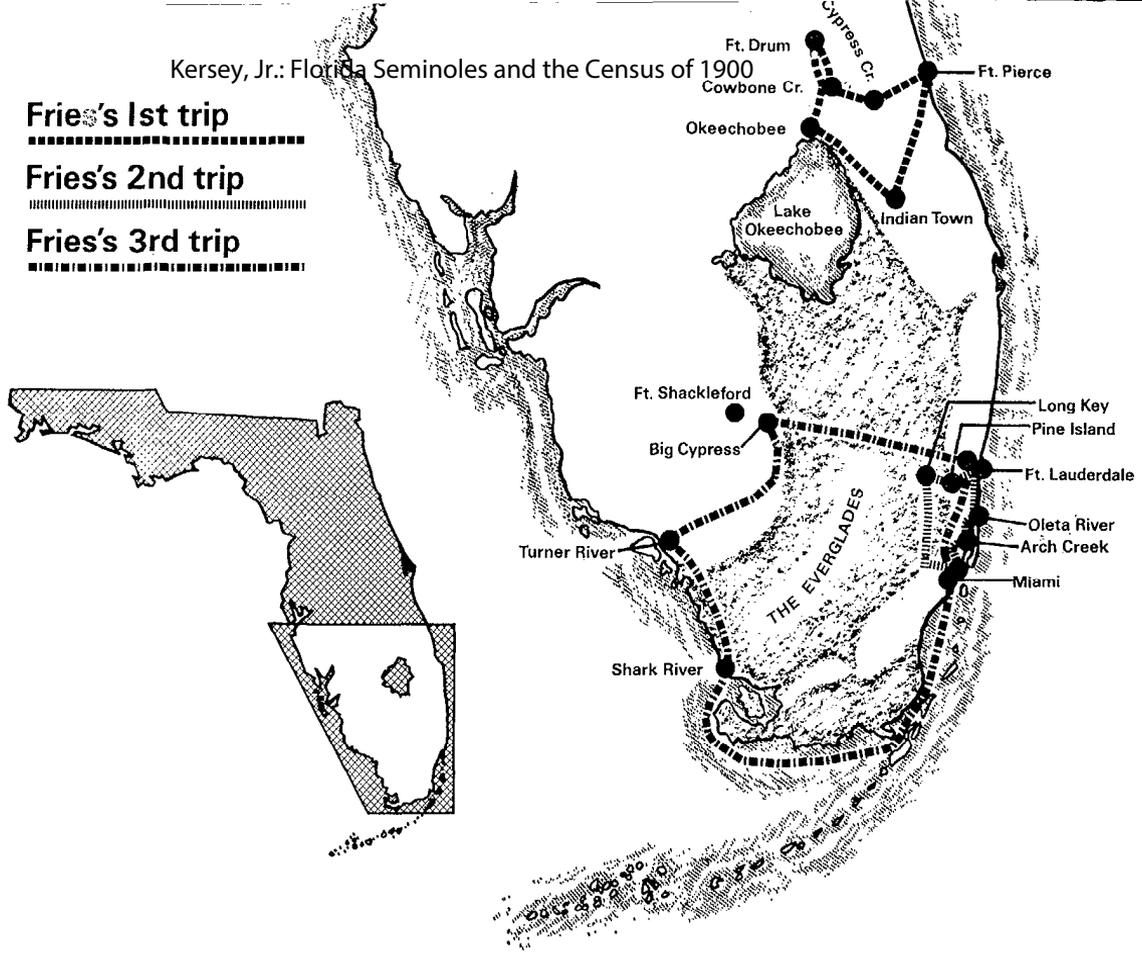
32. Fort Shackelford was a temporary fortification erected during the Third Seminole War. This site is now a part of the Big Cypress Seminole Reservation and is located in Sec. 20. T. 48 S., R. 33 E.

Kersey, Jr.: Florida Seminoles and the Census of 1900

Fries's 1st trip

Fries's 2nd trip

Fries's 3rd trip





J. Otto Fries

Photograph courtesy of the Orange County Historical Society.

we will gain by having come this way. If I had not engaged the extra man, I wrote to you about I hardly believe we could have come over, as in crossing the "backbone", we must continually get overboard and drag our boats across the nearly dry sawgrass.

I found that the Indians here are not so easy to get information from, but very suspicious about my doings. I believe that the merchants at Jupiter have sent them warnings, that I am after their lands. I have no proof, but believe so.

I expect to be around here 4 or 5 days, have one trip to make about 20 miles north, and one 10 miles west from here, before we leave for Chuckaluskee River and thence to Shark River.³³ While I hope to be able to make the trip in the allotted time, I still would ask you to get an extension of at most 10 days. You mentioned first that they would allow me 90 days, I think therefore it is not unfair to ask for 60 in all.

I am trying to get as correct count as can be done, and therefore take a little more time than other would do. I compare my notes carefully with storekeepers and hunters around the Everglades.

I send you to day [*sic*] a telegram, but am not at all sure if either that or this letter will reach you.

We all have good health, but have suffered a great deal from heat and bad water to drink. That we could cross the Glades in summertime has caused a great deal of astonishment.

I am getting a great deal of information, which I think will be of value for U.S. Government, when it soon will be compelled to take up the question of these poor Indians. I will of course submit these as an addition to my report.

Very respectfully

J. O. Fries

Sixteen days later a relieved Cheney received a telegram from Miami with the message: "Safely arrived here on road to Lauderdale. Thursday to Titusville. Hard trip, results fair, all well, in-

33. Chuckaluskee River and Shark River are waterways which enter Florida Bay in the Everglades and Ten Thousand Islands region. Chuckaluskee River was the old name of Turner River where a permanent Seminole camp was known to exist well into the present century. For further information on this region, see Charlton Tebeau, *Florida's Last Frontier* (Miami, revised ed., 1966), 45, 97.

form family, J. O. Fries"³⁴ This was followed the next day with another letter from Fries.

Lauderdale, Fla., Sept. 5 1900

J. M. Cheney, Esq
Orlando

Dear Sir

After a very hard and tough trip we have ended our long travel of about 400 miles. Mr Hendry leaves to day [*sic*] for his home, but I will not go before to morrow [*sic*] as I have all things to straighten up here.

I am absolutely sure that we have the numbers of the Indians *as near correct* as can be done under the circumstances. I do not know or have heard of a single one (either man, woman or child) omitted and hardly think there is one. I have I believe 346 on my list.

I am very tired and exhausted and do not write much to day [*sic*]. In the report I am going to send with my list (probably next Friday) I will give a full history of our travels also a report of all other circumstances that may be of interest.

Will wire you from Titusville.

Yours respectfully
J. O. Fries

In a subsequent communication Fries confirmed that the actual number of Seminoles enumerated was 339, which he felt represented practically all of them.³⁵ As with previous census tabulations there were minor discrepancies between the final published figures and those reported by the enumerators, perhaps owing to the elimination of Negroes living among the Indians—a question which Fries himself had raised when working among the Cow Creeks.³⁶ Nevertheless, the 1900 census tabulation of Seminoles appears to be the first accurate one in the modern era of the tribe.

On September 8, 1900, Fries wrote to Cheney submitting his final reports with explanatory notes and expense accounts, and his

34. Fries to Cheney (telegram), September 4, 1900, JMCC.

35. *Ibid.*, September 21, 1900, JMCC.

36. *Ibid.*, July 6, 1900, JMCC.

request that his appointment as special agent be cancelled.³⁷ Although it would take another month to clean up loose ends, such as making corrections requested by the Washington office, and securing approval for Sunday work compensation, the Seminole census of 1900 was at an end.

At this point it is appropriate to ask: What is the significance of the Fries-Cheney correspondence in the context of Florida history? There is a growing opinion that these documents, heretofore unknown to most scholars, add a valuable dimension to the limited literature on an important transitional area in Seminole history.³⁸ Primarily, the letters provide a rich personal account by dedicated individuals attempting to establish a precise figure on the Indian population. In the process they further confirmed the dispersion of the Seminole bands, as well as the location of some specific encampments at a particular point in time, i.e., 1900. Fries's observations about the Indians whom they encountered also affirmed certain Seminole cultural continuities, such as their child naming practices, mobility of camp life, hunting patterns, and the persistent significance of the Green Corn Dance. Furthermore, his comments concerning the relationships of blacks in the Cow Creek band were the most informative since MacCauley addressed that issue two decades earlier.³⁹ In fact, Fries may have been witnessing the last vestige of a century-old tie between blacks' and Indians in the state. These letters also document the existence of various historical personages, both white and Indian, through the roles they played in the census. If the original enumeration schedules had been preserved, they would have formed the basis for an interesting comparison with

37. *Ibid.*, September 8, 1900, JMCC.

38. The importance of this transitional period in Seminole history is discussed in several works, most notably: William C. Sturtevant, "Creek into Seminole," in *North American Indians in Historical Perspective*, E. B. Leacock and N. O. Lurie, eds. (New York, 1971), 111-17; Charles Fairbanks, "The Ethno-Archeology of the Florida Seminoles," in *TACACHALE: Essays on the Indians of Florida and Southeastern Georgia during the Historic Period*, Jerald T. Milanich and Samuel Proctor, eds. (Gainesville, 1978), 187-89; Harry A. Kersey, Jr., *Pelts, Plumes and Hides: White Traders Among the Seminole Indians, 1870-1930* (Gainesville, 1975); Charles H. Coe, *Red Patriots: The Story of the Seminoles* (Cincinnati, 1898).

39. MacCauley, "The Seminole Indians of Florida," 478, 490, 526.

the schedules gathered in 1880 by MacCauley, et al.⁴⁰ The same is true of Fries's explanatory notes accompanying the schedules which could have been compared with MacCauley's 1880 report to the Smithsonian Institution; historians can only mourn the loss of Fries's notes. Even so, the continued development of this collection leading to its eventual publication with maps and textual notes, will be a great service for scholars seeking to fill the voids in this period of Florida and Seminole history.

40. Bureau of the Census to H. A. Kersey, Jr., January 2, 1980. This communication co-ed the probable destruction of special enumeration schedules following the compilation of statistics for the 1900 census.