

CHAPTER V

LATTER-DAY EXPLORERS AND THE NATIVES

1. The Explorers

After crossing the lower Everglades in 1897 Hugh Willoughby commented:

It may seem strange, in our day of Arctic and African exploration, for the general public to learn that in our very midst, as it were, in one of our Atlantic Coast States, we have a tract of land one hundred and thirty miles long and seventy miles wide that is as much unknown to the white man as the heart of Africa. 1

These words ably describe the veil of obscurity which covered the interior of Florida below the twenty-seventh parallel from the state's discovery by Ponce de Leon in the early part of the sixteenth century through most of the nineteenth century. It seems almost incredulous that Lake Okeechobee (the second largest fresh water lake wholly within the United States) and the Everglades should be the objects of exploring expeditions in the years from 1885 to 1900. The military records of the two Seminole Wars, the Buckingham Smith reports published in 1848, and the exploits of the Disston enterprises all failed in large measure to dispel the mythical fancies popularly ascribed to the region. Little accurate information could be disseminated about this terra incognita until articulate travelers produced

1 Hugh L. Willoughby, Across the Everglades, 13.

some accounts.

Angelo Heilprin was the first of three South Florida explorers to preserve a record of explorations in the 1880-1890's. Heilprin's approach was that of the scientist and nature lover. James E. Ingraham, a businessman and the president of a railroad, was the second explorer. Hugh Willoughby, a winter visitor in Florida, pursuing a quest to satisfy his own curiosity, was the third explorer.

In 1886 Heilprin led a party of five persons down the west coast of Florida to the Caloosahatchee River, where the course was turned eastward into what he termed "the Okeechobee wilderness."² The ostensible purpose of this excursion was to make researches of a zoological nature in the Okeechobee region. Heilprin's schooner easily passed from the headwaters of the Caloosahatchee at Ft. Thompson into the canals connecting the river with Lakes Flirt, Hicpochee, and Okeechobee.

The voyage up the Caloosahatchee was made in leisurely fashion, with numerous landings to examine the flora and fauna along the river banks. For four days the party followed the tortuous stream from the Gulf of Mexico to the headwaters, an airline distance of fifty miles,

but measured along the sinuosities of the channel, which are especially well-marked in the upper course, and more particularly in the

² Angelo Heilprin, Okeechobee Wilderness, 1.

reach of the last few miles below the rapids, the distance is very nearly twice as great. ³

The clearings at Thorpe's landing attracted the attention of the scientist. He commented on the large tracts developed for the cultivation and production of pineapples, bananas, and sugar cane and the considerable industry derived from the growth of the cane, which yielded a sugar of fine quality.

Within ten miles of Ft. Thompson, Heilprin located

. . . without question the most remarkable fossiliferous deposit that has as yet been discovered in the state, and from a purely paleontological standpoint, perhaps the most significant in the entire United States east of the Mississippi River. ⁴

The river banks, for some miles, resembled a fossil shell-beach composed of countless numbers of at least ninety-six varieties of shells of large size and in a beautiful state of preservation.

From Ft. Thompson the group entered the first of the drainage company's canals, where Heilprin observed the canal banks and spoil dumps. His examination led him to form the opinion that fresh water limestone formed the bed-rock underlying the Okeechobee-Everglades waters and soil. He believed that the whole area of ponds and swamps marked the site of a vast shallow lake whose origin could be

³ Angelo Heilprin, Okeechobee Wilderness, iv.

⁴ Ibid., 28.

traced to the period when the land emerged from the sea, and that the union of waters had been scattered by the growth of vegetable life in combination with dessication.⁵ In the passage through the canals the party found a virtual paradise for birds including red-winged starlings, crow-blackbirds, herons, egrets, ibises, limpkins, and roseate spoon-bills. The animal life along the canals consisted of countless alligators, turtles, black bass, and gar fish. The flow of the water in the various cuts was estimated at three miles per hour.

The party cruised along the shores of Lake Okeechobee for six days, investigating the bayous, streams, and creeks which entered the lake. Previous reports of the lake had stated it to be a swampy lagoon or mud-flat whose miasmatic emanations rendered access a matter of risk. Such reports were found to be grossly untrue. The members of the party were pleased with the clear waters, which were much more agreeable than the barrel of water carried on the schooner. From the many soundings taken, Heilprin judged the great body of water to be resting in a shallow pan, whose surface became a mass of majestic billows with steady winds. First-hand evidence of this nature was furnished when the schooner was forced to lie to, at anchor, a full day while the waves

⁵ Angelo Heilprin, Okeechobee Wilderness, 33.

beat the boat unmercifully. The shore line of the lake on the south and southeast was not absolutely defined, owing to the continuous passage of open waters into the glades. The delimitation at this shore was irregularly marked, however, by the growth of saw grass interspersed with flag weeds. The northeastern and eastern shores were marked by a beach line of sand, rising five feet above the surface of the lake, and covered with a dense growth of oak, maple, and palmetto. This sand ridge supporting a hardwood border was observed to be but a fringe to the saw grass and cypress swamp at a moderate distance to the rear.

Heilprin could find only one dry island in the lake. This island, in the southwest corner of the lake, measured approximately two miles long and three-quarters of a mile wide. It was covered with a growth of small cypress and custard apple, and supported a continuous rookery from one end to the other.⁶

The party spent two days investigating the shore line and the numerous accessions, especially Taylor's Creek, which entered the lake at the northern shore. The banks of Taylor's Creek were well-defined with massive cypress towering one hundred and twenty-five to one hundred and fifty feet into the air and six feet in diameter at their

⁶ Angelo Heilprin, Okeechobee Wilderness, 43.

base. Great masses of water lettuce, a floating surface growth, made the forest almost impenetrable. Several flocks of parakeets, frequenting the highest branches of the cypress, were noticed here for the first time, and the members of the party were able to catch one of the little birds. The waters of the creek teemed with alligators, the largest specimen seen measured fifteen feet in length. Black bass and catfish were plentiful. Few mosquitoes were noticed throughout the trip, a fact Heilprin attributed to the season of the year. The scientist found the Taylor's Creek locality intriguing.

It would be vain to attempt to depict by word the solemn grandeur of these untrodden wilds, the dark recesses, almost untouched by the light of day, that peer forbiddingly into a wealth of boundless green--or to convey to the mind a true conception of the exuberance of vegetable life that is presented. At no time before our visit had I been so thoroughly impressed with the wild grandeur of an untrodden wilderness--nowhere have I so keenly appreciated the insignificance of my own humble being in the sea of life by which I was surrounded. 7

The project of draining the Everglades attracted the attention of Henry B. Plant in the last decade of the nineteenth century. At a director's meeting of the Plant controlled South Florida Railroad in Tampa, Florida, in February, 1892, the subject of vegetable developments was being discussed. Among the directors present were Plant, Henry M. Flagler of the Florida East Coast Railroad, and

7 Angelo Heilprin, Okeechobee Wilderness, 45.

James E. Ingraham, of the South Florida line. Plant was leading the discussion

. . . over a map which was spread on the table, and he said to me, "Mr. Ingraham, could we build a line from here to here?" being from Fort Myers to Miami. I said in reply, "Mr. Plant, that is right across the Everglades of Florida." "Well, he said, "What of it?" I said, "So far as I know only two white men ever made that trip and they were accompanied by Indians, and I doubt if there is any record of their experience but I would be very glad to run a line [of levels] across there and go in person." 8

"The Everglades Exploring Expedition" was organized as a result of this Tampa meeting. On March 12, 1892, a party of twenty white and two colored men boarded a South Florida Railroad train at Sanford for Port Tampa, where they embarked on the Plant System steamer Tarpon for Ft. Myers. James E. Ingraham, leader and organizer, appointed Wallace R. Moses secretary of the expedition. Arriving at Ft. Myers on March 14, the group camped a mile southeast of the town. John W. Newman, engineer in charge of the line of levels which was to run from the western edge of the glades to its eastern edge, was appointed officer in charge of the expedition. Word was passed to all hands that

8 James E. Ingraham letter, Ft. Lauderdale (Florida) Tropical Sun, January 1, 1922; David G. Fairchild, The World Was My Garden, 111; John C. Gifford, The Everglades and Other Essays Relating to Southern Florida, 19-20.

9 Wallace R. Moses, "The Everglades Exploring Expedition," 1.

Information is desired regarding the soil, the growth thereon, particularly anything unusual, and the adaptability of the soil to the growth of sugar cane, rice, tobacco, and sisal hemp; also the tropical fruits. 10

On March 15, two cypress skiffs and two canvas boats were sent ahead by ox team to the site of old Ft. Shackelford at the western edge of the glades. The following day the men broke camp in Ft. Myers and began their march to Ft. Shackelford, some fifty-five miles away. On the eighteenth they crossed Ocaloacoochee Slough and the northern end of the Big Cypress using the old government causeway¹¹ built during the Seminole War.

On March 21, the expedition left Ft. Shackelford, the surveyors starting their chaining and leveling from the position of the old fort. The average depth of the water was six inches, the current of the water sluggish and in a southerly direction. Rock outcroppings, many of them in the form of small pinnacles, made walking precarious. The camp that night was pitched on a slight elevation, covered with a few small cypress and various bushes. After making five miles the following day, camp was set up on an island a quarter of an acre in extent. On this island the growth consisted of grape vines, wild fig, elder bushes,

10 Wallace R. Moses, "The Everglades Exploring Expedition," 2.

11 Ibid., 5-8.

briers, and pumpkin vines. The average depth of the water was a foot with a change to a foot and a half in the latter part of the day.

On March twenty-third the surveyors set out at two in the morning, while the rest of the party moved off at seven. Camp that night was made on an island that had been the site of a former Indian habitation. The island was off the route of the survey and the food and bedding had to be packed two miles to camp. Wood for the camp fires was taken from a stock pile laid up by the Indians, who cut their fuel in advance in order to have a dry supply on revisiting the spot. Soundings for the day had averaged two to five feet of mud over the bed rock. "The Glades at this point present an endless sea of saw and other grasses, lily pads, a great many of them in bloom, with small patches of water amid clear spots and small islands here and there."¹²

The group traveled only two and a half miles on the twenty-fourth, having had to make several portages dragging the boats through the grass. "All hands extremely tired and whiskey was served out from the medicine stores."¹³ A number of turtles, marsh hens, and limpkins were taken during the day; they made a welcome addition to the bill of

12 W. R. Moses, "The Everglades Exploring Expedition," 16.

13 Ibid., 17.

fare. The next day proved the hardest traveling up to that date, and the expedition abandoned the smaller wooden boat, as well as some of the other equipment on a portage of 2,000 feet. The twenty-sixth proved to be a good day, with not quite so much saw grass encountered, and the group made five miles. The supply of flour ran out, but a good breakfast of hominy, rice, and beans was provided for the men.¹⁴

Sunday, March 27, proved a discouraging day for the men of the expedition. Traveling a little over two miles through large bodies of saw grass, they found the water insufficient to float the boats. In order to move through the grass it was necessary for two men to pull and two to push each of the boats through the mass of vegetation. The tendency of the growth of the grass was south and west, while the course to Miami was due southeast. Camp that night was made in the open glades, the party having had to retrace their steps for a mile and a half to avoid a particularly heavy patch of grass.

The following day the party made almost three miles, but two of the men became exhausted and had to be carried in one of the boats. Camp that night was again made in the open grass. Supper had to be cooked over a fire made from grass, supplemented by splinters from the false bottom of

¹⁴ W. R. Moses, "The Everglades Exploring Expedition," 21-22.

one of the canvas boats. Soundings found the basal rock four to six feet below the top of the muck covering, and Moses logged the fact that the saw grass was quite heavy, indicating very rich land.¹⁵ The group broke camp at seven on the morning of the twenty-ninth, each man carrying a pack.

Locomotion is extremely difficult and slow. The bog is fearful and it sometimes seems as though it would be easier to stay in it than to go on. Both legs up to the waist frequently become embedded in the same hole in the mud, and to extricate ones-self with from 30 to 50 lbs. weight on the back requires strength and time. Packing for any distance is impracticable. A man by himself, carrying nothing would probably fail to reach the timber from this point. The boats are very necessary to enable one to pull himself out of the mud and even then the labor is most exhaustive.¹⁶

The stopping place for the twelfth night out from Ft. Myers was taken from a flock of white herons who had a rookery on the island. Fifteen of the young birds were killed and cooked up into a dish the marchers thought much better than the average Florida chicken. The food had been rationed on the basis of moving five miles per day, whereas the party had averaged only three miles each day from Shackelford.¹⁷ March 30 the expedition made four miles, but the labor occasioned by working through the high grass became

22. 15 W. R. Moses, "The Everglades Exploring Expedition,"

16 Ibid.,

17 Ibid., 23.

too difficult for the chainmen and that phase of the work had to be given up. That night was spent on a quarter acre patch covered by a growth of stunted willows inhabited by turkey buzzards, which were "very odorous, but better than mud alone."¹⁸

On the last day of March the party found the glades bearing east of south with sufficient water to float the boats, necessitating only two short portages. With the depth of water averaging two to three feet, the expedition moved four miles a day on the first two days of April. The food stores had been reduced until all that remained was hominy, which the men supplemented with such animal life as they were able to procure on the march from day to day. The bag of game for the second of April consisted of seven terrapins, three blue herons, several water turkeys, and a forty pound alligator. The party saw a great many Indian signs, notably large burned over areas where the red men had sought game with fire hunting. On the second of April the survey was given up because of physical in-¹⁹capacity of the men.

The depth of the muck increased as the expedition moved eastward. Soundings to the bed rock now reached six to seven feet below the surface of the soil. During

24. 18 W. R. Moses, "The Everglades Exploring Expedition,"

19 Ibid., 28.

the day of April third over a dozen fish, including one weighing four pounds, jumped into the boats as the party passed through the narrow and tortuous channels of the saw grass. The group rested that night on an island covered with hackberry trees; from the top of one of the trees the timber line to the east could be seen, some five miles away. Constant wading in water and bog had weakened all the party and considerable lassitude prevailed.²⁰ A chance meeting with a Seminole, Billy Harney, resulted in his engagement to guide four of the group into Miami to secure provisions. Ingraham and Moses left with Harney on the afternoon of the fourth, riding in the native's dugout. Newman and another man followed in one of the canvas boats. The two boats reached the falls of the Miami River about nine the next morning, and were in the village of the same name at noon on April fifth.

Ingraham was able to hire another Indian to return with Harney and himself to guide the remaining members into the village. After a few days of sightseeing around the village the party left on a steamer for Titusville. There the group boarded a special train for Sanford, and completed its journey on April 16.²¹ This voyage of discovery by Ingraham and his party gave information that

20 W. R. Moses, "The Everglades Exploring Expedition," 32.

21 Ibid., 52.

was valuable when drainage was begun in later years. The question which prompted the expedition, namely the feasibility of building a railroad from Tampa to Miami, was²² answered in the negative.

A third explorer, Hugh L. Willoughby, a former lieutenant commander in the Rhode Island Naval Reserve and gentleman traveler, visited Florida during the winter of 1896 and made the usual trip up the Miami River to the rap-²³ids and into the glades. He met J. E. Ingraham and, after hearing the story of the latter's expedition, Willoughby made the boast that he would see if the passage across the Everglades could be made without having to sleep in wet clothes. Intrigued with his first view of the Everglades, Willoughby resolved to return the next year and undertake a journey from the headwaters of the Shark River to the headwaters of the Miami River. He stated that he wanted to examine the plant and animal life of the region and to

. . . show that the word swamp, as we understand it, has no application whatever to the Everglades; that it is a country of pure water; that this water is moving in one direction or another, depending on the natural topography of the country; that the air is wholesome, pure, and free from disease germs; that near the coast

22 J. E. Ingraham letter, Ft. Lauderdale (Florida) Tropical Sun, January 1, 1922.

23 Hugh L. Willoughby, Across the Everglades, 1-8.

and mangroves the mosquitoes thrive; but deep in the Everglades, in the winter time at least, you can sleep comfortably without a net. 24

Willoughby returned to the North for the summer of 1896 and assembled equipment for his trip the following winter. He secured two canoes of thirty inch beam, one fourteen and the other sixteen feet in length, equipped with single rig sails measuring forty square feet. For navigational aids he procured a case in which were carried an octant, aneroid barometer, thermometer, artificial horizon, zenith compass, and two chronometers with waterproof cases. ²⁵ For propelling the canoes Willoughby selected long poles similar to those used by the Seminoles. As a traveling companion Willoughby hired Ed Brewer, a guide and huntsman living near Miami with whom he had hunted the previous season.

Willoughby decided to make the passage from the lower southwest coast of Florida through the Everglades because there was no record of a previous passage along that line, and because he would be able to locate positions along the east coast railroad whenever he should emerge from the glades. ²⁶ The canoes and other gear were loaded on the sloop Cupid on December 29, 1896, and on the following day Willoughby shoved off and got underway for Cape Sable by

24 Hugh L. Willoughby, Across the Everglades, 14.

25 Ibid., 49-57.

26 Ibid., 59.

way of Key Largo. The little vessel reached Cape Sable on the morning of January 6 and moved into the Ten Thousand Islands area. Leaving the sloop about six miles from the mouth of Harney River, Willoughby and Brewer paddled their canoes to that stream. Entering Harney River they made their way upstream, stopping within a mile of its source²⁷ for the night.

The next morning the men set out up stream. The mangrove lined banks crowded the fifty foot width of the channel until after three quarters of a mile the foliage met overhead and the canoes were barely able to find a passage. Here the men believed they were on an Indian route, as the branches of the mangrove jungle had been cut, some rather recently.

A little way farther on . . . an opening appeared letting in a flood of daylight and we suddenly burst into the pathless Everglades. Here was the source of the Harney River very closely defined. We were standing on the rim that dams up that great basin of shoal water, with so few outlets that except in very dry seasons it cannot drain itself. 28

On the first day in the glades Willoughby noted that they had traveled nineteen miles by canoe but only eight miles as the crow flew. The water leads through the saw grass had been good, on the whole, though the grass tended to be heavy in spots. The current of the water was

27 Hugh L. Willoughby, Across the Everglades, 102.
28 Ibid., 104.

about a mile and a half per hour, setting to the southwest over a rocky bottom, but now and again covered up to a foot with mud. The water was pure and fresh, and Willoughby did not hesitate to drink it.

The next two days were discouraging. The two men met quite heavy grass at latitude $25^{\circ} 36''$ north. Ingraham had told Willoughby that he had crossed the heavy grass at $26^{\circ} 10''$. "That there is a break about latitude $25^{\circ} 50''$ known only to the Indians I have little doubt, else how could they travel from the edge of the Big Cypress to Miami with such rapidity." ²⁹ Finding their course blocked to the northeast by the heavy sawgrass, and believing it almost fatal to attempt the crossing, the explorers returned to their station of the third night. In the morning they took a more northerly course. At noon they arrived at a heavily wooded island and, discovering it to be an old Indian camp cleared in the middle to an extent of some sixty feet, they decided to set up their camp for the night.

On the fifth day the men made less than three miles, and were stymied by a ten foot wall of sawgrass. The camp that night was made on a very small hummock after they had cleared off the snakes and piled up the brush for bedding

29 Hugh L. Willoughby, Across the Everglades, 122.

down. The following day they observed Indian fires to the north and west and smoke on the east which they presumed to be Miami. Travel was so slow through the high grass and low water that they decided to retrace their steps to the first opening to the east. Close inspection showed the water to be running east of south, proving they had passed the dividing line of the watershed.

For the next four days the men made their way south and east, looking for a passage through the grass. Toward the end of the tenth day in the Everglades they reached the end of the heavy grass. Making their way four miles to the east on the eleventh and twelfth days they were still hindered by the low water and rock outcroppings.

The difficult wading, lifting of the feet out of the holes in the rock, the pulling, dragging and the extra care necessary to avoid tearing the loaded canoes to pieces exhausted us terribly. 30

Deeper water was reached the thirteenth day as they continued eastward. Making good time that day they reached an old camp which Brewer recognized. Turning their course northward, the men covered eleven miles the following day to end their second week in the Everglades. By Willoughby's estimate they were as far north as they had been on the sixth day and but seven miles further east. His figures led him to believe that they had made a fifty-five mile detour to avoid

30 Hugh L. Willoughby, Across the Everglades, 157.

seven miles of heavy saw grass. In the afternoon of the fifteenth day they reached the head of the Miami River, and completed their trip into Miami the following day.³¹

Willoughby's expedition was made through the lower glades and the data he collected bear out the reports of the relative worthlessness of the southern part of the area insofar as soil depth and water levels are concerned. Ingraham, the railroad builder, crossed the Everglades seeking to determine their value for agriculture and as a bed for his railroad. He realized that in time they might become a land of promise. Heilprin, the scientist and nature lover, found more than he sought in the Caloosahatchee shell beds and the wild flora and fauna of Okeechobee. Each of these latter-day explorers left a permanent record to be used, in one way or another, in the development of the Everglades.

2. The Seminoles

When the Seminole War ended in 1842, an Indian reservation was provided which roughly embraced the lands of the interior of Florida south of Lake Istokpoga. At that time the Office of Indian Affairs estimated there were 300 Seminoles remaining in Florida, but after the Hartsuff ambush of 1854, 150 Seminoles were forced to migrate to the

³¹ Hugh L. Willoughby, Across the Everglades, 165-166.

western Indian lands. The few remaining red men, who had been hunted like animals, settled in the innermost recesses of the isolated Everglades and the adjoining Big Cypress. In order to make sure they stayed there the Florida legislature in December, 1862, enacted a law to regulate trade and intercourse with the Indians.³²

Section one of the act authorized the governor to appoint a State Indian Agent, to hold office at the governor's pleasure, and to receive a stipend of \$1,500 a year. The agent was to seek by compact or agreement with the Indians for a settlement on a reservation south of a line running from the mouth of the Caloosahatchee to Lake Okeechobee and around the northern shore of that lake due east to the Atlantic Ocean. The agent was instructed to confer with the Indians, giving them assurance of the state's desire to protect them, and to manage and superintend all trade and intercourse with the Indians within their boundaries. The governor was allowed \$5,000 a year to carry out the act and was directed to appoint a merchant to handle the red men's trade, to prohibit all trespassing on the reservation, to forbid the sale of intoxicating liquors, and to enforce all of the laws of the state, except that criminal law was not to extend to crimes committed by one Indian against another

32 Chapter 1363, Laws of Florida, 1862.

Indian within their reservation.

The 1862 act was significant in that it sought to reduce the size of the reservation that had been a part of the settlement of the Seminole Indian War in 1842. Further, this act was the first overt move on the part of the State of Florida to aid and protect the aborigines albeit the act was repealed within the year. Shortly after the close of the Civil War the legislature took action in regard to the Seminole. An act passed in 1866 abolished all boundary lines, legalized free trade, allowed the Indians to make their own civil laws and to be governed by them. The 1866 act outlawed maltreatment of the Indians and made punishable any incidents that would incite the red men to hostility. The act provided for an Indian agent, but at the more economical rate of \$500 per year.³³ This law, abolishing outright any degree of right of the red men to lands in the state, left the Indians mere squatters on the hunting and fishing grounds of their forefathers.

The Florida Constitution of 1868 sought to recognize the Indians' rights by making provision in article sixteen for the seating of one Indian member in each house of the General Assembly. The Indian representative and senator were to have all the rights and pay of other members.

33 Chapter 1482, Laws of Florida, 1866.

F. Trench Townshend, an English tourist who stopped in the Miami area in 1874, found a small store on the banks of the Miami River supplied with staples for the few settlers and the Everglades Seminoles. Townshend noted that the store did a considerable trade with the Indians who resorted there for whiskey and beads.

It is supposed there are not more than a hundred and fifty Indians now remaining in Florida. . . . The Red Skins down at Miami were tall well grown men, with the usual straight black hair and strongly marked features; their squaws were a hideous bundle of rags decorated with glass beads and a few old coins. . . . The Indians complain that their lodges on the islands in the Everglades are so unhealthy that they cannot raise their children, and there is no doubt that they are decreasing and will probably be extinct even before the game on which they exist. 34

James Henshall, in 1878, concluded that the Seminoles were very peaceable, seldom being seen in the white man's village. He described them as splendid specimens of the Indian race: tall, symmetrical, and very straight with clean, sinewy limbs and good features.

They shave their heads as high as the tops of the ears, and braid the top lock into a long plait which they coil around the crown. The head-dress is composed of a number of bright colored shawls wound around the head in the manner of a turban, looking for all the world like a gaily painted cheese with a hole in the center to fit the head. 35

34 F. Trench Townshend, Wild Life in Florida and a Visit to Cuba, 240-241.

35 James A. Henshall, Camping and Cruising in Florida, 107-108

It was not until 1881 that a scientific study was made of the Seminoles of Florida. The Reverend Clay MacCauley was commissioned by the director of the United States Bureau of American Ethnology to inquire into the conditions and numbers of the Seminoles in Florida. MacCauley spent the months of January, February, and March of 1881 among the Seminoles. "Owing to the ignorance prevailing even in Florida of the locations of the homes of the Seminoles and also to the absence of routes of travel in Southern Florida much of my time at first was consumed in reaching the Indian country." ³⁶ The inquiry was further hampered by the lack of an interpreter; MacCauley finally attempted to master the native language with the aid of one man who could speak some English.

MacCauley found a total of two hundred and eight Indians, constituting thirty-seven families, living in twenty-two camps gathered into five widely separated settlements. These settlements were located in the Big Cypress, roughly twenty miles southwest of Lake Okeechobee; on the Miami River, about ten miles north of old Ft. Dallas; on Cow Creek, fifteen miles northeast of the mouth of the Kissimmee River; on Fish Eating Creek, five miles from the

³⁶ Clay MacCauley, "The Seminole Indians of Florida," United States Bureau of American Ethnology, Fifth Annual Report, 1883-1884, 475. Cited hereinafter as Clay MacCauley, "Report on the Seminole Indians."

western shore of Lake Okeechobee; and on Catfish Lake, a small lake midway between Lakes Pierce and Rosalie, towards the headwaters of the Kissimmee River.

The settlements are from forty to seventy miles apart, in an otherwise almost uninhabited region, which is in area about sixty by one hundred and eighty miles. The camps of which each settlement is composed lie at distances from one another varying from a half mile to two or more miles. 37

A breakdown by age and sex discloses several curious facts about the Indians. An overall excess of sixteen males was difficult to explain in the face of polygamous marriage. There were thirty-eight males between ages twenty and sixty, and fifty-six women between ages fifteen and sixty. Almost all these latter were the wives of the former. Of the fifty-four boys between ages five and twenty, and thirty-one girls under fifteen, there existed an excess of twenty-three boys. The excess in the number of young males presented a puzzling problem to MacCauley, who found the Seminoles were increasing in numbers but producing more men than women. He could see no reason why the tribe should not continue to increase unless it were checked by the non-birth of females. Further reasons for increase were the lack of wars from 1860 to 1880, the absence of epidemic disease for the same period, an abundance of animal and vegetable food easily obtained

37 Clay MacCauley, "Report on the Seminole Indians," 478.

and prepared, equable climate, and the temperate and moral lives led by the Indians.

After observing the social life of the Seminoles, especially their associations with the white race, MacCauley wrote:

The white half-breed does not exist among the Seminole, and nowhere could I learn that the Seminole woman is other than virtuous. The birth of a white half-breed would be followed by the death of the Indian mother at the hands of her own people. 38

The only explanation MacCauley could offer for the small number of Indians in southern Florida was that a great many more had migrated to the West than had been popularly supposed.

The physical characteristics of the people of the tribe were described as excellent, the men attracting attention by their six foot height, well filled out and symmetrically developed frames, with agreeable, small, and well sculptured features. The women were observed to share largely the good qualities of the men, though they were under rather than over the average height of females in general. The women possessed regular and agreeable features, and shapely and well developed bodies.

Indeed, the only Indian women I have seen with attractive features and forms are among the Seminole. . . . Among American Indians I am

confident that the Seminole women are of the first rank. 39

MacCauley believed the Seminoles to be among the brightest of the American Indians. The Indians were antagonistic to the white man as a race, but MacCauley had no trouble making friends with them when his motives were made clear. Most of them were eager to talk and answered directly without equivocation. Though descended from Indian peoples of many nations, the Seminoles were found to have been so strongly moulded by their associations with the Creek nation that they had adopted the Creek language, customs, and regulations. In their family life, they combined affection and cheerfulness with cooperative industry, and all hands took part in household industry and duties.

Distinctive dwellings marked the Seminole settlements; permanent houses were erected at the main camps and temporary houses at the sugar cane hammock, the hunting areas, and the "coontie" ground. The houses, more like sheds, were usually nine by sixteen feet, built of palmetto logs, thatched with palmetto leaves, and fitted with a floor or platform about three feet from the ground. The ridge pole was set about twelve feet above the ground, with the eaves sloping away to seven feet. The space above the joists was partially planked and used for the storage of food and other commodities. The sides were open to the four winds,

39 Clay MacCauley, "Report on the Seminole Indians," 482.

though some of the Indians had provided their houses with woven palmetto mats that could be hung from the eaves during periods of foul weather.

The society of the Seminoles, MacCauley discovered, was divided into nine gens or groups of relatives, tracing a common lineage. The gens divisions were also used to serve as a basis of very simple governmental organization. A man could not marry into his own gens; children belonged to the mother at birth, and were members of her gens.⁴⁰ The Florida Indians rejected the name of Seminole as a term of reproach or cowardice; they spoke of themselves as "point-of land" or peninsular Indians.

MacCauley found the Indians cultivating one hundred acres sown principally to corn, cane, melons, and beans. The cane averaged two inches in diameter and seventeen feet in length.

It was at "Old Tommy's" sugar field I met forty-eight of the people of the Big Cypress Swamp settlement. . . . They had left their homes for a few weeks together, "camping out" and making and eating syrup. 41

The Indians had over fifty head of cattle, one thousand hogs, five hundred chickens, and thirty-five horses. One of the principal items of their diet came from the "coontie" or

40 Clay MacCauley, "Report on the Seminole Indians," 508.
41 Ibid., 510.

Florida arrowroot. The Indians dug the roots from the wild growth in the woods and were adept in their primitive methods of producing flour through a series of poundings and washings. The Indians did no weaving; their cloth came from trading posts, similar to the one at Miami where MacCauley was told the value of Indian purchases ran to \$2,000 a year.

MacCauley pointed out the ease with which the natives lived off the bounty of nature as contrasted with the great moral strength which the tribe had gained from centuries of conflict with the white man. These conflicts, MacCauley believed, had made this little group of Seminoles a brave and a proud people. He pointed out the moving lines of population closing in on the lands of the Florida Indian, and the inherent dangers to the very life of the natives in the efforts then being directed toward the drainage of the Everglades.

But now that new factors are beginning to direct his career, now that he can no longer retreat, now that he can no longer successfully contend, now that he is to be forced into close, unavoidable contact with men he has known only as enemies, what will he become? If we anger him, he can still do much harm before we can conquer him; but if we seek, by a proper policy to do him justice, he may yet be our friend and ally. 42

Even before MacCauley's paper on the Seminoles appeared

42 Clay MacCauley, "Report on the Seminole Indians," 531.

under the auspices of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, a petition was laid before the Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Fund of Florida asking that reservations of land be made for the Indians to protect them in their homes and on their hunting grounds.⁴³ The Board, on March 12, 1883, ordered the secretary to correspond with Frank A. Hendry and E. R. Trafford, pioneer residents of the Ft. Myers area, relative to the possible location and quantity of lands needed for the benefit of the Seminoles.

In 1893 the Women's National Indian Association began a movement to assist the Florida Indians by procuring eighty acres of land in the Immokalee settlement, southwest of the Big Cypress. Several buildings were erected on this acreage, including a saw mill, school, and a residence for an agent. The distance of this reservation from the Indian camps combined with the reticence of the Seminoles to deal with the white man were among the factors which contributed to the closing of the agency shortly after the turn of the century.⁴⁴

Cornelius N. Bliss, United States Secretary of the Interior, devoted several paragraphs in the section on Indian Affairs of his Annual Report for 1896 to a resume

43 I.I.B. Minutes, III, 211.

44 Roy Nash, "Survey of the Seminole Indians of Florida," Senate Documents, Number 314, 71 Congress, 3 Session, 54.

of the status of the Seminoles of Florida.⁴⁵ Noting that the Seminoles had no legal rights in the state, he pointed out that attempts to locate them in 1888 under the provisions of the homestead act had failed. The failure was due, surprisingly enough, to the fact that no lands could be found for the purpose.

Under the swamp and overflowed land grant act of 1850, Florida had received by 1898, 16,734,852⁴⁶ of the 35,000,000 acres of land in the state. The area known as the Everglades, some 2,225,000 acres, was approved by the Secretary of Interior without exception on February 13, 1897, for transfer to the state as "swamp land list number eighty-seven." The Office of Indian Affairs requested the Secretary of the Interior to protect the interests of the surviving Indians of the state, and Secretary Bliss directed that an inspection be made of the territory involved. Colonel A. J. Duncan, brother-in-law of President William McKinley, was instructed to proceed to Florida in February, 1898, for the dual purpose of checking on land list eighty-seven and to recommend a reservation for the Indians. Legal opinion of the Interior Department was that the Seminoles' only claim to lands in the state was by right of occupancy,

45 Report of the Secretary of Interior, 1898, House Documents, Number 5, 55 Congress, 3 Session, LV-LVI.

46 Ibid., CCV.

but that any lands which were not of the wet variety might be excluded from the list on a revision of the grant in question.⁴⁷

Duncan's examination, covering a period of seven weeks, encompassed all the Indian settlements in and around the Everglades. At the conclusion of his tour of the Seminole camps, he wrote:

From time to time they have been driven within the Everglades and hammocks, and within a short time they have been dispossessed of a part of these, and unless protected the remaining hammocks on which they live will be seized by the irrepressible land grabber. 48

Duncan found three instances where the island settlements of the Indians on the eastern side of the Everglades had been expropriated by white squatters. He recommended that a list of lands and hammocks which he had located be surveyed and held for the Seminoles' occupancy. The locations, not to exceed 350,000 acres, were within or contiguous to the Everglades. He further recommended that the Indian agency situated at Immokalee be removed to a point near the camps of the natives, and that proper measures should be instituted immediately to carry out these proposals.⁴⁹

The Indian appropriation act of 1894, continued each

47 Appendix G, Report of the Secretary of Interior, 1898, House Documents, Number 5, 55 Congress, 3 Session, CCI.

48 Ibid., CCXI.

49 Ibid., CCXX-CCXI.

succeeding year, set aside \$6,000, one-half of which was to be used in the purchase of lands for the Seminoles. By June, 1898, 10,000 acres had been secured for a reservation in what is now Hendry County and by June, 1911, a total of 26,781 acres comprised federal reservations for the tribe. Dr. James E. Brecht, Florida agent of the Indian Service, expressed the hope in 1899 that "renewed effort may be made by the Government for work among them in their camps by a sufficient force of helpers."⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Roy Nash, "Survey of the Seminole Indians of Florida," Senate Documents, Number 314, 71 Congress, 3 Session, 62.