

## ***Fort Lauderdale and the Second Seminole War***

By the late eighteenth century, the aboriginal peoples of South Florida had disappeared and the Seminoles, originally Creek Indians from Georgia and Alabama, migrated to the area, adapting to a new lifestyle in the Everglades. At the same time, new white settlers (some with slaves of African descent) came to the area from the Bahamas and the newly formed United States. In 1821, Florida became a U.S. territory; the Indian Removal Act of 1830 mandated the removal of all Native Americans east of the Mississippi to Indian Territory (Oklahoma). The Seminoles chose to resist rather than be removed; this resulted in the Second (1835-1842) and Third (1855-1858) Seminole Wars. The modern Indians of the Seminole Tribe of Florida and the Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida are the descendants of the approximately 200 Seminoles who remained in Florida at the end of these wars.



The Ives Map of 1856 of "Florida South of Tampa Bay" documented not only the geography of the region but the recent military fortifications, routes, and battles as well. *Fort Lauderdale Historical Society*

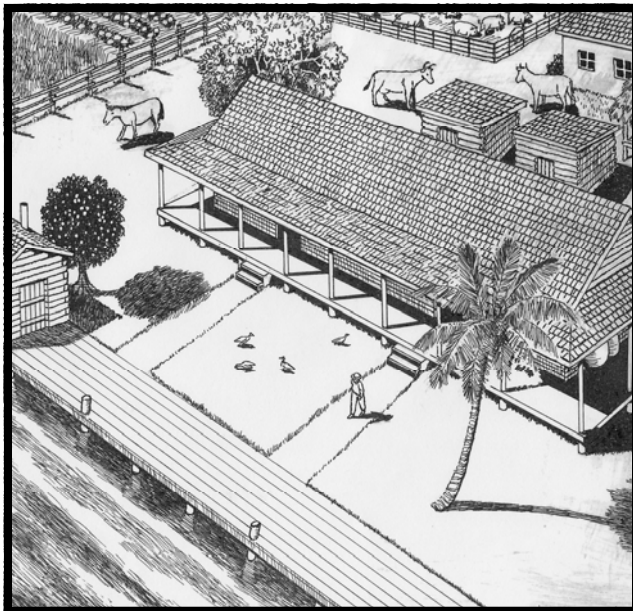


This painting depicts U.S. Navy marines searching for the Indians among the mangroves during the Seminole War. *United States Marine Corps*

## Fort Lauderdale and the Second Seminole War



Seminole reenactors in full Second Seminole War era regalia, at left. Ronnie and Almira Billie with children Ronnie and Natasha play the part of a Seminole family in nineteenth century South Florida at right. *Seminole Miccosukee Photo Archives*



By 1824 Marylander William Cooley had established a coontie (Florida arrowroot) plantation just east of the forks of New River (the river that flows through Fort Lauderdale), named *Coonti-hatchee* by the local Seminoles. His home included a cypress log house and a twenty-nine acre farm where he raised corn, sugarcane, citrus, coconuts, vegetables, and livestock. Cooley served as justice of the peace for what was then Monroe County and strove to remain on good terms with the local Seminole Indians. Nevertheless, resentment over the murder of a local Seminole by white settlers resulted in the massacre of Cooley's family in January of 1836, shortly after the outbreak of the Second Seminole War. Cooley and the remaining settlers fled to the Cape Florida lighthouse. *Fort Lauderdale Historical Society*

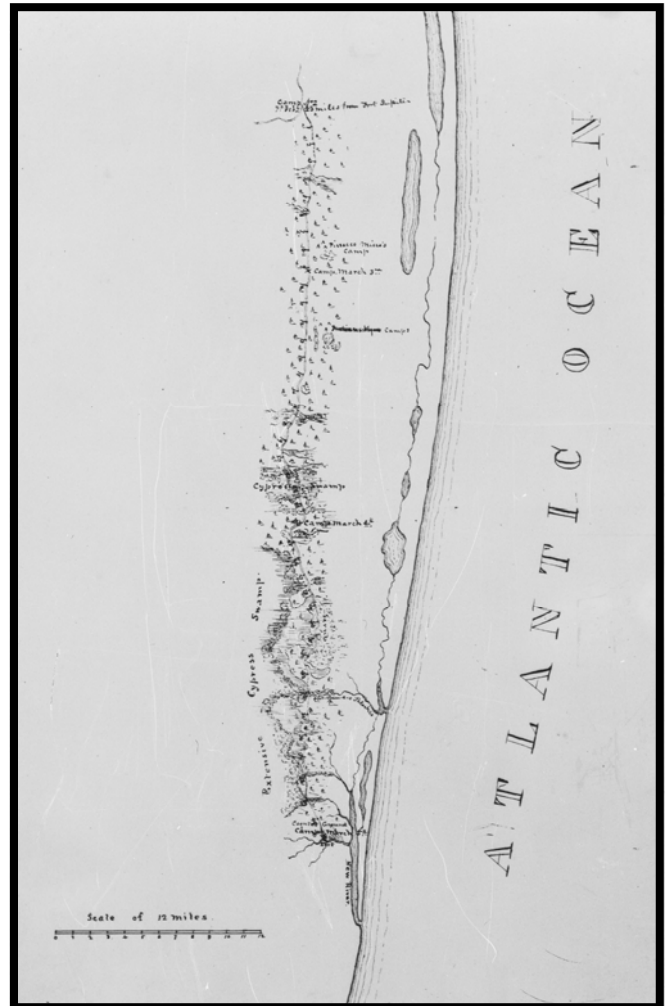


At left, a replica Second Seminole War era fort at Hillsborough River State Park. *Fort Lauderdale Historical Society* At right, Second Seminole War reenactors depict army and navy soldiers and sailors. *Seminole Miccosukee Photo Archives*



## First Fort

In response to the Cooley massacre and in search of the Indians and their leaders, Major General Thomas Jesup sent 200 mounted Tennessee Volunteers commanded by Major William Lauderdale and Lieutenant Robert Anderson with Company D, 3<sup>rd</sup> Artillery, from Jupiter to New River. The route they followed was the forerunner of "Military Trail." On March 6, 1838, they encamped on the north bank of New River at the "windings" or forks of the river "1/8 mile above Cooley's patch," (what is today approximately SW 8th Terrace and SW 4th Court). This site afforded several advantages to the military; it was a direct route to the Everglades and its Indian camps, close to the ocean, and at the heart of coontie country, considered of great value to the Seminoles. At New River the soldiers were met by the steamboat *Alabama* and the sloop *Citizen* loaded with provisions. Jesup issued Special Order Number 74 naming the new post "Fort Lauderdale," on March 16, 1838, and according to post surgeon Jacob Rhett Motte, named after the "brave volunteer officer of that name." On March 8, 152 soldiers and sailors under the command of Navy Lieutenant Levin Powell established Camp Powell directly across the river. By March 9, Anderson reported that the men were engaged in building a blockhouse 30 feet square, with a double tier for firing. Later a stockade was added, sixty by fifty feet, according to Anderson, with pickets "seven feet long, sunk 1 1/2 feet. Loop-holes under top string pieces."



Portion of Lauderdale's route, predecessor to Military Trail showing fort site at forks of New River. Note the 19th C position of New River Inlet, at approximately Sheridan Street. *Broward County Historical Commission*



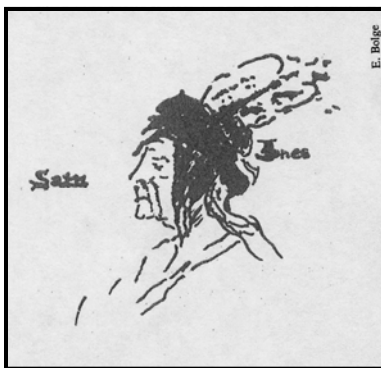
Artist's depiction of the first Fort Lauderdale located on the north bank of the forks of New River, approximately near what is today SW 8th Terrace and SW 4th Court. *Fort Lauderdale Historical Society*

# First Fort

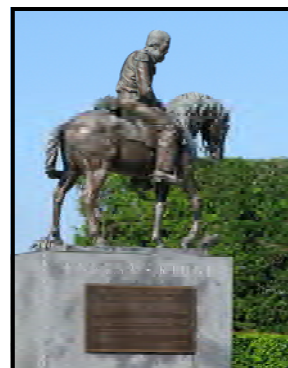
On March 18, Lieutenant Colonel James Bankhead came from Fort Dallas (in what is now Miami) with four artillery companies and assumed command. On March 22, the combined forces of 600 men sent an expedition in search of “Wild Cat, Alligator, and Sam Jones (the Seminole medicine man Abiaki),” and their followers whose main camp was at Pine Island in what is now Davie. A skirmish there drove the Indians from the island with few casualties, but it showed the military was capable of breaching what the Indians considered to be an impenetrable sanctuary. A few days later forty-four Indians surrendered to Bankhead near the fort.



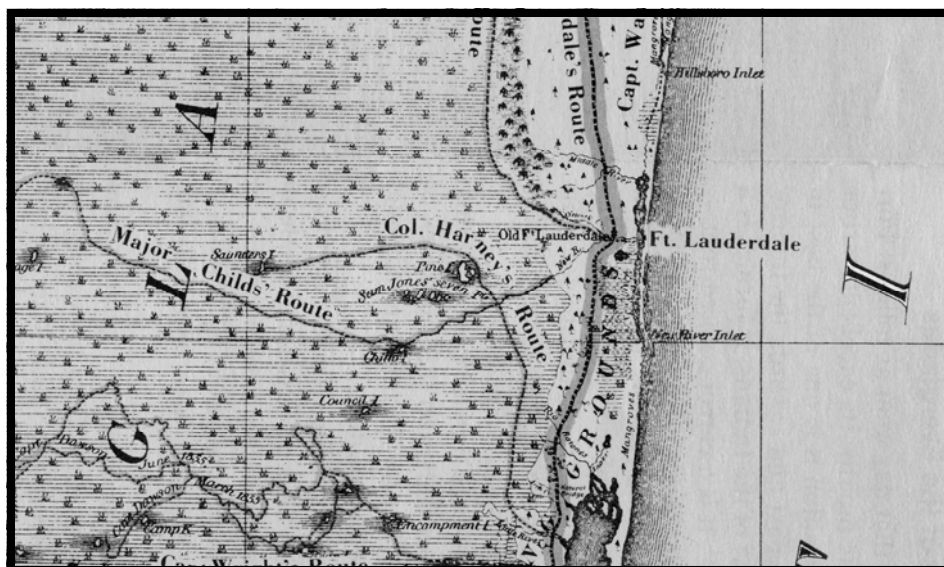
Lt Robert Anderson commanding Company D Third Artillery accompanied the Tennessee Volunteers to New River. Anderson rose to the rank of Brigadier General during the Civil War. *Fort Lauderdale Historical Society*



Seminole medicine man and acknowledged leader Abiaki, Arpeika, or Sam Jones as he was known to the troops.... *Broward County Historical Commission*



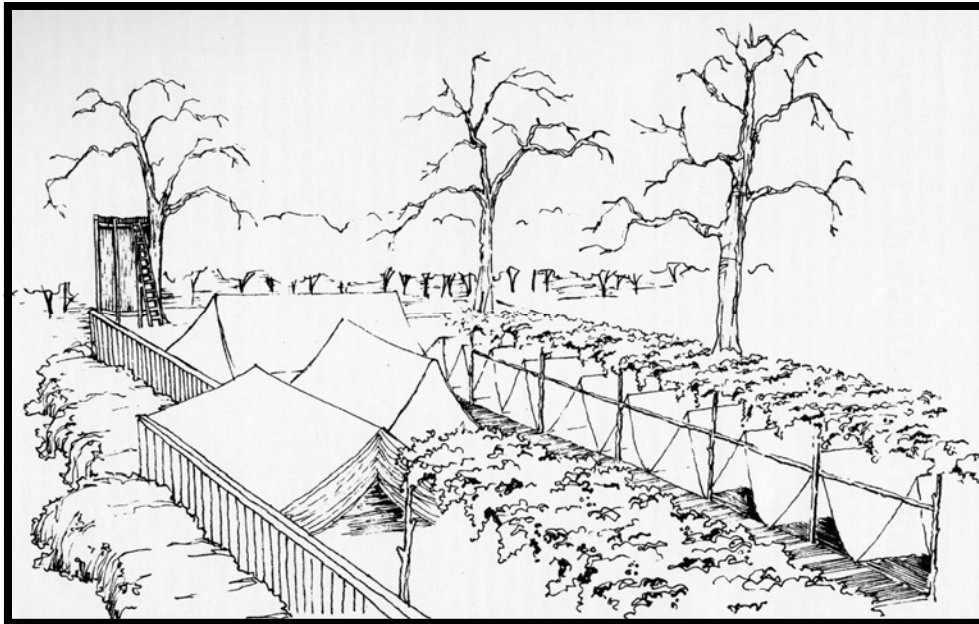
Major William Lauderdale, in command of 200 mounted Tennessee Volunteers established Fort Lauderdale in March of 1838. By April 7 his haggard troops were ordered home; he died en route in Baton Rouge. *Susan Gillis*



1856 map shows site of first and third forts and Pine Island, in what is now Davie. *Fort Lauderdale Historical Society*

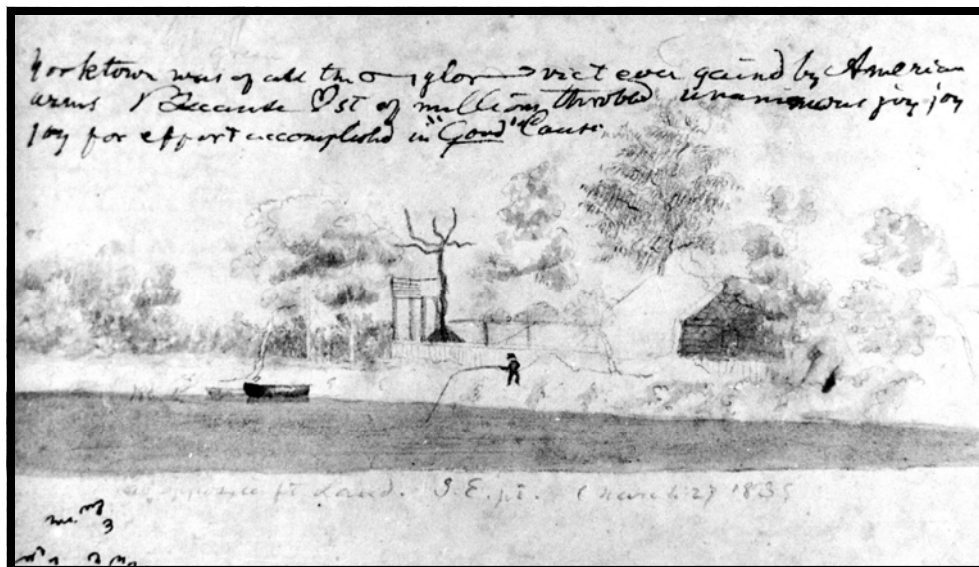
By April 4, Lauderdale and his men departed for Jupiter, shortly after Lieutenant Colonel William Harney, the war's most famous “Indian fighter,” took command. The garrison abandoned Fort Lauderdale on May 7, 1838. Soldiers returning to reestablish the fort in February of 1839 found the “old blockhouse and pickets burned by the Indians.”

## Second Fort



Drawing by Ellis Hughes of the second Fort Lauderdale, March 1839.  
Broward County Historical Commission

In February of 1839 Fort Lauderdale was reestablished by Company K Third Artillery under the command of Captain William Davidson. The new site was further downriver, close to the ocean on the north side of the river in the area of present Tarpon Bend. The fort was constructed on the banks of the river and consisted largely of tents surrounded by pickets eight to ten feet high with firing ports. At the southwest corner stood a watchtower elevated on posts with observation platform. A two story log blockhouse was constructed at the southeast corner. It had a canvas roof which “blended” with the tents. A well was dug inside the stockade and privy, cemetery, and garden were outside.



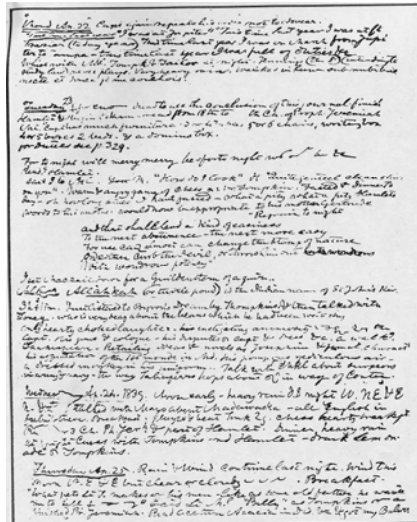
Drawing by Ellis Hughes of view from across New River of the second fort, March of 1839. Note the watchtower next to the dead tree, visible in the drawing of the tents above. The writing below reads “opposite ft. Laud. S.E. pt. March 27 1839.” The writing at the top of the picture does not relate to the image. Note the soldier fishing in the river at center. *Fort Lauderdale Historical Society*



# Second Fort

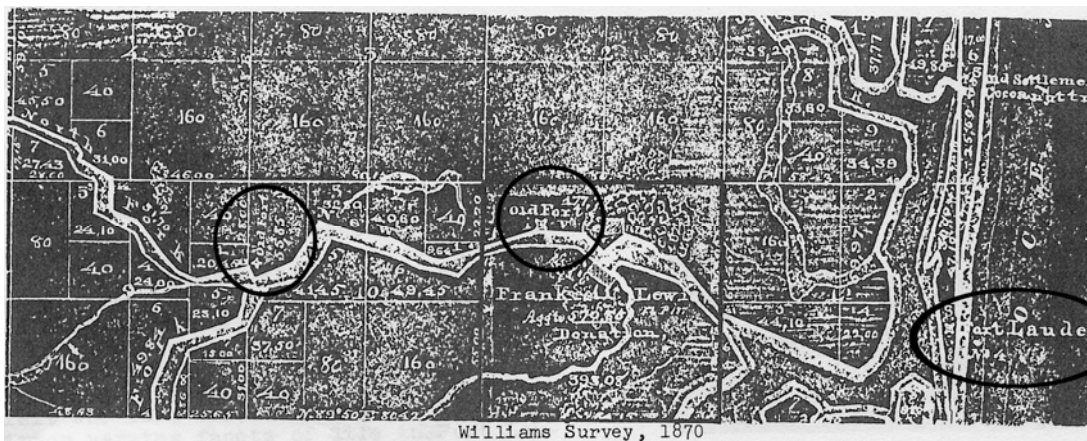


Reenactors demonstrate camp life at Fort Lauderdale. Fort Lauderdale Historical Society



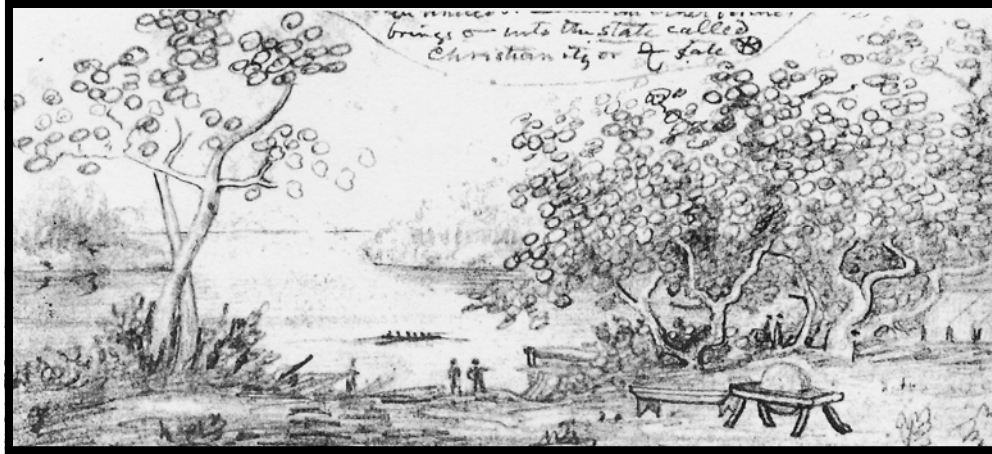
Page from the journal of Dr. Ellis Hughes. Hughes served as medical officer at Fort Lauderdale at the youthful age of 26. He recorded his experiences at the second and third fort and sketched the only authentic depictions of those outposts. Hughes' tendency to intoxication lead to his arrest and resignation from the army by 1840. Broward County Historical Commission

A diary kept by post surgeon Ellis Hughes has provided physical descriptions and drawings of the outpost as well as details of everyday life. The second fort consisted of soldiers and officers plus a few women and children, welcome company in this remote outpost. Hughes described the boredom that nonetheless ensued for the fort's residents, and the various activities such as hunting, fishing, drinking, and the arrival of an occasional boat provided. It was still war time, and hostilities with the Seminoles had not ended. A third and more permanent installation was established at the beach on a strip of land between the ocean and New River Sound (today's Intracoastal). By August of 1839 Hughes had moved his tent to the new fort. The third fort was completed and occupied by the end of September, and the second Fort Lauderdale essentially abandoned.



The McKay Williams Survey completed in 1845 and 1870 identified the site of three forts. The second fort was located at approximately SE 9th Avenue and SE 4th Street west of Tarpon Bend on New River. Fort Lauderdale Historical Society

## Third Fort

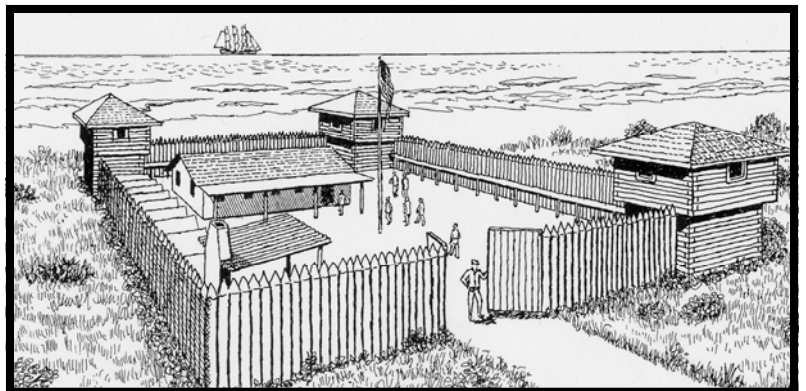


Hughes drawings include this scene of soldiers at what is probably the edge of New River Sound (today's Intracoastal) near the third fort site. *Broward County Historical Commission*

The third and most permanent Fort Lauderdale was constructed during the summer of 1839 on a strip of land between New River sound and the ocean at what is today the south beach parking lot, opposite Bahia Mar. Post surgeon Ellis Hughes documented the move declaring “Tomorrow I bid farewell to Fort Lauderdale,” the next day writing, “came down to the beach.” In a letter published in the *Niles National Register* dated October 5, 1839, Hughes reported on the construction of a stockade. “On the 30<sup>th</sup> [of September] all hands were employed in contracting the opened picquets, so as to form a perfect rectangular closure with a block house at three of its angles—the guns were placed in order to sweep the most assailable points...”

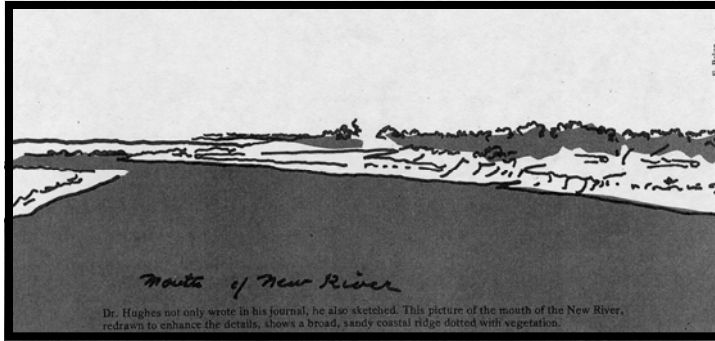
Hostile encounters with the Indians continued until May of 1839, when Alexander Macomb, commanding general of the U.S. Army, began negotiations to end the Second Seminole War. As a result, the Seminoles regularly visited the fort and brought welcome trade goods such as deer skin and coontie. One of these visitors was Abiaki himself, leader of the local Indians and respected medicine man. By late September the peace was broken. A shooting war between soldiers and the Indians recommenced.

The primary threat to morale was boredom rather than the occasional skirmishes. Like the second fort, the third was visited by steamboats and schooners providing the officers, at least, a chance to socialize and receive news of the outside world. The beautiful setting of the fort provided opportunities for ocean bathing and amazing fishing and hunting in those days before development.



The 19th century rendering at left depicts a fort similar to Fort Lauderdale but unknown location by an artist named Tibado; at right is an artist's interpretation of the beach fort. *Fort Lauderdale Historical Society*

# Third Fort



Hughes drawings include this scene of soldiers at the edge of New River Sound (today's Intracoastal) at the third fort; and what was then the mouth of New River. *Broward County Historical Commission*

During 1841, Fort Lauderdale served primarily as a base for coastal expeditions into the Everglades. In January of 1842, the last garrison departed the fort; it was briefly reoccupied by a naval expedition in April. On August 14, 1842, the war was officially over.

Although the Third Seminole War took place 1855-1858, no attempt to reoccupy Fort Lauderdale was apparently made. After the conflicts ceased, there were only a small number of inhabitants along New River throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century, save for a few Seminole camps. It was not until the end of the nineteenth century that the modern city of Fort Lauderdale had its true beginnings. In 1893, Guy Metcalf brought his cousin Frank Stranahan to New River to operate a ferry for the stage line traveling the new Dade County road. Stranahan established an overnight camp and store to serve travelers and the local Seminoles, eager for supplies. He called his camp not "New River," but "Fort Lauderdale" in memory of the fortifications that had once lined its banks.

There were differing opinions about Fort Lauderdale even then...

This flowery, ten stanza tribute to the fort was written by an unknown officer and appeared in the December 11, 1840 edition of the *Saint Augustine News*:

*A reef of pure coral bounds Lauderdale's land  
Along which the sun-fish in myriads play  
With hues to the sunbeams are shells on her strand  
In sparkling profusion enbathed in the spray...*

*O Lauderdale's River—its calmness and peace,  
Lakelike in its beauty—lakelike in its sleep  
It steals to the ocean to find its release  
Scarce curled by the ripples while gently they sleep...*

*O Lauderdale's spring a perennial spring  
The palmetto and grape their robes never change  
But fresh, ever verdant, these robes to them cling  
And know but one season, the year round its range...  
[Etc.]*

But Captain Erasmus Keyes, taking command of the fort in 1841 recalled:

*It was about seven o'clock in the morning when I first went on shore at Fort Lauderdale, if that could be called a fort which consisted of a cluster of cane-built huts and a few Indian wigwams. I was shown my quarters or a thatched hut of one room. There was nothing in the room but an old champagne basket which stood in a corner. On lifting the lid of the basket I saw many hundreds of enormous cockroaches resting in a clump of wet straw...on the east lay the ocean on the west, at an equal distance, ran a small stream called the Indian [New] River. Beyond the river an almost impenetrable jungle of tropical growth spread out. It was the abode of serpents, alligators, frogs, foxes, wildcats, and other noisy creatures, whose moans, yelps, and hootings joined with the hum and buzz of the innumerable winged and sharded insects that filled the whole surrounding atmosphere...The strange noises were not wholly disagreeable, but the army of fleas that invaded my couch kept me awake, and I thought of happier times.*

West Point graduate Erasmus Keyes was promoted to captain in 1841, serving at various garrisons including his stint at Fort Lauderdale. He would later rise to the rank of major general in the Union Army during the Civil War. *Library of Congress*



Abiaki was a frequent visitor to the fort in the summer of 1839. The *Key West Floridian* gave this description: His person is spare, tall, and erect; he is about sixty-five years old, yet he enjoys good health, being hale and hearty. He was dressed in a plain hunting shirt made out of an old sail, and under it wore a flannel shirt. In his hand he carried a calico hunting shirt trimmed with red fringe. On his head he wore a colored cotton handkerchief in cravat form. His legs were bare. Statue by Brad Cooley and Brad Cooley Jr at Treetops Park *Photo by Susan Gillis*