

= William Cooley =

William Cooley (1783 ? 1863) was one of the first American settlers , and a regional leader , in what is now known as Broward County , in the US state of Florida . His family was killed by Seminoles in 1836 , during the Second Seminole War . The attack , known as the " New River Massacre " , caused immediate abandonment of the area by whites .

Cooley was born in Maryland , but little else is known about his life prior to 1813 , when he arrived in East Florida as part of a military expedition . He established himself as a farmer in the northern part of the territory before moving south , where he traded with local Indians and continued to farm . He sided with natives in a land dispute against a merchant who had received a large grant from the King of Spain and was evicting the Indians from their lands . Unhappy with the actions of the Spanish , he moved to the New River area in 1826 to get as far as possible from the Spanish influence .

In New River , Cooley sustained himself as a salvager and farmer , cultivating and milling arrowroot . His fortune and influence grew : he became the first lawman and judge in the settlement , besides being a land appraiser . Local Indians held him responsible for what they saw as a misjudgment involving the murder of one of their chiefs and attacked the settlement in revenge on January 4 , 1836 .

Cooley survived the attack and lived for a further twenty @-@ seven years . He held administrative positions in Dade County , moved to Tampa in 1837 , and had a short stint working for the U.S. Army as a guide and courier . He moved to the Homosassa River area in 1840 , where he became the first postmaster and was a Hernando County candidate for the Florida House of Representatives . Returning to Tampa in 1847 , he was one of the first city councilors , serving three terms before he died in 1863 .

= = Early life and arrival in East Florida = =

Cooley was born in Maryland in 1783 ; little else is known about him prior to 1813 . Cooley has been referred to as William Cooley Jr . , William Coolie , William Colee and William Cooly .

Cooley arrived in East Florida in 1813 , during a joint campaign of Tennessee and Georgia forces . Some sources give credit to the hypothesis that Cooley fought with the Tennessee Volunteers under Colonel John Williams ; other sources say he was a lieutenant in the Georgia Militia , fighting under Colonel Samuel Alexander from Georgia . Cooley acquired property in Girt 's Landing on the St. Marys River , close to where the military units crossed East Florida that same year . Later , he went to the west bank of the St. Johns River , settling in an area 30 miles (48 km) south of modern Jacksonville .

Cooley later moved to Alligator Pond (near present @-@ day Lake City , Florida) , where he set up a farm and traded with the local Seminole tribe led by Chief Micanopy . The territory of East Florida was formally transferred from Spain to the United States in 1819 , under the Adams @-@ Onis Treaty . In 1820 , Spanish merchant Don Fernando de la Maza Arredondo began settlement of a 280 @,@ 000 @-@ acre (1 @,@ 130 km²) claim in the Alachua territory , which had been granted to him by King Ferdinand VII of Spain . Cooley negotiated with Don Fernando on behalf of the displaced Indians but was unsuccessful . Cooley moved away in 1823 ? possibly to escape the Spanish influence ? to the north bank of the New River .

= = New River settlement = =

Like the other New River settlers , Cooley did not buy land ; he simply occupied the land in hope that the United States would eventually survey the area and grant ownership to the present settlers . The settlement was primarily populated by Bahamians , who survived by turtling , fishing , shipbuilding and wrecking .

In 1830 , Frankee Lewis , who in 1788 had been one of the area 's first settlers , sold her business interests to Richard Fitzpatrick . After Fitzpatrick 's arrival , the settlement of approximately 70

people prospered with the introduction of a plantation regimen based on black slavery .

Cooley 's main occupation was gathering , processing and shipping arrowroot , a starch made from the root of the coontie plant . Arrowroot was used to make bread dough , wafers and biscuits ; its resistance to spoilage made it especially favored for use on ships . Pulp remaining after processing was used as a fertilizer or for animal rations . Favorable conditions for arrowroot cultivation contributed to the presence of several hundred Indians in the area ? arrowroot being a staple of their diet . The market price for the starch was between 8 ¢ (US) and 16 ¢ per pound (between 17 ¢ and 35 ¢ per kg) , and the geography of the river and the good performance of his machinery ? the output was close to 450 lb (200 kg) per day ? brought Cooley great prosperity . His good fortune allowed him to dedicate much of his time to exploration of the area as far north as Lake Okeechobee and brought him increasing political influence . It is likely that he married Nancy Dayton , a former Indian captive , on December 2 , 1830 . Richard Fitzpatrick , by that time the owner of a successful plantation with coconut and lime trees , plantains , and sugarcane , pressed for the appointment of Cooley as Justice of the Peace in 1831 , making Cooley responsible for adjudicating disputes of persons and property , punishment of minor offenders by fines and whippings , and oversight of the activities of wreckers . Serious offenders were jailed in Key West . By that time , Cooley owned a schooner and took trips not only to take prisoners but to trade coontie , sugarcane , and tropical fruit with Cape Florida , Indian Key , Key West and Havana .

While trade and farming activities were prominent , wrecking was the most important economic activity in the settlement . Northern newspapers started a campaign against wrecking in 1832 , claiming that the activity was just a disguise for piracy ; the 33 percent salvager 's fee underscored their claim . Cooley , already in charge of overseeing wrecking , received a territorial appointment as appraiser of the sunk vessels and their cargoes . The strength of hurricane seasons affected the activity , and the especially active 1835 season brought even bigger profits .

By 1835 , Cooley had two sons and one daughter . The boys were named Almonock and Montezuma , after two local Indian chiefs . His ten @-@ year @-@ old daughter and his nine @-@ year @-@ old son were tutored by the couple Mary E. Rigby and Joseph Flinton .

Cooley was appointed as an appraiser of property and slaves for Union Bank of Florida . His ally , Richard Fitzpatrick , purchased his coontie and citrus plantation on the Miami River for \$ 2 @, @ 500 . Subsequently , Fitzpatrick was elected as representative for Monroe County to the Territorial Legislative Council . The unanimous vote for Fitzpatrick in New River was questioned by the Key West Inquirer . Cooley 's conduct was implicitly questioned as well , since as Justice of the Peace , Cooley conducted the non @-@ secret balloting . In Key West , Fitzpatrick lost to William Hackley .

The Cooley property in New River had a house that was " twenty feet by fifty feet [6 by 15 m] , one story high , built of cypress logs , sealed and floored with 1 @-@ 1 / 2 inch [4 cm] planks " . At least three black slaves and several Indians cultivated sugar cane , corn , potatoes , pumpkins and other vegetables on the twenty @-@ acre (eight @-@ hectare) property , which also had a pen with eighty hogs . The coontie watermill was twenty @-@ seven by fourteen feet (eight by four meters) . His Key West holdings included a factory , two storage houses , kitchen and slave quarters ; coconut , lime and orange trees ; and domesticated and wild fowl .

= = New River Massacre = =

= = = Buildup = = =

Cooley maintained friendly relations and trade with the Seminole Indians in the area . In the early nineteenth century , Creek Indians had moved from Alabama and joined the Seminoles . In 1835 , white settlers killed Creek chief Alibama and burned his hut in a dispute . As Justice of the Peace , Cooley jailed the settlers , but they were released due to insufficient evidence after a hearing at the Monroe County Court in Key West . The Creek people blamed Cooley , saying he withheld evidence . The growing uneasiness between the Creeks and the whites led to the Creeks ' emigration to the Okeechobee area .

Major Francis L. Dade , military commandant at Key West , received intelligence that Cuba and Spain were arming the Indians ; investigations did not confirm the rumor . Reports coming from Fort Brooke , near present @-@ day Tampa , noted that Indians in the area were resisting orders from the federal government to emigrate to Mississippi , contradicting the assertions made by the federal authorities that the Indians had agreed to emigrate peacefully . Dade , two companies of soldiers , and all of the available arms were sent to Fort Brooke at Tampa Bay , the port designated for the commencement of the Indians ' emigration . The Indians answered by concentrating all of their forces in the New River region . On December 28 , 1835 , Dade and 107 soldiers were ambushed en route from Tampa Bay to Fort King , near present @-@ day Ocala . Only three soldiers survived ; the attackers lost only three men .

= = = Attack = = =

Six days later , Cooley led a large expedition to free the *Gil Blas* , a ship that had beached the previous year . The scale of the operation required all of the settlement 's able men . On the next day , January 4 , 1836 , the Indians attacked the settlement .

Between fifteen and twenty Indians invaded the Cooley house , overpowering the tutor and scalping him . Cooley 's wife grabbed their infant son and tried to run to the river , but was shot about 170 yards (155 m) from the house . The shot killed her and the baby . Cooley 's nine @-@ year @-@ old son died from a fractured skull , and his daughter was shot . Two of Cooley 's black slaves disappeared .

The tutor 's son heard the screams by the river and came back to retrieve his mother and two younger sisters . He managed to escape , going south by boat to the Cape Florida Lighthouse . Along the way , he warned the people at Arch Creek and Miami River of the attack , prompting them to flee as well .

= = = Aftermath = = =

After the attack , the Indians torched the house and left without attacking other dwellings . The next day , Cooley came back to bury the dead ; it is unclear who alerted the salvager 's team to the attack . After staying at the settlement for three days , Cooley went to the Cape Florida Lighthouse . One of the missing slaves appeared , reporting that he recognized the assailants as having been acquaintances of the Cooley family . The slave had heard the Indians ascribing the massacre to an act of revenge for Cooley 's having failed to obtain the conviction of Chief Alibama 's murderers .

Cooley took charge of the lighthouse encampment . Richard Fitzpatrick sent sixty slaves from his Miami plantation to the lighthouse . Fearing more attacks and aware of the precarious safety of the lighthouse , the settlers and slaves boarded Cooley 's schooner and smaller boats and escaped to Indian Key , 100 miles (161 km) north of Key West . Judge Marvin , a Key West justice , accused Seminole (or Calusa , depending on the source) chief Chakaika of leading the New River Settlement raiding group . This was not proved , but it is known that Chakaika was an important leader who coordinated the devastating attack on Indian Key in 1840 .

When Cooley arrived at Indian Key , he was informed that Indians had attempted to acquire arms and munition but had been repelled by the garrison in the island 's fort . Meanwhile , more than two hundred people from nearby sought refuge in the fort . Cannons were salvaged from the *Gil Blas* ; the ship was later burned to deny the Indians a chance to recover anything from it . Difficult sea conditions and fear of imminent attacks terrorized the islanders . Cooley asked for construction of forts at New River and Cape Sable , but news soon came from the Miami River reporting the total destruction of all white property , stalling all new initiatives .

Cooley went back to New River and discovered the Indians had returned to loot the settlement and had burned several other houses and plantations . A claim for restitution of his losses was denied in 1840 by the United States House of Representatives . Arriving at Key West on January 16 , 1836 , aboard the steamboat *Champion* , he was appointed temporary lighthouse keeper , staying until April of that year .

= = After New River = =

Cooley resumed his life as a wrecker . Later that same year , he worked again as justice of the peace and assumed a position as a legislatively @-@ appointed auctioneer .

Constant attacks and rumor @-@ spreading amplified the demands of Floridian community leaders , forcing the Navy to send Lieutenant Levin M. Powell to Key West . Lieutenant Powell built a small force of fifty seamen , ninety @-@ five marines , and eight officers , reinforced by two schooners and the United States Cutter Washington , commanded by Captain Day . Powell called Cooley to be his guide in the enterprise because of his knowledge of Indian leaders and customs . Powell had mixed success , although by December 1836 the situation was under control at the coasts . Cooley went back to his usual duties in Indian Key (Dade County Seat) ; not long after , he moved to Tampa but still worked occasionally as a guide .

General Thomas Jesup , headquartered in Fort Dade , made Cooley an express rider in early 1837 to deliver messages between Tampa Bay and Fort Heilman , a corridor of 170 miles (270 km) . That same year , reports circulated that Cooley was spreading rumors about a Seminole chief leading a rebellion involving black slaves and Indians . Afraid that Cooley could be directly involved , the general had him interrogated . Afterwards , a disgusted Cooley resigned his position .

= = Politician = =

Cooley befriended Captain William Bunce , a retailer striving to keep Indians in the area , as they represented a source of cheap labor . He became involved again in local politics , this time against General Jesup , who wanted to remove all Indians from Florida . Judge Steele , a newcomer from Connecticut , was Cooley 's ally in this fight .

By 1840 , he lived in Leon County , Florida , with a single slave . Cooley was living near the Homosassa River , where the Armed Occupation Act of 1842 allowed the distribution of 160 @-@ acre (65 ha) land grants . His leadership enabled him to get not only his own permit but permits for 28 other settlers . A lengthy correspondence with the General Land Office was eventually concluded satisfactorily for him and the other settlers . In 1843 , he was a candidate for a seat in the Florida House of Representatives for the newly created Hernando County , but he lost to James Gibbons . Two years later , he became the first postmaster in Homosassa and County Commissioner of Fisheries . He sold his land grant to Senator David Levy Yulee sequentially between 1846 and 1847 and moved back to Tampa .

From 1848 to 1860 , Cooley acquired several properties in the Tampa region , including one at Worth 's Harbor . By 1850 , he lived with seven slaves and was a Captain of the " Silver Grays " ? a militia for the home defense of Tampa in the 1850s . He owned a general store in the city , eventually sold to a member of the Tampa Masonic Lodge . He was nominated Port Warden of Tampa in 1853 . By 1855 , Cooley had become a leader in local politics ; he was the chairman at a meeting of the Democratic Party in Tampa , with sixty @-@ five members enrolled , on August 4 , 1855 . He was brought in as an alternate councilman for two months in the first Tampa council , served a full @-@ year term beginning in February 1857 , and returned in 1861 for another full term . Cooley estimated his personal wealth at \$ 10 @,@ 060 in 1860 .

= = Death and legacy = =

Cooley died in 1863 in Hillsborough County , Florida . His will was written in 1862 but recorded only after Cooley 's death , filed by Francis Matthews , who identified himself as his son @-@ in @-@ law . In the document , Cooley is referred to as William Cooly . Cooley left his estate to friends , charities , a woman called Fanny Anne listed as his daughter (wife of Francis Matthews) , and three grandsons and four granddaughters , but there is no evidence that they were his blood relatives . Colee Hammock Park in Fort Lauderdale is located near the site of his old home in the New River Settlement .

