

Chronology Of Historic Fort King

1826 - Gad Humphries constructs the first Seminole Indian Agency in what is now Ocala, FL near where Fort King would later be erected.

1827 - The history of Fort King begins with the sounds of soldiers and wagons making their way through nearby forests in search of a proper site to build a fort. And just as many forts eventually became American cities, this fort was destined to become Ocala, Florida.

March - Fort King is built to administrate the Treaty Of Moultrie Creek which relocated Seminoles to a large reservation in Central Florida. It was to promote law & order in the wilderness by protecting the Seminoles from trespassing settlers for a period of twenty years. The fort was named for Colonel William King, who had commanded the Fourth Infantry before Brigadier General Duncan L. Clinch.

1829 - As the recession of 1829 worsened, the army abandoned Fort King due to severe budget cuts. Seminoles were left with no soldiers to protect them, but did not disturb the fort. Instead, they waited for their protectors to return.

1832 - Andrew Jackson summons Seminole leaders to Paynes Landing (landing on the Ocklawaha River north of today's Eureka) to coerce their signatures on the new Treaty Of Paynes Landing ordering all Indians out of Florida (in compliance with the new Indian Removal Act passed by Congress ordering all Native Americans west of the Mississippi River).

June - Fort King is re-garrisoned to enforce the Treaty Of Paynes Landing. Now, instead of protecting the Seminoles, Fort King and its soldiers became a symbol of hate and oppression to the Seminoles.

1834 - Osceola, a young defiant Seminole, makes his first appearance to participate in talks held at Fort King between the U.S. Government and the Seminoles. Osceola rejects U.S. orders to leave Florida, opposed emigration to the West, and threatened war unless the Seminoles were left alone.

1835 - December 23, two companies of 108 U.S. Army Regulars, under the command of Major Francis Dade, were dispatched from Fort Brooke in Tampa to reinforce the troops at Fort King.

December 28, Major Dade and his troops were ambushed by Chief Micanopy and his war party. 106 soldiers lost their lives. This battle is known as the Dade Massacre.

That afternoon, outside of Fort King, Osceola and 80 warriors ambushed and killed Indian Agent Wiley Thompson and Lt. Constantine Smith. They then raided the nearby Sutler's Store, killing Erastus Rogers, his clerk and a boy before setting the store ablaze

These two events of December 28, 1835 are considered the beginnings of the Second Seminole War.

1835-1842 - During the seven-year war that followed, every major General and regiment of the U.S. Army were either stationed at, or passed through, the gates of Fort King. Notable Generals like Gaines, Scott, Clinch, Jessup, Taylor, and Armistead along with Junior Officers like Worth, Johnson, Prince, Bragg, Mead, and Pemberton would all see duty here. Yet, with all that might, the U.S. Army could not win the guerilla type warfare of the Seminoles. The Second Seminole War was the longest of the U.S. Indian wars.

1836 - Fort King is abandoned a second time and this time the Seminoles burn it to the ground.

1837 - The Seminole victory was short-lived. The Army returned, rebuilt the fort, and this time directed dragoon and infantry units in unrelenting "search & destroy" missions against the Seminoles. Colonel Duncan Clinch, one of the earliest commanding officers at Fort King wrote, "From my knowledge of the Indian character, I consider this post of more importance in controlling the Indians and in giving protection and security to the inhabitants of Florida than any other post in the Territory, as it is in the immediate vicinity of the largest number of the Florida Indians, and between them and the white inhabitants."

1839 - Major General Alexander Macomb convenes "peace talks" at Fort King.

1840 - The last fighting takes place at Fort King. Sixteen men, on a scouting mission led by Captain Gabriel Rains, were attacked just outside the Fort. They fought their way back into the Fort, but not until three soldiers were killed.

1842 - August 14, the Second Seminole War is officially declared over!

Oklahoma. The Seminoles that emigrated to Oklahoma became the Seminole Nation of today. A small number of "unconquered and defiant" Seminoles withdrew to the vastness of the Florida Everglades and today are known as the Seminole Tribe Of Florida. Soldiers killed during the war, including 34 at Fort King and the troops from the Dade Massacre, were disinterred and reburied under the coquina pyramids at the National Cemetery at St. Augustine, Florida.

- 1844 - With the war ended, the Fort was once again abandoned by the troops, transferred to the people of newly created Marion County, and the Fort was designated the County Seat. The Fort's buildings were used as the first courthouse and offices.
- 1845 - The first term of the Circuit Court was held at Fort King, which was used as the official courthouse until a new one could be built.
- 1846 - Settlers dismantle Fort King for its lumber, and a new courthouse is built in the new City Of Ocala.
- 1927 - The Ocala Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution purchase one acre of land at the Fort King site that was thought to be the original Fort King cemetery.
- 1933 - The Ocala Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution erect a monument to the war dead at the Fort King Cemetery.
- 1941 - The Kingsley family purchases the Fort King site and builds a home.
- 1953 - 1954 - The first sanctioned archaeological investigation of the Fort King site, with permission of the property owners, is completed by Wilfred T. Neil. He recovered over 1,000 artifacts; however, he did not locate any structural remains of the Fort. It would be another 35 years before an additional formal investigation would be undertaken.
- 1955 - Ocala dentist, Dr. Wayne McCall, Sr., purchased the home and 10 acres for \$27,700.00, and he and his wife Catherine raised seven boys there and owned the house until it was sold to the City of Ocala and Marion County in 2001.
- 1968 - Hurricane Gladys passes through Ocala and blows over a huge tree on the site exposing a cellar and over 100 beer & wine bottles thought to be from a Sutler's Store associated with Fort King.
- 1987 - During research of Ocala's Comprehensive Land Use Plan, City staff begins to realize the historical importance of this site for Ocala, Marion County and the nation. City Manager Scotty Andrews, Mayor E.L. Foster, and City Council Members support further historic preservation and archaeology. Paul Nugent of the Planning Department, believed an auger survey of the adjoining north 15 acres had to be demonstrated first before asking for a survey of the McCall property. Paul asked Joe Simmons, legal representative of the owners of the 15 acres, that if the City were awarded an archeological grant to survey the 15 acres, would Mr. Simmons and the owners give their permission. He answered, "yes"!

The City applied for a matching auger archaeology grant from the Florida

Department of State Bureau of Historic Preservation. One restriction made by the City was that there would be no cash match...any match had to be for in-kind services. Paul Nugent then convinced City Engineer, Bill Tenbroeck, to allow the time of the City survey crew to be counted towards the in-kind match.

Mr. Fred Gaske, an archeologist with the State of Florida Bureau of Historic Preservation, was always supportive of these types of grant requests. He did what he could behind the scenes in Tallahassee to make sure the Fort King project received "highly recommended" scores. The first of many grant requests was awarded and Fort King preservation was on its way!

Mark Bartholomew, Chief Surveyor with the City, assigned staff to survey the grid. Wooden stakes (survey lathes) were driven into the ground at each auger point, flagging tape wrapped around the top of each lather, and the location coordinates were written on it. Archeologist Bruce Pistek then drilled each auger hole, screened the dirt, placed the contents in labeled plastic bags, recorded the stratigraphy and then back-filled the holes. Without the survey crew hours, a match would never have been possible.

Robert Clark, City Transportation Planner, at the time of the first auger survey, had been reading a book entitled "**Fort Mellon 1837-1842: A Microcosm of the Second Seminole War**" written by Arthur E. Francke. The book contained an unidentified drawing of a fort which Clark readily identified as an illustration of the Second Fort King as depicted in the diary of Lieutenant John Sprague. Author Francke was contacted, confirmed the illustration was Fort King, and contributed a copy of the drawing. The drawing was used on the cover of the archeological report and appears on the Fort King National Historic Landmark website.

1991 - Ocala applied for and received a second matching grant from the State for an auger and ground penetrating radar survey of the McCall property.

1992 - Ocala applied for and received a Sustainable Community Program designation along with the \$25,000 reward that came with the designation. The funds were used for an excavation to find the remains of Fort King through Gary Ellis of the Gulf Archaeological Research Institute.

Marion County purchases the north 15 acres of the site, and the City signs an Interlocal Agreement to protect the site. Negotiations with Catherine McCall to purchase the McCall property breaks down.

1994 - Ocala applies for and receives a third matching grant from the Bureau of Historic Preservation to conduct an intensive archaeological evaluation of the north 15 acres. This survey concluded that the Fort was not located on these 15 acres, however, buildings surrounding the Fort were identified.

1997 - **August 19** - Henry Sheldon, a consulting engineer and history buff, drove by the property and noticed a "For Sale - Historic Site" sign on the McCall property. He immediately contacted City officials insisting that the public could not lose such an historic site. Bill Hunt of the City Planning Department set up a meeting in two days, instructing Sheldon to find someone to be our local "champion". Sheldon called John K. Mahon, retired University of Florida History Professor and author of "**History Of The Second Seminole War**" and asked if he would attend the meeting with Hunt and become our "champion." Meanwhile, Bill Hunt called local historic preservationist, Pamela Stafford, and asked if she too would attend the meeting.

August 21 - At the meeting, Sheldon showed a slide presentation depicting the historical importance of the Fort King site. The four concerned citizens committed to trying to save the site from development and leaned on Stafford's relationship with Catherine McCall and congressman Cliff Stearns to get the ball rolling. They also decided to show the slide presentation to the entire City Council on September 2, 1997. Assistant City Manager, Paul Nugent, had been working with Bill Hunt for the preceding 10 years on saving the site. Mahon and Sheldon also enlisted the help of the Seminole Wars Foundation of Florida, a group that historian and author Frank Laumer helped establish, to bring public attention to saving Seminole War diaries, documents and sites.

September 2 - Other historians and preservationists showed up at the City Council meeting. Local Seminole re-enactor Earl Debary, Historic Ocala Preservation Society (HOPS) President, John Olters, and Ocala Historic Preservation Advisory Board (OHPAB) member, Ira Holmes, all spoke of the significance of further studies into the site.

After the presentation, City Council President, Mike Amsden, and other council members indicated they would continue studies. Stafford agreed to negotiate with Catherine McCall on delaying development of the property and allowing further archeological examinations to try and locate actual structural features of the Fort, such as foundations, posts, etc. Gary Ellis, of Gulf Archeological Research Institute, was retained to conduct further studies.

1998 - **September** - Gary Ellis sends a status report letter to John Mahan which reads "We have undertaken an enormous amount of test excavations and remote sensing work, and our systemic approach has finally yielded the Fort! The work has resulted in the definition of a number of structural features related to both major Fort building episodes in the original 1827 Fort and the reconstructed 1837 Fort."

Ellis's findings included "46 stockade and building support postholes, a remnant of the original Fort's living floor, and at least seven areas containing structural remains. Artifacts recovered include numerous military buttons, and one 1838 half-dime coin, lead shot, early 19th Century ceramics, glass, nails, pipe stems and miscellaneous other period artifacts. Along with detailed military maps of the period locating the Fort on the hill, Ellis's findings conclusively substantiated a fort was on this site...Ellis had indeed found Fort King!

- 1999 -** Pamela Stafford arranges a meeting with Bill Hunt, Henry Sheldon and Congressman Cliff Stearns to ask for the Congressman's assistance in procuring a National Park Service Study. He agreed, and a Study was soon approved and signed off on by the President of the United States.

In order to facilitate the purchase of the property from Catherine McCall, Stafford and her group focused on a three-prong approach...the City of Ocala, Marion County and the State of Florida all join together to make this happen. They knew they needed the support of the Marion County Pennies For Parks program and decided to stack their next meeting in the Fort's favor. Some who attended the meeting and spoke passionately for this final piece of the puzzle included the Chief of the Seminole Nation from Oklahoma, the Leader of the Seminole Tribe of Florida, West Point dignitaries, City Council President, Mike Amsden, and City of Ocala Mayor, Gerald Ergle. Many letters were read from those who were unable to attend the meeting.

Pennies For Parks agrees to support the project, and soon the City of Ocala, Marion County, and the State of Florida join in to make the dream a reality!

- 2000 -** The Southeast Archaeological Center completes an assessment of the application requesting the site be designated a potential National Historic Landmark Site.

- 2001 - January -** Papers are signed, the property is acquired and the McCall family is thanked for their diligent protection of the land through their ownership.

May - National Park staff come to Ocala to hold roundtable discussions on the possibility of the site becoming a National Park.

- 2002 - April -** National Park staff delivers their report of various phases of development of the site and potential timelines, none of which could include re-construction of the Fort. If a reproduction of the Fort were to be built, then it could not hold a National Park designation.

October - Paul Nugent and Pamela Stafford meet with Carol Shull, Chief of the Federal National Historic Landmarks Survey Department. With her support, it was determined the site would qualify as a National Historic Landmark site.

Congressman Cliff Stearns was once again contacted to lend his support in Washington D.C.

2003 - April - Paul Nugent, Mike Amsden, Gerald Ergle and Pamela Stafford fly to Washington D.C. to attend the hearing held by the Landmarks Committee of the National Parks System Advisory Board. They were not allowed to speak; however, Congressman Stearns gave an eloquent speech about the historic significance of the project and pledged his support. The Board unanimously recommended the Fort King site for protection under the designation as a National Historic Landmark Site. The designation gives incredible protection to the site on a Federal level.

June - Nugent, Amsden and Stafford fly to Columbus, Ohio for a meeting of the National Parks System Advisory Board to show community support for the National Historic Landmark designation. The Board voted in favor of the designation and forwarded the nomination to the Secretary of Interior for her concurrence.

2004 - February 24 - Secretary of Interior, Gale Norton, signs the nomination and designates Fort King as a National Historic Landmark Site!

May 4 - Dr. Janet Snyder Matthews, Associate Director for the National Park Services Cultural Resource Department comes to Ocala and presents the National Historic Landmark designation to the citizens of Marion County at the downtown square.

Archaeological studies continue, but any plans to develop the site into a public park take a back seat due to budget cuts and the lack of interest for public funding from the tax rolls to develop the site.

2011 - April - A small vocal group continues to promote preservation and development of the historic site. The Fort King Heritage Association, Inc. (FKHA) is formed to "preserve, protect and promote" the Fort King National Historic Landmark Site, while serving as a citizen support group. FKHA begins to operate under a Memorandum Of Understanding (MOU) with both the City and the County. FKHA acts as a historical and fundraising organization.

2011 - 2013 - FKHA begins planning for development of the site, with utmost importance given to getting it open as a public park for daily visitors. The old McCall house on the property will serve as a temporary Visitors Center, and a mile-long Interpretive Trail with 21 historically informative kiosks will provide the basis for the new park. FKHA Board member Robin Corsiglia brings the interpretive signs to life by adding on-cell narration to each sign.

With the City of Ocala taking on administration of the new park, new paint and minor renovations are made to the house. Photos from the Dade Massacre re-enactment are pieced together by local graphic artist, Tito Comas, and made into a life-sized wall mural to greet those entering the Visitors Center.

A twelve minute video depicting the history of Fort King is written by A.T. Thomas and David Laffey and produced by Ron Mosby to welcome guests into the Visitors Center. Site-found artifacts and a reading room finish out the building.

2014 - May - Fort King officially opens to the public as a joint city/county park offering free admission, seven days a week, with the Visitors Center open Fridays and Saturdays using volunteer docents. Golf carts provide the Interpretive Trail experience to handicapped and elderly visitors.

September - The Ocala Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution agrees to lease their adjacent 1-acre Fort King cemetery to the city to bring that important property into the Park. The site is now 38 total acres! That same month, FKHA receives 501 C (3) tax exempt status.

December - FKHA agrees to support the application by the City of Ocala for a \$300,000.00 State of Florida Historical Special Category matching grant.

2015 - May - An eastern adjacent 3.5 acre parcel of land is purchased by FKHA with a grant from the private Felburn Foundation. The transaction included \$20,000.00 from FKHA and \$80,000.00 from the Felburn foundation. The site is now 42 acres!

For insurance and liability reasons, the MOU's are updated transferring FKHA assets to the City of Ocala.

2016 - May - FKHA kicks-off their **Buy A Log, Build A Fort** fundraising campaign with a goal of \$600,000 in cash and in-kind services. The aim is to sell 600 commemorative logs, Bronze (\$250), Silver (\$500) and Gold (\$1,000). Two traveling displays are produced by Conimar Corporation of Ocala for FKHA to take to local civic clubs, luncheons, meetings, etc, plus every festival in the area that would have us.

July - The State Of Florida grants the \$300,000 Special Category Grant to Fort King with a deadline of September 2017 to have the Fort re-constructed and match the grant.

December - The first re-enactment, "The Killing Of Wiley Thompson" is held on the site.

After reviewing RFP's (Request For Proposals), the City hires Tillman Engineering & Associates of Ocala as the design-build team to erect a replica of the 1837 Fort King.

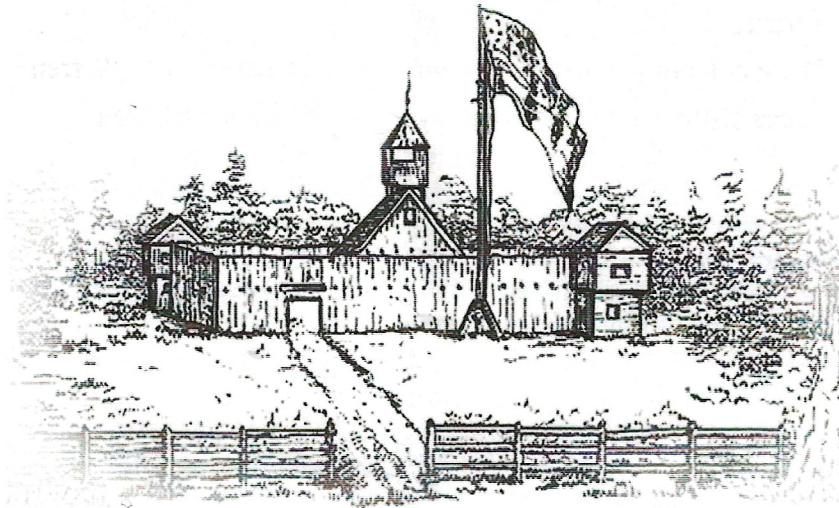
2017 - April - Site clearing begins, the first treated logs arrive, and construction begins.

May - FKHA has an invitational/public groundbreaking ceremony. Over 150 people attend, including a contingent from the Seminole Tribe of Florida. FKHA announces that they exceeded their fundraising goal, one year to the month from the kick-off of the **Buy-A-Log, Build-a-Fort** campaign.

July thru November - Despite Hurricane Irma coming through Ocala in September, the Fort is completed only a month behind schedule.

November 29 - V.I.P. Reception and tour of the Fort hosted by FKHA to recognize all donors, government officials and contributors.

December 1-3 - Grand Opening of the Fort to the public with school tours, re-enactments and an encampment.



2018

February – Fort King Heritage Foundation presents a check to the City of Ocala in the amount of \$220,253.24 in payment for the last invoice for construction of Fort King. The Fort is constructed and paid for!

May - 1841 Mountain Howitzer purchase by FKHF through the Felburn Foundation with the assistance of Guy Marwick was delivered May 10, 2018.

June - Clay Electric Foundation grant for \$14,175.00 was awarded to FKHF to pay for the purchase of museum quality Soldier and Seminole mannequins, period appropriate clothing, a display case construction, signs and mounting.

December - Third annual Ren-enactment "Fight for Freedom" was held at the Fort. School days were expanded to two days so 1,500 students could attend.

2019

April FKHF sponsored a re-enactment of the 175th Anniversary of the First Marion County Commission Meeting

November East parcel purchased for temporary Fort King Archaeology resource Center (City, County/TDC, FKHF/Felburn Foundation).
A contract was signed for the blacksmith shop and archaeology work.

2023

May 11, Fort King celebrated history with the dedication of the Blacksmith Shop.