

FLORIDA INDIAN OF PAST AND PRESENT



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WHY THE SEMINOLES SURVIVED

By Adelaide K. Bullen

OF ALL THE FLORIDA Indian groups revealed by archaeology and history, only the Seminoles remain today. As survival in a changing world is of interest to all of us, let's see how the Seminoles resemble or differ from other Florida Indians and what assets or liabilities of geography and history, as well as their reactions to life, may have marked them for the road to the future while other Indian cultures of Florida come to us mostly in stone and pottery and buried bones.

For those Indians who lived during the period of discovery, we have rare historical records to add to our knowledge. The map (Map I, next page) indicates areas occupied by major Indian groups when Europeans arrived. Presumed landing places of important early explorers are shown with their dates of arrival. I have used accounts of these expeditions and of other first-hand observers as primary source material. These documented Indian groups will be discussed separately and then compared with the Seminoles who occupied much of the same territory at later dates.

Some less important Indian groups and subgroups—doubtless familiar to the reader from Florida place-names—cannot be treated individually here. First, we shall become acquainted with Indians of the northern part of Florida—Timucuans and Apalachees. Then we shall turn our attention to groups in the south—Ais, Jaega, Tequesta, and Calusa. Finally we shall meet the Seminoles.

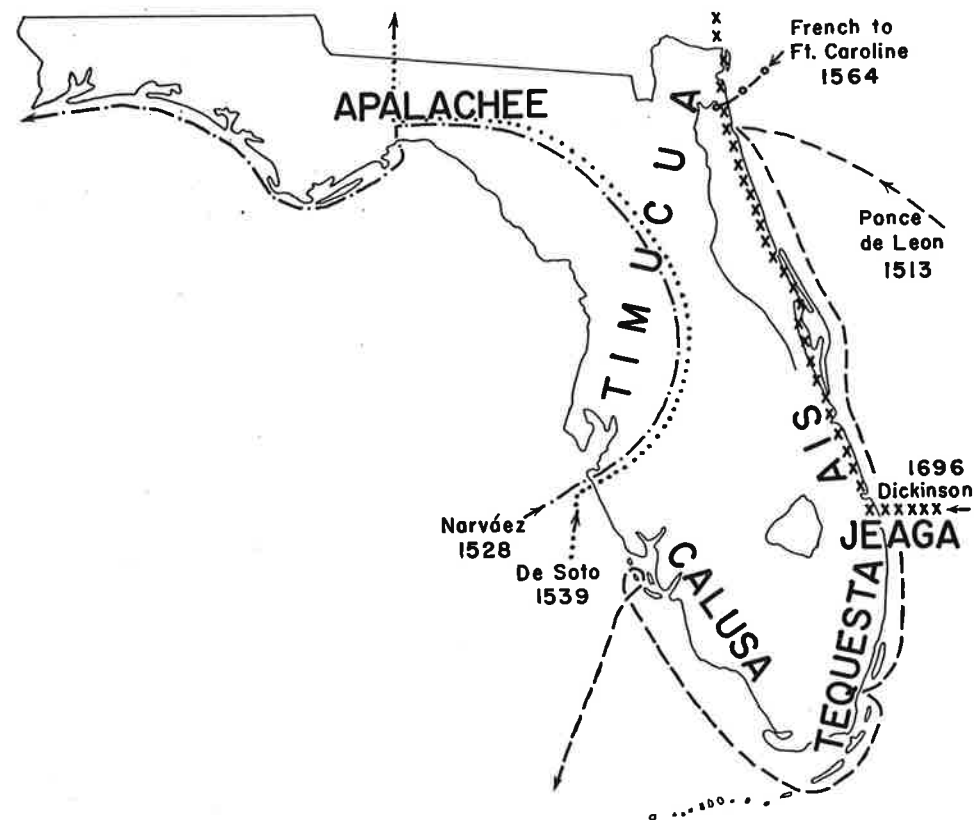
To compare these six Indian groups with the later Seminoles, we must view each group in a similar way. Then similarities and differences will become clear and perhaps we can find a clue as to why the Seminoles survived. I shall tell you about each group in "summary sentences" and by quotations from the explorers and observers themselves.

We shall turn our attention to the physical environment, biological endowment, level of technology, and some pertinent social and cultural practices. Then we shall take a quick look ahead to see what history tells us of these Indians and of their eventual fates. With this information—even though greatly abbreviated to be contained in a single chapter—we may gain some appreciation of the predominant characteristics of these different peoples. We know that check-stamped pottery was made by the Timucuans, but what were the Timucuans like? Can we get a glimpse of the people and the feeling of life in a Timucuan village?

TIMUCUANS

Our knowledge of the Timucuans of the sixteenth century stems not only from early accounts of explorers but from the pictorial documents of Le Moyne's paintings, subsequently etched by De Bry. These have been beautifully reproduced by

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Map I. Major Indian groups of Florida at the period of discovery.

Stefan Lorant with Le Moyne's comments. (For exact title of this book and of writings mentioned later, see selected references at end of chapter.)

Le Moyne came with the French expedition to Fort Caroline in 1564. While some features of the etchings reflect European influences, which may have been added to make the Indian culture more appealing to a European audience, major habits and customs which are obviously Indian (non-European) were not "imagined" by the artist. We can learn a great deal about the Timucuan from these drawings. A glance at the illustration, *THE QUEEN-ELECT IS BROUGHT TO THE KING* (Pl. I, below), impresses us with the cultural majesty of this group of Indians even though to us today their level of technology would seem meager compared to our own.

Le Moyne wrote commentaries for his pictures which call to our attention customs he considered striking when he observed the behavior of the Timucuan. He writes of *THE QUEEN-ELECT*, "When the king is ready to take a wife, he gives orders that from among the daughters of his principal men the tallest and most beautiful shall be chosen. The newly selected queen is brought to him on a litter covered with the skin of some rare animal and fitted with a canopy of boughs to shade her head.

"Four strong men carry her on their shoulders, each of them holding a forked wooden stick on which he rests the poles when they halt. Two more walk at the sides, shielding her from the sun with large round fans. Before the queen march the trumpeters, blowing on horns made of bark, large at the far end and small at the other, and hung with small oval balls of gold, silver, and brass, which tinkle as they march. Behind the queen are the most beautiful girls that can be found, clad in skirts made of pendant Spanish moss, their necks and arms decorated with



From Stefan Lorant's *The New World* (Duell, Sloan & Pearce)

Plate I. The Queen Elect Is Brought To The King.

necklaces and bracelets of pearls, each carrying a basket of choice fruits. At the end of the procession are the body guards."

From this picture we learn many things about the Timucuan. First, as to their physical environment, some areas must have been subtropical at least and certainly warm part of the year. Timucuan geographical boundaries are not known exactly. They extended north of the Jacksonville area until they met the boundaries of the Georgia Indians. On the eastern seaboard, from an explorer's account, Timucuan were found down the coast to just north of present-day Cape Kennedy (formerly Cape Canaveral). Timucuan territory extended in the west to the Aucilla River. The southwestern Timucuan limit remains in dispute. In all areas, Timucuan tribes with their own chiefs were part of the larger Timucuan "confederacy." Le Moyne made observational trips in the region of Fort Caroline, near present-day Jacksonville. He went up the St. Johns River and became acquainted with a number of different Timucuan groups.

In the picture of *THE QUEEN-ELECT*, accouterments reflect the available flora and fauna of the region: boughs and poles from trees, feathers from birds, skins and tails from animals, fruits of the land, Spanish-moss skirts and plaited baskets.

As to the biological endowment of the Timucuan, it is interesting to know that in the choice of a mate the "King" (also called "cacique" or "chief" by other writers) had the *tallest* and *most beautiful* daughter of one of the most important men chosen for his bride. That the "King" himself was also similarly endowed is suggested by the drawing of Chief Athore and Laudonnière (Pl. II, next page). Le Moyne writes, "When the French came to Florida the second time [and founded Fort Caroline], they were commanded by Laudonnière. . . . he went ashore . . . where he was met by the chief. . . .

"This Chief Athore was very handsome, wise, honorable, and strong, and at least half a foot taller than the tallest of our men. He was grave and modest, and his bear-