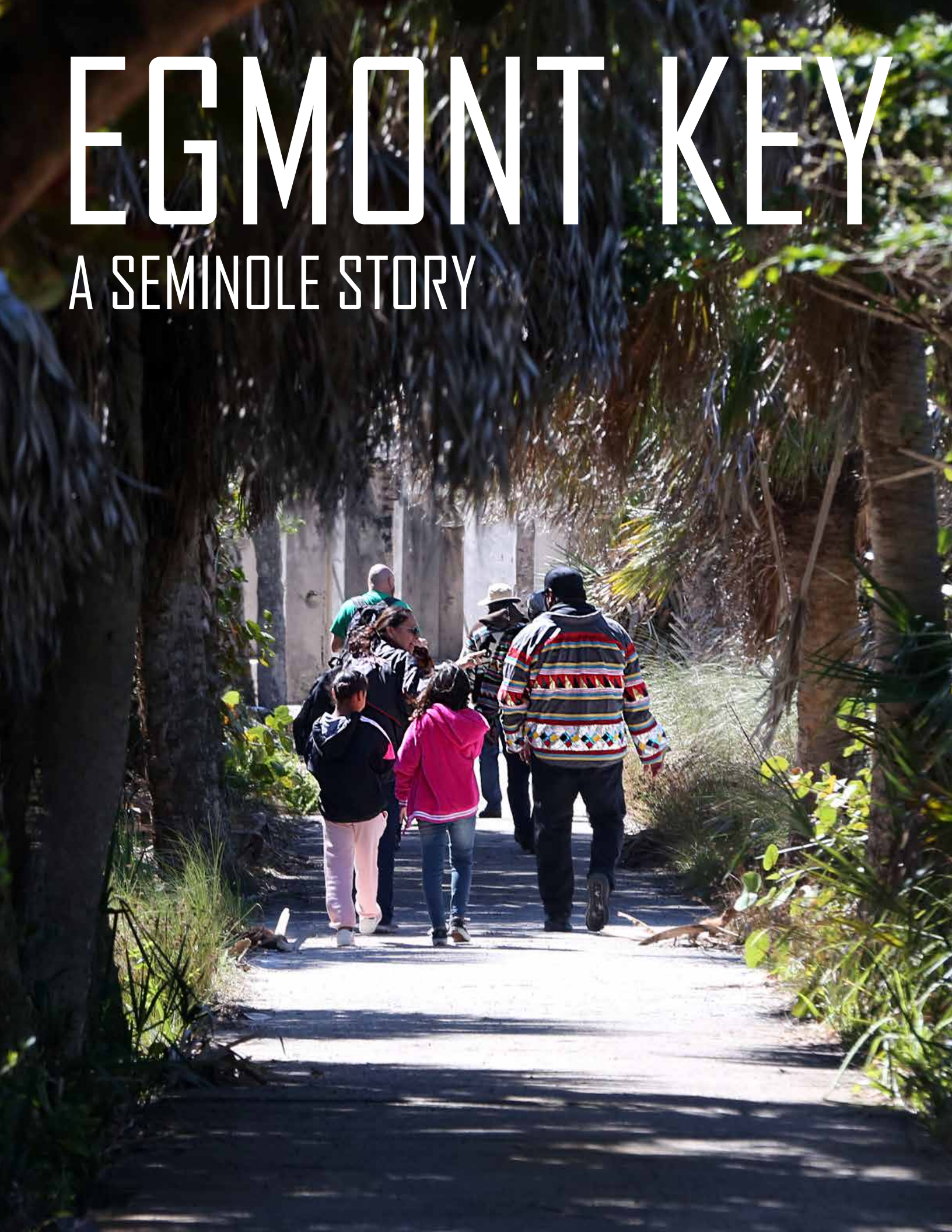


# EGMONT KEY

A SEMINOLE STORY





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SEMINOLE TRIBE OF FLORIDA  
**AH-TAH-THI-KI**  
M U S E U M  
A PLACE TO LEARN. A PLACE TO REMEMBER.



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# Carrying The Torch

*Egmont Key's tranquil scenery masks its disturbing past...*

For many of its visitors, Egmont Key is a destination that combines Florida history with beautiful scenery. The island is located at the mouth of Tampa Bay, just off the coasts of St. Petersburg and Bradenton. It is home to the Egmont Key Lighthouse, the Egmont Key National Wildlife Refuge, and the remnants of the Spanish-American War era Fort Dade. Its 400-acres worth of panoramic views provides visitors with an idyllic tourist attraction.

But for Seminoles, Egmont Key is a relic that unearths a myriad of emotions that clearly shows our resilience as Native Americans. Today, human environmental damage has caused it to become a fraction of the size it once was.

*We are the descendants of our ancestors' triumphs and the atrocities they endured...*

During the nineteenth century, the United States seized the homelands of many Native Americans. The Indian Removal Act of 1830 forcibly displaced Native Americans from familiar environments to foreign territories, actions that would alter their lives for generations. Many systemic issues within tribal communities today are undoubtedly the aftermath of this colonialism.

The Seminole Wars were a part of these large-scale efforts to remove Native Americans west. Seminole elders have shared stories passed down to them of the experiences their ancestors lived through during those dreadful periods in Seminole history. Egmont Key was used as an internment camp to hold imprisoned Seminoles before they





were transported west. It became known as the Seminole version of Alcatraz and was even called the dark place due to the horrors that took place on the island.

In 1858, the steamer *Grey Cloud* left Egmont Key, transporting 160 Seminoles west. Polly Parker (Emateloey) was on board, but managed to escape after they stopped in the Florida panhandle at St. Marks. Her legacy can be seen in her many descendants who are today members of the Seminole Tribe of Florida.

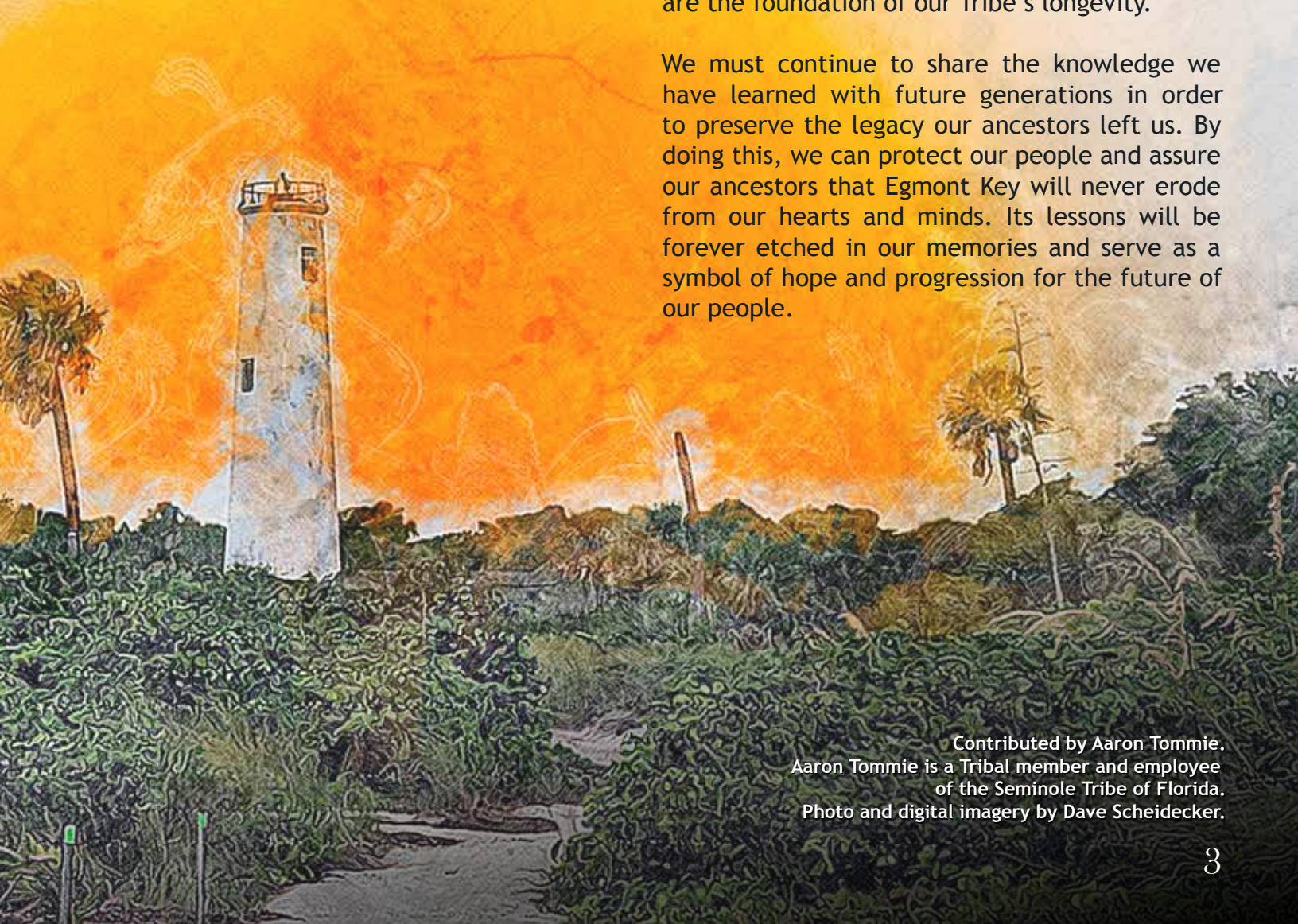
As a Seminole, it was important to me to visit Egmont Key so that I could experience the place where many of my ancestors were unwillingly held. I became enraged and saddened when I learned of the terrible events that happened on the island. One could only imagine the fear and confusion my ancestors lived with as they awaited uncertain futures, a far cry from the freedom they were accustomed to.

*As Egmont Key fades away, its historical relevance must live on...*

As the minority of minorities, it is essential that as Native Americans, our history is told from our perspective. In a society that often divides us based on our perceived differences and historical omissions, telling our stories for ourselves ensures that people learn the truth of who we truly are as Natives. People of all races can sympathize with the plight of Native Americans because the narrative of inferiority and forced relocation is evident in world history.

As Native People, we are vitalized by our indigenous cultures. As Seminoles, our fortitude defines us. From the guidance of our ancestors, we know that we can overcome seemingly insurmountable odds. As descendants of Polly Parker, Billy Bowlegs, and many of our other Seminole ancestors, it is our duty to carry the torch they left for us. Their sacrifices and foresight are the foundation of our Tribe's longevity.

We must continue to share the knowledge we have learned with future generations in order to preserve the legacy our ancestors left us. By doing this, we can protect our people and assure our ancestors that Egmont Key will never erode from our hearts and minds. Its lessons will be forever etched in our memories and serve as a symbol of hope and progression for the future of our people.



Contributed by Aaron Tommie.  
Aaron Tommie is a Tribal member and employee  
of the Seminole Tribe of Florida.  
Photo and digital imagery by Dave Scheidecker.



# The Sands of Florida



My father, King Phillip,  
told me I was made of the sands of Florida,  
and that when I was placed in the ground,  
the Seminoles would dance and sing around my grave.

- Coacoochee (Wild Cat)

**F**lorida and the Seminole Tribe of Florida (STOF) define the very being of one another. Today, the Seminoles' home in the low lying Everglades is critically threatened by climate change. The offshore island of Egmont Key has become the front line for the Tribe in a community effort to remember a difficult past that is today threatened with being washed away. Community engagement, archaeology, and climate change collide on Egmont, an island that is central to the past, present, and future of the Tribe.

The Seminole Tribe of Florida is one of two federally recognized tribes in the modern state of Florida. They are the proudly unconquered Seminoles. Descendants of fewer than 500 Seminoles who held out against impossible odds in South Florida swamps, the Tribe now has roughly 5000 members. Military historians record three wars between the Seminoles and the United States which they have collectively dubbed 'the Seminole Wars'. The Seminoles do not see this distinction and consider the whole period to be one long war when their survival was at stake. It is estimated that thousands of Seminoles were shipped or forcibly walked west during this period of bitter conflict. The legacy of the hardships that Seminole people faced continue to affect their identity in the modern world.



The northern beach of Egmont Key.  
Photo by Dave Scheidecker.



In Miccosukee, one language that Seminole people speak, there is a separate word for an island in the ocean (Yanh-kaa-choko) that is different from the word for their island homes in the heart of the Florida Everglades. Egmont Key is one of these oceanic islands, located in the Gulf of Mexico at the entrance to Tampa Bay.

The island first came to the attention of the Seminole Tribe of Florida Tribal Historic

Preservation Office (THPO) during a routine meeting. The THPO works to preserve and document the STOF's cultural heritage, both on and off modern reservations. The meeting was a standard government to government consultation with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). They explained that Egmont Key was in danger of washing away and Corps staff wanted the Tribe's opinion on preserving the island. Having a vague memory about a





Seminole presence on the island, the THPO began to investigate further.

During our research it became apparent that during the late 1850's (non-Seminole historians' Third Seminole War) the U.S. Army was having difficulty holding Tribal members in Fort Myers, on the Florida mainland, while they awaited deportation. To prevent Seminoles from escaping back

into the tropical labyrinth of the Everglades, the army identified a simple and harsh solution. Seminoles were transported on boat from Fort Myers to Egmont Key while they waited for the paddle steamer the *Grey Cloud* to take them to New Orleans and the west. While in captivity on the island many Seminoles perished.

The question for the Seminole Tribe of Florida became 'Do we want to remember this history?' In seeking an answer the STOF THPO began, as it always does, by actively engaging the Tribal communities and government we serve in the story of Egmont Key. We spoke with Tribal members one-on-one, arranged educational trips to the island, published articles in the Seminole Tribune, attended community meetings, and gave talks at Tribal schools. Community members visiting the island were greeted with a stark reminder of the Tribes' fight for survival in Florida.

Tribal Judge and respected elder, Willie Johns, summarized how Seminoles reacted to this history from Egmont Key saying, 'We never want to forget what happened here.' Since the government to government consultation with the USACE, Tribal members of all ages have reengaged with the story. The overwhelming sentiment was that if there was any possibility of saving the island it should be investigated. Then Chairman of the Tribe James E. Billie took the call to action and, in a July 29th 2013 letter to then U.S. Secretary of the Interior, Sally Jewell, wrote that: *"The history of this island is a matter of cultural memory for our people and we wish it to be preserved if at all possible so that the youth of our tribe can visit this place and learn how far we have come together."* ✦

OKE-LAH-CHE

Hene Esh-Ta-Kaa-Lek

Contributed by Dr. Paul N. Backhouse and Alyssa Boge.  
Paul Backhouse is the Senior Director of the Heritage and Environment Resources Office of the Seminole Tribe of Florida.  
Alyssa Boge is the Education Coordinator for the Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum.

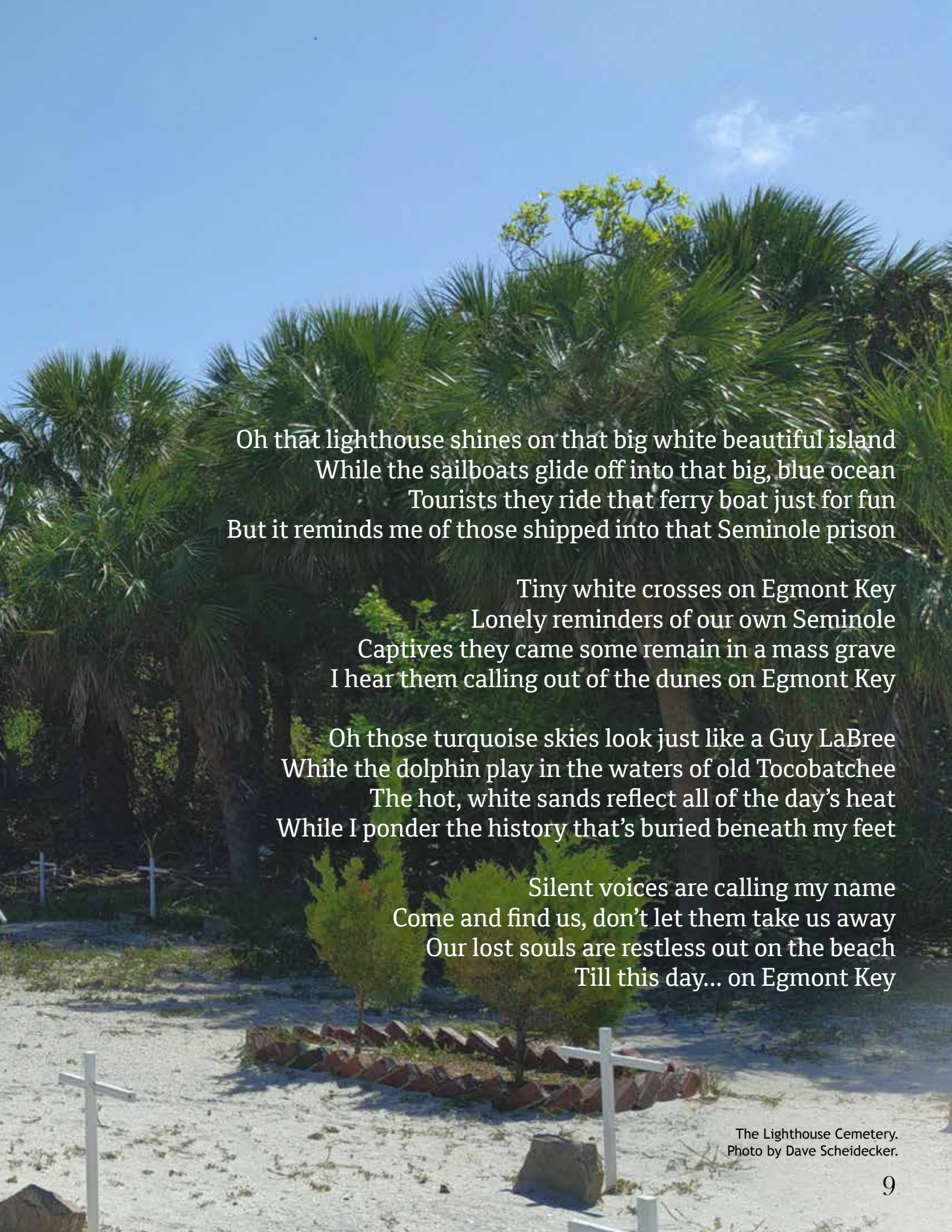


# *Egmont Key*

This song, written by Rita Youngman (Bird Clan), captures both the beauty of the island and its tragic history.







Oh that lighthouse shines on that big white beautiful island  
While the sailboats glide off into that big, blue ocean  
Tourists they ride that ferry boat just for fun  
But it reminds me of those shipped into that Seminole prison

Tiny white crosses on Egmont Key  
Lonely reminders of our own Seminole  
Captives they came some remain in a mass grave  
I hear them calling out of the dunes on Egmont Key

Oh those turquoise skies look just like a Guy LaBree  
While the dolphin play in the waters of old Tocobatchee  
The hot, white sands reflect all of the day's heat  
While I ponder the history that's buried beneath my feet

Silent voices are calling my name  
Come and find us, don't let them take us away  
Our lost souls are restless out on the beach  
Till this day... on Egmont Key





The island is named Egmont Key in honor of John Percival, the Second Earl of Egmont and first Lord of the Admiralty.



Holatta Micco, also known as Billy Bowlegs, leads the Seminole as the threat of continued pressure to leave Florida grows, and open conflict resumes.

Multiple city centers sit on Tampa Bay including Tocobaga, Uzita, and Mocoso, home to ancestors of the modern day Seminole people.

1757

1761

1847

1855

1857-1858

900 AD

2,000 BC

Don Francisco Maria Celi, a Spanish explorer, creates the first map of Tampa Bay. He names the island *San Blas y Barreda*.



The first lighthouse is constructed at Egmont Key, but is destroyed by a hurricane. The second lighthouse (shown here in 1910) is finished 10 years later.

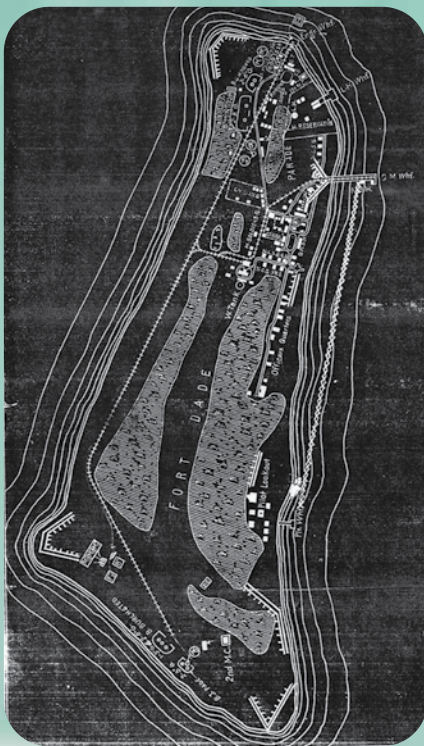


The U.S. Army selects Egmont Key as the location for a prison camp. Hundreds of Seminole, mostly women, children, and elders, are imprisoned on Egmont Key before being taken to "Indian Territory."

Egmont Key forms in the mouth of Tampa Bay. Ancestors of the Seminole Tribe begin using it as a fishing location.

# A TIMELINE OF





Fort Dade is completed. Supporting five artillery batteries, the military base encompasses the entire island.



Seminole elders retrace the removal journey of Billy Bowlegs, returning to Egmont Key for the first time since 1858.

During Prohibition, bootleggers use the abandoned Fort Dade buildings as hideouts. Federal Marshals light fires to burn them out, burning down most of the Fort Dade structures.

During the American Civil War the island is used first by Confederate, and later Union, forces.

1861-1864

1898

As the Spanish-American War looms, the U.S. selects Egmont Key as the location for a new coastal defense military base: Fort Dade.

1909

1921

Fort Dade is decommissioned following the end of the First World War.

1928

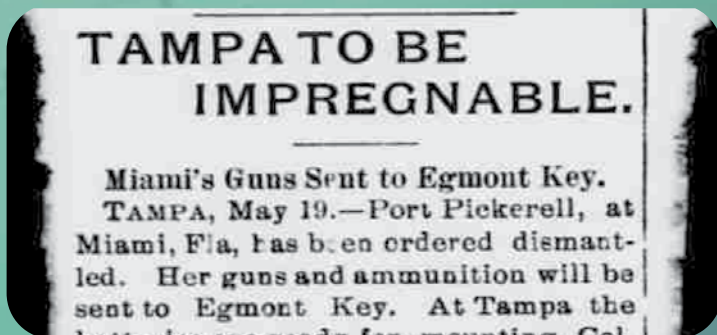
1989

2013

2016

The State of Florida establishes Egmont Key State Park.

A wildfire sparked by a lightning strike burns across Egmont Key over three days. The fire clears a wide area of underbrush that allows an archaeological survey to take place.



# EGMONT KEY



The first thing the Seminole saw when they entered Indian Territory was Fort Gibson, and a vast wilderness as far as the eye could see. Gibson was the last stop for many tribes on the Trail of Tears, and it was here that Native People were forced onto federal reservations.

## Fort Gibson



The United States Government officially held to the claim that the Seminole were not a distinct people, but instead a breakaway group from the Creek Nation. When the Seminole arrived in Indian Country they were placed into the Creek Reservation, and not their own land. The Creek had allied with the U.S. Government during the Creek Civil War in 1813, yet now the Seminole were told to live on the land of their enemy, and under Creek rule. The Seminole continuously lobbied and fought for their own land, and in 1856 won their independence, and a 2 million acre reservation. Billy Bowlegs and his people arrived onto this land, but the Seminole Reservation was short lived. When the United States Civil War ended, the government stripped the Seminole of their Reservation lands, even though Billy Bowlegs had led his people in support of the Union. The Oklahoma Seminole history is one of struggle and tragedy, yet also one of triumph, as they survived all the challenges put before them.

## New Orleans



In Louisiana the Seminole were kept at the New Orleans Barracks before being sent north. In 1866 the barracks were renamed "Jackson Barracks" in honor of Andrew Jackson, the man who had led the American forces against the Seminole, and created the policy of Indian Removal.



# The Seminole Removal Trail 1858



Polly Parker led a half dozen others in an escape when the *Grey Cloud* stopped for fuel at Saint Marks. They travelled across Florida on foot to rejoin their families near Lake Okeechobee.

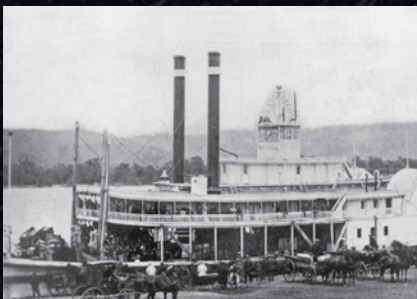
Billy Bowlegs was one of the primary Seminole leaders in the 1850s. After the U.S. Army incursion into Seminole territory, he retaliated, beginning the final phase of the Seminole War.



**Saint Marks**

**Polly's Path**

Egmont Key became a concentration camp for hundreds of Seminole elders, women, and children.



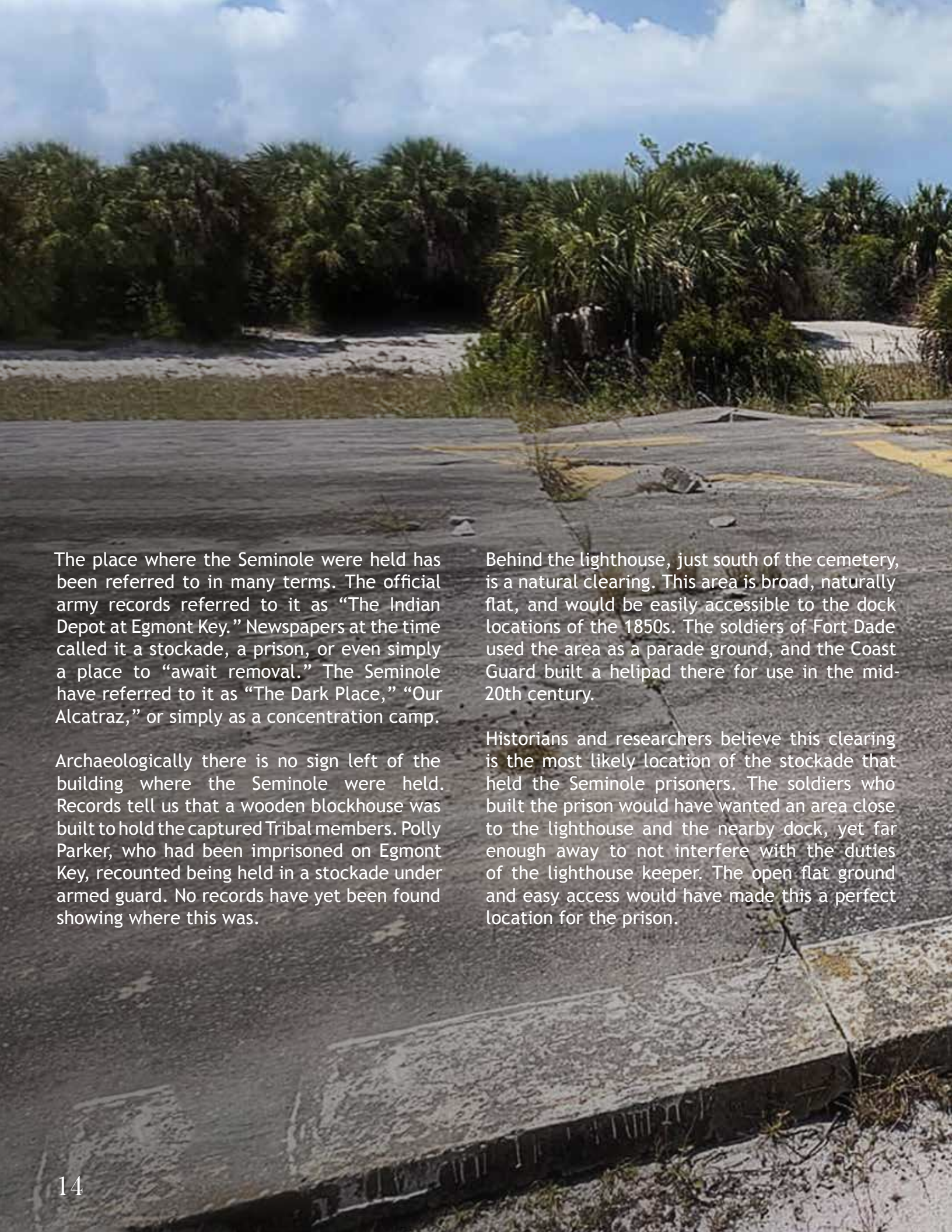
**Egmont Key**

**Seminole  
Florida**

**Fort Myers**

Captured or surrendered Seminole were originally held at Fort Myers, a Seminole War army fort. It was here where they were put on the steamer *Grey Cloud* for removal.





The place where the Seminole were held has been referred to in many terms. The official army records referred to it as “The Indian Depot at Egmont Key.” Newspapers at the time called it a stockade, a prison, or even simply a place to “await removal.” The Seminole have referred to it as “The Dark Place,” “Our Alcatraz,” or simply as a concentration camp.

Archaeologically there is no sign left of the building where the Seminole were held. Records tell us that a wooden blockhouse was built to hold the captured Tribal members. Polly Parker, who had been imprisoned on Egmont Key, recounted being held in a stockade under armed guard. No records have yet been found showing where this was.

Behind the lighthouse, just south of the cemetery, is a natural clearing. This area is broad, naturally flat, and would be easily accessible to the dock locations of the 1850s. The soldiers of Fort Dade used the area as a parade ground, and the Coast Guard built a helipad there for use in the mid-20th century.

Historians and researchers believe this clearing is the most likely location of the stockade that held the Seminole prisoners. The soldiers who built the prison would have wanted an area close to the lighthouse and the nearby dock, yet far enough away to not interfere with the duties of the lighthouse keeper. The open flat ground and easy access would have made this a perfect location for the prison.



# Prison Grounds



Photo and text contributed by Dave Scheidecker.  
Dave Scheidecker is an archaeologist and the Research  
Coordinator for the Tribal Historic Preservation Office.



# Polly Parker

Polly Parker (Emateloie) was captured on Fisheating Creek in 1856, marched over to Egmont Key, forced onto a ship called *Grey Cloud*, shipped on up the Gulf of Mexico to New Orleans where she would walk the Trail of Tears out west. But the ship stopped to refuel at Fort St. Marks, directly south of Tallahassee and, somehow, Polly escaped.

She walked through the woods and swamps all the way back to the Okeechobee area and began to create the Seminole Tribe as we know it today.

Eventually her children and their descendants would play monumental roles in our modern Tribe. In fact, Polly's great-great-grandkids are very prominent members of the Seminole Tribe. I wonder: What would have happened if Polly had never escaped and returned home?

Would the Seminole Tribe exist the way it is today? Would we be less successful?

For these are very intelligent people. A joke I used to say around them is, "The dumbest person in the Polly Parker family is a genius." Sometimes the smart brains don't fall too far from the apple tree, as they say. In this case it is very true: Some very intelligent people came from Emateloie. Polly's daughter Lucy Tiger begat Lena Morgan who had eight children: Hattie Bowers, Tom Bowers, Lottie Shore, Mildred Tommie, Dick Bowers, Andrew Bowers Sr., Joe Bowers and Casey Bowers.

The offspring of Lena Morgan include former Tribal Chairman Howard Tommie, former Tribal President Richard Bowers, former Tribal Board Representative Paul Bowers, Councilman Andrew J. Bowers Jr., former Tribal Secretary-Treasurer Dorothy Scott Osceola, former Health Director Elsie Bowers, Cultural Director Lorene Gopher, Gaming Commissioner Truman Bowers, former Tribal Clerk Mary Jane Willie, Governor's Council Liaison Stephen Bowers, Secretary's Administrative Assistant Wanda Bowers, Tribal Genealogist Geneva Shore, Seminole Craft Artist Nancy Shore, Cultural Events Specialist Lewis Gopher, Chairman's Special Assistant Norman "Skeeter" Bowers and Tribal General Counsel Jim Shore. Hattie Bowers died as a child and both Tom Bowers' children died young: Leon was a





high school graduate studying veterinary medicine and Carol was a Community Health Worker for the Seminole Tribe.

One of Polly's great-great-great-grandkids, Gloria Wilson, has had many Tribal positions and is now our Director of Community Planning. Another, Paula Bowers-Sanchez, is a professional singer, health educator and is married to our Tribal President. A great-great-great-great-grandchild, D'Anna Osceola, is a recent Miss Seminole. Four generations from Polly Parker, they continue to honor the family tree with quite a few more graduating from high school and, even better, from college. Yes, a very significant family in our Tribe.

You hear about Osceola. You hear about Micanopy. You hear about Wildcat and all their great deeds, but you don't really hear about the women too much. And here is a Seminole woman in our modern times who performed this heroic feat in escaping and coming back home, where she continued her Clan of the Bird. The family spread and went on to marry other clans, but they are all related to Emateloys.

This is all very important to me. Back in earlier days when I was flying my airplane and going to Tallahassee, there was a VOR (VHF Omnidirectional Radio) range

transmitter at Egmont Key, just off the Gulf Coast in St. Petersburg. It gave out a radio signal so you can track where you are when you are flying through the air. I always thought of the many Seminoles, including Billy Bowlegs, who were put in the stockade there on Egmont and then shipped north on the *Grey Cloud*. Egmont Key is a very important part of our Seminole history. I'd like to have Andrew J. Bowers Jr., Jim Shore and all Polly's living descendants visit the Egmont Key deportation center, then take the 100-mile boat trip all the way up to St. Marks. And stand there where she escaped to make it all the way back down to her home - more than 340 miles away - to start a family.

I would love to have a picture of the family standing right at the spot where the *Grey Cloud* left with this heroic woman not knowing what the future held, her destiny totally in doubt.

As it turned out, Emateloys's destiny was to start the Seminole Tribe as it is today. ✦

By James Billie (Bird Clan)  
This article originally appeared in the  
July 26, 2013 issue of the *Seminole Tribune*.



Descendants of Polly Parker visited Egmont Key on November 17, 2017. From left to right: Kenny Tommie (Bird Clan), Nancy Willie (Bird Clan), Lewis Gopher (Snake Clan), Bobby Lou Billie (Panther Clan), Gabriel Tommie (Bird Clan), and Aaron Tommie. Photo by Justin Giles, (Tiger/Big Cat Clan, Muscogee (Creek) Nation).



# The Removed

**E**gmont Key represents the intersection of the history of two proud Tribes. The handful of Seminole who managed to survive their internment on Egmont Key and later escaped to remain in Florida helped shape the future Seminole Tribe of Florida. Those who survived their internment and subsequent removal to the Indian Territories helped shaped the future Seminole Nation of Oklahoma.

*In December of 2017, Theodore “Ted” Isham, Historic Preservation Officer for the Seminole Nation of Oklahoma and member of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation - Wind Clan, visited Egmont Key for the first time. Over the intervening months Mr. Isham has had time to reflect on his journey to the island and on its history and its prospects for the future. Some of his thoughts (TI) are reflected below in his response to questions posed by THPO Archaeologist Maureen Mahoney (MM).*

**MM:** What were your first impressions of that island and kind of the history with it?

**TI:** Realizing the importance and the history that it has for the Seminoles, and especially for the Seminoles that were removed. I had a very good, very significant feel because of that important history. And because of the fact that it was an internment site it makes me think of all of the stories that people had, or have maybe even down to today, that are preserved. Stories of being detained there and what those might look like, thinking about some that thought of running or escaping somehow. So, my thoughts were along those lines, how sacred that space is for us, for both the sides of the remaining Seminole peoples both here in Florida and back in Oklahoma.

**MM:** You had shared one story about people walking into the ocean, could you share that again?

**TI:** I was looking to find someone who can corroborate it besides me, I haven’t done the search in an in-depth manner, but we made a plea on Facebook and I got no one to respond about the story. I’m hesitant to put something down for the fact that I would like to verify that someone else had heard that same story before I commit to it. So, the story that I had been told to me, and I cannot remember who told it to me, but as we know the Creeks and the Seminoles are so intertwined that it’s hard for us with the modern lens to separate which was which. So that the story may have actually come from the Creeks is a possibility, but after seeing the island and knowing the history surrounding it, I doubt that it is Creek, mainly because it fits exactly with what Egmont Key as we see it today represents.

Anyway, so it’s the idea of being forced away for whatever reason and we see that towards the end of the Third Seminole War the U.S. Army being pressed to end the hostilities, resort to capturing the women and children. And the Army would then capture the family to coerce and force the warriors to give up. They would capture the leaders by holding their families on that island, making it all the more poignant and disturbing that the women and children were used against their own men folk. I can imagine the sadness and the hopelessness of the situation. They’ve been hiding out all this long time, some 46 years in the Everglades and staying elusive. So now we see that the families are being captured and their warriors will be allowed to be captured because of that. That wasn’t a good situation at all, you know, like backs up against the wall/ between a rock and a hard place.

That’s how I view it. It’s not a very big stretch for me to say that after all of those years of being fighters and hiding and doing things like that, and doing the things they had to do to survive to that point, I don’t imagine that deciding not to go any further was a viable option. So en masse as the story has been told, whatever en masse might be, maybe one community, one family, whatever, they decided to just walk off (into the Gulf waters) instead of being taken away from their homelands. Torn away from the homeland, I guess, is what I would say. So anyway, that’s



Delegates from 34 tribes in front of Creek Council House, Indian Territory. Photo obtained from the National Archives, photographer unknown.



LIST OF EMIGRATING INDIANS.

|                         |                          |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| No kose Emathla,        | Sah nah-kochee,          |
| Sai-to-to-Hoyee,        | Sah ke-nee,              |
| Kiruth-Lagee,           | Anogee,                  |
| Mohiah-Thloka,          | Thomas,                  |
| Palat-Hakee,            | Moses,                   |
| Senee,                  | Jack,                    |
| Tustanuc Cochukanee,    | Ahlee,                   |
| Alafah mogo,            | Ok-to-ala-chee,          |
| Pebahnee,               | Sah-toahlee,             |
| Yalyachchee,            | Sah-toat-kee,            |
| Do. mother,             | See honwah-kee,          |
| Echakee,                | Lowa-kee,                |
| Tustanuchago,           | Tia-cho-wah-we,          |
| Hopoyee,                | Shuckoni-kee,            |
| Hahtlee,                | Cu-ih-sah-hah-chee-chee, |
| Upon-nux-kee,           | So-tiochee,              |
| Kowee-hajo,             | So-tensh-kee,            |
| Aseoon Hejuckee,        | Folonih-kee,             |
| Sahhoo-kahlee,          | Ah-hah-loch-emathla,     |
| Tus-com-no-hochuchee,   | Hou-3-kee,               |
| Ehunkah,                | Sah-tath-lee,            |
| Nokeseh-hajo,           | Mat-hogee,               |
| Fle-wahlee-tustanuggee, | Echup-nogee,             |
| Nathcup-hajo,           | Ware-hajo,               |
| So-wahlee,              | Mah-koyages,             |
| Mchhee,                 | Mesh-sah-kee,            |
| Kinnah-nee,             | Kinnah-lee,              |
| Kith-hogee,             | Welock-kee,              |
| Marce,                  | Mock-sadil,              |
| Osha-che-hala,          | Lacy,                    |
| Cheh-honah,             | Sah-puckile,             |
| Mioochee,               | Hatupae-chee,            |
| Sa-toh-kee,             | Betsy,                   |
| Polly,                  | Nancy,                   |
| Copee-bige-holah,       | Gen. William Bowlegs,    |
| Nocbah,                 | Chocote-Harchuc-kee,     |
| Tueekiah-hago,          | Inneah-hago,             |
| Ochee-hago,             | Kuntal-kee-Emathla,      |
| Hopith-lee,             | Christo-Emathla,         |
| Epockah-luck-ugee,      | Ozah-lah-hago,           |
| Jee-cho-chee,           | Nah-po-cheah-no-lah,     |
| Saonah-hago,            | Nokos-hago,              |
| Sasunc-kee,             | Fattie-mah-tee,          |
| Sah-ton-kee,            | Katza-Firaca,            |
| Ah-soon-wah,            | Ah-hah-loo-kee,          |
| Ya-to-lah-kee,          | Tah-ah-kee,              |
| Te-lah-lathoe,          | Chin-ho-yah,             |
| Fi-so-kee,              | Fah-ligant,              |
| Ho-kee-till,            | Sabbi-che-chee,          |
| Cla-lochee,             | Eth-la-kee,              |
| Mon-hoo-sagee,          | Mah-ut-lo-ee,            |
| Toos-hago,              | Konah-heg-choe,          |
| Zilvey,                 | Epith-ho-yah,            |
| Toney,                  | Fume-hatchee-Emathla,    |
| Louisa,                 | Konig-hago,              |
| Tech-to-chee,           | Polly,                   |
| Tie-to-ah-noc,          | Savoy,                   |
| Shah-fah-nah-kee,       | Fagay,                   |
| Ah-chule-hago,          | Hoa-ki,                  |
| Simon,                  | Ta-so-ka,                |
| Sah-ho-ee,              | Cha-ho-la-ti-ka,         |
| Beccy,                  | Kats-i-kee,              |
| Sally,                  | Me-co-le,                |
| Julian,                 | Hok-to-la-na,            |
| Patty,                  | So-kah-chee,             |
| Young Billy Bowlegs,    | Ah-fus-to-lee,           |
| Patty,                  | Hoch-tro-chee.           |

how I would write that if I feel a little bit more comfortable with the corroboration of the story.

MM: What should happen to the island since it will soon be submerged?

TI: If it was a temporary kind of event, that is if the island were to recover out of the ocean, even temporary means within a couple of lifetimes, we could think about doing something, but I think some of these changes that are happening are so long term that it could (be) a thousand of years before it returns. Maybe, more. And so, thinking about one thousand years is a long, long time and we do not know what will be available to us to help remember. I think our best bet is to not try to circumvent what nature is doing right now, even though we humans have caused it. And just let it go back into the sea even as there may come plans to try to 'save' the island by adding more and more sand.


So, commemorating the island for that vision of maybe in a thousand years, where would the island be, in our collective tribal memory, in the record books, and will we be able to find that information and continue the remembrances of those who have gone on? Commemorating it by placing the story into the cyber world, or documenting it via a written account, would be the best bet. But, up until that moment, we should make it more known, if that's a term. To help educate the people today about our histories, our shared histories. And what that means to us today. We can go far as we can until the island disappears by continually coming to this place. That time then would be unfortunate, as it's starting to make that disappearance, like we know it's doing now, we will remember that there was disease, there was death on the island, and there was sadness. And so, it would be good to do a repatriation, a commemoration, or locating and then re-locating of these burials that have happened on this island. A repatriation onto the mainland of whatever remains we may find there will be the best honor that we can give to these ancestors who are left here on this island.

MM: What are the other ways we can tell the story of Egmont?

TI: You mean telling what Egmont is and educating the public about what Egmont is? One thing that we did a couple of summers ago when I was doing that work, and I still haven't finished that work, but it's almost done, it's relating the removal routes, or the removal itself, and what happened within each of the routes. The routes for the removed Seminoles from Florida, would then begin with the internments at Fort Brooke, showing the significance of Fort Brooke in Tampa (a U.S. Army facility used during the Second Seminole War in part to hold captured and surrendered Seminoles. Many Seminoles died while in captivity there). Egmont Key as a hold over and staging place, and then on to Fort Pike and Jackson Barracks (both located near New Orleans, Louisiana) as another stopover place of the Removal. And just by making that route and stories as familiar to the modern people as possible the events of that time will be carried to the future. ✦

The list to the right named all of the Seminole who boarded the *Grey Cloud* on the final removal voyage from Egmont Key. It was originally published in the *New York Herald* on May 27, 1858.





When you leave out Egmont Key you leave out a part of  
**history**... you're not telling the whole story.  
Egmont should be at the **forefront**.

- Chief Justice Willie Johns, Wild Cat Clan


All history on that island is **Seminole** history.

- Manuel Tiger, Wind Clan

I heard a lot about **Enko-taan-choo-be**  
and the **Seminoles** that were captured. I think we can't lose the history of this  
place and we need to remember places like **Egmont Key** so that kids know  
what we went through and how we lived during the wars. We need to keep talking  
about this history so we don't lose it.

- Bobby Henry, Medicine Man, Otter Clan





I was more concerned about trying to protect it. Trying to **learn** what we can from it, because in the normal ebb and flow of human civilizations, you know when you have to **rebuild**, it's best to know what they tried in the **past**, so you don't end up making up the same mistakes again.

- Big Cypress Board Representative Joe Frank, Panther Clan

History is **good**. Get some of it, and hold onto it for our **kids**.

- Billie Walker, Panther Clan

They looked **death** right in the face, every single day. You know? To be caged up or put on an island where they really can't move about freely, and be **themselves** is... I can't even explain the word to you.

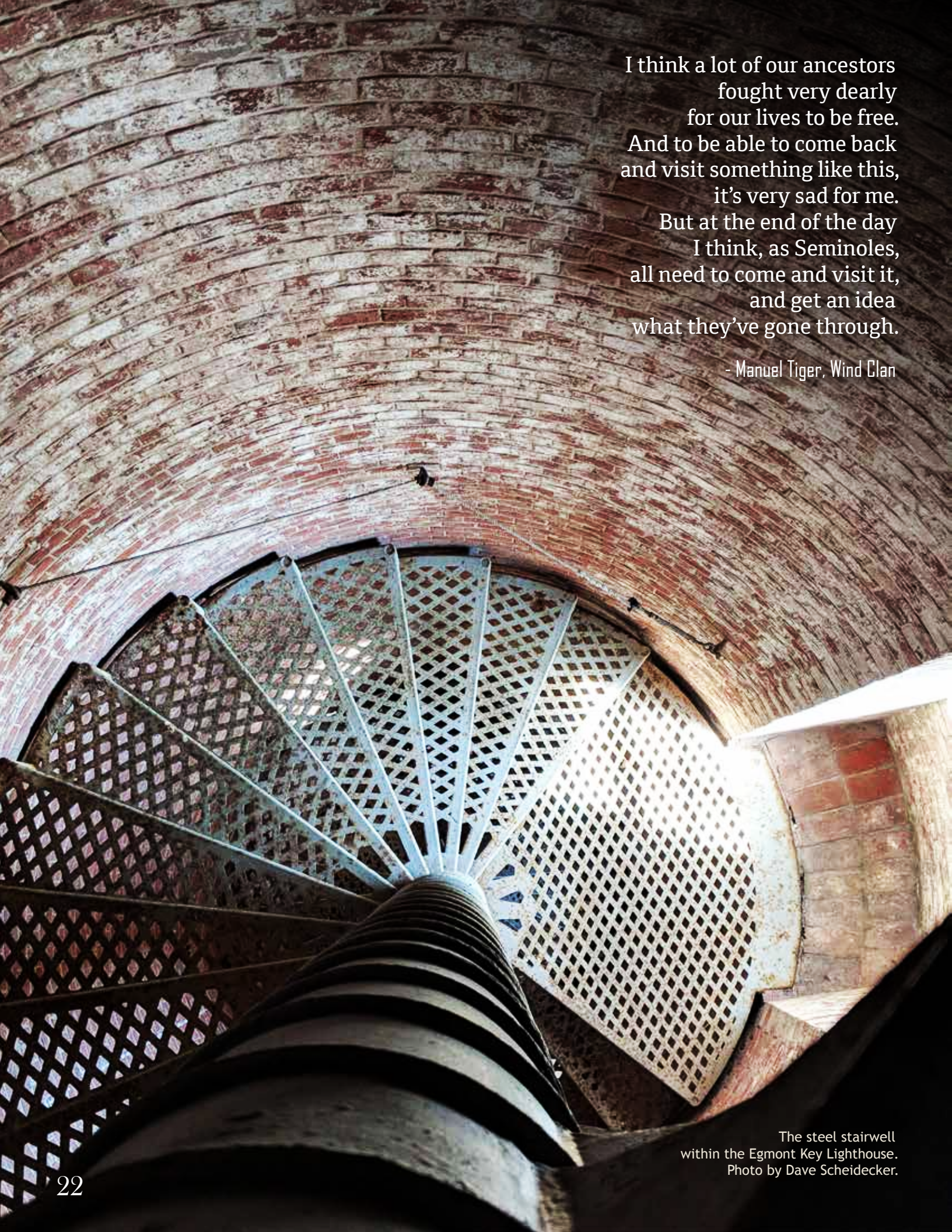
- Rita Youngman, Bird Clan

I like seeing **real** history, feeling it... feeling how it would have been to take myself back in time and put myself in their shoes... understand where my **Tribe** is headed and where it's coming from, and how **blessed** we are today.

- Lenny Ray Jim, Panther Clan

Artwork by Jalycia Billie-Valdez  
Jalycia is a member of the Seminole Tribe of Florida.





I think a lot of our ancestors  
fought very dearly  
for our lives to be free.  
And to be able to come back  
and visit something like this,  
it's very sad for me.  
But at the end of the day  
I think, as Seminoles,  
all need to come and visit it,  
and get an idea  
what they've gone through.

- Manuel Tiger, Wind Clan

The steel stairwell  
within the Egmont Key Lighthouse.  
Photo by Dave Scheidecker.



# The Story Beneath Our Feet

In the 1850s, the United States Army used Egmont Key as a concentration camp for Seminoles where they were held before being removed west. This was part of a larger plan to systematically force Native People from their homelands. The precise location of the camp has faded away with time, yet for the Seminole Tribe of Florida this place and its horrors are still important. In 2016 lightning struck the small island and the resulting wildfire burned away more than 80 acres of foliage. This provided a unique opportunity for the Tribal Historic Preservation Office to search the newly cleared ground for traces of the lost concentration camp.

Beginning in the fall of 2016, the THPO embarked on a metal detection survey of burned areas on Egmont Key. The team traveled to the island by ferry, carrying metal detectors, shovels, and lots of water. The THPO was joined by Michelle Sivilich and Gary Ellis from Gulf Archaeology Research Institute, Richard Sanchez from the Egmont Key Alliance, and Seminole Tribal member Rita Youngman. In all, the THPO metal detected 128 areas and discovered several historic artifacts locations. Although these objects were typical of nineteenth-century America, they were not clearly related to the Seminole. Nonetheless, these finds are exciting because they prove that physical evidence still remains from the period the Seminole were held captive on the island.

One challenge the team faced during their survey was that they were unable to determine the original locations of objects. During their visit, archaeologists observed that the coast was washing away and that had caused the soils to mix. They determined that regular storm surges from hurricanes likely pushed artifacts away from their original homes.



A brick road built for Fort Dade.  
Photo by Dave Scheidecker.



Another challenge they faced in finding the remains of the concentration camp on Egmont Key involves Fort Dade. Not long after the period of Seminole internment the island became embroiled in another American conflict. The short-lived Spanish-American War began in April 1898. In response, the U.S. government built up its coastal defenses. This included constructing a United States Military Reservation on the island, later renamed Fort Dade.

Across the small island, the U.S. built four artillery batteries, munitions depots, military housing, radio towers, support structures, roads, and a rail line. This vast military installation affected the majority of the island.

This fortification makes it difficult to find evidence of the Seminole story on Egmont Key. When soldiers built the fort, they destroyed earlier sites on the island. As a result, much of the evidence of the camp has likely been destroyed or removed from its original location.

The construction of Fort Dade dramatically changed the landscape of Egmont Key. This created challenges for the archaeologists as they sought evidence of the concentration camp.

Coastline erosion has also complicated the search for the concentration camp on Egmont Key. Because of these factors, the THPO could not determine whether



THPO Archaeologists Victoria Menchaca (left) and Dave Scheidecker (right) conduct a metal detection survey on a burned section of Egmont Key. Photo by Rechanda Lee (Diné Nation, Naakai Dine'é and Táchii'nii Clans).



the areas metal detected were where the Seminole were held during the 1850s. Although THPO staff were unable to identify the site of internment during the 2016-2017 survey, the investigations at Egmont Key have been successful in other ways. For the first time, the Seminole Tribe represented their interests on the island. Community members have been heavily involved in this project ensuring that the injustices of the past are confronted with due honor and respect.

The THPO understands that more can be done to tell the Seminole story on Egmont Key. In the coming years, the THPO hopes to conduct additional archival research, excavate areas where Seminoles may

have lived, examine the location of cemeteries on the island, and gather oral histories about the island. The THPO is confident that a combination of creative investigative methods and community insight will illuminate the lost history of this deeply significant place. ✦

Contributed by Rachel Morgan.  
Rachel Morgan is a former archaeologist  
with the Tribal Historic Preservation Office.





# Egmont Artifacts

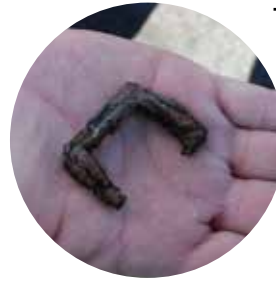
During the 2016 survey, THPO archaeologists looked for evidence of the 1850's occupation and the Seminole prison. Here are some of the artifacts they found.

## Barber Dime (1898)



A Barber "Liberty Head" dime minted in 1898, the same year construction began on Fort Dade.

## Iron Buckle (Unknown Date)



This badly corroded iron buckle was the first artifact uncovered during the survey. Unfortunately, whatever it was attached to is long gone.

## Glass Bottles (1904-1907)



A bottle and fragment from the time Fort Dade was in operation. These were manufactured by either the American Bottle Co. or the Adolphus Busch Manufacturing Co., and could have been used for beer or soda.

## Ceramic (20th Century)



A fragment of a decorative green transfer-printed ceramic plate. The technique places it in the twentieth century.

## Kerosene Lamp (1842+)

The metal collar and burner of a kerosene lantern used for light. The design marks it as one manufactured by Dietz, Brother & Company in New York City.







Archaeologists Michelle Sivilich (left) and Shawn Keyte (right) use a metal detector to scan for historic artifacts.

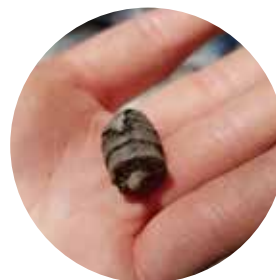
Photo by Rechanda Lee  
(Diné Nation, Naakai Dine'é and Táchii'nii Clans).

## Blacksmith Rivet (Pre-1850)



The uneven metal shows that this was a hammered rivet, created by hand by a blacksmith. While factory made nails and rivets had replaced these in many places by the time the prison was created, the army had stockpiles of older style tools that needed to be used up, and they sent many of these to the forts of the Seminole War.

## Minié Ball Ammunition (1849-1864)



Minié Balls were regularly used by the United States military in the 1850s and early 1860s. The three rounds discovered have been fired. The round to the left is a "cleaner" round, designed to clean powder build-up out of the rifle barrel when fired.





# Preserving Nature



Egmont Key National Wildlife Refuge was established in 1974 to preserve its natural, cultural, and historic significance for the benefit of present and future generations. Located at the mouth of Tampa Bay, Egmont Key is the only Refuge of the Tampa Bay complex that is open to the public.

Many agencies manage the land of Egmont Key. The U.S. Coast Guard owns approximately 35 acres at the north end of the island and the Tampa Bay Pilots Association occupies 10 acres in the middle of the island along the eastern shore. The rest of the island is owned by the U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service. Due to the popularity of the island among boaters, wildlife enthusiasts, and tourists, the Service established an agreement with the Florida Park Service in 1989 to cooperatively manage the island as both a National Wildlife Refuge and a Florida State Park.

In addition to its rich cultural history, Egmont Key's pristine habitats make it a safe haven that supports over 117 species of nesting migratory and wintering birds. The island also provides refuge and nesting habitat for threatened Atlantic loggerhead sea turtles and protects an unusually large population of gopher tortoises and box turtles. Two designated wildlife sanctuaries, encompassing about one third of the island, are closed to the public year-round to protect nesting birds and sea turtles.

Due to protections in recent years, brown pelicans, royal, sandwich and least terns, laughing gulls, and black skimmers have nested successfully and most have dramatically increased in numbers, due to enforcement of the closed sanctuaries. Still, disturbance by people and pets entering closed areas continues to threaten wintering bird populations.

Human disturbance in the summer months cause adult birds to fly from their nests, resulting in chicks and eggs being exposed to the hot sun and predators. Disturbance in the winter months may prevent birds from resting and gathering the body fat needed to complete long migrations.

A nesting colony of royal terns and sandwich terns within the Egmont Bird Sanctuary.

Photo by Joyce Kleen, Wildlife Biologist, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.



Approximately 120 to 160 Atlantic loggerhead sea turtles nest on Egmont Key each year. The main threat sea turtles face on Egmont key is eroding shorelines which lead to habitat loss and less space for sea turtles to lay eggs. Often, sea turtles nest too close to the vanishing shore and their eggs end up washing away.

Land dwelling gopher tortoises and box turtles also inhabit Egmont Key. Gopher tortoises are notable for their ability to dig sandy burrows, which they use to avoid the heat of the day. They can be found scattered around open areas on the island feeding on grass, sea grape and prickly pear cactus. Gopher tortoises are protected in the state of Florida and should not be disturbed. Box turtles are also found on the island and prefer the shaded forest areas. Their main diet on Egmont Key consists of roaches and sea grapes.

Well over 150,000 people visit Egmont Key annually. The highest numbers of visitors come during the spring and summer, coinciding with the peak nesting season for birds and sea turtles. Recreation opportunities on Egmont Key include shelling, hiking, birdwatching, fishing, swimming/snorkeling, nature photography, and visiting the historical sites. The refuge is open free of charge year round from sunrise to sunset. By responsibly managing the island, visitors and wildlife can continue to enjoy Egmont Key for generations. ✦

Contributed by Stan Garner.  
Stan Garner is the Visitor Services Manager for U.S.  
Fish & Wildlife Service at the Tampa Bay Refuges.




A turtle begins its life amidst great danger, like this turtle here on the beach.  
Photo by Ryan Maier, Federal Wildlife Officer, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.









Egmont Key is more than just an island. It's my people's **history**.

It's the brutal **truth** about how the U.S. government treated us just because of greed.

It's one of many examples of the pain and suffering we had to **endure** just to be here today.

It's a prime example of how **strong** and **resilient** our people are, and that is why we are known as the Unconquered **Seminole Tribe of Florida!**

-Quenton Cypress, Wind Clan

Quenton Cypress (Wind Clan) at the ruins of Battery Howard within Fort Dade.  
Photo by Dave Scheidecker.



# Island Under Threat

In recognition of the significant threats coming from severe erosion made worse by rising sea levels, the Florida Trust for Historic Preservation (Florida Trust) placed Egmont Key on its 2017 “Florida’s 11 to Save” list. Florida Trust, a partner of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, was founded in 1978 with a stated mission to “promote the preservation of the architectural, historical and archaeological heritage of Florida.” It works to achieve this through advocacy, education, and stewardship.

One goal of the “Florida’s 11 To Save” program is to direct the public’s attention to the need to save Florida’s historic resources. In its May 2017 press release the Florida Trust listed Egmont Key’s period of significance as pre-Columbian through the 1940s. They further noted that “the strategically located site served as an internment camp and deportation site during the Third Seminole War. A small cemetery contains unmarked graves of Seminoles who died on the island.”

Contributed by Bradley Mueller.

Bradley Mueller is a Compliance Specialist for the Tribal Historic Preservation Office.







The ruins of the Fort Dade Power Station. When the building was originally constructed, it lay in the middle of the Island. Now the ruins are on the western shore, and will soon be completely within the waters of the Gulf.  
Photo by Dave Scheidecker.





Historic coastlines superimposed onto a satellite map of Egmont Key show the erosion of the island over the last 150 years.



# Why Do You Save an Island?

Sea level rise in Florida presents a real impending threat and is currently affecting thousands of significant sites along the coast. Especially important to the Seminole Tribe is Egmont Key, which will likely disappear within the next 100 years. With the incoming tide of sea level rise, it is imperative that we capture the importance of this site and the gravity it carries in Tribal and Florida history.

In 1877, Egmont Key was an island of approximately 580 acres. Over 100 years later, the island is just barely over 200 acres. This is a result of erosion and the sea level rising 4 to 8 inches over that time. The Gulf of Mexico is swallowing up Egmont Key before our eyes. For the Seminole Tribe of Florida (STOF) and its members, Egmont Key represents the struggle for preservation against climate change. Without immediate intervention, the island will become only a memory.

Tribal members want action. It is still their history to care for. “Whatever they can do, I want it preserved. Like they said, this is where she [Polly Parker] was. It’s like y’all said, we are losing sand and trying to get help with that, mainly,” said Nancy Willie. Nancy Willie is a descendant of Polly Parker, a significant Seminole figure who escaped capture while on the Seminole’s Trail of Tears and eventually made her way back home to South Florida.

During the late Seminole War period, Egmont was employed as a concentration camp. Tribal members have often likened Egmont to “our Auschwitz.” It’s a place of death, a crucible that serves as a memorial for Tribal members’ ancestors’ ability to endure the grimmest of hardships. As Tribal member Rita Youngman explains, “Egmont Key is an important place since it is a reminder about how the Seminoles went on to survive one of the darkest periods in U.S. history.” It’s a monument that’s rapidly eroding from dynamic coastal forces, such as, storm surges, wave impacts, sea level rise, and hurricanes.

In the summer of 2017, Hurricane Irma came barreling across the state, wreaking massive damage to Florida’s coasts, uprooting millions of Floridians from their homes. At Egmont Key, wind gusts of up to 91 miles per hour were recorded at

the weather station located on the island. Fort Dade era structures that were once covered by beach white sand now lay bare from hurricane force winds. Artifacts previously located during archaeological fieldwork have now been displaced from wind erosion.

There have been positive strides to keep the island intact by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers through beach renourishment projects. However, those benefits are only short-lived as the newly deposited sand becomes scattered in a matter of months.

Unfortunately, Egmont Key is one of many places of high value that are under direct danger from the threat of climate change and sea-level rise. Thousands of cultural and historical sites across Florida are threatened by rising sea levels, as well as the unforeseen consequences of dramatic climate events. Based on data from the Florida Master Site File (a registry of all cultural sites in Florida), a minor increase of three feet above current sea levels will impact 16,015 cultural sites; further increase to six feet will impact 34,786 sites of importance to all Floridians. This will present a herculean challenge to protect these vulnerable places. Many will be lost.



Seminole Tribal members arrive at Egmont Key.  
Photo by Nicholas Butler





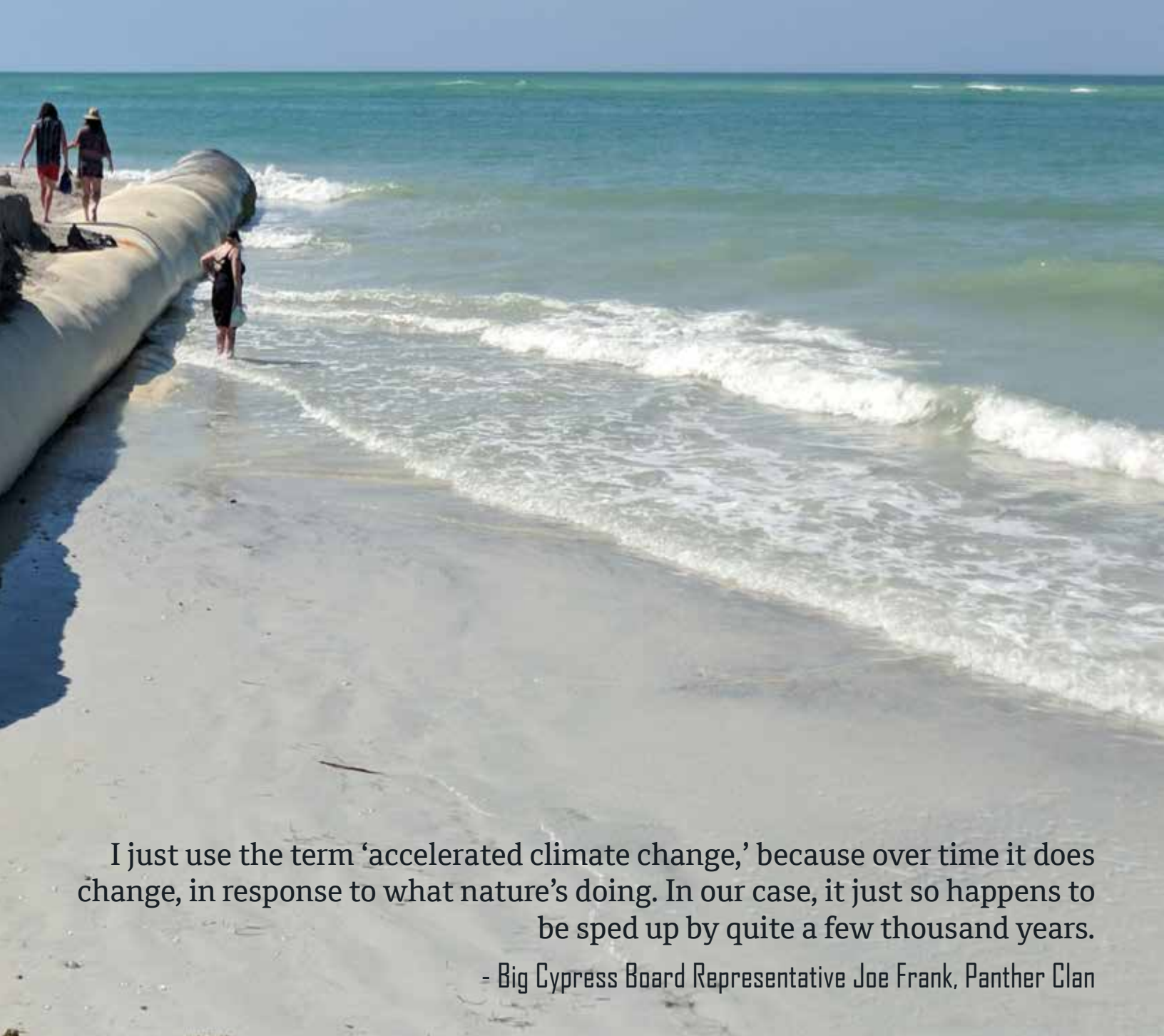
Erosion exposes protective barrier  
on the north shore of Egmont Key.  
Photo by Dave Scheidecker

Coastal communities throughout the state already feel the harsh reality of “accelerated-climate change” as described by Joe Frank, the STOF Big Cypress Board Representative. This is evidenced by rising waters, beach erosion, and intensifying hurricanes. As waters encroach on shorelines, they will eventually inundate places of cultural and historical significance along the coasts. Places such as Miami Beach and the Miami Art Deco Historic District are already trying to mitigate problems from water intrusion and flooding. What is the community of Miami without the Art Deco Historic District? Communities and places are intertwined in such a way that they help form a

cultural identity. Any attempt to disentangle them would reshape their history and future. It’s no different for the Seminole people.

“In the normal ebb and flow of human civilizations, when you have to rebuild,” says Mr. Frank, speaking on imminent impacts to cultural sites, “it’s best to know what they tried in the past, so you don’t end up making up the same mistakes again.” These mistakes remind us of our past, both our accomplishments and failures, and offer insights into how we might build a stronger future. Kevin Holata, a tribal member, shared his feelings about Egmont Key’s painful past. “It is a sensitive





I just use the term ‘accelerated climate change,’ because over time it does change, in response to what nature’s doing. In our case, it just so happens to be sped up by quite a few thousand years.

- Big Cypress Board Representative Joe Frank, Panther Clan

story and some tribal members may be hurt, but it’s about our history and it needs to be known.” Egmont Key serves to remind us of those failures, but also foretells how we can avoid future mistakes.

The Tribe can do what it can to share the lessons of Egmont Key, but the United States must invest considerably more in environmental sustainability, such as utilizing alternative forms of energy, in order to combat “accelerated-climate change.” As Mr. Frank points out, “What it gets down to is, yes, America and the whole world has to do a better job utilizing solar energy. I think there are a lot of countries that jumped on the bandwagon,

and the United States just has happened to be dragging butt right now, kind of last in line.” It is a community effort. Not only would these long-term investments help protect sites like Egmont Key and its history, but those of us who call Florida home can sleep a little sounder at night. ✦

Contributed by Nicholas Butler.  
Nicholas Butler is a former archaeologist,  
and current Geospatial Analyst with the  
Tribal Historic Preservation Office.





These are the Tribal members that helped shape this report.

### **James Billie, Bird Clan**

James Billie served as Chairman of the Seminole Tribe of Florida from 1979 to 2001, and from 2011 to 2016. He is a veteran, 75 years old, and “educated by time.”

### **Joe Frank, Panther Clan**

Joe Frank was raised predominately on the Big Cypress Reservation, as well as the Immokalee Camp. He spent some time moving between reservations following work. He worked over 30 years in forestry and currently serves as the Big Cypress Board Representative.

### **Willie Johns, Wild Cat Clan**

Willie Johns grew up on the Brighton Reservation and currently serves as the Seminole Appellate Court Chief Justice.

### **Billie Walker, Panther Clan**

Billie Walker was born in Devil’s Garden and grew up on the Big Cypress Reservation. He has been alligator wrestling since 1988 and was taught by Thomas Storm. He is also a farmer, gardener, storyteller, and legend keeper.

### **Aaron Tommie**

Aaron Tommie was born in West Palm Beach. He is currently an employee with the Seminole Tribe of Florida and wants to continue to help enhance the Tribe’s success.

### **Jalycia Billie-Valdez**

Jalycia Billie-Valdez is a Seminole Tribal member. She worked at the Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum in 2018 as part of her Summer Work Experience Program. She is currently in high school and is planning to attend an arts college when she graduates.



# Seminole Voices



Tribal members visit Fort Dade's Battery Mellon on the north end of Egmont Key. From left to right: (top row) Hunter Billie, Clifton "Lulu" Billie (Panther Clan), Eden Jumper (Panther Clan), Aaron Tommie, Dave Scheidecker (THPO Staff), (bottom row) Jackie Osceola (Panther Clan).

Photo by Justin Giles, Tiger/Big Cat Clan (Muscogee (Creek) Nation).

## **Bobby Henry, Otter Clan**

Bobby Henry was born in a traditional camp located off the Tamiami Trail in South Florida. Today he is a well-respected elder of the Tribe and is known as the Rainmaker.

## **Rita Youngman, Bird Clan**

Rita Youngman is a Seminole Tribal member, granddaughter of Toby and Rosa Johns from the Brighton Reservation, and a member of the Bird Clan. She currently resides in Lake Placid, Florida and is a singer and songwriter.

## **Quenton Cypress, Wind Clan**

Quenton Cypress was raised on the Big Cypress Reservation. He is the Community Engagement Manager for the Heritage and Environment Resources Office of the Seminole Tribe of Florida. He is also the President of the Weapons Demonstration Team that teaches Seminole War tactics and educates the general public on how the Seminoles lived during war time.

## **Nancy Willie, Bird Clan**

Nancy Willie was born in Miami and is a descendant of Polly Parker, a Seminole legend. Today, she is the Chairman's Coordinator.

## **Lenny Ray Jim, Panther Clan**

Lenny Ray Jim grew up on the Big Cypress Reservation and is self-employed.

## **Manuel Tiger, Wind Clan**

Manuel "Mondo" Tiger was born in Clewiston, Florida and is a graduate of Oklahoma State University. He is a cattle rancher and has served as the Councilman for the Big Cypress Reservation.





# Choosing a Path

Visible from the Tampa Skyway Bridge as a green speck on the western horizon, Egmont Key is an accretion of fine sand and sediment spilled into the Gulf of Mexico by Tampa Bay. Covering 250 acres, more or less, and rising to an average elevation of just five feet above mean sea level, the island is many things. To tourists and vacationers it is a beautiful stretch of sandy beach, a place for pictures, picnics, and parties. To history buffs it is an occasion to examine the remains of Fort Dade, constructed due to the Spanish American War. To wildlife it can be either a permanent home, temporary residence, or critical habitat. But, to members of the Seminole Tribe of Florida and Seminole Nation of Oklahoma, it is a reminder of a dark time in their past and a dark time in the history of U.S. Government Indian policy.

This volume is a Seminole Story and its focus is on the island's role in Seminole history, its meaning to the Seminoles of today, no matter where they reside, and the risks Egmont Key faces from climate change.

Over the decades the Seminole have demonstrated their strength and resiliency, but the island itself is fragile, and delicate. Egmont Key, subject to the forces of nature - wind, waves, and current - are slowly, sometimes not so slowly, eroding into the gulf waters. It is now less than 40 percent of the size it was in 1877. Compounding those problems, are the effects of climate change and rising sea levels.

Is the island worth saving? Is it worth saving for its critical habitat? Is it worth saving for its history or is just remembering the story of what happened there enough? Is it worth saving to remind us all, tribal and non-tribal, how not to treat others who are different from ourselves? And if our answer is yes to any of these questions, how can it be saved?

The Seminoles have shared a part of their story here. It's a story worth reflecting on and learning from. ✦

Contributed by Bradley Mueller.  
Bradley Mueller is a Compliance Specialist for the  
Tribal Historic Preservation Office.







