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THE COWKEEPER DYNASTY OF THE
SEMINOLE NATION

by KENNETH W. PORTER

It is generally agreed that the sons - or possibly nephews, at any rate the immediate successors - of the Alachua chief, who it was suggested in a previous article was Cowkeeper rather than Secoffee, - that these sons were Payne and Bowlegs. Sprague is probably correct when he writes of the former, "Payne was of a different character from his father and not to be led astray and blinded by absurd revelations and traditions. Though a bold and intrepid warrior, he cared more for the happiness of his people than the indulgence of vicious passions, or the influences of superstitious feelings. By his example and counsels, he secured the confidence of the Spanish government, and died at an advanced age, honored and respected."¹ Sprague does not seem to have been familiar with the exact circumstances of the chief's death, which was on the field of battle, at the hands of invaders from Georgia.

Payne was chief when Americans, after the Revolution, first became conscious of the Seminole. An explorer, W. H. Simmons, in 1822 endeavoring to locate a suitable site for a territorial capital after Florida had been ceded to the United States by Spain, wrote: "From the best accounts I could obtain in Florida, it appears that it was under King Payne, grandfather of Micconope, the present chief, that the Seminoles invaded and achieved the conquest of the territories they now occupy. He is said to have lived to near an hundred years of age, and, late in life, married a Yemasee woman, his slave, by whom he had the late Chief Payne, who bore, in the darkness of his complexion, an unequivocal mark of his Yemasee descent."

NOTE - ***This paper is in continuation of Professor Porter's "The Founder of the Seminole Nation" in our issue of April 1949. Ed.***

1. Sprague, J. T. ***The Origin, Progress and Conclusion of the Florida War.*** New York, 1848. p. 19.

The Charleston volunteer Cohen simply repeats this almost *verbatim*, without acknowledgement.² But Simmons contradicts himself later on, when he writes: "Micconope, the present head of the nation, is the nephew of King Payne" - *not* the grandson. Mikonopi, to be sure, might have been the *grandson* of King Payne and the nephew of King Payne's son, Chief Payne - assuming, which is improbable, that actually two chiefs named Payne existed.³ Cohen simply repeats Simmons, but with an important addition. "Micconope . . . is . . . the nephew of King Payne. . . . He has a crown which was given to 'Cowkeeper,' uncle of old Payne, by the British Government." Is "old Payne," the "King Payne" under whom the Seminole are said to have invaded Florida, or his supposed son "Chief Payne"? It seems probable that the "King Payne" who supposedly invaded Florida was actually Cowkeeper, and that "the late Chief Payne" was the son or nephew of, and successor to, the leader of the Florida invasion, and identical with the Seminole chief (dec. 1812), who is *usually* referred to as King Payne. The relationships among, and identities of, "Cowkeeper," "King Payne," "old Payne," "the late Chief Payne," evidently belong to the department of utter confusion. What is important in Cohen's statement is not the borrowing from Simmons, but the information which, being an alert and inquisitive if plagiaristic young man, he probably picked up from an authentic source in St. Augustine, that Payne's predecessor was the British ally Cowkeeper - no mention of Secoffee.⁴

2. [Simmons, William Hayne], *Notices of East Florida, Charleston, 1822*, p. 57 (Dr. Swanton does not include Simmons in his bibliography); Cohen, M. M., *Notices of Florida and the Campaigns, Charleston, 1836*, p. 33. George A. McCall, *Letters from the Frontiers, N. Y. 1868*, p. 146, seems to follow Simmons, though he does not mention the name of "King Payne's son," said to have been Mikonopi's father. McCall was in Florida during the 1820's and had an opportunity to become acquainted with the Seminole. The unusual darkness of the Yemassee was presumably the result of their association, and intermarriage, with runaway slaves from South Carolina who settled near them under the walls of St. Augustine.
3. Simmons, 62, 77.
4. Cohen, 238.

A significant statement appears in a letter from the Creek chief Alexander McGillivray to Governor Zespedes, Aug. 3, 1786: "as for the Semanolies I have but little Acquaintance with the present leaders, the former ones whom I knew are dead." Is not this because Cowkeeper (confused by Sprague with Secoffee) had died in the preceding year? Chief among "the present leaders" was undoubtedly Payne. "Payne and other Indians" are mentioned in a letter from St. Augustine, March 28, 1789.⁵ He was an opponent in 1792 of the adventurer William Augustus Bowles in his Florida schemes. "Kennard, Payne, Bowlegs and White King with several hundred Seminoles . . . proceeded to Mickasukie," Bowles's headquarters, to take him, but found him fled.⁶

The United States Indian agent, James Seagrove, addressed a friendly letter, April 14, 1793, to "Mr. Payne, head-chief of the Seminole tribe of the Creek Indians at Sotchaway [*sic*]." The bearer was kindly received by Payne, who promised to meet Seagrove at Colerain in seven days from April 30 and, with 21 others, actually arrived May 18 and remained until May 23. "Mr. Payne, the great Seminole and Lachaway King," delivered a "talk" May 22. The agent described him as "a very sensible, discreet Indian, and well informed," determined on peace, and who, to that end, was going "to remove the whole of his people down to Cape Florida, which is their hunting ground, . . . until the present troubles" - agitating the Creeks in United States territory - "are over."⁷

Payne was inconspicuous for nearly a score of years thereafter. About 1804 "Payne, the chief of the Seminoles," accompanied to St. Augustine a white woman who had been cap-

5. Caughey, John Walton, *McGillivray of the Creeks*, Norman, Okla., 1938, 124-125, 224.

6. Williams, John Lee, *The Territory of Florida*, New York, 1837, 191-192.

7. *American State Papers, Indian Affairs*, I, 380-381, 387-388.

tured by Florida Indians, probably Mikasuki, and was delivered upon payment of ransom.⁸

In 1812 Georgia militia, cooperating with the so-called Patriots in the East Florida annexation plot, invaded Alachua, and successfully resisting this attack King Payne "died in the field, with Roman dignity," being mortally wounded on September 28.⁹

Payne was succeeded by Bowlegs or Bo(w)leck, his brother - it is pleasant to encounter a relationship on which general agreement exists - whose Indian name is said by Simmons and his echo Cohen to have been "Islaapaopaya, signifying 'Faraway'," while Capt. John C. Casey, for years the Seminole agent, says that "King Bowlegs was called by the Indians Eneha Micco"¹⁰ - Lieutenant Governor; he might have been called both at different times and under various circumstances. Casey, who, because of his responsibility for the property interests of his Indian charges, needed to be particularly well informed concerning their relationships, refers to an Indian woman, Harriet Bowlegs, as "daughter of old King Bowlegs, and grand-daughter of old Cowkeeper," thus furnishing additional authority for the theory that Cowkeeper was the father, rather than the uncle, of King Payne, who was Bowleg's older brother.¹¹

Payne's old town and Bowlegs' town in Alachua were destroyed by the Tennesseans early in 1813 and the Alachua

8. 25th cong., 3d sess., H. of R., War Dep't, doc. 225, p. 60.

9. Porter, Kenneth Wiggins, "Negroes and the East Florida annexation plot," *Journal of Negro History*, xxx (Jan., 1945), esp. 9, 10, 19, 22; ASP, IA, I, 813, Nov. 2, 1812: "the Aulochawan Indians (Seminoles, at war in East Florida);" 838: Jan. 18, 1813: "Paine is dead of his wounds;" ASP, LA, ii, 409, 415.

10. Simmons, 51; Cohen, 238, 35; 25th cong., 3d sess., H. of R., War Dep't, doc. 225, 110-121. Casey, Tampa Bay, July 11, 1838, to Maj. Isaac Clark, Quartermaster, U.S.A., New Orleans, La.

11. Williams, 214, states that Payne and Bowlegs were Cowkeeper's sons. The author was an old resident of Florida.

Seminole forced to withdraw to the Suwanee.¹² Bowlegs is said to have sought revenge for his brother's death and the burning of the Alachua villages by joining the British in their attack on New Orleans,¹³ and when that failed he returned to the Suwanee, only to be driven again from his village, and his village destroyed, by Gen. Jackson in April, 1818.¹⁴ Cohen says that "Bowlegs . . . was . . . mortally wounded" after 1814 - whenever that might be - by the Americans, but it seems more probable, since he was alive in 1818, that he died a natural death in or before 1821. On August 15, 1821, it was said that he "died of grief."¹⁵

"Miccanopa," nephew of Payne and Bowlegs, was in 1821 described as "chief of the Seminole nation," with his residence at "Pe-lac-le-ke-ha." In 1822 he was described as "a young man, and . . . not . . . much respected by the nation."¹⁶ Williams disregards Bowlegs as head-chief and says "After the death of Payne, the eldest son of Solachoppo, or Long Tom, succeeded him, but dying early of a debauch, his younger brother, Micanopy, became chief of the Seminoles. His father resided at Wealusta, or Black Creek, and owned many cattle, and some slaves." Williams adds that, before he became chief, Mikonopi was "formerly called Sint Chakke or frequenter of the pond," hence the title of Pond Governor under which he is sometimes mentioned, because of his indolent fondness for sitting and watching his cattle come up to the watering-place.¹⁷ The brief reign of Mikonopi's nameless brother and predecessor probably was in the period 1818-1821.

Mikonopi was no worthy successor to Cowkeeper, Payne, and Bowlegs. He was, to employ an 1837 description, of middle

12. Porter, 26-27.

13. ASP, MA, I, 722-723.

14. ASP, MA, I, 689-749, *passim*.

15. Cohen, 35; ASP, IA, II, 409, 415.

16. Swanton, J. R., *Early History of the Creek Indians*. Washington, 1922. 407; Cohen, 238; Simmons, 62, 77.

17. Williams, 214, 272.

age, forty, fifty, or even older - estimates of Indians' ages frequently vary by as much as ten or twenty years - "five feet, six inches high; with a dull eye, rather a stupid countenance, a full fat face, and short neck, . . . weighed two hundred and fifty pounds." His appetite was voracious and his temperament unwarlike.¹⁸ He was greatly under the influence of his counsellor Jumper, a refugee Red Stick Creek who had married one of his sisters, and his interpreter, Abraham, a runaway slave from Pensacola, who had married a "widow" of King Bowlegs, presumably a woman of Negro or part-Negro blood, and a slave.¹⁹ Another sister was married to Emathla, known to the whites as King Philip, principal chief of the Seminole on the St. Johns, the second chief in the tribe and referred to as of "the royal blood," which probably means that he was in some way related to the founder of the dynasty, Cow-keeper. King Philip's favorite, though not his oldest, son, was the famous Wild Cat or Coacoochee.²⁰

Mikonopi's heir-apparent was Holatoochee (Little Chief), sometimes called Davy, variously described as his nephew and as his brother, whose age in 1837 was given as thirty, thirty-five, and fifty-five; he was tall, handsome, well-made, "with a thoughtful melancholy appearance," and well-dressed.²¹

Mikonopi was shipped west in 1838, arriving at Ft. Gibson, Indian Territory, June 12. He died at Ft. Gibson late in De-

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18. "Maj. Childs' correspondence," *Historical Magazine*, 3d ser., III (1844), 280; Sprague, 97; Foreman, Grant, *Indian Removal*, Norman, Okla., 1932, p. 328; Cohen, 238.
19. Porter, Kenneth Wiggins, "The Negro Abraham," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, xxv (July, 1946), esp. 8-15.
20. Sprague, 98.
21. *ASP, MA*, VII, 833; *Niles' Register*, LII (Mar. 25, 1837), 49; Childs, III, 170; *Charleston Courier*, Mar. 23, 1837; *Amy and Navy Chronicle*, VII (Mar. 7, 1839), 154-155. In 1837 he was "a young man" but five years later he was described as an "old chief" with "locks silvered by time." Sprague (98, 456, 459) emphasizes his advanced years; the other authorities describe him as youthful. Could there have been two Seminole known as Holatoochee, father and son, or uncle and nephew, one a brother of Mikonopi, the other a nephew?

ember, ten years later.²² Holatoochee did not appear among the claimants to the succession, though he was alive, for he went on a delegation to Florida, October 16, 1849.²³ Perhaps he was regarded as too old - Sprague says he was "about sixty" in the fall of 1841.²⁴ He seems at any rate to have been deceased by the following summer, as a niece was then laying claim to some of his property.²⁵

The principal claimants to the chieftaincy were Coacoochee (Wild Cat), son of King Philip (Emathla), and Jem, or Jim, Jumper ("Micco Nut-Cha-Sa"), son of Mikonopi's counsellor Jumper. Their fathers, who had died en route to the Territory, had married sisters of Mikonopi, and probably Coacoochee and Jim Jumper were the sons of those Sisters and bore the same relationship to Mikonopi as Mikonopi to his predecessor Bowlegs. Jim Jumper, who was involved with the Seminole sub-agent in a shady transaction concerning some Seminole Negroes who claimed to be free but whom Jumper and the sub-agent were endeavoring to reduce to slavery, was chosen as head-chief over Wild Cat, probably in large part through the sub-agent's influence. Upon his death, which occurred before 1856,²⁶ he was succeeded by his brother John (Hiniha Micco), who became a colonel in the Confederate army and was the Seminole chief as late as 1884.²⁷

Coacoochee, disgruntled by his failure to attain the chieftaincy, in 1849-1850 led several hundred Seminole Indians

22. Foreman, *Indian Removal*, ch. xxx; Foreman, *Five Civilized Tribes*, 257-258.

23. Foreman, *Five Civilized Tribes*, 248.

24. p. 313.

25. Nat'l Archs., War Dep't, Letters Rec'd, Aug. 15, 1850 (A135).

26. Foreman, *Five Civilized Tribes*, 259-261, 253; Abel, Annie Heloise, *The American Indian as Slaveholder and Sessessionist* (The slaveholding Indians, I), Cleveland, 1915, pp. 164 n. 280.

27. Debo, Angie, *The Road to Disappearance*, Norman, Okla., 1941, pp. 146, 276; Wardell, Morris L., *A Political History of the Cherokee Nation, 1838-1907*, Norman, Okla., 1938, p. 305. It will be remembered that, according to Capt. Casey, King Bowlegs's name was "Eneha Micco."

and Negroes into Mexico, where he established a military colony was commissioned a colonel, and died of small-pox early in 1857. He left a son, "young Coacoochee," who returned to the Territory in 1861, it is traditionally said to take part in the Civil War on the Confederate side, to which all the Five Civilized Tribes had at first committed themselves.²⁸

The Indians who, according to the treaty of 1842, had been finally permitted to remain in Florida, early in that year, before the treaty, acknowledged Holata Micco, better known as Billy Bowlegs, as their chief. He was 33 years old in 1845 (in 1858, however, he was described as "about fifty"), and was variously described as Mikonopi's nephew and as "the nephew of Micanopy, Old Bowlegs, and King Payne."²⁹ In 1858, after the Third Seminole War, he was shipped to the Indian Territory, where, in 1861, he headed the Loyal Seminole, whom he led north to Kansas. He served with distinction as a captain in the 1st Regiment, Indian Home Guard, until his death from smallpox early in 1864,³⁰ when he was succeeded as chief of the Loyal Seminole by Long John or Jack (John Chupko), his brother-in-law and, possibly, also his son-in-law.³¹

28. Mr. C. C. Patten, Wewoka, Okla., 1942. The author of this article is writing a history of the Seminole Negroes which will include an account of Coacoochee's career in the Indian Territory and Coanula.

29. Sprague, 451, 482, 494, 507, 512; *Harper's Weekly*, June 12, 1858.

30. Abel, I, 198-199, n. 376, 277 n. 571; Abel, *The American Indian as Participant in the Civil War* (The Slaveholding Indians, II), Cleveland, 1910, pp. 228 n. 64, 108 n. 256; Abel, *The American Indian under Reconstruction*, (The Slaveholding Indians, III), Cleveland, 1925, pp. 44 n. 75, 44-45 n. 76, 45 n. 77, 49; *War of the Rebellion, Official Records*, ser. I, vol. xxii, pt. 1, pp. 93-94, 350-351; *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs*, 1864, p. 317. The report of his death in 1859 (*A.R.C.I.A.*, 1859, p. 529), mentioned in Foreman, *Five Civilized Tribes*, 274 n. 11, should probably be put down to wish-fulfillment.

31. Abel, I, 198 n. 372, iii, 57 n. 113; "Billy Bowlegs in New Orleans," *Harper's Weekly*, II (June 12, 1858), 376-378. The Treaty of Aug. 1, 1861, mentioned "Eliza Chopco, daughter of Billy Bowlegs." Billy Bowlegs had in 1858 a daughter named Elizabeth, about 18 years of age, by his first wife, and it is possible that she subsequently married the brother of his young wife. Long Jack, thus acquiring, in the white man's opinion, the surname of "Chopco."

Relationships among the Seminole "royal family" are, as already seen, almost impossible to disentangle. Mikonopi is referred to both as King Payne's nephew and as his grandson. Holatoochee is described as Mikonopi's nephew and as his brother. Billy Bowlegs's relationships to the other principal contemporary members of the Cowkeeper dynasty are particularly perplexing.³² About the most one can say with any assurance in regard to these relationships is that Payne, Bowlegs, Mikonopi, Holatoochee, Billy Bowlegs, *et al.*, were all in some way related to one another and to old Cowkeeper. It was a dynasty which, from Cowkeeper through Payne, Bowlegs, Mikonopi, Billy Bowlegs (Florida band), Coacoochee (Mexican band), and the Jumpers (Territory band), persisted nearly a century and a half, from *ca.* 1740 to at least 1884.

32. See Appendix for a discussion of complications in the Billy Bowlegs pedigree.