



Florida's Pocahontas: A Changing Perspective?



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Abstract

How has the perspective of White settlers in Territorial Tallahassee affected the stories told about the Muskogee tribe?

Many of the perspectives regarding the interactions between Native Americans and White settlers have been told from the perspective of White settlers. Many of these perspectives describe the Native Americans as “savages” and depict them with a negative connotation. This is evident in the story Governor William Pope Duval told of Chief Neamathla and shown in the way many of the White settlers referred to Milly Francis’s father and the rest of their tribe as “savage” and “cruel”. Milly Francis is depicted in a very positive light because she saved the life of Duncan McCrimmon. However, research reveals that this act of kindness and bravery towards a White man displayed by someone of the Muskogee tribe was viewed by Whites as an anomaly in Native American behavior. Milly Francis herself, however, saw her intervention on behalf of McCrimmon as a normal human response. These contradicting perspectives illuminate why the Muskogee have had no choice but to fight hard for their lives and their homes when provoked by White settlers.



A portrait of Milly Francis in 1818

Discussion and Conclusion

- The Milly Francis story reinforced prejudices against Native Americans because Milly Francis was perceived as an outlier and the policy of removing Native Americans from Florida in the Indian Removal Act was implemented anyway.
- It is evident that around the time that Francis was to receive the Congressional Medal of Honor, many members of the Muskogee Nation had been removed from Florida and forced to travel the Trail of Tears.
- The purpose of the Ethan Allen Hitchcock’s journal was to write an ethnography about different Native American tribes, so that White people could gain more insight on Native American culture and their people.
- In order to prevent findings from being so negatively biased, the executive department of the Federal government appointed Hitchcock as the researcher because he was known for being fair and honest.
- Hitchcock interviewed Milly Francis about the encounter with Duncan McCrimmon and her tribe. He found that Milly Francis didn’t consider her actions exceptional, she simply sympathized with the young man.
- Milly Francis believed that McCrimmon shouldn’t be punished for participation in the war because he was simply too young to understand his participation in the war and engage in it through his own judgment.
- The narrative is that Milly Francis saved McCrimmon’s life and she is painted as a great heroine, but even then Milly Francis wasn’t even recognized for her “heroic act” until years later, after her lifetime.
- Even then, the rest of her tribe were still depicted as “savages” in concert with the common narrative. Whites remained surprised at the idea that there could be a “civilized” Native American, and speculated that Milly’s “half-breed” status accounted for her sympathy.

Methods

- I examined a variety of secondary and primary sources that related to Territorial Florida, so that I understood the culture, society, and atmosphere in Tallahassee from the time period of 1821-1841
- I built a bibliography of sources that reflected the area that I would like to focus on (sources include videos from a Muskogean storyteller, an ethnographic study on the Muskogee tribe, a book written about Milly Francis)
- After choosing to specialize my research on the Muskogee tribe, I have chosen to identify one specific primary source, the Journal of Ethan Allen Hitchcock, which concentrates on the encounter between Milly Francis, her tribe, and Duncan McCrimmon
- I will illuminate and critique that primary document to depict interactions between Muskogeans and Whites

References

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Great Seal of the State of Florida 1935-1985

Introduction

In the founding of Tallahassee, there was a convergence of different cultures, including the Spanish, the English, the Seminoles, and the Muskogee. History has many different perspectives and from the 1800s, there are mainly stories told from the perspective of the White man, instead of the Natives. Most of the Muskogee tribe’s history is told orally, but with a thorough investigation, I would like to use the stories told by White settlers to frame an understanding of the perception of the Muskogee tribe during Territorial Florida and address whether Milly Francis’s encounter with Duncan McCrimmon has actually changed attitudes toward Native Americans.