

# THE SEMINOLE WAR: THE ARMED OCCUPATION ACT

Ten days before General Worth declared the "Florida War" over, the United States Congress passed an act designed to encourage the continued settlement of Florida by armed men. Officially titled "An Act to provide for the armed occupation and settlement of the unsettled part of the peninsula of East Florida" (5 Stat. 502) but more generally known as the Armed Occupation Act, the law offered 160 acres of Seminole land to those who met certain conditions. They needed to be a white man over 18 years of age and able to bear arms, they were required to build a home on the land and cultivate it for five full years, and the land needed to be at least 2 miles away from the closest military garrison. The distance was designed to place armed civilians, often full families, in land occupied by the Seminole.

By August of 1843 over three hundred claims had been applied for, with the number nearing one thousand by 1848. By then Billy Bowlegs, recognized as the Seminole leader, had established a friendly relationship with the new Indian Agent Captain John Casey. Still the claims continued and further expansion pushed the Tribe further south and east into the wetlands, and showed the effectiveness of a strategy of pressure and containment over direct attack.

## FORM OF AFFIDAVIT.

I, A. B., being a settler in Florida, on the 4th August, 1842, and being about to apply to the proper authority for the benefit of the act of Congress, approved on the day aforesaid, entitled "An act to provide for the armed occupation and settlement of the unsettled part of the peninsula of East Florida," do hereby declare, on oath, that I am not the owner of one hundred and sixty acres of land.

A. B.

Sworn and subscribed before me, an acting justice of the peace, for East Florida, this ——— day of ———, A. D. 184—.

C. D.,

*Justice of the Peace.*

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**Above:** An affidavit template found in the "Report of the Commissioner of the General Land Office communicating an abstract of permits granted under the acts for the armed occupation of Florida" US Senate, April 27, 1848.

