

# PEN PICTURES OF Notable Florida Indians

By MRS. SAMUEL WEBB

## "OSCEOLA"—(THE RISING SUN)

His features are clothed with a warrior's pride,  
And he moves with a monarch's tread.  
He smiles with joy, as the flash of steel  
Through the Everglades grass is seen.

OSCEOLA has furnished to the poet, to the novelist, and to the lover of romance a most attractive subject, and scarcely any limit has been placed to the virtues attributed, or the exploits imagined in connection with this renowned Chief of the Seminoles.

His Indian name is derived from a root which means "The Rising Sun."

Osceola is recognized by historians as Florida's most distinguished historical character, for there is not another within its borders who is known from ocean to ocean, and whose generalship in warfare has the admiration of the civilized world. A more regal soldier, with magnetic personality—royal in its wild uncivilized way—has never been given to the world. His father was a white trader among the Creeks of Southern Georgia, who had met and won a beautiful Seminole maiden, whom he abandoned when their son, Osceola, was only four years old. It was in the year 1808, that the forsaken wife, Chekika, still young and attractive, crossed the border line between Georgia and Florida, and sought a home with the warlike Seminoles of the more Southern country.

Whether or not the mother of young Osceola instilled into his mind a desire for revenge no one can tell, but she surely made him an instrument of vengeance in requital of the wrongs heaped upon her people by the white men.

She trained him, first of all, to be a warrior; she taught him all the warlike traditions of the Creeks and Seminoles; and having in his veins the blood of two superior races—the white and the red—he was far above the average Indian in intelligence and arose rapidly to rank and power. He possessed the Indian craft and cunning, as well as the superior sagacity of the pale face. He spoke English, the language of his father, and also Creek or Seminole, that of his mother, so he was well equipped for meeting their foes in conference and, being eloquent by nature, was the chosen spokesman on all occasions. Although known only as a sub-chief, Osceola's notable attainments and his natural dominant qualities forced recognition from all his people as the actual leader of the Seminoles.

The King of the Seminoles, by right of inheritance, was Micanopy, who was present at the confer-

ence of the white commissioners and the red men at Fort King, and who, though he had assented to the emigration treaty, was swiftly turned by Osceola's skill and daring, which turned the tide of events in Seminole history. For Osceola, erect, defiant, and glaring at his foes whom he cunningly outwitted, pierced the rejected treaty with his keen-edged knife, when he said, on approaching the Council table: "Rather than act the coward by signing away the Seminole's inheritance, and taking my people into a strange land, I will fight 'til the last drop of blood moistens the dust of the Seminoles' hunting grounds. The land is ours, and this is the way I will sign all such treaties." The Treaty, still preserved in the Archives at Washington plainly shows them cut through three leaves, made by Osceola's dagger. The desk also showing the dagger mark, as well as the ink spilled by him.

Osceola possessed strong personal magnetism, and is said to have swayed his followers with a mere glance, while his shout of command produced an electric effect on all who heard it.

The key to his hatred of the whites is reported to have been the seizure of a much loved wife who was taken from him by slave-traders on the score of having been the daughter of a runaway slave woman, who later married an Indian chief, her father.

Arrested by order of General Thompson at Fort King, on his protests against the capture of his wife, he was placed in chains and, although later liberated, from that day on revenge was his only thought.

He was thirty years old when he came into prominence by attending the meeting of the chiefs with General Thompson.

On the 28th of December, 1835, Osceola suddenly appeared at Fort King and killed General Thompson and his secretary while taking their morning walk, and the same day Major Dade was surrounded by Indians in a swamp on a bend of the Withlacoochee River, where he and his whole command were annihilated. Osceola's fertile brain evolved both the plan and place of attack.

Many visitors go yearly to this spot, Dade Memorial Park, near Bushnell, Florida, where Major Dade and 108 Americans, his entire command, were massacred by the Seminoles. Eighty acres, embracing the scene of the massacre was purchased by the Florida Legislature to provide for the establishment of this park. At the place where the soldiers made their last stand there has been built a replica of the breastworks, the logs made of concrete. A monument of native stone in which are set two large bronze tablets dedicating the spot and giving the

names of the officers and men engaged in the conflict. The monument is surmounted by a life sized figure in bronze representing the infantry soldier in uniform of the time; small monuments mark the spot where Major Dade, Captain Frazier and Lieutenant Mudge fell. An imposing arch marks the entrance to the park.

Later, Osceola was arrested and taken a prisoner to St. Augustine. He could have made his escape with the other prisoners from the dungeon at Fort Marion, but he said: "I have done nothing to be ashamed of; it is for those to feel ashamed who entrapped me."

Osceola was later sent to Fort Moultrie on Sullivan Island, near Charleston, South Carolina, with two hundred and fifty prisoners, and died there January 30, 1838 at the age of thirty-four years.

To Fort Moultrie went George Catlin, the portrait painter of Indians eager to add to his gallery of notables the Seminole Chiefs, before they should be sent on their journey to Oklahoma.

Osceola arrayed himself in his best and stood accoutred for war while the painting was done. "I have painted him," wrote the artist, "in precisely the costume in which he stood for his picture, even to a string and a trinket. He wore three ostrich feathers in his hair and on his head a turban made of a varicolored cotton shawl. His dress was chiefly calico with a handsome sash or belt around his waist, and his rifle in his hand."

Shortly after his portrait was painted, Osceola became ill with a putrid sore throat. The physicians of Charleston held a consultation over him, but he refused their ministrations preferring the incantations of the medicine man of his tribe. This availed him little.

A half hour before death, he called for his costumes of war, and donned them. At his request, the officers of the post were summoned to see him arrayed for battle. Before their gaze, he painted one side of his face with vermilion—as one going into the fight. In silence he then shook hands with all the onlookers; he let himself be lowered again upon his bed and drew his scalping knife. Grasping it in his right hand, he folded his arms across his breast; and without a struggle passed on.

Two of his wives were by his side. Their piercing wails told the end had come.

A plaster cast of his face was taken shortly after death, which is preserved in the Fort St. Augustine, together with a standing life sized figure of him with his wife and child amid suitable surroundings in one of the casements, just as we might have pictured him in life. These were donated by Chauncey Depew.

At Fort Moultrie, where Osceola was buried, is a stone pillar with the following inscription:

#### OSCEOLA

#### PATRIOT AND WARRIOR

Died at Fort Moultrie  
January 30, 1838

In military tactics, the name of no greater genius adorns the pages of history than that of Florida's Patriot—Osceola The Seminole.