





Miccosukee Tribal member William McKinley Osceola presents a patchwork shirt to President Harry Truman at the Everglades National Park dedication on Dec. 6, 1947. (Courtesy of Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum)

December is traditionally known for the holiday season, but this year, the month also carries a historical significance. Dec. 6 marked 70 years since President Harry Truman visited with the Seminole Tribe of Florida.

In 1947, President Truman and other members of his administration worked to attract more attention to issues affecting Native American tribes. During that time, the Bureau of Indian Affairs suffered much criticism and many people, including Tribal leaders, wanted the department to be abolished and manage their own affairs. According to the book "Native Americans and the Legacy of Harry S. Truman," Truman originally vetoed a pro-Indian bill that year that would have reimbursed Native Americans for overpaid taxes. The bill would have amounted to \$220,000 and reduced the interest rate from 6 percent to 4 percent, but because of advice from the Treasury Department, it did not pass. However, despite the termination of the bill, Truman made his way around the country to meet with tribes and learn the issues that affected them.

Included in this tour was a stop at Everglades National Park, where he met with the Seminoles. The federal government and Seminole Tribe did not have an overall positive relationship at the time, as the naming of the National Park forced hundreds of Tribal members to relocate and the government was trying to terminate the Seminole Reservation. Despite this turmoil, Truman dubbed the National Park as "another great conservation victory" and praised the Seminole Tribe for its positive conservation efforts and use of natural resources.

Miccosukee Tribal leader William McKinley Osceola and other Tribal members presented Truman with a traditional Seminole shirt, comprised of orange, yellow and black patchwork symbolizing the Osceola family, for his efforts in visiting the Tribe. Additionally, medicine man Ingram Billy presented Truman with a bag made of palmetto leaf fiber, buckskin thread and cypress. According to logs of the visit, which were compiled by Lt. Commander William Rigdon, both the shirt and the bag were handmade. Chief Osceola's children, Mike and Carey, also attended the meeting, where Mike

interpreted the interaction between Truman and the Tribal members.

Although it was after Truman's presidency, the Tribe officially established its government in 1957, preventing further talks of termination and/or relocation.

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