Unimpressive marker notes historic treaty

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ST. AUGUSTINE --- The Treaty of Moultrie Creek never satisfied either the Indians or the whites, according to Florida historic Dr. Charles W. Tebeau. But it is generally agreed that this is where the Indians got one of their worse deals from the white man.

There were about 425 Indians here for the 17-day conference, that September of 1823. Finally, and reluctantly, on Sept. 18, the treaty was signed by 32 chiefs present. It was ratified by the U.S. Senate on Dec. 23, 1823.

The historic event took place under a large oak tree at the second landing on the north bank of Moultrie Creek, about five miles south of St. Augustine. An unimpressive marker stands about 100 feet away from the oak in a field to note the treaty-signing (photo).

Heading up the negotiations for the government was Florida Territorial Gov. William P. DuVal, since Andrew Jackson had already gone back to Tennessee. Even he wasn't familiar with the wild territory he was about to assign to the Indians.

Highlights of the "deal" in return for the Seminoles giving title to the "whole territory of Florida" obligated the United States to (1) protect the Indians as long as they obeyed the law; (2) supply them with $6,000 worth of agricultural equipment and livestock on the reservation; (3) pay them an annuity of $5,000 a year for 20 years; (4) keep white men off the reservation except those authorized to be there; these and other considerations, totaling in cash and in kind converted to cash, amounted to $221,000. According to Dr. John K. Mahon, another writer on the Seminole wars.

The proposed reservation stretched from north of the Withlacooche River to Charlotte Harbor and Lake Okeechobee on the south. Under threat from the white leaders, the Indians had little choice but to accept the terms.

Neamathla, head chief of the Mikasukis, had pleaded; "We rely on your justice and humanity; we hope you will not send us south, to a country where neither the hickory nut, the acorn, nor the persimmon grow." The Seminoles needed the oils derived from nuts.