Seminole and Settlers
South Florida Perspectives
1890 - 1920
by Barbara A. Poleo

Social consciousness awakened, railroads ruled and rumbled throughout the United States, and corporations seized the opportunities and land offered by drainage of the Florida Everglades. On the lower half of the Florida peninsula the remaining fragments of the Seminole people maneuvered to preserve their culture and independence, while interacting with white settlers who were invading the Florida frontier. An increasing awareness that the Indians were “in the way” forced government, individuals and societies to seek resolution to the dilemma of the Seminoles. As the boundaries of their domain eroded, the Indians, too, could no longer ignore the certainty of change. Although motives, goals and methods differed, everyone recognized the need to deal with the issue of land for the Florida Seminoles. Contact culture gave way to white culture, and the Seminoles felt the influence of a shifting economic base and the increasingly dominant white society. Missionaries, Indian agents, legislators, corporate moguls and individuals sought to impose answers. Opinions and solutions presented in newspapers, legislation and writings of the time provide valuable insight into perspectives during the three-decade span, 1890 to 1920.

In February 1859 the last ship to remove Seminoles from Florida sailed, leaving behind a small, but determined, fragment of about one hundred to live at peace in the Ten Thousand Islands, the Everglades and the Big Cypress Swamp. Before long, however, the Civil War directed attention to the Seminoles again, and the Confederacy appointed an Indian agent and appropriated funds to locate the Seminoles. Following the war, the 1868 Florida Constitution provided for one Seminole representative in the house and one in the senate. Considering their distrust and absence of formal education, it is not surprising that the Seminoles never

From the Seminole Wars of the early and mid-nineteenth century to today’s legal issues of sovereignty, the history of relations between the Seminoles and non-Indian settlers in south Florida has been one of constant change. At no time was this more true than in the thirty year period from 1890 to 1920, when railroads, canals, coastal settlements, Everglades drainage, and tourism rapidly transformed the face of the region. With once-plentiful land in increased demand by the new settlers, and particularly by powerful economic interests, the place of the Seminoles became a topic of much discussion. In this article, Barbara Poleo examines the changing situations facing the Seminoles and the variety of perspectives and solutions offered by government officials, land magnates, the public and the press.

Barbara Poleo, Special Projects Coordinator at the Broward County Historical Commission, is a graduate of Florida Atlantic University, where she is currently working on her Master’s Degree in History. A resident of Deerfield Beach, she is past president of the Deerfield Beach Historical Society.
Letter from M. M. Hall of Fort Pierce to Florida Governor Henry Mitchell pointing out problems facing the Seminoles.

appeared in the Florida Legislature. The provision was removed in the 1885 Constitution.

In the interim, although there was an awareness of the Seminoles in Florida, neither the state nor national governments took initiative. A reporter commented in 1874 that “as they increase in numbers faster than white settlers, it is not impossible that they may re occupy Southern Florida, sooner or later, it being, in fact, a region suited only to the roving hunter.” Ten years later the United States Congress appropriated $6,000 to “enable the Seminole of Florida to obtain homesteads upon the public lands of Florida.” No appropriate lands could be found, beginning a theme which would recur for the next thirty years.

Attention to the Seminoles in the 1890s derived from a national sense of social consciousness and an increasing awareness that the southern half of the Florida peninsula would not remain a vast wilderness. Both government and individuals recognized the inevitability of the latter, as evidenced in 1894 correspondence between M. M. Hall of Fort Pierce, D.W. Browning, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, U.S. Senator Wilkinson Call and Florida Governor H.L. Mitchell. Hall wrote to Mitchell that . . .

... It seems to me nothing but Justice and right but what the Government should come to the relief of the Semanoles Indians in Fla at once for they are in a deplorable condition. They do not own a foot of land in the State & in fact nothing else. This is what dependance for a living is upon the game & it is now gone, or will

be soon. What would be the proper steps to take in order to induce the Government to release these people of their troubles? . . . The La Grip have been killing them and especially the children they have no way of treating themself . . . for humanities sake something should should be done for these poor ignorant sufferers at once.

Hall foresaw the future of the Seminoles. Browning had previously responded to Senator Call that the Commissioner of the General Land Office had been instructed on October 11, 1893 by the Secretary of the Interior “to direct the local land officers not to allow any filings or entries in sections 1 and 2, township 52 south of range 41 east . . . and to take appropriate action for the cancellation of any filing or entries that may have been made in said sections.”

An early attempt to secure land for a reservation was made with the help of native Floridian Francis A. Hendry, already a trusted friend of the Seminoles, who led Amelia S. Quinton and two other ladies from the Women's National Indian Association to Seminole camps. Under the leadership of Mrs. Quinton, the group intended to provide homesteads to the Indians, while establishing chapels and missionary stations on the reservation. The Women's National Indian Association purchased four hundred acres of land about forty-five miles southeast of Fort Myers in 1891. The site selected was known at the time as the Allen settlement. Today it is Immokalee, Indian for “my home.” The federal government subsequently purchased eighty of these acres on which to establish an office, school, storage buildings and living quarters.

Missionary work at the Allen settlement began when Dr. J. E. Brecht and his wife arrived from St. Louis in 1891. Dr. Brecht organized a sawmill and began working with the Seminoles. By 1893 he was employed by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and the Women's National Indian Association transferred the mission to the Missionary Board of the Protestant Episcopal Church. Dr.
Brecht continued his work among the Seminoles until 1898, eventually realizing the futility of relocating the Indians and the need to acquire additional land for them. During his tenure with the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Dr. Brecht would purchase thousands of acres from various sources, such as Hamilton Disston, William Brown, the Florida Southern Railroad, Plant Investment Company and others. These purchases combined formed the backbone of what became the Big Cypress Indian Reservation.11

By 1891, the prodding of state officials by members of the Women’s National Indian Association led the Florida Legislature to authorize the Internal Improvement Fund to set apart 5,000 acres of land for permanent use by the Seminoles. This land was to be selected and held by three trustees appointed by the governor. The trustees were directed to “induce the Indians to enter upon and cultivate the same”11 without expense to the state or the Seminoles. James E. Ingraham, chairman, Francis A. Hendry and Garibaldi Niles, all with interests in Florida land development, were appointed. Whatever their goals, they set to work immediately to resolve the land question of the Seminoles.

At the December 31, 1892 meeting of the Internal Improvement Fund in Tallahassee, the Governor read a report from the Trustees of the Seminole Indians of their proceedings held in Miami on November 8. They resolved that a primary school should be established near Miami, that an attempt should be made to stop the sale of alcoholic beverages, that no homesteading be allowed for five years on land improved by the Indians, that Indians settle on land occupied in severity or a reservation, and that tracts be reserved for Indians near Fort Pierce, Big Cypress and on or near the Miami River. In addition they resolved to reserve from sale tracts described by section, township and range, falling in what is today south Broward and north Dade Counties and including Little Tiger’s Town and Harney’s Town in the Everglades near the Miami River. They also requested the Governor to negotiate an exchange of lands deeded to corporations which were occupied by Indian villages, and asked the Secretary of the Interior to provide seed for distribution to the Indians and to assure that a missionary be headquartered in Miami. Once again the response from the state was that no funds were available to locate and survey land for the Indians.12

In February of 1893 T. J. Morgan of the Office of Indian Affairs sent a letter to the Secretary of the Interior, referencing a letter received by him earlier in the year from L. B. Wombwell, Commissioner of Agriculture of the State of Florida and ex officio member of the Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Fund. Mr. Wombwell had described tracts of land that he suggested the Federal Government set aside for the Seminole Indians of Florida. With some questions, Morgan recommended turning the matter over to the perusal of the Commissioner of the General Land Office to “ascertain whether the lands described are vacant public lands” and, if so, said Commissioner should be instructed not to permit entries on said lands until the Office of Indian Affairs could appoint a special agent to investigate. Morgan further stipulated the importance of determining whether reservation of this particular tract would be “practicable and advisable,” indicating his assumption
that Wombell found the "character of the land suitable for the purpose and . . . practicable to reserve it."

During the 1890s another force was at work among the Seminoles—the traders. Among them were reputable, established traders who gained the Indians' trust, but there were also those who sought to instill distrust for personal gain, and there were whiskey sellers, who Dr. Brecht attempted to prosecute without success. The Seminoles traded, and established mutually beneficial relationships, with Frank Stranahan at New River, J. D. Girtman in Miami and Bill Brown at Brown's Boat Landing, among others.

These associations developed over the years, resulting in understanding and trust. At the same time whiskey dealers and disreputable traders went out among the Seminole camps. To protect their business these traders often fueled feelings of distrust already existing between the Indians and the white population and contributed to the difficulties faced by government and philanthropic organizations.

At the turn of the century adventurers and philanthropists also took an interest in studying the Seminoles and published their findings for the public. However, their methods and goals differed from those of the developer, entrepreneur and missionary. Two of these accounts offer a relatively objective view of Indian culture and brought the humanity of Indians to the attention of the public.

In the middle of the 1890s Professor C. B. Cory came to Florida to socialize, study the natural history of the area and hunt. Independently wealthy, he established the Florida Museum of Natural History in Palm Beach, a popular tourist attraction from 1895 to 1903. During the winter of 1894-1895 he spent several months among the Seminoles along the Hillsboro River, New River and in the Everglades. Cory wanted an Indian guide and it was only after several weeks spent among the Indians along the New River, and the assurances of Biscayne Bay guide and hunter, "Bill" Freeman, that Cory did not want to homestead, that Robert

Above are Charles B. Cory (left) and Robert Osceola. Below is a 1906 map showing vegetable growers' holdings in the New River area. Note the properties of J. M. Bryan at Big City Island, P. N. Bryan, and the Marshalls at Osceola Creek (courtesy of Fort Lauderdale Historical Society).
Osceola agreed to guide him.\(^8\)

Professor Cory described the hunting and camp life of the Seminoles. From otters and alligators to bear and manatee, hunting was seasonal. Deer killed in March were smoked and dried for summer use; otters and alligators were trapped and killed for their skins during the winter months. Most Seminoles had permanent camps, sometimes more than one. Cory's was a more scientific approach to life among the Seminoles, as illustrated by his description of how the Indians built a camp fire, arranging logs like the spokes of a wheel, pushing them in as they burned and pulling them away from the center of the wheel to extinguish the flame. He noted that Robert Osceola, Old Tommie and several others had camps on upper New River.\(^9\) Cory also published a list of Indian words and their meanings which added to public awareness of Seminole culture.\(^10\)

Robert Osceola’s suspicion was not unfounded. By 1898 he had lost his camp to farmers Marshall and Marsh, and Old Tommie had lost his to P. N. Bryan.\(^11\) Special Indian Inspector A. J. Duncan probably recorded Old Tommie’s loss in his 1897 account of a tract of forty acres of hammock land between the north and south fork of the New River that had been occupied by Indians on April 1, 1897, but “were taken possession of by a white man named Bryan,” while they were on a hunt “and he at present is occupying their homes and cultivating the hammocks formerly cultivated by them.”\(^12\)

Another account of the Seminole Indians, which appeared in a special 1901 illustrated edition of The Miami Metropolis, has been attributed to J. W. “Will” Stranahan, brother of Fort Lauderdale trader Frank.\(^13\) Earlier in the year an article in The Miami Metropolis had reported a visit by Mr. J. W. Stranahan to their offices. Described as engaged in merchandising, he had gained the confidence of the Seminoles by fair treatment and did quite a lot of business with them. According to the article, Mr. Stranahan had brought a sample of an Indian beadwork belt presented to him by “a squaw whom he had done some favor.” It was an intricate piece that demonstrated patience and skill to make and Will offered it to anyone who could guess the number of beads it contained within one thousand.\(^14\) Everyone over-guessed.

The Special Illustrated Edition account of “The Seminoles Indians and the Everglades” impressed readers with sweeping descriptions of sawgrass, water, cypress, alligators, otters, egrets and herons. Seminole villages on fertile hammock land were depicted, and photographs showed Seminole families, a village, young Indians dressed for the Green Corn Dance and Will Stranahan, Istahatka Hiliishawah, in Seminole attire. The article identified the location of the five Seminole villages in the Everglades: Okeechobee, Cow Creek, Big Cypress, Miami and New River. The author also noted their “mechanical genius” as they maneuvered their canoes with either pole or paddle. The tone of this article is respectful, even admiring, attributing character and dignity to the Seminoles. The account stated that they do not knowingly disobey the law and are “honorable and upright in their dealings when away from the debasing influence of whiskey, which the white people’s civilization brings to them.”\(^15\) The writer proposed that the lands in use by the Seminoles should be reserved for them so that they could continue to exert their natural right to “sufficient land to maintain themselves.”\(^16\) Stranahan concluded the article with reference to the 1908 report of Special Indian Commissioner A. J. Duncan and quoted former President Grover Cleveland’s statement while on a fishing trip on the New River in 1900 that “this
country was made for the Seminoles and they should be permitted to live there undisturbed."

As the close of the nineteenth century approached, A. J. Duncan and the Trustees of the Seminole Indians were still contending with the same issue—compliance with the provision of the Florida Resolution of 1891 to set aside 5,000 acres in trust of the Trustees of the Seminoles. This issue remained unresolved until 1899, when Duncan corresponded with James E. Ingraham. The vast region south of Lake Okeechobee had remained sparsely populated and hardly civilized in the 1890s. Drainage and the boom years loomed in the future, so the difficulty of securing land for the Seminoles peaks the curiosity of late twentieth century students. A logical conclusion is that the extended special interests of railroads, corporations, developers, and entrepreneurs who had designs for the future growth and prosperity of all these lands were busy acquiring choice property. Not quite sure of the location of all the choice land, they shuffled the issue of Seminole land until they could be sure what was accorded the Indians was worthless to whites.

The chairman of the state Seminole trustees, James Ingraham, had led an expedition across the Everglades from Fort Myers to Miami earlier in 1892 at which time fellow trustee Francis Hendry estimated the total Seminole population in Florida to be less than three hundred. Ingraham was then president of the South Florida Railroad Company and in the employ of Henry Plant. He would later become land commissioner and vice president of the Florida East Coast Railway Company and vice president of the Florida East Coast Drainage and Sugar Company, which had acquired 800,000 acres in southeast Florida. Ingraham was recognized as a prominent figure in the advancement of the southeastern portion of the state.

His business interests and adventures brought James E. Ingraham in direct contact with the Seminoles, and during the 1890s he was acknowledged as someone who took an active interest in the welfare of the Indians. His familiarity with the needs of the Seminoles is evidenced in his approach to his position as Trustee of the Seminole Indians and his consistent attempt to satisfy the needs of both development interests and the Indians of Florida. He understood from the beginning the importance of acquiring land for the Seminoles where they already had camps and not relocating them to reservations.

During the closing years of the nineteenth century, Special Indian Inspector A. J. Duncan, brother-in-law of President William McKinley, spent time in Florida among the Seminoles and recommended that the "Seminole be given lands they now occupy as homes and that a portion of the Everglades be set aside for them as a hunting reservation." In May 1898 Duncan requested a meeting with C. B. Gwynn of the Agricultural Department in Tallahassee, indicating that the matter should come before the Florida Legislature and Congress "next winter," and mentioning that he had spoken to Florida's "genial governor in regard to this matter and . . . was assured he personally was much interested in the welfare of these people."

In August 1898 Duncan was in south Florida with surveyor Otto Fries in an attempt to isolate land for the Seminoles, specifically certain islands near the Everglades. According to a contemporary newspaper article, issues discussed included the "unfortunate conditions" and injustices done to the Indians as they were driven from their camp sites by whites, as well as the need to encourage them to adopt the ways of white civilization, and the problem of the decreasing availability of game. The government attempt to locate land for the Seminoles received cooperation from other branches of government and "attention from various quarters." In the same article "List 87" is mentioned as land that had been patented to Florida by the Federal government as swamp and overflowed lands, although it was not underwater. Duncan suggested recovery of this land for use of the Seminoles.

Duncan's report on the Seminoles, the result of his August survey, appeared in The Miami Metropolis on December 9, 1898. Included in the report were studies of Seminole law, religion, festivals, slavery, education, medicine men, marriage, intoxication, physical appearance and employment. Duncan reported that he could not recommend a plan for education of the Indians at that time, but noticed that their children were taught strict obedience to parents and elders. He noted that their principal means of support had been hunting, but that as conditions in the Everglades evolved over the next three to five years, "(t)hese Indians

Minnie Moore Willson (left) with Seminole friends, ca. 1900 (courtesy of the Florida Photographic Archives).
will be compelled to fall back upon agriculture for a living." He further stated that the Seminoles had never asked the government for support. His report advocated the theory that acquisition of land for the Indians should not be influenced by their refusal to locate on it at the time and underscored the fact that although they had not yet requested support, a time would come when they would need the assistance of government.

From his description of them as "industrious people, men and women" to the fact that their "moral relations are exceptionally good," the Duncan report communicated to the public the human side of the Seminole. Children of the Indians are depicted as playing "with as much good nature as white children," and Duncan outlines the making of dolls by the Indians in the same manner as the "rag baby" of poor white children. While he states that they have no religion, he found that "morality and justice constitute the foundation of their guidance in all matters of duty." The Special Inspector of the Seminoles took care to objectively describe the uniqueness of this culture, yet injected enough similarity to Christian values to appeal to the 1890s white citizen. He also asked the government to prohibit the sale of whiskey to the Indians. His report encouraged the concept that this culture merited protection, especially since the Indians exhibited easily understood white characteristics such as morals, duty and love of family.

Finally, in the last days of December 1898, "Home For the Seminole," a letter from Minnie Moore Willson, appeared in the newspaper, proclaiming the need to treat the Seminoles "as human beings, deserving the protection of American law and secure to them lands on which they may feel a safety" and stating that the Indians had found a friend in A. J. Duncan. Mrs. Willson's goals encompassed acquiring land for the Seminole as well as raising funds to be used to educate the "squaws as well as the braves ... ambitious to earn money." In her view governmental influence would result in making "these brown-faced people ... easy converts to civilization and Christianity." Mrs. Willson's methods and goals would later come into conflict with those of the Florida Federation of Women's Clubs under the leadership of May Mann Jennings, wife of former Governor Jennings, and the organization's chair of the Seminole Indian committee, Ivy Stranahan.

Within three months after Minnie Moore Willson's letter was published, Duncan wrote privately to James Ingraham, advising him that while in Kissimmee he had asked "Seminole Friends" (Mrs. Willson) to work with the legislators quietly and not publicly to resolve the land question. In the same letter he indicated that he found land for reservations that would not be costly to Florida and would not be objectionable to the railroad. Duncan further suggested that someone be authorized to introduce a bill in the legislature to address the issue as presented in his formal letter to the Trustees (Ingraham, Hendry and G. W. Dittmar). In closing his private letter to Ingraham, A. J. Duncan said he would meet the railroad executive in St. Augustine to discuss "the matter and ... some other matters connected with the affair."

Duncan's formal letter was also dated March 13, 1899 and was addressed to the Florida Commissioners for Securing Lands of Seminole Indians. Interestingly, the title, "Securing Lands of Seminole Indians," as opposed to "for the Seminole Indians" infers recognition, at least in Duncan's context, of the Indians' right to Florida land. This letter opens by underscoring the power given to the Commissioners by the Act of 1891 and indicating that the Governor and legislature would act favorably on their recommendations. The proposed legislation would be in the interest of Florida, and in addition meet the future needs of the Seminoles.

The federal government offered the state an incentive to resolve the issue of land for the Seminoles by indicating that it would "turn over to the state all lands under list 87, swamp and overflowed lands which have been in dispute for the last 40 years." Most of the land selected by Duncan was located in what is today the Big Cypress reservation. Additionally, he requested part of the lands surveyed with Otto Fries in 1898, including Pine Island and Long Key. He noted that most of the recommended sites were "not suitable for white men, but suitable for the Indians, owing to their isolated location, and the fact that a large part of them are suitable only for hunting." Prompt action was expected in order that the state exempt from sale or reconvey the reservation lands to the federal government.

On March 30, 1899 Ingraham wrote to F.A. Hendry personally and enclosed copies of A.J. Duncan's March 13 private and formal correspondence. Hendry, born in 1833, had served in the Third Seminole War and the Confederacy. Known as the cattle king of south Florida during the 1880s, he had bought large tracts of land from the state. On these lands he had established a ranch which he sold just before the end of the nineteenth century. Hendry was widely recognized for his friendship with the Seminoles, and history records that Chief Billy Conapatchee and his brother walked sixty miles to see him before he died. From 1893 to 1904 Hendry served six terms in the Florida Legislature representing Lee County.

Ingraham's recommendation to Hendry was to accept the lands suggested by Duncan. He also indicated that the tracts in Townships 50, 51 and 52, Range 40 and 41, known as Pine Island, Big City and the Keys, where a number of Indians were residing, be included in the five thousand acres to be reserved by the state for the Seminoles. Furthermore, he emphasized that legislation needed to be acted upon promptly and should encompass the hunting grounds recommended in Duncan's report. With support from the Dade County legislators already secured, Ingraham urged Hendry to use his influence in the next legislature to "aid in having a bill passed for this purpose."

A few days later, on April 4, 1899, Ingraham again wrote to Hendry, this time on Florida East Coast Railway Land Department stationery, pre-
senting a formal request that the recommendations of the Indian Inspector be acted upon favorably. Referring to the survey conducted in the summer of 1898, he asked that the Governor recommend to the legislature that they convey use of the Pine Island and Long Key tract for the use of the Seminoles, as soon as List 87 had been approved and said lands were deeded to the state by the federal government.47

Within days Ingraham received a letter from John Milton Bryan, Dania pioneer. Born in 1838, J. M. Bryan had also served in the Third Seminole War, during which time he first saw parts of the southern half of Florida and began to realize their possibilities. He served in the Florida legislature in the 1870s and 1880s, as a representative from Orange County. After moving to Dania, Bryan recognized that development depended on transportation and that the railroads needed to be regulated to protect the public. He led a movement to create the Railroad Commission of Florida, and Governor Bloxham appointed him its first chairman in 1897, a position he held until 1903.48

Bryan reminded Ingraham that he represented large interests and enclosed a description of the land claims made by his sons, J. M. Bryan, Jr. and W. J. Bryan, and his cousin, P. N. Bryan, which happened to fall within the boundaries of the lands to be secured for the Seminoles. He indicated that he did not send this information to A. J. Duncan and added that he would have settled in Fort Lauderdale were it not “for drunken Indians.” He further argued that “men will hesitate to take their families where such things are going on.”49

Ingraham responded to J. M. Bryan two days later that because he also represented a large interest, he felt that the “question of the Seminole Indians” needed to be considered “on conditions as they exist, and I believe it would be better to locate them west of Lauderdale and give them a recognized position than to have them overrunning the whole country.”50 Ingraham’s concern for the Seminoles extended beyond the humanitarian to the practical. As he expressed in his letter, he believed conflict between the white settlers and the Indians was inevitable unless provisions were made to reserve land for them. The same day he answered Bryan, Ingraham corresponded with Governor Bloxham, indicating his concern that Bryan’s opposition would be difficult to overcome in the Florida Legislature. He also expressed his concern that land be reserved for Indians at the forthcoming legislative session, not two years in the future. To resolve these problems, Ingraham requested the governor’s assistance to set aside the land claimed by P. N. Bryan, J. M. Bryan, Jr. and W. J. Bryan, from inclusion in the Indian reservation.51

On May 29, 1899, the legislature approved an act authorizing the Trustees of the Internal Improvement Fund of the State of Florida with the assistance of the Trustees of the Seminole Indians to secure tracts of land as enumerated in the act for the Seminoles. The property claimed by J. M. Bryan, Jr. and W. J. Bryan were exempted from the legislation. However, P.N. Bryan’s claim was included in the reservation land.52 Act Number 103 of the Florida Legislature, approved June 1, 1899, allocated funds for a Seminole Industrial School, provided for its management and appointed three financial trustees, J. R. Parrott, G. W. Wilson and F. A. Hendry.53

The outcome of this flurry of activity was that Duncan recommended that a tract extending south and west of Fort Shackelford be purchased by the United States Government for hunting and that certain hammocks and islands on the east side of the Everglades that the Seminoles had occupied for generations be reserved from the Swamp Act grant. These hammocks and islands had been surveyed and identified by Duncan in his summer 1898 expedition with Fries.54 Charles H. Coe, in his contemporary book, Red Patriots, doubted the lands would be granted by Congress, because there were many who had no sympathy for the Seminoles and still favored removal to the Indian Territory.55 Eventually some of Duncan’s recommendations resulted in the acquisition of twelve forty-acre tracts near Dania.56

The political complexity of responding to white settlers while attempting to meet the needs of the Indians almost always resulted in a loss to the Indians. Newspaper coverage at the time was not investigative and the general public was barely aware of the maneuverings of vested interests, as illustrated by the above correspondence.

During the first decade of the twentieth century drainage of the Everglades began under the leadership of Governor Napoleon Bonaparte Broward, for whom Broward County would be named, and the physical world of the Seminoles would be changed forever. The impact of Everglades drainage on the Seminoles was multi-faceted. Directly it permanently altered the natural landscape, drying traditional hunting grounds and increasing the rate of white settlement, already begun by Flagler’s Florida East Coast Railway service shortly before the end of the nineteenth century. Developers of lands opened by the railroad and Everglades drainage actively recruited
Map of south Florida, 1926, showing the Seminole Indian reservation lands acquired by Dr. Brecht and by the Indian Appropriation Act of 1911, which formed the basis of the Big Cypress Reservation, and the state reservation allotted by the 1917 legislature.
settlers from other sections of the United States.

Other consequences were not as direct, but just as damaging. Essentially drainage was managed by the Internal Improvement Fund, established and governed by politicians and businessmen eager to see progress and development. The project was funded by the sale of drained land, making it imperative that choice tracts be made available to whites. Often Seminoles were referred to as squatters on land where they had traditionally camped and cultivated for years.87

As the white population multiplied, the traders became merchants. Gradually over the course of the first twenty years of the twentieth century, the bulk of their income shifted from Indian trade to supplying the needs of development. In Fort Lauderdale, for example, one of the bases for drainage operations, Frank Stranahan was joined by others in purveying goods and services to the Internal Improvement Fund, the workers it brought into the area, and eventually the settlers who followed. While the Seminoles had less to trade, the merchant-traders began to sell more to whites and had little need to help their old trading partners.88

Some, including Frank Stranahan and his wife, Ivy, eventually were able to help relocate the Seminoles on reservations, thereby assisting the Indians while enabling continued settlement.

In 1910 the federal government appropriated $15,000 for the Seminoles of Florida and by the Indian Appropriation Act of 1911 provided an additional $10,000. On June 28, 1911, President William H. Taft signed an executive order setting aside land for the Seminoles in Collier, Martin, and Broward Counties. Eventually the 480 acres in Broward County became the center of federal operations.89 However, at the time the order went into effect, missionaries and politicians realized that they were unable to relocate the Indians. This is evidenced by the attitude of L. D. Creel, Special Envoy of the Office of Indian Affairs, who advised that work for the Seminoles be terminated and the position of Special Agent be discontinued. He suggested that the lands set aside by executive order in 1911 be reserved until the Seminoles themselves were inclined to use them.90

It would be two years before a Special Commissioner to the Seminoles would be appointed. Lucien A. Spencer served in that position from 1913 until his death in 1930.91 Spencer wrote a report to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, published in 1913. This report described the Seminoles as unique, uncommunicative and harboring hate toward whites that had intensified over the years. Spencer went on to state that they are "brave and generous to a fault and extremely cleanly in the morals, person, and home life."92

The report highlighted the fact that until 1912 the primary source of income to the Indians was derived from hunting alligators. Additionally, Spencer considered their farming methods crude. While stating that attempts to educate the Seminoles were hindered by tribal law, he recognized the eventual influence of white culture when stating that "(a)ssurance has been given that after the death of the present council the ban on education will be removed by their successors."93 Spencer ended his report optimistically, urging that patience would result in bringing civilization to the Seminoles in a few years.

The Seminoles played an integral role in the settlement of south Florida. Before drainage, their trade primed local economies, enabling early settlers to establish themselves and prosper without farming. Their willingness to abandon the land which they had cleared for camps facilitated later settlement. As drainage reclaimed the Everglades, the Seminole struggled to maintain his culture and way of life. Eventually unable to productively hunt, raise cattle, and subsistence farm, they were forced eastward, out of the 'Glades, to the coast where real estate development, commercial farming and capitalist ventures were thriving. With skills unsuited to their new environment, the Seminoles were forced to earn a living picking beans, serving as tourist attractions and surviving any way they could. In the Miami Metropolis of 1897, Seminole Indian camps are listed as “Places of Interest to be Seen in and About Miami and Biscayne Bay."94 By 1917 advertisements in the Miami Herald proclaimed “Remarkable Photos of the Fast Disappearing Seminoles at Elbre's, Post Cards, 10 cents, Large Prints, 25 Cents.”95

By 1917 Everglades drainage...
was largely accomplished, settlers were arriving, and as the Seminoles sought lands on which to be “squatters,” a severe drought eliminated any possibility that the Indians could maintain their traditional lifestyle. In March 1917 a Congressional Committee arrived in Fort Lauderdale. They were accompanied to the Indian camp by local dignitaries, W. H. Marshall, Phil Bryan, Mayor Will J. Reed, Mr. and Mrs. Frank Stranahan, W. C. Kyle, Harry Baker, Sam Gillian and Sentinel editor George G. Mathews. The camp conditions were reported as squalid. Indian Commissioner Coleman suggested that in order to improve the condition of the Indians, lands should be reserved for their use, an experienced agent appointed, and they should be educated to “meet the changed conditions brought about by white civilization.”

Each local dignitary spoke before the committee. Frank Stranahan, who had been associated with the Seminoles for almost thirty years, “advocated giving the Indians lands and teaching them to farm in the white man’s way,” because otherwise the Indians would disappear. The committee indicated a desire to find a solution and after dinner proceeded to Miami to visit more Seminole camps.

Headlines in the Miami newspaper indicated a different tone. “Reservation in Oklahoma for Seminole Indians of Florida Who Have a Hard Row to Hoe” would have frightened any Seminole who had contended with many obstacles to remain on his native soil. From this article it is obvious that the Indians’ conditions were declining even more rapidly due to the drought, which exacerbated the already dwindling availability of game for trade and placed the Seminoles in debt to traders who had been willing to give them credit, such as J. W. Buck in Miami. The inference can be drawn that by now the approximately four hundred Seminoles in the Everglades would have to relocate to reservations or face the threat of removal to Oklahoma.

No mention of the visit by the Congressional committee is found in The Miami Metropolis until March 30, 1917. On that date no indication of the result of this visit for the Seminoles is given. What is reported is an appreciation of the courtesies extended to the committee by the Chamber of Commerce and a “thank you for the royal entertainment” received.

The following month Governor Sidney J. Catts, in his message to the Florida Legislature, included reference to the Seminole Indian reservations, stating that

(as) the Seminole Indians are the last vestige of the red men left in the state of Florida, and as these aborigines were the original settlers on the soil, and as they have been defrauded of all lands of this state which was originally their fathers’, I recommend that the legislature appropriate enough public lands of Florida to form a reservation for these Indians, not s per sterpes, but as a tribe, with the title to vest in the tribe forever . . .

On May 9, 1917, Governor Catts signed a measure establishing land for a state reservation, consisting of 99,200 acres in Monroe County. This action culminated the work of Minnie Moore Willson and her husband, James Willson, Jr., who had worked for Catts’ election campaign. The measure, which received the support of Lucien Spencer, had passed after a hearing before the Internal Improvement Board assured legislators that the land was suited only to hunting and fishing and had “little value for whites.” Only in 1935 did the 1917 reservation land serve a practical purpose, when it was exchanged for a tract adjoining the Hendry County reservation.

Accounts in newspapers, memoirs, correspondence and publications record a public perspective of the Seminole ranging from an independent, distrustful native to an embarrassment in civilized areas to a tragic figure, who finally accepts his place as proscribed by the state and federal governments. From a 1901 article reporting that the Florida East Coast Railway was providing free transportation to Tommy Jumper, suffering from tuberculosis and in need of funds to stay in St. Augustine for treatment, to an article six years later stating that “(a) few years from now . . . the few remaining tribes will cease to exist, the remnants being scattered to the four points of the country,” public coverage seemed to focus on non-political and non-controversial topics. Earlier accounts in the Fort Myers Press included the opinion of Bill Brown that the Seminoles were “beginning to succumb to White ways,” because they bought washtubs, washboards, derby hats, music boxes, suits, shoes, silk ties and handkerchiefs, the fact that “J. O. Fries found 339 Seminoles in 1900,” and an amusing anecdote about Tommie Osceola, “who says he has been drunk for two years; Indian doctor told him wyo mal would make him big sleep . . . Old Snooks died a few months back from too much rum of his own make.” Another account at the end of 1905 related that a beef and pork barbecue had been prepared at the home of missionary W. J. Godden and “not a redskin came.”

From the 1890s to 1920 the Seminoles gradually lost the freedom to practice their lifestyle and culture. As whites introduced their economy, religion, and culture into south Florida, the Seminoles tried to adjust and maintain their independence. They were able to adjust to trading with
whites. For a time they withdrew into the depths of the state, but they were
unable to accommodate the results of Everglades drainage and the loss of
traditional hunting grounds and habitations. Eventually the Seminoles were
obliged to submit to the life the reservations finally provided.
Whatever the motive — good or
greed — the policy influencing the ac-
quision of land for the Seminoles
was based on concession and accom-
modation. Until prominent and po-
litically persuasive entities were cer-
tain that the land ceded by state and
central government for reservations
would not infringe on possible profit
and interests of white settlers, a tug-
of-war waged across the Everglades
until 1917. By that year two events
were coalescing, the climax of Ever-
glades drainage and a drought. As a
result, developers could be certain
that reservation land was only habit-
able by "aborigines," and the "red
man" could no longer freely and suc-
cessfully hunt, farm, roam, or even be a squatter. Drainage and the
drought drove the Seminole onto
the front page of newspapers and out
of civilized, settled areas.
Almost one hundred years later,
both cultures have survived; both
have evolved. Social consciousness
is again in vogue, and the Seminoles
are sovereign. However, as they
strive to display their heritage, main-
tain their identity and defend their
culture, the question remains
whether they have achieved indepen-
dence or continued the process of
adapting to interdependence with the
world around them.

NOTES

2. Ibid., 146.
5. M. M. Hall letter to His Excellency H. L. Mitchell, August 14, 1894, copy in Joe Knetch Collection, Broward County Historical Commission, Fort Lauderdale (hereafter cited as Knetch Collection).
7. Coe, Red Patriots, 228.
10. Ibid., 163; Coe, Red Patriots, 230.
13. T. J. Morgan, Office of Indian Affairs, to Secretary of the Interior, February 8, 1893, Knetch Collection.
15. Ibid., 27-72.
17. "In the 'Glades: Prof. C. B. Cory Tells About What He Saw in the Everglades," TheTropical Sun (West Palm Beach), May 23, 1895.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
21. The Miami Metropolis, November 25, 1898.
23. Ibid., 7.
24. The Miami Metropolis, May 24, 1901.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.
29. Ibid., 3.
32. "The Seminoles are to be Deeded Their Present Homes," The Miami Metropolis, April 22, 1898.
33. A. J. Duncan to Mr. C. B. Gwynn, May 11, 1898, copy in Knetch Collection.
34. West, "Seminole in Broward County," 5.
36. Ibid.
38. Ibid.
40. Ibid.
41. Covington, Seminole Indians, 184-185.
42. A. J. Duncan to Hon. J. E. Ingraham, March 13, 1899, copy in Knetch Collection.
43. A. J. Duncan to Hon. J. E. Ingraham et. al., Florida Commissioners for securing lands of Seminole Indians, March 13, 1899, copy in Knetch Collection.
44. Ibid.
46. J. E. Ingraham to Mr. F. A. Hendry, March 30, 1899, copy in Knetch Collection.
47. Ingraham to Hendry, April 4, 1899, copy in Knetch Collection.
49. Jno. M. Bryan to Mr. J. E. Ingraham, April 10, 1899, copy in Knetch Collection.
50. J. E. Ingraham to Hon. J. M. Bryan, April 12, 1899, copy in Knetch Collection.
52. Acts and Regulations Adopted by the Legislature of Florida, Seventh Regular Session (Tallahassee: Tallahassee Book and Job Print, 1989), 149-150.
53. Ibid., 148.
54. Coe, Red Patriots, 256.
55. Ibid.
56. Covington, Seminoles of Florida, 325, note 34.
64. "Places of Interest," The Miami Metropolis, June 4, 1897 (column regularly published through 1898).
67. Ibid.
69. Ibid.
70. "Recent Visitors Were Impressed With Mi-
71. "Governor in Message to Legislature Makes Many Timely Recommendations," The Mi-
avi Metropolis, April 8, 1917.
72. Covington, Seminole Indians, 185.
73. Hanna and Hanna, Lake Okeechobee, 334.
74. "A Seminole in Distress," The Miami Me-
avi, September 27, 1917.
75. "The Seminoles Are Decreasing," The Mi-
avi Metropolis, January 25, 1907.
76. Fort Myers Press, March 26, 1894.
77. Ibid., September 4, 1902.
78. Ibid., October 19, 1905.
79. Ibid., December 28, 1905.