



Josie Billie Camp

BIG CYPRESS — The Tribal Historic Preservation Office (THPO) recently completed an investigation of the historic Josie Billie Camp and its eligibility for the Tribal Register of Historic Places (TRHP). As development on the reservations grows, the THPO completes surveys as part of the On-Reservation Review Process to ensure culturally significant places, such as historic camps and plant gathering areas, will be respected and preserved. During the investigation of the Josie Billie Camp, it was determined that the camp be listed for the TRHP.

The Josie Billie Camp is located to the north of Josie Billie Highway, in the north-central portion of the Big Cypress Indian Reservation. It was believed to have been established around 1943 by Josie Billie and his wife Lucy Tiger. According to family members, the camp consisted of four chickees, a store, and a large garden that contained peas, sweet potatoes, corn, and sugar cane. Prior to this settlement in Big Cypress, he lived at his childhood camp near Fort Shackelford, also on the Big Cypress Reservation, and a camp near Ochopee.

Josie Billie played many vital roles within the Seminole Tribal community. One of the greatest roles that Josie Billie played was as a medicine man for the community. Besides practicing medicine and healing, medicine men also played an important role as community leaders. They typically represented the Tribe in a political and judicial capacity during the annual Green Corn Dance. Becoming a medicine man was a long, arduous task that could take up to four years to complete.

In an article written by William Straight M.D. in 1970, Straight discusses Josie Billie's baptism and

how he came to be a Baptist Minister on the Big Cypress Reservation. According to Straight, Josie Billie was baptized in January 1945 by missionary Stanley Smith and attended the Florida Baptist Institute in 1946. After his return, he became the assistant pastor of the Big Cypress Baptist Church.

By working with Tribal members to document these important places and memories, the THPO is building an archive of knowledge that Tribal members can use to help tell future generations important stories about life and culture on the reservations. To contribute your knowledge of historic camps on the reservation or memories about life in the camp, call the Tribal Historic Preservation Office at 863-983-6549 or stop by any of our offices.

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