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# FLORIDA SEMINOLE AGENCY

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## SPECIAL REPORT

*of the*

## FLORIDA SEMINOLE AGENCY



PRESENTED BY MR. FLETCHER

AUGUST 19, 1921.—Referred to the Committee on Printing

WASHINGTON  
GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE

1921

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SENATE RESOLUTION 187.

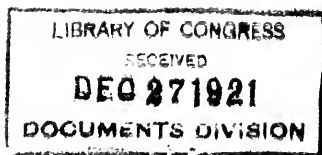
Reported by Mr. MOSES.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES,  
*December 12, 1921.*

*Resolved*, That the manuscript entitled "Special Report on the Florida Seminole Agency" be printed as a Senate document.

Attest:

GEORGE A. SANDERSON,  
*Secretary.*





SPECIAL REPORT OF THE  
**FLORIDA SEMINOLE AGENCY.**

By Lucien A. Spencer, Special Commissioner.

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TRIBES.

The population of the Florida Seminoles is made up of two distinct tribes, speaking different languages and having very little in common.

The northern tribe, locally known as the Cow Creeks, numbering 115, speak the Muskogean language, while the southern tribe, known locally as the Big Cypress Indians, with a population of 339, speak a dialect language known as Miccosukee. The population, made up of the two tribes, is scattered over a territory comprising 9,000 square miles, in which there are no roads and practically no white population.

During the Indian wars the Cow Creeks and Miccosukees maintained a defensive alliance, but did not mingle socially, and to this day intermarriage between the two tribes is of rare occurrence.

TRIBAL CUSTOMS.

The Seminoles are an orderly people. They are divided into bands each under a headman who enforces strict discipline and requires perfect obedience to the unwritten code. When a statutory law is broken it is due to ignorance, and when the laws are made known to an Indian, no second case of violation has ever been recorded against them. The local courts recognize this fact, and usually the judges seek to impress upon an Indian who is undergoing trial the nature of the law that he has broken, knowing that he will carry the news of this law to his people and thus prevent it from being broken again.

The tribal laws of the Indians are just and inflexible and if one is violated the erring one accepts the penalty, even though it be death itself, without a protest.

Indian-custom marriage still prevails, but such marriages are more binding among them than legal marriages are among white people.

MORALITY.

Probably no people on earth have a higher standard of morality than the Florida Seminoles, and it is not a single standard.

The Indians have a high respect for property rights, and theft and lying are serious crimes in their unwritten code.

Gambling is unknown among them.

DOMESTIC LIFE.

The domestic life of the Florida Seminoles offers a great contrast to that of most other Indians. The women are treated with much consideration and their wishes control family policy. The women

perform the greater part of the work about the camps, but not as menials; for indeed, they are quite independent, and are the financiers of the home.

The Seminole children are almost perfect models of parental control, such a thing as willful disobedience being of rare occurrence. The authority of the parents is maintained without the harshness and severity common in many white families, obedience being rendered as a tribute to family law and not through fear of punishment.

The house is a shacklike structure suited to the semitropical country. Every Seminole has a house; as soon as a child is able to care for its own simplest needs, it occupies a house separate from its mother. The wife has her home and the husband has his, and they occupy their respective homes, each living in a separate house.

In his report made in 1880 to the Bureau of Ethnology, the Rev. Clay MacCauley describes the dress of the Florida Seminoles as follows:

The clothing of the Seminoles at this time was scanty. The males usually wore a cotton or calico shirt, belted at the waist, and reaching within several inches of the knees. A kerchief about the neck, and a turban made of one or more bright colored shawls, folded and wound several times about the head, with ends neatly tucked away, completed the dress.

The women wore a skirt, with short waist of calico or gingham, but no covering for head or feet.

This description holds for the camp dress of these Indians at the present time. Their common attire is unlike that of any other inhabitants of America. However, the clothing of the whites appeals to the young men of the tribes. At home or on a hunting trip the young man is content to go without covering for his legs or feet, but when he visits a white community, he puts on shoes and trousers if he has them.

#### HEALTH.

The Seminole Indians of Florida are known as the most healthy tribe in the United States. Dr. O. S. Phillips (United States Indian Service), who made a health survey of these Indians, said in part:

The Seminole Indians suffer less from the ravages of disease than any tribe I have ever visited.

The only disease of any consequence found among them is hookworm, which, if those infected could be congregated a little closer and given systematic treatment, could be eradicated in a comparatively short time, though, of course, there is always danger of reinfection.

The excellent health enjoyed by these people is, I believe, due to the fact that they live in the open air all the time, day and night.

Scattered through the wilderness as they are, with few roads or trails, it would be impossible for regularly employed physicians to work among them.

Dr. R. E. L. Newberne, chief medical supervisor, United States Indian Service, inspected the work among the Florida Seminoles during the month of March, 1921, and the following is taken from his report:

It is said that the Florida Seminoles are free from tuberculosis. I hope they are, but the assertion is too good to accept without question. It is also said that venereal disease is unknown among them. I can accept that as a fact. \* \* \* An arrangement to have medical attention rendered by the nearest available physician is being followed. Some of the Indians are so isolated that a physician can not get to them when they are ill. Those who are able to travel—and a Seminole has to be very ill if he can not travel—usually seek a physician and Maj. Spencer pays the cost.

I saw a little boy in the Lee County Memorial Hospital at Fort Myers who had been successfully operated upon for inguinal hernia under a general anesthetic, this operation being the first ever performed upon a Seminole under anesthesia.

The barriers are giving way and the Seminoles are seeking the benefits of civilization. May they never know its vices. \* \* \*

When the Indians congregate on their reservation it will be feasible to employ regular medical services for them, but until that time the present arrangement should remain in force.

The year just closing has been a season of distress for many of the Seminoles. There was no demand for fur or alligator hides, the only two things that they depend on to obtain money with which to buy the necessaries of life other than those which they obtain through hunting. A certain amount of illness has been caused by undernourishment among the children, and an unbalanced ration containing too much meat among the adults. It was also necessary to furnish certain of the older Indians provisions in order to prevent famine conditions.

Expenditures for relief of distress among the Florida Seminoles for the fiscal year 1921 have been as follows:

Professional services of physicians.....	\$332.35
Professional services of opticians.....	4.50
Hospital expenses.....	244.50
Medicines.....	63.57
Transportation of sick Indians.....	66.52
Telegrams relative to sick Indians.....	1.11
Provisions supplied to sick and destitute Indians.....	1,082.24
Total.....	1,794.79

#### EDUCATION.

Under this head Dr. Newberne reports as follows:

It is not practicable to establish schools for these Indians so long as they remain scattered as they are at present. If they occupy their reservation, as many of them desire to do, schools can be established. How to educate the children of these people without jeopardizing their health is one of the greatest problems of the agency. There are no health problems or moral problems connected with the uplift work among the Seminole Indians other than that of preventing deterioration from the present attainments. The problems are educational and industrial in character. The first will be hard to solve, but the second, I believe, will be easy if the program of the local agency is supported by adequate appropriations. \* \* \* I believe that the Florida Seminole Agency is in good hands and that the administrative officer is worthy of full support.

#### INDUSTRIAL POLICY.

The United States Government holds 26,741.72 acres of land for the use and benefit of the Florida Seminoles. An industrial policy has been outlined looking toward the establishment of an industrial center on the largest tract of this land (17,280 acres) situated in Lee County, about 80 miles from Fort Myers.

For the purpose of carrying out this policy, \$20,000 was appropriated for the year 1920 and with this money 12,800 acres of grazing land was fenced, necessary reservation buildings erected, and the interest and cooperation of the Indians established. Four thousand dollars was set aside for the purchase of a herd of cattle for the range.

In order to continue the work, \$15,000 was requested for 1921, but only \$5,000 appropriated. The Indian Office refused to allow the purchase of the cattle because there would be no funds to carry the herd through the year, and the work came to a standstill.

The necessary expense of maintaining the work during the year 1921 was approximately \$7,207. In order to prevent actual famine, the Indian Office advanced \$2,207 of its own funds.

Seven thousand dollars has been appropriated for the year 1922 and every cent will be needed to prevent actual suffering and keep the present plant from deteriorating.

The idea of the industrial policy is to make these Indians self-supporting and not a constant drain upon Government funds. With the disappearance of game and the occupancy of the land by white settlers, some provision must be made for these Indians. With sufficient appropriations this can be accomplished in less than five years, while, on the other hand, small appropriations merely prevent actual suffering for the time being but give no remedy for existing conditions. They make the Indian an object of charity instead of helping him to maintain his independence and self-respect.

The question is often asked: "Will the Indian accept this offer?" The answer is an emphatic yes. All labor at the industrial center is performed by Indians. With the limited resources, it is necessary to allot a small amount of work to each Indian in order that all may have a chance. While this report is being written, 50 adult males are at the industrial center working in turn as funds can be secured to pay them. If sufficient funds were provided to carry out the necessary improvements, a large majority of the Florida Indians would be there to carry on the work.

The Indian is primarily an agriculturalist, and given proper instruction regarding fertilization and care of crops, improved breeding, and care of cattle and hogs he will have the best crops and finest herds in this part of the State.

*Financial report, fiscal year 1921.*

Receipts:

Appropriation support of Seminoles in Florida.....	85,000.00
Appropriation relief of distress and preventing disease.....	1,707.00
Appropriation general expenses, Indian Service.....	500.00
Total.....	7,207.00

Disbursements:

Salaries and labor.....	4,100.00
Motor transportation—	
Gasoline and oil.....	509.55
Repairs and equipment.....	356.64
Health and sanitation.....	1,794.79
Fuel and lights.....	81.25
Travel and per diem.....	306.35
Miscellaneous expenses.....	58.42
Total.....	7,207.00

Attention is called to the fact that receipts from appropriations for relief of distress and general expenses, Indian Service, were provided by the Office of Indian Affairs to meet emergencies and prevent famine conditions. This work had no official claim on these funds in any way.

Respectfully submitted.

LUCIEN A. SPENCER,  
*Special Commissioner and Special Disbursing Agent.*















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