

Washington Digest

Seminoles Misrepresented By Sensational Writers

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(This is the second of two articles based on visits to the Seminole Indian reservation at Brighton, Fla.)

SOMEWHERE NORTH OF THE EVERGLADES. — Whenever one tries, as I did, to study the human side of the Seminoles—that nation which has left so little written record of its short but historic life span—one is deluged with information and misinformation. Misinformation of the type on which the Sunday supplement writer feeds.

For example, examine the contradictory data on the Seminoles and snake killing: When I called on Agent Boehmer, his wife recounted how a greatly excited Indian had appeared one day on their doorstep to announce his pressing desire that Boehmer come to the Seminole camp—a 100 rods or so distant—to kill a rattler.

Boehmer obliged. He carefully avoided carrying the corpse through the camp (a Seminole taboo), and he noted the usual fire lighted at the point where the victim fell. As usual, the Indian children had cooperated with him, without actively participating in the execution.

There are two explanations as to why the Seminoles would not themselves kill the snake. One is that once in the past the Seminoles were ordered by the White Man to leave Florida for points west. They prepared to remain even though it meant retiring deep into the Everglades. However they decided it would be a good idea for both parties if they made a treaty with the snakes. They did so on a "live and let live" basis. That is one explanation.

Or it may have been one of those common sense arrangements embellished with the authority of mysticism. There are few snakes which, if left alone, won't reciprocate.

Another interpretation may be that when a white man attacks the rattler, the chances are that if anyone is bitten, it would not be an Indian. I understand Seminoles do kill snakes when it seems necessary.

Boehmer, whose opinion I learned to value as I pursued this subject, thinks the rattlesnake situation is interesting, but I couldn't get him to say it meant the Seminole was superstitious.

Gaudy Costumes

Intrigue Observer

Like every observer, I was impressed by the Seminole attire. Not by the men's—they wear conventional garments lightened by a gay handkerchief about the neck when they pursue their daily tasks, hunt on the reservation or loaf in camp. They have shortened the long skirt-like garment (comparable to the woman's cape) to sport-shirt length, even in ceremonial dress.

I found only Sam Huff, reputed to be a medicine man as well as the handy man at the school, wearing the long skirt-like garment, plus the blouse. Some say Sam clings to this outfit merely because of his love for the past; others say it may have something to do with his special function as a medicine man; there is a whisper that it is a badge of repentance or punishment for some past sin. Sam is a grandfather today. He still lives in the nearby camp with the rest of his three generations.

The younger men save their gay shirts for dress up occasions (the annual green corn dance and the hunting dance), but they have adopted modern trousers. Their shirts are covered with complicated geometric tracery; their scarves are bound by a metal or wooden clasp; they wear beads or other brightly-decorated fobs.

The most striking piece of Seminole clothing is the woman's billowing skirt; next come the beads which cover her neck from shoulder blade to ear tips; then her hair-dress.

Unlike the men, the Seminole women (except those who have been completely converted to modern ways) wear their special garb and wear it all the time. Consequently,

they always look "dressed up." The hairdress, an innovation and a highly practical one, dates back only some six or seven years. The woman's smooth black hair is brought forward over a semi-circular cardboard form like the wide peak of a cap. This gives her the appearance of peering at you from underneath a wide, circular hat brim, and is achieved easily without the aid of the beauty shop and virtually without mirrors. Furthermore, the coiffure is one development that has no connection with the White Man's culture.

Women's Skirts Are Real Art

Unlike the hairdo, the Seminole skirt and cape haven't changed except to grow more artistic and more intricate with the advent of colored textiles. They likewise have become less difficult to create, thanks to the hand-driven sewing machine. This gadget long since has been as common in tepee, hogan or even igloo as an ice-pick in a modern flat.

The skirts are made of parallel bands of a brightly colored patchwork design which experts claim are real art. They are fashioned of hundreds of separate pieces of colorful cloth, blended or contrasted to make a barbarically splendid whole. The skirts bell out, widening in circumference as they approach the hem which, according to regulations, must trail at least three inches or thereabouts on the ground.

How can this be a practical everyday dress in a country of swamps and morasses, of barbed and cutting underbrush? That is the first question I (and every ignorant ob-



Seminole maid and brave sport native dress in Everglades.

server) asks. But they are practical, say the experts who have seen them in operation. Through wet going and wading, they are "histed" (there are no undergarments to complicate matters). Traveling over the dry and dusty fields, rife with snakes and other annoying reptiles, they protect the bare feet and shins. As Miss or Mrs. Seminole moves forward, toeing in slightly, according to good Indian custom, she gently kicks the dragging rim forward without baring the bare feet to inquisitive eyes or any flora or fauna that might obtrude.

The only other cloth garment is the cape. This is usually a single solid and bright color matching the skirt.

The Seminole beads remain a mystery. So far, I have been able to learn little concerning the origin, purpose or excuse for them beyond the explanation offered by Agent Boehmer and supported by his wife: "They wear them because they think they're pretty." And what better reason in any woman's lexicon?

It does seem strange, though, to see a comely Indian matron, her skirt tucked high before a roaring fire on a hot Florida day, or working vigorously in a tomato patch, or even strolling through a shop among sweltering whites in low cut dresses or open sport shirts, with perhaps 25 pounds (they have been weighed) of beads in a solid collar rising as high as the whalebone-enforced "chokers" American girls wore in the first decades of the 1900s.



CONGRESSIONAL BROTHERS . . . Repr. John Davis Lodge, left, Connecticut, and Sen. Henry Cabot Lodge, Massachusetts, put their brotherly heads together to compare notes on legislation in the 80th congress. They are sons of the late U. S. Sen. Henry Cabot Lodge, who was a mighty power in the senate during the Wilson regime. Both brothers are Republicans and are expected to take an active part in official Washington during the next few years.



CRASHED AT JONES BEACH . . . Jones beach, famed New York playground, narrowly averted being the scene of one of the month's worst plane disasters. A Baltimore to Los Angeles airliner lost in the snow and unable to find LaGuardia airfield, was forced to crash land at Jones beach. The pilot carefully chose the hard strip of sand between breakers and soft beach sand. The 13 passengers and three crew members were shaken but otherwise uninjured.



BABY STRONG MAN . . . He stands in the air with the greatest of ease and with the utmost in pleasure. Does little six-month-old Ronnie Udoff, shows standing on the hand of his dad, Bud Udoff, at their home in Chicago. This part of Ronnie's education started two months ago, and he seems to be having the time of his life.



WORLD'S BREASTSTROKE CHAMP . . . Joe Verdeur, LaSalle college, Philadelphia, is hailed as the new world's champion by his victory in 200-yard breaststroke, in breaking record set in 1933 by R. R. Hough of 1 minute and 21 seconds. Verdeur is a freshman with three more years of intercollegiate competition before him. He also is undefeated in the 225-yard free-style event. LaSalle will count heavily on him to splash the Blue and Gold to further victories.



SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE . . . Repr. Joseph W. Martin Jr. (R., Mass.), as he opened the 80th session of congress, after his election as speaker of the house. Following the Republican landslide, he succeeded Repr. Sam Rayburn (D., Tex.).



WITHOUT A COUNTRY . . . Mildred Gillars, 37, American musician-actress, known as "Axis Sally," arrested in Berlin for treasonable activities on behalf of the Nazi propaganda ministry, is now without a country to call her own.



SAVED FROM FIRE . . . John Ecosanto, Chicago, keeps cool even though a fire burns his hat shop. Here he is shown with some of the hats he saved from the raging flames that completely destroyed his shop and most of his stock.



ITALY'S PRIME MINISTER . . . Alcide de Gasperi, as he arrived at Washington, the guest of the United States government. In addition to visits to various government departments he will meet with leading Italians to report as their prime minister.



HOGAN WINS . . . Ben Hogan, Hershey, Pa., who won the Los Angeles golf tournament over Tony Penna with a 72-hole score of 230, a new Riviera Country club course record.



SHIFT OF COMMANDERS
WASHINGTON. — Inside fact about the shift of U. S. commanders in Germany is that the stage was set for the change shortly after Lt. Gen. Lucius D. Clay visited the National Association of Manufacturers in New York.

Shortly before that, the senate war investigating committee's chief counsel, George Meader, had come back from Germany with a preliminary report highly critical of what went on in the U. S. occupation zone.

General Clay, then in the United States, was upset by this report and talked to Secretary of State Byrnes about resigning. He felt that Gen. Joseph McNarney, top commander of U. S. troops in Germany, was the man really responsible, although he, Clay, as head of the military government for Germany, got the blame.

On top of the unfavorable Meader report, General Clay addressed a meeting of the National Association of Manufacturers and afterwards sat down at an off-the-record meeting of NAM leaders including some of the top moguls of American industry. Their solution for the future of Germany was simple. They told Clay that they should be permitted to get in touch with their opposite numbers in German industry — the big industrialists who helped build up Hitler's war machine.

If allowed to do business with the German cartels, the U. S. industrialists told Clay, they would have Germany back on its feet in no time.

This shocked General Clay. He said he would retire from the army immediately if any such deal was carried out. He warned that the German people did not believe in or understand free enterprise and that Germany could only continue under strong government controls.

CAPITAL CHAFF

The RFC apparently thinks that the Germans are a better risk than veterans' housing. It will advance about 3 billion dollars to rebuild Germany during the next three years, but was afraid of losing money on Wilson Wyatt's prefabricated housing for veterans. . . . Wyatt, ex-mayor of Louisville, passed out golden keys to the city of Louisville to guests he invited to a farewell party. . . . No wonder John L. Lewis is hard luck for labor. He's the "13th" vice president of the A. F. of L.

AIRLINE DYNAMITE

The dynamite now exploding inside Trans World Airlines between Jack Frye, its president, and Howard Hughes, its chief stockholder, has caused members of the civil aeronautics board to begin some careful probing of the aviation industry. Their probe indicates that things aren't going anywhere nearly as well as the airline ballyhoo indicates.

Among other things, six companies operated in the red during the first nine months of 1948—TWA, Colonial, Chicago and Southern, Northeastern, Pennsylvania-Central and Western.

Furthermore, the airlines have over-ordered new planes to such an extent that they will never be able to use more than a fraction of the planes supposed to be delivered.

For instance, the present fleet of civil planes has a capacity of 15 billion seat miles annually. However, when the planes now on order are delivered, capacity will be 41 billion passenger seat miles.

This is in contrast to the fact that the planes now on hand are 100 per cent in excess of the passengers now carried. Result is many unpublicized cancellations. One of the most disquieting situations is the fact that TWA has placed large orders with Lockheed, and heavy cancellations would deal Lockheed a tough blow.

PACIFIC MERRY-GO-ROUND

Best way to gain popularity in the Far East today is to take along a supply of Roosevelt dimes. Congressional travelers returned from China and the Pacific islands report that these were the most welcome gifts they could make to native dignitaries. . . . First general election in history of the Truk island group in the Pacific was held in January. Island chieftains and officials for the entire group were chosen. Heretofore these offices have been hereditary. . . . Among the voters were many who have lived under Spanish, German and Japanese control. This was their first election.

SCHOOLS NEED TYPEWRITERS

Schools and colleges may come ahead of veterans in getting surplus war property for educational uses, according to a plan now under consideration at the White House. At present veterans get first crack at typewriters, adding machines and all other types of equipment—and when the vets are through there isn't much left for the states, schools and colleges. This problem recently was placed before the President by ex-Sen. Joseph Roemer of West Virginia.

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BARBS . . . by Baukhage

Static in your automobile radio may come from your tires. A static suppression powder has been devised which will cure it.

The wild life census will be taken this month. I wonder if they have much trouble getting a 200-year-old turtle to tell her age.

Half of the individual owners of the steel industry are women.

Good restaurants may be serving Guatemalan honey instead of sugar for coffee some day, says Middle American Information. Nice, but we'd settle for a little more sugar.