

POST TIME

Marker to honor historic Okeechobee battle site

Readers: This weekend “marks” a milestone for one of our more outlying but historically rich areas: Okeechobee County.



Eliot Kleinberg

At 11 a.m. Saturday, at the reenactment of the historic Battle of Okeechobee, a marker will be dedicated at its new spot at a new state park.

The 1837 skirmish on the north shore of the big lake is approaching its 175th anniversary.

The battle, on Christmas Day 1837, was the biggest and bloodiest fight of the Second Seminole War, one of America's most controversial, and mostly forgotten.

At an expanse of sawgrass, chest-high water and muck, Gen. Zachary Taylor — later president — led about 1,000 U.S. soldiers and Missouri volunteers who routed several hundred Seminoles.

The new park is itself a stunning victory for forces who for decades fought to protect the site from encroaching development.

In 2006, as part of the \$3 billion Florida Forever program, the state agreed to buy 145 of the 211 acres at the battlefield, which the National Trust for Historic Places had listed as one of America's 11 most endangered historic sites.

Officials said it likely would have ended up as townhomes.

Plans include a small museum that will describe the battle and house artifacts found at the site.

While the site will host this weekend's reenactment, it's not yet open as a park. No structures have been built yet.

The Second Seminole War, 1835 to 1842, was the longest and most expensive the white man waged against American Indians and draws parallels to Vietnam.

Soldiers were sent far away to an inhospitable swamp to fight locals familiar with the territory, and it was a war of attrition in which three died of disease for every one killed in battle.

After the war, the Seminoles were scattered, with about 600 shipped west



Palm Beach Post file photo

Willard Steele, playing the part of Gen. Zachary Taylor who fought in the Seminole War at Okeechobee, sets up the Missouri Volunteer Flag at the battle site south of Okeechobee.

as part of the “Trail of Tears” and the rest vanishing into the Everglades.

In 1939, West Palm Beach and Fort Pierce chapters of the Daughters of the American Revolution erected a roadside marker along U.S. 441 near the battlefield. In November 2011, the marker was moved to the new park site.

The Battle of Okeechobee State Park site is at 3500 S.E. 38th Ave. in Okeechobee.

Reenactment Web site:
www.okeechobeebattlefield.com.

Submit your questions to Post Time, The Palm Beach Post, 2751 S. Dixie Highway, West Palm Beach, FL 33405. Include your full name and hometown. Call (561) 820-4418. Sorry, no personal replies.

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