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Cover Illustration: Part of the University of Florida at Lake City. The Science Building (left) and Flagler Gymnasium were two of three buildings constructed between 1902 and 1905 before the campus was moved to Gainesville in 1906. In all, the state abandoned over \$200,000 in fixed capital. Image courtesy of Florida Department of Special and Area Studies Collection, University of Florida.

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Florida's Sledd Affair: Andrew Sledd and the Fight for Higher Education in Florida

by Carl Van Ness

Andrew Sledd served only briefly as president of the University of Florida from 1904 to 1909. Under constant attack during his short tenure Sledd nonetheless managed to achieve more than many of his successors. The university has never acknowledged his contributions, and his presidency has been largely overshadowed by that of his rival and successor, Albert A. Murphree. Murphree, president from 1909 to 1927, achieved iconic status when a statue was raised in his honor in 1949. The imposing figure of Murphree in academic garb presides eternally in the campus historic district.

While Sledd's career at the University of Florida has been overlooked, the same cannot be said of his time at Emory University. Sledd is most often remembered for a racial controversy that engulfed him there in 1902. In an article penned for the *Atlantic Monthly* entitled "The Negro: Another View," Sledd condemned the lawlessness of the South and those who participated in racial vigilantism. "There is nothing," he asserted, "in a white skin *or a black* to nullify the essential rights of man as man." He went on to assert that the South had no prerogative on matters of race. "The negro question is a national one; as much so as the question of

Carl Van Ness is University Archivist and University Historian at the University of Florida. He wishes to express his appreciation to colleague James Cusick for his much-needed editorial advice. He also wishes to acknowledge the privilege and honor of adding to the edifice built by the university's first historian, Samuel Proctor.

Although attitudes about white racial superiority continued well into the twentieth century, over time the most negative impressions of the Seminoles began to wane. As war veterans passed away and as railroad construction and Everglade drainage opened Florida to settlement, some of the fear targeted towards the Seminoles subsided. Indeed, some people even looked back regretfully at the frontier days, nostalgic for a time when frontiersmen “helped to wrest [their] state from the Indians and lived to enjoy the blessings of a family amid the usual frontier homes of the woods.”⁴³ In 1893, the historian Frederick Jackson Turner presented his famous frontier thesis in Chicago, arguing that the “perennial rebirth along a continually advancing frontier line” had made Americans distinct from all other nations of people.⁴⁴ Turner’s discussion of the close of the American frontier created the sense that a stage of the United States’ national development had ended. New concerns over rapid societal change in the wake of American modernization gradually replaced old anxieties about Indian attacks.

In the American South, concerns over modernization encouraged nostalgia for pre-Civil War lifestyles. Pride for the “Lost Cause” led some southerners to sympathize with Natives who had suffered from the 1830 Removal Act: both groups had lost their land and freedom due to the actions of the federal government.⁴⁵ Along with their commiseration for a people who had suffered under the hands of the federal government was a mixed sense of admiration and envy that the remaining Seminoles in Florida had managed to preserve so many of their traditional life ways in the state’s isolated swamps. The Seminoles, for these southerners, became a model of continued resistance.

Of particular interest to individuals nostalgic for the antebellum South were persistent rumors that the Seminoles continued to own slaves. Although actual reports from government agents who surveyed Seminole villages contradicted these rumors, newspapers described the ongoing enslavement of Seminole blacks in covetous rather than disapproving tones.⁴⁶ An 1889 article published in the

43. Parrish, *Battling the Seminoles*, 27.

44. Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Holt, 1947), cited in Alan Trachtenberg, *Shades of Hiawatha: Staging Indians, Making Americans, 1880-1930* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004), 34.

45. Dr. Theda Perdue, personal communication, UNC Chapel Hill, March 2008.

46. In his 1884 report, government agent Clay MacCauley argued that he saw “nothing and could not hear of anything to justify [the] statement” that the

