Historians' Publications

'Captured on Canvas': McKenney-Hall's History of the Indian Tribes of North America." by Shirley H. Bowers

The Florida Historical Quarterly 71, no. 3 (1993): 339–47.

Florida Department of State / Division of Historical Resources
This project is sponsored in part by the Department of State, Division of Historical Resources and the State of Florida.

"CAPTURED ON CANVAS": McKENNEY-HALL'S *HISTORY OF THE INDIAN TRIBES OF NORTH AMERICA*

by SHIRLEY H. BOWERS

THOMAS Lorraine McKenney was the second superintendent of Indian Trade and later the first director of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Born March 21, 1785, in Somerset County, Maryland, he was twenty-four when he moved to Washington, D.C., and opened a dry-goods establishment in Georgetown. McKenney's friends– some of the most powerful men in government– included John C. Calhoun, Henry Clay, and Secretary of State James Monroe. These contacts helped him receive the appointment in 1816 as superintendent in the Office of Indian Trade.

George Washington had created the Indian Trade office as an agency of the War Department in 1796. Trading posts would be established along the southern and western frontiers where Indians could exchange their furs and skins for the goods they needed– coffee, sugar, tobacco, and gunpowder. There were other reasons to keep these posts active and strong. The British and Spanish often incited Indian discontent, and the posts could provide some security for the settlers.[1] The Indians also needed protection from greedy and unscrupulous traders.[2] Control of the trading posts was an important administrative function, and in 1806 the superintendent of Indian Trade became the first head of the Bureau of Indian Affairs.[3]

McKenney had served as the army's chief supply officer during the War of 1812, and he was well experienced for his appointment to the trade office. He was genuinely concerned with the well being of the Indians, and he was an astute observer of their culture. He urged clerks and managers at the trading posts

Shirley Bowers is a resident of Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida.

1. Edwin C. McReynolds, *The Seminoles* (Norman, OK, 1957), 23.
2. Herman J. Viola, *Thomas L. McKenney: Architect of America's Early Indian Policy, 1816-1830* (Chicago, 1974), 7.
3. S. Lyman Tyler, *A History of Indian Policy* (Washington, 1973), 41.

to send him artifacts, weapons, clothing, and ornaments from the various tribes, which he planned to preserve.

The posts, however successful, could not halt the hostility caused by the settlers' voracious appetite for the land claimed by the Indians. The natives resented the efforts to force them to leave their ancestral homes and resettle in the West. To secure their cooperation and support, Indian delegations were invited to visit Washington where they were lavishly entertained. The chiefs were presented with specially designed Peace Medals which they wore around their necks. They were given gifts of clothing, food, and wine, sometimes as a ruse to negotiate one-sided treaties or as a display of the government's power.[4]

McKenney lost his Indian Trade office in 1822 when Congress abolished the office. He then became involved briefly as a newspaper publisher in Washington. He ardently supported John C. Calhoun's candidacy in the presidential campaign of 1824. In part to pay this debt, Calhoun, secretary of war under John Quincy Adams, established the Bureau of Indian Affairs within his department in 1824 and appointed McKenney as its first superintendent. McKenney often boasted that he "controlled the destinies of more Indian natives on the American continent than any one man."[5]

McKenney was now able to enlarge his Indian archives, and he began collecting books, maps, and written material about the leaders and the various tribes. He also was involved in hosting the visiting Indian delegations. He had the opportunity to meet and talk with the Indian chiefs. He realized that the Indian way of life was changing, and he wanted to preserve a pictorial record of their lives. McKenney enlisted Charles Bird King, an artist friend, to paint portraits of the tribal leaders who came to Washington to visit their "Great White Father."[6] The government paid for the paintings, and they were hung in McKenney's offices on the second floor of the War Department building in Washington.[7]

King, a native of Newport, Rhode Island, was only four when he lost his father in an Indian raid in Ohio in 1790. Even

4. James D. Horan, *The McKenney-Hall Portrait Gallery of American Indians* (New York, 1972), 43-45.
5. Ibid., 22.
6. Herman J. Viola, *The Indian Legacy of Charles Bird King* (Washington, 1976), 20.
7. Patricia R. Wickman, *Osceola's Legacy* (Tuscaloosa, 1991), 70.

as a child he was interested in art, and by age fifteen he was studying in New York City. He continued his art education in London from 1805 to 1812, but the impending war with Britain made him decide to return home. After exhibiting his work in Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Richmond, he settled in Washington. From 1822 to 1842 King painted over 140 portraits of Indians for McKenney's War Department gallery.[8] They included several Florida Seminoles, painted during those delegations' visits to Washington in 1825 and 1826.[9]

This glorious period for McKenney ended after Andrew Jackson became president in 1829. Jackson, never an Indian sympathizer, also remembered McKenney's support for Calhoun during the presidential race in 1824 when Jackson was also a candidate. In 1830, realizing that his position was in jeopardy, McKenney began a program that he had long considered. He would print a portfolio of Indian paintings, along with historical and biographical sketches, and make the work available for general distribution. For a project of such magnitude McKenney needed substantial financial support. Samuel F. Bradford, a Philadelphia printer, became his first partner. The plan was to reprint twenty of the portraits, with McKenney providing the text.

A new process called lithography offered a medium that could be used to reproduce the paintings. Without President Jackson's permission, but with the cooperation of Secretary of War Lewis Cass, McKenney surreptitiously began shipping the original paintings, a few at a time, to Philadelphia. They were copied on canvas by Henry Inman, an artist and partner in the lithographic establishment of Inman and Childs, and were then shipped back to Washington. The likenesses were transferred onto a specially prepared stone with a greasy crayon. When the stone was dampened, the ink in the printing process adhered only to the drawing, and many detailed prints could be produced.[10] Various print-shop artists colored the reproductions.

McKenney was pleased with the results, and he and Bradford decided to announce publicly their proposed volumes. In 1836, McKenney published an introductory *Catalogue of One*

8. Viola, *Indian Legacy,* 21.
9. Wickman, *Osceola's Legacy,* 70.
10. Viola, *Thomas L. McKenney,* 255,

Hundred and Fifteen Indian Portraits to announce the forthcoming three-volume edition of the prints. Fifteen of the portraits in the *Catalogue* were of Creeks and Seminoles.[11] For six dollars customers received one portrait reproduced on fine paper, hand-colored, and accompanied by the text that had been prepared from McKenney's notes. For $120 a full set of the proposed folio was offered.[12]

Competition, bankruptcies, broken partnerships, deaths, and strained friendships plagued the operation, but after eight years of effort the first volume was published in February 1837. The title page of *History of the Indian Tribes of North America* carried McKenney's name and that of his new partner, James Hall. Hall lived in Cincinnati where he had a good reputation as a jurist, prolific novelist, western historian, and journal editor. He also had some experience as a publisher. He met with McKenney in 1835 and agreed to write the biographies needed for the publication, as well as the general historical sketches of the Indian tribes.[13] The first volume of plates was published at Philadelphia in 1836. It was reissued in Philadelphia and London in 1837 and again the following year together with the second volume.[14]

The project continued to suffer serious financial problems, particularly after the bank panic in 1837 which depleted the original subscribers' list so drastically that even the persistent McKenney finally had to admit defeat. He was out of funds and had exhausted the patience and generosity of most of his friends.

Thomas McKenney died in New York City in 1859 penniless and with no known survivors. Completion of his massive endeavor was turned over to a series of printers and lithographers. The first folio was published in three volumes in 1842 and 1844.[15] The original collection of King portraits was transferred to the National Institute in 1841 and then in 1858 to the Smithsonian Institution. The Smithsonian fire of January 15, 1865, destroyed many of the portraits, but the Henry Inman copies of the Bird portraits still exist.[16] Portraits of the Seminoles of

11. Wickman, *Osceola's Legacy*, 72.
12. Viola, *Thomas L. McKenney*, 256.
13. Horan, *McKenney-Hall Portrait Gallery*, 108.
14. Wickman, *Osceola's Legacy*, 70.
15. Ibid., 73.
16. Ibid.

This project is sponsored in part by the Department of State, Division of Historical Resources and the State of Florida.

This project is sponsored in part by the Department of State, Division of Historical Resources and the State of Florida.

Florida are prominent in the McKenney-Hall collection. Two of the most handsome pictures in the folio, notable for their full-length portrayal, are those of Aseola (Osceola) and Tuko-See-Mathla. Their clothing and accessories are intricately detailed, providing an accurate glimpse of Seminole tribal dress.

It is not known who was the actual artist of the Osceola portrait. Osceola never visited Washington, but, while in captivity at Fort Moultrie in South Carolina, several artists came to paint this most famous Indian.[17] One was George Catlin, the preeminent painter of American Indians. The War Department commissioned him to do Osceola's portrait. William L. Lanning and Robert John Curtis, both of Charleston, were two other artists who painted Osceola.

The portrait of Tuko-See-Mathla, a principal chief, is well documented. Also known as John Hicks, he was a member of the Seminole delegation that visited Washington in May 1826.[18] Florida territorial governor William P. DuVal had wanted to bestow upon him the honorific title of governor, but officials in Washington denied the request: "He will be distinguished by a Great Medal, and acknowledged Chief of his people."[19]

Head chief Micanopy and lesser chiefs Holata Mico, Itcho Tustenuggee, Neamathla, Fuche Luste Hadjo, and Tulce Emathla accompanied Tuko-See-Mathla on his visit to Washington in 1826.[20] They are portrayed wearing clothing supplied by their government hosts and typical Seminole tribal accessories. Several of the Seminoles are shown wearing the Peace Medals given them by President John Quincy Adams. According to the records of the War Department Indian Gallery, Charles Bird King was responsible for all of these portraits.[21]

A complete three-volume set of the original McKenney-Hall book, *History of the Indian Tribes of North America,* is in the collection of the P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History at the University of Florida. Individual lithographs, occasionally found

17. Ibid., 70-73.
18. John K. Mahon, *History of the Second Seminole War, 1835-1842,* rev. ed. (Gainesville, 1967), 62.
19. Francis Paul Pruche, *Indian Peace Medals in American History* (Madison, WI, 1971), 56.
20. Mahon, *Second Seminole War,* 62.
21. Viola, *Thomas L. McKenney,* 143-43 (as abstracted from the Catalog of War Department Indian Gallery).

MICANOPY,
A SEMINOLE CHIEF

This project is sponsored in part by the Department of State, Division of Historical Resources and the State of Florida.

through print dealers, sell for several hundred dollars each. For Floridians who want an opportunity to see an accurate portrayal of their Seminole Indian forebearers, thanks go to Thomas L. McKenney, the Indians' friend and the visionary who had them captured on canvas.

Florida Department of State / Division of Historical Resources
This project is sponsored in part by the Department of State, Division of Historical Resources and the State of Florida.