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THOMAS P. KENNEDY: INDIAN TRADER

By DR. JAMES W. COVINGTON

Probably the most important Indian trader along the western coast of Florida during the period 1842-1860 was Thomas P. Kennedy.

Born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 1812, Kennedy came to Fort Brooke in 1840 where he established a sutler's store which was a source of military supplies for the army. At the conclusion of the war, Kennedy continued to maintain the sutler's store but began to trade with the Seminole Indians who visited Tampa from their temporary reserve located some hundred miles to the south. During these visits to Fort Brooke, the only place where trading with the Indians was legal, a house in the village of Tampa was reserved for them and they held nightly dances in the yard behind

PROMISSORY NOTE TO KENNEDY & DARLING

At the outbreak of the Civil War, Tampa's Acting Mayor John Jackson issued a promissory note to the pioneer firm of Kennedy & Darling "being for repairs of cannon carriages and implements, ammunition and for defense of the city. " The amount of the note was for $299.58, and was authorized by the City Council on June 28, 1861. The deputy city clerk who attested the Council's action was V. Darling. 

-Photo from HAMPTON DUNN COLLECTION
the house. Use of this house allowed the Indians a place in which they could sleep and "sober up" to make the trip back home. Usually one Indian refrained from drinking so that he could guide the other males back to the barracks.

Within a short time Kennedy decided to expand his operations by opening a fishing establishment on probably what was Pine Island in Charlotte Harbor. Although Charlotte Harbor was well known for its bountiful supply of fish there were few fishermen at the harbor for the troops had removed them during the Second Seminole War (1835-1842) suspecting that they supplied the Indians with arms and ammunition. Even some Cuban fishermen, suspected of being Seminoles, had been taken as far west as New Orleans before they proved their heritage. When General William Worth gave his approval to the establishment of the fishery in July, 1844, he specified that there should be no trade permitted with the Indians and the enterprise could be terminated whenever the commander of the military forces in Florida so desired.

**PINE ISLAND MOVE**

When some problems developed at the trading post in Fort Brooke, military authorities permitted Kennedy in October, 1845, to expand operations from his base store at Tampa and Whiting Streets to the former Caldez fishing rancho at Pine Island and, as a result, few Indians made the trip to
Tampa. Articles needed for the port were carried in Kennedy’s twelve-ton sloop Julia Ann which left Tampa on September 20, 1845. Joah Griffin was engaged by Kennedy to serve as storekeeper and sent to assist him was Chai, a Creek Indian who had served the whites during the 1835-42 war, and his wife. Kennedy was afraid that due to restrictions imposed on the visits of the Indians to Fort Brooke and activities of illegal traders the Indians would not visit his newly established trading post. The whites at "McRaes" sold whiskey to the Indians and warned them if they went to the Pine Island store they would be captured and sent to Indian Territory.

In subsequent years Kennedy served as a blockade runner during the Mexican War, acquired a partner John Darling, married Adelaide Christy, niece of former commander at Fort Brooke and due to a fire lost his trading store. The Mexican War helped Kennedy make much money, for he purchased larger ships and ran them through the weakly manned blockade to the American Army at Vera Cruz; but on one trip while carrying supplies he was captured and held in custody for several months. Upon his return to Tampa in 1848, Kennedy joining forces with John P. Darling founded Kennedy & Darling, a firm that became one of the area’s leading mercantile establishments. Located next to the Palmer House on Whiting Street, the firm of Kennedy & Darling boasted that if it obtained ample supplies by steamer from New Orleans it would purchase cotton, hides and deerskins. Darling’s thirty-two-ton schooner Rosella had been added to the small fleet of vessels serving the firm. When the store at Pine Island was destroyed by fire, Kennedy & Darling looked about for another location in which to profit from the Indian trade.

ARTICLES FOR TRADE

Major William Morris, who was in charge of Indian affairs at Fort Brooke, gave Kennedy & Darling permission in March, 1849 to open another store on present-day Payne’s Creek, a tributary of the Peace River. After the firm had erected a combination store and dwelling, crude huts, wharf and a bridge, the Seminoles traded at the store in greater numbers than had come to the earlier store. Articles kept at the store for trade with the Indians included rifles, brass kettles, beads, blankets, tin cups and pans, calicos and cotton goods, powder, lead, flints, tobacco, broadcloth, spurs, bridles, saddles, mirrors, tools, shawls, hoes, hatchets, combs, salt and whiskey. Disturbing however was the fact that within a period of eight months the Indians had purchased one hundred pounds of rifle powder and a sizeable amount of lead, showing an interest in powder and lead far beyond their normal hunting requirements.

One such transaction took place when Chipco, accompanied by three women, came to the store on July 17, 1849, carrying with him watermelons, deer meat, sweet potatoes, deer and other skins and beeswax which was purchased by Captain George S. Payne proprietor of the store. Only nine or more of the available watermelons were acquired, for Payne believed that they would not sell well in New York. Chipco remarked that he was going to return a pony recently purchased at the post for it was not what he had ordered.

BURNT STORE, HOUSE

In the Summer of 1849 a few Seminoles aroused by restrictions placed upon their movements by the legislature killed one man
and wounded another near Fort Pierce and killed two more at the Payne's Creek store. After killing William Barker and vandalizing a small village on the Indian River north of Fort Pierce, the Indians moved toward the west coast where another target had been selected. On July 17, near nightfall, four Indians appeared at the store carrying rifles and requesting the use of a boat to carry a pack of deerskins from the other side of Payne's Creek. Payne promised use of the boat but refused their request to sleep in the store. While the whites began eating the evening meal the Indians sat on the porch near the door smoking their pipes but suddenly opened fire from the door killing Whidden and Payne and wounding McCullough. When the Indians paused to reload, McCullough grabbed a rifle from the wall and followed his wife and child who were running to the bridge. Both McCullough and his wife were wounded again by the Indians but were able to escape by hiding in the underbrush. When they could not find the McCulloughs, the Indians took what they wanted from the store and set fire to the building and huts. The McCulloughs made their way some twenty miles to the nearest white settlements which were on the Alafia River. Some time later, Nancy McCullough identified one of the attacking party as Yoholochee, a Mikasuki whom she had seen frequently at her father's house on the Alafia River.  

The destruction of the well-equipped Payne's Creek store was a complete loss to the Kennedy & Darling firm for there was no restitution either by the Indians or Federal Government. The Army built a military post, Fort Chokkunikla (burnt house), on the site but it lasted only a few months. The Burnt Store and Burnt House episodes ended Kennedy's Indian trade activities. When Billy Bowlegs left Florida he gave his medals bestowed by the Federal Government to Kennedy whose family still retains them. Chipco was one of the leaders of the attack and Billy had little control over the Chipco band. Although three of the ones involved in the killings were surrendered to the whites, they were not punished but given $600 and sent to the West.

NOTES

1 Karl H. Grismer, Tampa: A History of the City of Tampa and the Tampa Bay Region of Florida (St. Petersburg, 1956), 313


3 Grant Foreman, Indian Removal: The Emigration of the Five Civilized Tribes of Indians (Norman, 1953), 364-365.

4 Captain John T. Sprague to Thomas P. Kennedy, July 3, 1844, Files of Captain John Casey Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

5 Kennedy to Sprague, October 2, 1845, Casey Files.

6 Ibid.

7 Grismer, Tampa, 313.


9 Disposition of William and Nancy McCullough, August 11, 1849, Senate Executive Document 39, Thirtieth Congress, 1 sess., 161-163.

10 Ibid., 161.

11 Ibid.