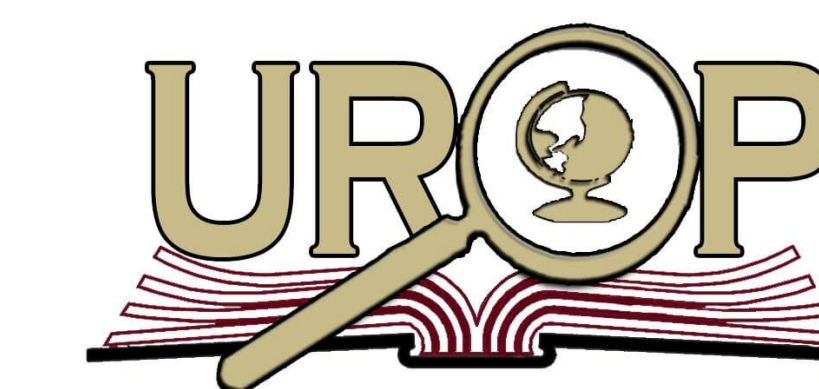




Tallahassee Turns 200: Complex Perspectives on Native Americans in Early Tallahassee (1821-1841)



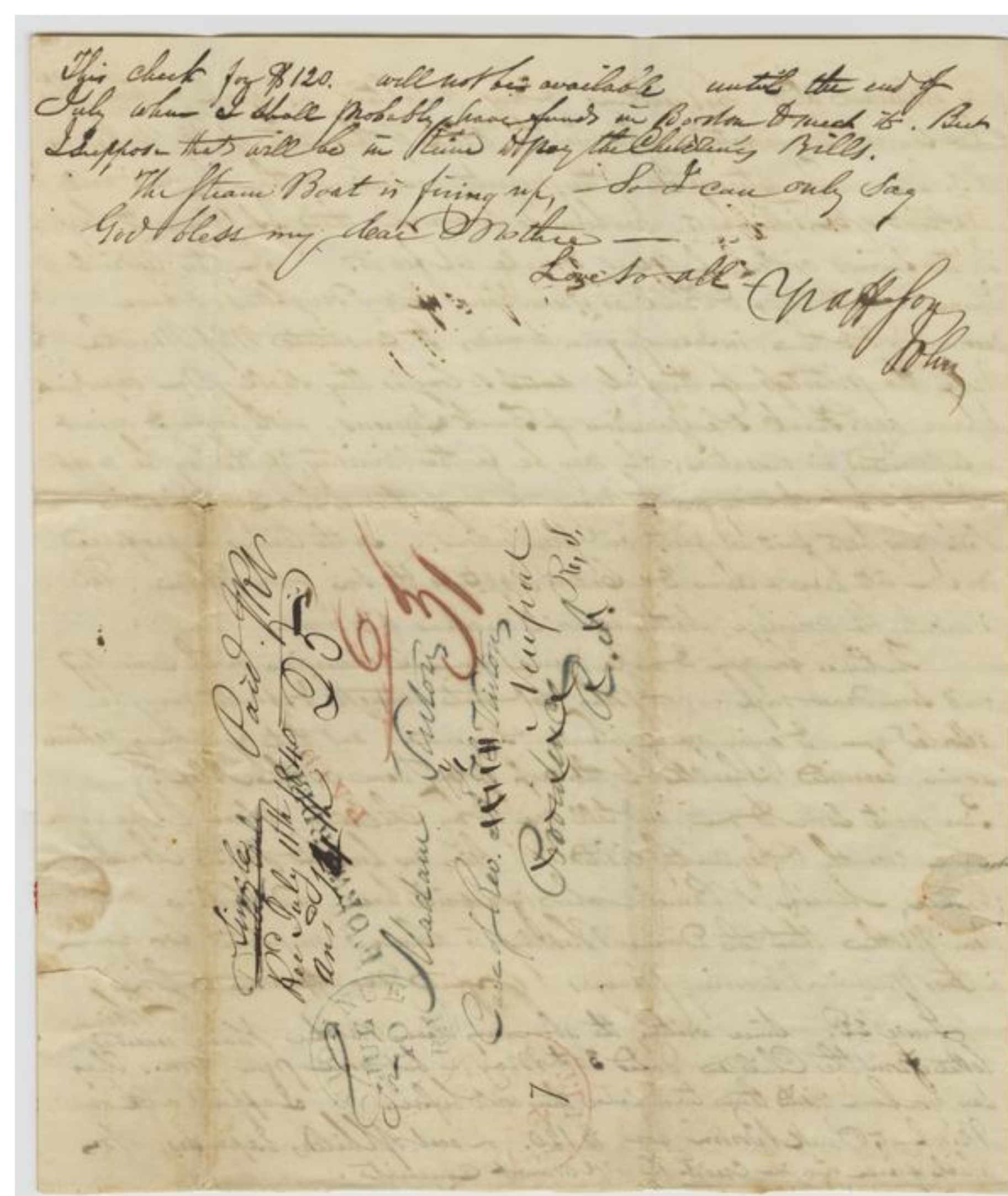
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Background Information:

In 2024, Tallahassee will celebrate its bicentennial anniversary. Theater with a Mission is celebrating this milestone by looking back on the city's earliest history, from the selection of the Capital's location through the first decades of this city's lifespan. Through research, one area of contention quickly emerged: what were the earliest settlers' opinions of and reactions to their Native American neighbors? Secondary sources vary wildly in their recounting, from Washington Irving's accounts of the scornful, untrustworthy warriors in *The Crayon Papers* to T.D. Allman's *Finding Florida* portrayal of reasonable diplomats so utterly scorned by the white settlers that even their names are recorded incorrectly in the history books. This unclear past lays a troubled foundational relationship to Native Americans that continues through Tallahassee's history and into the current day. Through my research I delved into primary accounts from early Tallahassee to begin to understand the complex and oftentimes contradictory feelings of the Tallahassee settlers, both to clarify our city's history and to hopefully provide some insight into its present.

Methods:

- Generalized study: this project began with examination of secondary sources such as historical biographies, oral histories, and abridged transcripts to establish an overview of Tallahassee's early history. These secondary sources were augmented by primary sources at key points of interest, such as diary entries and selections from relevant newspapers.
- Annotated bibliography: Next, I moved to building an annotated bibliography of sources related specifically to perspectives on Native Americans. This began with cataloging any mention of interactions with native tribes from the above-mentioned secondary sources. Then, through examination of the sources cited within these secondary sources and additional research through both FSU libraries' special collections and the digital repositories of other universities, I began collecting relevant primary sources. These sources were then examined and, if found relevant, added to the bibliography.
- Primary analysis: for the final stage of my research, I selected four primary documents to examine in-depth, aided by research mentors and peers. Once selected, I obtained scans or transcriptions of all original documents and began transcribing, contextualizing, and interpreting these letters to obtain preliminary results.



Captain John Rogers Vinton's Letter to his Mother, June 1840

"They did not make an attack on our citizens, but they were extremely insolent and made many threats."

Governor Duval, letter to Secretary of War John Calhoun



Chief Neamathla, described as the leader of North Florida's native tribes until he was deposed by DuVal and replaced by Chief Tuckose Emathla in July of 1824

Preliminary Results:

While further analysis of these letters and their context will continue to reveal enlightening information, this research has already uncovered a variety of complex viewpoints on Native Americans crucial to an accurate dramatization of early Tallahassee. Through intertextual examination, a gendered theme has emerged:

- As 1820s Floridian society placed women and men in vastly different social climates, the gender of a settler has implications as to their potential view of Native Americans. Men, especially men in government, were more likely to see Native Americans as both violent and troublesome, the "arduous" duty of relocating them requiring "uncommon patience, time, and prudence" (Quotes from Governor Duval, letter to Secretary of War John Calhoun via *Territorial Papers of the United States*). Women had a more peaceful understanding of their native neighbors, likely a result of "seeing them about most of the time" in both social and trade situations when natives would "come into [a settler's] house with venison and game to sell" (Quotes from Lizzy Brown's memoir via *The Florida Historical Quarterly*)

Conclusions:

Views on Native Americans were not as monolithic and fixed as modern imaginations paint them to be. The social and political climate of relationships between Native Americans and settlers shifted wildly from 1821 to 1841, and viewpoints on Native American tribes were just as fickle. As demonstrated by DuVal's letters, settlers switched their opinions on native tribes to match the latest political failure or success. Within months, they could run the full gamut of opinions, from seeing Natives as educated peoples to savage brutes.

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"This fall I saw for the first time a grand [gathering] of Indians...I remember them as a handsome body of men."



Lizzy Brown, one of the first children in the new city of Tallahassee who cataloged her experiences in Florida through a detailed memoir