

Minnie and Ivy: Minnie Moore-Willson, Ivy Stranahan, and Seminole Reform in Early Twentieth Century Florida

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MINNIE AND IVY: MINNIE MOORE-WILLSON, IVY STRANAHAN, AND SEMINOLE
REFORM IN EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY FLORIDA

by

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B.A. University of Florida, 2009

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ABSTRACT

During an era when the Seminoles were little regarded in Florida, despite mass Indian reform nationwide, Minnie Moore-Willson of Kissimmee and Ivy Stranahan of Fort Lauderdale attempted to bring reform to the state. Living amongst members of the tribe, both women used their familiarity with Seminole life and practices, as well as their political and social connections, to enact change for the tribe. This was done, respectively, through the creation of reservations and attempting to increase educational and vocational opportunities for tribe members. This thesis examines the lives and activism of Minnie Moore-Willson and Ivy Stranahan over the first two decades of the twentieth century and details their attempts to reform federal and state policies towards Seminoles in Florida. It illustrates the relationships of the women with each other, the Seminoles, and political power brokers in early twentieth century Florida, and attempts to determine their motivations. In doing so, the thesis argues that, though often ignored in the historiography of Seminoles in Florida, these women served as key figures in enacting Seminole-related reforms during the era. Examining Moore-Willson and Stranahan's lives and works affords a greater understanding of how non-Seminole women conceptualized and carried out Florida reform efforts and provides a new perspective for evaluating the early stages of Florida Seminole reform and comparable efforts in other areas of the United States.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 1: A BRIEF HISTORY OF SEMINOLES IN FLORIDA AND WHITE PERCEPTIONS OF SEMINOLES IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY	20
CHAPTER 2: MINNIE MOORE-WILLSON AND THE FIGHT TO “SAVE” THE SEMINOLES	38
CHAPTER 3: IVY STRANAHAN, THE FLORIDA FEDERATION OF WOMEN’S CLUBS, AND THE OTHER SIDE OF FLORIDA INDIAN REFORM.....	62
CONCLUSION.....	81
REFERENCES	88

INTRODUCTION

On May 20th, 1917 Florida Governor Sidney J. Catts signed into law an Act establishing the State Seminole Indian Reservation in Monroe County.¹ The Seminole Land Bill, as it was known, set aside 99,200 acres for the use and residence of the Seminole Indians concentrated north of the Shark River (in modern-day Monroe County) and stretched in to the Ten Thousand Islands, just off of the coast of southwest Florida. The law dismayed some reformers advocating for the allotment of cultivable Seminole lands, as the land sat below sea level and contained soil not entirely conducive to farming. For the first time in the history of the State of Florida however, land set aside for Indian use would be put in the hands of Seminole Indians, limiting federal control of the group and the property they held.² Controversy surrounded the act, but it was, and remains, a monumental piece of legislation, as it resulted in part from whites working for the Seminoles without the precondition of Indian removal and over twenty years of reformer action within the state. Just as importantly, the act was a testament to the work of the female Indian reformers in Florida, and an example of how they could achieve political change within the state.

Minnie Moore-Willson of Kissimmee, who had petitioned Catts and the Florida legislature for years regarding Seminole lands, received from Catts the golden pen with which he had signed the bill into law. Moore-Willson was a strong-willed and often outspoken reformer who had made her name with her 1896 work *The Seminoles of Florida*. She was an active

¹ Florida, *Statutes*, 285.061; James W. Covington, "Florida Seminoles 1900-1920," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 53 no. 2 (Oct. 1974): 195.

² U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs and Roy Nash. *Seminole Indians: Survey of the Seminole Indians of Florida*. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1931).

member of the “Friends of the Florida Seminoles” reform society, an early organization advocating for the Seminole cause. Inspired by Helen Hunt Jackson and her seminal 1881 work on the experiences of the Western Indians, *A Century of Dishonor*, Moore-Willson had taken up the pen to raise public awareness of the Florida Seminoles.³ Many Floridians regarded her as the “Mother” of the bill, a force within the efforts to obtain lands for the Seminoles and save the tribe from what she believed was its imminent extinction.⁴ While her work to enact change for the Seminoles represented the new guard of female reformers in Florida, working for greater influence within the public sphere and attempting more than Indian conversion to Christianity, others played notable roles as well. South of Moore-Willson’s enclave in Kissimmee lived Ivy Cromartie Stranahan, the wife of Frank Stranahan, one of the most prolific Indian traders in South Florida and the founder of Fort Lauderdale. Stranahan, like Moore-Willson, and unlike many female reformers of the day, lived within close proximity to a band of Seminole Indians, and her interactions with the tribe influenced her later crusade for Indian reform.

The two women had little in common. Moore-Willson had a reputation as unyielding, her words often considered acerbic and her personality abrasive. She worked for immediate action, and accepted no excuses.⁵ Stranahan, a former school teacher and staunch believer in temperance, whom the Seminoles named “*Watchie Esta/Hutrie*” (“Little White Mother”), worked with the Florida Federation of Women’s Clubs and sought to create conditions through which the Seminoles would ultimately be able to assimilate into South Florida’s mainstream

³ Harry A. Kersey, Jr., “The ‘Friends of the Florida Seminoles’ Society, 1899-1926,” *Tequesta* 1, no. 34 (1974), 13-14.

⁴ Minnie Moore-Willson, *The Seminoles of Florida* (New York: Moffat, Yard and Company, 1910), 6.

⁵ Harry A. Kersey, Jr., “The Case of Tom Tiger’s Horse: An Early Foray into Indian Rights,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 53, no. 3 (Jan. 1975), 305.

society.⁶ While often at odds in temperament and ideology, both formed relationships with the Seminoles that influenced the Indian reform in Florida during the period between 1900 and 1920. This thesis will attempt to detail the role that women played in Florida Indian reform during the era. By highlighting the work of Moore-Willson and Stranahan, respectively, particularly during the fight for the State Seminole Reservation, and detailing their influence on the lives on Seminoles, the thesis will provide a nuanced view of those most involved within the reform movement to demonstrate greater female involvement in Seminole reform.

The means by which Moore-Willson and Stranahan enacted change were at odds, despite the women being involved in the same social circles and ultimately having similar goals in terms of obtaining land for the tribe. This can be explained through their generational differences and dissimilar backgrounds. Moore-Willson, some two decades Stranahan's senior, came from a background of well-to-do Pennsylvanians. During the post-Civil War era, it is likely that, living in the north, she was aware of nationwide changes in Indian policy and the works of Indian reform organizations like the IRA and WNIA. Familiar with greater Indian policy, her knowledge of the reservation system and greater national policy towards Indians colored her beliefs on what was best for the Seminoles. Stranahan, born in Florida a generation removed from the Third Seminole War, and raised in the little populated southern portion of the state, likely had little knowledge of national Indian reform movements until her involvement with the FFWC. Her views on the Seminoles were influenced by stories from her youth on the cusp of the Everglades and her ardent Methodism, which called for the salvation of Seminole souls.

⁶ Harry A. Kersey Jr., *The Stranahans of Fort Lauderdale: A Pioneer Family of New River* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003): 132, 138.

Recognizing these differences allows for a more meaningful understanding of why these women took the paths they did to Seminole reform.

In order to better understand the world in which Moore-Willson and Stranahan acted, it is important to recognize the social and political atmosphere surrounding Indian reform in the United States as a whole during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. During this period, the federal government, having spent the majority of the nineteenth century embroiled in numerous “Indian Wars,” began to quell its attempts to destroy native populations and revive the campaign to assimilate Indians into an idealized notion of America. Long regarded as non-citizens on the periphery of society, Indians again began to capture the attention of the American public, and the idea of “Kill[ing] the Indian in him, and save the man,” championed by Indian reformers such as Richard Henry Pratt, brought the assimilation program greater awareness across the country.⁷ Ideas of racial equality did not drive the assimilation process which gained support from many due to the failure of the reservation system in the West and the paternalistic notion that Indians lacked the abilities to succeed and thrive in the changing American landscape. Many in the United States regarded Indians as relics of a bygone era, and while their perceived relationship with nature possibly served as an impetus for white interest in conservation and environmentalism, most Americans thought it necessary to stamp out tribal practices and offer Indians a new way of life. The policies enacted by the federal government through the latter part of the nineteenth century, and often championed by national Indian reform groups, limited Indian control over tribal economics and politics and placed them further under

⁷ Richard Henry Pratt, “The Advantages of Mingling Indians with Whites” (paper presented at the Nineteenth Annual Conference on Charities and Corrections, Denver, CO, June, 1892). History Matters: The U.S. Survey Course on the Web, <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/4929/> (accessed October 20, 2013).

the authority of the federal government. Reformers believed that policies like the General Allotment Act (popularly known as the Dawes Act) of 1887 would solve the “Indian problem” and many shifts in Indian perception and reform took place as a consequence of this collective mindset.⁸

Indians in the trans-Mississippi West felt the brunt of this federal Indian policy, however, while the Seminoles of Florida, both in their daily lives and political structures, remained relatively untouched by the federal government’s reforms, holding a distinctly dissimilar experience than their western brethren. Their isolation during this period followed a trend in Seminole history, as from their beginnings as a group, they had not experienced the same pattern of relocation and removal common to other tribes. In the mid-eighteenth century, bands of Creek Indians began to split from the Creek Confederacy and migrate into what was then Spanish Florida. These Indians, along with members of other Southeastern tribes including the Yuchis, Yamassees, and the remnants of Florida’s original inhabitants (Timucuas, Calusas, and Apalachees) became what the Spanish called “cimmarons,” or runaways.⁹ They would later become known as the Seminoles, and would serve as a thorn in the side of the U.S. military throughout the course of the nineteenth century, primarily in the form of the Seminole Wars (1814-1819, 1835-1842, 1855-1858). The Indians whom both Moore-Willson and Stranahan

⁸ The General Allotment Act, signed into law on February 8, 1887 by President Grover Cleveland, allotted reservation land to Indians in parcels and allowed for individual ownership and title of these former reservation lands. The law reflected the Federal Government’s paternalistic policies towards Native Americans, and was meant to be a solution to the “Indian Problem” that U.S. officials and citizens believed had plagued the American West for most of the nineteenth century.

⁹ There is little consensus on the origins of the word “Seminole,” but many scholars contend that it appears to be a deviation of the Spanish term “cimmaron.” Older sources show dissent over the true origin of the word, such as Frank Drew’s assertion in his 1927 article “Notes on the Origin of the Seminole Indians of Florida” that the word translates to “people whom the Sun God does not love (i.e. accursed).” Frank Drew, “Notes on the Origin of the Seminole Indians in Florida,” *Florida Historical Society Quarterly* no. 6, vol. 1 (July, 1926), 21.

would encounter in Southern Florida were a mere two generations removed from the Third Seminole War, and the remnants of a once populous group in the region. The Seminole Wars had ravaged the Seminole people and they had been pushed deeper and deeper into the bowels of the Florida Everglades. Those that did remain, however, eked out their existence through the pelt and plume trade on the edges of the vast swampland, and only in the latter part of the nineteenth century did white encroachment truly begin to affect the Seminoles.

While Frederick Jackson Turner had declared the frontier closed in 1890, Turner's thesis did not consider South Florida, which at the time remained an unexplored borderland and untamed swamp.¹⁰ The slow but steady arrival of whites in South Florida fostered great changes in the lives of the Florida Seminoles. While many, like the reformer Pratt, believed that the Seminoles' suspicion of the federal government was "just" but that "no great progress [could] be made in the education and civilization of these people," some whites who lived among or interacted with the Indians in South Florida, such as Moore-Willson and Stranahan rejected this perception.¹¹ Seminoles were so far removed from the national consciousness that, relative to western Indians, national reformers and the media paid them comparatively little attention. And though some government representatives argued that Seminoles were "intellectually first class...in comparison with other American aborigines," the American public thought of

¹⁰ Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" (paper presented at the American Historical Association, Chicago, IL, July 12, 1893), <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/gilded/empire/text1/turner.pdf> (accessed October 20, 2013).

¹¹ William C. Sturtevant, "R.H. Pratt's Report on the Seminole in 1879," *Florida Anthropologist* 9, no. 1 (March, 1956), 14.

Seminoles as simply as another group of “villainous foils for white heroes.”¹² Both Moore-Willson and Stranahan, during the early years of their activism, ascribed to the belief that Seminoles would soon be extinct, yet both contended that in order for the group to survive and progress, they needed the legal title to their own land and government acceptance of their right to self-determination. Though the Indian reform movements in greater United States would ignore the Seminoles, Moore-Willson and Stranahan, despite their different beliefs in the best ways of enacting reform, would play substantial roles in the changes affecting Seminoles in the early twentieth century.

The unique approach that both Moore-Willson and Stranahan took towards Indian reform must be emphasized. Despite the activists’ ideologies and different means of gaining attention for the Seminole’s cause, both women worked for Indian reform that was categorically different from the Indian reform and the growing assimilation movement that was taking place in the West and other parts of the nation. Rather than promote assimilation through distributing individual parcels of land to Seminole individuals and families, Moore-Willson and Stranahan hoped to create a reservation system for Indians in Florida. They hoped to provide the Seminoles with territory they could control collectively, land which they held title to and had historically occupied. The approach was wholly Florida-centric and a way for the state to truly begin supporting its Indian population. The government of Florida had done little to enact positive change for the Seminoles and at times entirely ignored reform measures. For example, in 1907, the federal government designated 520 acres of land for Seminole use. When the brother of

¹² U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs and Clay McCauley, *The Seminole Indians of Florida*. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1887), 494; Mikaela M. Adams, “Savage Foes, Noble Warriors, and Frail Remnants: Florida Seminoles in White Imagination, 1865-1934,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 87, no. 3 (Winter 2009), 411.

Governor Nathan P. Bryan moved on to this land and fenced it in shortly thereafter, Seminole land rights went ignored.¹³ In this culture of inaction, Moore-Willson and Stranahan worked to gain attention and support for the betterment of the Seminoles and the creation of a state reserve, rather than stamp out their culture, as had been seen on a national level. Furthermore, the women did it in a culture that, while not oppressive, was unfriendly to women within the public sphere. In the male-dominated American South, Moore-Willson and Stranahan were representative of a new breed of female activists, engaged in suffrage and public affairs, who wanted their opinions to be heard, opinions that included leveling the playing field for those underrepresented in Floridian life.

The historiography of the white-Seminole relations, particularly during the period between 1900-1920, is underdeveloped, and those works that do address the topic focus mostly on the Seminole War and the post-reservation system era, the latter of which did not take hold in Florida until the 1920s. National Indian reforms largely bypassed Florida, and Seminoles, living on the fringes of society, posed little threat to whites in the populated regions of the state. The personal perceptions that white activists in Florida held of Seminoles, influenced by their own communications with members of the tribe, played roles in the interactions that reformers had with Seminoles and, ultimately, on the change that they were able to enact in their daily lives. In order to possess a greater understanding of Moore-Willson and Stranahan, as well as the views that other white Floridians held of Seminoles and the reforms of the early twentieth century, the

¹³ James W. Covington, "Florida Seminoles: 1900-1920," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 53 no. 2 (October 1974), 194.

history of Seminoles in Florida, as well as the state of Native American-white relations in the United States, must first be understood. This can only be done by tracing the still minimal historiography of Seminoles in Florida.

The reform efforts of Moore-Willson and Stranahan remain largely ignored within the canon of Florida history. Appearing briefly as footnotes in major works regarding Everglades preservation and those about seminal figures like Marjorie Stoneman Douglas, their works have been overlooked.¹⁴ This is not surprising however, considering the lack of literature published regarding Seminoles. Efforts like Willson's *The Seminoles of Florida* and Charles H. Coe's *Red Patriots*, originally published in 1898 and 1896, respectively are among the earliest literary accounts of the Seminoles. The modern historiography related to Seminoles in Florida and their relationship with white Floridians begins with John K. Mahon's *History of the Second Seminole War, 1835-1842*. Originally published in 1967, Mahon's book is perhaps the most detailed study of the relationship between whites and Seminoles in the nineteenth century and remains a seminal and regularly cited work within the field. Mahon's monograph was the first substantive work written on the Second Seminole War in over a century, and in a sense, introduced the Second Seminole War, the costliest of the Indian Wars, to the general public. In its resonance, it continues to impact current historians' views of the Seminoles and the modern understanding of their history, as well as their significance in greater military and Florida history. Though clearly a work of military history, with great attention paid to both the strategy and tactics of Generals Edmund Gaines, Winfield Scott, and Thomas Sidney Jesup, *History of the Second Seminole War*

¹⁴ Kersey's monograph, *The Stranahans of Fort Lauderdale*, has attempted to fill this void by providing an account of Ivy Stranahan's life as the "first lady" of Fort Lauderdale. But while Kersey provides a well researched account of her works with Seminoles, his work provides more emphasis on the efforts of her husband, Frank, to expand the town of Fort Lauderdale.

does afford some attention to the federal government's frustration and anger in trying to remove the Seminoles, and shows how the Seminoles were seen as little more than a nuisance to many Americans. Mahon's discussion of Florida's resident white population during the war is minimal, and this is unfortunate, as he alludes to their vocal disavowal of both the Seminoles and the federal troops attempting to remove them by referencing the many editorials that Florida whites sent to newspapers concerning their disappointment with the War. By not affording them the agency that they deserve, Mahon misses a great opportunity to uncover the earlier, non-military, relationship between Florida whites and Seminoles.

Mahon's work marks the beginning of a stunted historiography of the Seminoles and their interactions with whites in Florida. Though he overlooks many of the interactions between the two groups outside of a military context, Mahon's work provides an understanding of the Second Seminole War that is necessary for understanding future interactions between whites and Seminoles in the latter part of the nineteenth century. This war largely introduced the two groups to each other on a grand scale and played a role in creating the idea of "the Seminole" in white popular memory.

The Second Seminole War and its after effects make up a large portion of academic studies regarding Seminole-white relations. Until recently, white South Floridians, despite the fact that they most often interacted with and worked among the Seminoles in the lucrative plume and pelt trade of the Everglades, were disregarded in historical study. Harry A. Kersey Jr.'s work *Pelts, Plumes, and Hides: White Traders Among the Seminole Indians 1870-1930*, published in 1975, changed this by affording agency to South Floridians. This work remains the first, and

most significant, work within the historiography of white interaction with Seminoles during the age of Indian reform. And unlike many other works pertaining to the Seminole Indians, Kersey's provides a social history of the relationship between whites and Seminoles within the context of the greater economics of the region. In avoiding a military focus, it allows for an understanding of the white traders and reformers most involved in the political and economic changes occurring on the cusp of the Everglades during the era. Kersey argues there was a strong and positive social relationship formed between Seminoles and whites in the heyday of the pelt and plume trade in South Florida. This relationship only deteriorated when the Seminoles were no longer able to hunt on their native grounds due to restrictive government policies, conservation efforts, increasing tourism related to Florida's land boom, and the state government's plan to drain the Everglades. Until this period, whites had been dependent on Seminole hunters for trade goods. South Florida whites' economic realities caused the issue of perceived racial differences to have less importance in the region than in the northern part of the state. The camaraderie created by regular interaction, Kersey argues, created an inherent appreciation for the Seminoles and their way of life in Florida, and this lasted until the 1920s and the beginnings of the Seminole Reservation system.

Kersey's work, however, exists in a vacuum. Kersey only alludes to the greater political and economic issues that led to strained relations between whites and Seminoles, ignoring the progression of events that led to the national conservation movement and shifts in Indian policy. He offers little in terms of contextualization, as an understanding of the politics of the era is necessary to the topic. Kersey, however, does succeed in avoiding the traps that often exist in Indian history in Florida (particularly in the earlier works of writers like Charlton Tebeau,

described below), by not affording great levels of attention to only the men involved with Seminole trade. Recognizing the significance of the wives of Indian traders, particularly Stranahan and Moore-Willson, Kersey details their efforts to improve Seminole education and, in the case of Moore-Willson, work with and befriend Seminole leaders to implement positive change for the group, while still acknowledging their inherent paternalism. That Kersey acknowledges the fact that women played a role in influencing social change for the Seminoles is novel for histories of this group, and necessary in expanding the narrative of white-Indian relations in Florida. Despite its brevity, lack of context, and Kersey's sometimes positivist views of their interactions, *Pelts, Plumes, and Hides* is the standard for the study of whites and Seminoles during this era and sets the stage for expansion.

Some of the earliest accounts of Seminoles were written by Tebeau and Charles H. Coe, works that are now considered outdated. While their books helped introduce an audience to Seminoles, members of the tribe appeared as primarily as background actors in the scope of greater events in Florida history. Coe, himself an activist in the progressive era, presented Seminoles solely as victims in his book *Red Patriots*. For these reasons, their works will not be addressed at length. Few attempts to write comprehensive histories of the Seminoles have been made. James W. Covington's 1993 work, *The Seminoles of Florida*, attempts to rectify this and provide a thorough understanding of the changes that the Seminoles experienced over time. While Covington allots great attention to the Seminole Wars and the post-World War II era, his description of the period between 1900 and 1920 is limited, but does offer insight into those most involved with the Indian Reform movement within Florida. Noting the significant fractures within the reform movement and the strongly held opinions of all involved, Covington allows for

some understanding of the major actors within Seminole reform during this era, particularly religious figures, as well as Moore-Willson, and the means of power, whether governmental or through private societies, by which they enacted reform. Much like Kersey's work, Covington succeeds in detailing the encounters between Seminoles and white Floridians, but even though his is one of the few works to provide a clear timeline of Seminole history in Florida, his book suffers from the imbalanced portrait that he paints of the group, ignoring significant concepts related to Seminole history including their relationships with race and slavery. That said, Covington's work offers insight into white actions toward the Seminoles, which is useful in assessing the shifts in the white-Seminole relations over the course of time. Unfortunately, Covington's use of archaic language (including his regular use of "semi-civilized" and "savage" as descriptors) makes his work appear outdated and limited in academic value.¹⁵ The best that can be said about Covington's work is that he makes an effort to present to the public a comprehensive history of the Seminoles, even if it suffers from flaws. In that sense, *The Seminoles of Florida* attempts to fill a void within the historiography of Seminole history in Florida.

Florida history remains an understudied field, and prominent works on the Seminoles are no exception. Considering the national awareness of the group through figures like Osceola, it is almost shocking how few academic works exist regarding the tribe. A WorldCat search of the 261 available texts for the search term "Seminole" shows that of the published academic historical works and dissertations on Seminoles, only ten relate to the Florida Seminoles post-removal. These works include many by Harry A Kersey, Jr., photo accounts and works on

¹⁵ James W. Covington, *The Seminoles of Florida* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1993), 2-4.

tourism. Many of the works focus on the Second Seminole War, Oklahoma Seminoles, and Black Seminoles. Mikaela M. Adams notes that “a search on the Proquest Historical *New York Times* Database revealed that 7,732 articles mentioned “Apaches in the period between 1865 and 1935, while 16,169 mentioned ‘Sioux’ and 5,191 mentioned ‘Comanches.’ By contrast, only 1,510 mentioned both ‘Florida’ and ‘Seminole.’”¹⁶ Accounts of the tribe, and particularly their relationships with whites in any era, are lacking. Further, while the group makes appearances in greater works on Indian history and their origins are popular in works on the Jacksonian Era, academically, they have been largely ignored as their own entity within the scope of Florida’s history.¹⁷ The works that have been written, Mahon’s, Kersey’s, and Covington’s, generally make up the canon of academic monograph-length Seminole history.

Kersey’s work serves as the centerpiece of literature for white-Seminole relations in the period. But other works relevant to the study consist of those that pertain to Indian-white relations nationally and the impact of national reformist thought on policy and its implementation. Brian W. Dippie’s 1982 work, *The Vanishing American: White Attitudes and U.S. Indian Policy*, is one of the first significant works to truly provide insight into white perceptions of, and actions towards, Native Americans over the course of the nation’s history. In his work, Dippie intones many of the ideas that were both believed and promoted by Moore-Willson and Stranahan during the period of Indian reform in Florida, particularly in his discussion of the “vanishing Indian.” According to Dippie, U.S. policy towards Native

¹⁶ Adams, “Savage Foes,” 409.

¹⁷ Claudio Saunt’s 1999 work *A New Order of Things: Property, Power, and the Transformation of the Creek Indians, 1733-1816* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), clearly illustrates the origins of the Seminoles as a splinter group of the Creek Confederation and is an excellent example of the strength of the works published regarding the Seminoles prior to their permanent settlement in Florida.

Americans was fatalistic, and predicated on the myth of the vanishing Indian, the belief that the Indians were a vanishing people, not long for this world. As Indians were bound to disappear, American policy should reflect this, in terms of land management and education. However, following the failure of the reservation system and the growth of reform movements, the meaning of “vanishing” shifted, and the concept of “kill the Indian, save the man” was born. Dippie argues that it was the conflicted views of whites towards Native Americans, in terms of civilization, race, and culture, which resulted in major shifts in U.S. policy towards them. The ideas white Americans held, both in the government and general population, shifted greatly during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but understanding how Indians were regarded by these groups provides insight into the mindsets of Florida’s reformers.

Frederick E. Hoxie’s 1984 work, *A Final Promise: The Campaign to Assimilate the Indians, 1880-1920*, builds on Dippie’s work and is regarded as one of the seminal works in regards to white perceptions and actions towards Indians. Hoxie’s work frames Indian affairs in a broad national context and claims that the assimilation campaign stemmed from distrust of the reservation system, which had failed to “civilize” Indians, and was a part of the United States’ political and racial culture during the Progressive era. While this was not what spurred action among Seminole reformers, Hoxie’s work is particularly significant in that he details the racial and paternalistic attitudes involved in setting policy, arguing that, in the first phase of the assimilation campaign (incorporation into American society and equality), “it would be misleading to overstate the difference between white attitudes towards Indians and other racial minorities in the late nineteenth century...the Indian education program constituted a unique

level of federal activism on behalf of a non-white minority.”¹⁸ His detailing of the role that racial opinions and paternalism played in enacting Indian reform provides insight into the mindset of white reformers, and while it may not be applied directly to Florida, it is still helpful for understanding national viewpoints. The idea that thoughts of racial superiority and social evolution influenced public perception of Indians in the early twentieth century, and assimilation turned to incorporation without equality, with Indians playing a role in American society decidedly apart from whites, also helps to better contextualize the situation in Florida.

Although few academic works exist detailing the lives and works of Moore-Willson and Stranahan, or white-Seminole relations during this period, through those available, and the bevy of first person accounts of this period, it is possible to gain an understanding and appreciation of the world that these women lived in during the early part of the twentieth century. These works also document the massive changes that were taking place, both politically and in the public’s eye, in Indian affairs. South Florida was something of a borderland until the twentieth century – open, untamed, and unfamiliar. Between 1900 and 1920, this changed and the region grew in population and popularity. The changes taking place in South Florida often came at the expense of the Seminole population who had been driven into the region in past decades, but through their abilities and beliefs, no matter what drove them, female activists like Moore-Willson and Stranahan attempted to save who they believed were a “vanishing people.”¹⁹ Though they remain largely forgotten in the greater history of Florida, this thesis will attempt to bring their actions and efforts to aid the Seminoles to light.

¹⁸ Frederick Hoxie, *A Final Promise: The Campaign to Assimilate the Indians, 1880-1920* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 69.

¹⁹ Minnie Moore-Willson, *Seminoles*, 54.

Introducing Moore-Willson and Stranahan's work within Florida Indian reform and contrasting their means of achieving this reform in order to better understand the role of women in the state's Indian reform movement is the main goal of this thesis. In examining the unwavering and personally guided attempts of these women to affect change for Seminoles in an era when very little was known about the tribe outside of the context of war, this thesis expands the understanding of two women who greatly impacted Seminole reform in the early twentieth century. The questions that must be answered in the course of this thesis, and must be answered in order to gain a greater sense of white-Seminole relations and Florida history, start with the very simple question of "what role did Florida's women play in enacting Indian reform within the state?" Using the two women most involved in reform as a model, the question "who were Minnie Moore-Willson and Ivy Stranahan and what were their contributions to Seminole reform?" will be explored. In detailing this, the personal persuasions of both women, and their own biases and influences are examined, as well as how the culture surrounding Indian reform and state politics impacted the women. Further, the organizational relationships of Moore-Willson and Stranahan are analyzed, as well as their encounters with each other. Illustrating the movements that these women led in hopes of attaining permanent land for Seminoles serves not only to contrast the two women but to provide a greater understanding of the various routes that Seminole reform took between 1900-1920.

While this thesis explores the careers of Moore-Willson and Stranahan and the impact that their own personalities and opinions had on Seminole reform between 1900 and 1920, it does so against the backdrop of the greater relationship between whites and Seminoles during this period, and particularly the perceptions that white Floridians held of Seminoles. While

previous works have chronicled White-Seminole relations during this period, many have focused on trade or made the Seminoles background actors within the movement to protect the Florida Everglades. Through looking at the published works and private papers of Moore-Willson and Stranahan, whites who lived near the Seminoles during this era and who were heavily involved in Seminole reform, I offer an assessment of how their personal relationships and preconceived notions on race and religion influenced their work. Utilizing their correspondence with Seminoles, others involved in the movement, and Floridians of political significance will do this, and not limit my assessment to trade relationships with the Seminoles or greater environmental movement, which previous authors (namely Tebeau and Kersey) have done. This thesis is based on various primary sources, and the personal correspondences and papers of Moore-Willson and Stranahan (accessed at the University of Miami Special Collections and Fort Lauderdale Historical Society, respectively). Further, ethnohistorical and government commissioned reports on the Seminole people, the published writings of reformers and activists, works published concerning the tribe during the era, and newspaper, magazine, and journal articles from the period have been analyzed. I have incorporated these works to determine the shifts in how whites regarded Seminoles and the world in which Moore-Willson and Stranahan operated, rather than as a means to describe Seminole society, as Harry A. Kersey Jr. and James W. Covington have done. Through qualitative research, as well as an understanding of shifting perceptions of Indians during this period, this work should contribute to the understudied canon of Seminoles in Florida history and the role that Moore-Willson and Stranahan, as well as white perceptions of them, played in formulating policy. Mahon, Covington, and especially Kersey, have set the stage for understanding Seminoles within Florida's greater history and the changes that interactions with

whites brought to them, and this thesis hopefully further humanizes this relationship and offers insight into two women who advocated for change.

CHAPTER 1: A BRIEF HISTORY OF SEMINOLES IN FLORIDA AND WHITE PERCEPTIONS OF SEMINOLES IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

By 1900, Seminoles and Florida's white settlers had been segregated for at least two generations. The Second and Third Seminole Wars, which took place between 1835-1842 and 1855-1858, respectively, had decreased the Seminole population greatly, and sent a large population of the tribe to Indian Territory (now Oklahoma). Those members of the Seminoles remaining in Florida had been further cast out of familiar lands and pushed deeper into the state's interior and the Florida Everglades. With the Seminoles, already marginal in number and relegated to developmental backwaters, interaction between whites and Indians in the state decreased markedly, and the knowledge of Seminole life and history held by whites, both in Florida and around the country, lessened dramatically.

The pre-twentieth century history of the Seminoles provides the context for better understanding the relationship between Florida whites and Seminoles during the early part of the twentieth century, and the perceptions whites held of Seminoles, both on a local and national scale. The Seminoles' past prior to Florida becoming a state encompassed significant events in southern Indian history and the amalgamation of the region's tribes. It is notable that the Seminoles of Florida, in the hopes of salvaging an Indian identity, created a new identity that was wholly Floridian. As much as they became a part of Florida and a significant part of the history of the state, the concept of 'Florida,' an untamed borderland, also became a part of them.

Culturally and linguistically diverse Indian groups inhabited Florida prior to European contact. The most important in terms of influence were the Timucuas in north and north-central

Florida, the Apalachees in northwest Florida, and the Calusas in south Florida.²⁰ With European contact, and the disease and conflict that accompanied it, these groups would see their numbers decimated. By the early eighteenth century, with the increasing intrusion of British colonies and colonists, the remnants of these groups had fled for safer havens; vestiges of the Calusas and Timucuas (who had seen their lands conquered by former enemies) evacuated to Cuba on Spanish vessels in 1763, and Creeks in modern-Alabama and Georgia absorbed the Apalachees. The massive death and departure of Florida's original inhabitants during this period created a population vacuum within the territory. This allowed for the greater migration of other Indians into the state.

Over the course of the eighteenth century, the Creeks of the southeastern United States had created for themselves a highly stratified society. Traditional Creek virtues based in martial culture and localized power had become heavily influenced by European economic and social ideals.²¹ The creation of hierarchies of power and the use of fiat currency were becoming standard in parts of Creek society. While many of these changes occurred organically and in response to the shifting socio-economic climate within the region, many members of Creek communities did not accept the changing ideas regarding ownership and hierarchy. This was particularly true of the Lower Creeks, who heavily populated the region that is now Alabama.²² These "wayward Creek," along with more traditionalist members of other southeastern tribes who rejected European ideas of progress, would become known as the Seminoles, breaking from

²⁰ John H. Hann, *The History of the Timucua Indians and Missions* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996), xi.

²¹ Claudio Saunt, *A New Order of Things: Property, Power, and the Transformation of the Creek Indians, 1733-1816* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 93.

²² *Ibid.*, 6.

the Creeks and joining Indians who had migrated to the state of Florida over the previous fifty years.²³ Drawing “inspiration from opponents of “civilization”” within the Creek community, the Seminoles were formed after the Red Stick War of 1813-1814, a conflict pitting different Creek factions in inter-tribal bloodshed that resulted in the migration of some traditionalists to Florida.²⁴

During the period when Creeks and other Southeastern Indians were finding refuge in Florida, a contingent of Indians who had become fairly successful under Spanish rule already populated the state. The most prominent of these was Cowkeeper of the Alachua band, who had aided the naturalist William Bartram in his study of Florida. They were regarded as the earliest “Seminoles,” a blanket term used by Europeans beginning in the late 18th century to define any Florida Indians. Many native newcomers to the region joined the existing groups. The prospect of a safe haven for the newcomers was short-lived. The War of 1812, the Red Stick War, and border conflicts such as the Patriot War of 1812 sharpened antagonisms between white Americans and Florida Indians. Together, these events would lead to the First Seminole War. Following the War of 1812, Seminoles, along with three hundred escaped African American slaves occupied a former British fort on the Apalachicola River known as “Negro Fort.” Fearful of the problems that a fort in the hands of Seminoles and escaped slaves could cause, the United States, with Creek allies, attacked “Negro Fort” in July 1816, killing over 300 inhabitants. In an instant, Seminole strength in numbers had been weakened.²⁵ Skirmishes and frontier raids quickly followed. The U.S. Army’s burning of Seminole chief Neamathla’s village, Fowltown,

²³ Ibid., 34.

²⁴ Ibid., 236.

²⁵ John K. Mahon, “The First Seminole War, November 21, 1817-May 24, 1818,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 77, no. 1 (Summer 1988), 63.

on November 21, 1817, marked the official beginning of the First Seminole War. Though relatively brief, the First Seminole War led to the destruction of Seminole villages in North Florida and further dispersed the Indians into Alachua, the Tampa area, and deeper into the peninsula.²⁶ More significantly, shifting attitudes on race and Indian removal emanating from the conflict colored white-Seminole relations in Florida throughout the rest of the nineteenth century

The already tenuous relationship Seminoles had with whites became more problematic with the Treaties of Moultrie Creek and Payne's Landing. The 1820s saw high pressure for Indian removal in the United States, and Spain's cession of Florida and its official acquisition in 1821 by the U.S. resulted in citizen pressure to quickly set up a treaty with the Seminoles.²⁷ If the Seminoles had any agricultural prosperity, it was lost through the havoc wreaked by the Patriot War, and later, Jackson's assault on their lands.²⁸ But in 1823, American negotiators parleyed with Seminole chief Neamathla, joined by 435 Indians from both east and west of the Suwannee River, at Moultrie Creek, just outside of St. Augustine. Many white Floridians, not taking into account the diversity or history of the Seminoles, thought it best to remove all Indians and return them to live among the Creeks in Alabama and Georgia. Seminole leadership clearly disagreed.²⁹ Ultimately, terms were set in which Florida Indians would receive four million acres of reservation land in Central Florida and the Seminoles in the panhandle would be allowed to remain in that region, as well as receive five thousand dollars in annuities for twenty years.³⁰ The reservation, Lieutenant (and later Indian agent) Gad Humphreys believed, had not "500 acres of

²⁶ Ibid., 67.

²⁷ J. Leitch Wright, *Creeks and Seminoles* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 233.

²⁸ John K. Mahon, "The Treaty of Moultrie Creek, 1823," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 40, no. 4 (April 1962), 350.

²⁹ Wright, *Creeks*, 233.

³⁰ Ibid, 235.

good land,” and further, Indians were cut off from all coastal trading.³¹ Though many believed that the Treaty of Moultrie Creek was the result of coercion, or more likely, threat of force, it nonetheless became law.³² With the stroke of a pen, the Seminoles lost their regional autonomy, and Florida became a powder keg waiting to spark.

The Seminoles believed that moving deeper into Central Florida and away from white settlers would protect from the effects of the Indian Removal Act of 1830, but the Treaty of Payne’s Landing in 1832 undercut that belief. Following the passage of the Indian Removal Act, white Florida settlers began, more and more, to see Indians as obstacles. A mere nine years after the Treaty of Moultrie Creek had attempted to move Florida Indians on to reservation lands, the Treaty of Payne’s Landing further tried to disperse the Seminoles. It declared that the Seminoles (represented by seven chiefs), upon inspecting reservation land west of the Mississippi River, would agree to leave Florida, amalgamate with the Creeks, and surrender all claims in the state, including the four million acres awarded in the Treaty of Moultrie Creek. From the beginning, both Indians and outside forces saw the treaty as suspect. Coercion and fraud were accused, as Indian Commissioner James Gadsen never submitted minutes of the meeting. Chief Micanopy of Alachua claimed that he had never signed, despite his name being written on the treaty.³³ That a majority of the tribe’s chiefs had not signed the treaty and that it was considered invalid among the Seminoles meant little to white Floridians, who praised it.³⁴ The intense pressure for removal

³¹ Canter Brown, Jr., “The Florida Crisis of 1826-1827 and the Second Seminole War,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 73, no. 4 (April 1995), 422.

³² Mahon, “Moultrie Creek,” 371.

³³ John K. Mahon, “Two Seminole Treaties: Payne’s Landing, 1832, and Ft. Gibson, 1833,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (July 1962), 9.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 11.

was met by Indians who were willing to lose everything to stay on their land.³⁵ This would lead directly to the Second Seminole War, the costliest of the U.S.-Indian Wars, and one of the darkest periods in the relationship between whites and Seminoles in Florida.³⁶

The situation in early 1830s Florida was tense. The Seminole treaties led to greater skirmishes between Indians and settlers. Though borderland skirmishes were common in both the era and region, the clear threat of Indian removal gave them much greater impact. On November 26, 1835, sparks ignited. Chief Charley Emaltha, who had agreed to emigrate west and was encouraging his people to do the same, was accused of betrayal and murdered by a Seminole band led by Osceola.³⁷ This sent panic throughout the Florida frontier. On December 28, 1835, with hostility in the air, Seminoles, who had emerged from a tree line, ambushed two companies of men, led by Major Francis L. Dade, while marching to Fort King. The attack, which would take on the name “Dade’s Massacre,” left one survivor, Private Ransome Clarke, and marked the beginning of the Second Seminole War.

The Second Seminole War resonates in American history for many reasons. It was the costliest of the Indian Wars and the war that set into motion the careers of American military men like Winfield Scott and Zachary Taylor and made national figures out of Jackson’s allies. However, it was also responsible for creating the myth of the Seminoles that would permeate Floridian and American thought beginning in the late nineteenth century. The Second Seminole War would last from 1835 to 1842, and, using the tactics of ambush followed by hasty retreat, the

³⁵ Ibid., 21.

³⁶ Wright, *Creeks*, 344; James W. Covington, *The Seminoles of Florida* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1993), 63.

³⁷ James M. Denham, “Some Prefer the Seminoles:” Violence and Disorder among Soldiers and Settlers in the Second Seminole War, 1835-1842,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 70, no.1 (July 1991), 38.

Seminoles quickly confounded American troops. Bloody as they were, large, open-field battles of note were few and far between. Paired with the fact that Florida troops were ill-equipped and regularly quarreled with settlers over the fact that soldiers were not quelling the Indian threat, territorial governor Robert R. Reid sardonically declared that “the soldiers’ behavior had caused the settlers to “prefer the Seminoles.”³⁸

Among the Indians most associated with the Second Seminole War and the myth of the Seminoles as “noble savages” were Osceola, Jumper, Alligator, Arpeika (Sam Jones) and Coacoochee (Wildcat), who was also the nephew of Micanopy. While each of these men would contribute to the myth of the Seminoles as a wild and unconquered people, Osceola would become the symbol of the war, and after it, a symbol of true patriotism and fighter of oppression. Born in Alabama, Osceola was an Upper Creek, who, following the havoc of the First Seminole War found refuge with Peter McQueen, an adversary of Andrew Jackson. Osceola spent his formative years with McQueen, and this likely shaped his worldview.³⁹ Following his attack on Charley Emathla and Indian Agent Wiley Thompson, Osceola and his band would continue to confound American troops and lead his people until his capture under a white flag of truce in September 1837. Much has been written on Osceola’s capture and the treachery surrounding it, but following his removal to Fort Moultrie, South Carolina and subsequent death in 1838, stories of him took on mythic proportions among both whites and Indians.

After Osceola’s death, Coacoochee continued fighting. Known best for his bold escape from Fort Marion in October 1837, Coacoochee was regarded as the one Seminole capable of

³⁸ Ibid., 46.

³⁹ Brown, Jr., “Florida Crisis,” 421.

carrying on the fight, and his escape easily kept the war going. The escape was remembered in Seminole War myths as “more than a daring exploit, a picturesque episode; it was of considerable importance to the subsequent history of the Seminole War,” as within months, Coacoochee was leading Seminoles against General Zachary Taylor at the Battle of Okeechobee.⁴⁰ Coacoochee would continue to fight in Florida until 1841, after which he departed for Indian Territory, but kept the struggle alive in the West, leading some black Seminoles to their eventual freedom in Mexico. Arpeika would be the most significant Seminole to neither surrender nor be removed. But by 1842, Seminole forces grew weaker and skirmishes between the two sides became more irregular. The Second Seminole War did not end with a treaty, but rather with both sides either unwilling or unable to continue fighting. The Seminoles, either by dispersal or death saw their numbers diminished. Still, those that did remain took on a sort of legend in Florida and their mere presence continued to serve as a source of fear to white Floridians.

Though Seminole numbers dwindled, and the United States Army had left Florida, minor skirmishes between Seminoles and whites (soldiers and vigilantes) continued through the 1850s. An 1853 bill to remove the Seminoles was passed in the Florida House, but later vetoed as implementation was difficult.⁴¹ Then, in December 1855, a group of United States military topographical surveyors destroyed a crop of banana plants belonging to Seminole chief Billy Bowlegs. Showing little remorse or respect, the group apparently refused to apologize or compensate for the damages. Adding insult to injury, Lieutenant George Lucas Hartsuff, leader

⁴⁰ Kenneth W. Porter, “Seminole Flight from Fort Marion,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 22, no. 3 (January 1944), 128.

⁴¹ George C. Bittle, “Florida Frontier Incidents during the 1850s,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 42, no. 2 (October 1970), 153-154.

of the survey, declared the land “a barren waste...valueless to a civilized population.”⁴² This story, perhaps apocryphal, took hold amongst the U.S. public. Regardless of its veracity, increasing skirmishes between whites and Seminoles triggered the Third Seminole War.

White Floridians believed that the Indians would be quelled and removed quickly, but the familiar tactics of the Second Seminole War - ambush, volley, as hasty retreat - allowed the Seminoles to tease out the war through the spring of 1858, despite being outnumbered 15-1.⁴³ By the spring of 1858, however, the war was over, with the agreement that many Seminoles would be removed to Indian Territory in return for cash and a reservation separate from the Creeks. Those who remained went deeper into South Florida, and remained quiet, though they would continue to instill dread in white Floridians. The Third Seminole War would be the last of the Indian Wars in the American South. But the potential uprising of Seminoles became a major fear of the Confederacy during the Civil War. Some Confederates hoped to form an alliance with the Seminoles, fearing that South Florida was becoming a “refuge for draft evaders and union sympathizers.”⁴⁴ But the Seminoles remained quiet, and kept their distance from the war between their former enemies.

The Seminoles had been thoroughly outnumbered and outmatched in weaponry for half a century, causing some white Floridians to view them as valiant warriors in a cause similar to that of the Confederacy. As many Americans became nostalgic for a simple past filled with noble savages uncorrupted by modernity, Florida Seminoles gained more sympathy. The perception

⁴² Ray B. Seley, Jr., “Lieutenant Hartsuff and the Banana Plants,” *Tequesta* 23 (1963), 4.

⁴³ James W. Covington, “An Episode in the Third Seminole War,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 45, no. 1 (July 1966), 51.

⁴⁴ Robert A. Taylor, “Unforgiving Threat: Florida Seminoles in the Civil War,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 63, no. 3 (Jan., 1991), 303.

figures like Minnie Moore-Willson and Ivy Stranahan, as well as other reformers during early twentieth century, held, would have been heavily influenced by this mythology of the Seminoles, by the stories of treaties betrayed and the legend of Osceola. It was a mythology that had grown over time and was shaped by the fact that few whites had regular contact with the group by the early 1900s. Though ideas of white supremacy continued to pervade American thought, politics, and political action, sympathy was increasingly shown to the Indians, mostly by religious and women's organizations. Many believed that the Seminoles were a dying race and that they should be protected before they vanished from the American landscape.⁴⁵ As the Seminoles had fought for the better part of half a century against their removal and, as a group, had never signed peace accords with the United States, they were regarded unlike their western brethren. While a large portion of the population (particularly western settlers, and in turn, western government officials) often regarded Western Indians as little more than savages, the Seminoles had the distinct difference of being regarded also as patriots, willing to die for their land; and to many whites, there was great honor in this. Particularly in the South, the Seminoles evoked the Lost Cause; they had resisted unjustified aggression and imperialism, and fought valiantly for a losing side. That some southerners believed that Seminoles continued to hold slaves after the Civil War aided in white reverence of them. Further, to some, the Seminoles brought to mind the original patriots of the Revolutionary War, and on an intellectual level they were to be commended.⁴⁶ The relatively positive view that turn-of-the-century whites held of Seminoles undoubtedly influenced later reform efforts.

⁴⁵ Hoxie, *A Final Promise*, 127.

⁴⁶ Adams, "Savage Foes," 416-418.

During the winter of 1880-1881, the U.S. government commissioned Clay MacCauley to obtain a census of the Seminoles in Florida. With the exception of interactions with a few South Florida traders (mostly relating to the emergence of the pelt and plume trade out of the region), the Seminoles had generally remained separated from whites, despite increased white encroachment into South Florida in the post-Civil War era. MacCauley recognized that little was known about the group and what had become of them following the Third Seminole War, but what he found was an “ignorance prevailing even in Florida” regarding the Seminoles.⁴⁷ It was with the aid of a single Seminole who spoke English that MacCauley was able to gauge the tribe’s situation, as well as reproduce their extensive vocabulary for the Bureau of Ethnology. MacCauley’s work brought to light the condition and potential future of the Seminoles, framed against the prevailing racial and political thought of the time. The document that MacCauley produced, which would eventually be published in 1887, proved to be much more than a census. Not only was it the first ethnological study of the group detailing all major aspects of Seminole life, it became the portrait of the Seminoles that would influence knowledge and perceptions of them for at least the next half century.⁴⁸

Characterizing the Seminoles as antagonistic to the United States (but with good reason) and uncivilized but “hardly...savage,” MacCauley helped to create the perception of the group as different from other Indians.⁴⁹ He described the Seminoles in absolutes. They were “frank” and

⁴⁷ U.S. Bureau of Ethnology, *The Seminole Indians of Florida in Fifth Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology to the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institute by Clay MacCauley* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1887), 475.

⁴⁸ William Sturtevant, “Accomplishments and Opportunities in Florida Indian Ethnology,” *Florida Anthropology: Notes in Anthropology* 2 (1958), 20.

⁴⁹ U.S. Bureau of Ethnology, *The Seminole Indians*, 491.

“truthful,” and “intellectually first class...in comparison with other American aborigines.”⁵⁰ In comparison to the indolent Plains Indians, the Seminoles were “worker[s] and not loafers[s],” and this, along with their rich material culture, forwarded the idea that the Seminoles were worth saving.⁵¹ If the Seminoles did not see rapid changes coming to their future, MacCauley did, and his assertion that the influx of white immigration into South Florida and the attempts to drain Lake Okeechobee would have the Seminoles “enter a future unlike any past he has ever known,” would quickly prove to ring true.⁵² In this environment of change, and influenced by MacCauley’s census and prescient words, activists for the Seminole cause would come forth.

MacCauley’s work would be the standard ethnohistory of the Seminoles until Roy Nash’s 1930 report, also commissioned by the United States government. Still, MacCauley’s work was a government report, and despite being available to academics and activists, it was not readily accessible to the common man, who still relied on more personal sources for understanding the Seminoles. Through the early twentieth century, those with the greatest contact with Seminoles and the most defined relationships were white traders and their families.⁵³ While people like Minnie Moore-Willson and Ivy Stranahan, the wife of a trader who had gained a positive impression and mutual respect with the Seminoles, aimed to inform and educate people regarding the Seminoles through their relationships, defining the Seminoles for the greater public was still left to the media. In that context, the Seminoles often remained startling caricatures based on images stemming from the Seminole Wars of the previous century. A 1905 Buffalo Bill

⁵⁰ Ibid., 492-494.

⁵¹ Ibid., 504.

⁵² Ibid., 532.

⁵³ Harry A. Kersey, Jr., *Pelts, Plumes, and Hides: White Traders Among the Seminole Indians 1870-1930* (Gainesville: University Presses of Florida. 1975), 33.

pulp comic entitled “Florida Foes” had Buffalo Bill fighting Seminoles in a Florida Everglades as hazardous as the West. The idea that Seminoles were savages who fed prisoners to alligators pervaded turn-of-the-century pulp fiction regarding Florida, and in them Seminoles were portrayed largely as “villainous foils for white heroes.”⁵⁴

Despite such cartoonish characterizations, the Seminoles, when not ignored, still fared relatively well in the American imagination when compared to Western Indians. In an 1875 piece, they were declared to have been deemed by other writers as “mythical...[and] therefore, more interesting as a tribe than any other in the United States.”⁵⁵ That their degradation was the result of American persecution only made them more attractive to writers, who spun yarns about the Seminoles that would create the public perception of them. The idea of the Seminoles as mythic beings went far beyond exhortations of Osceola and his honor, as authors tried to trace them back to the lost city of Atlantis, and define them as being different, and finer, specimens than any other Indian tribe.⁵⁶ Works on the Seminoles also focused heavily on physical aspects, like their muscular structure and facial features, to draw comparisons to and differentiate them from whites. Their relative isolation furthered this fairly sympathetic view. During an era in which conservation and environmental protection were gaining popularity, the idea that the Seminoles seemingly held a closer relation to the land was commonplace and comparisons between Seminoles and elements of their natural environment were regularly made.⁵⁷ “Shyer than a wild doe,” as Leonora Beck Ellis called them in her article “The Seminoles of Florida,”

⁵⁴ Adams, “Savage Foes,” 411-412.

⁵⁵ Frederick A. Ober, “Ten Days with the Seminoles: I,” *Appleton’s Journal of Literature, Science, and Art* 14, no. 332 (July 1875), 142.

⁵⁶ Leonora Beck Ellis, “The Seminoles of Florida,” *Gunton’s Magazine* 25, no. 6, December 1903, 26.

⁵⁷ Tom Holm, *The Great Confusion in Indian Affairs: Native Americans and Whites in the Progressive Era* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), 24.

they were rightfully fearful of whites because of what the Americans had done to them.⁵⁸ Yet, because of their deep knowledge of the land, they were able to survive as few whites could. A 1903 magazine article also compared them to wild deer and argued that they were there for the same reason, “because they had been hunted to their last hole, a significant reminder of the way in which the white man has borne his burden.”⁵⁹

The sympathy extended to Seminoles was brought into greater relief through the photographs by Julian Dimock, and his father, A.W. The father and son duo were outdoorsmen, conservationists, and photographers, who helped introduce South Florida to the nation through a series of articles and photographs beginning in the late 1880s.⁶⁰ Their descriptions of the Seminoles as “defiant...yet simpleminded” and exploited by whites resonated deeply with whites, as they were accompanied by stark black and white photos of the Seminoles eking out their existence on pine barrens.⁶¹ The photographs served as more than merely visual confirmation of a mostly forgotten tribe. The Dimocks used them to call for change and the creation of a reservation, arguing that after living among them and learning how they survived, “unless action soon be taken, it will be too late for or government to escape the infamy of crushing this helpless people to whom its obligations are particularly sacred.”⁶² The Dimocks, through photographs that ran in nationwide publications and became a part of the Smithsonian collection, led Americans to see the Seminoles as reserved and moral, and worthy of the aid of the government.

⁵⁸ Ellis, “The Seminoles of Florida,” 28.

⁵⁹ “The Everglades,” *Forest and Stream: A Journal of Outdoor Life, Travel, Nature Study, Shooting, Fishing, and Yachting* 51, no. 3 (July 18, 1903), 50.

⁶⁰ Jerald T. Milanich and Nina J. Root, *Hidden Seminoles* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011), 14.

⁶¹ A.W. Dimock, “A Despoiled People,” *Outlook* 97, no. 4 (January 28, 1911), 201-202.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 205.

The timeliness of MacCauley's work, as well as the decreasing friction between Seminoles and whites in Florida in the 1890s, created an atmosphere perfect for the publication of two of the most significant activist works on the Florida Seminoles.⁶³ Both published in 1898, Charles H. Coe's *Red Patriots: The Story of the Seminoles* and Minnie Moore-Willson's *The Seminoles of Florida* would serve as pleas for protection and reform on behalf of the Seminole Indians. Charles H. Coe was neither a historian nor ethnologist. Despite having lived in coastal Florida for six years prior to the publication of *Red Patriots*, it is unlikely that he ever met any Florida Indians. However, while unemployed in Washington, D.C., surrounded by the stirrings of Indian reform in the era led by the Women's National Indian Association (WNIA), and aware of the feeble approach that had been taken to national Indian reform, Coe produced a work that would put forth the plight of the Florida Seminoles and the idea that great injustice had been done towards them.⁶⁴ In his preface to the book, Florida historian Charlton Tebeau argues that Coe "wanted the people of Florida to redeem their honor by recognizing the legal and property rights of the Seminoles," and Coe did so by presenting to his audience a portrait of the Seminoles in which they were proud, but also subjects of pity.⁶⁵ While Coe's work was undoubtedly paternalistic, it spoke to whites and elicited shame. As whites were to blame for the dishonored treaties of the Seminoles and had led to them being "unable to restrain their savage passions," whites should ultimately take charge in returning their property and their dignity.⁶⁶ Coe believed that the Seminoles only became what they did because of a lack of humanity showed to them, and that their savagery could be undone. The idea that the Indians should be able to live without

⁶³ Harry A. Kersey, Jr., "The Seminole Uprising of 1907," *Florida Anthropologist* 27, no. 2 (June 1974), 51.

⁶⁴ Charles H. Coe, *Red Patriots: The Story of the Seminoles* (Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1974), xxiii-xxiv.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, v.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 20.

molestation in South Florida would cost the state nothing, though even Coe realized that his vision clearly argued against the capitalists interested in draining the Everglades.⁶⁷ Still, Coe's work spoke to a large population, many of them white women, and despite not having a great impact on the Florida legislature, the notion that the Seminoles' degradation could be partially solved with property rights took hold. In his effort to prove that the Seminoles were a maligned group, Coe succeeded in producing a work that did for the Seminoles what Helen Hunt Jackson's *A Century of Dishonor* had done for the Plains Indians earlier in the decade: humanize them.

Coe's work did not have as much political appeal or influence as Hunt Jackson's, yet made a strong case for white assistance being extended to the Seminoles. Minnie Moore-Willson's *The Seminoles of Florida* served many of the same purposes as Coe's work, and published in the same year, it came during a period when Indian reform and protection literature was gaining popularity. In contrast to Coe's work, however, Moore-Willson's was a much more personal appeal, as she was familiar with and lived in close proximity to the Cow Creek Seminoles in the Kissimmee area. Moore-Willson's work will be discussed at length in later chapters, but understanding its place in the canon of Seminole literature at the time is necessary as Moore-Willson held the ear of not only the residents of the state, but increasingly, of Florida politicians, including Senator Duncan U. Fletcher. Concluding that a reservation was the only means of preserving the Seminole people, Moore-Willson's work painted the Seminoles as heroic figures and her descriptions of them were made with the full knowledge that, as the Seminoles were little known or remembered as threats to the United States, her depiction of them

⁶⁷ Ibid., 231-257.

had a great chance of becoming the one most remembered.⁶⁸ Moore-Willson truly believed that the Seminoles were better than the Western Indians and she presented them as such. They were “real Indians,” and the “true key-bearer” to the Everglades, and they deserved the protection of whites and the right to their own land.⁶⁹ In romanticizing the Seminoles, Moore-Willson illustrated the racial politics of the time. She portrayed them in stark contrast to African-Americans, arguing that it was ludicrous for “barbarous” blacks to be protected by laws when Seminoles were not, particularly taking into account the “character...and superiority” of the Seminoles.⁷⁰ That the “first rays of Christian light [had] pierced the dark camps of the Everglades Indians” (despite its relative failure among the Seminoles) further showcased the necessity to aid these salvageable souls.⁷¹ Not highly versed in Indian history, Moore-Willson argued that the dignity and honor of the Seminoles was a result of their descent from the Aztecs through whom they held connections to ancient Israelites and Egyptians.⁷² Though her associations were tenuous, the idea that Native American tribes had descended from the tribes of Israel was a popular theory during the era, and made her argument about the necessity to save the Seminoles from extinction and provide them safe harbor likely more appealing to religiously inclined readers. Though problematic in their portrayal of history and in their paternalism, Coe and Moore-Willson’s books were the first monograph length works to advocate for the Seminoles, and in doing so propagated their cause and introduced a view of them outside of cartoonish characterizations to a white audience. These works were the sole academic portrayals

⁶⁸ Moore-Willson, *The Seminoles of Florida*, 55.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 92, 126.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 65. In 1891, the WNIA entered Florida with the purpose of proselytizing to the Seminoles. But despite the efforts of both reformers and preachers, few Seminoles embraced Christianity at this time.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 79.

of Seminoles during this era, and through their reach, influenced how whites perceived Indians in the early twentieth century.⁷³

Understanding how the group was regarded during the era is necessary to understanding Seminole reform and advocacy. By the early 1900s, the Seminoles had become not only known, but mythologized. Though the state of Florida had done little to help Seminoles, figures like Minnie Moore-Willson and Ivy Stranahan, the most prominent female Indian reformers, would use this mythology and the positive (if not patronizing) perception of the group to advocate for Seminoles through the first decades of the century. It would only be through increased knowledge of the group that change would occur. While their own interactions with Seminoles influenced their personal quests for reform and the creation of a Seminole reservation, these reformers recognized the importance of building on the perceptions of the group, and emphasizing their ability to become civilized and Christianized, to gain public support for Seminole reform.

⁷³ Though not published as a work of academia, Moore-Willson's work gained traction throughout the early twentieth century and was later condensed and published as an article in the July 1928 issue of the *Florida Historical Quarterly*.

CHAPTER 2: MINNIE MOORE-WILLSON AND THE FIGHT TO “SAVE” THE SEMINOLES

By 1900, many Floridians thought Seminoles to be relics of an ancient time. To some, particularly those in Florida’s government, the Seminoles’ culture needed to be washed away in the name of progress, and in the name of dredging the Everglades. However, others, especially those with Indian ties in South Florida or involvement in national Indian affairs, saw the Seminoles as mainstays of the state’s natural environment. These reformers called for their preservation in the name of maintaining the natural history of the United States, and hope to restore to the Seminoles lands that years of bloody warfare had taken away. Many Floridians became involved in the effort to protect the Seminoles to enact what they believed to be positive reforms in their name out of respect for the tribe’s melancholic past and the romantic notions they evoked, as well as the high character that they believed white Americans should show.⁷⁴ One of the most vocal and ultimately, most significant figures within the course of Seminole reform in the state was Minnie Moore-Willson of Kissimmee, Florida. Over the course of forty years, Moore-Willson dedicated her time to the cause of providing protection and aid to a people whom she saw as “vanishing” from American life.⁷⁵ Her tireless efforts effected change in a manner that yielded her equal parts respect and scorn, and made her a greatly divisive figure in early twentieth century Florida. Unwilling to wait for change, Moore-Willson ensured that it happened, and through her writings and campaigning she represented a major force in Florida’s Indian reform.

⁷⁴ Minnie Moore-Willson, “The Florida Seminoles and their rights in the Everglades” [ca. 1915], Unpublished Typescript, Minnie Moore-Willson Papers, Special Collections, University of Miami Libraries, Coral Gables, Florida.

⁷⁵ Moore-Willson, *The Seminoles of Florida*, 54.

Like much of the United States during the early 1900s, Florida was a region in the throes of change. Henry Flagler's East Coast Railroad had further opened up South Florida for tourists and residents alike, and by 1900, the state's population had boomed to 528,000 – up 42% from just a decade prior.⁷⁶ The Progressive Era was well underway in Florida, and the 1904 election of Napoleon Bonaparte Broward saw the call for Everglades drainage, and the implementation of fish and game conservation laws.⁷⁷ Moore-Willson thrived in this culture of change and used the era's turbulence to her advantage in the arena of Indian reform. A suffragette and active participant in the fight for the expansion of women's rights, Moore-Willson expanded her political focus to obtaining a reservation for Seminoles. Within the state, Indian policy was essentially nonexistent. According to Moore-Willson, the state was "leisurely taking our time at finishing the extermination of the original American" through neglect. She believed that as far as the nation was concerned, there were "no Indians in Florida."⁷⁸ Through her writings and associations, she threw herself to the forefront of righting this.

Like many of Florida's early twentieth century conservationists and reformers, Moore-Willson was not a native of the state. Born in West Newton, Pennsylvania, on August 14, 1859, she did not come to Florida until the early 1880s as a winter tourist. Visiting Kissimmee, Florida, she fell in love with the region's natural beauty and gained an interest in the Seminoles who inhabited the area. Following her 1890 marriage to fellow naturalist and businessman, James Mallory Willson, the couple settled in Kissimmee permanently and began a lifelong mission to preserve Florida and its original inhabitants. Her background was northern and patrician, so

⁷⁶ Michael Gannon, *Florida: A Short History*, rev. ed. (1993; repr., Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), 69.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁷⁸ Moore-Willson, *Seminoles*, 55.

unlike the Indians she championed, or many of the Floridians whom she came up against. But through her campaigns, Moore-Willson became a figure of significance in Florida history.

Quickly after settling in Kissimmee, the Willsons educated themselves in the history and daily lives of the Seminoles. The Cow Creek band of Seminoles lived in close proximity to the couple. Unlike many whites in the area, who lived in fear of Indian uprisings, the Willsons interacted with the Seminoles, learned about their culture and language and reciprocated their friendship.⁷⁹ The Seminoles posed little real threat to the white settlers of the region and Moore-Willson recognized this. Her awareness of the Indian situation in Florida created the perfect climate for the publication of her book, *The Seminoles of Florida* (1896).⁸⁰

Moore-Willson's book came during a small wave of publications advocating for Indian reform. It followed Helen Hunt Jackson's seminal 1881 work, *A Century of Dishonor*, which had chronicled the injustices done to the Plains Indians and appealed to the United States Congress for reform in their name. Unlike Jackson, however, who had never lived among Indians and gained her knowledge largely from printed sources, Moore-Willson had a personal relationship with Seminoles. She saw how they lived in Florida, knew their customs and culture, and recognized the importance in preserving them. While the books were alike in conviction and appealed to the morality of Americans, Moore-Willson's work was part plea, part history, and one of the first to provide a written Seminole vocabulary.⁸¹ Although she was not an ethnologist, Moore-Willson was shrewd and capable, and most importantly, knew her audience. She

⁷⁹ Harry A. Kersey, Jr., "The Seminole 'Uprising' of 1907," *Florida Anthropologist* 27, no. 2 (June, 1974), 56.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁸¹ The vocabulary in *The Seminoles of Florida* was compiled by James M. Willson and would be used for decades following its publication. While it has been deemed inaccurate by anthropologists, its significance remains as one of the first complete attempts at translation.

understood the importance of humanizing the Seminoles for white Americans prior to appealing for changes to the laws that affected them.

In line with mainstream views regarding Indians at the time, Moore-Willson argued that the Seminoles were a vanishing people (however, she would note that their numbers were slowly increasing). Building on Clay MacCauley's 1887 report, she believed that the rapid changes the influx of whites brought to Florida's environment would create an unsure future for them.⁸² *The Seminoles of Florida* attempted to shame whites into action by arguing that whites were solely to blame for the vanishing of the Indians, and prompt them to atone for the actions of the Seminole Wars, "a blot and dishonor on our nation," which had deprived them of their land and divided their people.⁸³ Despite the efforts of western Indian reformers, many Americans still viewed western Indians as savages, and Moore-Willson attempted to re-define Seminoles, calling them "real Indians."⁸⁴ As such, they were not guilty of the same barbarism as other tribes. She noted that "their history presents a character, a power, and a romance that impels respect, and an acknowledgement of their superiority."⁸⁵ Arguing that they were descendants of not only the Aztecs, but of the ancient Israelites and Egyptians (she would later write to a friend that similarities could be found in the Seminole turban and the Egyptian article of dress), she believed that they were worthy of not only protection from Americans, but deserved their own lands.⁸⁶ The Seminoles were the people of Osceola, who possessed the "grave dignity characteristic of the red man," and using this characterization, Moore-Willson presented a romanticized version

⁸² U.S. Bureau of Ethnology, *The Seminole Indians*, 532.

⁸³ Moore-Willson, *Seminoles*, 35.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 92.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁸⁶ A.B. Reynolds to Minnie Moore-Willson, June 14, 1899, Minnie Moore-Willson Papers, Special Collections, University of Miami Libraries, Coral Gables, Florida; Moore-Willson, *Seminoles*, 79.

of the Seminoles as an unwavering people, compelled into submission by whites who did not understand how different they were from other Indians.⁸⁷ *The Seminoles of Florida* ended with a plea to protect the Seminoles, to prevent their removal and provide them with legal titles to their own reservation land. Over the next two decades, the book greatly influenced thought on the Seminoles, propelled Moore-Willson to the state stage, and “became a rallying point for those Floridians who believed that the time had come to initiate positive action on behalf of the Indian people.”⁸⁸

The Seminoles of Florida cemented Moore-Willson’s position as an authority on the Seminoles. South Florida naturalists and activists praised the work. Famed naturalist Kirk Munroe commended Moore-Willson for uncovering “the salient features of that most cowardly war which was not ended until the Red Patriots were forced into submission through the foulest treacheries that have ever disgraced the American name” and “brought out so strongly [the Seminoles’] sense of honor, their absolute integrity...and their sturdy independence of character.”⁸⁹ Others regarded the book as an indictment of white America, worthy of sharing shelf space with *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.⁹⁰ It took a few reprints to secure greater state and national readership, but by the start of the twentieth century, the local resonance of the book prompted more and more Floridians to approach Moore-Willson in hopes of learning more about Seminole

⁸⁷ Ibid., 26.

⁸⁸ Harry A. Kersey, Jr., “Private Societies and the Maintenance of Seminole Tribal Integrity, 1899-1957,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 53, no. 3 (January 1978), 303.

⁸⁹ Kirk Munroe to Minnie Moore-Willson, January 20, 1910, Minnie Moore-Willson Papers, Special Collections, University of Miami Libraries, Coral Gables, Florida.

⁹⁰ Thomas J. Healy to Minnie Moore-Willson, March 6, 1910, Minnie Moore-Willson Papers, Special Collections, University of Miami Libraries, Coral Gables, Florida.

culture and their way of life, as well as how to gain an audience with them.⁹¹ Certainly, the publication of *The Seminoles of Florida* fostered greater interest in the Seminoles and their welfare. Along with the personal work of her husband James within the Seminole community, the book served as one of the stepping stones for the creation of the Friends of the Florida Seminoles group.

While recognizing Moore-Willson's significance within the realm of citizen activism for the Seminole cause, it is equally important to remember the actions of her husband James in gaining public awareness of the Seminoles and working alongside them to better their situation in a rapidly changing Florida. His bold wife often eclipsed him, but James was a quieter force, one who worked alongside Minnie and often provided her with important introductions, and was recognized by many as one of the whites in the region who had the closest personal relationship with the Seminoles.⁹² In her own book, Minnie declared James as the "Seminoles' best friend among the whites," and James' actions in a trial to help a local Seminole man obtain his stolen property furthered this view.⁹³ The property, a horse, had been stolen from local resident Tom Tiger by a white Floridian intent on fleecing the Indian. Willson represented Tiger in what would be "the first case in Florida in which an Indian sought protection of the court."⁹⁴ Having no legal citizenship, Seminoles were not subject to the laws or protections of the state, so Willson petitioned for their rights. Despite losing the case due to lack of evidence, Willson, along with others disgusted by the treatment of Tom Tiger, collected money to purchase a new horse for

⁹¹ I.J.F. King to Minnie Moore-Willson, February 4, 1902, Minnie Moore-Willson Papers, Special Collections, University of Miami Libraries, Coral Gables, Florida.

⁹² Harry A. Kersey, Jr. "The "Friends of the Florida Seminoles" Society: 1899-1926," *Tequesta* 1, no. 34 (1974), 5.

⁹³ Moore-Willson, *Seminoles*, 79.

⁹⁴ Harry A. Kersey, Jr. "The Case of Tom Tiger's Horse," 314.

Tiger, and the national spectacle shined a light not only on the Florida Seminoles, but the movement to aid them.⁹⁵

On January 7, 1899, Minnie Moore and James M. Willson, along with others holding similar views, founded the Friends of the Florida Seminoles Society. Organized to advocate for the Seminoles, the group, whose board included the Willsons, clergy members, like Reverends William Crane Gray and Jacob E. Brecht, and politicians, like C.A. Carson and Francis A. Hendry, became “the first effective citizens’ voice for Seminole rights in the state.”⁹⁶ The Society had various goals, including the establishment of a Seminole industrial school (a proposal that the Seminoles neither wanted nor accepted), and increasing awareness of the Society within the state, as most of its fundraising was done outside of Florida.⁹⁷ But most significantly, the Society aimed to influence the passage of legislation to establish a Seminole reservation in South Florida. On a large scale this had never been done before, and while attempts to establish small reservations had been made, most had ended in failure. In May 1891, a joint resolution passed in the Florida legislature “relating to the donation of certain swamp and overflowed lands to the Seminole Indians in South Florida” where they could live “without fear of disturbance and molestation,” but this was little more than lip service by the part of a Florida legislature to national Indian policy, and little came of it, nor the U.S. Congress’ 1894 appropriations for the purchase of Seminole lands.⁹⁸ Between 1894 and 1900, approximately 23,000 acres had been purchased at the cost of \$13,308.52 for Seminole use, and very little of it

⁹⁵ Ibid., 315.

⁹⁶ Kersey, Jr. “The “Friends of the Florida Seminoles” Society,” 5.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 10-11.

⁹⁸ Coe, *Red Patriots*, 231, 251.

was in Seminole hands.⁹⁹ These purchases had come largely from Christian organizations following their recognition that the Seminoles were not going to leave the state. But few local citizens actively supported these efforts. The Friends of the Florida Seminoles recognized this reality, and embarked on a mission to promote citizen activism. They followed in the footsteps of the WNIA, who had purchased land in the Everglades in 1891 and established a Christian mission for the Seminoles at Immokalee under the guidance of Amelia Quinton. When formed in Philadelphia in 1879, the WNIA had allowed women to share ideas and promote their beliefs that Indians needed to be saved, both from extinction and by the grace of a Christian god. However, the WNIA focused on missionary efforts and racial development, and defined their goals as civilization, Christianization, and education, ignoring the possibility that Indians were content in keeping their own cultural values.¹⁰⁰ The Friends of the Florida Seminoles would mirror their beliefs in providing aid and land, but not their efforts of Christianization. In 1899, the Society began searching for property to purchase as reservation land. They hoped that this land would be acceptable to the Seminoles and make action on the part of the state government as uncomplicated as possible.¹⁰¹

The Seminoles had already suffered the loss of most of their lands over the course of the nineteenth century and were beginning to suffer economically due to conservation laws on the little land that remained under their control. In 1900, afraid that Seminoles and their culture were becoming little more than tourist attractions, the Friends of the Florida Seminoles purchased land to be used as a reservation for the tribe. The first of the lands that the Society bought for

⁹⁹ Covington, "Florida Seminoles," 192.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 10-14.

¹⁰¹ Harry A. Kersey, Jr. "Educating the Seminole Indians of Florida, 1879-1970," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 49, no. 1 (July 1970), 21.

Seminole use encompassed 80 acres in Brevard County that could be used for hunting, farming, and education. Moore-Willson became heavily involved in the endeavor and took it on as a personal case of charity, even writing to the State Treasurer asking for all back taxes against the land to be cancelled on account of the land being used for charitable purposes.¹⁰² Though the venture was ultimately unsuccessful (as few Seminoles actually utilized the land and the cost of ownership become untenable for the Society), it marked the beginning of more serious efforts to obtain a large-scale Seminole reservation in Florida, with Moore-Willson at the forefront.

Following its endeavor to establish the Brevard County reservation, the Society, and thus Moore-Willson, worked to increase whites' knowledge of Seminole culture. Moore-Willson recognized the fear that whites, particularly in the Kissimmee region, still harbored regarding Seminoles. In order to make the Seminoles appear less like an 'other,' she started a publicity campaign to introduce them to the public. Moore-Willson aided publications in obtaining photos of Seminoles and her home served as a stopping point for journalists and photographers seeking to write about or photograph the Indians. She also acted as an authority on obtaining Seminole cultural items for display.¹⁰³ Moreover, in 1907, both James and Minnie Moore-Willson quelled (generally unreasonable) fears of an Indian uprising, brought about by the issue of Tom Tiger's bones. Following Tom Tiger's death in the late 1890s, the bones of the 6'6 Indian were buried in traditional Seminole fashion. An amusement park operator from Pennsylvania who claimed to be from the Smithsonian Institute, discovered the burial grounds and subsequently removed the bones for public display. After the offended Seminoles threatened retribution, it was only

¹⁰² Minnie Moore-Willson to Hon. J.B. Whitfeld, September 28, 1900, Minnie Moore-Willson Papers, Special Collections, University of Miami Libraries, Coral Gables, Florida.

¹⁰³ I.J.F. King to Minnie Moore-Willson, February 4, 1902, Minnie Moore-Willson Papers, Special Collections, University of Miami Libraries, Coral Gables, Florida.

through the diplomacy of James Willson and the belief that Willson could have the bones returned, that reduced tensions. The Willsons then created an educational campaign that both introduced whites to Indian culture and aided in the preservation of Seminole artifacts to combat white citizen anxieties about the Seminoles. In doing this, the Willsons attempted to allay persistent community fears and further the cause of the Society.¹⁰⁴ Over the course of the first decade of the twentieth century, Moore-Willson would continue to work with the Society, as well as with the Florida Federation of Women's Clubs, a group of powerful and passionate women that boasted over 100,000 members and championed both Seminole issues and women's suffrage. But it was not until 1910 and the reprint of her book that Moore-Willson truly came into her own and began to forge ahead in her Seminole activism.

With its original publication in 1896, *The Seminoles of Florida* had a localized impact within the state. The book introduced many to Moore-Willson and served as a springboard for the Friends of the Florida Seminoles. However, few except Willson, who pushed for the 1910 reissue and paid for the reprinting and publication of the work herself, believed in the further reach and potential of the book. Environmental activists like Munroe had praised Moore-Willson but feared that it was “to [sic] late and that nothing will be done, other than perhaps a monument to their memory after the last of the tribe has been gathered to his fathers.”¹⁰⁵ Moore-Willson recognized the power of her words in a Florida whose citizens' sympathies were shifting towards the Seminoles, and a nation that was moving away from the idea of “kill the Indian, save the man.” She made sure that the reprint of her book, and her plea, was placed in as many influential

¹⁰⁴ Kersey, Jr., “Uprising,” 56.

¹⁰⁵ Kirk Munroe to Minnie Moore-Willson, February 7, 1910, Minnie Moore-Willson Papers, Special Collections, University of Miami Libraries, Coral Gables, Florida.

hands as possible, thereby igniting the passion to create a large Seminole reserve in South Florida.

As the reprint of *The Seminoles of Florida* gained more widespread appeal, Moore-Willson's reform efforts found champions across the nation. She began to receive letters from Indians praising her work. Tahau, a man of mixed white and Indian heritage, claimed that the book aroused in Indians the indignation that they had felt from "unfulfilled promises of the government." According to Tahau, Moore-Willson's book would "do much in creating public sentiment not only for the poor Seminoles, but for other oppressed tribes as well."¹⁰⁶ Moore-Willson could take personal comfort in the fact that the book spoke to Indians, despite the fact that few Seminoles had read it or been consulted in its creation. However, a greater level of professional achievement, as well as reflection, would come from the praise that she would soon receive from Florida Senator Duncan U. Fletcher.

Through both her own efforts and the work of the Friends of the Florida Seminoles, Moore-Willson was gaining traction in the creation of a reservation, but outside of her relationship with fellow Seminole activist politicians like State Senator C.A. Carson and Louis and Francis A. Hendry, she did not hold the same level of influence as other activist women within the very insular world of Florida politics. Unlike some members of the Florida Federation of Women's Clubs (FFWC) with important names and important husbands, Moore-Willson relied largely on her own writings to gain the attention that she believed her cause deserved. Her work paid off when Fletcher contacted Moore-Willson in 1913, claiming a familiarity with her

¹⁰⁶ Tahau to Minnie Moore-Willson, June 9, 1911, Minnie Moore-Willson Papers, Special Collections, University of Miami Libraries, Coral Gables, Florida.

writings, a long-standing interest in the Seminoles, and a belief that “this great government should mete to them simple justice, if nothing more.”¹⁰⁷ Moore-Willson believed that the Seminoles had three friends in Florida – the legislature, the Florida Federation of Women’s Clubs (FFWC), and the Florida Press Association. Fletcher warned Moore-Willson that, for the most part, these allies had actually done little. Writing to her in a 1914 letter, Fletcher declared the federal government much more of an ally to the Seminoles and Moore-Willson’s cause, and asked her “is it more important to have an ally extending its sympathy and good wishes by generously worded resolutions, or an ally that actually puts up the means, and sets in motion the agencies, which go right down among the Indians and supplies the needed help?”¹⁰⁸ His words came on the heels of Governor Park Trammell’s veto of a bill to provide a 100,000 acre reservation for the Seminoles, on account of his belief that it would be unfair to Florida whites, and they stuck with Moore-Willson. In the coming years, she would find herself at odds with the reigning powers in Florida and seek assistance wherever she could find it in making the Seminole reservation a reality.¹⁰⁹

But as she gained the praise of powerful people and watched her book grow in popularity, Moore-Willson’s attempts to achieve a large scale Seminole reservation stagnated. The Seminoles had not migrated to the 80 acre reservation in Brevard, and the land the federal government set aside, 23,000 acres, was sandy, unfertile, and by the 1910s, had no Indians living

¹⁰⁷ Senator Duncan U. Fletcher to Minnie Moore-Willson, September 6, 1913, Minnie Moore-Willson Papers, Special Collections, University of Miami Libraries, Coral Gables, Florida.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, November 28, 1914, Minnie Moore-Willson Papers, Special Collections, University of Miami Libraries, Coral Gables, Florida.

¹⁰⁹ Covington, “Formation of the State of Florida Indian Reservation,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 64, no. 1 (July 1985), 65.

on it.¹¹⁰ After Trammell's veto of a new reservation, it appeared that the Seminoles were in a holding pattern. Moore-Willson's words could elicit sympathy for the tribe, but action required more work, more petitioning, and more allies.

Large scale reservation formation in Florida had never been implemented on the same level as in the West. During the nineteenth century reservation boom, Florida's Indians were either at war with the United States or geographically isolated enough for a large scale reservation to be untenable. Furthermore, as the Seminoles had never signed a peace treaty with the United States, the implementation of the reservation system was more difficult. Nationwide, in the 1880s and 1890s, the reservation system was losing steam and many across the nation saw allotment and assimilation as the only route to native survival.¹¹¹ Into the twentieth century however, U.S. sentiment began to shift. Ideas of assimilation lost favor, as "freeing" Indians to fend for themselves in American society – to essentially, sink or swim – became more of an appealing possibility¹¹² In what historian C. Joseph Genetin-Pilawa described as "upholding a mythic notion of American individualism," national Indian reform shifted by the twentieth century from wanting to "save" Indians to expecting unaided assimilation.¹¹³ With her nineteenth century perspective that reservations were needed for survival, Moore-Willson was working for a solution deemed flawed in the West. Reservations had never been tested for Seminoles, and she believed that they could succeed in Florida. She sought a nineteenth century enclave free of white intrusion for the Seminoles but under modern beliefs that the Seminole way of life and

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 64.

¹¹¹ C. Joseph Genetin-Pilawa, *Crooked Paths to Allotment: The Fight over Federal Indian Policy after the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 26.

¹¹² Hoxie, *A Final Promise*, 187.

¹¹³ Genetin-Pilawa, *Crooked Paths*, 116.

culture should be protected, rather than stamped out. Moore-Willson was seeking to enact reforms that not only provided Indians with communal land, but the ability to protect their tribal identity. She believed a reservation could do this. Without a reservation, she feared that the Seminoles would be left behind, and their culture extinguished under threat of white encroachment.

Nineteen-fifteen marked the start of Moore-Willson's most significant and influential foray into Indian reform. Prior to that year, she had used her membership in the FFWC, on the Federation's Indian Committee, to secure Indian aid and advocate for the creation of a reservation. From its beginnings in 1895, the FFWC had taken on issues of public policy and over the next two decades, would only grow in power. By 1915, it boasted 100,000 members.¹¹⁴ As Florida's largest volunteer organization, it became one of the state's most powerful groups. The women at the head of the FFWC were determined in their efforts, whether the cause was suffrage, environmental protection, or Indian affairs, and their connections in politics were strong and far reaching. No woman in Florida held as much influence in the state as the FFWC's president during this era, May Mann Jennings.¹¹⁵ The wife and daughter of prominent Florida politicians, Jennings had grown up in the political sphere and had made her voice heard in Tallahassee. Known for her ability to get things done, Jennings was an ally to Moore-Willson for most of the 1910s, but as the Reservation process stalled, their relationship grew toxic and their opinions of each other turned a political fight into personal mudslinging.

¹¹⁴ Joan S. Carver, "Women in Florida," *The Journal of Politics* 41, no. 3 (August, 1979), 942.

¹¹⁵ Leslie Kemp-Poole, "The Women of the Early Florida Audubon Society: Agents of History in the Fight to Save State Birds," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 85, no. 3 (Winter, 2007), 319.

In a 1915 FFCW publication, Moore-Willson decried the state's Indian policy and its tardiness in enacting any Indian reform.¹¹⁶ Moore-Willson believed that the subject had gotten too big for her works alone and declared that she was willing to do what she needed to in getting the state to finally act; including releasing information that she claimed to have that would embarrass state officials.¹¹⁷ She did not name names, but it was believed that she referred to the business dealings on Indian land on the part of former Governor William S. Jennings, among others. Moore-Willson's threats quickly drew the ire of Mann Jennings, the governor's wife, who until this point had claimed to not realize that there had been any difference in the beliefs of herself, the Federation and Moore-Willson on Indian affairs. She told Moore-Willson that it was to the disadvantage of the Seminoles for women to ask the legislature for worthless land in the name of expediency. Mann Jennings further warned Moore-Willson that "antagonism never accomplishes anything, and as the Federation has a splendid standing with officials in the state, we cannot afford to jeopardize that standing by any antagonism," and made it clear that if Moore-Willson persisted in her course, that she "would have to do it as an individual."¹¹⁸ Mann Jennings believed that Moore-Willson's veiled threats against state officials and harsh words would both undermine the cause of the Federation, and of women in Florida politics, "as a great many men still think that women get carried away by sentiment, [and] intusiasm [sic]," and clarified to Moore-Willson that if she were to publish statements regarding Seminoles again, it would require the approval of Ivy Stranahan, then the Chairman of the Federation's Indian

¹¹⁶ Covington, "Formation," 68.

¹¹⁷ Minnie Moore-Willson to Mrs. Hocker, February 18, 1915, Minnie Moore-Willson Papers, Special Collections, University of Miami Libraries, Coral Gables, Florida.

¹¹⁸ May Mann Jennings to Minnie Moore-Willson, May 12, 1915, Minnie Moore-Willson Papers, Special Collections, University of Miami Libraries, Coral Gables, Florida.

Committee.¹¹⁹ Like Mann Jennings, Moore-Willson did not take threats lightly, and while she did not resign from her position on the Indian Committee, she searched for allies more committed to her cause of immediately obtaining a reservation.

In 1915, members of the national Indian Rights Association (IRA), founded in 1882 under the banner of civilizing Indians, visited the Everglades to examine Seminole “settlements, [and] note their health, home, [and] industries.”¹²⁰ IRA Secretary Matthew K. Sniffen was effectively in charge of the group’s management and reached out to Moore-Willson for suggestions and help in this endeavor. Following her rift with the FFWC, the IRA would become Moore-Willson’s staunchest ally in the efforts to obtain a reservation. She introduced the IRA and Sniffen to her belief that the FFWC and those they worked with were a ““stumbling block” to the progress of justice for these poor people,” and encouraged them to “smoke out” William S. Jennings in regards to the 100,000 acres of Everglades lands that he had purchased in 1899.¹²¹ She and the IRA believed that the Jennings’ (and their political circle) were the answer to the question that she had been asking in her writings: “Why have the Seminoles in Florida been continuously denied lands in the Everglades?” It is important to note that it was during this time that Moore-Willson began to appear more paranoid in her behaviors, declaring herself and her allies to be the only true friends of the Seminoles. All others, she believed, who claimed to be advocates of the Indians wanted to do nothing but push their own agendas.¹²² Arguing that “the only difficulty in [the Seminoles] not getting lands lies in the hands of a very few politicians and

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ M.K. Sniffen to Minnie Moore-Willson, December 9, 1915, Minnie Moore-Willson Papers, Special Collections, University of Miami Libraries, Coral Gables, Florida.

¹²¹ Ibid., December 21, 1915, Minnie Moore-Willson Papers, Special Collections, University of Miami Libraries, Coral Gables, Florida.

¹²² Covington, “Formation,” 68.

land grafters” who stood in the way of progress, she believed that Indian reform, and creating a full-scale Seminole reservation with all expediency, were not being promoted to the public “because the leading paper is controlled by the same people who own the Everglade land, and they refuse to take any articles, even the simplest one, concerning the Seminoles from me.”¹²³

Moore-Willson was on her way to effecting change for the Seminoles in South Florida. She had enlisted the assistance of the IRA, one of the most powerful Indian lobbying groups in the nation, as well as U.S. Indian Commissioner Cato Sells, who offered assistance in regards to best practices for reform groups. With the help of the IRA and Sells, Moore-Willson could obtain a deeper foothold among politicians and take advantage of the weight behind their names. Despite this, Moore-Willson believed herself to be thwarted at every corner, particularly by the leadership of the FFWC (of which she remained a member). She declared Mann Jennings “the enemy” to progress (in correspondence, Moore-Willson would often refer to Jennings as “our friend, the enemy”), and accused her of being part of a greater enemy, “so few in number and yet so powerful [that they] must fear something being uncovered.”¹²⁴ Moore-Willson insisted that it was the moral imperative for Jennings to relinquish her Everglades lands to these “long neglected people, since she has the land now, and all that is needed is the stroke of a pen, and Mr. Jennings’ consent, to give them [the land] to the Seminoles.”¹²⁵ Further, she believed that Mann Jennings had been maligning her name in the Florida press, disparaging her work, and circulating the idea that Moore-Willson was in favor of giving “worthless lands” to the

¹²³ Minnie Moore-Willson to Tahau, March 2, 1916, Minnie Moore-Willson Papers, Special Collections, University of Miami Libraries, Coral Gables, Florida.

¹²⁴ Minnie Moore-Willson to Mary Lee Legat, March 10, 1916, Minnie Moore-Willson Papers, Special Collections, University of Miami Libraries, Coral Gables, Florida.

¹²⁵ Minnie Moore-Willson to Mrs. Graves, March 14, 1916, Minnie Moore-Willson Papers, Special Collections, University of Miami Libraries, Coral Gables, Florida.

Seminoles. Unwilling to accept such criticism, real or imagined, Moore-Willson threatened to write an exposé on the Williams S. Jennings “if she wanted to create an explosion.”¹²⁶ Privately, Moore-Willson criticized any person not working for the immediate creation of a reservation. Despite an outwardly friendly relationship with Ivy Stranahan, chairman of the FFWC Indian Committee, Moore-Willson informed others that she was unsure of Stranahan, stating in a letter to fellow committee member Mrs. W.B. Young that “confidentially, I do not know how far I can trust her.”¹²⁷ She further declared that she knew that Stranahan “knows very little” about the Seminoles and that “her husband made his money off the Indians, and he is wealthy now,” but that Frank Stranahan could have paid them more for their goods.”¹²⁸ Considering the insularity of the FFWC and the close associations of those involved with Indian reform in Florida at the time, it was of little surprise when Stranahan kindly encouraged Moore-Willson to step down and act independently of the Committee, for the benefit of her own accomplishments and desires.¹²⁹

Moore-Willson’s ability to make enemies and belief that her opinions were always right likely hindered her attempts to reach the audience she wished. Robert Sterling Yard, head of the Department of the Interior, warned Moore-Willson that with her defiant attitude, she would not “get anywhere, for all your good work, in the face of public apathy about the Seminoles,” even though “the tragedy and romance associated with them is capable of being made a strong

¹²⁶ Minnie Moore-Willson to Mrs. W.B. Young, March 10, 1916, Minnie Moore-Willson Papers, Special Collections, University of Miami Libraries, Coral Gables, Florida.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, April 26, 1916, Minnie Moore-Willson Papers, Special Collections, University of Miami Libraries, Coral Gables, Florida.

¹²⁸ Minnie Moore-Willson to Mrs. Graves, March 14, 1916, Minnie Moore-Willson Papers, Special Collections, University of Miami Libraries, Coral Gables, Florida.

¹²⁹ Ivy Stranahan to Minnie Moore-Willson, December 26, 1916, Minnie Moore-Willson Papers, Special Collections, University of Miami Libraries, Coral Gables, Florida.

pull.”¹³⁰ But by the end of 1916, despite the obstacles that came from leaving the FFWC’s Indian Committee and disassociating from some of the most powerful women in the state, Moore-Willson was in the ear of some of Florida’s most influential men. Having reached out to J.E. Ingraham, the Vice President of the Florida East Coast Railway, Moore-Willson had created a business ally with great sympathy to her goals, and with Sniffen writing on the behalf of an Indian reservation to legislature members in Tallahassee, the prospect of creating a large scale reservation in South Florida was being heard in the state’s capital.¹³¹

Moore-Willson was fighting against her peers for a Seminole reservation, but the fact that public sentiment was on her side buoyed her. She received letters from all over the state praising her cause. But Moore-Willson still felt she was being attacked by members of the Jacksonville press, whom she believed were in the pocket of Mann Jennings. Moore-Willson felt “all-in,” and was often physically and financially taxed from her work, but her allies refused to allow her to falter. “Things may not be as dark as they seem at first glance,” Sniffen wrote to her in a 1917 letter, “just cheer up and remember that the fight has not yet taken place. We have not yet been defeated because we must first get into the fight and test the enemy’s actual strength.”¹³² Along with the Floridians on her side, words like these kept Moore-Wilson going. The political rise of Sidney J. Catts only fueled her further.

¹³⁰ Robert Sterling Yard to Minnie Moore-Willson, June 24, 1916, Minnie Moore-Willson Papers, Special Collections, University of Miami Libraries, Coral Gables, Florida.

¹³¹ J.E. Ingraham to Minnie Moore-Willson, December 12, 1916. Minnie Moore-Willson Papers, Special Collections, University of Miami Libraries, Coral Gables, Florida.

¹³² Matthew K. Sniffen to Minnie Moore-Willson, March 12, 1917, Minnie Moore-Willson Papers, Special Collections, University of Miami Libraries, Coral Gables, Florida.

Catts was elected Governor of Florida in 1916. On the surface, he and Moore-Willson could not have been more different. She was a Northerner, considered herself cultured and refined, and was fighting to save a vanishing people who could not save themselves. Catts was an Alabaman pastor who had made his way to North Florida to preach his gospel as much as his politics, and who poor whites regarded as the defender of the common man. However, they had something in common – both were tired of the Democratic leadership in Florida.¹³³ James Willson had forged a relationship with the governor and in February of 1917, Catts sent to Moore-Willson a letter more encouraging than anything she had received from Tallahassee in the past. “I am very much in favor of this (looking to the better conditions of the Seminole Indians) and also to righting their wrong, if we can meet on any common ground and basis of operation [sic],” Catts wrote, “So when you get your bill prepared will you kindly send me a copy or let me read it before it goes to the Legislature [sic]?”¹³⁴ Catts realized that land given to Seminoles was land that would have little effect on proposed Everglades drainage, and as a Tallahassee outsider with no personal stake or investment in Everglades land, he was able and willing to work with Moore-Willson. With the governor seemingly on her side, Moore-Willson went to work again, drafting another bill and calling upon anyone of influence. Along with Ingraham and Hendry, James A. Moore of the South Florida Farms Co. pledged his support, declaring that some of his friends were “influential at Tallahassee and have some friends who are, so I am doing all I can to

¹³³ Catts ran, and won, as a member of the Prohibition Party. While he campaigned against them, during his term, Catts would actually be quite conciliatory to the Democratic leadership and maintain a positive working relationship. More information on Catts can be found in Wayne Flynt’s seminal work *Cracker Messiah: Governor Sidney J. Catts of Florida* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977).

¹³⁴ Sidney J. Catts to Minnie Moore-Willson, February 5, 1917, Minnie Moore-Willson Papers, Special Collections, University of Miami Libraries, Coral Gables, Florida.

help the good work along.”¹³⁵ Sells pledged assistance, if necessary, and U.S. Indian Inspector W.S. Coleman asked for official permission to join the Friends of the Florida Seminoles, and provided personal aid.¹³⁶ With Spencer, Sniffen, and her husband James, Moore-Willson began drafting the bill. Written by Milton Pledger, an attorney, Nathan C. Bryan of Kissimmee introduced it to the Florida House of Representatives.¹³⁷ Called the Seminole Land Bill, it set aside 99,200 acres stretching from the Florida Everglades into the 10,000 Islands off of the state’s west coast for Seminole land cultivation and use. On May 9, 1917, the bill passed in the Florida legislature. On May 20, 1917, Governor Catts signed it into law. It was monumental legislation. For the first time in its history, the state had set aside land for the use of Seminoles. There was a Seminole Reservation in Florida. Moore-Willson had lost her allies in the FFWC and had worked at this on her own. She had spent countless hours and days drawing attention to the necessity of the immediate creation of a reservation. In recognition of her role as the “mother of the Seminole Land Bill,” Governor Catts gave Moore-Willson the golden pen with which the bill was signed into law.¹³⁸

Moore-Willson received much praise for her efforts. Sells sent hearty congratulations via telegram. Director General of the General Federation of Women’s Clubs, Grace Julian Clarke, commended Moore-Willson, stating that she deserved “untold credit for holding on until success

¹³⁵ James A. Moore to Minnie Moore-Willson, March 29, 1917, Minnie Moore-Willson Papers, Special Collections, University of Miami Libraries, Coral Gables, Florida.

¹³⁶ W.S. Coleman to Minnie Moore-Willson, February 15, 1917, Minnie Moore-Willson Papers, Special Collections, University of Miami Libraries, Coral Gables, Florida.

¹³⁷ Covington, “Formation,” 70.

¹³⁸ Kersey, Jr. “The “Friends of the Florida Seminoles” Society,” 14.

came at last. Many would have lost heart long years ago.”¹³⁹ The United States Indian School staff in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, sent their congratulations to Moore-Willson. Some of the most significant praise, however, came from women within the state, and fellow members of the FFCW, like Minerva Jennings, who congratulated Moore-Willson “upon the final victory of justice over greed.”¹⁴⁰ Margaret R. Young, another member of the General Federation of Women’s Clubs, based out of Jacksonville, extolled Moore-Willson in contrast to May Mann Jennings, stating “And just to think, *there is no possible way for a certain person to claim it...A certain body proclaims in loud tones that SHE DID IT. All of our men and women look upon the lady as a huge joke...I think your achievement the best of the women of the state, or rather any women of the state.*”¹⁴¹

Yet, the praise for Moore-Willson was not universal. *The Florida Times-Union*, based in Jacksonville, published a scathing editorial on the bill, declaring that only 5% of the land was tillable, and that the state (encouraged by Moore-Willson) had “donated worthless...swamp land” to the Seminoles.¹⁴² In reality, the land *was* wet, not conducive to growing, and a cause for pessimism in many ways, including the fear that poachers would benefit more from the hunting grounds than the Indians who relied on it.¹⁴³ Additionally, the fear that Seminoles would not agree to move on to the land still existed. To Moore-Willson, this merely meant that more work lay ahead.

¹³⁹ Grace Julian Clarke to Minnie Moore-Willson, June 2, 1917, Minnie Moore-Willson Papers, Special Collections, University of Miami Libraries, Coral Gables, Florida.

¹⁴⁰ Minerva P. Jennings to Minnie Moore-Willson, May 10, 1917, Minnie Moore-Willson Papers, Special Collections, University of Miami Libraries, Coral Gables, Florida.

¹⁴¹ Margaret R. Young to Minnie Moore-Willson, May 18, 1917, Minnie Moore-Willson Papers, Special Collections, University of Miami Libraries, Coral Gables, Florida.

¹⁴² *Florida Times-Union*, May 10, 1917, p. 4.

¹⁴³ U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs and Roy Nash. *Seminole Indians: Survey of the Seminole Indians of Florida*. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1931), 57.

Following the passage of the Seminole Land Bill, Moore-Willson continued to lobby for the Seminoles, but in the greater context of environmental protection. After Governor Catts opposed lobbying to give the title of the Seminole reservation land to the federal government, preferring to keep control of the reservation in state hands, Moore-Willson fought to make sure that drainage efforts and Florida land interests did not disturb the land.¹⁴⁴ She continued to be the go-to figure for politicians, religious organizations, and environmentalists seeking information on the Seminoles and conferred with figures like Clay MacCauley and George Bird Grinnell regarding the creation of a National Park in the Florida Everglades.¹⁴⁵ By the 1920s, her goal had become to “do something big for the Indians, the bird life, and the animals of the Everglades. I can do it, but I want to do it pleasantly and graciously,” she stated, and once again, she began working with the FFWC, and Mann Jennings (as well as Marjorie Stoneman Douglas) for the preservation of the Everglades.¹⁴⁶

Though she lived among them, Moore-Willson often saw the Seminoles as a natural part of her environment. She had appreciated the Seminoles as a people, their history and their plight, but clearly saw them through the paternalistic lens of needing to be saved, and herself as the person with the clearest vision to enact change in their favor. Her efforts were commendable and her ability to work as a woman outside the confines of Florida’s political elites was impressive. Still, Moore-Willson’s legacy remains problematic. Her view of the Seminoles as a part of the Everglades, little different than the birds and animals that inhabited the great swamp, minimized

¹⁴⁴ Matthew K. Sniffen to Minnie Moore-Willson, March 6, 1919, Minnie Moore-Willson Papers, Special Collections, University of Miami Libraries, Coral Gables, Florida.

¹⁴⁵ George Bird Grinnell to Minnie Moore-Willson, October 22, 1925, Minnie Moore-Willson Papers, Special Collections, University of Miami Libraries, Coral Gables, Florida.

¹⁴⁶ Minnie Moore-Willson to Mrs. Vans Agnew, August 25, 1925, Minnie Moore-Willson Papers, Special Collections, University of Miami Libraries, Coral Gables, Florida.

the importance of her personal relationships with them. Her means of introducing their history and culture to a white audience proved that she continued to see them as a mythical other. Despite the inherent paternalism and problematic motivations behind Moore-Willson's efforts, her ability to call for Indian reform placed her in a unique position among Florida's female reformers. Moore-Willson died in 1937, and though her writings on the Seminoles would be discredited harshly within the field of anthropology as the twentieth century progressed, she remained one of the first ladies of Seminole reform within the state of Florida, the driving force behind Florida's first state reservation.¹⁴⁷ An unyielding woman, she was the "mother of the Seminole Land Bill."¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁷ In a 1958 publication of the Florida Anthropological Society entitled "Notes in Anthropology, vol. 2" William C. Sturtevant declared that Moore-Willson's *The Seminoles of Florida* was "unfortunately the best known description of the Seminoles. The work is a highly romanticized and inaccurate accumulation of observations and hypotheses...to sift the few useful facts from the mass of inaccuracies requires considerable knowledge of Seminole culture and of Seminole personalities, and the book is not to be recommended for any purpose." Sturtevant, "Accomplishments and Opportunities in Florida Indian Ethnology," 21.

¹⁴⁸ Kersey, Jr. "The "Friends of the Florida Seminoles" Society," 14.

CHAPTER 3: IVY STRANAHAN, THE FLORIDA FEDERATION OF WOMEN'S CLUBS, AND THE OTHER SIDE OF FLORIDA INDIAN REFORM

In the early part of the twentieth century, Minnie Moore-Willson demonstrated the power in what one dedicated woman could do when given time and a platform. Moore-Willson was something of a lone wolf, working independently and tirelessly for the cause of a Seminole reservation. Her goal was singular and her ability to capture an audience was undeniable; the general recognition she received as the impetus behind the 1917 Seminole Lands Bill proved this. In working alone, Moore-Willson was an anomaly, however. Over the course of the first decades of the twentieth century, women reformers were slowly gaining influence in Florida. They were forming women's clubs and petitioning their legislature for comprehensive change, swayed by the Progressive political winds that had come over the state. To many of these women, Seminole reform was part of a greater agenda to change Florida for the better. Gaining rights for the Seminoles, whether they were land rights, education, or better access to healthcare, was only one component of a more moral, more just, more righteous Florida. They saw their ability to enact change in Florida, and they recognized that there was strength in numbers. Unlike Moore-Willson, who often reacted negatively to ideas opposing her own even if they would be effective, many of the women understood that politics in Florida was not a zero-sum game, particularly in the realm of Seminole reform, where so little had been done to aid to the tribe. In banding together, their voices became clearer, stronger, and able to reach a vast, and important, audience. Of these women who would champion Seminole reform, only one had the first-hand experience with Seminoles that could rival Moore-Willson's: Ivy Stranahan of Fort Lauderdale. Stranahan was never as forceful as Moore-Willson, but she was just as vocal on Seminole issues,

and by the time of her death in 1971, was considered one of the foremost friends that the Seminoles had in the twentieth century.

Stranahan and Moore-Willson held several similarities. Unlike many of the women who fought for Indian reform in the state, both of them lived near the Seminoles. They maintained relationships with them and took measures to understand their way of life. Both women let the Seminoles into their homes, and even if they did not consider them equals, they tried to the best of their abilities to better their daily situations. Both women married men who were not only known, but lauded, in their communities, and in terms of local memory, both women outshined their husbands as the arbiters on Indian affairs in their regions. These two women could easily be regarded as the driving forces behind Seminole reform in the state of Florida, and while both shared a passion for Seminole reform, and an honest love of the Seminole people, this was largely where their similarities ended. Ultimately, it was their differences in opinion, and their differences in choice of allies, that drove the Seminole reform movement of the early twentieth century.

As previously stated, Florida was late in enacting any type of Indian reform. While during the post-Civil War era, the rest of the United States clamored first for the reservation system, and then for incorporating Indians into greater American society, Florida remained quiet.¹⁴⁹ The Seminoles, fractured following the wars of the nineteenth century, generally steered clear of white settlements in Florida and remained in the inhospitable Florida Everglades. Though en vogue nationwide, acculturation did not take place in Florida. Aside from the attempts of the WNIA to Christianize the Seminoles in the 1890s, few took an active interest in

¹⁴⁹ Hoxie, *A Final Promise*, x.

the tribe. This changed in the early 1900s, two decades after the rest of the nation. Stranahan was among the twentieth century women who took cues from the WNIA members of the decades before her. Many of those women left behind ideas of acculturating Indians in favor of a Progressive stance declaring that Indian ways needed to be preserved out of concern for conservation and environmentalism.¹⁵⁰ Stranahan, however, believed acculturation was the only way for Seminoles to survive. Stranahan advocated the Christianization of the Seminoles; through this, they would gain both civilization and education, and Stranahan worked with the FFWC to accomplish this. Stranahan closely fit the mold of a post-Civil War Indian reformer in her advocacy as a Protestant ethic drove her work. Like those women, Stranahan followed the “time honored feminist tradition of creating a network of middle and upper class friends who shared [her] values and hopes.”¹⁵¹ Stranahan’s hopes included creating a safe and productive reservation for the Indians and imparting Christian ideals to them.

Stranahan’s Christianity drove her in all of her efforts. Moore-Willson was an active Southern Baptist who believed in missionary efforts abroad, but her religion little influenced her daily reform efforts for the Seminoles.¹⁵² Stranahan, from her youth, let her Methodism act as her guide in all facets of her life. Ivy Julia Cromartie was born to farmers in White Springs, Florida, on the banks of the Suwannee River, on February 24, 1881.¹⁵³ In 1885, her family relocated to Juno, Florida, in modern day Palm Beach County following the Great Freeze, which

¹⁵⁰ Holm, *The Great Confusion in Indian Affairs*, 53.

¹⁵¹ Valerie Sherer-Mathes, “Nineteenth Century Women and Reform: The Women’s National Indian Association,” *American Indian Quarterly* 14, no. 1 (Winter 1990), 1.

¹⁵² W.H. Smith to Minnie Moore-Willson, March 13, 1908, Minnie Moore-Willson Papers, Special Collections, University of Miami Libraries, Coral Gables, Florida.

¹⁵³ August Burghard, *Mrs. Frank Stranahan, Pioneer* (Fort Lauderdale, FL: The Historical Society of Fort Lauderdale, Inc., 1968), 1.

incapacitated the state's growing regions, before settling in Lemon City in 1887.¹⁵⁴ In Lemon City, near Miami, she had her first experiences with the natural Florida that dominated so much of her later life. As a young adult, she learned about the threats to Florida wildlife and the state's natural environment from her family's association with the Bradley family. It is probable that she was acquainted with Audubon Society warden Guy Bradley, and this relationship likely increased her knowledge of natural Florida and influenced her later views on the immorality of plume hunting in the Florida Everglades.¹⁵⁵

In 1899, she left Lemon City to become a teacher in New River (modern Fort Lauderdale). She had not graduated from high school, but with the aid of a tutor, she passed the Florida exam for elementary education certification.¹⁵⁶ She was assigned to a one-room schoolhouse, and teaching students, sometimes only a few at a time, she began her career as an educator. In that year of teaching, she met Frank Stranahan. Frank was the postmaster of New River, the owner of the New River camp and trading post, and at the forefront of the Indian trade in the community. Frank Stranahan and the Seminoles in Fort Lauderdale respected each other. Their relationship was based on trust, and in the unsettled South Florida swamplands, he recognized the abilities of the Indians and their importance in creating a viable trade economy in South Florida.¹⁵⁷ The goods that the Seminole trade provided Frank (largely animal pelts and hides and bird plumage, the last of which sold for exorbitant prices for women's apparel in major cities) aided in making him New River's most prominent businessman, and its most eligible bachelor. Frank was immediately smitten with Ivy, and she reciprocated his affection. On August

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 2.

¹⁵⁵ Kersey, Jr., *The Stranahans of Fort Lauderdale*, 117.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 72.

¹⁵⁷ Kersey, Jr., *Pelts, Plumes, and Hides*, 40-53.

16, 1900, within a year of her arrival in New River, the two were married in Lemon City and Ivy Cromartie became Ivy Stranahan.¹⁵⁸ Despite her reappointment to teach the next school year, the newly minted Mrs. Stranahan declined her position and ended her public school teaching career.¹⁵⁹ Through the relationship that Frank had developed with the Seminoles, however, her life as an educator was only beginning.

For decades, Frank had associated with the Seminoles through his trading post. With every hunt, 100-150 Indians docked their canoes at the New River Trading Camp and bartered their pelts and hides with him.¹⁶⁰ Soon after marrying, Ivy became involved with the people her husband relied on for trade. She was a committed proponent of temperance, and her influence with the Seminole community began with encouraging her husband to stop the sale of alcohol to Indians in his store. Ivy believed that alcohol consumption was a great evil to befall upon the nation and threatened Christian morals, but it was particularly damaging to the Indians. Ivy Stranahan had her first success, albeit small, in Florida Indian reform, in convincing Frank to curtail the alcohol supply in the Everglades, including seemingly innocuous items like vanilla extract.¹⁶¹ In 1904, the Stranahans moved the store from their home and its original New River location, and by 1905, their trade with the Indians was all but over. Due to environmental concerns, the state government set restrictions on plume hunting and hide prices decreased dramatically. While Frank continued to buy from the Seminoles out of “a nostalgic connection with the bygone days of Indian trade,” the level of trade was never the same.¹⁶² Despite the drop

¹⁵⁸ Kersey, Jr., *Stranahans*, 74.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 73.

¹⁶⁰ Burghard, *Stranahan*, 18.

¹⁶¹ Kersey Jr., *Stranahans*, 116.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 82.

in trade relations during these years, Ivy's personal relationship with the Seminoles was only beginning.

In 1902, shortly following her wedding and introduction to the Seminoles, Stranahan began using her education background to reach out to the Seminole children of the hunters and traders that frequented the trading post. At first, their interactions were limited, with Stranahan offering the children fruit or allowing them to dress up in her seemingly exotic hats.¹⁶³ But soon, in the yard of the trading post, Stranahan introduced the children to basic English and arithmetic. She saw it as a part of her "Christian duty to work with the youngsters so that they may be better prepared to cope with the ever encroaching white culture."¹⁶⁴ Stranahan claimed not to proselytize to the Seminole youth, but she followed in the tradition of the missionary women of the WNIA who had attempted to establish schools on their missions, and utilized educational materials obtained from a local Presbyterian church that served as Sunday school lessons and had religious overtones.¹⁶⁵ Stranahan did not believe, as R.H. Pratt had declared some two decades prior, that "no great progress [could] be made in the education and civilization" of the Seminoles and her faith in the ability of many of the Seminole children was unwavering.¹⁶⁶ After the relocation of the trading post, Ivy drove in a Model T Ford down the unpaved and swampy roads into the Seminole camps to provide the western education that she believed the Seminoles deserved.¹⁶⁷ Sitting on a log in the middle of the pine barrens, pictorial lessons in hand, Ivy Stranahan became the first teacher of western education to many Seminole children. Despite her

¹⁶³ Burghard, *Stranahan*, 18.

¹⁶⁴ Kersey, Jr., "Educating the Seminole Indians of Florida," 24.

¹⁶⁵ Kersey, Jr., *Stranahans*, 131.

¹⁶⁶ William C. Sturtevant, "R.H. Pratt's Report on the Seminoles in 1879," *Florida Anthropologist* 9 (March 1956), 14-15.

¹⁶⁷ Kersey, Jr., *Stranahans*, 131.

regular interaction with the Seminoles and her willingness to let them into her home (a willingness that many other upper-class whites of the era likely did not share), Stranahan's efforts were undoubtedly marked with paternalism. To the Seminoles, she stated, "we don't want to make you like us, we just want to give you education, so that you can make the best of what you are." And to Strahan, the best that Seminoles could be were Christians with a western education.¹⁶⁸ The medicine men of the Seminole community often derided her as an interloper, attempting to finish the stamping out of Seminole culture that the Americans had started in the nineteenth century. Regardless of whether Stranahan's goals were solely assimilationist in intent; her dedication to Seminole education was unquestionable, as she continued the work for over twenty-five years.¹⁶⁹

Stranahan's passion was Seminole education. She worked tirelessly for the building of a Seminole school and believed that Seminole children had an eagerness to learn.¹⁷⁰ When this education was not available in segregated and scarcely populated South Florida, she funded the education of Seminole youth (like Betty Mae Jumper, the granddaughter of Tom Tiger) at the federal Indian School in Cherokee, North Carolina. She regularly corresponded with the children there and sent clothing and other needed goods.¹⁷¹ Though her passion lay in the education of Seminole children, it was a cause which received little attention, both nationwide, and within Florida Indian reform circles. It held Stranahan's attention for the rest of her life, but in the 1910s, she became involved in more diverse aspects of Indian reform.

¹⁶⁸ Kersey, Jr., *Pelts*, 54.

¹⁶⁹ Kersey, Jr., "Educating," 24.

¹⁷⁰ Betty Mae Tiger Jumper and Patsy West, *A Seminole Legend: The Life of Betty Mae Tiger Jumper* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001), 106.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

Through the first decade of the twentieth century, Ivy performed most of her work with the Seminoles on a local scale. Her greatest means of influence was effecting policy at her husband's store and traveling into the Seminole camps to provide elementary education to Seminole children. These actions were, by no means, minimal. Few who had migrated to South Florida during this time acknowledged the Indians at all. Her status in the Seminole community also led Lorenzo Creel of the Office of Indian Affairs to call upon her and her husband to encourage Seminoles to build their camps on federal lands near Fort Lauderdale.¹⁷² Still, Stranahan's actions only served to affect individual Seminoles, rather than the status of the entire tribe. Her reach would grow in the second decade of the twentieth century, when she became more involved with the FFWC. The FFWC had been founded in Green Cove Springs, Florida, in 1895.¹⁷³ At a time when women ached to be a part of the political landscape, women's clubs in Florida allowed women (mostly middle class) the opportunity to devote themselves to causes outside of the home and family. Through them, women were able to share their experiences and their passions, and encourage others to join them in their own pet causes. Due to Frank Stranahan's situation and political position within the state, Ivy was already afforded the opportunity to take part in meaningful activities outside of the home, and the FFWC (as well as her own local women's club) gave her the chance to do even more.¹⁷⁴ Members of the Florida legislature during the era routinely regarded women involved in politics with scorn. The strength in numbers offered by the FFWC worked to change this. After having "been told politely to go home and tend to the babies," they continued to argue with legislators for their causes, of which

¹⁷² Lorenzo Creel to Frank Stranahan, July 7, 1911, Stranahan Historical Collection, Fort Lauderdale Historical Society, Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

¹⁷³ Lucy Worthington Blackman, *The Florida Federation of Women's Clubs, 1895-1939* (Jacksonville, FL: Southern Historical Publishing Associates, 1939), 7.

¹⁷⁴ Kersey Jr., *Stranahans*, 118.

Seminole reform was one of many.¹⁷⁵ Through her membership in the FFWC, Ivy Stranahan met May Mann Jennings. Many regarded as Mann Jennings the most powerful woman in Florida, and she had created “an old-girl network,” a web of female friends in the state, “many of whom were related to the state’s most powerful male business, political, and civic leaders.”¹⁷⁶ Stranahan and Jennings quickly forged a relationship, and though some believed that the influential Mann Jennings controlled Stranahan’s actions, in reality, Jennings held a deep regard for Stranahan’s knowledge and passion, particularly in regards to first-hand familiarity with the tribe. This mutual appreciation helped Stranahan find a statewide audience in lobbying for Indian reform.¹⁷⁷

Ivy Stranahan rapidly rose through the ranks of the FFWC and by 1915 she had become the head of the FFWC’s Indian Affairs Committee. Her swift rise was partially because of her connection to the Seminoles. Living in Fort Lauderdale, Stranahan had the ability to confer with Seminoles and gauge their interest in the FFWC’s reform measures.¹⁷⁸ Due to her proximity to the tribe, and her regular interactions with them through her Seminole education program, FFWC members relied on her to provide them with information regarding the Indians who they wanted to “civilize,” but in reality, knew very little about. Mann Jennings further played a role in Stranahan’s rise. Stranahan’s work with the Seminoles, her relationship with Seminoles like Tony Tommie and Billy Cono-Patchee, and her knowledge of the daily habits of the tribe impressed Mann Jennings, and she declared to many that Stranahan knew “more than any other

¹⁷⁵ Blackman, *Federation*, 23-24.

¹⁷⁶ Linda D. Vance, *May Mann Jennings: Florida’s Genteel Activist* (Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1985), 81.

¹⁷⁷ Kersey, Jr., *Stranahans*, 123.

¹⁷⁸ May Mann Jennings to Ivy Stranahan, August 18, 1915, Stranahan Historical Collection, Fort Lauderdale Historical Society, Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

woman in the state about Seminoles.”¹⁷⁹ While Moore-Willson outwardly disagreed with this, Mann Jennings’s public comments were enough to boost Stranahan’s name, gain her respect among women in the FFWC, and cement her position as the head of the Indian Affairs Committee.

As head of the Committee, Stranahan pushed the cause of Seminole education to the forefront of the committee’s efforts, and also appealed to Mann Jennings, whose own pet cause throughout the twentieth century had been child welfare and education.¹⁸⁰ Stranahan long believed that a western, Christian education would best provide Seminoles with the skills needed to thrive in rapidly changing South Florida and more, to assimilate into the United States. Even when working with them in camp, she had never learned the Seminole language (Miccosukee, in the Fort Lauderdale region), but rather encouraged young Seminoles to learn English.¹⁸¹ Working with the FFWC, however, expanded Stranahan’s ideas regarding the type of education necessary for young Seminoles. “Being taught to read and write, etc” was wonderful, wrote Mann Jennings in a letter to Stranahan, but it was her “wish to have them made useful citizens.”¹⁸² With the Indian Committee, Stranahan proposed greater industrial and agricultural training for Seminoles. This tied in directly with the type of reservation land the FFWC was proposing for the tribe. If the Seminoles were given arable tracts of land, as well as the seeds and tools to work it, agricultural education would be beneficial to all.

¹⁷⁹ Minnie Moore-Willson to Mrs. Graves, March 14, 1916, Minnie Moore-Willson Papers, Special Collections, University of Miami Libraries, Coral Gables, Florida.

¹⁸⁰ Vance, *Jennings*, 65-66.

¹⁸¹ The Seminoles in Florida spoke two different languages, due to a split within the Creek confederation prior to emigrating to Florida. In the southern parts of the state, the Seminoles spoke Miccosukee. Further north, the Seminoles spoke Muscogee, also known as “Creek.” The languages, while from the same family, were not mutually intelligible.

¹⁸² May Mann Jennings to Ivy Stranahan, August 10, 1915, Stranahan Historical Collection, Fort Lauderdale Historical Society, Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

Stranahan had readied herself to fight for the cause of Seminole education. As head of the FFWC's Indian Committee, she finally had the tools and the reach to advocate for the rights that she believed Seminoles were owed and would benefit from. Despite her enthusiasm for Indian education and her newfound means of promoting it, her ability to do so was soon dampened. By 1915, Moore-Willson had been promoting the cause of a state Seminole reservation for over a decade and been gaining influential followers in her cause. The FFWC, of which Moore-Willson was a member, had too supported the idea of a Seminole reservation, but by 1915, as noted, Moore-Willson's relationship with the organization was becoming more and more strained, largely in part to "her acerbic denunciations of legislative inaction and her abrasive personality."¹⁸³ That same year, Moore-Willson made statements in a FFWC publication alluding to a scandal in the state government regarding drainage that was preventing the granting of reservation lands to the Indians. As the head of the Indian Committee, the responsibility for handling internal strife within the Committee fell squarely in Stranahan's lap. After Mann Jennings, who in 1914 became President of the FFWC, reprimanded Moore-Willson for her actions, arguing that they would only harm the Indian cause in Tallahassee, Moore-Willson was directed to have any of her future publications regarding the Seminoles, "substantiated by facts, and free from antagonism."¹⁸⁴ Stranahan was also to approve them. This created a difficult situation for both women and tested Stranahan's leadership of the Indian Committee. Stranahan respected Moore-Willson's ideals, and particularly her publication, *The Seminoles of Florida*, and agreed with her that Big Cypress should be set aside for Seminole use. But placed in charge

¹⁸³ Kersey, Jr., "Private Societies and the Maintenance of Seminole Tribal Integrity," 305.

¹⁸⁴ May Mann Jennings to Minnie Moore-Willson, May 12, 1915, Minnie Moore-Willson Papers, Special Collections, University of Miami Libraries, Coral Gables, Florida.

of monitoring Moore-Willson's words, Stranahan found it difficult to rein in her colleague's attacks on the state government.¹⁸⁵ Moore-Willson made it all the more difficult by privately admonishing Stranahan to other Committee members, claiming that Stranahan's actual knowledge of the Seminoles was "very little," and insinuating that Frank Stranahan's wealth, obtained through Indian trade, had been ill-gotten and predatory towards the Seminoles.¹⁸⁶ This quiet antagonism led to not only a rift between the women, but a fight over what was best for the Seminoles.

Moore-Willson's fight for the Seminole reservation was at the center of Florida's Indian reform movement in 1916. Moore-Willson beseeched the state government to allot the Seminoles any land in the Everglades, as quickly as possible. This placed Moore-Willson in the center of the battle for an Indian reservation, and against Stranahan and the FFWC Indian Committee. Stranahan believed that the Seminoles deserved a reservation in Florida but one centered on lands that could be used for agriculture. As early as 1911, she had corresponded with Lorenzo Creel of the Office of Indian Affairs about reservation land for the tribe.¹⁸⁷ She, like many sympathetic activists of the day, believed that the U.S. Government had wronged the Seminoles and hurt them through unfair treaties. She believed that the Seminoles had once been "monarch of all they surveyed...reduced to a pitiful state bordering starvation and made a people

¹⁸⁵ Ivy Stranahan to Minnie Moore-Willson, April 29, 1916, Minnie Moore-Willson Papers, Special Collections, University of Miami Libraries, Coral Gables, Florida.

¹⁸⁶ Minnie Moore-Willson to Mrs. Graves, March 14, 1916, Minnie Moore-Willson Papers, Special Collections, University of Miami Libraries, Coral Gables, Florida.

¹⁸⁷ Lorenzo Creel to Frank Stranahan, July 7, 1911, Stranahan Historical Collection, Fort Lauderdale Historical Society, Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

without a home” by the “progressive ambitions” of whites.¹⁸⁸ She believed that the sympathy of the state was owed to them and that whites should atone for their treatment of these people. Consequently, she disagreed with Moore-Willson’s methods of obtaining a state reservation for the Seminoles with all haste and in any place. Stranahan held that land given to the tribe should be more than hunting grounds, it should be arable, and able to sustain an industrial school.¹⁸⁹ Land that did not provide for the agricultural education of Indians and assimilate them into American society was worthless. And Stranahan fought to make it clear that if the legislature could not set aside good lands for the tribe, then receiving no land was a better alternative.

In her 1916 report to the Board of the FFWC, Stranahan put forth the Indian Committee’s proposals for the year’s legislative session. The Committee proposed scholarships and funding efforts for Seminole education, and pledged an effort to preserve Seminole art and study their customs. Most importantly, however, under Stranahan’s guidance, it became the official position of the FFWC to have Big Cypress Swamp set aside as a game preserve (as it was unsuitable for agricultural purposes), while working “to secure the purchase by our national government of a sufficient tract of land to engage the remaining remnant of Seminole Indians in profitable stock raising and farming, as a means of livelihood.”¹⁹⁰ Stranahan made it clear that mere land for the Seminoles did not matter to herself or the ladies of the FFWC. The reformers preferred good, arable land, even if it was not unspoiled and had been drained. Stranahan was becoming closer

¹⁸⁸ Ivy Stranahan, “The Seminole Indians,” undated essay, Stranahan Historical Collection, Fort Lauderdale Historical Society, Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

¹⁸⁹ May Mann Jennings to Ivy Stranahan, January 27, 1916, Stranahan Historical Collection, Fort Lauderdale Historical Society, Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

¹⁹⁰ Ivy Stranahan to the Board of the Florida Federation of Women’s Clubs, “Seminole Indian Committee Plan of Work,” February 14, 1916, Stranahan Historical Collection, Fort Lauderdale Historical Society, Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

with Mann Jennings, who had built a vacation home (“House-in-the-Woods”) in Brickell, a bustling Miami neighborhood for the wealthy, in 1916, and through this relationship began corresponding with Senator Duncan U. Fletcher and Congressman William Sears.¹⁹¹ Mann Jennings and Stranahan encouraged the men to further the Sears Bill, which would have provided 100,000 acres of land to Seminoles under the control of the federal government, but little came of it.¹⁹² At the same time, Moore-Willson was gaining powerful support, both around the state and in Washington, D.C., for the immediate creation of a state reservation on unspoiled land, and Stranahan’s quest to obtain reservation land suitable for farming, ranching, and education was becoming more difficult. That Moore-Willson had obtained the aid of Matthew K. Sniffen and the IRA, a group that had previously declared the Seminoles “in want of nothing,” and uninterested in help, also hurt the FFWC’s cause.¹⁹³

Stranahan considered herself a friend to the Seminoles. She spent time in their camps, invited their children into her home, offered them an education, and attempted to prevent the “one wrong greater than any other...perpetuated against these people...the sale of intoxicants to them.”¹⁹⁴ In Stranahan’s paternalistic mode of thinking, she had done more for them and knew more about their needs and abilities than most in South Florida. She believed that the policy that Moore-Willson was putting forth was anathema to the needs of the Indians and to their survival in the changing atmosphere of South Florida. As their representative as head of the FFWC Indian

¹⁹¹ Vance, *Jennings*, 52.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 91.

¹⁹³ Ivy Stranahan to the Board of the Florida Federation of Women’s Clubs, “Seminole Indian Committee Plan of Work,” February 14, 1916, Stranahan Historical Collection, Fort Lauderdale Historical Society, Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

¹⁹⁴ Ivy Stranahan, “The Seminole Indians,” undated essay, Stranahan Historical Collection, Fort Lauderdale Historical Society, Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

Committee, Stranahan could not support it. Unable to rein her in, and agreeing with Mann Jennings that Moore-Willson was “not of any service to [the FFWC] in our Indian cause,”¹⁹⁵ Stranahan encouraged Moore-Willson to work independently, telling her that she would perhaps be happier and able to accomplish more apart from the committee.¹⁹⁶ Moore-Willson’s continued misconduct, in the eyes of the FFWC, and her “great deal of prejudice against anybody who has any interest in the ‘Glades,’” as well as her “determination to treat everybody who does not agree with her methods of treating the Indians as an enemy to the cause,” led to Stranahan’s dismissal of Moore-Willson from the Indian Committee in early 1917.¹⁹⁷ Mann Jennings encouraged Stranahan to introduce new members to the Committee, with views more in line with her own in regards to the Christianization and acculturation of Seminoles, writing to Stranahan that “when Minnie Moore Willson does things different from what other people do, they are always right.”¹⁹⁸ The fight with Moore-Willson, however, had been time-consuming for Stranahan and the entire Indian Committee, largely preventing them from accomplishing their goals for the 1917 Legislative session. In trying to undermine the “sensationalism” of Moore-Willson’s writings and push back against her accusations that drainage was the reason why many people of import refused to follow her cause, Stranahan’s goal, trying to obtain an Indian school on arable lands went unaccomplished.¹⁹⁹ Though the women tried to regroup, to use their connections within the Legislature and local politics to put forth a new bill, and to strike up a friendship with

¹⁹⁵ May Mann Jennings to Ivy Stranahan, February 24, 1916, Stranahan Historical Collection, Fort Lauderdale Historical Society, Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

¹⁹⁶ Ivy Stranahan to Minnie-Moore Willson, December 27, 1916, Minnie Moore-Willson Papers, Special Collections, University of Miami Libraries, Coral Gables, Florida.

¹⁹⁷ May Mann Jennings to Ivy Stranahan, February 24, 1916, Stranahan Historical Collection, Fort Lauderdale Historical Society, Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

¹⁹⁸ May Mann Jennings to Ivy Stranahan, January 18, 1917, Stranahan Historical Collection, Fort Lauderdale Historical Society, Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

¹⁹⁹ May Mann Jennings to Ivy Stranahan, January 27, 1916, Stranahan Historical Collection, Fort Lauderdale Historical Society, Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

Governor Sidney J. Catts prior to the legislative session to aid their cause, ultimately, Moore-Willson succeeded.²⁰⁰ In May 1917, her fight to provide the Seminoles with an unspoiled reservation in South Florida ended with a bill that provided them with nearly 100,000 acres in (present day) Monroe County. It was not the land that Stranahan wanted, nor what she believed that the Seminoles deserved. Still, despite her failure in this capacity, possibly the biggest fight in terms of Seminole reform in the 1910s, her work was not over.

The failure to promote and pass her version of the Seminole Lands Bill in 1917 was, undoubtedly, a failure on Stranahan's part. Despite her connections to seats of Floridian power through both the FFWC and her husband, she was unable to convince the legislature to pass a bill containing provisions to educate the Seminoles in agriculture and industry, or a provision to put the lands in federal hands, once obtained for the tribe. A busy woman, also heavily involved in the state's temperance movement and the war effort in aid of Europe, Stranahan did not allow the failure of one bill, particularly so early in her career, to temper her activism.²⁰¹ Ivy Stranahan agitated for the lands to be put into federal ownership, as the national government would not make improvements upon it while it stayed in state hands.²⁰² She believed that she could do this with the FFWC's influence on the state's congressmen and senators, and that it was the responsibility of the state to do its best to allow the Indians to become self-supporting, even if it meant the transfer of lands out of their control.²⁰³

²⁰⁰ Vance, *Jennings*, 94.

²⁰¹ Blackman, *Federation*, 33.

²⁰² Vance, *Jennings*, 118.

²⁰³ F.E. Harrison to Ivy Stranahan, December 14, 1918, Stranahan Historical Collection, Fort Lauderdale Historical Society, Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

Stranahan encouraged federal officials to come to Tallahassee and convince the state government of the improvements that they could make upon the land, but was rebuffed when told that “the Department [of the Interior] wishes to keep out of polotics [sic] as we receive criticism from some people...that such Government employees use their position to influence state legislation.”²⁰⁴ She was further dismayed that the federal government was leery of taking over the land due to their previous relationship with the Seminoles. F.E. Brandon of the Department of the Interior wrote to her that before any action could be taken, there was “not pretense on our part” and the “big job [was] to combat Indian prejudice against the Government.”²⁰⁵ Until this could be done, the federal government would not step in, and as Governor Catts was unwilling to relinquish the land, the issue died.

Deterred, but not discouraged, Stranahan continued to work with the Seminoles on a personal basis. Since his youth, Chief Tony Tommy had shared a bond with the Stranahans. After moving their trading post, he continued to interact with them and learn from Ivy, unafraid of asking for her time or aid when needed.²⁰⁶ Despite the drawbacks in the reservation fight, Stranahan made sure that on a human level, the Seminoles, and Tommy’s family, in particular, were taken care of, bringing them meat when they had none, and offering funds and support for the education of Seminole children.²⁰⁷ If the government could not provide them a better future, Ivy Stranahan would.

²⁰⁴ F.E. Brandon to Ivy Stranahan, April 4, 1919, Stranahan Historical Collection, Fort Lauderdale Historical Society, Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Tony Tommy to Mr. and Mrs. Stranahan, October 18, 1915, Stranahan Historical Collection, Fort Lauderdale Historical Society, Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

²⁰⁷ Tony Tommie to Frank Stranahan, 1918, Stranahan Historical Collection, Fort Lauderdale Historical Society, Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

Her work in the 1910s and association with the FFWC prepared her for greater fights in the name of the Seminoles. Though a foe on the reservation matter, Moore-Willson had taught her the power of her words, and the importance of self-organization. In the late 1920s, Stranahan formed the Friends of the Seminoles, a group that aimed to bring the Seminoles into the twentieth century using Christian morals and values.²⁰⁸ According to Stranahan, they were “the remnant of a proud race of people who are being carried roughly in a cruel struggle for some place in a civilization which they do not understand and for which they most certainly are not prepared.”²⁰⁹ Through education, “patience, tolerance, and a good neighbor policy,” a policy which included keeping immorality, and particularly alcohol, out of Seminole life, Stranahan’s society attempted to bring change to the Seminoles.

Stranahan’s ardent religion, early 20th century ideals of patriarchy, and the belief that Americanization was to be embraced by the Indian, drove her attitudes towards the Seminoles. She believed that in following her way of life, the Seminoles could not only better themselves, but their status in society. Her work within the FFWC encompassed the belief of “it takes a village,” and with the help of other upper and middle class women in the state, she drew attention to the plight of the Seminoles. Even though she was personally close to many Seminoles, the idea that as an educated, Christian woman, she knew what was best for the tribe undoubtedly influenced her actions. This paternalist attitude should not, however, take away from the fact that she believed that the Seminoles deserved more than the poverty and fear of

²⁰⁸ While the groups are similarly named, Ivy’s society had no association with the Friends of the Florida Seminoles founded in 1899 by Moore-Willson and like-minded Indian reformers. Ivy’s group focused much more on the Americanization and education of Seminole children, whereas Moore-Willson’s group was heavily involved in the movement to obtain a reservation for the tribe.

²⁰⁹ Ivy Stranahan, “Complete Report of Work of Friends of Florida Seminoles, 1933-1936,” May 31, 1936, Stranahan Historical Collection, Fort Lauderdale Historical Society, Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

government that came from the three Seminole Wars. The Seminoles recognized this, and though few took advantage of the educational opportunities that Stranahan offered, as she continued to fight on their behalf, she gained a great amount of respect among the community. Following her death in 1971, and after seven decades of interaction with and action for the Seminoles, the tribe honored her. “As long as the rivers flow, and the grass grows,” Joe Dan Osceola, then President of the Seminole Tribal Historical Society stated, “the Seminole Tribe of Florida will always be grateful to Mrs. Frank Stranahan.”²¹⁰ Ivy Stranahan was not a rabble-rouser, in the vein of Moore-Willson. She worked within the confines of the system, using her first-hand knowledge of the Seminoles, her sociability, and her connections to advocate for them. That she truly believed in the potential of the tribe and regularly interacted with its members made her different, and it made her one of the most significant Indian reformers in Florida history.

²¹⁰ Joe Dan Osceola, “Speech to Tribal Members and Friends of the Seminoles,” (1977) in Ivy Stranahan, *Narrative History in Miniature of the Seminole Indians of Florida* (Fort Lauderdale: Fort Lauderdale Historical Society, 1977), 1.

CONCLUSION

The reservation land set aside for the Seminoles in 1917 was more than a landmark piece of Florida legislation officially awarding state lands to the Seminoles. It marked the culmination of an awareness campaign for the tribe that lasted nearly two decades and demonstrated what Florida's female activists could achieve. After a half century of being alternately feared and ignored by the government and much of the white population of Florida, the Seminoles were finally being recognized as more than relics of the state's martial past. Two women at the forefront of this were Minnie Moore-Willson and Ivy Stranahan. In an era when women's voices were routinely silenced in the political sphere, Moore-Willson and Stranahan used their words and their positions in society to advocate for the Seminoles, possibly Florida's most voiceless minority. Living near the Seminoles and fostering relationships with members of the tribe placed them both in prime positions to become familiar with the tribe. The relationships they formed led them to believe that the treatment of Seminoles was a great societal ill, and that they could play a role in fixing it.

Moore-Willson did so using her sharp tongue and her refusal to allow those in power to stop her. Her work, *The Seminoles of Florida*, introduced untold numbers to the plight of the Seminoles. Despite its lack of ethnological credibility, the book spoke to people and made Moore-Willson a force within the Seminole reform movement. This credibility allowed her to agitate for change, no matter the political consequences. It took more than a strong belief in a Seminole reservation to make it so, it took years of active campaigning, and Moore-Willson allowed no one to stand in her way when it came to advocating for what she believed was the

correct course of action. The creation of the Monroe County reservation was the culmination of this.

Stranahan worked within the confines of a group of activist women. Capable and affable, she made her objectives regarding Seminole reform known through the work of the FFWC's Indian Committee. Her relationship with May Mann Jennings and the female power brokers of the state allowed her to gain a place at the table. Once there, she made it clear that the complete salvation of the Seminoles, in every sense of the word, was the only option. Fighting for a worthy, arable reservation for the Seminoles, as well as full education, and acceptance into the citizenry of Florida, Stranahan's goal for Seminole reform was all-encompassing, and it made her an authority on the tribe. The resultant respect and appreciation that she received from the Seminoles was part of her legacy.

The fight between the two women over the reservation land showed the passion that both women had for righting the wrongs that had led the Seminoles to be "reduced to a pitiful state bordering starvation and made a people without a home."²¹¹ As did many women involved in Indian reform nationwide, they saw themselves as guardians of the Seminoles, responsible for their current and future well-being. Mythical ideas of the Seminoles as being more than mere noble savages and descendants of the Lost Tribes of Israel undoubtedly influenced their noblesse oblige.²¹² Those beliefs aside, however, both women saw firsthand the difficulties that the Seminoles faced in daily life, difficulties in survival brought on by over a century of white encroachment, and regardless of motivation, tried to better their circumstances.

²¹¹ Ivy Stranahan, "The Seminole Indians," undated essay, Stranahan Historical Collection, Fort Lauderdale Historical Society, Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

²¹² Moore-Willson, *The Seminoles of Florida*, 79.

During this period, Moore-Willson and Stranahan did more for Seminole reform in Florida than had been done in any previous generation. They tried to implement in Florida something that had never succeeded on a large scale. The idea of a successful reservation had fallen out of favor nationally. Moore-Willson and Stranahan believed that reservations could succeed in the state, and this was in great part because they both believed that Seminoles did not lack the ability to succeed and thrive in Florida, but rather, they had not been given the opportunity to do so. The failure of the nation to implement reservations did not mean reservations could not help Indians in Florida. Moore-Willson and Stranahan went about reform in different ways, and wanted different things from reservations, but both women eschewed popular ideas regarding social evolution at the time, declaring that, with help, the Seminoles were capable of succeeding. During President Woodrow Wilson's administration, when the nation was becoming less and less concerned with the plight of its native people, this was a particularly radical stance.²¹³ That it was happening in Florida was not. During this era, Florida was transitioning from unpopulated frontier to hotbed of activism. Moore-Willson and Stranahan were able to thrive in the state because many in the state were receptive, in return. The state was swirling with change between the burgeoning environmental movement to save the Everglades, the temperance movement, and women agitating for the right to vote. With so many voices calling for change, Moore-Willson and Stranahan made theirs heard through their knowledge, passion, and ability to engage others in the worthiness of their cause. They represented the female reformers of Florida, a generation of women who demanded attention and roused support for their beliefs. They represented the power of a voice, even without a vote, and their results

²¹³ Hoxie, *A Final Promise*, 178.

showed the influence of female activism. That Moore-Willson, even without the support of the FFWC, the locus of power in Florida's female political activism, could succeed in capturing the state legislature's attention in creating a reservation, proved that the state was slowly changing, and that women, outside of the control of their husbands, could impact policy.

Over the course of their lives, the two women, despite having so many differences in approach and demeanor, advocated for the Seminoles. Moore-Willson worked through the 1920s and 1930s for Everglades protection and became actively involved in the state's Audubon Society. She believed that preserving Seminole culture was a major aspect of saving the Florida Everglades and the state's natural environment. Her beliefs were enmeshed in early twentieth century Progressive thought that Indian identity was intertwined with the land.²¹⁴ A product of her time, she sought to aid them in preserving this identity. Stranahan, too, continued to work among the Seminoles until her death in 1971. It was Stranahan who convinced many Seminoles to move to the Dania Beach Reservation upon its formation in 1926, even driving them, if necessary.²¹⁵ Her passion for the education of young Seminoles, particularly young Seminole women, never faded, and through the 1950s, she personally funded the education of many Seminole children at boarding schools. Through her organization, the Friends of Florida Seminoles, she determined to bring a teacher to the Seminoles in South Florida and preached to them the dangers of immorality and the power of education.²¹⁶ Their lifelong dedication to the tribe led Roy Nash to declare, in his 1931 report to the federal government regarding the Seminoles, that "it is difficult to overestimate what the friendship of people like the Stranahans

²¹⁴ Holm, *The Great Confusion in Indian Affairs*, 24.

²¹⁵ Jumper and West, *A Seminole Legend*, 47.

²¹⁶ Ivy Stranahan, "Complete Report of Work of Friends of Florida Seminoles, 1933-1936," May 31, 1936, Stranahan Historical Collection, Fort Lauderdale Historical Society, Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

of Fort Lauderdale...and the Wilsons [sic] of Kissimmee meant to the Seminoles during the years when they distrusted the government and hated the missionary.”²¹⁷

Though Moore-Willson and Stranahan drew from many of the stereotypes of the Seminoles, particularly those that portrayed them as “innocent, child-like people of the ‘Glades,” in their advocacy for the group, it was their personal relationship with them that led to their credibility as reformers.²¹⁸ Both women understood how Seminoles were perceived within the state and used the mythology of the group to spread knowledge regarding them. This proved to the government, and people, of Florida that the Seminoles were not only capable of attaining salvation and a place in twentieth century Florida, but also deserving of it.

Moore-Willson and Stranahan were part of a generation of Florida women who brought massive change to the state in the early part of the twentieth century. Unlike Mann Jennings, who rallied Florida’s women around myriad causes and the remarkable Marjory Stoneman Douglas, who became the voice of Everglades preservation, however, they never received widespread acclaim.²¹⁹ This was because the people that they championed, the Seminoles, were at best, forgotten, and at worst, ignored. Their attempts to provide aid to the Seminoles, whether through a reservation or education, were not backed by strong national fervor, as was the case with the burgeoning environmental movement, and over time, Moore-Willson and Stranahan were relegated to the footnotes of Florida history.

²¹⁷ U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs and Roy Nash. *Seminole Indians*, 54.

²¹⁸ Minnie Moore-Willson, *The Birds of the Everglades and their Neighbors – The Seminole Indians* (Tampa, FL, The Tampa Tribune Publishing Company, 1920), 4.

²¹⁹ Jack E. Davis, “Up from the Sawgrass: Marjory Stoneman Douglas and the Influence of Female Activism in Florida Conservation,” in *Making Waves: Female Activists in Twentieth Century Florida*, ed. Jack E. Davis and Kari Frederickson (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), 147.

Unlike many other Indian tribes, historiography of the Florida Seminoles remains limited, aside from the Seminole Wars. As a result of this, scholarly work on Seminole reform efforts also remains underdeveloped. The study of the early stage of Seminole reform remains tied closely with environmental histories regarding the Everglades, and this does not only the reformers, but the tribe, a disservice, and falls into 1920s era traps of tying Indians to the land on which they lived.²²⁰ Understanding the efforts of Moore-Willson and Stranahan allows for a more developed awareness of the Florida during the early twentieth century. Their names remain generally unknown in greater Florida history, but their actions influenced the social politics of the state tremendously, and their passion for the Seminoles rivaled that of any of Florida's well known female activists of the twentieth century. Indian reform is often considered a story of the American West. While not as encompassing, it did exist in Florida, and Moore-Willson and Stranahan were at the forefront of it. Assessing the work that the women performed gives greater insight into an era of Seminole history that remains largely ignored. The end of the third Seminole War in 1858 until the fight for federal tribal recognition, which ended in 1957, is a period to which scholars have paid little attention. During this time, the Seminoles continued to live, continued to fight for survival, and evolved as a tribe. Figures like Moore-Willson and Stranahan remain a part of the story of their evolution.

In 1917, a newspaper editor reminded Moore-Willson that she had “one great winning power in any Southern state –skirts! A southern man cannot get by a female plea easily,” and that she should use the power that her femininity afforded her.²²¹ The pleas of women perhaps held

²²⁰ Holm, *Confusion*, 53.

²²¹ Caroline Hull Griswold to Minnie Moore-Willson, March 28, 1917, Minnie Moore-Willson Papers, Special Collections, University of Miami Libraries, Coral Gables, Florida.

power, but Moore-Willson and Stranahan relied on much more than merely asking men for the change. Both women demanded it. Unable to vote or hold political office, Moore-Willson and Stranahan raised awareness and appealed to anyone willing to aid their causes. The knowledge both women held of the Seminoles and the relationships that they had forged with them made these appeals so much more significant. Seminoles held a mythical place in the minds of many Americans, but Seminole reform was a topic little broached in the state in the early twentieth century. Moore-Willson and Stranahan, in their own ways, attempted to change this. In doing so, they became two of Florida's most important advocates for the tribe.

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