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# THE FLORIDA SEMINOLE CAMP

BY

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## PREFACE

The field work of which these notes are a product was conducted in 1939. The ethnographic data presented pertain to that date and do not account for any changes which may have taken place since. I am indebted to the Department of Anthropology of the University of Chicago for their financial support of the project, and to Field Museum of Natural History for the publication of the results. My wife, Anne Harding Spoehr, has generously contributed the figures appearing on the genealogical charts; it is hoped the figures will give them an added interest. Dr. Paul S. Martin, Chief Curator of Anthropology, has rendered kind assistance, and my thanks go to Miss Lillian Ross, Associate Editor of Scientific Publications, for her aid. Mr. Orr Goodson, Acting Director, has facilitated the report's publication. Mr. Robert Yule, Assistant in the Department of Anthropology, has aided in the drafting of the charts. Lastly, I wish to thank Naha Tiger and Dan Parker, my Seminole interpreters, for their assistance and co-operation.

ALEXANDER SPOEHR



# THE FLORIDA SEMINOLE CAMP

## I. INTRODUCTION

The Seminole today are a socially undigested particle in the contemporary society of Florida. This handful of Indians, retaining their own language, many of their old customs, and their colorful native dress, are an anachronism in the land of tourist resorts, race tracks, citrus groves, and cattle ranches. The Cow Creek Seminole, the subject of this report, number approximately 175 persons, and live either on the Brighton Reservation or in scattered camps in the relatively unpopulated area west of Fort Pierce, a resort town on the east coast of the peninsula. Although most of the Seminole are economically dependent on the white society that has engulfed them, the majority of Cow Creek Indians prefer to maintain their abodes away from white or negro settlements.

These notes supplement a previous brief publication on Florida Seminole social organization (Spoehr, 1941). They consist of additional data on the composition and housing arrangements of the Cow Creek Seminole camp. The camp is both a social unit—the most important local and kinship group—and the place where an Indian family lives. It is the most readily apparent division of Seminole society. Also, the majority of camps consist of extended families, and this type of social grouping is sufficiently infrequent among North American Indians today to warrant further description of its existence among the Seminole. Furthermore, though the camp has maintained surprising stability in the face of increasingly strong forces of acculturation, conditions exist which will no doubt lead to changes in its organization. Any light that can be thrown on these conditions can assist us in gaining an insight into the dissolution of the extended family among other tribes.

In the following description of the Seminole camp, I have included a number of genealogical charts that show the make-up of particular family groups. These source materials have a place for the same reason that plans and elevations are included in an archaeological report. They give a tangible basis for any conclusions presented and provide for additional inferences on the part of the reader.

## II. THE CAMP AND ITS HOUSES

Despite their proximity to the gaudy life of the Florida resort towns, the Cow Creek Seminole continue to maintain a camp organization and to build distinctive types of houses that have their origin in the aboriginal culture of the Indians. Seminole camps are built on hammocks (Plate 2) or on high spots in the pine forests, and are located in the more remote part of the interior. Even on the relatively small Brighton Reservation the camps are not close together but tend to be built in rather secluded spots in individual hammocks. Viewed from outside a hammock, the camp often is revealed only by glimpses of thatched roof, with perhaps a bit of smoke rising from the cook house and mingling with the green of the surrounding palms. As one approaches closer and enters the edge of the camp clearing, the ground plan of the houses becomes evident. The camps are all similar and conform to the plan shown in Figure 12. The houses of the component elementary families of the camp, or of individuals, form a ring around the cook house, which is always in the center. One house in this outer zone is reserved for use at mealtimes. In addition, most camps have a "baby" house. A few also have a palmetto shelter that serves as a garage for a much-prized Ford.

There are three principal types of Seminole house: the living house, the cook house, and the "baby" house. The standard living house is an open-sided, thatch-roofed structure with a raised floor and is used for sleeping and lounging, and as a place for the women to sew. The house used for eating is also of this type. Its characteristics are shown in Figure 13 and are described below.

### STANDARD LIVING HOUSE

*House Posts.*—Cut from trunks of pines or palms. Nowadays they are occasionally made of sawed lumber. Posts are notched at top to receive wall plates. There are six posts to the average house, three to each long side.

*Roof.*—Framework usually of sawed lumber, secured with nails. Roof itself always of thatch made from palmetto fans. Houses may be gabled at one or both ends, depending on the industry and whim of the owner. Gabled houses are preferred for their effectiveness in keeping out the rain. Roof weights of wood are used to hold down the thatch.

*Floors.*—Always raised. Floors built in the old manner are supported by a set of posts separate from those supporting the roof. Formerly, floors were constructed of split logs (Plate 4); today sawed lumber is used whenever possible.

*Dimensions.*—Largest house seen was 11 by 25 feet; smallest 7 by 12 feet; average about 8 by 15 feet. This conforms with the dimensions given by MacCauley (1884, p. 500).



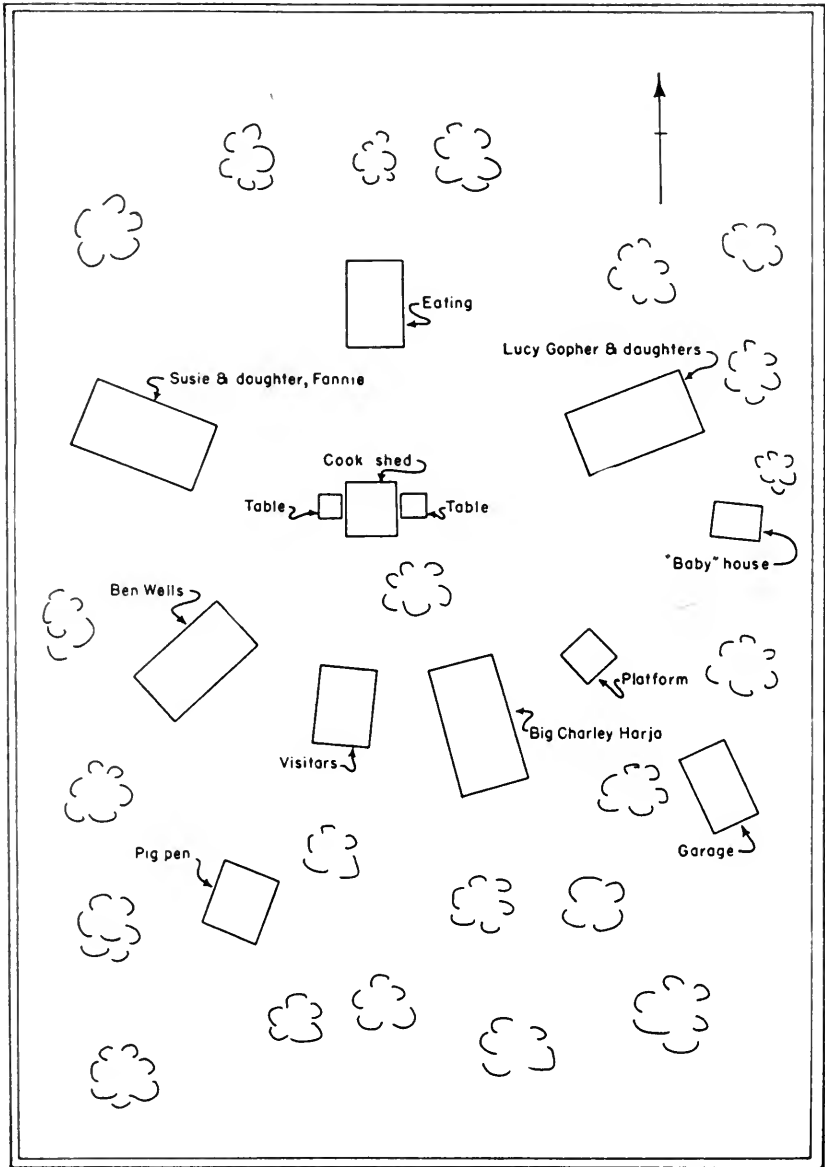


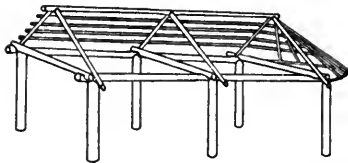
FIG. 12. Big Charley's camp. The genealogical relations of the members of this camp are shown in Figure 15.

*Miscellaneous.*—It is relatively easy to construct a house. A man may build it himself, working part time for five or six days, or get a friend to help him and build it in two or three. Although sawed lumber is desirable for roof and floor, a house can easily be made of local materials. The attitude toward house building is rather casual, and no magical practices seem to be associated with house construction.

MacCauley's (1884, Plate 19) illustration of a Seminole house shows a floor not supported by a separate set of posts; it also has two center posts supporting the ridge pole. I observed only one house with the latter feature; it was the only house constructed entirely without nails.

The cook house and the "baby" house deserve special mention, as they differ from the living house. The "baby" house is simply a small edition of the latter and is built for the use of a Seminole mother and her new-born child. The mother gives birth to her child in a small shelter built in a secluded spot fifty to a hundred yards away from the camp. Here she is attended by several women, one of whom acts as midwife. After the child has been born, the mother remains in the shelter for four days. Men do not visit her, for her condition is thought to be dangerous to males. After the four days, the mother and child return to the camp, but they stay in a separate small house, the "baby" house, built at the edge of the clearing by the woman's husband. The traditional rule is that the mother and child should use this house for four months. The woman cooks her own food, and men avoid touching her for fear of falling ill. At the end of the period she returns to her own house and resumes her normal life, though most women today observe tradition only to the extent of staying in the "baby" house for about a month.

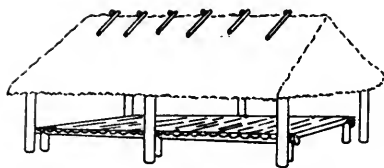
The other type of house is the cook house. This is a simple structure consisting of four posts supporting a thatched roof. In the frequent rains of the Florida wet season some protection is necessary and the thatched roof serves its purpose adequately enough. The camp fire is small and burns most of the day, being fed by the ends of large logs radiating out from the fire. Here the culinary art of the Seminole housewife is practiced. Hung on the rafters of the smoke-blackened interior are her pots and pans, with other small necessities stuck in various nooks and crannies within handy reach for seasoning the pots simmering on the fire.



FRAME WORK WITHOUT FLOOR  
NEAR SIDE OF ROOF IS OMITTED



END VIEW



SIDE VIEW

FIG. 13. A Seminole living house.

### III. ORGANIZATION OF THE CAMP

A description of the Seminole camp organization is given in an earlier publication (Spoehr, 1941). A brief statement of the principles on which the Cow Creek camp is based is given below.

(1) Marriage is matrilineal. When a man marries, he goes to his wife's camp and moves in. The couple then remain with the wife's parents.

(2) The majority of camps consist of extended families whose core is a matrilineal lineage. However, the camp more often than not is extended to include other related lineages or other related single individuals. In any case, all women and unmarried men in the camp should belong to the same clan. Married men in the camp naturally may belong to different clans. Cow Creek clans are matrilineal.

(3) The Cow Creek Seminole maintain relatively permanent camps. However, (a) Indians are constantly visiting other camps, and (b) they set up temporary camps in localities where they wish to stay for a short time and where they have no permanent camps to visit. In such case Rule 2 still applies.

The present chapter consists of source materials on the extended family, an analysis of those camps which are comprised of elementary families, discussion of the few deviations from the normal camp organization, and a brief section on the routine of camp life.

#### SOURCE MATERIALS ON THE EXTENDED FAMILY

There follow six examples of the Cow Creek extended family (pp. 130-141). Each family comprises a single camp. The genealogical relation of the members of a camp are shown on one page, with descriptive remarks on the page opposite. Although the Seminole camp is a relatively permanent unit, its membership will change through a period of several years, while some camps will break up completely and new ones form. However, the principles that are the basis of their organization remain, and it is to illustrate these that the following examples are included.

Camp members are identified on the genealogies by their first names. Most men and women now bear and use names of white origin, as well as Indian names, though English surnames have only recently become inherited through the male line. Brothers may have quite different surnames, and a man's son may have a surname dif-

ferent from his own. Clan identifications are included in parentheses after the name of a camp member. Each genealogical chart shows active camp members in silhouette. The outline figures represent relatives who are dead, divorced, or regularly absent from the camp.

## SAM'S CAMP

(Figure 14)

### *Composition*

*Sam (Panther)* and *wife (Bird)*. They have eight children, six of whom regularly live with them. The oldest daughter is married to *Willie (Panther)*, a young man.

### *Remarks*

The two absent children live with the mother's sister at a distant camp. When Willie and his wife have children they will continue to live at this camp.

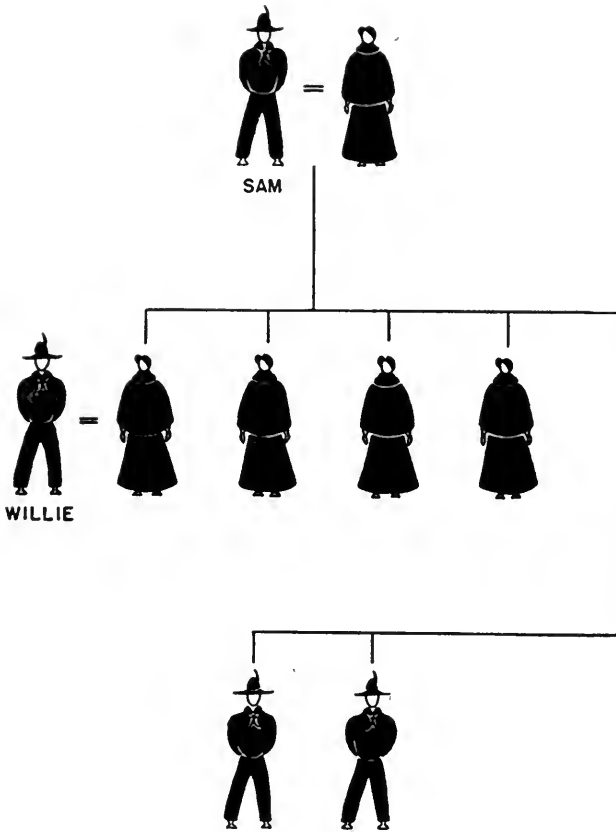


FIG. 14. Members of Sam's camp.

BIG CHARLEY'S CAMP  
(Plate 3; Figures 12 and 15)

*Composition*

*Big Charley (Talahasee)*. An old bachelor.

*Susie (Talahasee)*. Big Charley's sister. She divorced her husband years ago. He has since died. She has one daughter, *Fannie*.

*Lucy (Talahasee)*. Another elderly woman who stays at Big Charley's camp most of the time, the remainder being spent at one of her own some two miles away. Both her erstwhile husbands are dead.

*Annie (Talahasee)* and *Lina (Talahasee)*, Lucy's two daughters. Both are single. Lina was married a short time and has one small child by her former husband.

*Ben (Talahasee)*. An unmarried man in his thirties. Both his parents are dead.

*Francis (Panther)*. A small boy. His presence here is the one exception to the rule that unmarried males belong to the same clan as the women of the camp. His mother died shortly after he was born. Ordinarily, his mother's kinfolk would have taken him, but I was told that they disliked the father and feeling that the child would resemble the latter they relinquished all claim to Francis. The father brought the boy to this camp, where he is cared for after a fashion by Susie. The father has remarried and takes little interest in the child.

*Remarks*

Figure 12 shows the ground plan of this camp. The "baby" house was built for Lina by her husband.



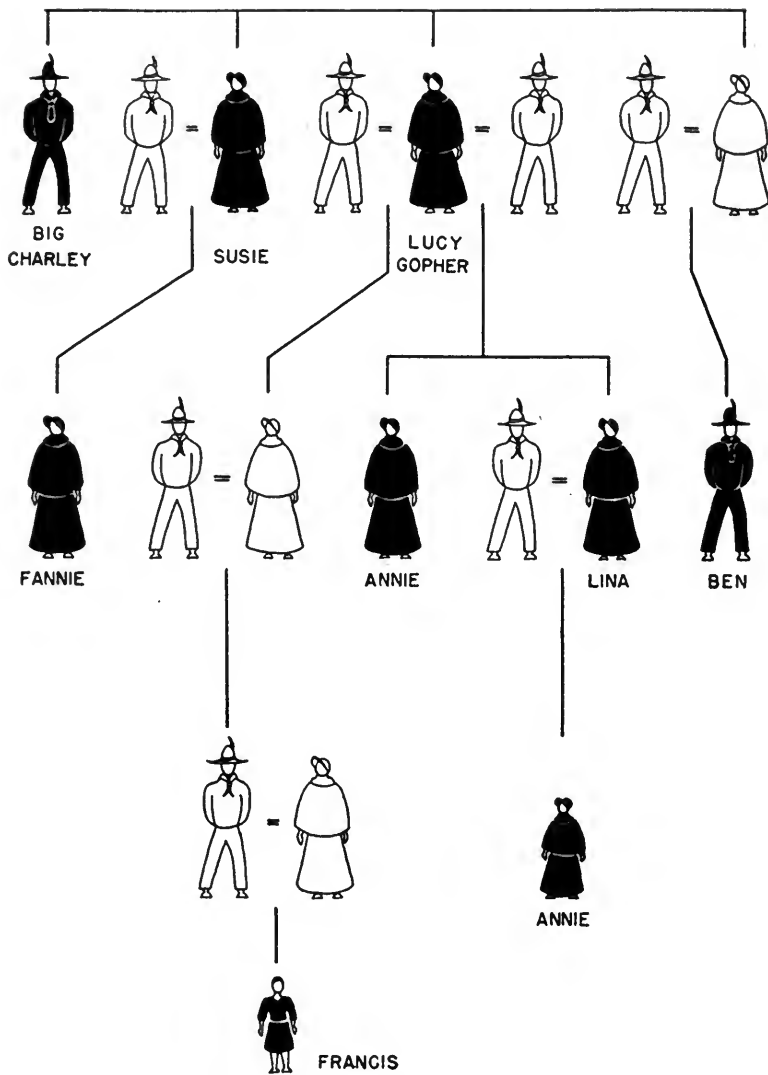


FIG. 15. Members of Big Charley's camp.

## NAHA'S CAMP

(Figure 16)

### *Composition*

*Naha (Snake)*. An elderly man who married his wife after the death of her first husband. He has no children.

*Rosie (Bird)*. Naha's wife.

*Little Joe (Bird)* and *Casey (Bird)*. Two adolescent boys. Their father is dead. Their mother has remarried and lives at a distant camp.

*Rosie's great-granddaughter (Bird)*. A small child, cared for by Naha and Rosie, who are fond of children and like to have at least one small child in camp. The child's parents live at another camp, and have plenty of children to spare.

*Frank (Panther)* and *wife (Bird)*. A young couple who are away a good deal, looking after their hogs in the Cow Creek region. This camp remains their permanent base.

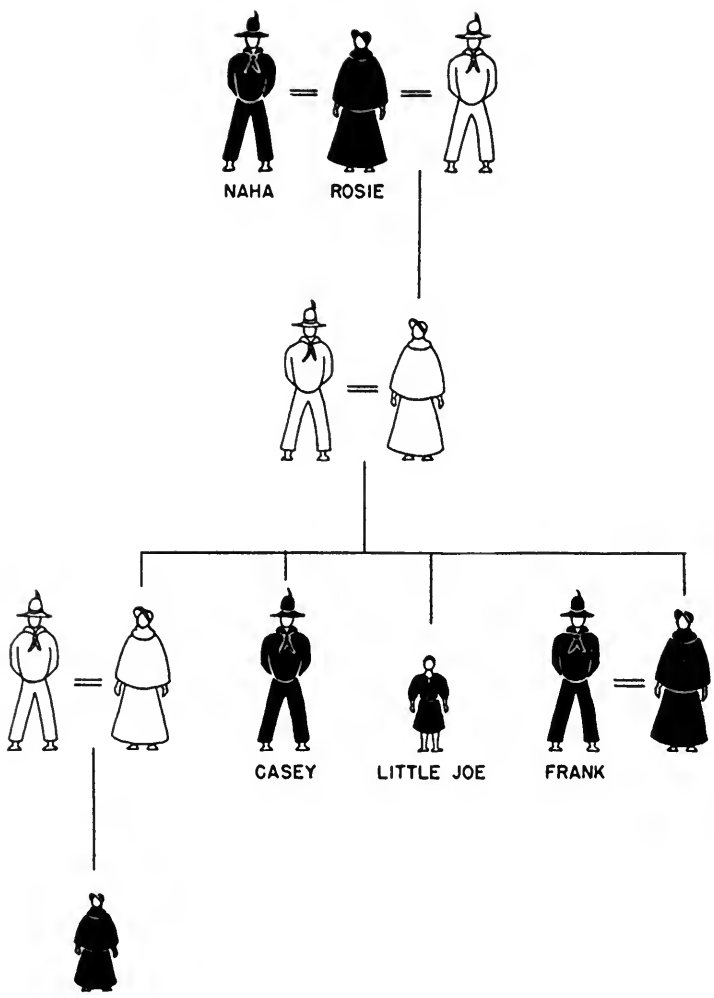


FIG. 16. Members of Naha's camp.

## DAN'S CAMP

(Figure 17)

### *Composition*

*Dan (Panther)*. A middle-aged man. Married once before; his first wife died. He had two daughters by his first wife. His second wife is of a different clan from his first, and as a result his daughters no longer live with him. This is hard on Dan, as he is much attached to the two girls.

*Dan's wife (Bird)*. Also middle-aged. Previously married and divorced. Her two children by her previous marriage live at this camp, the daughter being married to *Barfield (Panther)*. They have two children.

*Toby (Panther)* and *wife (Bird)*, with two children. Toby and Barfield are brothers. A third brother is unmarried and hence lives at a camp where the women are of the Panther clan.

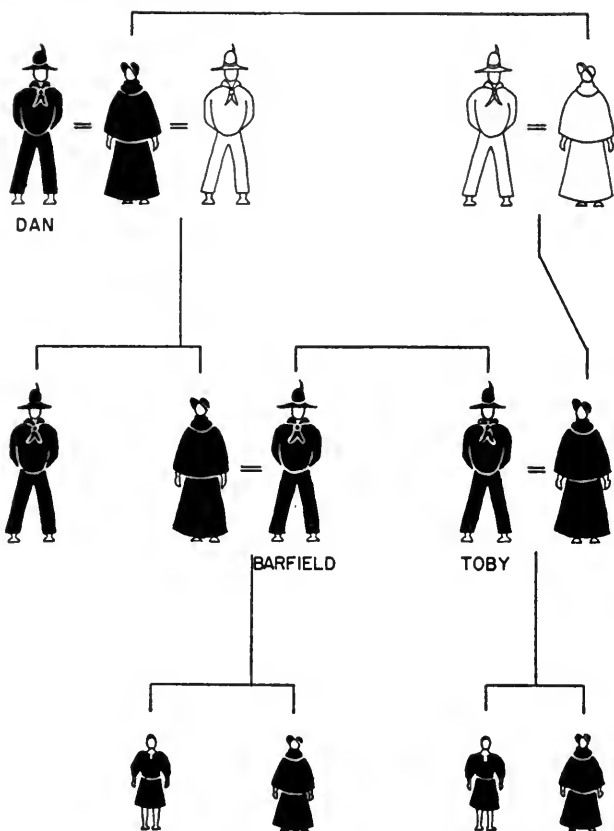


FIG. 17. Members of  $I_1$ Dan's camp.

## CHARLEY'S CAMP

(Figure 18)

### *Composition*

*Charley (Panther)* and *Emma*, his wife (*Talahasee*), and six children. The oldest, *Kopi*, has one child. Her husband is dead. *Charley* and *Emma* have one daughter, who does not live at this camp.

*John (Deer)* and wife (*Talahasee*). Although *John's* wife and *Charley's* wife are cousins, the latter is much the older of the two. *John* is a young man. He and his wife have one child.

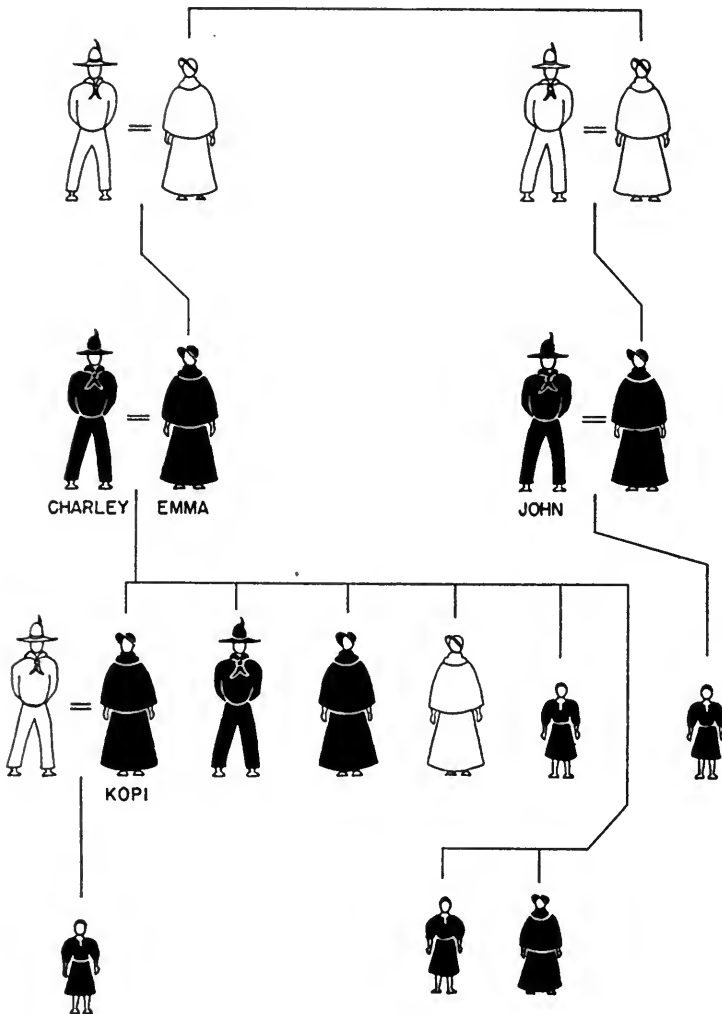


FIG. 18. Members of Charley's camp.

## JAKE'S CAMP

(Figure 19)

### *Composition*

*Jake (Panther)*. Middle-aged bachelor.

*Sheila (Panther)*, Jake's sister. A widow. Also middle-aged.

*Joe (Panther)*, *Joe's sister (Panther)*, and her husband, *John (Talahasee)*. All young people.

*Judge (Panther)*. His mother is dead. His father has not remarried and does not live at this camp.

*Judge's sister (Panther)* and her husband, *Tom (Bird)*.

*Argy (Panther)*. Young bachelor.

*Kodner (Panther)*. She is Argy's sister and much older than he. She is divorced. Her daughter, *Julie (Panther)*, is also divorced. She has two children by her former husband.

*Argy's other sister (Panther)* and husband, *John (Otter)*.



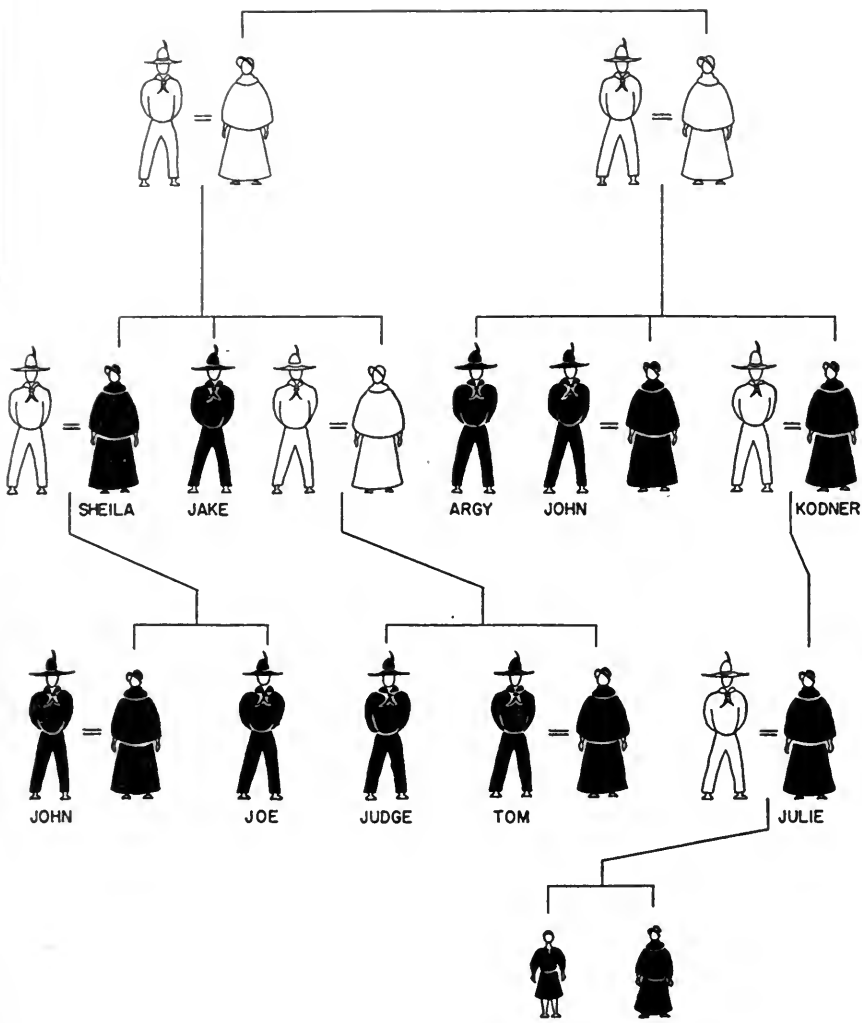


FIG. 19. Members of Jake's camp.

## CAMPS CONSISTING ONLY OF ELEMENTARY FAMILIES

In 1939 there were twenty Cow Creek Seminole camps. Thirteen of these consisted of extended family groups, six of elementary families alone, and one was maintained by a single old man. These six elementary family groups are exceptions to the more usual form of camp organization and consequently demand examination. Each camp consisted of a single family (a man, his wife, and their children), except for one where the wife's mother also stayed. Although it is perfectly true that in a camp consisting of several elementary families each is recognized as a social grouping in its own right, we may ask why in six cases a camp is comprised only of the elementary family unit.

*Size.*—The first consideration is one of size. The total number of persons living in the six camps was 32, or approximately 18 per cent of the band. The numerical size of the individual camps is given below:

	Persons per camp	Number of camps
	2 .....	1
	4 .....	2
	6 .....	1
	8 .....	1
	12 .....	1
Total.....	32	6

When a Cow Creek camp has more than a dozen persons, domestic arrangements, particularly with regard to cooking, tend to become complicated. For this reason, I believe it is primarily because of their size that the largest camp and perhaps the second largest, are composed only of elementary families.

*Personal Inclination.*—For the remaining four camps, personal inclination to live as separate families seems to be the motivating force that keeps these families separate. In none of the four cases is there any desire to merge with existing camps.

It might be concluded that the female and unmarried male members of these elementary families have less of a feeling of unity with their clansmen than the other Cow Creek Seminole. This is actually not the case. The strength of the clan bond is clearly brought out in the constant visiting of Indians with one another. I have listed six camps as consisting of elementary families alone. Yet at any one time it is doubtful that at any of these camps only or all the immediate family would be present. Part of the camp, usually one or more of the children, would be away visiting

some other camp, or visitors from another camp would be visiting the one in question. In this visiting, women, unmarried men, and married men who have left their wives at home always go to a camp where the women belong to their own clan. Likewise, a husband and wife go to a camp where the women are of the wife's clan. Thus, regardless of the camp, the clan retains its strength. This fact is important in evaluating the strength of the marriage tie as against that of consanguinity in the organization of the family. The presence of Seminole camps consisting only of elementary families suggests that among them the marriage tie has become stronger relative to the tie of consanguinity than among those camps consisting of extended families. I am inclined to doubt this, although remaining unable to explain further the existence of camps comprised of elementary families.

INDIVIDUALS LIVING ALONE

Three individuals, all old men, live alone. One maintains a camp, with an adjacent garden plot, on the reservation. The other two live in vacant Indian houses near the agency school building. All appear satisfied with their domestic arrangements.

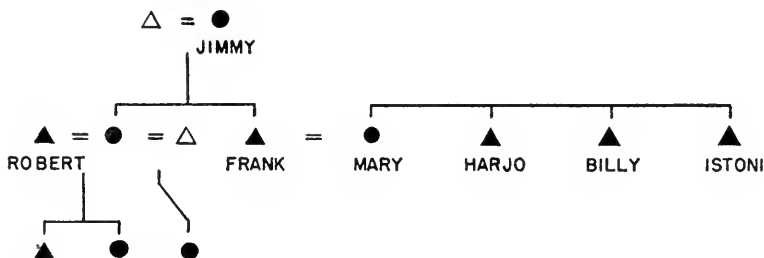
OTHER DEVIATIONS

The following additional deviations from the normal camp organization were noted:

A. Francis, a small boy who belonged to the Panther clan, but who lived at a camp where the women belonged to the Talahasee clan (see p. 132).

B. One camp consisting of the following persons, whose genealogical relationship is shown below.

1. Frank, his wife, Mary, and their two children.
2. Mary's three unmarried brothers, Harjo, Billy, and Istoni.
3. Frank's mother, Jimmy.
4. Frank's sister's child by a previous union.



Frank's wife, Mary, belongs to the Talahasee clan, while his mother and niece belong to the Panther clan. This is an inconsistency. The arrangement worked, however, mostly because Mary was very willing to have Frank's mother do most of the domestic chores. But one day Robert arrived at the camp with his wife and children, deposited them, and departed indefinitely for reasons best known to himself. Mary's three unmarried brothers promptly rebelled at having to help support Robert's wife and children. Frank's mother got angry, saying that if her daughter had to leave she would too. Mary was first willing to see them go, but when they actually started to leave, she burst into tears. Her brothers remained adamant, however, so Frank's mother, his sister, and her children left. They were joined by another sister and her husband and together built a new camp. They were aided by Frank's father, who is one of the three old men living alone; he has long been divorced from Frank's mother, but the two are perfectly friendly and he was glad to help. Thus the original inconsistency in the camp organization was resolved by a conflict that split the camp into two independent groups.

#### THE ROUTINE OF CAMP LIFE

The camp rises about dawn. After the morning meal, the men depart for work, not to return until late in the day. Generally the women remain at home. Their time is filled by sewing on brightly colored patchwork dresses and shirts, by making dolls for sale to tourists, and by caring for the small children. Around noon they may prepare a simple meal. They are fond of visiting each other, and small talk is a favorite pastime. At various times during the year they go off, with or without their menfolk, to white-owned vegetable fields and work as pickers. The Indians themselves undertake a very limited amount of agricultural work and the women spend some time tending their gardens.

The men return to the camp in the late afternoon. The evening meal is eaten, and not long after dark the camp is closed for the day. If visitors are present, however, the guests and their hosts may talk together well into the night, grouped together on the floor of a house under the uncertain light of an old kerosene lantern hanging from a rafter.

Meals are usually three a day, but the time of eating varies according to the appetites of those concerned. Usually men, women, and children all eat together. If visitors come during the day, the *safki* pot will more than likely be warmed up and some fry bread gotten out. *Safki*, similar to a thin corn gruel, is served with all meals and as an in-between snack. Fry bread and coffee are also always at hand. Boiled meat and turtle, boiled vegetables, and fresh citrus fruit comprise most of the remainder of the Cow Creek Seminole diet.

One of the more vivid memories retained by anyone who has been among the Seminole is the array of blackened pots set on the

floor of the eating house. Food plays a large social role in Seminole life. Everywhere the offering of food is the mark of the courteous host, and the guest is bound to partake of the offering or else offend. The Seminole largely dispense with handshaking and the more obvious signs of cordiality. Instead they offer the main necessity of life; sitting in the eating hut, they quietly converse while visitors drink their *safki* and eat their fry bread. The offering of food is thus a much-used social mechanism for maintaining friendly relations among the Indians.

#### IV. SOCIAL CHANGE AND THE SEMINOLE CAMP

The extended family suffered an early decline among most of those North American Indian tribes where it once existed. The actual process of its dissolution is not clear. For this reason the Florida Seminole offer an excellent opportunity to study the forces of change affecting their family organization, with the hope that from such a study one can extract clues as to the breakdown of the extended family among other tribes. My field work among the Cow Creek Seminole was too brief to allow an adequate examination of the social forces that are modifying the present social organization, but a number of conclusions follow concerning the camp and the forces acting to change its composition.

An examination of the social changes affecting the Cow Creek camp demands that one discover (a) the conditions tending to preserve the extended family, and (b) those that are working to modify it. In the latter case, modification is in the direction of breakdown into elementary family units.

##### CONDITIONS TENDING TO PRESERVE THE EXTENDED FAMILY

(1) Conservatism of the women. Their interests are more circumscribed, they have little familiarity with English, and a greater desire to live in their traditional form of family group. They are also fond of visiting, they like to gossip, and they get plenty of opportunity for companionship from the extended family. As I have mentioned previously (Spoehr, 1941) there is a greater solidarity among the women of a camp than among the men.

(2) Matrilocal marriage and the consequent strength of the lineage. Bride and groom continue to take up permanent residence at the former's camp.

(3) The relative ease of divorce and the fact that the father assumes no responsibility for his divorced wife and her children. This condition necessitates some means of caring for the ex-wife and children. It is found in the strength of lineage and clan, and the consequent fact that a divorced wife can find aid in a camp where the women are of her own clan. Actually the women earn considerable cash through the sale of dolls and as vegetable pickers, so they are by no means completely dependent on their menfolk.

(4) Strength of the clan. There is a feeling that the camps are also subdivisions of the clan. This is shown at the time of the Green

Corn Dance when the camps of each clan form a single large camp for the duration of the dance. To a certain extent the clan tends to support the traditional camp organization.

#### FORCES TENDING TO MODIFY THE EXTENDED FAMILY

(1) It is an axiom of economics that the range of human wants is unlimited. From my own observations, I feel that the most important force affecting the Seminole extended family is directly attributable to the expanding wants of the Indians arising through contact with the white man and the material products of his civilization. Indian men all wish to own an automobile. Every woman of any position at all has a sewing machine. Young people are fond of portable phonographs and spend spare cash on records. Iron pots, pans, and tools are in common use. Young men aspire to fine hats and high-heeled riding boots. Though women make all their own clothes, they buy the dress goods from stores in Okeechobee and Fort Pierce, and do as much shopping around as any white woman. The many strings of beads every Seminole woman and girl wears are, or were before World War II, European importations.

The desire to own these things and the means of obtaining them are, of course, quite different. But though the Florida Seminole have had their share of lean and poverty-stricken years, by 1939 they had a steady cash income through working for the government in getting their new reservation established, for neighboring white cattlemen and vegetable growers, and through the sale of dolls and trinkets to the tourist trade. In addition, they practiced a certain amount of subsistence agriculture and had a very considerable number of hogs, while they were also in the process of getting a herd of cattle established on the reservation. As a result, sufficient wealth was being accumulated to allow the Indians to satisfy certain of their new wants. However, individuals are subject in different degrees to an increasing range of wants; furthermore, they are differently endowed and differently disposed towards getting the means—in this case, money—of satisfying such wants. A married man who wished to better his material position would be at some disadvantage if he lived in a large Seminole camp. There are too many people around to borrow and carelessly use his possessions. If he does get ahead, jealousy may be aroused among the other members of the camp and unpleasantness may ensue. So his natural desire is to take his wife and children and set up his own camp. This wish was expressed to me by several Seminole men, and I believe there

is an incipient tendency present which will result in a shift from extended to elementary family groups.

*A priori*, one might conclude that the desire to better their material condition was particularly apparent among the six camps that consisted only of elementary families. Yet in only two or at most three instances was this at all noticeable. In one other case—an elderly man and woman living alone—the couple were highly conservative Indians who dislike the government, refused to live on the reservation, and maintained a camp far from the nearest whites. Nevertheless, I feel that the desire of the Indians to better their material condition will continue, and I believe it is a good guess that this desire will contribute greatly toward changing the form of family organization.

(2) Certain other factors involved in any breakdown of the extended family should also be noted. Firstly, the extended family is a consumption but not a production unit. This robs it of considerable strength, and is at least a permissive condition to change. Secondly, any movement toward elementary families tends to strengthen the position of the father as against the mother's brother, for the interest of a man setting up his own establishment will tend to center more on his own than on his sister's children. Lastly, English names are coming into more general use. These are commencing to be inherited in the male line and women are beginning to take their husbands' surnames, all of which emphasizes the paternal line and the connubial tie as against the matrilineal lineage.

In conclusion, culture contact with respect to material culture has too often been considered simply as a displacement of native artifacts by those of white manufacture with a subsequent decline in native techniques. The iron pot and the sewing machine, however, stand for a different set of values that have the capacity of sharpening the natives' appetite for new and different things, and ultimately may lead to very considerable social change in the native society. The degree to which any society expands its range of wants and the particular character of these wants (including those of a non-material nature) are important social facts. Among the small handful of Indians that remain in Florida, I suspect that their changing values with respect to material things and the consequent effect on their family organization are illustrative of a common condition in the breakdown of the extended family among other native societies.



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PLATES





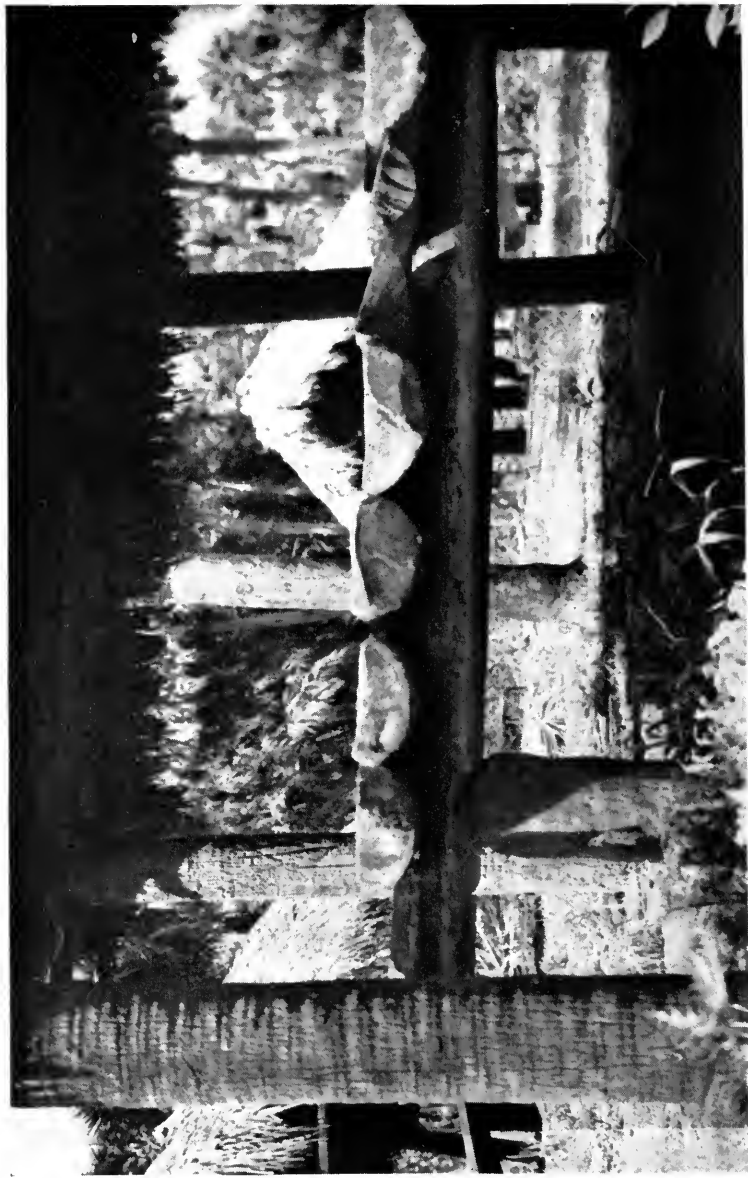
INDIAN CORN-GRINDER



A SMALL HAMMOCK



BIG CHARLEY'S CAMP



FLOOR OF AN OLD HOUSE





A SEMINOLE HOUSEWIFE





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