

# Pre-Columbian Man in Southern Florida

by KARL SQUIRES

*Mr. Squires has for years carried on investigations as a naturalist and archæologist in Southern Florida, both to enrich his own extensive collections and as a representative of the Smithsonian Institution. In his present paper he offers a general exposition of the early Indian inhabitants of this district, indicating the opportunities open to us for further study in this field.*

WHEN one thinks of the early Indian races whose members roamed through the woods and poled their dugout canoes through the sombre fastnesses of the Everglades and the Cypress swamps of Florida hundreds of years before the coming of the first white man, the natural thing has been to associate the name Seminole with all of these peoples. Scarcely a person but, when asked, will say that the first inhabitants of Florida were the forebears of the present Indians whose gaudy costumes, so familiar in South Florida, add another touch of glamour to an already charming land.

As a matter of fact, the Seminoles were comparatively recent intruders and it is doubtful if they reached any part of South Florida much before the middle of the last century. They were originally of Creek stock who found the continued advance of the whites into their lands more than they wished to bear. They moved southward into Northern and Western Florida where they conquered and either destroyed or absorbed the races there. The nucleus of the Seminole nation was undoubtedly that band of Indians that came to Florida first in 1750 from the large Creek towns along the Chatahoochee river. These bands attacked and destroyed the Apalachee towns in Northern Florida and gradually spread downward into the state. The first groups that came were Oconee Indians who were from the vicinity of Milledgeville, Georgia. Later large numbers of Muskogee Creeks and Hitchiti who were also allied with the Creeks moved southward. As these bands advanced, they either conquered and destroyed the races which they encountered or they absorbed them. Renegade whites and runaway negro slaves found a safe haven among them and so they became a strong and feared race of more or less mixed blood. They gradually spread across the entire northern portion of the state and by

the end of the 18th century occupied most of the central part of the peninsula.

When the Seminoles, hard pressed to hold their villages and towns near the center of the state, moved southward into the country about Lake Okeechobee and the Caloosahatchee river region, they induced the Indians already there to take up arms in their interests. The latter were called Spanish Indians because of their friendliness towards the Spaniards. In 1839 Colonel Harney had gone to Charlotte Harbor to establish a trading post with the natives. Not long after that his camp was attacked and of the force of 30 men stationed there 18 were killed. In retaliation, Colonel Harney with a large force attacked the Spanish Indians (Caloosas), killed their chief Chekika and a number of his followers. Chekika's band then went on the warpath and the next year Dr. Perrine, a botanist who had received a large land grant on the lower East Coast for the purpose of experimenting with tropical plants, and who, due to the Indian war had established his home and station on Indian Key, was killed by them. These marauding Indians as well as the band which in 1836 burned the Cape Florida lighthouse on Biscayne Key were Caloosas or Tequestas and not Seminoles on whom the blame has usually been placed.

The warlike attitude of the Seminoles toward both red and white men had long caused friction and finally the famous Seminole Wars, resulting in the deportation to what is now the state of Oklahoma, of most of the race. The remainder, undefeated, unconquered, and untamed, retreated further into the swamps and glades where most of them have remained until now. When the first Spanish adventurers arrived, searching for the wealth of the Indies and later when Ponce de Leon came in his quest for the Fountain of Youth, they found the land inhabited by a people who for perhaps thousands of years, had a civilization, crude though it was, which differed in many respects from that of the other portion of this continent. These people were governed by a loosely bound federation dominated and controlled by the Caloosas who occupied the southwestern part of the Gulf coast and inland to Lake Okeechobee, known to them as Lake Mayamme. Along the lower East coast were the Tequestas and north of them the Ais and Jaegas. The central part of the peninsula was inhabited by the Temukas.

Of these several races the most powerful and largest was the Caloosa. The chief called Calos, later corrupted to Carlos by the Spaniards, was the controlling power in the federation. The Caloosa metropolis was at or near Caxambas and Marco. At the time of the Spanish entry into the

country they probably numbered at least 25,000 persons. They were, at that time however, already a decadent race. Chicken pox introduced by the Spaniards, and against which they seemed to have no resistance destroyed them rapidly. One hundred years later they had been so devastated by disease that but a mere remnant remained.

The Caloosas were a fierce and warlike race, cruel and bloodthirsty. Their very name means Fierce People. They were large of stature, heavy set and powerful. The Tequestas who, allied to the Caloosas, lived along the lower east coast and on the Keys were similar to their neighbors in every way. Their chief was called Tekesta or Tequesta and their metropolis was on Biscayne bay at the mouth of the Miami river. On the site of the old Royal Palm hotel was a very large town and across the river on the Brickell property was a similar village. There were a number of other large villages near by. One in particular was at Miami Beach, 96th street and the Bay. Here a short canal had been dug as a landing for their canoes and the largest burial mound which has been found in Dade County was located a short distance to the north of the habitation area which was nearly a city block in area.

Another site was at Sherwood Forest in Little River. Here was located also the first and perhaps the only Spanish Mission in this vicinity. This mission was abandoned not long after it was established as the Indians did not look with favor on the teachings of the worthy Jesuit Fathers. There has been some difference in opinion as to the exact location of this mission, some authorities placing it somewhere in Coconut Grove. However, there is no doubt that there was such a mission somewhere in Miami. Other villages of the Tequestas were scattered about the lower East Coast from Cape Canaveral to Key West. A very large and populous village was on the west shore of Lake Worth in the town of Riviera. Evidently the broad reaches of the Everglades with a seemingly endless stretch of flooded sawgrass prairie which separated the lands of the Tekestas from the Caloosas did not prevent communication by canoe for the writer has discovered numbers of both habitation and burial sites on some of the hammocks far back in the 'Glades. Some of these were perhaps permanent villages, others seem to have been camping grounds only.

All these Indians of pre-Columbian times lived on and about large mounds. This custom, however, was not theirs alone. In various and widely separated parts of the world these mounds of long departed and perhaps unknown and forgotten races remain as monuments to a past civilization. Excavation by archeologists in Florida have shown that there are at least three different kinds of mounds. These were used for widely

different purposes. The most common by far is the habitation mound, sometimes known as the kitchen midden or midden mound. Here lived the members of family group or village as the case might be. The local chief, called the cacique, had his dwelling on the center of the mound. Grouped about were the houses of the principal men. Other members of the community placed their houses about the mound on the flat surrounding land. The mound itself was built up by the gradual accumulation of debris, over a period of hundreds of years. This debris was covered, from time to time, with sand, shells or dirt as the case might be. Excavations into these mounds have brought to light weapons, tools, utensils and ornaments which were dropped and eventually buried. All pottery which has been found in Southern Florida had been broken. Burial mounds, North and West of the larger Midden Mounds were composed of sand and contained nothing but human remains. When a person died, the body was set out usually on a platform of branches. The birds and animals picked the bones. These were then gathered and placed on the mound and covered with sand. In time, some of these mounds have become very large and much higher than the middens. A third type of mound was used for ceremonies and other official purposes. Such mounds are of sand, sometimes 25 feet or more in height and in some cases several hundred feet in length with flattened top.

A very interesting ceremonial mound exists in North Dade county out several miles in the Everglades. Surrounded for miles by deep black muck, this mound is constructed entirely of beach sand. It is more than 25 feet high, about 900 feet in length and 300 feet in width. On the east side three terraces bring the approach gradually down to the level of the glades. At present the flattened top plateau is covered with a large oak hammock except for a central clearing on which in recent years the Seminoles have held festivals. A similar sand mound north of Boca Raton is at least 30 feet in height and nearly round. Another north of West Palm Beach is west of the present highway, long and high with a high narrow causeway leading to the shore of Lake Worth nearly a quarter of a mile away. Here are the remains of two very large shell and dirt midden mounds, one on each side of a natural creek which has long since dried away.

When we consider that Southern Florida itself is a comparatively recent elevation above the shallow sea which covered it for thousands of years, it is surprising that any culture could have been established there. It is true that there are no buried cities, temples or pyramids. In fact there are but three or four monuments of stone in this part of the state.

Only slight evidence exists that stone was used in construction by the people who lived, worked, fought and roamed the peninsula a thousand or more years ago. They did, however, build shell roads, dig canals from tidewater to their larger cities, and transport enormous quantities of sand many miles to build large mounds, the use of some of which has not as yet been determined.

The culture of these early inhabitants, crude and simple as it must have been, was different from that of the tribes and races who lived contemporary with them farther north on the American Continent at the time of the advent of the white man in the Western Hemisphere. The life of the people of South Florida was simple. They lived for the most part in small villages and the sites selected were always on advantageous high points. They hunted and fished. Their weapons were crude. Deer bone furnished fishhooks, spear points, bodkins, pins for the hair and other ornaments. From the larger Conchs and other shells they made chisels, axes, gorgets and pendants. Stone was not commonly used. In fact very few pieces of any sort of stone have been found in the mounds. Sailfish beaks and Stingray tails were used to some extent as barbs and points. Most of those found so far have come from the Miami Beach mounds. The pottery used by these people was crude. Some of the pieces found show evidence that the wheel was used but much of their pots were just shaped. Evidently each locality had its own designs. In the heart of the Caloosa land, for example, we find the outside bordered with a feather-edge design which varies on different pots. Nowhere on the lower East Coast has the featheredge been used. The smaller pots and bowls on the Gulf coast were often painted or colored reddish on the outside. The Tequesta pottery seems to have had a much greater variety of markings and designs than has so far been discovered on the West Coast in the Caloosa mounds. A sort of a basket weave design is very common all along the East Coast. This design covers the entire pot.

The celts which are rather common in all the larger mounds vary considerably also with location. These chisels, axes and similar instruments and weapons, all of which are known to the ethnologist as celts, were in almost every case made from the thick lip of the Pink Conch (*Strombus gigas*). In the Miami area nearly all the specimens found have a square cutting edge. At a large mound near Boca Raton in Palm Beach County and at the mounds excavated around Palm Beach the celts invariably had rounded edges. Some have straight sides and others are nearly triangular in shape. Gorgets were made from the columellas or central cores of the large Gastropod shells, from various small shells of

all sorts and even from the under plate of turtles. Shark teeth and small shells made necklaces and other ornaments. In the burial mound at upper Miami Beach was found a fossil shark tooth nearly three inches in length. This tooth was probably of the miocene age and worn as an ornament since it was drilled with the typical hour-glass hole. As has been stated, deer bone furnished the people with an endless variety of small implements, weapons and ornaments. Baskets were made by plaiting palmetto leaves. Fishing and other lines were made from twisted fibers.

Of their religion we know very little. They lived mainly for the present and had little or no thought for the future. They had Gods of a sort, according to the early Spanish writings. According to the narratives, it would seem that Calos, chief of all the Caloosas and overlord of the other races which composed the Caloosa federation, had set himself up long, long ago as being possessed of supernatural powers. These were passed on through the succeeding generations. Spiritual power was united with political and social power and the rulers made the most of such power. The subjects of Calos believed that his charms and sorceries were the cause of good crops and plentiful harvest. The lesser rulers of the other allied nations came under this spell for each village and family group paid annual tribute to him composed of food, weapons, and skins.

Each year at harvest time a solemn ceremony took place. The leaders attended and after feasting and sacrifices were made the pledge of allegiance was made by what was known as the Black Drink Ceremony. This was performed by each drinking a very bitter liquid made from berries and used for this purpose only. Special drinking cups, made from the shell of the Lightning Conch (*Fulgur perversa*) were kept for the occasion. Some of the first Spanish writers refer to human sacrifices but this fact has not been definitely established. It is known, however, that whenever a Cacique died every servant of his was put to death. Lopez de Velasco writes that after the death of a Cacique his larger bones were removed from the body and set up in his house as a shrine. For a month his followers came daily to the place and worshipped there.

Most of our knowledge of their customs and culture has come to us from the meagre reports and other writings of the early Spanish Conquistadores and one or two Englishmen who were shipwrecked along the coast and were obliged to make their way northward along the coast often through the lands of unfriendly natives. Our best information comes from the journal of Hernando de Escalante Fontenada, a Spaniard who was shipwrecked on the lower West Coast early in the 16th century. He was held a captive for seventeen years, although he was allowed the

run of the villages and through most of the Caloosa regions. He spent most of his time visiting the various towns of the Caloosas and in this way became very familiar with their culture. His writings have been preserved in the archives of the Spanish Government and have been made available to the archeologists in this country.

Another Spaniard, named Garcelaso, a member of one of the early Spanish expeditions, described the town of Ossachille, which is supposed to have been somewhere in either Manatee or Sarasota County. This description may be taken as typical of the villages in this part of the state at that time. Translated from the original, he writes as follows: "As many as possible, at least the chief and under lords, had houses built on the flat of the top mound site, according to the grandeur of the ruler, accommodating from ten to twenty houses, for the dwellings of the family and the serving people. On the flat at the foot of the hill (mound) they make a quadrangle square, according to the size of the village which is to be located around it."

Up to the time of the Spanish invasion the inhabitants of South Florida seem to have had little if any trade relations with the races further north. Excavation of the mounds in the northern part of the state reveal vast numbers of stone weapons and implements. Many of these are of material not naturally found within hundreds of miles of the place where they were discovered. Gold and silver beads and other ornaments are not uncommon in the mounds of the upper West Coast of the state.

The only mound from which were found highly ornamented artifacts and carved wood have been found was at Marco in 1904. About four years ago a project sponsored by the Smithsonian Institute of Washington made extensive excavations at some large mounds near Belle Glade. Here at a depth of some four feet below the water level a number of pieces of carved wood and a number of gold beads were found.

The age of the mounds in South Florida has not yet been accurately determined. It is certain, however, that man lived and roamed along the higher parts of lower Florida for perhaps several thousands of years. Also it is rather possible that there was an earlier race perhaps more intellectual and having a higher form of culture than the Caloosas and their allies. Some of the larger mounds go to much greater depth than others. Recent excavations at a number of the more important village sites reveal a most interesting story.

At Miami Beach the lower portions of both the burial and the midden mounds at the foot of 96th street extend several feet below the present

high water level. Since all the mounds were built on the surface of the ground and are close to the waters of Biscayne Bay it is evident that the former inhabitants must have lived there at a time when the land was far enough above tidewater to insure dry land at all times. The land on which the mound rests must have settled at least six feet to have made habitation there possible. Statistics have estimated that there has been a gradual settlement of the lands in that part of the state at a rate of one inch to one hundred years. Assuming that to be true, the age of the lowest strata must be around six thousand years. Mammal bones of long extinct species have been found among the remains of broken pottery, ashes and other debris in the habitation part of the mounds. This would also indicate the great age of the earliest settlement.

In the lower levels of the Miami Beach mounds and the larger ones at Belle Glade there appears to have been a different culture of a more advanced type. The skeletal remains show a distinct difference and show forms which indicate a higher intelligence. This earlier race if it existed was probably over run and destroyed by the more warlike and hostile race which followed. The origin of these early races is still in doubt. The Caloosa and Tequesta groups may have migrated from Asia but their customs and habits and language differed materially from that of the Choctaws and Creeks who lived north of them. Excavations of mounds on a number of the larger Islands in the West Indies has brought to light hundreds of artifacts from those regions. Since the artifacts from South Florida are comparable to the former it is quite possible that our early floridians came from the East rather than from the North. Several hundreds of mounds scattered over the state have not been excavated and our only hope of more accurate information of these long departed peoples is that at some future date scientific research may reveal the key to the ancient civilizations which flourished here so long ago.