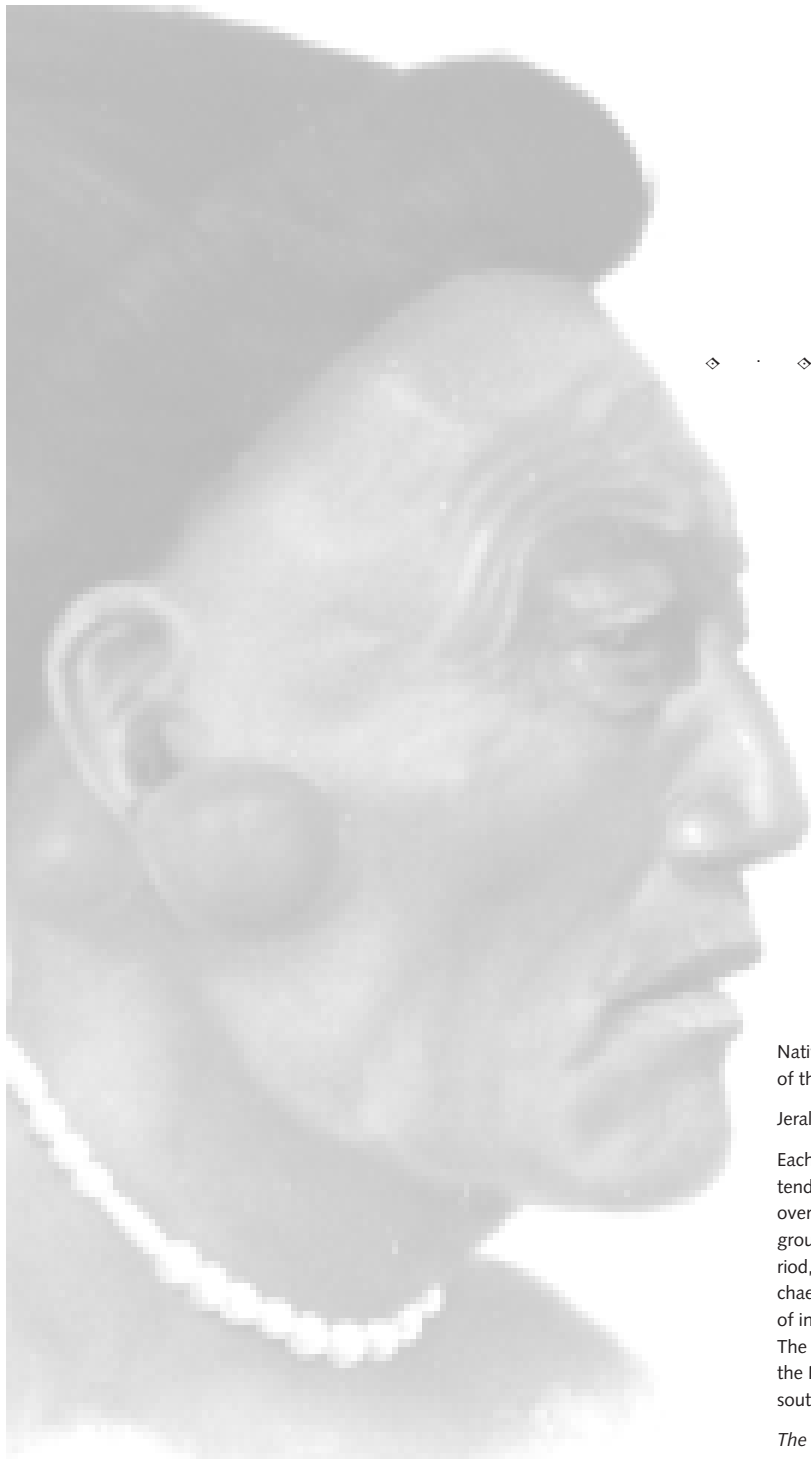


Florida's Indians from Ancient Times to the Present



Native Peoples, Cultures, and Places
of the Southeastern United States

Jerald T. Milanich, Series Editor

Each volume in this series is intended to provide a highly readable overview of an American Indian group, the culture of a discrete period, region or place, a major archaeological site, or a specific topic of interest crossing many cultures. The goal is to make readers aware of the Native American heritage of the southeastern United States.

The Apalachee Indians and Mission San Luis by John H. Hann and Bonnie G. McEwan

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University Press of Florida
Gainesville
Tallahassee
Tampa
Boca Raton
Pensacola
Orlando
Miami
Jacksonville

This publication has been financed in part with historic preservation grant assistance provided by the Bureau of Historic Preservation, Division of Historical Resources, Florida Department of State, assisted by the Historic Preservation Advisory Council. However, the contents and opinions do not necessarily reflect the views and opinions of the Florida Department of State, nor does the mention of trade names or commercial products constitute endorsement or recommendation by the Florida Department of State.



A Florida Heritage Publication

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03 02 01 00 99 98 C 6 5 4 3 2 1

03 02 01 00 99 98 P 6 5 4 3 2 1

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA

Florida's Indians from ancient times to the present / Jerald T. Milanich
p. cm. —(Native peoples, cultures, and places of the southeastern United States)
Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 0-8130-1598-7 (cl.: alk. paper). — ISBN 0-8130-1599-5 (pbk.: alk. paper)

1. Indians of North America—Florida. 2. Florida—Antiquities.

I. Title. II. Series.

E78.F6M555 1998 97-45841

975.9'01—dc21

The University Press of Florida is the scholarly publishing agency for the State University System of Florida, comprising Florida A&M University, Florida Atlantic University, Florida International University, Florida State University, University of Central Florida, University of Florida, University of North Florida, University of South Florida, and University of West Florida.

University Press of Florida
15 Northwest 15th Street
Gainesville, FL 32611
<http://nersp.nerdc.ufl.edu/~upf>

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Apalachee Indians in Louisiana, photographed ca. 1914

Past and Present

The September 1996 issue of the *Florida Anthropologist* contained a remarkable snapshot in its “Featured Photograph” section (p. 163). Taken about 1914 in Bayou Cypre, Louisiana, the black-and-white image shows five great-great-grandchildren of John Baptiste Vallery, “identified as an Apalache[e] Indian in Catholic baptismal records in Natchitoches, Louisiana.”

Why is this eighty-five-year-old photograph of Apalachee Indians so extraordinary? Why would an early twentieth-century record of five American Indians be of interest today? The answers to those questions are in large part what this book is about.

The first Indians came into the region that is now Florida 12,000 years ago. The land they found and from which they wrested their livelihood was a land far different from the Florida of today. It was the end of the Pleistocene, the Great Ice Age, and Florida was cooler and drier. Having huge amounts of water tied up in glaciers around the world meant that sea level was as much as 300 feet lower than it is today. As a consequence, Florida’s total land area was about twice what it is presently.

As human populations increased and as the climate of Florida became more like it is at present, the native societies also changed. By about 3000 B.C., the warmer and wetter conditions had resulted in the appearance of modern vegetation communities. Sea level also had risen nearly to its modern level. The number of people continued to increase, and by the time the first Europeans invaded the land Juan Ponce de León had named *La Florida*, literally hundreds of different Indian societies lived in every part of the state.

One of those groups was the Apalachee Indians, whose home was in the eastern panhandle. Some of the most important Apalachee Indian towns,

including their precolumbian capitals, were in Leon County. Indeed one of the most important archaeological sites in Florida—Lake Jackson, a precolumbian Apalachee Indian capital—is quite near Tallahassee, Florida’s present-day state capital. Many other native groups lived elsewhere in the state, from the western panhandle to the northeast coast and southward to the Keys.

But the lives these native peoples had carved out of their natural settings would soon be threatened and ultimately destroyed. Florida and the rest of the Americas drew colonists from Europe, especially from Spain, France, and later Great Britain. Conquistadors, entrepreneurs, soldiers, missionary friars, and settlers all came to Florida seeking wealth, souls to save, and new lands to colonize.

Two centuries after the founding of the first European town, St. Augustine, the European colonization of Florida had resulted in the destruction of the native populace. By 1763 warfare, slave raiding, and especially epidemics of disease had annihilated what had been a population of some 350,000 people at the time Ponce de León first came to Florida in 1513.

European conflicts, which spilled over to rivalries in the Americas, including the southeastern United States, also helped to contribute to the demise of the Florida Indians. When Spain withdrew from St. Augustine and Florida in 1763–64 as a result of a treaty with Great Britain, fewer than 100 Indians remained to accompany the departing Spaniards. And most of those native people were not descendants of the indigenous people who had been there when St. Augustine was founded in 1565. Rather, they were the relatives of South Carolinian, Georgian, and other native groups who had moved southward into Florida during the late colonial period.

During the early eighteenth century, a time when raids on Spanish missions by English-speaking Carolinian militia destroyed most of the existing Indian settlements in northern Florida, some of the Indians fled westward, out of the state. Nearly all disappeared, probably merging with other native societies and losing their own ethnic identities. One remnant population known to have survived into the nineteenth century was a small number of Apalachee Indians, who in 1836 were living on the Red River in Louisiana. Researchers—James Covington in the 1960s and more recently Donald Hunter—have documented the presence of those Red River Apalachee, perhaps the last of the Florida Indians. The few native people taken to Cuba from St. Augustine in 1763–64 did not survive long in their new setting. Only the Apalachee endured, and they apparently ceased to exist sometime in the nineteenth century. Or did they?

The photograph in the *Florida Anthropologist* is proof to the contrary. Those of us who had lamented the final demise of the Florida Indians were wrong. All the indigenous Indians of Florida were not lost under the stifling blanket of colonialism. Recently, descendants of the Apalachee Indians literally walked out of history into the present. Thanks to the research of Donald Hunter and to the Apalachee themselves, the story of these modern Louisiana residents is now being told.

This book is about the Apalachee Indians and their neighbors, people like the Calusa, Tequesta, Jororo, Potano, and Ais, who once made their homes in Florida. It also is about their ancestors and their ancestors' ancestors, a chain of people going back 12,000 years to the first Floridians.

Today in Florida there are other Indians, who also have a proud past and whose stories deserve to be told. These people include the descendants of Creek Indians who began moving into Florida after 1750 and became the Seminole and Miccosukee people. Many modern residents of Florida do not know that the Seminole and the Miccosukee Indians are not descendants of the precolumbian Florida Indians. Their histories, like the histories of all other Floridians living in the state today, lie outside the boundaries of what is rapidly becoming the third largest of the 50 united states.

The 13,000,000 late twentieth-century residents of Florida include not only Seminole and Miccosukee peoples but other Native Americans as well. Like nearly all other Floridians, these Native Americans moved to Florida or were born there in the last century. These modern Florida Indians also are a part of the story told here.

In organizing this book I have chosen to begin at the beginning, the time of the Paleoindians, when perhaps only a few dozen people initially moved into the state in search of food, water, and the other items they needed to sustain their way of life. Soon these earliest Indians were joined by others, and over the next several thousand years, the time of the Archaic cultures, many generations utilized Florida's natural bounty. As the environment changed, so did the native cultures. The first two chapters draw on archaeological and paleoenvironmental evidence to relate what we know about these early people, who would eventually establish settlements throughout Florida.

The next five chapters draw on archaeological investigations to describe the various cultures that developed out of the earlier Archaic cultures by 500 B.C. As we shall see, we can separate these later people into a number of distinctive cultures, each associated with a geographical region. Despite

their diversity, which arose in large part because of the different environmental zones in which they lived, these native groups shared many aspects of their lifeways. At least some cultures can be traced forward into the colonial period, a time when European observers recorded information about the native Floridians. Where appropriate, I have drawn on those historical accounts to help interpret and enhance the archaeological record of these post-500 B.C. precolumbian cultures.

The events of the colonial period and the impact of the European presence on the native societies are the focus of the eighth and ninth chapters. For the sixteenth, seventeenth, and early eighteenth centuries, archaeology and history combine to tell us who the people were, how they lived, and what happened to them. The final chapter brings us to the present.

My goal in writing this book is to provide a not-too-long overview, one that will be useful to readers interested in past and present Native Americans and in the history of the Sunshine State. I have tried to keep jargon to a minimum. However, archaeologists do use a lot of names. In order to know who it is we are speaking about, we must be able to refer to the various cultures and the people associated with those cultures. Unfortunately, we have no idea how precolumbian peoples may have referred to themselves. So we assign names, usually but not always names taken from modern places where archaeological investigations into the cultures were first carried out.

As a consequence, we have precolumbian cultures with names like Safety Harbor or Alachua or Caloosahatchee. Nearly all of these names have been in use in archaeological literature for many decades. For the oldest native cultures, those of the Paleoindians and Archaic peoples, we have been even less creative. Their names simply mean “ancient” or “old” Indians.

As much as possible, I promise not to dwell on these archaeological names for the early Florida Indians. For readers who may want to delve more deeply into the intricacies of archaeological and historical interpretations, I have provided a list of additional readings (and I have listed addresses for two web sites that will provide access to a wealth of on-line information for those using the Internet).

On the other hand, I do use a lot of modern place-names. I want to connect the past to the present, to convey that in the very places where we walk, talk, and toil today, Native Americans once did the very same things. It is important to respect that past, just as it is important for us to respect the human diversity that surrounds all of us today. Learning about the past increases our ability to appreciate the present and to plan our future.

Acknowledgments

Thanks are due Nancy White, Marvin Smith, and the other individuals who reviewed drafts of my manuscript and to the team at the University Press of Florida, especially Ken Scott, who gave me the impetus, and Meredith Morris-Babb, who gave intercontinental encouragement. My colleague Bill Keegan made it possible to complete this project a long way from home. I am grateful to you all.

The Bureau of Historic Preservation, Division of Historical Resources, Florida Department of State, provided a publication subsidy.