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Celebrating and Preserving Seminole Maroon History and Heritage

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TEXAS SEMINOLE MAROON HERITAGE TO BE FEATURED AT ANNUAL LOXAHATCHEE BATTLEFIELD PARK EVENT

The 2020 Annual Seminole Maroon Spiritual Remembrance of the Battles of the Loxahatchee to be held at Jupiter's Battlefield Park on Sunday, January 19, will feature special first-time historic presentations on the unique history of Black Seminole Trail of Tears survivors and their descendants whose quest for renewed freedom led them from Oklahoma to Mexico and then to the landmark town of Brackettville, near Fort Clark, Texas, and to outstanding distinction in military service.

It is there that the military unit known as the Seminole Negro Indian Scouts, which included Native members as well, served from 1870 to 1914, with no less than four of their number receiving the Congressional medal of Honor for their valor.

Ms. Windy Goodloe of The Seminole Indian Scouts Cemetery Association (SISCA) in Brackettville joins noted Florida historian Dr. Anthony Dixon in bringing to light the rich and complex heritage of those Texans whose saga parallels that of other branches of the African American Seminole Diaspora who departed the ancestral "Freedom Land" of Florida to establish still-vibrant communities in Oklahoma, Mexico, and the Bahamas.

These two keepers and protectors of a rich history will join other scheduled visitors, as well as local luminaries, including performers and cultural vendors led by community and spiritual leaders presenting cross-cultural traditional opening ceremonies.

It is providentially significant that the anniversaries of these two critical battles, which turned the tide of the decades-long military onslaught against the freedom seekers, occur during the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. holiday weekend honoring peace.

The 2020 program begins at 9:00 a.m. with cross-cultural ceremonial traditions and concludes with guided Battlefield tours conducted at 1:00 p.m. by the Loxahatchee Battlefield Preservationists.

Traditional Rituals on Slate

The site of the Commemorative event, 9060 Indiantown Road (one mile west of Florida's Turnpike and Interstate 95) in northern Palm Beach County, will hold traditional rituals and prayers, performances, speakers, open-mic interactive "Village Talk," historical exhibits, and guided battlefield tours.

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A most popular and revered feature of the annual gathering is the traditional Native American blessing ceremony, conducted by Miami-based Carib tribal Queen Mrs. Catherine Hummingbird Ramirez, which combines healing, cleansing, and guidance, not only opening the way for the rest of the multicultural spiritual program but also for the new year.

The event commemorates two battles fought along the banks of the Loxahatchee River on January 15 and January 24, 1838, during the Second Seminole War. Seminole survivors of the Christmas Day, 1837 Battle of Okeechobee, regrouped at a settlement in this location, and encountered combined U.S. forces and Tennessee Volunteers.

Included are both vital Native and African American perspectives, particularly in the light of Dr. King's revolutionary teachings on nonviolence, even as the memory of the fallen on all sides is honored at the consecrated battlefield site.

A Popular Event

Once known as "Palm Beach County's forgotten war," these battles have come to increasing local, statewide, and even national awareness thanks in large part to the Annual Remembrance, co-founded in 1996 by the late Seminole Maroon descendant, historian and activist Isa Hamm Bryant, historian Richard Procyk and archaeological researcher Steve Carr and others.

The diligence of this founding cadre resulted in identifying the true location of the battlefield and bringing a more accurate version of the story to life, with presentations and exhibits.

Diversity of Maroon Communities

In fact, much of the Seminole population, like Maroon communities of self-liberators from enslavement elsewhere in the hemisphere and their Native allies, had been settled in Florida for generations, with thriving farms and herds.

These communities also welcomed new recruits and established Underground Railroad escape routes to freedom beyond Florida, much to the frustration of slaveholders and Andrew Jackson's scheme for "Indian Removal" of all Indigenous nations east of the Mississippi River, leading to these military incursions into Spanish territory becoming the fledgling United States' first foreign war.

A Critical Turning Point in History

The two Battles of the Loxahatchee are regarded as a critical turning point in the four-decades-long assault on freedom known as the three Seminole Wars.

In the first of these 1838 encounters, known as Powell's Battle, Native and African American Seminoles, keenly aware of troop movements, ambushed and defeated a Naval Expeditionary Force led by Lieutenant Levin Powell, which had been sent to search them out.

Learning of this development from the survivors, General Thomas Jesup commanded a force of 1,500 men against approximately 300 Seminoles in the second encounter, known as Jesup's Battle, which led to the vastly outnumbered Seminoles retreating into the Everglades, from which many would be lured weeks later to Fort Jupiter under a white flag of truce.

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The truce was not honored by Jesup as the Seminole families were deported on the Trail of Tears to Oklahoma Territory or, in several cases, turned over to “slave catchers,” as one of the major motives for the “Seminole Wars” was to capture alleged “escaped slaves” who had found freedom in Spanish Florida.

These freedom-seekers joined or were and being joined by Native Tribal members escaping from European settler encroachment in the English-claimed states to the north of the peninsula.

A Special Year

This year marks the Twenty-second Anniversary of the Remembrance held by the Florida Black Historical Research Project, Inc., a 501-c-3 non-profit that also seeks, through August, 2020, to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the fateful August, 1619, arrival of the first captive Africans in British North America.

Much like the nation’s Bicentennial in 1976, this quadricentennial observance, which continues through August, 2020, provides a powerful catalyst for revisiting and increasing our knowledge of American history, before, during, and since the lifetimes of those 20 first arrivals.

Free and Open to the Public

This program, organized by Florida Black Historical Research Project, Inc. and produced in cooperation with Palm Beach County Parks Department and the Loxahatchee Battlefield Preservationists, is free and open to the public. For further information, please visit the FBHRPINC.org website or call 305-772-7714 or 305-904-7620.