



**John Lee Williams Visits Tallahassee Village meets Neamathla,
describes Indians, Ball Game, Rattlesnake dance,
and Cascade at Tallahassee**

Continued from our Fifth number. "Journal of the expedition to the Interior of West Florida."

October 28, 1823

After visiting Maj. Robinson's plantation near the Ochlockonee River, Williams "found himself at the new Tallahassee village. Seeing a stout Indian surrounded by a number of children, in a patch of pistache nuts, he approached the Indian and enquired for the chief of the village. He sternly enquired what was wanted with the chief? Said in tolerable English that he was Neamathla. Mr. Williams answered that he and his colleague were sent by the Governor of Florida to select a situation to build a house, for the meeting of his Council, that the distance from Pensacola to St. Augustine was so great, that it had become necessary to assemble the Council in the centre of the Territory. For that purpose he had sent commissioners to select a suitable spot, and desired him to assist them in the selection with his advice and counsel, and for any provisions his people could afford for their horses or guides, they should be well paid." Neamathla shown papers with signature and seal of governor. Seemed to be satisfied. Said also Walton was a "good man, and a friend. He then walked to a kind of gallery, where he ordered cigars, and pistachio nuts to be brought and conversed freely on common topics, several other Indians soon came in Neamathla became reserved and complained of illness." Dr. Simmons and his guide Ellis soon came up. Ellis teased Neamathla which "irked him." They knew each other. "He ordered our housed to be turned loose in his fields, and our baggage deposited in one of his council houses, said he wished us to tarry until morning, that he might consult with his people."

"In the afternoon the young men and women of this nation played ball against each other. The ball ground is a large circle, in the center of which is erected a pole 30 feet high, against which each party throws the ball, when it is caught rebounding by the party who threw it, they tally two, if caught by the opposite party them throw it at the pole. The players were all naked to the waist, and the males and females exerted themselves in equal energy. The men threw and caught with batsticks, the women used their hands only.



May scuffles ensued in prevented each other from catching the ball, but all ended in perfect good humor. The men evidently gave advantages to the women, who in the end won the game, on which the vanquished were sentenced to seek light wood for the evening council fire, which having procured, they brought in great order, on their shoulders, keeping their Indian file, and signing in concert.”

“The dancing square has a council house or rather shed, on each side, one of which the travelers occupied, one was occupied by the women, the others held a motley throng of all ages. Then Indian commenced the dance by a kind of reel, the figure though intricate was performed with perfect accuracy.”

“The Rattlesnake dance succeeded. At each corner of the square a wand or cane is stuck in the ground, around these points the long file of dancers double & coil in a thousand fantastic figures all singing in concert a melancholy but sweet air. The chief dictated a new verse after having gone round the square & made a short rest; the some seemed to be extempore, and the tenor of it an s tot he snakes, requesting them to go into their holes, that they may not be molested by the hunters.”

“A sage looking Indian remarked that should any one touch a wand while coiling round it, he would certainly be bitten by a snake on the first hunting excursion. The wampum dance and mad dance succeeded. This these the women wore rattles formed of Terrapin shells, tried to their legs, which in the dance sound much like a tambourine. During these dances their gestures were generally martial, often manful, and conducted with perfect order and harmony.”

“In the morning the commissioners had a audience before he Chiefs of the Village, where every objection being removed, they departed to explore the center of the Territory.”

Goes on to describe the geological aspects of area between Tallahassee and St. Marks. Goes on to describe the sinks (or rivers that go under ground). “On the low pine lands these streams often burst out in lakes & ponds, many of which appear to be evidently the mere channel of a river, which may often be traced for miles after it again sinks but a line of bushes, sink holes and water maples. In several instances a fine sized mill stream drains the waters of one lake into another, only two or three miles distant and is seen no more.”



On the Tallahassee Cascade: “A beautiful brook that passes the seat of government at Tallahassee had scoped out a gulph from 30 to 90 feet deep, and nearly a half mile in length, and sinks through the cleft of a rock, at the base of the hill. This gulph at times appears to have been half full of water; where the stream first pitches into it, there is a perpendicular fall of 20 or 30 feet.” to be continued

[Pensacola Gazette, May 29, 1824]

Journal subsequently continued. Goes on to describe the area around Tallahassee and decision to select it as a site. Says St. Marks, Miccosukee, and Wakulla Springs too unhealthy. On the other hand Tallahassee is “within four miles of the centre, betwixt the east and west lines of the territory, a more beautiful country can scarcely be imagined, it is high, rolling, and well watered, the richness of the soil renders it so perfectly adapted to farming, that living must ultimately be cheap and abundant.” Says already many settlers there. Says Indians about to be removed. Says 500 of them are now cultivating fields now although not very extensive, “will be immediately occupied by the white people and improved to great advantage. To these may be added the old fields from which the Indians were driven by General Jackson. These are covered with fine old peach trees, and many of the huts still remain in a good state of preservation. These circumstances render an early emigration of Tallahassee much less difficult than if the country was wholly unimproved. The seat of government will not only furnish a ready market for the produce of the farmers, but to respectable emigrants the society will infinitely more improved, than in a mere common place of business. Education will undoubtedly claim the early attention of the Legislature, and in no part of the world can it be fostered under the happier auspices than on the gentle rolling hills and native lawns of Tallahassee. Indeed it will not be presumption to anticipate the time when the great fountain of Wakully will become the Arethusa if not the Helicon of Florida.”

‘For drinks the sea no lovelier wave than thine.’

Says congress has given Territory a quarter section of land on which to erect public buildings.

Says Mr. Robinson has already built temporary buildings for the Council.

[Pensacola Gazette, June 5, 1824]



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Next installment of Journal:

“The Indians settlements in the center of the Territory of Florida are dominated generally the Fowl Towns. There are five principal villages, besides other scattting settlements, of tow, three or four huts in various directions.

1. Cahaliahathee is situated at the head springs of the western branch of the St. Marks river, about tow moves above the last of Tallahassee. This is rather a new settlement, the land is rich & the spring of water abundant and of excellent quality. There are about one hundred and eighty inhabitants, of whom seventy are warriors. Neamathla resides here, in fact he directed and assisted in making the settlement, his is chief of the Fowl Towns; but each village has particular chief, or Tusinugy, to regulate their civil concerns.
2. Old Tallahassee lies along the south side of the lake; here may be 200 acres improved, the land seems rich, the peach trees numerous and large, the huts much scattered. There 190 inhabitants of which 75 are warriors. Chefisuco Haj is chief of this village.
3. “Taphulga is situate on the Tallinhatchee creek, contains 145 inhabitants and 4 warriors. Emathlache is chief. This cite is reserved, tow miles square, for the use of Nea Mathla and 30 of his friends, to which he removes the ensuing autumn, while Emathlache removes to the Appalachicola River, to a reserve made to him and the mulatto king.” “The lands called Rock Comfort are said to be among the best about Ocklockey.”
4. Allikhadjae on the St. Marks above the great sink. 80 inhabitants, 30 warriors.
5. Etotulga governed by Emethla Hadjo, 70 inhabitants, 20 warriors.
6. New Mickasukey, 30 miles N. E. of Tallahassee. All the settlements contain about 500 inhabitants and about 174 warriors. Tokase Mathla is the national and Tuskeeneh the civil chief. The old villages situate on the borders of the great Savana are deserted, and the present improvements are comparatively new.”

“The about Indians depend principally on hunting for their meat, buy they raise many vegetables they have bins of corn through the year. They cultivate, besides, Pistache and other ground nuts, beans pumpkins, melons and many sweet potatoes, beside they make a kind of Cassare bread from the bamboo briar root, which they grate up, and preserved the starch. They seem to enjoy much peace and happiness among themselves, and except occasionally hunting the cattle and hogs of their white neighbors, are quiet inhabitants.”



Says Indians are emigrants from the Muscogulge or Creek nations, many of the fugitives of for the tribes, conquered by Gen. Jackson; they took refuge in Florida after the battles of Emukfaw, the Horseshoe, &c. The chiefs are generally men of much talent and experiences, and seem disposed to recommend to the people the raising of stock and the cultivation of the soil.

“The Indians in general are rather idle, violently republican, and much disposed to watch with jealous care the power of their chiefs. The men are more handsome than the women, and dress more neatly and with better taste. The women are more close and sharp in making a bargain than the men, perhaps their property coasts them more labour, than that of the men. Their children appear healthy and smart. The female usually carries her infant in her arms, not on her back, as is usual among the northern tribes. Education is not know there, children expense very little restraint from their parents from their parents, yet there seems to be much affection existing between them; they scarcely are made to labor until they adopt it by choice. They are not so ingenious in manufacturing, their wampums as the northern tribes, but are much more addicted to raising cattle, hogs, and fowls. Indeed their savage character is considerably broken and it would be surprising if they should make considerable progress in civilization at the situation where they are now about to be located.”

[Pensacola Gazette, June 12, 1824]

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