

The Miccosukee

Bruce Dahlquist, February 2025

As you drive around Florida, the impact of the Miccosukee can be seen throughout all quadrants of the State. While driving south on U.S. 41, you pass many signs saying “Indian Village”, then after the turn to the east on your way to Miami or the Keys, you pass the town of Miccosukee. These are the physical reminders of the Miccosukee Tribe, dating back centuries. The Miccosukee Tribe pre-dates Columbus.

The term “Miccosukee” is based upon the words “micco” which means leader, and “sukee” which means pig or hog.

The colors in the Miccosukee logo of yellow, red, black, and white symbolize the circle of life – east, north, west, and south.

In the 1700’s, the Spaniards enticed the Lower Creeks to relocate into Spanish Florida and assume land previously occupied by Florida’s Indigenous tribes. The Miccosukee Tribe in northern Florida was part of the Lower Creek Region.

The Creek Nation was divided into 2 areas, extending from the Appalachians to the Keys. The Upper Creeks lived in the mountains and spoke Muskogee. The Lower Creeks lived at the base of the mountains and spoke Mikasuki, a dialect of the Hitichiti.

The Miccosukee established settlements in the Apalachee Bay region, including the city of Miccosukee. It stretched for 10 miles along the shore of Lake Miccosukee. At one time, this was one of the largest cities in Florida. Lake Miccosukee is north of U.S. 10, between SR 319 and SR 19. In the 18th Century. The Miccosukee settled here to escape both the white settlers and the Upper Creeks, as they resisted efforts to become assimilated.

In the 18th Century, the British recognized the Miccosukee as a tribal town affiliated with the Creek Confederacy.

After the Revolutionary War, white settlers started pushing west and south creating conflict with the Upper Creeks. These conflicts led to the Creek War of 1813-1814. The Upper Creeks, known as the Red Sticks, joined the tribes of Florida after being defeated during the Creek War.

This pushed the Miccosukee farther south. The Miccosukees eventually settled around Alachua, near Gainesville. The Miccosukee adapted to living in small groups in temporary hammock style.

The Miccosukees and the Seminoles remained separate entities from the Creek Confederacy, which was negotiating with the Europeans who had claimed influence over Alabama, Georgia, and northern Florida. The Native Americans in Florida disputed these negotiations because the Creeks did not speak for those living in Florida. Prior to 1812, the Creek National Council was also denying treaty annuities to the tribes in Florida.

The destruction of the Negro Fort on the Apalachicola River by American forces and their Creek allies in 1816, contributed to the First Seminole War.

The Battle of the Miccosukee was also one of the key actions leading to the First Seminole War. It was fought northeast of Tallahassee. The Whites claimed victory because they destroyed many Miccosukee villages. The Indians saw this as a victory because the fighting delayed further destruction and bloodshed, allowing women and children to escape farther south.

The Miccosukees joined with the Seminoles in defending their Florida homeland against the encroaching white settlers and Andrew Jackson during the 1820's. Although they were independent of the of the Upper Creeks, the U.S. saw them as a single entity.

Another factor leading to the First Seminole War was after U.S. troops broke a verbal agreement with Neamathia, the Chief of the Lower Creek village. The troops attacked the Lower Creek's village of Fowltown in southwest Georgia on November 21st, and again on November 23rd, 1817. These unprovoked attacks brought together an alliance of the Creek and Seminole warriors for war against the United States. The Indians then retaliated with the Scott's Massacre and the Battle of Ocheessee on the Apalachicola River, attacking Fort Scott and Fort Hughes in Georgia.

April 1, 1818, forces under Andrew Jackson attacked again under the pretext of retaliation of Indian raids against the settlers in Georgia. It was also an opportunity for the U.S. to grab East and West Florida, which were under Spanish control. The Spanish were politically and militarily too weak to protect Florida.

When Florida became a U.S. territory in 1821, the government increased the pressure to remove all Indians living in Florida. Treaties such as Moultrie Creek (1823) and Payne's Landing (1833) were agreements that tried to bring together all of the Native Americans in Florida into isolated tracts of land – first in central Florida and later in southeastern and southwestern Florida. This was to provide settlers with more available land in Florida. These treaties were never agreed on by all of the Florida bands, including the Miccosukee.

During the Seminole Wars, many Seminoles were forced to relocate west of the Mississippi River to the Indian Territory, forming the Seminole Nation of Oklahoma. However, approximately 200 Seminoles stayed in Florida. Those who remained were

concentrated in central and southern Florida. As early as 1827, they had a permanent presence in the Everglades.

With the Indian Removal Act of 1830, the U.S. relocated several thousand more Seminole and hundreds of Black Seminole who were associated with them into the Indian Territory in Oklahoma.

The U.S. tried to put the Florida Seminoles within the Creek Confederacy under Creek administration, which was not correct. The Florida Seminoles in Oklahoma got their own reservation and got federal recognition and became the Seminole Nation of Oklahoma.

Those who remained fought the U.S. during the Second and Third Seminole Wars. Eventually, this led to large groups of Indians also being moved to the Indian Territory.

The Second Seminole War began in 1835, after Indians retaliated for repeated abuses by the white settlers in Florida - including theft, violence, and illegal entry into Indian lands.

The Indians conducted guerilla style warfare against the superior and technologically advanced U.S. government. The Miccosukee Chief Sam Jones, proved to be an effective leader during the Second Seminole war. His strategy of hiding the tribe on tree islands (Hammocks) in the Big Cypress Swamp ensured the presence of present-day Seminoles and Miccosukee living in Florida.

The effects of the war resulted in many more Indigenous people dying or being deported. However, it did not lead to their complete removal. By 1842, approximately 300 Native Americans remained in Florida. More than 4,000 were forcibly removed to the Indian Territory between 1835-1842.

The Third Seminole War began in 1855 when a small band of Indians, led by Billy Bowlegs, attacked American encampments in response to repeated harassment and destruction of property by the U.S. military forces. The result was that Billy Bowleg's band was shipped to Oklahoma. However, many Indians remained, living in the swamps and wetlands in the south.

By 1858, 200 ancestors of the modern Miccosukee and Seminole tribes remained in Florida. They survived by living in the Big Cypress Swamp, which was unknown by the U.S. During the 1860's, the military was needed to fight the Civil War, so the U.S. let them remain in Florida,

Before 1928, prior to the construction of Tamiami Trail, the native settlements were divided into 2 groups:

The Low Creek Indians that lived north of Lake "O."

The Cypress Indians that lived south of Lake "O" along the sloughs and rivers in the western Everglades. They travelled through the wetlands on canoes, and would travel as far as the Caribbean, Cuba, and the Bahamas.

In the 1920's and 1930's, many established communities existed along the Tamiami Trail. They were called the Trail Indians and kept more traditional practices.

In 1947, the U. S. Department of the Interior made most of the Miccosukee Tribe's ancestral land part of the Everglades National Park.

After WWII, the Federal Government began a program to integrate the tribes into the mainstream population by:

Relocating tribal members from rural areas into urban areas for training and Employment.

Extending state authorities over tribal reservations.

Terminating federal recognition of tribal status as a sovereign entity.

This was later terminated by Congress. By this time, though, 104 tribes had already been terminated.

In 1950, a group of Seminoles filed a compensation claim with the Indian Claims Commission for lands taken by the U.S. government. Many Miccosukees claimed that they never reached an official peace with the U.S, and wanted their land returned rather than compensation.

Tension between the Miccosukees and Seminoles peaked during the 1960's, under a federal government program for termination of recognition.

The Miccosukee response was the Buckskin Declaration of 1954, which was delivered to one of President Eisenhower's aides. It said the Trail Indians wanted nothing from the U.S. government, only to live their lives on the land as they always had.

At the same time, the Reservation Indians of Florida became known as the Seminole Tribe of Florida, after they developed a constitution and a corporate charter to organize a government. They were recognized with federal recognition in 1957.

The Miccosukee living along the Tamiami Trail did not get federal recognition. Because of this, Buffalo Tiger, the first chairman of the Miccosukee Tribe, visited Cuba and met

with Fidel Castro to have Cuba recognize them with international recognition as a sovereign country within the United States.

After this, the Miccosukee Tribe got tribal sovereignty from the United States. On January 11, 1962, the U.S. Secretary of Interior approved the Miccosukee Constitution, and was officially recognized as The Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida. Together with the Seminole Nation of Oklahoma, and the Seminole Tribe of Florida, the Miccosukee Tribe is only one of three recognized Seminole entities.

Miccosukee Tribe was the first Native American tribe in the U.S. to achieve this distinction by taking advantage of Richard Nixon's preference for self-determination among Indigenous tribes. This became the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975.

Today, the Tribe occupies several reservations in southern Florida, collectively known as the Miccosukee Indian Reservation. The most populous area is the Miccosukee Reserved Area or the Tamiami Trail Reservation, west of Miami, The Alligator Alley Reservation is located on the northern border of the Everglades National Park. The third is in the South Florida Water Management District Water Conservation Area. It is for hunting fishing, frogging, and subsistence agriculture to continue the Miccosukee way of life.

The Traditionals or Independents are the Miccosukees living in Florida who are unaffiliated. The Traditionals live in the Big Cypress Swamps.

Today, there are approximately 640 Miccosukee, representing Independent Miccosukees, Seminoles and other Indian families living in the Miccosukee Service Area along Tamiami Trail. Miccosukee Tribe operates its own police, court system, clinic, day care center, senior center, Community Action Agency, educational system, and other social services.

For additional information on the Miccosukee or the Seminole, see the packages of information in the Marco Men's Club website, in the Travel Discussion section:

The Seminole Wars 1817-1858
Florida History and Chronology

Another option is to visit the Miccosukee Village Museum on Tamiami Trail, in the town of Miccosukee.