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Promoting Philately in the Sunshine State

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Special Issue Florida Seminole Wars Fort Covers and Correspondence

Special Agent, Army of Florida
Orlando Fla. July 24th 1846

Dear Sir

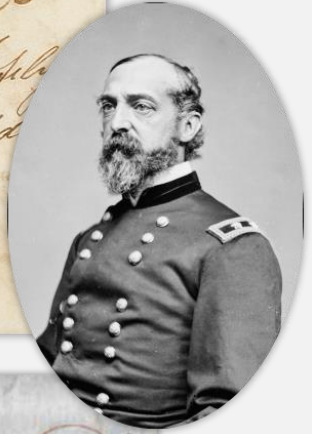
I have the honor herewith to forward copies of all my official correspondence for the month of July, except that which the War Department and the Department of the Gulf have also the honor to acknowledge the receipt during the same period, of General Cass' Special Order, No. 31 of 34.

Very respectfully
Your obedient servant
Wm. D. Moseley
Major General
Commanding Army of Florida

To Mr. General
Washington

To his Excellency
July 26 1846

William D. Moseley
Governor of Florida
Tallahassee
Florida



Fort Myers Fla
August 15-16-1846



Mr Geo W. St
General
S. Am

John Beard Esq
Register of State Lands
Tallahassee
Florida

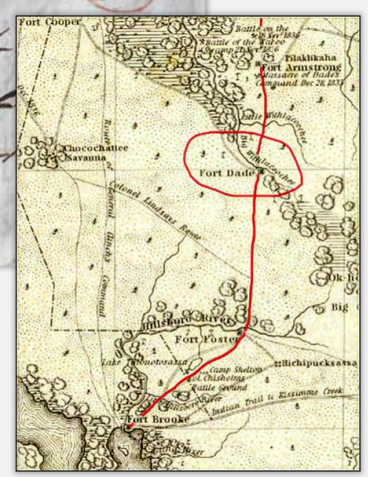


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Danger in the Florida Frontier

By Chris Kimball



Micapony's Seminoles ambush Major Francis Dade's 110-man column in December 1835.
(Courtesy of the Warfare History Network.com)

The Second Seminole War 1835-1842 was also known as the Florida War, and was the longest, most expensive Indian war the United States fought in the 19th century. At its height in 1837 and 1838, half the U.S. Army was in Florida. Casualties were high, but mostly from diseases in the southern climate. The only way to communicate into the interior was by foot, wagon, mule or horse. The unsung hero of the war was the Express Rider who carried thousands of messages over dirt trails during the seven-year war.

In 1838, General Zachary Taylor developed a system of twenty-mile squares in Florida. This entailed a central fort in each square, with a garrison of soldiers. In 1839, he reported to Congress that during his two years as commander of Florida forces, his soldiers had constructed fifty-three new forts or outposts, 848 miles of wagon roads, and 3643 feet of causeways and bridges. These joined the forts and roads which had been constructed during the previous two years before Taylor's command.¹

Daily correspondence and reports from these forts and outposts were ultimately sent to Washington. Communication to and between more than two hundred forts over what was easily a thousand miles of roads was a daunting task for any Express Rider and mail delivery. Letters packed into leather saddle bags were sent on their perilous way, using either civilian riders or soldiers. Lieutenant A.T. Lee authored the poem, *The Florida Express Rider*, which described challenges of the rider.

“When the wild whoop tells me of danger near,
I crouch in my saddle, but not in fear,
For I know there's a hand that can always save,
Whilst a God watches over the young and brave.”²

One of the first shots fired during the Second Seminole War was the ambush and killing of Private Kinsley Dalton sent to carry the mail from Fort Brooke at Tampa Bay to Fort King, at present day Ocala, 100 miles distant. Miccosukee warriors ambushed him a few miles from Fort Brooke. The killing is believed to have been in retaliation for an incident two months earlier, when a Miccosukee warrior was killed by settlers in a fight over stolen cattle near present day Gainesville. Dalton's body was found in a pond, scalped and brutally mutilated.³

Attacks, Ambushes, and Murders Continued Throughout the War

Brevetted Brigadier General Walker Keith Armistead transmitted his May 1840 reports to the Adjutant General. One of these was Lieutenant Colonel Bennett Riley report to Colonel David Twiggs regarding the pursuit of Indians.

“Captain Beall having reported to me with his company of Dragoons (Figure 1) on the evening of the 21st [May 1840], I dispatched him early on the morning of the 22nd in pursuit of a large party of Indians, who fired upon & killed an express rider the day before, near Fort Wacasassa.”⁴



Figure 1. A Dragoon soldier in the Seminole War.
(From *The Life and Military Services of General William Selby Harney*)⁵

Private John Walsh, a 7th Infantry soldier, disappeared on Express rider duty in February 1840, and was presumed dead. This was confirmed when his jacket and clothing were found at an Indian camp raided eleven months later in January 1841.⁶

In March 1838, a stage carrying mail between Jacksonville and St. Augustine was ambushed and the driver killed. The sixteen- or seventeen-year-old driver, George Walton, was shot and scalped.

Another traveler sighted the unmanned horseless wagon, and quickly fled to St. Augustine to raise the alarm. Mayor F. L. Dancy ordered local militia soldiers to investigate. The broken-up stage and body of the driver were found, but not the mail.⁷

The same day, another mail carrier, Mr. J. Garcias, departed St. Augustine to the north and was later found killed and brutally mutilated, the wagon broken up, and horses taken. In both cases, the mail was taken and eventually found two miles away where the Indians had dumped it on the ground. Although there was some damage to the letters, most was still intact.⁸

In late August 1841, an Express rider from Tampa Bay had not arrived at Palatka after twenty-four hours and was feared dead. Another rider had been fired upon near Fort Holmes. On July 30th Lieut. Irwin, 3rd Infantry, located two bodies of murdered mail carriers about a mile apart, near Fort Pleasant east of Tallahassee. These were only a few incidents of rider's deaths during the war.⁹

Many Others Were Wounded

An express rider was shot in the arm near Fort Harlee but made his escape.¹⁰ Another was shot in the wrist by an awaiting ambush near Fort Holmes but reached Palatka with his mail.¹¹

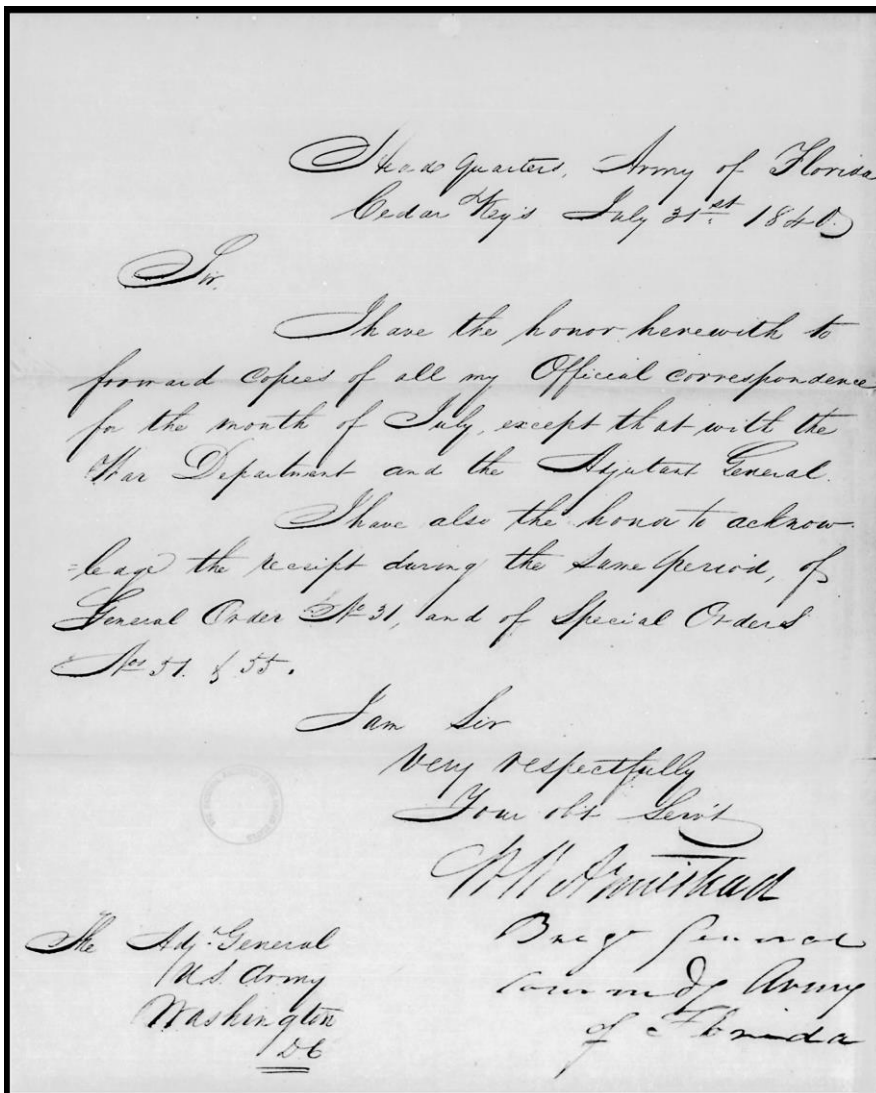
And Others Survived Danger

An Express rider going from Fort Micanopy to Fort Fanning sees two Indians in the road and manages to elude them until he is out of the range of their rifles. A detachment of soldiers who investigated the incident determined there had been eighty to one hundred Indians waiting in ambush.¹²

At the same time, General Walker Armistead learned one of the Express routes had been discontinued from the supply depot at Black Creek to Fort King due to the dangers on the trail.

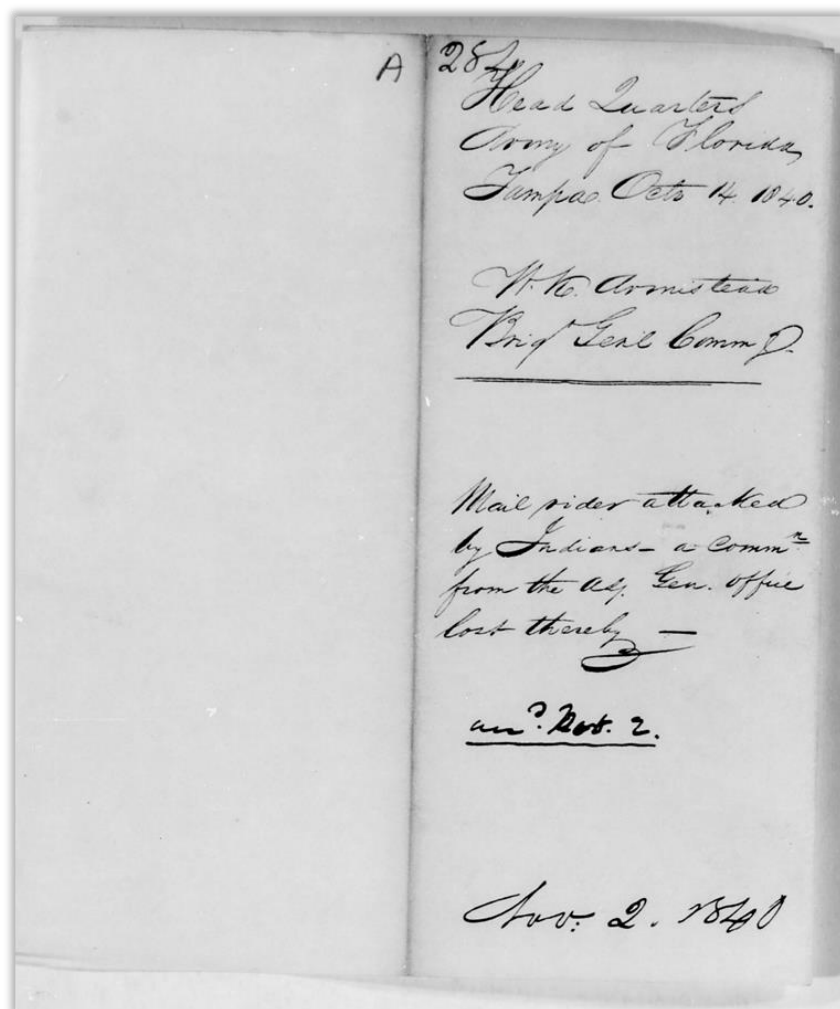
The general directed that the route be kept up until further orders from him. This is discussed in his August report to the Adjutant General transmitting his July correspondence (Figure 2)¹³

Figure 2. Letter mailed from Cedar Keys transmitting the July correspondence of General Walker Armistead to the Army Adjutant General, July 31, 1840.



Another Express rider escaped, but the mail he was carrying, which included Army dispatches, was taken by the Indians. On September 8th, 1840, an Express rider going from Fort Holmes, southwest of Palatka, is fired upon by Indians. His horse became alarmed and raced through the party of warriors with the rider lying flat on its back. His hat was shot off, but he was not wounded.

Sadly, the horse was shot, rode another one hundred yards and expired. The rider grabbed his mail bag and started to run towards Fort Russell on Orange Creek. With the Indians in hot pursuit, the rider was compelled to drop the mail bag to escape with his life (Figure 3).¹⁴



Later that afternoon, Lieutenant J. McKinstry, 2nd Infantry, took twenty-five men with him to pursue the attackers, but pursued without success. They gave up at eight p.m. and bivouacked on the bank of the Ocklawaha River.

The next morning, they returned to the scene of the action, and spread out to search in the palmettos. The greater part of the mail was found with the dispatches from the commanding general having been torn open. These letters were found a few miles further off, but missing was a letter to the commanding general. It was believed the Indians had someone who could read, and now were in possession of valuable information on the movements of the Army.¹⁵

Figure 3. Wrapper, General Walker Armistead to Army Adjutant General describing the incident of the rider's escape between Fort Holmes and Fort Russell.

What Seemed Providential

Fort Foster and Fort Dade were abandoned due to outbreaks of sickness, as reported in the September 28, 1837, Army & Navy Chronicle. Below is an extract of the letter.

“All was tranquil, and the Indians had not committed any depredations; the mail rider passed through the nation unmolested and had in several instances conversed with the Indians, and that they were friendly, but not disposed to leave the country.”¹⁶

Chief Wild Cat, or Coacoochee (Figure 4), one of the most famous warriors and a very colorful character, was well known for conducting raids near St. Augustine.

He once said, “That they saw the mailman, but they did not hurt him. They had killed two before and got nothing but a bundle of papers.” I wonder if this had been young Mr. Walton and Mr. Garcias?¹⁷

Armed Escorts

In response to the inevitable ambushes, orders were issued in 1839 for army escort to accompany the wagon trains. Sometimes they were complied with, and sometimes there were no available soldiers. Other orders issued were for a guard consisting of five men to ensure the mail was safely delivered.¹⁹

“Last year there was a positive order from the general commanding, that at least one mounted company should accompany every train leaving depots. It has been a matter of surprise to all, that the train between Fort Heileman and Fort Micanopy has not been cut off during the summer, as it regularly leaves without a single man for an escort.”²⁰



Figure 4. Chief Wild Cat / Coacoochee
(From *The Florida War*)¹⁸



Figure 5. Ambush.
(From *Through Swamp and Glade: A Tale of the Seminole War*)²¹

In an interesting turn of events, a mail guard captured Chief Olati-Mico and two other Indians a few miles from Tampa Bay.²²

Only Reimbursed if in Combat

Concurrent to the Second Seminole War, in 1836 and 1837, was the Second Creek War in the neighboring states of Alabama and Georgia. It could actually be considered part of a larger conflict between the United States and the Indian tribes who did not want to leave their ancestral homes.

Reviewing the quartermaster's letters sent from the Army Quartermaster, General Thomas S. Jesup, showed there was little relief for those who risked life and limb.

Jesup was a tight spender. The government would only reimburse riders for horses killed in battle. Just being ambushed or if the horse died for other reasons would not be reimbursed.

Major T. Cross, Acting Quartermaster General wrote Mr. John Henley, Montgomery, Alabama, August 19th, 1836.

“The Secretary of War has referred to this office, your letter to him of the 8th instant, enclosing a claim of G. M. Mason for the value of a horse alleged to have been killed in the service of the United States while carrying an express from Big Warrior Stand to Tuskegee, by order of Major General Jesup. In reply I have to inform you that there is no authority for the payment of such a claim. The March 19, 1836, Act of Congress provides that mounted Militia or Volunteers shall be allowed forty cents per day for the use and risk of their horses, except when killed in battle, or dying of wounds received in battle. As the claim submitted does not come within either of these exceptions, there is no authority short of Congress that can direct its payments.”²³

These dangers of the express riders were a precursor to what would be repeated out west in the following decades. The post rider always faced risk and danger.

Endnotes

¹ *Letters Received by the Office of the Adjutant General (Main Series) 1822-1860* (short form *Adjutant General*), Record Group 94, National Archives and Records Administration, 1839, T234.

² *The Army and Navy Chronicle* (short form *A & N C*), Benjamin Homans, editor, Washington, D.C., 1835-1842. Vol. 12 #46 (Nov. 18, 1841) 361. Poem, *The Florida Express Rider* by Lieut. A.T. Lee.

³ *A & N C*, Vol. 1 #38 (Sep. 17, 1835) 300; and #42 (Oct. 15, 1835) 331-2.

⁴ *Adjutant General*, op. cit., 1840, A124.

⁵ Reavis, L.U., 1878, *The Life and Military Services of General William Selby Harney*, 121.

⁶ *Alachua Ambush, Bloody Battles of the 2nd Seminole War* (short form *Alachua Ambush*), Christopher Kimball, 2019, published by IngramSpark, 207.

⁷ *A & N C*, op. cit., Vol. 6 #13 Mar. 29, 1838) 202.

⁸ *A & N C*, op. cit., Vol. 10 #9 (Feb. 27, 1839) 142-3; and Vol. 10 #10 (Mar. 5, 1839) 157.

⁹ *A & N C*, op. cit., Vol. 12 #36 (Sep. 9, 1841) 284.

¹⁰ *A & N C*, op. cit., Vol. 6 #17 (Apr. 26, 1838) 269.

¹¹ *A & N C*, op. cit., Vol. 11 #12 (Sep. 17, 1840) 189-190.

¹² *A & N C*, op. cit., Vol. 11 #7 (Aug. 13, 1840) 106.

¹³ *Adjutant General*, op. cit., 1840, A204

¹⁴ *Adjutant General*, op. cit., 1840, A284.

¹⁵ *A & N C*, op. cit., Vol. 11 #17 (Oct. 22, 1840) 268.

¹⁶ *A & N C*, op. cit., Vol. 5 #13 (Sep. 28, 1837) 203.

¹⁷ *Alachua Ambush*, op., cit., 89; *Adjutant General*, 1840, A132.

¹⁸ Sprague, John T., 1848, *The Florida War*, University of Tampa Press, 2000,98.

¹⁹ *A & N C*, op. cit., Vol. 10 #12 (Mar. 19, 1839) 187.

²⁰ *A & N C*, op. cit., Vol. 7 #10 (Sep. 6, 1838) 155-156.

²¹ Munroe, Kirk, 1896, *Through Swamp and Glade: A Tale of the Seminole War*, Blackie and Son, London, 1897, ii.

²² *A & N C*, op. cit., Vol. 5 #20 (Nov. 16, 1837) 314.

²³ *Letters Sent by the Office of the Quartermaster General (Main Series) 1818-1870*, Record Group 92, National Archives and Records Administration, 467.



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Fort Meade – An Isolated Seminole War Fort

By Deane R. Briggs, M.D.

This article focuses on the establishment and abandonment of Fort Meade, from 1849 to 1854. Readers are encouraged to review detailed articles on Fort Meade by David C. Lingard in the *Florida Postal History Journal*, Vol. 12, No. 2, July 2005 and in *LaPosta*, Whole Number 219, June-July 2006.

During the period of relative peace between the Second and Third Seminole Wars, an attack on an Indian trading post south of present-day Fort Meade nearly started another war.

On July 17, 1849, four Indians who had earlier attacked a settlement just north of Fort Pierce, met Chief Echo Emathala Chopco (known as Chipco) on his way to a trading post run by Captain George Payne and Dempsey Whidden. After trading was completed, the Indians demanded whiskey, which was allowed at most trading posts, but Payne repeatedly refused the Indian request over several hours. This resulted in the Indians shooting and killing Payne and Whidden and wounding William McCullough and his wife Nancy while they were having dinner.

Both McCulloughs and their child were able to escape into the woods and eventually made it three days later to the home of Dempsey's brother William J. Whidden at Aliafia, twenty-five miles to the west of Fort Meade.

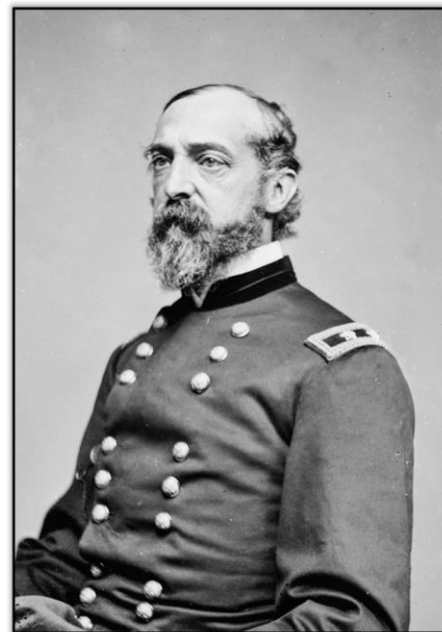


Figure 1. Gen. George G. Meade. (Courtesy Wikipedia)

The Indians meanwhile celebrated and plundered the trading post and burned it and the outbuildings, leaving behind the charred bodies of Payne and Whidden and one untouched barrel of whiskey as a warning.

The next day, they fired into another brother, James W. Widden's, home six miles to the north, wounding one of his sons. This trading post was soon known as Chokonikla, which was a Seminole word for "Burnt House".¹

As would be expected following the atrocity at Chokonikla, newspapers reported outrageous reports of one hundred warriors confronting the army and burning a store. As a result, many terrified settlers had abandoned their homes as far north as Fort King (Ocala).

The only nearby garrison was Fort Brooke near Tampa which was at the time quite small. General David E. Twiggs (Figure 2) arrived at Fort Brooke to assume command of all Florida troops on August 25, 1849, and built an army of 1,700 men by the end of September.



Figure 2. General David E. Twiggs. (Courtesy Wikipedia)

General Twiggs also began to implement his plan to establish a line of posts stretching across the state to serve as a buffer between settlers and Indians.

On December 13, 1849, General Twiggs accompanied Lieutenant George G. Meade to a site forty-six miles southeast of Tampa and twelve miles north of a recently established Fort Chokonikla. Meade was born in Spain in 1815, the son of a Naval Agent serving for the United States. The family returned to the United States in 1817, and Meade eventually graduated in 1835 from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point.² Meade had surveyed the area near the ruins of an old Indian town of Talakchopco and the "old Indian ford" at Peas Creek. Twiggs was so impressed with the site that he directed a main river crossing depot to be constructed and named it Fort Meade.

Construction of Fort Meade was begun six days later on December 19, 1849, with troops from nearby Fort Fraser under command of Lt. Col. Henry Bainbridge of the 7th Infantry. Within a month, twenty-two officers and 397 enlisted men were stationed at the fort.³ By mid-January 1850, Twiggs informed the secretary of war that the line of posts from Tampa to Fort Meade and to the Atlantic had been established.

The letter in Figure 3 is from Lt. Col. Bainbridge requesting his Fort Meade pay for February 1850, payable in New York.

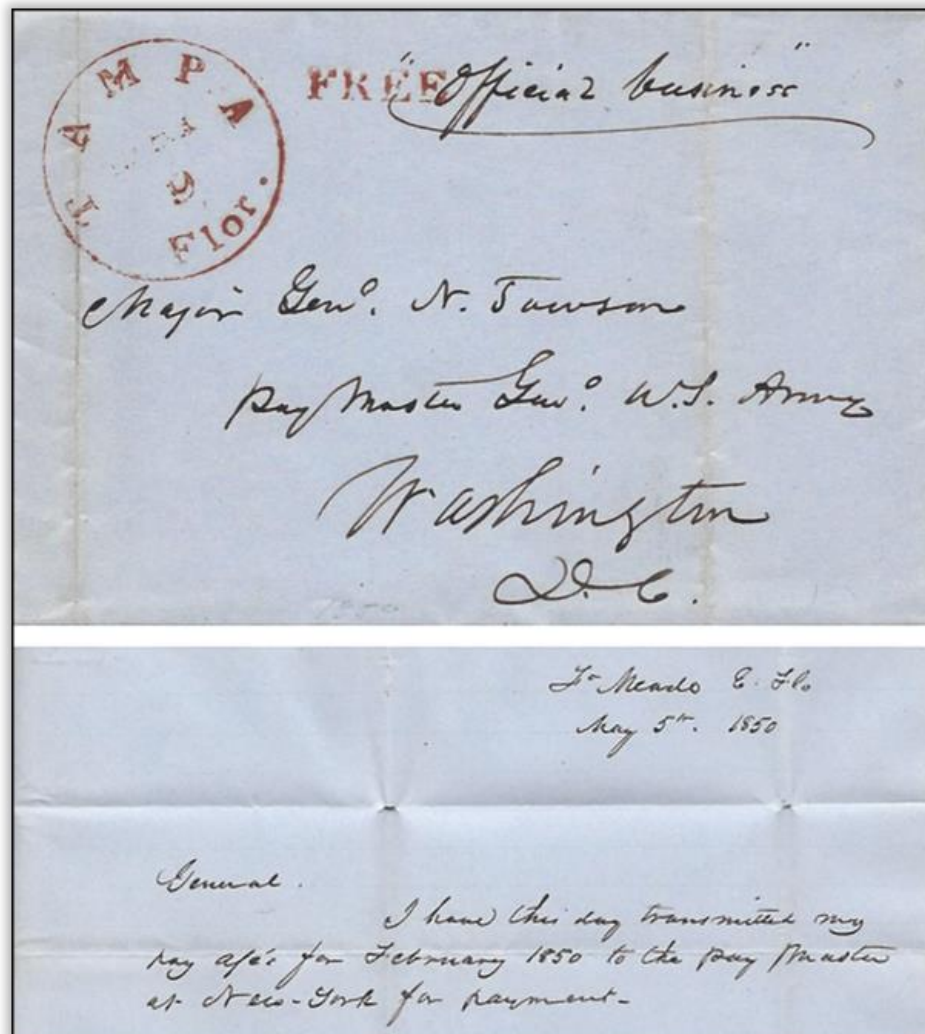


Figure 3. Lt. Col. Henry Bainbridge letter datelined Ft. Meade E. Flo., May 5, 1850.

Perhaps the earliest surviving letters from Fort Meade were both written by Surgeon Bernard Miles Byrne on March 30, 1850, to John Beard, Esq., Tallahassee, Florida, datelined Fort Meade, Florida, with a follow up letter the next day, March 31, 1850, datelined Fort Meade, Pea Creek, Florida (Figures 4 and 5).

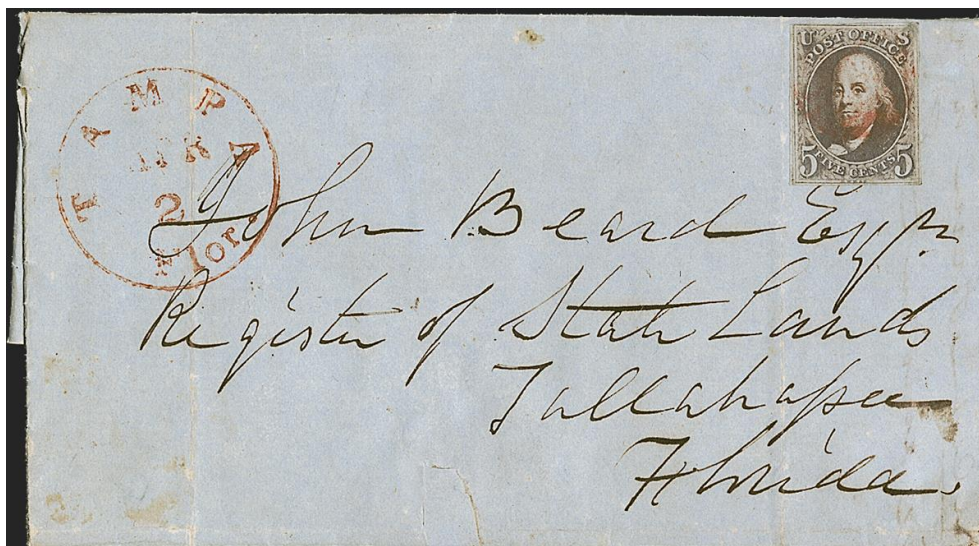


Figure 4. Byrne letter datelined Fort Meade, Florida, March 30th, 1850.



Figure 5. Byrne letter datelined Fort Meade, Pea Creek, Florida, March 31st, 1850.

Surgeon Byrne entered the U.S. Army Medical Department as an Assistant Surgeon on March 20, 1836, and spent most of his time in Florida with assignments in St. Augustine, Fort Heilman at Garey's Ferry, Fort Bankhead and Key Biscayne, as well as Fort Brooke from where he was assigned to Fort Meade.⁴ Monthly Fort Meade military records show that Surgeon Byrne was stationed at Fort Meade from December 1849 until June 10, 1850, but absent for parts of February and March.⁵

Both letters to John Beard, who was Florida Register of State Lands, deal with requests to purchase 506 acres of land for \$240, several additional parcels for \$1140, and 880 acres for \$700 in various parts of central Florida totaling 1440 acres for \$2,080. It also mentions his support of Major Beard's slavery and strong secessionist feelings.

Image	Accession	Names	Date	Doc #	State	Meridian	Twp - Rng	Allquots	Sec. #	County
	MW-0995-076	BYRNE, BERNARD M. BYRNE, BERNARD M.	4/1/1854	14330	FL	Tallahassee	0135 - 019E	NE¼	25	Marion
	MW-0955-241	BYRNE, BERNARD M. BENNETT, JOHN M.	6/20/1851	3008	FL	Tallahassee	0115 - 014E	SW¼SW¼	6	Dixie, Levy
	MW-1117-026	BYRNE, BERNARD M. FERGUSON, WILLIAM	8/15/1855	25003	FL	Tallahassee	0135 - 021E	Lot/Trct 1	20	Marion
	FL0320_308	BYRNE, BERNARD M.	7/10/1844	537	FL	Tallahassee	0165 - 018E	NE¼SE¼	12	Marion
	FL0350_004	BYRNE, BERNARD M.	1/20/1845	55	FL	Tallahassee	0135 - 021E	NW¼	18	Marion
	FL0350_141	BYRNE, BERNARD M.	7/1/1848	13	FL	Tallahassee	0135 - 021E	NE¼	18	Marion
	FL0350_142	BYRNE, BERNARD M.	7/1/1848	14	FL	Tallahassee	0135 - 021E	W½SE¼	18	Marion
	FL0390_452	BYRNE, BERNARD M.	2/19/1857	4339	FL	Tallahassee	0135 - 021E	N¼	19	Marion
	FL0390_453	BYRNE, BERNARD M.	2/19/1857	4340	FL	Tallahassee	0115 - 014E	W½NW¼	20	Levy
	FL0400_190	BYRNE, BERNARD M.	10/30/1857	4334	FL	Tallahassee	0135 - 021E	E½SW¼	18	Marion
	FL0420_240	BYRNE, BERNARD M.	8/1/1860	5050	FL	Tallahassee	0115 - 014E	SE¼NW¼	31	Levy
							0115 - 014E	SW¼NE¼	31	Levy
							0115 - 013E	W½NW¼	36	Levy
							0115 - 013E	NE¼NW¼	36	Levy

Figure 6. Florida land parcels owned by Bernard M. Byrne.

According to records in the U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management (Figure 6), Bernard Byrne in partnership with his son Charles and a few others accumulated forty-three various parcels in Marion, Dixie and Levy Counties between 1844 and 1860, but the ones requested in these letters were not awarded. After Byrne's death on September 6, 1860, his wife Louisa Matlack Byrne petitioned to have the parcels of land in Levy County that he owned transferred to her.

Another early letter datelined Ft. Meade E. Flor, June 20, 1850, is shown in Figure 7. It was written by 1st Lieut. George H. Thomas (an 1840 U.S. Military Academy graduate and later known in the Civil War as the Rock of Chickamauga) to his brother. It is a lengthy letter noting the fertile land unlike the eastern coast and delightful climate as in any part of Virginia.

He was "extremely disgusted at the order to march to this place" and anticipated only being at Fort Meade for two to three weeks, but records show he was at Fort Meade from May 1850, until ordered to Fort Brooke on July 8. He was subsequently transferred to Fort Myers and wrote a follow-up letter to his brother on August 15, 1850.⁶

An interesting Statistical Report on Sickness and Mortality in the Army of the United States from 1839 to 1855 has a full multipage discussion of medical problems at Fort Meade written by Assistant Surgeon Jonathan Letherman in 1852.⁷



Figure 7. Letter of George H. Thomas datelined Ft. Meade E. Flor, June 20th 1850.

He had been stationed at Fort Meade beginning in November 1850, and noted that during the summer of 1850, “sickness prevailed to a great extent”. He felt it was due to the low ground on the bank of the river and stream where the fort was situated. He recommended to Lieutenant Morris, 1st artillery, who at the time was in command of the fort, that the fort be moved to higher open ground, with no tree hammocks to allow better circulation of air.

This recommendation was accepted and by March of 1851 a new fort was completed on a ridge a mile to the west on the Tampa Road. The new fort consisted of a 46 x 20-foot two room building, a second 40 x 20-foot two room building, and a 34 x 14-foot two room building for officers, each with a 7 to 8-foot hallway between the rooms. Each had a porch and building behind as a kitchen. Soldier’s barracks consisted of a 180 x 21-foot building, with a 38 x 30-foot commissary store, and a 20 x 14-foot clothing store. A 45 x 9 ½-foot long Guardhouse, a 16 x 13-foot cookhouse, a 40 x 20-foot mess house for soldiers, and two shingle houses 27 x 14-foot and 15 x 10-foot completed the fort layout. A small bake house and shed for horses and a 50 x 25-foot Hospital located a half mile from the post was also present.⁸



Apparently, even with the new fort location, malaria and yellow fever outbreaks continued at Fort Meade. Figure 8 shows a letter from New York addressed to Lieut. Anson J. Cook, U.S.A. at Fort Meade, Tampa, Florida via Charleston. 1st Lieut. Cook is recorded on monthly records from Fort Meade beginning January 1, 1853, to be “Absent on Detached Service” for each month until it is recorded that he died of yellow fever on October 19, 1853.⁹

Figure 8. Letter addressed to Lieut. Anson J. Cook, at Fort Meade.

First Lieut. Thomas Jonathan Jackson, (later “Stonewall” Jackson) (Figure 9) arrived in Florida in the fall of 1850, with the First Artillery. He was an ambitious young officer who had recently won a brevet major rank in the Mexican War.

After a short detachment at Fort Hamer, Jackson arrived at Fort Meade on December 18, 1850, as second in command behind Maj. William H. French. Instead of being involved with the construction of the new fort location as his position as the commissary and quartermaster as he assumed would be his duty, French assigned Jackson on January 27, 1851, to six-day scouting duties with twelve men and two non-commissioned officers, to look for Indians. None were reported and French assigned Jackson again on February 18th on a 90-mile excursion to Lake Tohopekaliga to scout for Indians with none sighted.



Figure 9. Thomas J. Jackson. (Courtesy Bettmann Archives)

By March, Jackson had decided that he needed to get away from Fort Meade. Requests to transfer to another regiment or for a nine month leave of absence presumably to go to Europe went nowhere.¹⁰

By late March, after a series of letters back and forth between French and Jackson, and alleged charges of unbecoming an Officer and a Gentleman, led to an eventual court-martial arrest of Jackson on May 1, 1851.

French charged, among other things, Jackson being absent without leave for nine months.



Figure 10. photo of Officers Quarters of Fort Meade.¹¹

Many of the central Florida forts established by Gen. Twiggs to cut interaction with Indians were abandoned by 1854, with construction of Fort Thompson on the Caloosahatchee River and newer forts established closer to the Indian settlements further south. Fort Meade was one of the last to be abandoned and was sold for \$200 on December 1, 1854, to a cattleman, John Irving Hooker, who had been the beef provider to Fort Myers.¹² All that remains of the original Fort Meade is a photo of one of the officer's quarters shown in Figure 10.

Endnotes

¹ Canter Brown, Jr., "Florida's Peace River Frontier", University of Florida Press, 1991, pp. 82-85.

² <http://www.usace.army.mil> > Engineers Biographies

³ Canter Brown, Jr. "Fort Meade 1849-1900", The University of Alabama Press, 1995. pp.5-6.

⁴ Army and Navy Chronicle 1835-1842.

⁵ Microfilm Fort Meade military records provided by and courtesy Polk County History Center and Genealogical Library, Bartow, Florida.

⁶ Vernon R. Morris, Jr., M.D. "Military Fort Myers from 1850 – Part 1" *Florida Postal History Journal*, Vol. 29, No. 1, January 2022, pp 7-9.

⁷ Richard H. Coolidge, M.D., "Statistical Report on the Sickness and Mortality in the Army of the United States". Washington, 1856, pp. 330-333.

⁸ Canter Brown, Jr. "Fort Meade 1849-1900", The University of Alabama Press, 1995. pp. 11-12.

⁹ Microfilm Fort Meade military records, op. cit.

¹⁰ Lenoir Chambers, “Stonewall Jackson” William Morrow & Co., New York, 1959. Section 8 Fort Meade, pp. 167-199.

¹¹ Felix Nerod “Military Forts, Camps, and Private Block Houses and Posts of Polk County”, an article in the *Polk County Historical Quarterly*, courtesy of Polk County History Center and Genealogical Library, Bartow, Florida.

¹² Canter Brown, Jr. “Fort Meade 1849-1900”, The University of Alabama Press, 1995, pp 20-21.

Fort Dade 1846 Way Letter By Thomas Lera and Arnold Davis

Introduction

Way letters are those received by a post rider or contract mail route carrier (an individual or firm who transports mail by stage, wagon, water-way vessel, or railroad) on the way between post offices, and are to be delivered at the first post office reached on that route.

For this service, the carrier or postmaster would add a “Way” fee of one cent to the postage from the location of mail pickup to the destination post office. The next post office on the route would calibrate the rate not from that post office but based upon the actual distance from the pick-up and denote “Way” on the cover. ¹

The below table shows the postal rate for a one-page folded letter.

Table One: Postage Rate and Way Fee

Post Office Act	Distance	Postage ¢	Postage plus 1¢ Way fee
March 3, 1845	not over 30 miles	5¢	6¢

Figure 1 is an example of a Fort Dade 1846 Way 6 letter. The Way 6 manuscript marking is seen in the upper right corner.

**Figure 1. Fort Dade, Type II,
January 8, 1846, Way 6 Letter.**
(Courtesy of Florida State
Archives)



Discussion - The Letter

The question is: “Where did the post rider pick up this folded letter?”

The letter, sent by James M. Bates to Governor Mosley, had a unique docketing or dateline by writing *Forchuchco*. James is most likely referring to the church congregation as he did not have enough room to write: “*For church congregation*” (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Portion of first page showing the docketing / dateline.
(Courtesy of Florida State Archives)

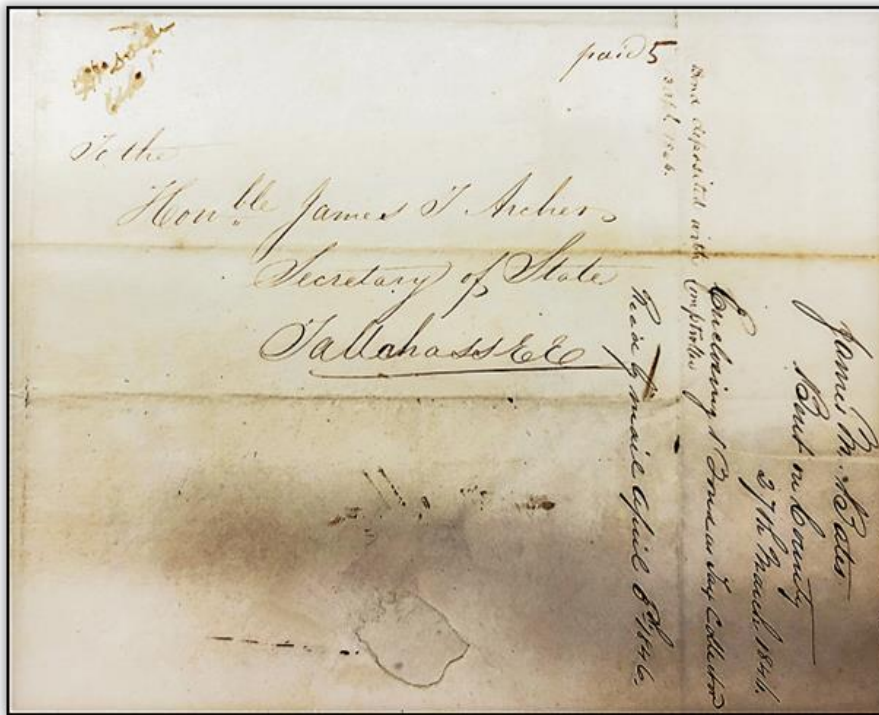
It reads:

“Sir: Circumstances compel me to address you this letter in relation to the organization of the county of Benton. I wrote to you in my last letter that I would enter into bonds and proceed immediately to discharge the duties of sheriff of said county. I immediately tried to assemble the Judge of Probates and County Commissioners but failed in so doing, We appointed the 29th of December last for one second meeting which also failed. Then appointed the fifth instant and never has been able to get but one commissioner to meet, that is Mr. John Wiggins.

“And I find on examination that none of the commissioners has been qualified and I understand that the Judge of Probates has not complied with the law. Therefore, I am at a loss to know what to do as I have no person to receive my securities and I am compelled by law to make my returns of the county taxes by the fourth Monday instant. And I find it impossible to do so in consequence of this failure of the proper officers of the county to qualify me according to the law of the state in such cases made and provided.

“I therefore cannot be held responsible for their neglect as I have regularly attended any meeting called according to appointment ready to be qualified and to discharge my duty as sheriff of said county. You will perceive by this that there has been no dereliction on my part and any advice or course you may deem proper in relation thereto I am willing to abide by.

“I am respectfully your obedient servant James M. Bates.”



Governor Mosley must have responded to Bates because the letter in Figure 3 included the bond. The Ft. Dade letter, postmarked April 1, 1846, was addressed to James T. Archer, Secretary of State, from the Benton County Tax Assessor. It enclosed James M. Bates' bond which was deposited by the State Controller April 13, 1846.

Fort Dade Post Offices

On December 23, 1836, Brigadier General T. M. Jesup, in command of troops in Florida, ordered the construction of Fort Dade at the point where the road between Fort Brooke and Fort King crossed the Withlacoochee River.

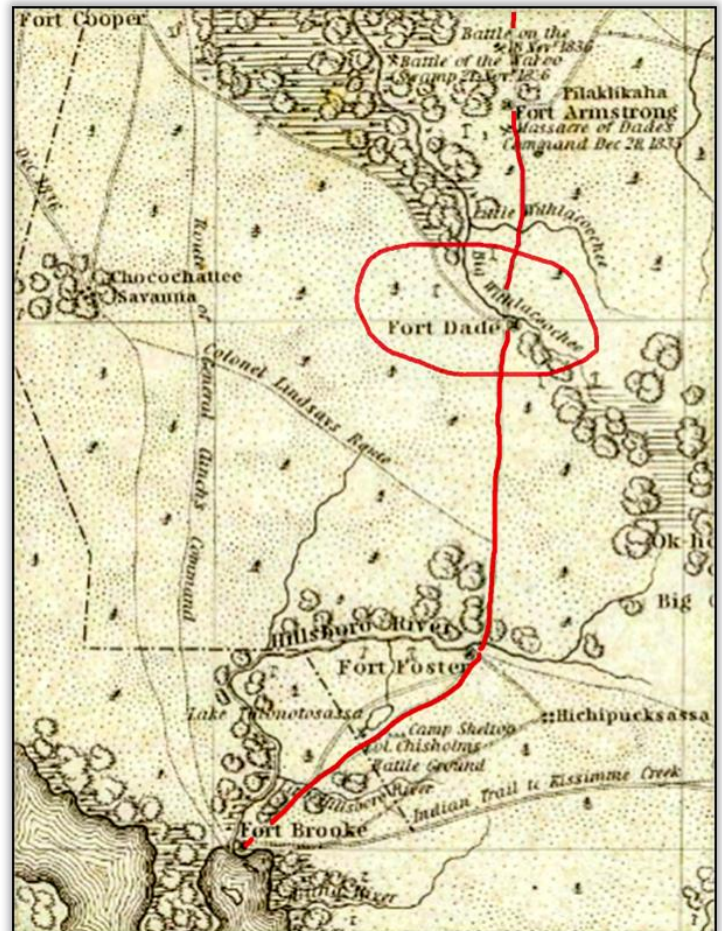
Figure 3. New Type III, Ft. Dade manuscript postmark (upper left) docketed April 1, 1846. (Courtesy of Florida State Archives)

It was established under the command of Major George Birch, 4th Infantry, in January 1837 on the left bank of the river, about forty miles northeast of Fort Brooke and thirteen miles from the Dade battleground (Figure 4).²

During the following summer, the location was found to be unhealthy due to mosquito infestations. After the struggle with the Seminoles ended in 1842, the post was temporarily abandoned for the summer and thereafter intermittently occupied until its final abandonment November 20, 1849.

In September 1849, Lieutenant Colonel Henry Bainbridge was sent from Fort Brooke to garrison the old Fort Dade with a detachment of the Seventh Infantry. He stopped eight miles short of the Withlacoochee River where settlers had built houses, planted crops, and even established a post office earlier on January 2, 1845. This settlement came to be known as the Fort Dade Community. The troops camped near this community and continued to complete their post returns for "Ft. Dade, Fla."³

Figure 4. Portion of the 1838 Map of the Seat of War in Florida showing military road between Fort Brooke and Fort Dade where it crossed the Withlacoochee River.



Between 1845 and 185, this post office had four postmasters and shifted location a mile this way, two miles that, depending on the residence of each succeeding postmaster. Finally, it settled in the rolling hummocks some three miles west of the Fort King Road (Fig. 5).⁴

Conclusion

The 1850 census indicated James M. Bates & family lived in “Buddy's Lake Settlement” where he was a farmer. Previously he had been Justice of the Peace 1842-44, Sheriff of Benton County 1846-1851, and on August 20, 1853, first postmaster of the newly established Cedar Tree post office.

It seems safe to assume the 1853 Cedar Tree Post Office and Buddy Lake Settlement were in the same area. In 1852, when the Fort Dade (2) Post Office (Figure 5) was reestablished, it was serviced by postal route No. 3524.

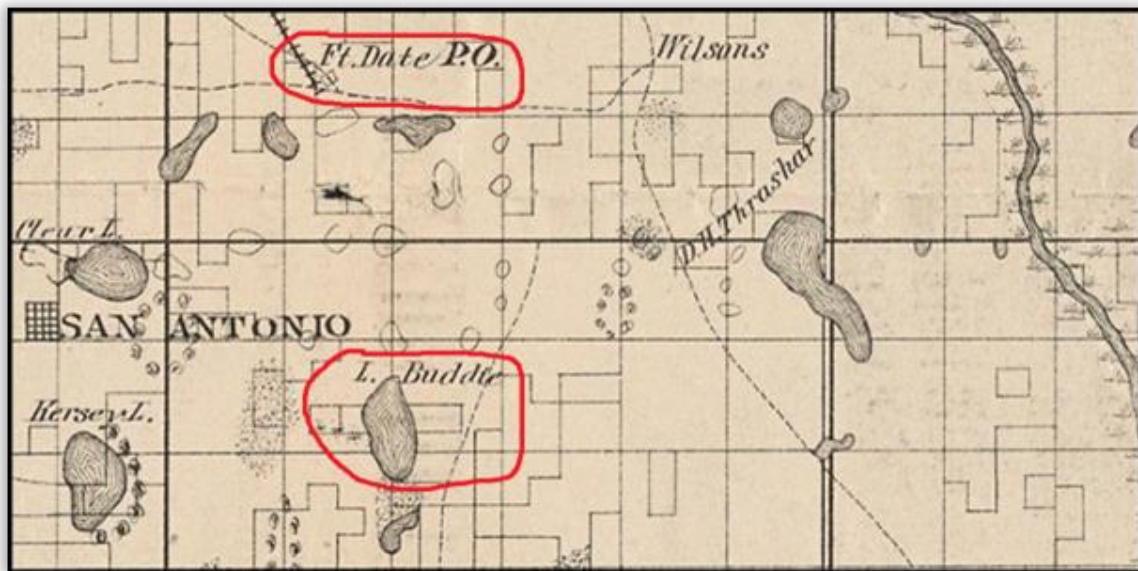


Figure 5. Locations of Fort Dade (2) Post Office and Buddie (Buddy) Lakes Settlement and Withlacochee River on the far right.

Post Office Site Surveys show the locations of the post offices in 1853 were:

- Fort Taylor - Township 24, Range 19, Section 3
- Fort Dade - Township 24, Range 21, Section 29
- Cedar Tree - Township 24, Range 20, Section 23

Finally, it appears the Fort Dade, January 8, 1846, WAY letter was picked up by a post rider at the Buddy's Lakes Settlement.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Seminole War Foundation members Steven Rinck and Chris Kimball for their comments and recommendations, and Jacklyn Attaway Florida State Archivist and Sandra Fitzgerald for their assistance and editorial suggestions.

Endnotes

¹ *American Stampless Cover Catalog Vol. II*, David G. Phillips Publishing Co., Inc., North Miami, FL, 1997, pg. 152.

² *1838 Map of the Seat of War in Florida*, Compiled by Order of The Honorable Joel R. Poinsett, Secretary of War, under the Direction of Colonel J.J. Abert U.S. Topographic Engineer, Bureau of U.S. Topographical Engineers Washington City, accessed May 25, 2023 at www.davidrumsey.com/luna/servlet/detail/RUMSEY~8~1~1593~190046:Map-Of-The-Seat-Of-War-In-Florida

³ Fort Dade was located in the vicinity of the Post Office 8 miles south of the Withlacoochee River and on the direct road to Tampa. *Post Return of Detachment 7th U. S. Infantry at Fort Dade for the Month of September 1849*.

⁴ *1884 Map of Hernando County, Florida* drafted by J.F. Sands, Yale University Library Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Call Number 792 H43 1884, accessed May 25, 2023, at www.collections.library.yale.edu/catalog/15811397.

1850 Cover from Military Fort Myers By Vernon R. Morris, Jr., M.D.

The only known cover (Figure 1) in private hands from military Fort Myers, in Florida, traveled a long and varied postal route. It dates from the very earliest days of a future great metropolis and contains important historical content. The address panel of the cover is struck with a Tampa circular datestamp. The origin is confirmed by the internal dateline (“Fort Myers Fla August 15th 1850”) shown inset in Figure 1.

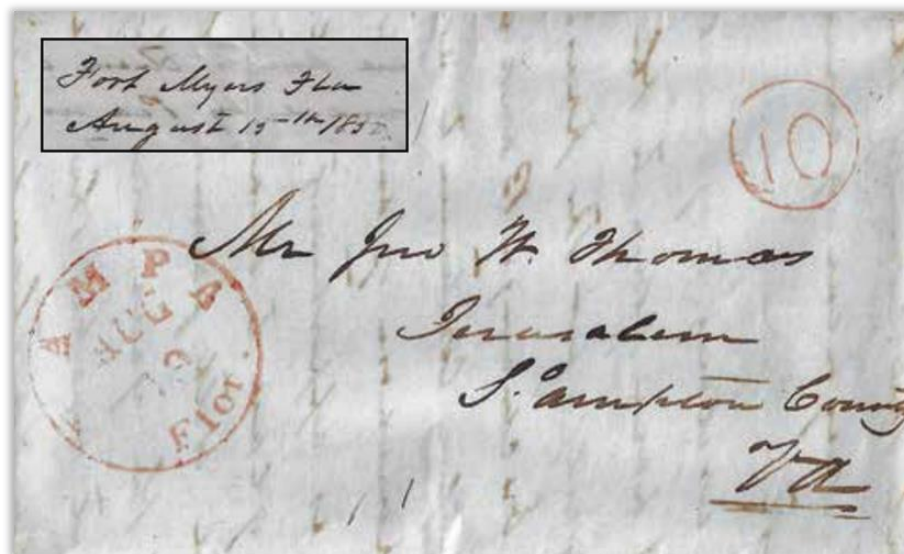


Figure 1. Fort Myers Fla August 15th 1850 cover. The only one known in private hands.

More than three pages of handwritten contents characterize Fort Myers as the “most remote of all the posts in Fla...the most important post,” established “to give the Indians an opportunity of trading so as to give them no excuse for going into the settlements.”



Figure 2. Chief Billy Bowlegs.
(Courtesy GrearFortMyers.com)

The writer of the letter, George Thomas, refers to murders in the previous year, mentions Indian leader Billy Bowlegs (Figure 2), and an agreement that limits the Indian territory: “Those who do not wish to move west, may remain in Florida.”

This was only five years following Florida statehood, during the interlude between the Second and Third Seminole Indian Wars, also known as the “Billy Bowlegs war.”

This cover must have been carried privately to Tampa by Captain Gonzalez on his weekly schooner, which from 1850 to 1858 carried mail and provisions between Tampa and Fort Myers.¹ Tampa’s post office had opened September 13, 1834. Four days after it was datelined, the cover entered the mails at Tampa, 124 miles to the north. At Tampa it was struck by the red “TAMPA Flor AUG 19” circular datestamp with matching 18-millimeter numeral “10” in circle.

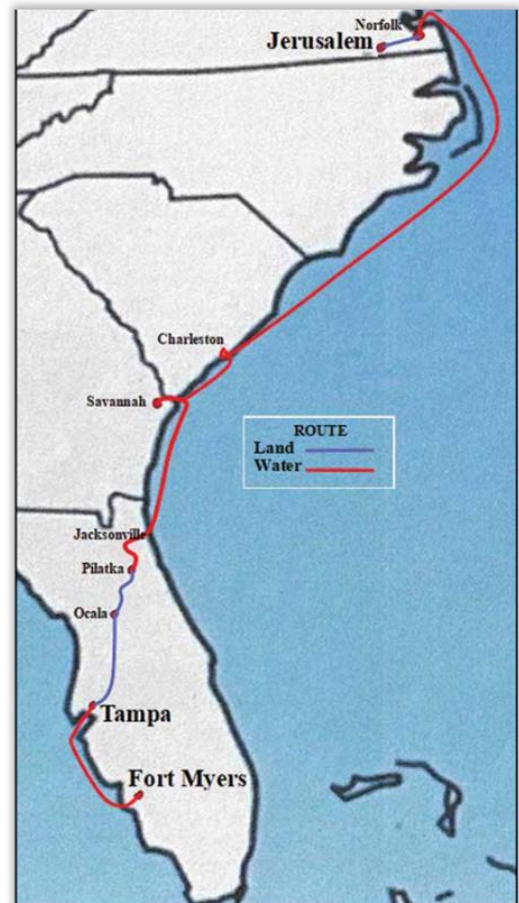
From Tampa, a road north to Fort King in Ocala had been cleared by 1827. See the Figure 3 map.

Postal route 3506 continued on to Pilatka on the St. Johns River. From there, steamboats traveled north with locked mail bags daily on postal route 3251 from Pilatka to Jacksonville, Savannah, Charleston, and eventually Norfolk, Virginia.²

Postal carriage reverted to land travel for the transit from Norfolk to Jerusalem, a southern Virginia town now called Courtland. Total postal distance of 760 miles readily qualified for the over-500 miles rate of 10¢, due from the recipient, the sender’s brother James Thomas. The distance traveled from Fort Myers to Jerusalem was 884 miles.

Military Fort Myers was founded on February 15, 1850, initially from makeshift thatched palm fronds, but soon to be accessed by a substantial 1000-foot wharf with rails into the strategic Caloosahatchee River.

Figure 3. Map of southeastern United States, showing locations discussed in this article. Blue lines indicate land carriage, red lines show carriage over water.



The fort was named after Lt. Col. Abraham C. Myers, chief quartermaster of the Department of Florida. Myers was never stationed at Fort Myers, nor did he ever visit.

After several years of construction, the fort boasted officers' quarters, administration offices, warehouses for munitions and general supplies, guardhouse, blacksmith and carpenter shops, kitchen, bakery, laundry, sutler's store, stables, a 2½ story hospital, even a bowling alley and a 500-foot bathing pier. In 1854 Captain F.A. Hendry claimed the fort's 139 acres and 57 buildings made it Florida's finest.³

A sketch map of fort from around this time, taken from the Grismer history, *The Story of Fort Myers*, cited at Endnote 1, is shown as Figure 4.

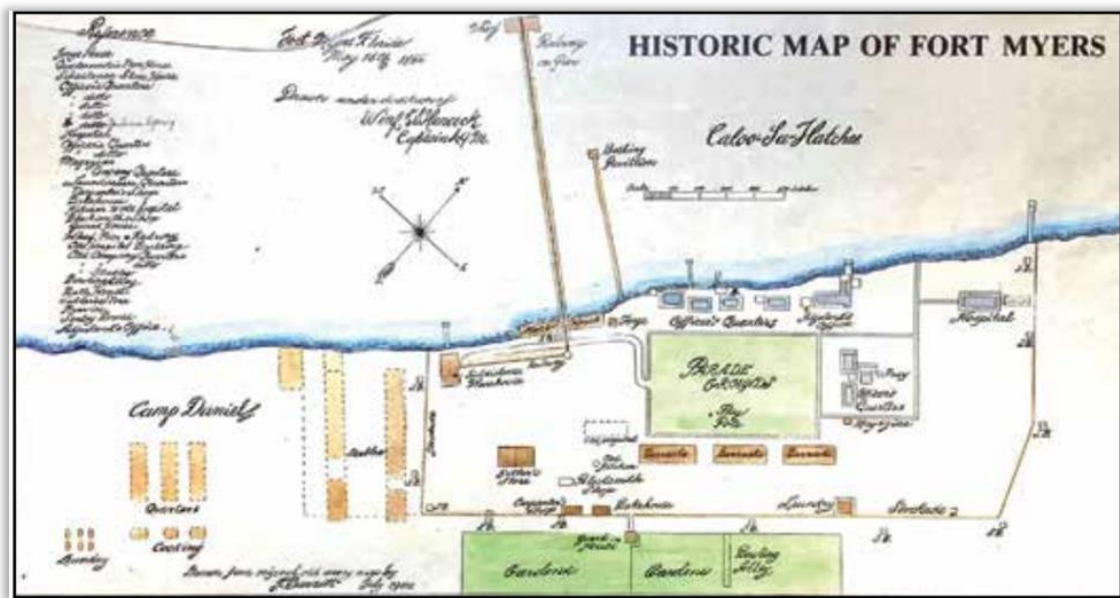


Figure 4. Sketch map of military Fort Myers at its peak in 1856, redrawn in 1982.

Another three years later, on January 10, 1861, Florida was the third state to secede from the nation. Federal troops withdrew. During January 1864 Union troops reoccupied Fort Myers, which was the southern-most fort east of the Mississippi. Very late in the Civil War, Florida became important to the Union for beef supplies and free black soldiers.

Not until August 22, 1876, did a post office open at Fort Meyers, but it was named "Myers" to distinguish it from Fort Myer, Virginia. Residents objected strenuously, and the shortened name "Myers" was never used locally.

The assistance of Deane Briggs, Tom Lera, Frank Crown, Dick Winter, Steve Kennedy, the Florida Historical Society, and the IMAG History and Science Museum has been greatly appreciated.

Endnotes

¹ Karl Grismer, *The Story of Fort Myers*, The Island Press, Fort Myers Beach 1982, pp. 66, 87.

² James Baird, "Early Coastal Mail Carriage South of Charleston," *Chronicle* 252 (2016), pp. 326, 329, 333.

³ *The Florida Historical Quarterly*, October 1993, Vol. 72, No. 2, pg. 152.

Articles of Distinction Awards

Congratulations are extended to the following members for their “best of the best” articles in the 2023 issues of the *Florida Postal History Journal*.

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"Marion County, Florida Stampless Post Offices - Parts 1 and 2"
Tom Lera and Arnold Davis

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"The Barefoot Mailman"
Juan L. Riera

Third Place

"The Death of William Banghart"
Todd D. House

Literature Competition Awards

Congratulations are extended to Society members for awards earned at the Sarasota National Stamp Exhibition, January 19-21, 2024.

- APS Research Award and Large Gold: **Thomas Lera**, “Mail Carried by Indians in East & West Florida to Panton, Leslie & Co. Mercantile Stores”
- Large Gold and Reserve Grand Award: **Bryant Korn**, “Chronology of Liberia's Registration Envelopes from 1882-1889”
- Large Silver: **Juan L. Riera**, “The Barefoot Mailman”
- Silver: **Juan L. Riera**, “Aviation Rivalry Spurred On By Air Mail”

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