

## **THE SEPARATISTS: THE SEMINOLE NATION (1832 – 1839)**

The Seminoles signed the Treaty of Payne's Landing in 1832 after many years of fighting with the U.S. government over land in their native Florida. Prior to 1832, the Seminoles had lived in Spanish Florida. In the late 1700s and early 1800s, several treaties had been conducted with the Seminole that dealt with the ownership of slaves. The Seminole owned slaves and many runaway slaves from Georgia found their way into the tribe. Slave owners in Georgia wanted their property back and in 1818, General Andrew Jackson invaded Florida to try and recapture these slaves. This raid resulted in the First Seminole War that ended with the signing of the Treaty of Indian Springs in 1821. As a result of the treaty, the Seminoles lost five million acres of land in Florida.

### ***The Great Seminole Warrior, Osceola***

Osceola (1804-1838) was a Seminole warrior who did not approve of American expansion into the American Indian home lands of the southeast..

Born a Creek in Alabama, he was also known as Billy Powell. His family was pushed into Florida to live with the Seminole people.

During his life, he was witness to many battles between the U.S. and the Seminole over land issues. Osceola died at Fort Moultrie, South Carolina in 1837.



**Seminoles attacking federal military post during the Second Seminole War of 1835-1842. Courtesy of the Seminole Nation of Florida.**

After the First Seminole War, members of the tribe were forced to live in the interior of Florida near Tampa Bay. Few crops were able to grow in the swamp and tribal members were not used to living in such conditions. Even U.S. government officials noted that the swamp land was “so poor that no settlement could ever be made on it [as] there was no part of it worth cultivation...added to the dreary poverty of the land, it presents the most miserable and gloomy prospects I ever beheld.”

### **SEMINOLE NATION OF OKLAHOMA**

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**Osceola, a Seminole warrior. McKenney-Hall 1837 lithograph. Courtesy of the Archives and Manuscripts Division of the Oklahoma Historical Society.**

After the passage of the Indian Removal Act of 1830, gathering Seminole tribal members together to draw up a removal treaty was difficult since many lived in the interior of the Florida swamps. However, the Treaty of Payne's Landing was signed on May 9, 1832. It guaranteed that the Seminoles would leave Florida.

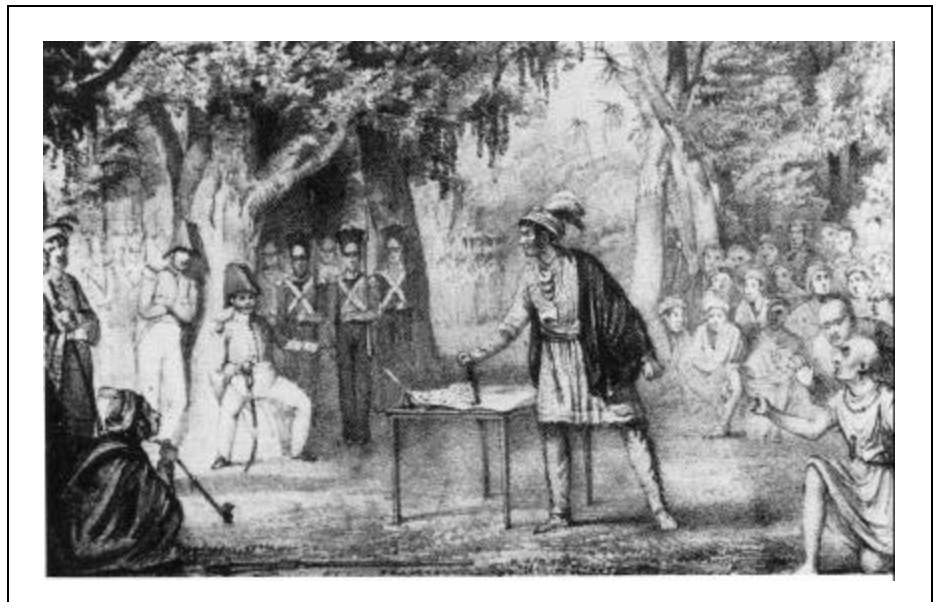
In 1835, realizing that removal to Indian Territory was imminent, several Seminole (including the warrior Osceola), decided to target white traders and U.S. soldiers. These hostilities ended in bloodshed and the Second Seminole War (1836-1842).

For many years before removal, the Seminoles lived within small groups in Florida. They attacked detachments of U.S. soldiers and disappeared like ghosts into the swamplands. They were nearly impossible to find. It was so difficult that the U.S. army sent bloodhounds into the swamps to try and track down Seminoles.

Tired of fighting, destitute and starving, at least 200 Seminoles, led by Chief Micanopy, agreed to move westward in 1837 but changed their minds at the last minute after hearing that they would not be able to take their slaves with them. They fled back into the swamps of Florida and the U.S. army went after them by employing other allied American Indians (Creek, Shawnee, Delaware, Kickapoo, Sauk, Fox and Choctaws) to round them up. Gradually the army and allies began flushing out small bands of Seminoles, including the warrior Osceola, whom they sent to prison in South Carolina.

The U.S. army, ready to admit defeat in 1838 and allow the Seminole to live in Florida, tricked tribal members into another "treaty meeting." When at least 500 Seminoles showed up with their slaves, they were captured and sent to Tampa Bay for removal westward.

**This famous painting depicts the warrior, Osceola, plunging his knife into a U.S. removal treaty. Courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society.**



The Seminoles made their way to Arkansas after traveling across the Gulf of Mexico. Landing at the port of New Orleans, they sailed up the Mississippi and Arkansas rivers. Despite their destitute condition, few Seminoles died on the first trip to Arkansas. The lower death rate was attributed to the Seminoles “adhering to their own peculiar treatment of the sick....frequently deluging the patient with cold water, and to a constant kneading of the body.”

In 1836, river levels in Arkansas proved too low for the first groups of Seminoles to float directly from Little Rock to Fort Smith by steamboat. Instead, they had to get off the steamboats before reaching Fort Smith and travel in wagons. Illness began to rise within the tribe as more Seminoles traveled through Arkansas. The way the Seminoles treated their sick caused much concern among the white population in Arkansas. They saw the sick being “constantly [bathed] in cold water, which was ending them rapidly to their grave; as their camps were filthy.”

Rain arrived in Arkansas to swell the rivers and create more ill health in 1837. One observer wrote, “The effluvia and pestilential atmosphere in the Waggon (sic), where some 20 sick or dying lay in their own filth, and even the tainted air of their camps is almost insupportable and affects more or less those exposed to it.” By the time one group of Seminoles had reached Fort Smith, Principal Chief Holathe Emathla had died.

By the time the last members of the Seminole Nation were rounded up in Florida, at least half of the population of at least one thousand were ill. Once again, low water in 1838 delayed steamboats at Little Rock. The local newspaper, the *Arkansas Gazette*, had very little sympathy for the Seminoles and wrote that they were

the “most dirty, naked and squalid...that we have seen” (apparently not taking into account the conditions that were forced upon them when they left Florida). To make matters worse, Seminole slaves were confiscated upon reaching the capitol city. Governor James Conway was brought into the scuffle over the confiscated slaves when the U.S. army asked him to decide if they had the right to take the slaves from the Seminoles. Conway declined to answer such a question even though he had power to decide American Indian questions in his state.

The land the Seminoles chose for their new home was near the Creek Nation. Today, the Seminole Nation has several thousand members living in both Oklahoma and Florida, where they are governed by an 1871 constitution and an elected chief.



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THE STORY.



**This lesson is made possible by the Arkansas  
Natural and Cultural Resources Council, the  
1/8th Cent Conservation Tax and the Depart-  
ment of Arkansas Heritage.**