

Colorful Garb Marks Florida Indians

Seminoles Misrepresented By Sensational Writers

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(This is the second of two articles based on visits to the Seminole Indian reservation at Brighton, Fla.)

SOMEWHERE NORTH OF THE EVERGLADES. — Whenever one tries, as I did, to study the human side of the Seminoles—that nation which has left so little written record of its short but historic life-span—one is deluged with information and misinformation. Misinformation of the type on which the Sunday supplement writer feeds.

For example, examine the contradictory data on the Seminoles and snake killing: When I called on Agent Boehmer, his wife recounted how a greatly excited Indian had appeared one day on their doorstep to announce his pressing desire that Boehmer come to the Seminole camp—a 100 rods or so distant—to kill a rattler.

Boehmer obliged. He carefully avoided carrying the corpse through the camp (a Seminole taboo), and he noted the usual fire lighted at the point where the victim fell. As usual, the Indian children had cooperated with him, without actively participating in the execution.

There are two explanations as to why the Seminoles would not themselves kill the snake. One is that once in the past the Seminoles were ordered by the White Man to leave Florida for points west. They prepared to remain even though it meant retiring deep into the Everglades. However they decided it would be a good idea for both parties if they made a treaty with the snakes. They did so on a "live and let live" basis. That is one explanation.

Or it may have been one of those common sense arrangements embellished with the authority of mysticism. There are few snakes which, if left alone, won't reciprocate.

Another interpretation may be that when a white man attacks the rattler, the chances are that if anyone is bitten, it would not be an Indian. I understand Seminoles do kill snakes when it seems necessary.

Boehmer, whose opinion I learned to value as I pursued this subject, thinks the rattlesnake situation is interesting, but I couldn't get him to say it meant the Seminole was superstitious.

Gaudy Costumes Intrigue Observer

Like every observer, I was impressed by the Seminole attire. Not by the men's—they wear conventional garments lightened by a gay handkerchief about the neck when they pursue their daily tasks, hunt on the reservation or loaf in camp. They have shortened the long skirt-like garment (comparable to the woman's cape) to sport-shirt length, even in ceremonial dress.

I found only Sam Huff, reputed to be a medicine man as well as the handy man at the school, wearing the long skirt-like garment, plus the blouse. Some say Sam clings to this outfit merely because of his love for the past; others say it may have something to do with his special function as a medicine man; there is a whisper that it is a badge of repentance or punishment for some past sin. Sam is a grandfather today. He still lives in the nearby camp with the rest of his three generations.

The younger men save their gay shirts for dress up occasions (the annual green corn dance and the hunting dance), but they have adopted modern trousers. Their shirts are covered with complicated geometric tracery; their scarves are bound by a metal or wooden clasp; they wear beads or other brightly-decorated fobs.

The most striking piece of Seminole clothing is the woman's billowing skirt; next come the beads which cover her neck from shoulder blade to ear tips; then her hair-dress.

Unlike the men, the Seminole women (except those who have been completely converted to modern ways) wear their special garb and wear it all the time. Consequently, they always look "dressed up."

The hairdress, an innovation and a highly practical one, dates back only some six or seven years. The woman's smooth black hair is brought forward over a semi-circular cardboard form like the wide peak of a cap. This gives her the appearance of peering at you from underneath a wide, circular hat brim, and is achieved easily without the aid of the beauty shop and virtually without mirrors. Furthermore, the coiffure is one development that has no connection with the White Man's culture.

Women's Skirts Are Real Art

Unlike the hairdo, the Seminole skirt and cape haven't changed except to grow more artistic and more intricate with the advent of colored textiles. They likewise have become less difficult to create, thanks to the hand-driven sewing machine. This gadget long since has been as common in tepee, hogan or even igloo as an ice-pick in a modern flat.

The skirts are made of parallel bands of a brightly colored patchwork design which experts claim are real art. They are fashioned of hundreds of separate pieces of colorful cloth, blended or contrasted to make a barbarically splendorous whole. The skirts bell out, widening in circumference as they approach the hem which, according to regulations, must trail at least three inches or thereabouts on the ground.

How can this be a practical everyday dress in a country of swamps and morasses, of barbed and cutting underbrush? That is the first question I (and every ignorant observer) asks. But they are practical, say the experts who have seen them in operation. Through wet going and wading, they are "histed" (there are no undergarments to complicate matters). Traveling over the dry and dusty fields, rife with snakes and other annoying reptiles, they protect the bare feet and shins. As Miss or Mrs. Seminole moves forward, toeing in slightly, according to good Indian custom, she gently kicks the dragging rim forward without baring the bare feet to inquisitive eyes or any flora or fauna that might intrude.

The only other cloth garment is the cape. This is usually a single solid and bright color matching the skirt.

The Seminole beads remain a mystery. So far, I have been able to learn little concerning the origin, purpose or excuse for them beyond the explanation offered by Agent Boehmer and supported by his wife: "They wear them because they think they're pretty." And what better reason in any woman's lexicon?

It does seem strange, though, to see a comely Indian matron, her skirt tucked high before a roaring fire on a hot Florida day, or working vigorously in a tomato patch, or even strolling through a shop among sweltering whites in low cut dresses or open sport shirts, with perhaps 25 pounds (they have been weighed) of beads in a solid collar rising as high as the whalebone-enforced "chokers" American girls wore in the first decades of the 1900s.



NEW GERMAN FLAG . . . Unfurled for the first time (officially) is the new German flag, shown being hoisted on the Tagblatt tower in Stuttgart, Germany. New state colors are black, red and gold.

TEMPORARY TREND

Marriages and Births Hit Peak

WASHINGTON. — Return of war veterans was largely responsible for boosting marriages and births to record highs in 1946. Viewing the trend, population experts are trying to figure out how long the United States can support large population increases, but Guy Irving Burch, director of the population reference bureau, believes the rise is only temporary.

Births in 1946 were one per cent greater than in 1943, previous record year, according to the office of vital statistics.

Births headed toward a peak 11 months after a record high in the number of American marriages. The trend still is upward.

Family Size Drops. Before the 1946 rise in the birth rate the average size of the "completed" American family was about 2.5 children. It is estimated that



POLIO POSTER BABY . . . Once a victim of the dread polio disease, Nancy Drury, 4-year-old daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Frank Drury of Louisville, Ky., was chosen to symbolize the fight against infantile paralysis in the 1947 March of Dimes. Nancy, shown relaxing in a warm bath at her home, made a splendid recovery after being stricken with polio in July, 1944.

NEWS REVIEW

Marshall Gets Key Post; Labor Reforms Studied

STATE DEPARTMENT: Happy Day

"There are two happy days a man has in public life," former Secretary Byrnes told British Ambassador Kerr. "There is the day a man is elected to office. Then there is the day he quits."

January 7, 1947, therefore was a happy day for the dapper little South Carolinian when he stepped down from his high post in the Truman administration. It was a happy day, too — under the Byrnes' standard—for General Marshall who was named to succeed him.

But as Byrnes implied, Marshall's cheer was destined to be short-lived as he took over direction of the nation's international affairs. Byrnes had a tough time tussling with the Russians over completion of peace treaties for the axis satellites and Marshall faced the even tougher job of framing pacts for Germany and Austria.

Although friendly with Russian leaders, Marshall is no admirer of Communism or Communist tactics. Just before being named to office, he blasted Chinese Reds for risking the welfare of their country to obtain power and resorting to untruths to tar the U. S.

Some observers also read in Marshall's appointment an effort by President Truman to build the general up as his successor in 1948. Should Marshall make a name for himself in the state department, his work there plus his prestige as the No. 1 military chief in World War II would give the Democrats a strong candidate to offset dissatisfaction with the Truman regime in the reconversion period.

CONGRESS:

Sharpen Payroll Axe

Economy-minded GOP house members, axe in hand, were eying the big federal payroll in their announced drive to scale U. S. expenditures 12 billion dollars below the 1946 budget of 41 billion dollars.

Declaring that there is hardly a government department that does not have twice as many employees as needed, Representative Taber (Rep., N. Y.), chairman of the house appropriations committee, asserted that 1,000,000 workers could be chopped off the payroll of 2,300-

000 without seriously impairing services. Not more than 500,000 employees in all are needed, Taber said.

Labor Reforms

Sen. Joe Ball (Rep., Minn.) and Rep. George Case (Rep., S. D.) pushed labor reform in early sessions of the 80th congress. Ball proposing sweeping measures for corrective legislation.

First, Ball called for prohibition of secondary boycotts and making labor organizations liable for violating contracts.

Then, he introduced legislation to ban all union and closed shop agreements and maintenance of membership contracts.

Finally, Ball proposed to decentralize collective bargaining to prevent the tieup of an entire industry through general negotiations.

The new Case bill introduced in the house permits issuance of injunctions to prevent strikes impairing the public welfare; forbids unions to coerce employees, seize property in disputes, withdraw essential maintenance workers, or order walk-outs with majority approval of members; and makes union liable for damages resulting from breach of contract. The bill also grants the states authority to ban the closed shop.

ECONOMICS:

President Reports

In the first annual economic report issued by the President under the employment act of 1946, Mr. Truman set forth the principles for a prosperous America. Drawn by a three man council of economic advisers, the report called for continuance of the traditional free enterprise system supplemented by constructive government assistance where necessary.

Long-range recommendations include maximum use of labor and productive facilities, prevention of economic fluctuations, cooperation in international trade and finance, and promotion of welfare, health and security.

Because of their immediate bearing, the short-range recommendations were of greater interest. The report asked for the maintenance of present tax rates to provide for substantial retirement of the national debt; lowering of prices wherever possible to increase consumption; moderation of labor demands to head off additional price rises; increase in the minimum wage above 40 cents an hour, and extension of the fair labor standards act to workers now excluded.

"The statistics show that, first, the depression postponed about 800,000 marriages for a time; second, the war caused young people to defer marriage.

"Veterans have returned. They were, and still are, being married in large numbers. So the birth rate is up. This will continue for a time. But then the trend will recede. Births will decline.

"Most students of population trends agree that the United States will experience a decline of about 25 per cent in the birth rate before the year 2000.

"The experts disagree when the population total will 'stabilize' itself; these estimates range from the present number of about 140,000,000 persons to about 175,000,000 or even 200,000,000."

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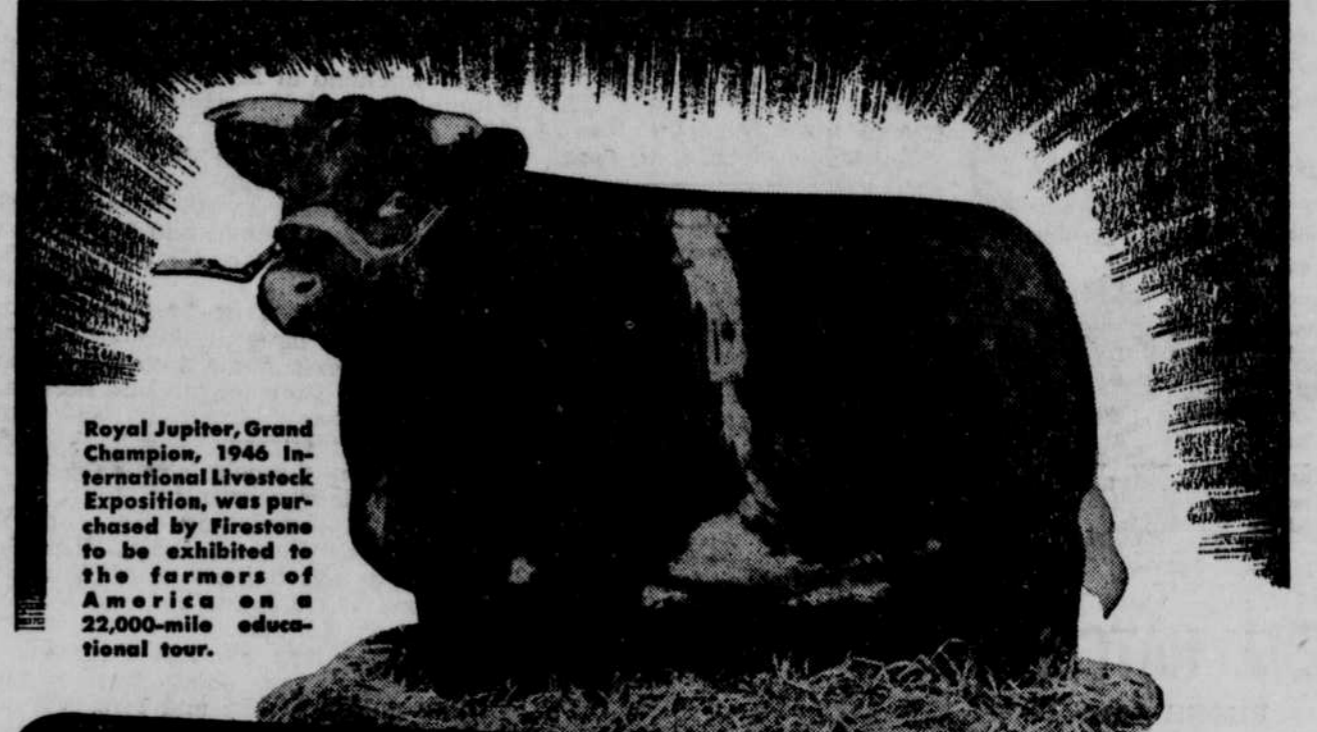
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