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Special Feature

Slavery and the University of Florida: African Americans, Seminoles and the Origins of Higher Education in Florida

Ahmad Brown, Gabriella Paul, Javier Escoto-Garcia, and Morgan Peltier

Artist's Ken Snelling's projection of the East Florida Seminary (from Broward Lovell, *Gone With the Hickory Stick: School Days in Marion County, 1845-1960* [1975]

Preface

Jon Sensbach
Professor of History, University of Florida

Born into slavery in South Carolina, Samuel Small was among dozens of enslaved men, women and children who moved with planter John M. Taylor and his family to the South's new cotton frontier in Marion County, Florida, in the early 1850s. Through their unpaid labor in sweltering cotton and sugar fields, hundreds of enslaved workers in central Florida, including Small, generated profits that made possible a new, state-supported academy, founded in Ocala in 1853, called the East Florida Seminary, on whose board John Taylor served.

After the Civil War, Samuel Small went on to become one of a handful African-American representatives elected to the state Legislature during Reconstruction. The East Florida Seminary, which moved to Gainesville in 1866, merged with other small colleges to become the University of Florida in 1905. Now one of the premier public institutions of higher learning in the country, the University owes its existence to Small and many other enslaved people. This article, researched and written by a team of undergraduate History students, explores those connections.

Many colleges and universities, among them some of the most prestigious institutions in the country, have conducted such studies. One after another has found deeply entrenched ties to slavery. At the University of Virginia, for example, a report issued in 2018 noted that "slavery, in every way imaginable, was central to the project of designing, funding, building and maintaining the school." Institutions continue to struggle to square the mission of higher education with their historical complicity in racial discrimination and lasting social inequalities.[1]

In the Fall of 2018, I taught a class at the University of Florida in which students and I grappled with those issues. To our knowledge, no one had ever studied whether the University also carried such debts. At the end of the term, four students—Ahmad Brown, Javier Escoto-Garcia, Gabriella Paul and Morgan Peltier—volunteered to investigate that question as an independent study the next semester. From their research, the authors conclude that, like so many others, the University did indeed have deep economic, social, and racial ties to slavery. Many of the East Florida Seminary's students came from families who collectively owned hundreds of

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[1] President's Commission on Slavery and the University, "Report to President Teresa A. Sullivan" (Charlottesville, Va., 2018), 15. https://vpdiversity.virginia.edu/sites/vpdiversity.virginia.edu/files/PCSU%20Report%20FINAL_July%202018.pdf. On slavery and higher education, see Craig Steven Wilder, *Ebony and Ivy: Race, Slavery and the Troubled History of America's Universities* (New York, 2014); and Leslie M. Harris, James T. Campbell, and Alfred L. Brophy, eds., *Slavery and the University: Histories and Legacies* (Athens, Ga., 2019).

enslaved people, as did members of the school's Board of Education. Profits generated from slave labor kept the school running. The research also points out the link between higher education and the removal of Native Americans from their own territory. The sale of former Seminole land supported a new fund that created the East Florida Seminary. The University's history runs not only through slave-trading but through expropriation of Native land on which the campus sits. Through this project, the Samuel Smalls of the world can become visible again.

I. Seminoles and Slavery

The founding of the East Florida Seminary in 1853 was a direct product of the decades-long struggle for control over the Florida peninsula between the Seminole Indians, enslaved and free African Americans, and the United States. The Seminole Wars (1816-18, 1835-42 and 1853-58) originated in two objectives by the U.S.: to drive the Seminoles out of Florida and gain their land for cotton and slavery, and to stop the flight into Florida of enslaved African Americans from neighboring states seeking refuge among the Seminoles. The U.S. pursued war to secure property in land and enslaved workers. Seminoles and their African-American allies fought to defend territory and freedom.

The Seminoles were Lower Creek peoples who

migrated into Spanish Florida from Georgia and Alabama in the mid-eighteenth century. They allied first with the Spanish, then with the British, who colonized Florida between 1763-83, then again with the Spanish, who reclaimed Florida after the American Revolution until 1821. With both Spanish and British settlements and plantations clustered in the northeast part of the colony, Seminoles occupied the large expanse of territory from the west to north-central Florida, as far south as present-day Marion County, where they raised cattle and horses, traded in deerskins, and practiced subsistence agriculture.

Enslaved Africans and Africans Americans, meanwhile, had a long history of seeking freedom in Florida. The Spanish crown offered freedom to escaped slaves from the rival English colony of Carolina, and though that policy ended after 1783, many escapees still slipped across the border from Georgia to find sanctuary among the Seminoles and in the swamps and forests of Florida.[2]

By the early nineteenth century, American independence unleashed "an aggressive Anglo-American expansion into the Gulf South borderlands" that pressured Spain to cede Florida to the U.S. When attempts to buy the colony failed, the U.S. resorted to military force, supporting a

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[2] Jane Landers, *Black Society in Spanish Florida* (Urbana, Ill., 1999); Larry Eugene Rivers, *Rebels and Runaways: Slave Resistance in Nineteenth-Century Florida* (Urbana, Ill., 2013).

group of frontiersmen from Georgia who invaded Florida in 1812, in a conflict known as the "Patriot War" that became folded into the larger War of 1812. While inconclusive, the Patriot War ushered in a period of warfare for the next six years that hastened the U.S. takeover of Florida. Tensions between Indians and Anglo-Americans continued to flare along the Florida-Georgia border, prompting the outbreak of the First Seminole War in 1817 and a second U.S. invasion led by Andrew Jackson in 1818. After the war, Spain ceded Florida to the U.S. in 1819, and the Seminoles, unable to stem the tide of settlers pouring into their land, signed a treaty in 1823 agreeing to withdraw to a four-million-acre reservation between Alachua and Tampa and to return enslaved runaways.[3]

Yet even this concession did not satisfy the U.S. government. As the cotton frontier pushed further south, Seminoles felt pressure to give up the rest of their land. That pressure derived from what historians call "settler colonialism," the desire by invader-settlers to drive indigenous people from their homeland and occupy it themselves. "Territoriality is settler colonialism's specific, irreducible element" that fosters a "logic of elimination" of native people, according to anthropologist Patrick Wolfe. With the election of Jackson as

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[3] William S. Belko, "Epilogue to the War of 1812: The Monroe Administration, American Anglophobia, and the First Seminole War," in Belko, ed., *America's Hundred Years' War*, 54-102; C.S. Monaco, *The Second Seminole War and the Limits of American Aggression* (Baltimore, 2018), quote 16-17.

president in 1828 and the passage by Congress two years later of the Indian Removal Act, settler colonialism became national policy, a form of ethnic cleansing which Jackson couched as benevolent concern for Indian welfare.[4]

The unrelenting demand to remove Indians sparked the Second Seminole War. One group of Seminole chiefs signed a treaty in 1832 agreeing to move to Oklahoma within three years. The treaty angered many Seminoles who refused to move. A U.S. military detachment that entered Seminole territory to enforce the Removal Act in 1835 was ambushed and destroyed by Seminole and African-American forces. Dade's Massacre, as the attack was called, put the U.S. on notice that it was facing a capable and determined resistance movement featuring younger, more militant Seminole leaders, including Osceola, who killed the U.S. agent in charge of the removal plan.[5]

The presence of so many African Americans in this opposition force reminded the military that this was a war about slavery as well as Indian removal. In addition, according to historian C.W. Monaco, "the very existence of black slaves among any Indigenous population easily fueled suspicions by the southern elites that rebellion could ensue," heightening the

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[4] Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8 (2006), 387-409. On the expanding cotton frontier, see Edward Baptist, *Creating an Old South: Middle Florida's Plantation Frontier Before the Civil War* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2002).
[5] Monaco, *Second Seminole War*, 47-63.

government's desire to remove the Indians from their lands. One officer famously called the conflict a "Negro, not an Indian war."[6]

The Second Seminole War ended up as among the most sustained resistance campaigns by eastern Indians against white territorial incursion. Still, despite the opposition, some 4,000 Seminoles and their slaves had been deported to Oklahoma by 1842 and others resettled in south Florida.[7] Seminole removal opened millions of acres in central Florida to white settlers and their enslaved laborers. To attract migrants to territory that had not yet been completely secured, the federal government passed the Armed Occupation Act in 1842 making up to 200,000 acres available for land grants. The act gave 160 acres to any man aged eighteen or older able and willing to bear arms to defend his property. The act had the desired effect. Thousands of settlers from both in and outside of Florida, many of them Seminole War veterans, received permits and moved into the region, bringing slaves with them or buying them once they settled. In Marion County, the heart of former Seminole territory, 253 permits were issued by the end of 1843. In one historian's estimation, "the Armed Occupation Act of 1842 changed the face and structure of

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[6] Ibid., 33; Matthew Clavin, "'It is a negro, not an Indian war': Southampton, St. Domingo, and the Second Seminole War," in Belko., ed., *America's Hundred Years' War,* 181-208; Rivers, *Rebels and Runaways*. Some Black resisters were free people, others were enslaved by the Seminoles.
[7] Monaco, *Second Seminole War,* 95-96; Belko, *America's Hundred Years' War,* 4.

Marion County."[8]

At least some, perhaps more, land grant recipients under the act later became involved with the East Florida Seminary in the 1850s, either as board members or as parents of enrollees. One, for example, was board member John G. Reardon, who received several grants totaling 556 acres. One of those grants came later, in 1850, as the result of "An Act granting Bounty Land to certain Offices and Soldiers who have been engaged in the Military Service of the United States." Reardon, identified as a lieutenant in the Florida Volunteers during the Mexican War, received 160 acres under warrant no. 2343.[9]

By 1845, when Florida was granted statehood, years-long federal policy aimed at land occupation, population growth and capital development through slavery was working. Native inhabitants had been largely dispossessed of their land, havens for runaway slaves had been rooted out, and the state had been readied for plantation agriculture. By 1850, the state's population stood at 87,445, up from 54,477 in 1840, of whom 39,300 were enslaved. Most of the enslaved population was

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[8] Covington, James W. "The Armed Occupation Act of 1842," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 40, no. 1 (1961): 41-52; Joe Knetsch, "The Impact of the Armed Occupation Act of 1842 on Marion County, Florida," address to Marion County Historical Society, 1990, in Special Collections, Smathers Library, University of Florida.

[9] Fillmore, Millard, Pres. "Military Warrant." Digital image. US Department of Interior. https://glorecords.blm.gov/details/patent/default.aspx?accession=0597-088&docClass=MW&sid=aiyxhtj5.amb#patentDetailsTabIndex=1.

concentrated in "Middle Florida"—the Panhandle region between the Apalachicola and Suwanee rivers--but Alachua and Marion counties were poised for a large increase during the 1850s.

II. Creation of the East Florida Seminary

The history of the state seminary, like much of Florida's history more broadly, is synonymous with the history of public lands and slavery. The East Florida Seminary, which opened its doors in Marion County in 1853, owed its existence to the removal of Native Americans and the enslavement of African Americans that made possible the state's acquisition of land upon which the seminary itself was later built.

The first official mention of a university of Florida can be traced back to 1824.[10] It was an idea brought up amidst the legislative council that governed the territory of Florida, before it was granted statehood in 1845. Yet, though Florida was first established as a U.S. territory in 1821, it took three decades and a series of congressional acts, from 1823 to 1853, to establish a state-supported seminary in the state. The first, passed by the U.S. Congress, on March 3, 1823, under President James Monroe, sought to reserve 92,120 acres of land in the east and west territories of Florida to be granted to the government upon statehood. The sale of that land would support the

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[10] *University Record* Vol. VI (Gainesville: University of Florida, May 1911) p.16.

construction of a seminary of higher learning in each territory. This act proved the basis for the creation of two seminaries that would later become what are today recognized the University of Florida and Florida State University.[11]

By 1827, Congress sought to locate the townships wherein the east and west Florida seminaries would be erected. The original boundary was originally set as the Apalachicola River. In 1851, the boundary was relocated to the Suwannee: a 246-mile river separating Florida's peninsula from its panhandle. The congressional act also granted the governor and legislature of the territory authority to possess and lease the land year-to-year, stipulating that money raised would be appropriated to the use of schools, and the erection of a seminary of learning."[12] With the Armed Occupation Act of 1842, Florida attracted many migrants from Georgia and the Carolinas, and by [13] 1845, the state's Seminary Land Fund made available for sale some 92,000 acres of former Seminole land. Proceeds would fund the eventual opening, in 1853, of the East Florida Seminary. Thus, the first campus of the University of Florida was made possible by Indian removal and profits from slave-based agriculture operated upon public

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[11] Library of Congress, Sess. II, Ch. 29 (March 3. 1823), p. 756; Samuel Proctor, "The University of Florida: Its Early Years" (Ph.D. diss., University of Florida, 1958) p. 7.
[12] Library of Congress, Sess. II, Ch. 29 (March 3. 1823), p. 201-202.
[13] Charles L. Crow, "The East Florida Seminary While in Ocala, 1853-1866" (unpublished typescript, Federal Writers' Project, 193-?), Special Collections, Smathers Library, University of Florida, 34.

seminary land.[14]

On Nov. 30, 1850, the most consequential action toward opening the doors of the East Florida Seminary occurred, after nearly three decades of largely provisional acts passed by Congress. The legislation outlined seminary plans that would prioritize the training of teachers, offering free tuition to students studying to become teachers, but also offer courses in the mechanic arts, husbandry, agricultural chemistry, fundamental law, along with lectures in astronomy, anatomy, history, moral philosophy and the languages. Gov. Brown signed the bills into law on Jan. 24, 1851.[15] "Each seminary would be financed by gifts, donations, tuition, and one-half the interest from the Seminary Land Fund."[16] Every county was expected to report to the state legislature which lands, money or other provisions–possibly free labor–their respective towns were willing to donate toward the purpose of constructing a seminary.[17]

All that remained was to choose the seminary's location. In 1852, lawmakers considered one proposal to put the campus in Micanopy, in Alachua County, and another to put it on the existing site of the East Florida Independent Institute of Ocala, in Marion County. They chose the latter

[14] Proctor, "University of Florida," 15-16.
[15] Ibid., 20 -22.
[16] Ibid., 23; L.M. Bristol, *Supplementary Material Accompanying Lectures on Three Focal Points in the Development of Florida State System of Higher Education* (Gainesville, Fl., 1952), 14-15.
[17] Crowe, "East Florida Seminary," 29.

option due to the persuasive influence of a man named, Gilbert G. Kingsbury, also known as S.S. Burton. Upon arriving in Marion County in 1852, Burton and his assistant Horatio Mann united five small schools to create the East Florida Independent Institute. One of the five was Hammond's school, built within a four-block square in the young town of Ocala, bound by Lime, Pine, Fourth and Sixth Streets.[18] Though private, the Institute operated like a public school, offering courses in reading, writing, arithmetic, geography, Latin and religion. Its clientele came from the elite planters of Marion County. "It was no longer an unusual sight," according to historian Samuel Proctor, "to see boys and girls being driven into town from nearby plantations in wagons and buggies and chaperoned by Negro household servants."[19]

This is the private academy Burton pitched in his 10-page speech to the state legislature to locate the East Florida Seminary at his Institute. Burton's winning argument portrayed Ocala as a state investment due to two factors: Good lands and a ready population. He predicted an influx of settlers after the Second Seminole War and promised that Native Americans would be removed to make room for them. "The number of emegrants [sic] that pass south through Ocala is not less than 150 per week. These lands will be much more rapidly sold as

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[18] Eloise Robinson Ott and Louis Hickman Chazal, *Ocali Country, Kingdom of the Sun: A History of Marion County, Florida* (Ocklawaha, Fl.: Marion Publishers, 1966), 71.
[19] Proctor, "University of Florida," 41-42.

soon as the Indians are removed. And the Indians will be. The general government will see to it that they are removed . . . If the state won't Volunteers will. They must and will be removed."[20] Burton thus made explicit the connection between Seminole dispossession and settler colonialism.

The legislature voted on Jan. 6, 1853 to adopt Burton's Institute as the East Florida State Seminary – the date represented today on the University of Florida's official seal, thereby regarded as the date of the university's founding.[21] The three buildings Burton included in his offer for the location of the seminary, which would become the campus of the seminary, were among the earliest public buildings to be constructed in Marion County. It is unknown whether enslaved labor contributed directly to building of these structures, with poor documentation of the area's rapid development between 1850 to 1860. It is reasonable to assume that slavery and infrastructure were closely related. In fact, one historian, Eloise Ott, claims, "practically every plantation was provided with its gin and sugar mill with all other necessary agricultural equipment and it is said that the slaves here were particularly well trained in the making of farming implements and in building."[22] Enslaved workers also cleared heavily forested land for agriculture and built local churches. According to

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[20] Ibid., 6.
[21] Proctor, "University of Florida," 46.
[22] Ott and Chazal, *Ocali Country,* 85

eyewitness accounts, enslaved laborers raised the first church in Ocala, the Methodist Episcopal Church, completed in 1850. Thomas Frink, owner of fourteen slaves himself by 1860, supervised the work.[23] Similarly, the first Baptist Church of Ocala, organized by the wives of prominent Marion County planters, Maria Baker Taylor and S.M.G. Gary, was erected through slave labor. As is characteristic of the time, many prominent families of the town were involved in the church and, soon, the seminary. The very slaves who built Ocala's first churches might have constructed the East Florida Seminary as well.

In 1853, the East Florida Seminary opened its doors with Burton as principal. The Seminary's first Board of Education, appointed by Gov. Thomas Brown, included many former trustees of Burton's East Florida Independent Institute, including Major Lewis C. Gaines, Rev. William Royall, William S. Harris and John M. McIntosh.[24] However, Burton did not transition well in supervising the seminary as a state institution instead of his personal academic entity. He grossly neglected to follow the Board's instructions for documentation. Therefore, the final report of the seminary's first session relied solely on Burton's estimates of 60 to 90 students in attendance paying a tuition fee of $1,000.[25] Board President L.C. Gaines also listed

[23] Ibid., 85.
[24] Proctor, "University of Florida,"28.
[25] Crow, "East Florida Seminary," 41.

the subjects that were taught: reading, writing, arithmetic, natural philosophy, English grammar, geography, drawing, music and Latin.

Two incidents involving Burton, one the violent flogging of a student and the other an apparent romantic scandal with music teacher Anna Underwood, led to his removal, the seminary's temporary closing and replacement of the entire faculty upon its reopening in 1854. Burton's replacement, J. G. Bowman, also proved unpopular and was succeeded by Samuel Darwin McConnell around 1857, when the seminary completed its first profitable session.[26] McConnell is credited with the seminary's substantial growth in enrollment and sophistication. The Board of Education, comprised by William Royal and W. S. Harris, was replaced by prominent men in the community such as J. E. Williams and John M. Taylor. Student enrollment increased in every session over which McConnell presided, beginning with 58 students during his first term in 1857 and ending with 84 in 1860. For the first time, during this period, students came from outside Marion County and outside the state.[27]

In January 1861, Robert P. Bryce was appointed principal, the last to oversee the seminary while it stood in Marion County. Bryce, alongside the entire 1861 graduating class of seminary boys, would fight and die for the

[26] Proctor, "University of Florida," 47, 73.
[27] Crow, "East Florida Seminary," 67.

Confederacy. Seminary land funds were reallocated for the purchase of arms in the war, racking up a debt that debilitated the East Florida Seminary and from which it would never recover in Ocala. But as the school's enthusiastic participation in the Confederate cause demonstrated, the creation, maintenance and philosophy of the Seminary were deeply intertwined with slavery.

III. Slavery and Seminarians

Although the slender documentary record about the East Florida Seminary does not indicate whether any enslaved people were owned in the institution's name, the Seminary was founded just as plantation agriculture and slavery were spreading into the deep South's new frontier in central Florida. Marion County lay at the heart of that expansion. As land was cleared, cotton production increased dramatically, and the county also led the state in sugar cane cultivation. In 1850, the county's enslaved population numbered about 550. By 1860, that figure had increased tenfold, to 5,532, or 62 percent of the total population. Thus, the school's chief connection to slavery was through its student body and board, most of whom were members of the Ocala and Marion County plantation elite and directly tied to slave ownership. The exploitation of unfree labor in enslaved-majority Marion County made it possible for students from wealthy families to attend the school while providing white male board members with the income that

elevated them to positions of leadership both locally and across the state of Florida.[28]

This conclusion is supported by compiling lists of known names of students, faculty, board members, and anyone else involved with the Seminary and comparing them against federal census records from 1850 and 1860. Many names are identified in two histories of the Seminary. One was historian Samuel Proctor's dissertation from 1958, a history of the University of Florida's early years between 1853-1906. The second was a manuscript by C.L. Crow written under the auspices of the Federal Writers' Project in the 1930s, "East Florida Seminary (1853-66)." Both works employ primary documentation from the 1850s, including congressional acts, annual Seminary reports included in the *Florida Senate Journal,* and other sources. In addition, Crow tapped into a useful vein of information through oral interviews with surviving alumni of the East Florida Seminary. These diverse sources allowed him to discuss in detail the board members, administrative staff, and state officials who were involved with the early origins of the school and to analyze the land grants and legislation responsible for its creation of the school.[29]

No board minutes, student records, instructional materials or other primary sources have been preserved from

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[28] 1850 and 1860 federal censuses, Marion County (Florida State Archives, Tallahassee); Julia Floyd Smith, *Slavery and Plantation Growth in Antebellum Florida, 1821-1860* (Gainesville, Fl., 1973, 2017), 10-11.
[29] Crow, "East Florida Seminary," Proctor, "University of Florida."

the Seminary. In fact, only one document is known to have survived from the school, but it is a valuable one—a program for an "Exhibition," or commencement and closing ceremony, on July 12, 1861, three months after the Civil War started. The program lists songs and patriotic speeches honoring the Confederate cause, identifying by name the performers among students and faculty. Some twenty additional names surface in this document, eighteen of whom are students.[30] Of these 18 students, six names, when cross-referenced with the 1850 and 1860 Slave Schedules of both Marion and Alachua County, can be confirmed as either members of slaveholding families or eventual slaveholders themselves, accounting for 197 and possibly 200 slaves: A.E. Blitch, 11; Bruton/Frink 19, or 22; House, or Howse, 19; McGahagin, 76; Reardon, 7, and Pyles, 65. Though these families represent only a small percentage of the student body at the East Florida Seminary, several of them came from some of the largest slave-holding families in central Florida. Because so many names of other students at the Seminary remain unknown, the proportion of Marion County's enslaved population connected to the school through their labor is certain to have been far higher.[31]

One of the first noticeable figures on the

[30] East Florida Seminary Exhibition, 1861, in Special Collections, Smathers Library, University of Florida.

[31] These schedules do not display the individual names of the slaves themselves but instead give only the name of their owner accompanied with the enslaved person's age and gender.

commencement list was J.G. Reardon, the salutatory speaker, whose father, John G. Reardon, the Mexican War veteran, had received several land grants and became a prominent figure in the early structuring of the Ocala area during the 19th century.[32] J.G. Reardon Jr. must have been born shortly after the 1850 census was taken because he participated in the commencement ceremony in 1861, just 11 years later. Reardon's mother, Caroline M. Reardon, owned 7 slaves.

Credited for singing "Slumber Gently Falls" after J.G. Reardon's introduction, a Miss House was most likely 1 of 3 children born in the mid-19th century to Edmund D. and Cynthia House. In the 1850 slave census of Marion County, Edmund D. House owned 11 slaves, while in 1860, a Mrs. C.C. House owned 8 slaves. The commencement list also shows a Miss Pinckston, or Penkston, whose father owned 2 slaves.[33]

C.L. Crow refers to a Miss Susannah Bruton, who was a student at the East Florida Seminary and who, many years later, discussed her recollections of the school with Crow himself in an oral interview in the 1930s. "The Exhibition, or commencement exercises as it would be called now," Crow wrote, "closed with a wild demonstration of devotion to the Southern Cause, as Miss Susannah Bruton, now Mrs. Sue E. Frink, of Lutz, Florida, sang to the tune of Dixie a 'Rebel' song

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[32] David Cook, "Confederate Veterans gather in Ocala to remember Civil War years" *Ocala Star Banner*, May 25, 2013.
[33] East Florida Seminary Exhibition; 1850 Marion County Census; 1860 Slave Census.

written for the occasion by the principal of the seminary and printed on the program." Miss Bruton performed several times throughout the commencement ceremony, including a song called, "An old man would be wooing," a "prayer" and the closing song dedicated to the Confederacy, "Dixie." Susannah Bruton was the daughter of David Bruton, a 46-year-old farmer, county surveyor, and possibly slave owner. When she married Albert Frink, a Confederate soldier or veteran, she married into a slaveholding, or formerly slaveholding, family: her husband's father, Thomas E. Frink, owned 5 slaves in Marion County in 1850 and 14 in 1860.[34]

During his contribution to the commencement ceremony through his appearances in the speech, "The Crisis" and the dialogue; "Quarrel between Brutus and Cassius," Alonzo E. Blitch would have been roughly 18 years of age. He was the second oldest of 5 brothers, and was the son of Ephraim, 43 years old, and Frances, 37 years old, who owned 11 slaves in 1860. The Pyles family owned the second largest number of slaves out of all six identified slaveholding families on the commencement program. Miss Pyles sang in "Serenade

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[34] East Florida State Seminary Exhibition; 1850 Marion County Census; 1850 and 1860 Marion County Slave Schedules; Arthur Wyllie, *Florida Confederate Pensions* (2014). Evidence is uncertain, but there were 3 prominent Bruton families in Marion County in 1850, only one on which (no first name provided) was in possession of 3 slaves. Susannah's father could have owned these 3 slaves. As a farmer and county supervisor, his work would have required a lot of time and effort, leaving his land in need of attending. On Sue Burton Frink, see also Ott, "Ocala Prior to 1868," 92 n.22.

March" and "Soiree Waltz." The 1850 census contains what appears to be three generations of the Pyles family, all from the state of Georgia. A daughter, Frances, would probably have been the Miss Pyles referred to on the commencement list. The 1860 Marion County Slave census lists Mrs. F.M. Pyles with 65 slaves.[35]

In addition, the names of the early board members of the East Florida Seminary mentioned by Crow and Proctor represent another strong connection between the school and slavery. Many of these board members owned enslaved workers and large landholdings. One was John M. McIntosh, a North Carolina native and veteran of the Seminole War who was a beneficiary of the federal Armed Occupation Act and who settled in Tallahassee in the 1830s. McIntosh was a farmer near Orange Lake in Marion County after opening a store on the Suwannee River in 1839. The official secretary of the Board of Education for the East Florida Seminary, McIntosh owned 6 slaves in 1860. McIntosh's life story provides a glimpse of the

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[35] East Florida Seminary Exhibition; 1850 Marion County Census; 1860 Florida Slave Schedule. Crow also referred to first-hand information he learned from a man named "Mr. McGahagin," who is likely to have been a student at the Seminary shortly before or after the Civil War. His extensive knowledge about the administrative staff and his ability to recall exact names and the sequence of leadership suggest that he attended the school at some point. W.M. and J.L. McGahagin were the only two identifiable people with that last name at any time throughout the Seminary's existence. William McGahagin, the recipient of a 160-grant from the Armed Occupation act, owned 28 slaves, while J.L., a son or other family member, owned 48.

social mobility that existed for White Americans in 19th century Florida. McIntosh worked his way up to prosperity because of the privileges afforded by federal support, such as free land through the Armed Occupation Act.[36]

Another member, and eventual president, of the Seminary's board of education was Lewis C. Gaines, a successful editor and proprietor of two small Ocala newspapers known as "The Conservator" and "The Tropical Farmer" which was considered to be "the only agricultural paper south of the Potomac." During a time when property value was a strong symbol of wealth, Lewis C. Gaines had the highest property value in Marion County at $7,000. Gaines owned 18 slaves in 1850, of whom seven were 12 years or younger. Another prosperous businessman and planter on the board was Adin Waterman, owner of 15 slaves, who was appointed by the Governor of Florida, Madison Starke Perry, in 1857. Other board members included John E. Williams, who owned 32 slaves; John M. Taylor, a planter who moved from South Carolina to Marion County in 1852 with his family and his large enslaved workforce, which numbered 64 in 1860; and Samuel St. George Rogers, another Seminole War veteran, who owned 83 slaves, making him the largest slaveholder in the group. S.D. McConnell, the third principal of the Seminary,

[36] Proctor, "University of Florida," 28; idem., "Reminiscences of a Florida Pioneer: John M. McIntosh," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 38 (1959), 67-70; 1860 Marion County Slave Schedule.

owned one slave. Collectively, then, the leadership structure of the East Florida Seminary, consisting of its board of education and its most influential principal, claimed ownership of at least 219 enslaved people.[37]

In sum, the sparse information that remains about the student body and leadership of the Seminary reveals tight connections between wealth, privilege, slaveholding and public education. Marion County, the site of one of two state seminaries, saw a rapid influx of white settlers and enslaved African-American workers, between 1845 and 1860. Many white newcomers received federal land grants, and others bought former Seminole land for plantation agriculture. Money from land sales went into a fund to support the Seminary, which in turn provided education almost exclusively to children of the planting elite. Therefore, the origins, operation and survival of the institution that would later become the University of Florida are inextricably bound to the fate of enslaved Americans working under the scorching Florida heat.

IV. Religion, Slavery and Resistance

Nineteenth-century Florida was a religious frontier society in which faith, education and slavery were often

[37] Board members listed in Proctor, "University of Florida," 28, 59-60, 63; 1850 and 1860 Mary County Slave Schedules. Other board members identified by Proctor include Oliver Tomney, "an affluent merchant of Ocala," who owned one enslaved woman in 1860, as well as Rev. William Royall and William S. Harris, but any slave holdings they might have had are not reflected in the census.

intertwined. This relationship elucidates both the influence of slavery and religion on the Seminary and the ways that enslaved African Americans resisted their captivity. As we have seen, many faculty and administrators of the East Florida Seminary were both slave holders and connected to local churches. Juxtaposing these positions reveals how faith shaped the attitude of slave owners and how they, in turn, shaped the Seminary. Many slaveholders saw slavery as a necessary good. An exemplary figure was Maria Baker Taylor, wife of John M. Taylor, board member to the Seminary and owner of sixty-four slaves. Maria Baker Taylor (1813-1895) was a devout Baptist whose diary is representative of the mentality of Marion Country slaveholders. Her writings also shed light on the enslaved African-American population of the county whose labor supported the school.[38]

In 1853, the Taylors moved from South Carolina to Osceola Plantation, four miles southwest of Ocala. When John M. Taylor sought out a new plantation after a crop failure in 1848, Maria expressed a desire for a "healthy region, and where we can enjoy advantages for the education of our children."[39] It is unknown if the Seminary influenced the Taylors' decision to settle in Marion County, but in S.S. Burton's boast of

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[38] 1860 U.S. Census, Marion County, Florida, slave schedule, Ocala, page 357, John M. Taylor, slave owner, NARA microfilm publication 653, roll 110.
Kathryn Carlisle Schwartz, *Baptist Faith in Action: The Private Writings of Maria Baker Taylor, 1813-1895* (Columbia, S.C., 2003), 83-85.
[39] Ibid., 71.

"Marion's millions of dollars of slave property, its 300,000 acres of tillable land" may have appealed to the Taylors.[40] But in order to move to Florida, the Taylors had to sell eleven slaves, including "so many small ones."[41] Financed through the sale of slaves, the Taylors became "midrange members of the Florida Plantation aristocracy." The 1860 census valued John Taylor's personal property at $50,000, about $35,000 of which was invested in slaves. Maria noted that the plantation was so successful that John "will make more cotton than he can possibly pick and a superabundance of provisions."[42]

During this period, religious instruction was an essential component of standardized education, and with its focus on religious teachings, the Seminary employed at least six clergymen as faculty. The use of religion to defend slavery and teach Christian submissiveness to enslaved laborers was a popular strategy throughout the South. Maria mentioned that Pastor Old John "came to hear the little negroes their lessons" and she gave a catechism probably written by Charles Colcock Jones, a minister who wrote *The Religious Instructions of the Negroes*. Their ownership of this catechism meant that the Taylors were entrenched in the fusion between slavery, religion, and education.[43]

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[40] Ott and Chazal, *Ocali Country,* 72.
[41] Taylor to John Morgandollar Taylor, 26 February 1850, in Schwartz, ed., *Baptist Faith in Action*, 72.
[42] Schwartz, *Baptist Faith in Action*, 86.
[43]Maria Baker Taylor, *Diary*, in Schwartz, *Baptist Faith in Action,* 96;

The struggle for control between enslavers and enslaved extended to the daily demands of labor, as Maria Taylor's diary make abundantly clear. Maria noted that one woman, Phillis, was sick several times in the Spring of 1857: "Sent medicine to Phillis who is sick . . . Phillis in a critical way . . . Phillis went home sick." Maria began to suspect deception. "I am induced to believe that Phillis has been deceiving me with respect to herself…" Maria then "went down to the negro house to see her" and came away "confirmed in the opinion." Whites often levied racist accusations against Blacks of idleness and laziness, knowing that work slowdowns and stoppages were also a powerful method of resistance for slaves. But what Maria failed to note at the time she first recorded the illness was that Phillis was pregnant and several days later delivered a stillborn child. So she might not have been deceiving Taylor at all. Several months later, Taylor again accused her of idleness and even self-harm, again not taking into consideration the possible after effects of a difficult pregnancy and stillborn birth. "One of our servants [Phillis] has acted very badly & we suspect her of starving herself to keep from work," Taylor wrote in July 1857. "She was so much reduced & weak last week that we had to stimulate her." Toward the end of August, Maria noted that there was some improvement. "Phillis the

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Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 152-57. On plantation missions to slaves, see also Larry Eugene Rivers, *Slavery in Florida: Territorial Days to Emancipation* (Gainesville, Fl., 2000), 106-24; and Janet Duitsman Cornelius, *Slave Missions and the Black Church in the Antebellum South* (Columbia, S.C., 1999).

Negro who has been starving herself went out last Monday for the first time this year & picked a little cotton." The clinical notation of Phillis, her loss of child, and her work productivity is emblematic of the treatment of most slaves.[44]

The fear of slave rebellion was certainly in the thoughts of the Taylors and other white residents in Marion County in 1857 when Maria's son-in-law, Thomas Bauskett, was attacked by a neighbor's slave. Bauskett "returned home bloody & wounded having been struck down by a Negro with a heavy stick."[45] Fear increased in 1860, when Bauskett's cousin-in-law, Dr. William J. Keitt, a prominent planter and state senator, was murdered by several of his slaves.[46]

The clearest attestation of the connection of slavery to the East Florida Seminary was the vigorous support for the Confederacy by faculty and students in the Civil War. Dr. Daniel A. Vogt, the state representative and doctor who tended to Phillis, read the resolution of secession to the House. Samuel D. McConnell, third principal of the Seminary, helped

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[44] Maria Baker Taylor, *Diary,* July 13 and Aug. 24, 1857, in Schwartz, *Baptist Faith in Action*, 100-01.
[45] Ibid., Aug. 30, 1857, 102.
[46] According to a note included in Maria Taylor's diary, "Dr. Keitt was murdered by his Negroes Lewis & Allen on Sat 18th [Dec.] between 9 & 10 with a razor. A held him down & L held his beard with one hand & lavcut his throat from ear to ear, splitting his ears & cutting into the neck bone. A & L were hung. M whipped & banished the state with ol John & Hazelius. Israel banished. Keitt was ill in bed from effects of poison by his Negroes. He cried for help & begged forgiveness. Allen said we did forgive him & then beat him choked him & killed him." Letter from Bauskett, quoted in Schwartz, *Baptist Faith in Action,* 107.

draw up the resolution. Delegates from Marion County were sent to a Democratic convention in Charleston and included Summerfield M.G. Gary, William McGahagin, and James B. Owens.[47] Gary was a lawyer in Ocala who owned four slaves and his wife helped Maria Taylor in construction of the first Baptist Church. The Seminary closed in 1861 in the outbreak of the war. Once the war officially commenced, "instructors, together with every boy of the class enlisted in the army of the South."

V. Conclusion

The Civil War did not directly enter Marion County until the very end when, in March 1865, an African-American regiment of Union soldiers invaded briefly. Marching west from Palatka, the troops destroyed a sugar plantation and liberated the enslaved workers.[48] After the war, about 1,000 newly emancipated people assembled on Seminary grounds, indicating that the school also acted as a community meeting location. Word had gone out for them "to consider the new privileges devolved upon them by their enfranchisement," and by daybreak, "from all parts of the county they had begun to assemble on the Seminary grounds." Former slaves now became freedpeople with rights and privileges previously

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[47] Ott and Chazal, *Ocali Country,* 77.
[48] Maria Baker Taylor, *Diary,* March 22 and 29, Apr. 1, 1864, in Schwartz, *Baptist Faith in Action*, 172-73; Ott and Chazal, *Ocali Country,* 85-86.

denied them. The most notable speaker was Samuel Small, a former slave of the Taylor family on Osceola Plantation.[49]

The fact that Small addressed a large crowd of his fellow freedpeople on the occasion of emancipation indicates the esteem he held among them. Small would emerge as a leader among Blacks in Marion County during Reconstruction. Maria Taylor noted in her diary that Small was one of several "Radical" speakers before a Black audience in 1866. That year, 90 Black members of the Baptist Church in Ocala, who had worshiped in the biracial congregation for several years, withdrew to form the independent Mount Moriah Baptist Church under Small's leadership. The postwar period also saw the heyday of African-American electoral power. Small was elected to several local offices and to the Florida House, where he served from 1873-75, becoming one of the first Black state legislators in Florida, along with Singleton Coleman, and Scipio Jasper.[50]

These men were only a select few Blacks who rose to prominence in Marion County after the war. In reality, most freedpeople continued to face economic dependency and discrimination. Like their predecessors in the antebellum period, Blacks in Ocala during the postbellum period strove for

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[49] Ott and Chazal, *Ocali Country,* 90.

[50] Maria Baker Taylor, *Diary,* July 4, 1867, in Schwartz, *Baptist Faith in Action,* 209; Canter Brown, *Florida's Black Public Officials, 1867-1924* (Tuscaloosa, 1998), 126. Mount Moriah still exists today as a historically African American congregation.

equality, and their descendants led the Civil Rights Movement there. One such activist was Reverend Frank Pinkston, a descendent of the Pinkston's plantation slaves and, like Small, a Baptist preacher. His story is a reminder that, even though the East Florida Seminary's duration in Ocala ended after the Civil War, its aftermath and the influence of people in its orbit could be felt decades later, even to the present.[51]

In 1866, the East Florida Seminary moved to Gainesville. In 1905, under the Buckman Act, which reorganized the state university system, it merged with several other small colleges and became the University of Florida, the state's land-grant institution. The Seminary's legacy and its connection to slavery live on in the University—constituting a history that is not well known and needs to be acknowledged.

[51] Another Civil Right activist, Bettie Blakely, described her memories of Pinkston in an interview in 2014 with the Samuel L. Proctor Oral History Program