

Forgotten Florida Series

Prehistoric Civilizations: Palm Beach County purchased the land in 1978, but was unaware of the historical significance of the park until several historical advocates advised them in the early 1990's. Acting on this information, the county brought in archaeologists who were impressed with the density of prehistoric material. They also suggested that there was "evidence of a continual time line of use of the area by historic and prehistoric civilizations as far back as the Paleo-Indian period." (10,000 B.C. to 6500 B.C.) Their survey resulted in the assessment of 50 historic, archaeological and architectural sites which include: prehistoric villages and camps, two 19th century Seminole villages, evidence of the two battles fought in the Second Seminole War (January, 1838), pioneer homesteads, farms, packing houses; In fact, almost every aspect of human history and inhabitation of Palm Beach County is represented in the park. The correct location of this history may have remained unknown as the state had the Battle of the Loxahatchee in the wrong place- Martin County.

Preserving History: To protect and preserve this store-house of multi-level history, the

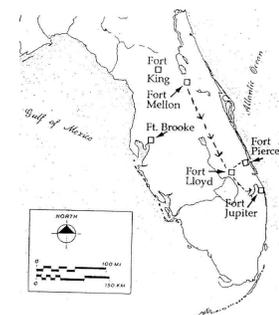


Palm Beach County Board of County Commissioners recently designated Riverbend Park a historic district. Almost lost to history, the true location of the Battle of the Loxahatchee was finally confirmed and hopefully the park will be placed into the National Register of Historic Places.

Visitors that come to Florida often complain that we have no history. Unfortunately, some longtime residents are also unaware of the significant history that surrounds us. A case in point is Riverbend Park, located in west Jupiter. Early pioneers and citrus grove planters dug, drained, filled, and in general contaminated the archaeological treasure trove of history that lies along the Loxahatchee River at Indiantown Road. Although Jupiter was impacted in 1838, with two battles fought along the headwaters of the Loxahatchee.

Powell's amphibious detachment of 80 inexperienced sailors and soldiers were no match for the Seminole guerrilla swamp fighters. At one point during the firefight, the disorganized sailors broke ranks and ran in the direction of their boats. The rear guard action then fell to the army detachment that prevented additional casualties and returned the men to their boats anchored at the southwest fork of the Loxahatchee River. Powell's beleaguered contingent returned to their base at Ft. Pierce where they advised General Jesup of their defeat.

Jesup's Army Moves South to Jupiter: General Jesup received this news of Powell's rout with anxious concern before marching south from Ft. Lloyd to the Jupiter area with his army, which included 400 artillerymen, 600 mounted dragoons, and 500 mounted Tennessee and Alabama volunteers, along with 35 Delaware Indians.



On January 24, nine days after Powell's defeat, Jesup's foot-sore

and exhausted troops, some of whom had marched almost 200 miles from Ft. Mellon (Sanford, Florida), confronted the waiting Seminoles on the Loxahatchee River.

Seminole Battle Strategy As in previous battles, the Seminoles chose their battlefield locations with great care, usually with an almost impassable slough and cypress swamp in front of a thick hammock where they were concealed.

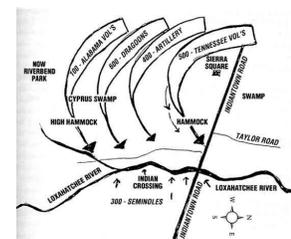
A month earlier, at the Battle of Okeechobee, the Seminoles used a similar strategy, positioning themselves on a high hammock that separated them from the troops with a swamp that was almost waist deep. The Seminoles there even cut the sawgrass, generally five feet high, hacking it short to expose the soldiers who had to carry their weapons over their heads in the brackish water and mud.

General Jesup's troops now faced such a battlefield situation, as the Seminoles pulled the troops to the southeast to ensure that they would be caught in the cypress swamp, that was nearly a half mile wide.

Renewed interest in the Second Seminole War (1835-1842), was heightened when archeologists uncovered conclusive artefactual evidence that confirmed the location of the Battle of the Loxahatchee at Riverbend Park in West Jupiter.

The Last Standing Battle of the Second Seminole War:

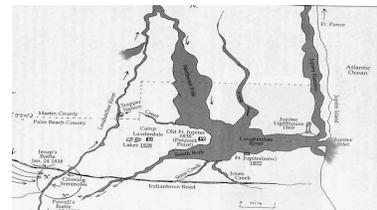
Major General Thomas S. Jesup faced this type of battlefield situation when his dragoons and the Tennessee Volunteers who led the chase, were drawn into a watery stronghold of mud, water, and cypress knees that caused the horses to stumble and sink up to their saddle girths. As the mounted men struggled and floundered over the slippery, bruising cypress knees, they were forced to dismount and charge the hammock on foot, where they were caught in heavy



musket fire, sometimes at close range.

The soldiers gradually pressed the Seminoles back into a dense hammock where visibility was reduced to a few feet. At this point, the artillerymen came up and joined the battle using field artillery (six-pounders and howitzers) at the edge of the hammock.

Army Surgeon Jacob Motte, an eyewitness, described the scene; "Congreve rockets also contributed their terrible whizzing toward increasing the stunning uproar that raged on all sides. The Indians yelled and shrieked; the rifles cracked, and their balls whistled; the musketry rattled; the Congreve rockets whizzed; the artillery bellowed; the shells burst; and take it all in all there was created no small racket for a while."



Despite the hot fire, the army pushed across the swamp into the dense hammock where the Loxahatchee River, about thirty-five feet wide, ran through its center. Unlike the earlier Battle of Okeechobee, the Seminoles retreated to a second position, which they had prepared beforehand, on the opposite side of the river.

The Seminoles Regroup: The hammock on both sides of the river was heavily wooded. In preparation for the soldiers, the Seminoles had cleared areas around the cypress trees where notches were cut to rest their rifles. Some hid in the trees that overlooked the river and were deadly with their rifle fire.

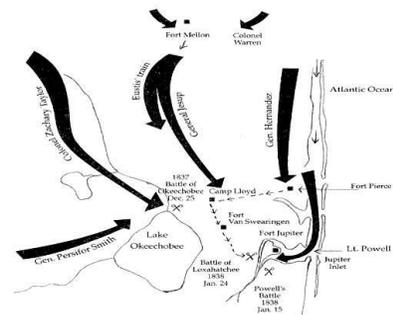
General Jesup urged the Tennessee Volunteers to move forward. They had taken cover on the west side of the river across from the Indian Crossing, where the heaviest Indian fire was concentrated. The intense fire from this new and formidable position across the river had abruptly stopped the Volunteers momentum.



Solitary Soldier General Jesup rode up to the Tennesseans and dismounted. Drawing his pistol, he ordered them to follow him and charged ahead. When he reached the riverbank, he stopped and looked around--only to find that he was alone. Just then, a musket ball struck and shattered his glasses, cutting his left cheek just below the eye. Still calling to the Volunteers, the General picked up his broken glasses and moved to the rear. The consequences of this incident did not end here, as the bad blood generated between the army regulars and the Volunteers continued until the end of the campaign.

General Jesup Pursues the Fleeing Seminoles: The Battle of the Loxahatchee impacted Jupiter on January 24, 1838. As you recall, General Jesup's troops arrived at the headwaters of the Loxahatchee weary from their two hundred mile march from Fort Mellon, when suddenly they were fired on by the Seminoles.

As the army dragoons and Tennessee Volunteers gave pursuit they were drawn into a cypress swamp and dense hammock -- -a planned Seminole strategy. Despite hot fire from Seminole rifles, the army pushed across the swamp into the hammock forcing the Seminoles into a second position on the opposite side of the Loxahatchee River.



The Seminoles, using a river ford--"Indian Crossing"-- quickly regrouped and waited for the troops to follow. The Tennessee Volunteers were positioned on the west side of the river directly across from the ford where the Indian fire was concentrated.

With the air across the river filled with musket balls, the Volunteers hesitated. General

Jesup, leaping from his horse, pistol in hand, ordered them to follow him and charged ahead to the river's edge. When he reached the riverbank he stopped and looked around only to find he was alone. The Tennesseans had not moved. Jesup turned back but a ball hit him just below the left eye. The Tennesseans finally advanced to the water's edge where they received most of the battle casualties.

Although the Army regulars accused the Volunteers with cowardice for not moving forward when ordered to do so by the General--there may have been conflicting signals at work.

Tennessee Volunteers had been positioned on the left, directly in front of the ford where the musket fire was the heaviest. The artillery took the center position on the skirmish line; Colonel William S. Harney led his dragoons on the right; and Colonel Twiggs held the Alabama Volunteers on the extreme right, where they were not engaged.

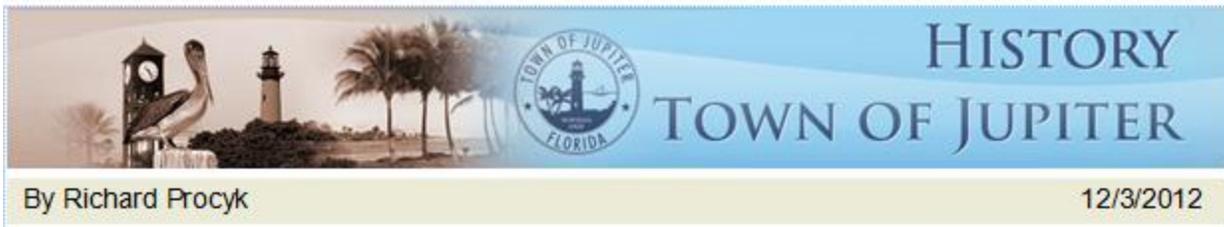
Tennessee Volunteers Suffer Casualties 1838 Tennessee Volunteer Roster

The dragoons and Alabama Volunteers on the right end of the line fared the best, with the least number of casualties, whereas the Tennesseans on the left, in the heart of the firefight, had the most. Jesup's casualty report to Washington, D.C. was as follows:

Killed-- Third Regiment of Artillery, 2. Tennessee Volunteers, 5-7; 2 died later.

Wounded-- Third Regiment of Artillery, 6. Second Regiment of





Dragoons, 1. Tennessee Volunteers, 30.

Meanwhile, Colonel Harney and his dragoons swam across the river and took a position that flanked the Seminoles. The Indians, who were heavily outnumbered, (7-1) broke into several groups and headed south.

After the battle, Surgeon Motte called the Volunteers, “useless and unwieldy hordes of unorganized militia”. General Jesup, aware of the politics involved, chose only to say, “some confusion occurred among the Tennessee Volunteers”. He did not explain why he chose to lead the Volunteers into combat personally rather than ordering the Volunteer commanders to take charge.

In the, "Aftermath of the Battle", we will examine the politics involved and how the extreme tensions between Jesup's regulars and the Volunteers erupted into serious altercations, sometimes close to murder, that would require the separation of troops.

Aftermath of Battle: After the Battle of Loxahatchee there was considerable tension between Jesup's regulars and the Tennessee Volunteers. Epithets were exchanged together with gestures of contempt escalating into threats and open violence between the two groups.

Although the regular army troops were accusing the volunteers of cowardice, Jesup knew that many of them had fought with General Andrew Jackson during his early campaigns and in Florida in 1836. In fact, some had as much combat experience as his own troops. In his report to Washington, Jesup carefully considered the politics involved.

The Politics of War: The Tennesseans were commanded by Major William Lauderdale, a close friend and associate of Jackson and Secretary of War Poinsett.



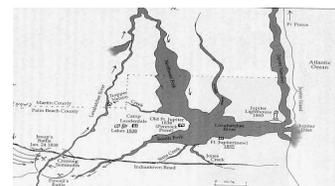
Jesup knew that the Tennessee Volunteers and their success were very important to the still powerful former president, who had staked his reputation on their 1838 campaign in Florida.

Meanwhile, after the battle the Seminoles fled south and were pursued by several units of the Third Artillery. Jesup's troops re-crossed the river and bivouacked for the night on the north side of the battlefield.

Return to Ft. Jupiter: The next morning litters were prepared to transport the wounded on the five mile march to the wide section of the Loxahatchee River near the Jupiter Inlet. As the long train of men, horses, wagons, and mules cut their way through the heavy underbrush, the battered and exhausted army, hundreds without shoes, their clothing in tatters, some wearing feedbags, marched to the river where they built a stockade as a depot for provisions that were expected from Ft. Pierce.

This strategic position along the river, known as Pennock Point today, juts out into the wide section of the Loxahatchee. This strip of land lies between the northwest and the southwest fork of the river. On January 28, 1838, the stockade was completed, and designated as Ft. Jupiter.

One Army, Two Camps: In his report to Washington, Jesup never mentioned the strained and serious difficulties between the regular army and the Lauderdale's Tennessee Volunteers. The fact that his troops were camped at Ft. Jupiter and the volunteers one mile west never was mentioned or recorded in the official records.



As it was unknown that General Jesup has separated his troops in different locations, this missing piece of history was not revealed until a vocational archaeologists



discovered the site and archaeologist Robert S. Carr and his Archaeological and Historical Conservancy, Inc. confirmed it in 1989.

Some years later this scenario was repeated when vocational archaeologists located the Loxahatchee Battlefield in Riverbend Park. Almost lost to history, the park has been designated a historic district and now is protected for future generations.

Florida Cowboys When people think of tough, two fisted cowboys, large cattle ranches and Indians raiding the old homestead, most of us remember the movies and the novels of the Wild West. Apparently, history is once again slanted by omission. A long time before domestic cattle were brought to the western part of the United States, they were brought to Florida.

In 1521, Ponce De Leon sailed from Santo Domingo to Florida, arriving with 6 heifers and a bull. These early Spanish imports became known as scrub cows and are the ancestors of most of the present-day Florida herds.

Florida was still Spanish territory in those days and in less than 100 years, cowboys or "vaqueros", as they called by early Spanish colonists, herded cattle on ranches between the St. Johns and the Apalachicola rivers.

The "first" cowboys were not a John Wayne or Jimmy Stewart type, tall in the saddle, but were more likely friendly Indians, black men, slave or free, or descendants of the Spanish.

These early herds were descendants of cattle born in Spain and would sometimes graze alongside small native buffalo herds which then lived in Florida. Some descendants of these earliest cattle still roam over Florida's ranges and are fondly called "cracker cattle".



The information in this series was taken from Richard Procyk's new book on Florida history "GUNS ACROSS THE LOXAHATCHEE" which was published November 1, 1999. For availability and purchase information contact the author at by Email at richpro@bellsouth.net.

Horses used by early cowboys were also descended from Spanish horses which came from these early Spanish ponies and are called "cracker ponies."

About the middle of the 1700's, Seminole Indians began to drift into north Florida and finding wild cattle, began to raise large herds, mostly near and on Paine's Prairie, near Gainesville.

Two famous early Indians who raised cattle were Chief Billy Bowlegs and Chief Cowkeeper. Some of these herds of cattle numbered over 1000 head. These Indian cowboys rode beautiful ponies and were considered to be quite wealthy, as besides owning huge herds of cattle, they also owned black slaves who were used to herd their cattle becoming the first "black cowboys".

In 1821, when Spain ceded Florida to the United States, settlers and pioneers from Georgia, South Carolina and Alabama followed the herds into north Florida. The newcomers began rounding up wild cattle and herds belonging to the Indians and taking land that was often occupied by the Indians.

Trouble between white settlers and Indians soon developed over crazing rights and slave ownership. This increased hostility over cattle and slaves became one of the major causes for the Second Seminole War (1835-1842), the longest Indian war in American history.

Grazing cattle would remain an important industry to the Florida Indians for many years.



Even today one of the best cattle ranches in the United States is owned and operated by Seminole Indians at the Brighton Indian Reservation near Lake Okeechobee.

The next time you drive through the center of our state and see all the cattle ranches, look for a Florida cowboy and remember it all started here long before the west was won.