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FORMATION OF THE STATE OF FLORIDA INDIAN RESERVATION

by JAMES M. COVINGTON

IN Florida there are four reservations for Indians— three established by the federal government and one by the state of Florida. The state reservation was established through the efforts of white friends of the Seminoles, a representative from a national organization, several politicians, the federal Indian agent in Florida, and a friendly governor. Ever since the end of the Third Seminole War in 1858, some whites tried to assist the few Indians remaining in the state. Under the terms of the Florida Constitution written in 1868, the Seminoles were entitled to elect one person to the state house of representatives and one to the state senate, but since no one informed the Indians about this right, they held no elections and the provision was dropped in the Constitution of 1885.¹ On June 8, 1891, under pressure from a few whites, the Florida legislature authorized the trustees of the Board of Internal Improvements to set aside a tract of land no greater than 5,000 acres for the Indians.² A commission composed of three men was appointed to select the land, but since the Indians were scattered over a vast expanse of southern Florida, the commission felt that any attempt to force them on to a reservation would be foolish, if not impossible. Therefore the commission voted to acquire land on which the Indians had already settled. However no reservation was selected since there were no funds available to locate and survey such lands.³

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1. Section Seven, Article XVI, Constitution of Florida, 1868, as printed in Harry B. Skillman, comp. and ed., *The Compiled General Laws of Florida*, 12 vols. (Atlanta, 1928), V, 4970.
2. *Laws of Florida*, 1891, 216.
3. Report of James A. Ingraham to William B. Bloxham as copied in letter of special agent Lorenzo Creel to commissioner of Indian Affairs, Robert Valentine, March 29, 1911, 27957-1911, Letters Received, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives, Washington (hereinafter BIA).

On April 27, 1897, the commission meeting at St. Augustine recommended the acquisition of 5,000 acres at Long Key in the Everglades for a reservation. The land was deemed suitable for agriculture, accessible by canoe, and sufficiently distant from white settlement to be safe from "encroachment." However, no action was taken on this recommendation.⁴

In 1899, an organization known as the Friends of the Seminole Indians was formed at Kissimmee, and it began pushing a program aimed at assisting the Indians. The founders of the organization included Bishop William C. Gray, Francis Hendry, P. A. Vans Agnew, Indian Agent Jacob Brecht, James M. Willson, Jr., and his wife, Minnie Moore-Willson. A tract of eighty acres was purchased for \$40,000 for use by a Muskogee-speaking band, but the Indians would not occupy the site. When the officers of the organization had tried to purchase the actual camping sites of the Indians, they found the price asked by land companies to be prohibitive. Acting under pressure from Friends of the Seminole Indians, the Florida legislature on May 29, 1899, set aside thirty-six townships which included Fort Shackleford and adjacent land on the western edge of the Everglades. According to A. J. Angle, chairman of the House Indian Affairs Committee in 1911, most of this land had earlier been sold to individuals and corporations, and the trustees of the Internal Improvement Fund sold the remainder claiming that the legislature had no authority to make such a grant.⁵ Several days later, on June 1, 1899, the state authorized \$500 for two successive years to establish an industrial school for the Seminoles in Brevard County, but since no more money was made available, the school never progressed beyond the planning stage.⁶ The passage of these two measures was intended to convince persons interested in the Seminoles that the state was doing something for them, but in fact such measures were of little benefit to the Indians.

Although the federal government owned some scattered 23,000 acres lying west of the Everglades that had been purchased for the use of the Indians, it was water-logged and gen-

4. Ibid.

5. Charles F. Nesler, February 23, 1904, in File 176F2-1909, BIA; *Laws of Florida*, 1899, 149; *Florida House Journal*, 1911, 1923-24.

6. *Laws of Florida*, 1899, 148.

erally unfertile, and it would not be suitable for cultivation until drainage lowered the water table. In the winter of 1910-1911 Lorenzo Creel, special agent to the Seminoles in Florida, was ordered to make a thorough investigation of Indian lands. He described the federal property as being "sandy and infertile, sour and unproductive; it seemed worthless for agricultural purposes."⁷ When it was purchased, a few Indians had been living on several small hammocks scattered about the prairie, but they had left the area, and none were there in 1911.

While in Florida Creel met with former Governor William S. Jennings, who was then attorney for the Everglades Land Sales Company. Since the land in alternate sections lying to the north of the reservation had been sold by the state to land companies that had sub-divided the property into five- and ten-acre tracts to sell to individual owners at prices ranging from \$24.00 to \$60.00 per acre, Jennings did not want any more land preserved for the Indians. In fact he believed that the Indians, who had signed a treaty in 1833 to go to Oklahoma, had no rights in Florida either as citizens or as wards of the government.⁸ With the digging of drainage canals near Fort Shackleford, the lands were expected to double in value, and from the white viewpoint they would be too valuable to use for an Indian reservation.

On June 28, 1911, President William Howard Taft, by Executive Order, set aside tracts of land near Dania and in Collier and Martin counties for the use of the Seminoles.⁹ These tracts had been reserved for the Indians as a result of an earlier investigation and exhaustive report made in 1898 by Indian Inspector Andrew J. Duncan.¹⁰ The addition of these smaller reservations should have satisfied the Friends of the Seminole Indians, but none of the land seemed acceptable to the Indians. The goal of the Friends and other organizations trying to help the Indians appears to have been a state reservation rather than one provided by the federal government. These people knew

7. Creel to commissioner of Indian Affairs, March 29, 1911, 27957-1911, BIA

8. *Ibid.*

9. *Presidential Executive Orders*, Compiled by Works Progress Administration Historical Records Survey, 2 vols. (New York, 1944), I, 122.

10. Charles H. Coe, *Red Patriots: The Story of the Seminoles* (Cincinnati, 1899; facsimile edition, Gainesville, 1974), 256. Duncan was the brother-in-law of President William McKinley.

that only about twenty per cent of the available land was fit for agriculture and about thirty per cent for grazing; the rest was worthless due to high water during the summer. They also wanted the state to reserve land for the Indians that would be safe from white encroachment. They hoped that federal officials would establish a school and demonstration farm on a federal reservation that would be conducted by a Creek versed in modern agriculture methods. Sooner or later, the state land, used at first as a hunting preserve, would be taken over by the federal government and the Indians trained by the agricultural teacher would make use of sites in the reserve.

Prime movers in the drive to obtain a state reservation for the Seminoles were James Willson, Jr., a Kissimmee real estate man, and his wife, Minnie Moore-Willson, who wrote the popular *The Seminoles of Florida* published in 1896. Several Muskogee-speakers often visited in their home in Kissimmee, and the Willsons were willing to devote time and money to aid their Indian friends. Success for the state reservation seemed near when a bill, introduced into the state legislature by Representative Louis A. Hendry of Fort Myers to set aside fifteen townships in Monroe County, passed the house by a vote of thirty-seven to three on May 26, 1911. However, it failed to receive any action beyond introduction in the senate.¹¹

Two years later another bill providing for a reservation of 100,000 acres passed the house on May 23, 1913, by a vote of forty-five to one and the senate on June 4 by twenty-three to zero, but was vetoed by Governor Park Trammell on the following day, June 5, 1913.¹² The governor gave as his reasons for the action, the unfairness of an outright gift of 235,000 acres to 400 Indians when there were 800,000 persons living in Florida. In addition, Trammell stated that private ownership of the land was needed so that drainage taxes could be collected and that if the Indians needed a reservation, the federal government should relinquish part of the 350,000 acres that it owned in Florida.¹³ The veto was sustained by a vote of nine yeas to forty-three nays. In 1915 Augustus M. Wilson of Myakka proposed a

11. *Florida House Journal*, 1911, 1925-26; *Florida Senate Journal*, 1911, 1567.

12. *Florida House Journal*, 1913, 1747; *Florida Senate Journal*, 1913, 2233.

13. *Florida House Journal*, 1913, 2578-80; some time later a citizen purchased 60,000 acres of this desired tract for forty-two cents an acre.

similar measure, but it never received enough support to reach the floor of either the house or the senate.

In 1916 the Willsons secured the help of the Indian Rights Association, a Philadelphia-based organization that had been established in 1882.¹⁴ Herbert Welsh was the leader of the Association that became the major non-governmental unit dedicated to the cause of helping the American Indian.¹⁵ It was mainly a lobbying instrument, but often government officials turned to the Indian Rights Association for advice and recommendations for jobs in the Indian Bureau. Welsh's assistant and recording secretary for many years was Mathew Sniffen, who spent much of his time working in the field.

In 1887, the Indian Rights Association helped write and lobby through Congress the General Allotment, or Dawes Act which provided for the division of reservations into 160-acre tracts and the sale of some land to white purchasers. Under terms of the act, many reservations were dissolved and the Indians lost much of the land that had been allotted to them.¹⁶ Commissioner of Indian Affairs John Collier later called the Allotment Act legislation that had "deprived [the Indians] of vast quantities of property and created a class of landless paupers who depended upon the federal government."¹⁷ By 1916, the Indian Rights Association, realizing the folly of its 1887 work, was trying to create more reservations instead of destroying them.

In 1916, while on a field trip to investigate conditions among the Seminoles, Sniffen met many of the Floridians who wanted to help the Seminoles. Coming by boat from Philadelphia to

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14. Henry E. Fritz, *The Movement for Indian, Assimilation, 1860-1890* (Philadelphia, 1963), 199-200. William Welsh, Sr., father of William, had been the first chairman of the Board of Indian Commissioners, the regulatory inspection agency overseeing operations of the Office of Indian Affairs.
 15. For information concerning the Indian Rights Association, see Francis P. Prucha, *American Indian Policy in Crisis: Christian Reformers and the Indian, 1865-1900* (Norman, 1976), 138-43; Jack T. Ericson, ed., *A Guide to Microfilm Edition, Indian Rights Association Papers, 1864-1973* (Glen Rock, N.J., 1975), 1-5.
 16. See essay by Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., in Jane F. Smith and Robert Kvasnicka, eds. *Indian-White Relations: A Persistent Paradox* (Washington, 1976), 83-85; Benay Blend, "The Indian Rights Association, the Allotment Policy and the Five Civilized Tribes, 1923-1936," *American Indian Quarterly*, VII (Spring 1983), 68-69.
 17. Kenneth R. Philp, *John Collier's Crusade for Indian Reform, 1920-1954* (Tucson, 1977), 127.

Jacksonville, he visited St. Augustine where he talked with De-Witt Webb, who had been physician to the western Indian prisoners in the 1870s when they were incarcerated in Fort Marion, now the Castillo de San Marcos.¹⁸ He also met with James Ingraham, chairman of the 1891 reservation selection commission.¹⁹ While at Jacksonville, attorney Vans Agnew, originally from Kissimmee, gave Sniffen a copy of the Indian land measure that had been vetoed by Governor Trammell. Before going into the Everglades and Big Cypress Swamp, Sniffen met James and Minnie Moore-Willson at Kissimmee. Leaving there, he and his companions, agent Lucien Spencer, Joseph Elkinton, and Billy Bowlegs III, went into the Big Cypress Swamp in search of the Indian camps. Fleas, red bugs, and water proved to be as great obstacles to their journey as the elusive Seminoles. Sniffen reported that the some 600 Indians scattered in thirty-two camps were in a precarious economic situation for there was little demand any longer for either alligator hides or bird plumes. His report appeared in a publication of the Indian Bights Association.²⁰

In planning her campaign to secure a state reservation for the Seminoles, Minnie Moore-Willson feared opposition from some prominent people in Florida. These included May Mann Jennings, president of the Florida Federation of Women's Clubs and wife of the former governor. Moore-Willson alleged that Governor Jennings had acquired 100,000 acres of land at thirty cents an acre and wanted even more. Thus, if the Indians left Florida, lands designated for them could be made available to land companies in which he had an interest.²¹ In 1915 when Mrs. Moore-Willson had written in a publication of the Florida Federation of Women's Clubs a criticism of the state's position on Indian policy, she was told that henceforth all statements on the Seminoles would have to be cleared by Ivy Cromartie Strana-

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18. For an account of Indian prisoners at Fort Marion, see Karen D. Petersen, *Plains Indian Art from Fort Marion* (Norman, 1971), 3-20.
 19. Matthew Sniffen to Herbert Welsh, February 1, 1916, roll 30, Indian Rights Association Papers, Pennsylvania Historical Society, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (hereinafter cited as IRA.)
 20. Matthew K. Sniffen, "Florida's Obligation to the Seminole Indians: A Plea for Justice," *Indian Rights Association*, No. 111, 2nd series (February 20, 1917), 1-8.
 21. Minnie Moore-Willson to Joseph Elkinton, March 15, 1916, roll 30, IRA.

han, chairman of the clubs Seminole Indian committee.²² Despite pressure to resign from the Indian committee, Mrs. Moore-Willson remained but directed the main thrust of her views in areas where she could not be controlled by Mrs. Jennings or Mrs. Stranahan.²³ Actually, Mrs. Jennings testified before a congressional committee in 1917 that she was angry that Governor Trammell had vetoed the bill and that she supported a state reservation. She did admit that some Floridians felt that "some of the large land interests in the State are involved in the non-passage of the bill."²⁴ Another Moore-Willson foe seemed to be Congressman William J. Sears, a member of the House Indian Committee, who was eager to support a bill providing for another federal reservation in Florida.²⁵ Moore-Willson should not have regarded Sears as an enemy for he came from Kissimmee and had been on the city council and mayor. The Willsons, however, were concerned that he would use the reservation idea for his own political advantage. Mrs. Moore-Willson believed that there were others on the state level who pretended to be friends of the Indians but who really either "lost" bills in committee or helped push measures that really gave the Indians nothing.

First, and perhaps the most important goal in the preliminary planning stage in 1916, was to try to get Governor-elect Sidney J. Catts interested in the Indians. Representing almost a complete break with his past political policies, he seemed to be

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22. Harry A. Kersey, Jr., "Private Societies and the Maintenance of Seminole Tribal Integrity, 1899-1957," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, LVI (January 1978), 307-88; Moore-Willson to Ivy Stranahan, January 7, 1917, roll 32, IRA.
 23. May Mann Jennings to Moore-Willson, May 12, 1915, Minnie Moore-Willson Collection, Otto G. Richter Library, University of Miami, Coral Gables, Florida. In her letter, Jennings stated that obtaining worthless land would discourage the legislature from giving the Indians better acreage in the future. It was more desirable to decide what was wanted and to keep asking for it until it was obtained. Looking at the results later, Mrs. Jennings was correct; Moore-Willson, not understanding the situation, would have obtained less valuable land.
 24. Testimony of May Mann Jennings, *Conditions of the Florida Seminoles*, Hearings before the Committee on Investigation of the Indian Service, House of Representatives, 65th Cong., 1st sess., March 12-14, 1917, 100.
 25. *Ibid.*, 12-14, 95-96. Sears wanted more land and money for the Seminoles. In March 1917, when the House of Representatives committee had a meeting in St. Augustine, it was felt that most of the members desired a small reservation for the Indians.

a most suitable official to help the Indians.²⁶ Catts showed great loyalty to those who had helped him get elected, and he appointed several relatives and close friends to high positions. Since her husband had worked for Catts, Mrs. Moore-Willson suggested that Sniffen write him a letter.²⁷ In reply, Catts informed Sniffen that "we need to do something about these Indians."²⁸ Catts planned to take the matter up with the Willsons, who, according to Sniffen, hoped to have a bill introduced in the upcoming (1917) legislature. Catts asked for more information from Sniffen and promised to study the matter. At this Point, Catts was in favor of either a federal reservation or federal assistance, as he stated in letters to Welsh and Sniffen. However, after a conversation with James Willson on February 21, 1917, the governor seemed ready to sign any deeds to Indian land when it was selected and would call a meeting of the Board of Internal Improvements for approval of this action.²⁹

With Catts's support assured, it was necessary now to apply pressure on Bureau of Indian Affairs officials in Washington so that they would not oppose the proposed reservation. Lucien Spencer, the agent to the Seminoles, was away serving as chaplain in the Florida National Guard on the Mexican border from the summer of 1916 to March 1917, but he promised the support both of his temporary replacement and himself when he returned by March 1, 1917.³⁰ Cato Sells, United States Commissioner of Indian Affairs, when contacted by Governor Catts, offered assistance in securing "additional land for our needy Indians."³¹ Within a short time Spencer and W. S. Coleman, his replacement associate, would be advised by Washington that they should cooperate as much as possible in getting the bill through the Florida legislature but only if assistance was requested by persons in Florida.³² Writing from Texas, Spencer

26. For an account of the patronage of Catts, see Wayne Flynt, *Cracker Messiah: Governor Sidney J. Catts of Florida* (Baton Rouge, 1977), 108, 111; *Tampa Daily Times*, March 10, 1917; David R. Colburn and Richard K. Scher, *Florida's Gubernatorial Politics in the Twentieth Century* (Tallahassee, 1980), 136-37.

27. Moore-Willson to Sniffen, January 15, 1917, IRA.

28. Catts to Sniffen, February 5, 1917, IRA.

29. *Ibid.*, February 13, 1917, IRA; Catts to Welsh, February 12, 1917, IRA.

30. Lucien Spencer to Sniffen, February 28, 1917, IRA.

31. Cato Sells to Catts, March 17, 1917, IRA.

32. Sells to W. S. Coleman, March 1, 1917, IRA.

advised Coleman to keep in contact with James Willson and to keep him on the right track for "he needs a balance wheel in regard to Indian matters."³³ Sniffen urged Catts to ask that Coleman and Spencer appear before him and the legislature.³⁴

A major step was taken when Governor Catts recommended in his message to the legislature on April 3, 1917, that the Seminoles be given a reservation "to cause them to be in comfort in perpetuity."³⁵ In many instances, legislators did not write proposed laws themselves but permitted outside groups or individuals to draft the initial proposals. Then the lawmakers could make adjustments after the proposal had been sent to committee or during debate on the floors of the chambers. The proposed reservation bill had to be discussed by Spencer, the Willsons, and Sniffen, and then it would be written by Milton Pledger, an attorney from Kissimmee. Next, Representative Nathan C. Bryan from the Kissimmee district was invited to join in the discussions. Since he was the representative from the district he would be the appropriate person to introduce the bill. It was Bryan who wired Cato Sells, commissioner of Indian Affairs on March 22, 1917, requesting the appearance of Spencer before the Florida legislature. He was likely the one who also convinced the commissioner to change his mind since, on March 1, 1917, Sells had written Spencer that it was better to stay out of state politics.³⁶

In order to help steer the bill through the legislature, Sniffen arrived from Philadelphia to assist with final arrangements for the Tallahassee session. Present at the first meeting, probably during the third week of March 1917, in Kissimmee were the Willsons, Pledger, Sniffen, and two others. Sniffen noted that no bill had yet been written. The next day Pledger, the Willsons,

33. Spencer to Coleman, March 4, 1917, IRA.

34. Sniffen to Catts, March 15, 1917, IRA.

35. Catts to Sniffen, March 17, 1917, IRA. In his message, Catts recommended that 10,000 acres of public land be acquired as a reservation near Moore Haven because James Moore (developer of Moore Haven) was a friend of the Indians. See "Governor's Message," *Florida House Journal*, 1917, 27. Actually Moore had sold his interest in Moore Haven in 1916, but he may have been trying to use his influence to divide DeSoto County. Alfred J. Hanna and Kathryn A. Hanna, *Lake Okechobee: Wellspring of the Everglades* (Indianapolis, 1948), 246-49.

36. James Willson to Sniffen, March 22, 1917, IRA.

and Sniffen drafted a tentative measure that was discussed with Congressman Sears who, during the fall 1916 session of Congress, had introduced a bill to purchase land for the Seminoles. On the way back to Jacksonville, Sniffen stopped at St. Augustine where he conferred with James Ingraham and Dewitt Webb whom he had met on his 1916 trip.³⁷

After receiving instructions to assist in the legislative hearings for the bill, Seminole Agent Spencer left Miami on March 29 and proceeded by train to Jacksonville where he joined Sniffen and made plans for the meeting of the legislature and passage of the Indian bill. While on the train from Jacksonville to Tallahassee, Spencer met Carey A. Hardee, speaker of the house (later governor of Florida, 1921-1925), who discussed the Seminole matter with him. Hardee asked Spencer to recommend the names of some members of the legislature who "could act intelligently on the Indian committee."³⁸ Of the list of six submitted by Spencer, Hardee appointed four.

James Willson recommended that the Reverend S. W. Lawler, a Methodist minister at Tallahassee, be present to introduce Sniffen and Spencer to Governor Catts who was also a Baptist minister. Lawler had moved from Kissimmee to Tallahassee and was a good friend of both Catts and the Seminole Indians. On March 30 Lawler accompanied Sniffen and Spencer to the office of the governor where he introduced them and then departed.³⁹ The governor told his two visitors about his plan for a reservation of 10,000 acres for the Indians to be located west of Moore Haven. Sniffen and Spencer then informed the governor that in their opinion six townships or 100,000 acres would be needed in an area that whites would neither desire nor find useful. Catts finally agreed to the larger reservation, inviting Sniffen and Spencer to return on April 4.⁴⁰

37. Sniffen to Welsh, March 30, 1917, IRA.

38. *Ibid.*, April 1, 1917, IRA. House committee members included W. G. Tilghman, Putnam County, chairman; N. C. Bryan, Osceola County; F. L. Woodruff, Orange County; and J. M. Swain, St. Lucie County. Sniffen's letter does not indicate his choices.

39. Willson to Sniffen, March 30, 1917, IRA.

40. Sniffen to Willson, March 31, 1917, IRA. In the letter written on March 31, 1917, Sniffen said that he and Spencer had met with Catts from 3:30 to 4:00 P.M. earlier that day, but in a letter dated May 14, 1917, from Spencer to Commissioner Sells, the date is given as March 30 and the time

In their first drafting of the bill, the group meeting in Kissimmee had planned the creation of a state reservation only if Congress appropriated sufficient funds for proper development of the site. Spencer, however, recommended that the land be secured first to be followed by a request for federal funds and acquisition.

Sniffen rewrote the bill, making changes that had been recommended by Catts, and when he and Spencer returned to the governor's office on April 4, Catts expressed his full support for the proposed measure.⁴¹ After Catts had given his approval Nathan C. Bryan introduced House Bill 32 on April 4, and James A. Alexander of DeLand sponsored Senate Bill 19 at the same time.⁴² Alexander, who had attended Cumberland Law School with Catts, had friendly relations both with the governor and other senators.

When the House Committee on Indian Affairs met on April 10, Sniffen and Spencer testified as to the implications of the bill. Amos Lewis from Marianna questioned the authority of the legislature to grant land that already was under the jurisdiction of the Internal Improvements Board for an Indian reservation. The matter was referred to the attorney-general's office for a ruling, and Catts's secretary helped speed that action. The decision, rendered on the same day by Attorney-General Thomas F. West, was favorable. The following day, April 11, the committee gave its approval to the measure by a vote of five to one; Lewis cast the one negative vote. Upon a request from Representative Arthur Gomez of Key West, the measure was referred back to committee.⁴³

At this point, Sniffen had to return to Philadelphia, and James Willson arrived in Tallahassee to take his place. Although the Indian Rights Association had offered to pay Willson's way from Kissimmee, he would not accept the money.⁴⁴ James Moore, Moore Haven real estate developer, was also in Tallahas-

as being in the morning (fn. 46). Sniffen's letter should be considered to be more reliable for it was written on or near the meeting date, and Spencer's letter as incorrect as to the date if not time of the meeting.

41. Sniffen to Willson, April 8, 1917, IRA.

42. *Florida Senate Journal*, 1917, 138; *Florida House Journal*, 1917, 137.

43. *Florida House Journal*, 1917, 308-09.

44. Sniffen to Alexander Brown, April 9, 1917, IRA.

see at the time, and he was urged to use his considerable influence on behalf of the measure. Claude Johnson, correspondent of the Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, was also contacted, and he provided favorable publicity.⁴⁵

Some limited opposition appeared when the committees received the bill. Monroe County Senator J. N. Fogarty and Representatives Gomez and John Sawyer had been instructed by their board of county commissioners to oppose the bill. The commissioners were angry because they had not been consulted on the bill. Hoping to soften the opposition, Willson took full blame for the drafting of the measure. He and Spencer prepared a paper explaining the need for an Indian reservation and sent it to the Monroe commissioners. They were asking that if their position was found to be fair and beneficial to Monroe County, the board should change its instructions. After reading the paper, the commissioners agreed with its point of view and urged their legislators to work for the passage of the measure.⁴⁶

The careful preparation made by the supporters of the bill proved to be of great value when the committees of the house and senate began debate on the measure. Sniffen and Spencer testified before the Senate Judiciary B committee on April 10, 1917, and the matter was then referred to a sub-committee that was to meet with the Internal Improvements Board. During that interval the attorney-general would study the Indian land issue. At the Internal Improvements Board hearing, Willson noted that only ten per cent of the reservation was good for anything but hunting and fishing. The Reverend Lawler reduced that figure to five per cent when he testified.⁴⁷ It was announced at this hearing that the land would have little value for whites; there were no plans for its use except as an Indian reservation. The board supported the request, and after the Senate sub-committee received the commissioners' unanimous approval of the bill it made its positive recommendation on May 1. The measure was then ready for a vote by the senate. Somehow the bill was not placed on the senate calendar and no one seemed to be able to locate it. After a frantic search the measure

45. Willson to Sniffen, April 11, 1917, IRA.

46. Spencer to Sells, May 14, 1917, IRA.

47. Willson to Sniffen, April 21, 1917, IRA.

was found. It was then placed on the senate calendar, and was passed on May 8 by a vote of twenty-seven to zero.⁴⁸ In the house, the bill was sent to the Committee of Indian Affairs where it received a favorable vote of five to one on April 11, 1917. Chairman W. G. Tilghman then placed it on the house calendar for a second reading. After the third reading on May 2, the bill passed the house by a vote of forty-seven to zero.⁴⁹

Governor Catts signed the measure into law on May 9, 1917. Sniffen, Willson, and Spencer were present at the signing ceremony. Catts presented Mrs. Minnie Moore-Willson with the gold pen which he had used in recognition of her work during the past twenty years.⁵⁰ The success of the operation was due to the dedication of the Willsons, the political astuteness and personal charm of Sniffen, and Spencer's knowledge of state and national politics.

The trustees of the Internal Improvement Fund transferred 99,200 acres in Monroe County to the Board of Commissioners of State Institutions (Florida cabinet) for the perpetual use and benefit of the Seminole Indians. Roy Nash, visiting the reservation in 1930, saw little agricultural value in the site due to the excessive rainfall, but it was good for hunting and fishing.⁵¹ Few Indians used the area; they did not want to be confined to a reservation, and the state was not willing to spend much money on it. In 1935 the land was exchanged for 104,000 acres in Broward and Palm Beach counties so that Everglades National Park could be created. This new reservation land did have some value as a result of oil and gas leases granted in 1955 and limited grazing and hunting activities, but the release of water from flood control areas to the north caused considerable damage to the deer and other wild life.⁵²

Finally it should be noted that nowhere during the entire proceeding had the Indians been consulted as to the value or use of the proposed reservation. White friends thought they

48. *Florida Senate Journal*, 1917, 996-97.

49. *Florida House Journal*, 1917, 1050.

50. *Jacksonville Florida Times-Union*, May 10, 1917; *Laws of Florida*, 1917, I, 131-32.

51. U. S. Congress, Senate, *Survey of the Seminole Indians of Florida*, Senate Docs. 314, 71st Cong., 3rd sess., 57-59.

52. *Tampa Morning Tribune*, July 20, 1932. See also, *ibid.*, July 21, 1982.

could help the Seminoles by providing them with a reservation, but due to local opposition it was placed in an area thought to have little value to the white man and there was little money for upkeep. Had either the federal government or the state of Florida been willing to purchase good agricultural land the reservation would have been more suitable. The white friends of the Indians had accepted land where only hunting and fishing subsistence activities would be possible. Even this was for a limited period of time; construction of the Tamiami Trail in the 1920s changed completely the nature of the area, and the advent of the automobile age ended its isolation.