

*Travels through North and South Carolina, Georgia, East and West Florida* by William Bartram published in 1791 by James & Johnson

His comments on the Seminole town of Cuscowilla and the adjacent Payne's Prairie.

Cuscowilla: 1776

“The town stands on the most pleasant situation that could be well imagined or desired, in an inland country; upon a high swelling ridge of sand hills, within three or four hundred yards of a large and beautiful lake, the circular shore of which continually washes a sandy beach, under a moderately high sloping bank, terminated on one side by extensive forests, consisting of Orange groves, overtopped with grand Magnolias, Palms, Poplar, Tilia, Live Oaks, and others already noticed; and, the opposite point of the crescent, gradually retires with hummocky projecting points, indenting the grassy marshes, and lastly terminates in infinite green plains and meadows, united with the skies and waters of the lake. Such a natural landscape, such a rural scene, is not to be imitated by the united ingenuity and labour of man. At present the ground betwixt the town and the lake is adorned by an open grove of very tall Pine trees, which standing at a considerable distance from each other admit a delightful prospect of the sparkling waters. The lake abounds with various excellent fish and wild fowl; there are incredible numbers of the later, especially in the winter season, when they arrive here from the north to winter...

“They Plant but little here about the town; only a small garden plot at each habitation, consisting of a little Corn, Beans, Tobacco, Citruls, & c. Their plantation, which supplies tem with

the chief of their vegetable provisions, ... lies on the rich prolific lands bordering on the great Alachua savanna, about two miles distance. This plantation is one common enclosure, and is worked and tended by the whole community; yet every family has a particular part, according to its own appointment, marked off when planted; and this portion receives the common labour and assistance until ripe, when each family gathers and deposits in its granary its own proper share, setting apart a small gift or contribution for the public granary, which stands in the centre of the plantation.

“The youth under the supervisal of some of their ancient people, are daily stationed in the fields, and are continually whooping and hallooming, to chase away crows, jackdaws, black-birds, and such predatory animals; and the lads are armed with bows and arrows, and being trained up to it from their early youth. Are sure at a mark, and in the course of the day load themselves with squirrels, birds, & c. The men in turn patrol the corn fields at night, to protect their provisions from the depredations of night rovers, as bears, raccoons, and deer; the two former being immoderately fond of young corn, when the grain is filled with a rich milk, as sweet and nourishing as cream; and the deer are fond of the Potatoe vines.

“We were welcomed to the town, and conducted by the young men and maidens to the chief’s house, which stood on an eminence, and was distinguished from the rest by its superior magnitude, a large flag being hoisted on a high staff at one corner. We immediately alighted: the chief, who is called the Cowkeeper, attended by several ancient men, came to us, and in a very free and sociable manner, shook our hands, or rather arms. (a form of salutation peculiar to the American Indians) saying at

the same time, 'You are come.' We followed him to an apartment prepared for the reception of their guests.

"The town of Cuscowilla, which is the capital of the Alachua tribe, contains about thirty habitations, each of which consists of two houses nearly the same size, about thirty feet in length, twelve feet wide, and about the same in height. The door is placed midway on one side or in the front. This house is divided equally, across, into two apartments, one of which is the cook room and common hall, and the other the lodging room. The other house is nearly of the same dimensions, standing about twenty yards from the dwelling house, its end next to the dwelling house is open on three sides, supported by posts or pillars. It has an open loft or platform, the ascent to which is by a portable stair or ladder: this is a pleasant, cool, airy situation, and here the master or chief of the family retires to repose in the hot seasons, and receives his guests or visitors. The other half of this building is closed on all sides by notched logs; the lowest or ground part is a potatoe house, and the upper story over it is a granary for corn and other provisions.

"Their houses are constructed of a kind of frame. In the first place, strong corner pillars are fixed in the ground, with others somewhat less, ranging on a line between, these are strengthened by cross pieces of timber, and the whole with the roof is covered close with the bark of the Cypress tree. The dwelling stands near the middle of a square yard, encompassed by a low bank, formed with the earth taken out of the yard, which is carefully swept. Their towns are clean, the inhabitants being in particular in laying their filth at a proper distance from their dwellings, which undoubtedly contributes to the healthiness of their habitations.

“The extensive Alachua savanna is a level green plain, above fifteen miles over, fifty miles in circumference, and scarcely a tree or a bush of any kind to be seen on it. It is encircled with high sloping hills, covered with waving forests and fragrant Orange groves, rising from an exuberantly fertile soil. The towering *Magnolia grandiflora* and transcendent Palm, stand conspicuous amongst them. At the same time are seen innumerable droves of cattle; the lordly bull, lowing cow, and capricious heifer. The hills and groves re-echo their cheerful, social voices. Herds of sprightly deer, squadrons of the beautiful fleet Seminole horse, flocks of turkeys, civilized communities of the sonorous watchful crane, mix together, appearing happy and contented in the enjoyment of peace, till disturbed and affrighted by the warrior man.

“Behold yonder, coming upon them through the darkened groves, sneakingly and unawares the naked red warrior, invading the Elysian fields and green plains of Alachua. At the terrible appearance of the painted, fearless, uncontrolled, and free Seminole, the peaceful innocent nations are at once thrown into disorder and dismay. See the different tribes and bands, how they draw towards each other! as it were deliberating upon the general good. Suddenly they speed off with their young in the center; but the roebuck fears him not: here he lays himself down, bathes and flounders in the cool flood. The red warrior, whose plumed head flashes lightning, whoops in vein; his proud ambitious horse stags and pants, the earth glides under his feet, his flowing mane whistles in the wind, as he comes up full of vain hopes. The bounding roe views his rapid approaches, rises up, lifts aloft his antlered head, erects the white flag, and fetching a shrill whistle, says to his fleet and free associates, ‘follow’; he bounds off, and in a few minute distances his foe a mile; suddenly he stops, turns

about, and laughing says 'how vain! go chase meteors in the azure plains above, or hunt butterflies in the fields about your towns.'"

William Bartram