

STORIES FROM THE PAST

THE CITY OF OCALA WILL ONCE AGAIN HOST ITS LEGENDS OF THE FORT EVENT, CONNECTING THE PUBLIC WITH EVENTS THAT SHAPED OUR COMMUNITY.

WRITTEN BY BY MELISSA PETERSON

On December 28, 1835, Osceola, leader of the Seminole Indians, attacked Fort King with a band of approximately 240 tribe members. His primary focus was to kill Wiley Thompson, who had betrayed him and his people time and time again. Just outside of the walls of Fort King, but within view of the blockhouse, Osceola executed his attack, ending the life of Wiley Thompson and several others. Not a single Seminole was killed during the attack.

This is just one of the stories surrounding the site on which the reconstructed Fort King now sits, and it will be just one of the stories told during the Legends of the Fort event, hosted by the City of Ocala's Recreation and Parks Department on April 29, from 6-10pm. During the event, guests will step back into history to meet the legends of Fort King's past in a one-hour guided tour.

"Guests will be guided by lantern through the park where they will stop at stations along the trail to hear about the past," says Ashley Dobbs, marketing and communications manager for the City of Ocala. "All stories are connected to Fort King and Ocala's history and will be told by historic reenactors and a Seminole Tribe member. Folks also can explore inside the Fort while talking to other reenactors, learn pioneer games and purchase light snacks and refreshments. It's a wonderful experience to see the park in the night and explore a trail that is normally closed at those

times throughout the rest of the year."

The inaugural Legends of the Fort event was held in October of last year and is planned to be an ongoing event multiple times throughout the year. Tour guides for the event are Fort King and City of Ocala Volunteers.

"The storytellers are very knowledgeable," says Ashley. "Our program coordinator, Kathleen Ramirez, has studied local history for years and is heavily interested in the stories that have been passed down from generations all across Ocala and through the Seminole Tribe. Guests will encounter stories from the Seminole history, military campaigns, life in frontier Florida, important characters of their time and livelihood strategies for surviving—or not surviving—the harshest elements in Florida history."

The reconstructed fort was built in the summer of 2016 and took six months to complete. The structure was rebuilt to serve as an educational tool—not just for the students of Marion County but for all students across the state.

"Our period in history is studied in the eighth-grade curriculum," explains Ashley. "We currently educate more than 8,000 students annually on the history of the Seminole Wars. Many people do not realize that Fort King was the first county seat of the newly established Marion County. It also served as the first county courthouse."

During the event, group tours will leave every 15 minutes. Tickets must be purchased in advance and are \$10 per person for general admission. Children under 5 are free. Parking will be located on NE 41st Avenue.

Additional history-based events take place throughout the year at Fort King National Historic Landmark, including the two-day Festival at Fort King held in December each year, historic homesteading classes and, this month, School of the Soldier, happening on April 15, 10am-3pm, where you can learn about what it took to be a soldier during the Seminole Wars. In addition to these events, the park is open sunrise to 5pm every day, and the visitors center and Archaeology Resource Center are open every Friday and Saturday from 10am-5pm.

"Events like these give people the opportunity to hear stories from multiple perspectives from people who were here that made Ocala," says Ashley. "Fort King is specifically important because it was a major U.S. Army headquarters and was the birthplace of the city itself."

LEGENDS OF THE FORT

Fort King National Historic Landmark, 3925 E Fort King Street

April 29, 6-10pm

Purchase tickets at <https://bit.ly/3Yhs82D>
ocalafl.org/recpark or ftking.org

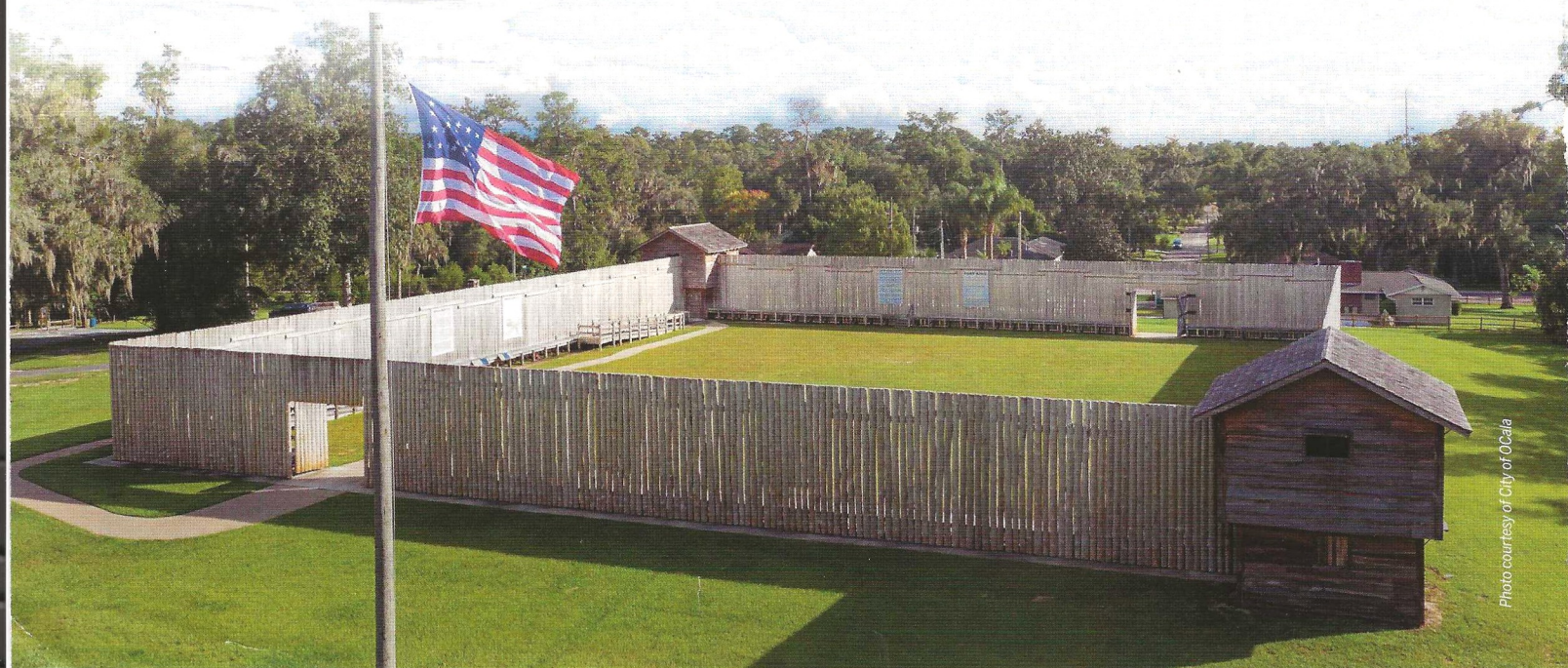


Photo courtesy of City of Ocala