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Document relating to the bill "to provide for the armed occupation and settlement of that part of Florida which is now overrun and infested by marauding bands of hostile Indians."

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DOCUMENT

RELATING

To the bill "to provide for the armed occupation and settlement of that part of Florida which is now overrun and infested by marauding bands of hostile Indians."

JANUARY 3, 1839.

Submitted by Mr. BENTON, to accompany Senate bill No. 160, and ordered to be printed:

SURGEON GENERAL'S OFFICE,
December 30, 1838:

SIR: Your communication of the 28th instant, on the subject of an armed occupation and settlement of that part of Florida now overrun by the Indians, I have had the honor to receive.

In reply to your several interrogatories—"How far it is possible to find land fit for cultivation for these settlers, especially towards the extremity of the peninsula? whether healthy positions can be had for stations? and what are the facilities of raising grain and vegetables, and of getting fish and game for the support of the settlers?" I beg leave to present to you the following statement, as the result of my knowledge and experience, in relation to the matters submitted to my consideration.

There is an extensive range of country and of very good land between the cove of the Withlacoochee and Silver Spring branch, at the head of navigation, on the Ochlawaha, and there are many good tracts between those two rivers, extending to the Indian settlement called Pilaklikaha, where there is another body of good land.

This section of country is capable of supporting several thousand inhabitants; there is a plenty of game in it, and the rivers and lakes in the vicinity afford fish in abundance, and, withal, it has the advantage of water communication by the Withlacoochee with the Gulf of Mexico, and through the Ochlawaha and the St. Johns river with the Atlantic. In addition to these considerations, there are several healthy points in the country, particularly in the vicinity of Fort King; and here a large settlement should be made, as it will be the barrier between the Indians and the white settlements, and constitute the base of operations.

There are some good lands on Talakchopto, both near the head of the river where it is called Pease creek, and on the lower banks near the head of Charlotte's harbor.

There are three or four good tracts on or near the banks of the Coloosa-Hatchee, particularly in the vicinity of Fort Thompson, at the great crossing of the river. Fish and game abound, I believe, in this region. I am not so satisfied as to the healthfulness of this section of the country; but

it should be occupied at all risks, as it is on the line of the nearest practicable route between the gulf and the Atlantic side of the peninsula.

A few good tracts can be gotten on the shores, and on the islands within Marcus sound, near Cape Roman.

There is a beautiful tract of land on Pavilion river, ten or twelve leagues southeast of Cape Roman, and some parcels of good land may be found on the banks of Shark river, and on the shores of Lake Manitou, ten leagues still farther east.

At Cape Sable there is a beautiful spot for a military post and depot for a colony, which should be established on a prairie, running east and by north from that cape along the coast towards Cape Florida. This prairie runs immediately on the sea shore for thirty-five miles, then turns a little north and to the interior of the country, extending perhaps twenty or thirty miles more in length. It appears to be an inclined plain, falling imperceptibly from the sea shore to the everglades, a distance of fifteen or twenty miles, to the interior of the country. From what I saw of the products of the land on the cape and the islands in the vicinity, I am induced to believe that the soil of this prairie will produce in great perfection grain and vegetables of every kind, with sugar cane, cotton, &c. &c. Through the prairie there are numerous clumps and groves of trees, which will afford both fuel and building timber for the settlers. The keys and sand-bars in front of the cape make an excellent harbor for steamboats and sail vessels drawing from six to ten feet water. The waters along this coast are full of turtle and fish of every kind, and the prairie and woods around abound in game.

The immediate site of Cape Sable is evidently healthy, as are almost all situations directly on the sea board; and I have no doubt that healthy positions can be gotten on the prairie, as the climate is delightful even in the summer season, from the prevalence of the sea breeze, or trade winds.

There are also good tracts of land on New river, and a great body of it on Indian river, both on the Atlantic side of the peninsula; and near this last river, on St. Lucie's sound, another settlement should be made. This section of country, being within the influence of the sea atmosphere, should be healthy; fish abound in the rivers and sounds about, and game perhaps is plenty in the country.

The settlement on the gulf side at Cape Sable, and on the Atlantic side near Indian river, with the present military post at Tampa Bay, a small post at Punta Rassa, a block house at or near Cape Florida, and another at Jupiter inlet, with the occasional assistance of a revenue cutter, will command the whole coast, and cut off the intercourse between the Indians and the Spanish fishermen, and boatmen from the British isles; while the two settlements more in the interior of the country, with a military establishment some where on the middle ground between the Coloosa Hatchee and Indian river settlements, will be in position to control the Indians.

I have, like yourself, arrived at the conclusion that the war with the Seminole Indians can be terminated in a shorter time, and at less cost, by an armed occupation of the country, than by the continuance of a regular mode of warfare. Our armies have been for years engaged in hunting up, pursuing, and killing a few Indians in each campaign; and, judging from the success we have already had, it will take five or ten years longer to kill off those that still remain, and seem determined to remain, in the country. The establishment of military colonies, on the other hand, will change the system of warfare. *Instead of the white men fighting*

the Indians in their natural fortresses, the Indians will have to come out and attack the whites within *their* lines of defence, and where the skill and intelligence of the civilized man can have its influence. We shall act on the defensive; and experience teaches us that we are better at repelling an invasion than in making a conquest. The Indians will certainly attack our settlements, and in each conflict, and in each succeeding year, will lose more men than have fallen before our heavy columns marching through the country.

This is the way that the western country was won from the savages of that region. The pioneers to the west pitched their camps and built their block houses through the country, and then fought a little and worked a little, until the Indians, finding that they could not dislodge the white men, pulled up stakes themselves and retired beyond the Mississippi.

And so will the Seminole Indians act, for they cannot abide in the same country with the white man. As soon as they find that the white men have set themselves down near their favorite haunts, and are determined to hold on to the country through summer and through winter, and for ever, they will, after repeated unsuccessful efforts to destroy or drive off the settlers, in submission to their destiny, surrender to the white man, and ask to be removed to the west.

The proposed system of operations will have the advantage, too, of settling the country while the war progresses; and by the time that the Indians have retired from the country it will be under cultivation, and in a state to admit at once of a great influx of population. Whereas, under the present order of things, the immediate theatre of action will be rendered still more desolate as the war continues; and the adjacent districts being also drained of their resources, the country will not be in a condition to receive a body of emigrants for twelve or eighteen months after the Indians have been cut off, or have been removed to their new country beyond the Mississippi.

I have the honor to be, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

TH. LAWSON,

Surgeon General.

The Hon. THOMAS H. BENTON,

United States Senator, Washington.