

**UCLA**

**American Indian Culture and Research Journal**

**Title**

My Work Among the Florida Seminole. By James Lafayette Glenn.

**Permalink**

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7qn60685>

**Journal**

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 8(4)

**ISSN**

0161-6463

**Author**

Garbarino, Merwyn S.

**Publication Date**

1984-09-01

**DOI**

10.17953

**Copyright Information**

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

places where his favorite titles were omitted and some titles of questionable value were included. Overall, one must compliment the compilers on their selection as well as their annotations.

Several years ago I approached several publishers with the idea of producing a guide to the best reference works in print on American Indians. Each publisher indicated the idea was nice but the market was too small to make the project economically worthwhile. At seventy-five dollars per copy, I suspect the American Library Association will sell very few copies to individuals. Given the quality of the content of the book, if the price were more reasonable, the book could be in the library of every American Indian scholar and graduate student and they would benefit a great deal. As it is, make sure your local library buys a copy.

*G. Edward Evans*  
*University of Denver*

**My Work Among the Florida Seminole.** By James Lafayette Glenn. Edited by Harry A. Kersey. Gainesville: The University Presses of Florida, 1982. 121 pp. \$12.00 Cloth.

James Lafayette Glenn, minister of a church in Everglades City, Florida, was appointed Special Commissioner to the Florida Seminole Indians in 1931. He served in this capacity for about five years. Somewhat over a decade after his appointment he wrote a memoir of his experiences in the federal Indian service which, edited by Harry A. Kersey, has now been published by the University Presses of Florida with the support of the Fort Lauderdale Historical Society. The editor has added some significant supplementary information in an introduction and in footnotes. The book is a personal and anecdotal statement of Glenn's years as an agent and should not be considered a scholarly study.

Glenn's reminiscences take the form of a long letter to a niece, organized around a series of photographs, and I found that format unfortunate, for the photographs are often poorly reproduced—or perhaps the originals were of poor quality. At any rate, the pictures are not very informative, though it is perhaps unfair to expect high professional standards from a casual snapshot. Nonetheless, poorly defined and prosaic photographs do not give much information or add much to the accompanying text, nor does the text enlarge upon the pictures in any useful

way. Glenn's choice of events to recount in his letter is a strange mixture and doubtless was shaped to a large extent by the device of using the photographs to develop the narrative, and the disjointed nature of the resulting account precludes a smooth flow of information. The pictures comprise more than one-third of the material, and it reminded me of an evening spent going through an old family photo-album—personal, subjective, and highly selective.

Glenn left his mark on Florida Seminoles most importantly in his successful efforts to obtain land to expand the reservation areas, and he worked to improve housing and develop animal husbandry. His vehemently expressed disgust with the policies developed under the new Commissioner of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, John Collier, is not explained, and his reaction is puzzling. Most concerned and knowledgeable people felt that Collier's administration was a big step in the right direction and an important, innovative correction to past ills.

Though Glenn was clearly sympathetic toward Seminoles and aware of their many problems, caught as they were between two worlds, he was also frequently guilty of a patronizing attitude toward them which will be distasteful to many readers who may also be offended by some of Glenn's ideas about the way American Indians should live. Nonetheless, whatever we might consider ethnocentric and paternalistic in his attitude, we cannot doubt his good intentions and his essential humanity as he traveled truly great distances weekly to minister to the Seminole people, frequently giving legal and medical aid as well as exhortations to good behavior. We read of his frustrations with do-gooders and bureaucrats and his unhappiness about the consumption of alcohol and its consequences.

What we do not learn much about is the Seminole view during the early thirties. Anyone reading this small volume for insight into Seminole culture will be disappointed. But, to be fair, the book does not pretend to be an ethnography; as the title states, it is a description of Glenn's work, his recollection of his life as an agent, and as such it is a piece of regional Americana. We get a feel for his trials traveling in a swampy area during rainy seasons on bad roads, visiting Seminoles who lived in widely scattered camps and who moved about frequently. As someone who did ethnographic research in that area some thirty years after Glenn, I enjoyed reading the book. Some of my own

problems in traveling were vividly recaptured by his accounts of driving in the swampy terrain. My vehicle too had to be pushed and pried out of the muck more than once. It is also interesting to have a document by a federal agent that is so revealing, not only of his reactions to his job, but also of his total inexperience and training for such a position. The primary value of this work for the student lies in the personal nature of these revelations.

*Merwyn S. Garbarino*  
*University of Illinois at Chicago*  
*Circle Campus*

**Women in Navajo Society.** By Ruth Roessel. Rough Rock, Navajo Nation, Arizona: Navajo Resource Center, 1981. 184 pp. \$15.00 Cloth.

Ruth Roessel has done a valuable service in bringing together in one volume an assortment of materials which bear on being female and Navajo. Part I reviews past publications on the subject. Part II begins with the mythic past when various Holy People were on the earth and sets forth instructions on child-rearing and marriage which were given at that time; it includes a section on Changing Woman, probably the single most important supernatural being in Navajo culture. The remaining chapters in Part II set forth in some detail the roles and associated ideal behavior of traditional Navajo women, from marriage to food and its preparation, to participation in curing rituals and in politics. A recounting of some of the highlights of the author's life and her summary chapter, "My Philosophy," are in Part III. The book is illustrated by just over one hundred black-and-white photographs and numerous sketches.

It seems fair to review the book according to the criteria Roessel used in her review of the literature in Part I. Her approval is accorded those whose "writing and research are primarily designed to assist, benefit or be used by the Navajos" rather than those whose writing "is mainly aimed at their profession and for 'understanding of a general order'" (31). Thus she uses twenty-six photographs of her daughter's *Kinaalda*, or puberty ceremony, while the book *Kinaalda* by a female Anglo-American anthropologist (Charlotte Frisbie, 1967), which contains fifteen pictures of the ceremony, draws the threat that "The desire by anthropol-