



St. Augustine

Seminole War

Two years after Florida became a part of the United States it was decided by the Government to move the Seminole Indians to the southern part of the state. Accordingly a meeting was held at Moultrie, about four miles south of St. Augustine (the spot is now marked) at which seventy chiefs and warriors were present. This meeting lasted from September 6th to 18th, 1823, the Indians at last agreeing to give up their farms in consideration of fourteen thousand dollars, with an additional five thousand each year for twenty years, and move to the wild, unproductive country south of the Withlacooche river.

As time went on disputes arose between the Indians and whites. The former did not restrict themselves within their limits and so gave some just cause for complaint. The escaped negro slaves formed a continual cause of contention, the former owners demanding their surrender and the Indians refusing to give them up. At last a desire grew up among the whites for the removal of the Indians and a treaty was entered into at Payne's Landing, on the Ocklawaha river, on May 9, 1832, by which certain Indians were to visit the West, and if reporting favorably the nation would remove west of the Mississippi, where they were to receive an equal extent of land. By the application of undue pressure this committee was required to sign a treaty whereby they approved of the change. The Indians were not satisfied with the report and refused to go. The government at once, however, began preparations for their removal. At a meeting between Indians and whites April 22, 1835, violent language was used and Chief Osceola, driving his knife through the treaty, exclaimed: "The only treaty I will execute is with this." Matters soon reached a state where war became inevitable. The Indians bought large quantities of powder, and the War Department sent ten companies of troops to enforce their removal. The first important engagement is known as The Dade Massacre.

Major Francis L. Dade, with a command of 139 men, marching north from Tampa Bay, was surprised by the Indians on the morning of December 28, 1835, and Major Dade, with half his command, fell dead at the first fire. The battle continued until 2 P.M. when the last white man fell, all except four being killed. Two reached Tampa. One soon died and the other survived five years.

Osceola, who arrived at the scene in the evening, permitted the Indians to take only the guns and ammunition, telling them they were fighting for a principle, not

for plunder. The remains of these men now lie at rest under the three pyramids in the National Cemetery at St. Augustine.

The war continued for nearly seven years, during which time more than forty battles were fought. The army consisted of ten thousand men; the Indians, at the beginning, about five thousand men, women and children. The army lost in deaths among the regulars fourteen hundred and sixty-six, of whom two hundred and fifteen were officers. The Indians were hunted until all but about three hundred were captured or killed. Those captured were sent to the Indian Territory. The few not captured were sent to the Indian Territory. The few not captured escaped into the everglades, where the white man could not follow; where they have wandered as homeless outcasts until

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Osceola and
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powerful in
shoulders and
was a fierce and
skilled in all the
warfare, a savage
as great a patriot
ever known. He
classed as one
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Legislature of
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The cost to the
money was about
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Coacoochee were
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war. Osceola
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Indian mode of
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as the world has
deserves to be
of our greatest

In October, 1837, General Hernandez surprised and captured two camps of Indians eighteen miles from St. Augustine. Among these prisoners, who were all lodged in Fort Marion, was King Philip, who desired the attendance of his son Coacoochee. Shortly after arrangements were made for a conference under a flag of truce, between General Jessup, Coacoochee and Osceola. This meeting took place on the morning of October 21, 1837, under a tree about seven miles southwest from St. Augustine (the spot is now marked by a suitable monument). Coacoochee, however, instead of accompanying the General, found himself closely confined in the fort. General Hernandez was ordered to go out with 200 men to meet and capture Osceola, and on his remonstrating with his chief on this violation of a flag of truce, was peremptorily ordered to obey. Seated on a log, Osceola with his 80 warriors, all unarmed, around him, began the conference. At a given signal the troops closed in and all the unsuspecting Indians were captured. Mr. Masters, who was present, said: "I shall never forget that day, nor the sad, disappointed face of Chief Osceola and the other Indians. I thought it too unjust for anything."

Coacoochee and Hadjo, the medicine man, with Osceola, were confined in the court room at Fort Marion. The former two decided to effect their escape, which they did by tearing their blankets into strips which they used for ropes. Then by digging niches in the masonry, they climbed to the ventilator, eighteen feet above the floor, worked their way through the horizontal iron bars eight inches apart, and escaped into the moat below, Coacoochee climbing down the rope, Hadjo falling the entire distance, about 25 feet.

Osceola refused to accompany them, saying a white man had unjustly imprisoned him and a white man should set him free. He dug niches in a wall (still visible) to enable him to climb to the window ledge over the door. Here, we are told, he would sit and with sad, longing eyes gaze upon as much of the outer world as the court of the fort presented. On January 1, 1838, Osceola, with 209 other Indians, men, women and children, were transferred from Fort Marion to Fort Moultrie, in Charleston harbor, where he died, broken hearted, on the 30th of that month, from an infection to the throat.

Today there stands Fort Marion, near the scene of his imprisonment, a life size statue of this great chief, the features of which are modeled from Osceola's death mask, now at the National Museum in Washington.