

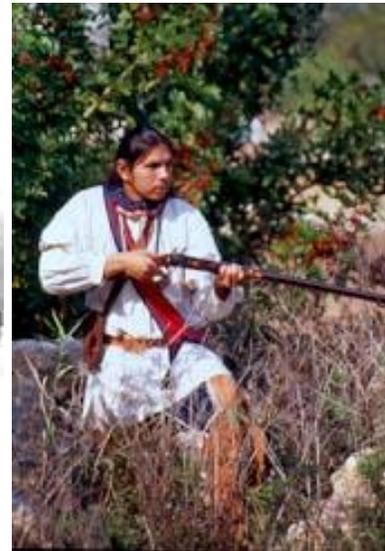


By Joe Bonikowski

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## Riverbend Park the site of historical battle

*By Joe Bonikowski, Palm Beach Post Staff Writer for the Neighborhood Post, The Palm Beach Post, as published Wed., August 22, 2001*



Many of us are not natives. Much like our forefathers who streamed through Ellis Island, we made the trek here from distant lands -- New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and even Canada.

There, we were well-acquainted with our neighborhood's past. Living in Philadelphia, I took advantage of every opportunity I had to visit historical sites such as Independence Hall, Valley Forge and Washington's Crossing. Sites that most people know through lessons in school. Most of our neighborhood's recorded history occurred within the past 150 years -- the Jupiter Lighthouse, the Celestial Railroad and Flagler's railroad, Kelsey City and the Winter Club.

But one period that's been overlooked hopefully won't be for much longer. "It's a piece of history that was almost lost," said Jupiter resident, author and a vocational archaeologist Richard Procyk, a retired Miami Beach Police lieutenant. Just south of Indiantown Road, and west of Florida's Turnpike, sits a plot of land known as Riverbend Park. It belongs to Palm Beach County, but many residents don't know it's there. Heck, if you drive by and blink you'll miss it.

More than 163 years ago on that plot of land near the headwaters of the Loxahatchee River, Red and Black Seminoles fought U.S. soldiers. The Battle of the Loxahatchee took place on Jan. 24, 1838. A historical battlefield in our midst? "No one had a clue that the Seminole Wars were fought in Jupiter 160 years ago," Procyk said. "I interviewed Bessie DuBois more than 20 times and she didn't know it was the best-kept secret in town." Procyk is eager to share that secret with more of us.



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This fall, he'll lead walking tours of the battlefield and share insight from his book, *Guns across the Loxahatchee*. Call the Florida History Center & Museum at 747-6639 to reserve a spot on the tour and a look at the past. When he moved to Jupiter in 1985, four years after retiring from the Miami Beach Police Department, he had no idea his new home had some history. Soon after, a friend visited and informed Procyk that his residence was only a block and a half from the site of Old Fort Jupiter, used by the soldiers who fought the Battle of the Loxahatchee. It's a site that thousands pass by every day, just north of the Roebuck-Loxahatchee River Road intersection. The friend coaxed Procyk into digging and Procyk found a button that belonged to one of the soldiers. That discovery sparked his interest in local history, inspired his research and led to his book.

During his research, he discovered that an encampment of Tennessee volunteers who fought in the battle had been about a half block from his house. Ten years ago, he guided the effort to have that encampment memorialized with a gray granite marker, which is on Winding Lake Drive in The Shores development. As we walked to the marker at The Shores under the hot August sun, all I could think of was getting back to Procyk's air-conditioned home and having a tall glass of ice water.

Then I thought about the regular soldiers, the volunteers and the Seminoles. They didn't have those luxuries. We need to remember, and honor, those who were here long before us but weren't as fortunate. Procyk's now working to have the park renamed to something with greater significance.

Riverbend Battlefield Park, Battle of the Loxahatchee Historic Park and Loxahatchee River Battlefield Park are the names being considered, but there isn't one that's more important than the other two to him. "I don't care what the name is, provided that in some fashion it tells people that there is history there."

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