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Indian Massacre in Gadsen County

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immersion therein. How to heat the water with no stones to heat in the fire but coquina which would burn into lime. Necessity knows no law and by building up an earthenware pot from the marsh clay the mystery is readily solved. A hole was dug in the sand lined with a deer skin; this was filled with water, the earthenware pot was placed therein, a fire built inside which soon boiled the water, oysters were placed around the pot, or dipped in until the shell opened and they were pried open with another shell, and the oyster was ready for eating. In the case of the donac or soup clam, the conditions were reversed; the clams were boiled, the broth made use of with fish, game and other food. Pieces of broken pottery are plentifully found among the shell piles, as well as large conchs with the point broken to obtain the contents. In the case of the fresh water snails along the St. Johns river, the dipping in the hot water would loosen the animal, leaving the shell intact. As to the method of making fire, it was presumably obtained by friction in some manner, and in their travels by canoe or overland could be kept in the cooking pot. All the pieces that are found are black on the inside. In the investigation of the conditions that then existed there is as much enjoyment and satisfaction secured by the lover of nature in his search for information as in other pursuits, and if the mystery of how the shell mounds were formed is satisfactorily made plain, it is but a contribution to knowledge freely imparted to those who have not had the opportunity to investigate for themselves.

INDIAN MASSACRE IN GADSDEN COUNTY.

BY A. L. WOODWARD.

Published by the Times-Union, 1902.

Sixteen miles southwest of Quincy, the county seat of the grand old county of Gadsden, and about a mile from the banks of the Tallogee creek, spelled on the maps Taliga, lives John K. McLane, now in his eighty-third year, and a descendant of those, sturdy old Scotch colonists who have contributed so much to the history of this republic.

Hearing that the old man had passed through some

thrilling experiences in his early life and being in the immediate vicinity, I availed myself of the opportunity of calling at the home of his son, Alexander McLane, where the old gentleman is passing his declining years, surrounded by all the comforts which his dutiful sons are able to provide.

I reached the house about noon of a September day, and found the object of my quest seated upon the piazza in a large and comfortable home-made rocker.

Despite his advanced, age, I found him in full possession of sight and hearing, with a mind clear and vigorous, and a memory which could recall with distinctness the most minute details of events which transpired three-quarters of a century ago. In personal appearance he is about the medium height, and walks with remarkable erectness for one of his age. His frame is well-knit and sinewy, and the clear glint of his blue eyes shows that within dwells the stuff of which heroes are made. He is pleasant and affable in manner, and when I had introduced myself and expressed a desire to hear from his own lips the story of his siege and battle with the Indians in 1840 he very kindly gave me the narrative, which follows:

"I was born in the city of Savannah, Georgia, in 1820, and came to Florida with my mother and step-father, who was also my uncle, in 1826, and settled a few miles north of Quincy, which was then a hamlet. In 1837 we moved to this place, cleared some land and built a small cabin of logs, twelve by fifteen feet, which stood just beyond that old house which you see out in the field there to the south.

"The bridge you crossed over the Tallogee, about a mile back, still has in its foundations some of the old mud sills put there by Gen. Andrew Jackson, and the road you traveled from there to this place is the old Federal Road, cut by Old Hickory in the early Indian wars.

"At the time of which I speak, the 23d of April, 1840, there were very few settlers in this part of the country. Our nearest white neighbor to the south was in the town of Apalachicola; on the north a man named Johnson, grandfather of J. R. Johnson, lived at what is now Sycamore, about five miles off. On the east, about four miles, lived Alexander McDougal, David Holloman and Stephen Pickett.

"Near Jackson's Bluff, on the Ocklocknee river, was

a camp of volunteers under command of Captain Duncan Bonie, and on the Apalachicola river, at what is now Bristol, was a camp of United States regulars.

“The face of the country has undergone a great change since then. There were no blackjack oaks, such as you now see, growing thick among the pines, but the country was open pine woods, with very little undergrowth. You could see a deer feeding for many hundred yards. The fields we cultivated were across the branch— you can’t see it from here— while between us and the branch was a thick hammock, which is now, as you see, an open field.

“Some fifteen or twenty steps in the rear of the cabin was a small kitchen, and still back of this a workshop and blacksmith forge.

“Our family consisted of stepfather, my mother, a sister, thirteen years of age; another sister of two, a babe and myself. I was in my twentieth year, and had been sick with chills.

“What was known as the Creek War was then in progress. We knew that a band of Creek Indians from Georgia had crossed the Apalachicola and had gone down to the west bank of that river, recrossing it to the east bank in what is now known as the New River Country in lower Liberty County.

“I had gotten up about sunrise that morning. My mother had told me to go across to the field and get some herbs to make tea. My stepfather was absent in Quincy. My sister had gone out ahead of me and was at the cowpen attending to the milking. My mother and the two little ones were in the house. The door was on the east end of the house, also a window, with a chimney and fireplace between the two. The house had port-holes sawed in the logs for musketry, as most houses had in those days. We had several guns and plenty of ammunition.

“I had gone out and was between the house and the cowpen when I heard a ripping in the low bushes north-west of the house. At first I thought it was some of our cattle, which had taken fright at something and were running to the pen, but upon turning around, what was my horror to see a band of eighteen Creek warriors in full war costume, armed with guns, scalping knives and bows and arrows, coming toward the house in a run.

“I screamed to my sister, ‘run to the house, the Indians! the Indians!’ She sprang off like a deer and

soon gained the house. I also ran in the direction of the house, but before I reached it the foremost warrior stopped, threw his rifle upon me and fired. The ball grazed my left shoulder, inflicting a trifling wound.

"I succeeded in getting into the house and fastening the door when the Indians, with their usual cowardice, fearing they would be shot from the loop-hole, retreated to the kitchen and proceeded to hold a big feast with what they found there. We had plenty of bacon, meal and other provisions, and there was also a quantity of cooked food. We could plainly hear them as they cooked and feasted, but they were careful not to expose themselves to fire from the loop-holes. Then occurred the awful tragedy of the day, the memory of which will never fade from my mind. My mother had taken up the idea that she could take the children and escape to the east, keeping the house between her and the Indians in the kitchen, until she got across the branch, when she could then reach the Pickett or McDougal settlement, four miles away. I pleaded with her not to make the attempt, telling her that the Indians always had pickets out, who would see her, and begged her to remain and all die together. But she was determined to go, and I think her judgment was overcome by terror and excitement. She helped the children out of the window, then got out herself and with the two little ones in her arms and my eldest sister running by her side, they started for the fringe of timber that skirted the creek. Looking through a loop-hole my worst fears were realized, for I saw two Indians running around on the north side to head her off. I opened the door and jumped out and was taking aim at one of those Indians when a bullet from the rear whistled past my head and I was forced to jump back into the house and fasten the door. In another moment I heard the screams of my mother and sister and then two shots rang out and all was still.

"The next day we found them near the bank of the creek, where they had been murdered. My mother was shot in the forehead and her throat was cut. My sister was shot in the breast, her throat was also cut and she was scalped. She had long, beautiful hair. The two little ones had been brained with a lightwood knot.

"No language could possibly express my feelings at this moment, knowing that my dearest relatives were lying out there brutally murdered by those red devils,

and realizing fully that if captured alive a horrible and lingering death awaited me, shut up alone in the cabin and expecting momentarily that a rush would be made for the door.

“But I did not have much time to think. I have said that after the shooting all was still, but suddenly the silence was broken by an ominous roaring in the direction of the kitchen, which, as I have said, stood in the rear and west of the house, separated only by a space of fifteen or twenty feet. I realized at once that they had set fire to the kitchen in hopes of burning the house and roasting me like a rat in a trap, but the logs of which the house was built did not catch readily.

“There was a quantity of cotton in the workshop, and they rolled this into balls which they set afire and threw upon the roof of the house by means of long poles, which they cut near the branch. But the balls of burning cotton rolled off the steep roof without igniting it. This I did not know at the time, and, thinking that my jig was about up, I determined to sell my life dearly, and made preparations accordingly. Pulling the heavy dinner-table across the room to act as a sort of breastwork or barricade, I laid my musket, heavily loaded with slugs, upon it. Then taking my rifle, I placed the muzzle to my forehead to see if I could pull the trigger with my naked toe, having determined to kill myself rather than be captured. As I lowered the rifle I discovered to my dismay that it was cocked and the trigger sprung, and I had actually touched it with my toe in experimenting. It was a wonder I did not discharge it and kill myself prematurely.

“All this time I was praying with all my soul, ‘O Lord, if you are ever going to help me, help me now.’ I think this was the first time I had ever prayed, at least I don’t remember ever having prayed before. And my prayer was answered, too. The wind had been blowing from the west, and blowing the flames from the kitchen directly toward the house. Suddenly there was a lull, and then the wind shifted and began blowing from the east to southeast.

“The savages finding themselves foiled, now adopted a strategy. Peering through my loop-hole, I could not see an Indian— all had disappeared. Then I heard their calls and answers far off in the woods, as if they were leaving. But I knew too much about Indian character

to be deceived, and instead of rushing out and attempting to escape, as they thought I would, I remained in the house. Then again all was still except for the crackling and roaring of the burning kitchen. But I was watching with all my eyes, looking first through one loop-hole, then running across and looking through another. As I looked out on the north side of the house I saw a solitary Indian skulking from one pine to another. He had a torch in his hand and I knew at once what he was up to. He thought I was watching the west end, and he could slip around to the east end and fire the house. I kept my eye upon him; he was out of range of my gun and I did not care to venture a chance shot. Finally he got around to the east end and stood some minutes behind a big pine. Meantime the enemy on the west were making a great din, but I knew it was a ruse to attract my attention. Finally the Indian on the east end left his pine tree and came hopping as it were in a stooping posture toward the house. I had my old musket pointed in the loop-hole, and waited until he had got within twenty or twenty-five feet from the house, when I pulled the trigger and let the big charge of slugs loose. I had aimed at his breast, but I think he hopped just as I pulled the trigger, for he got the whole load in the bowels. The recoil of the old musket set me backward sprawling on the floor, but as I fell I heard the most unearthly screech and yell that ever came from a human throat, and I knew enough about Indians to know it was his death-scream.

“By the time I had pulled myself together, regained my feet and looked through the loop-hole he had staggered up and gotten around on the south side of the house, to the rail fence, and another Indian was helping him over. I tried to shoot, but my attention was attracted by a demonstration on the west side, and when I again looked for them they had disappeared. Then there ensued a period of profound silence, which was finally broken by a low, plaintive wail or chant, and it seemed that the whole band had gathered around the wounded one in the hammock on the south side. I could not see any of them, but could hear them, and knew that the wounded Indian was dying, and more from the noises made, that he was either a chief or a chief's son. I afterward learned that the latter was correct. He was the only son of the old chief, and was in command of this

raiding party. Now they would imitate the coding of a dove, then the hooting of an owl and the barking of a wolf.

“The siege had now continued the greater part of the day, and the sun had long since passed the meridian. I did not abate anything of my watchfulness, well-knowing that the Indians were enraged by the death of their comrade, but the chanting and wailing went on and I could not catch a glimpse of a single Indian.

“Looking through a loop-hole on the north side about the middle of the afternoon, what was my joy as well as horror to see my stepfather with the mare and cart. I jumped out of the door and ran to meet him signaling him to keep quiet, that the Indians were around. It seemed they were so much engrossed with their death ceremonies that they had not seen him or heard the cart. As soon as I got to him, I told him to unhitch the mare quickly. He asked me where mother and the children were. I told him hurriedly they were murdered, pointing in the direction they ran. He said ‘I am going to find them.’ I said, ‘No, you can do them no good; let us both get on the mare and try to escape.’ ‘No,’ said he, ‘you get on the mare and run; I am going to find them.’ With that he soon disappeared in the direction of the branch. There was no time to stand on ceremony, so I jumped upon the mare just as the Indians discovered me and came running and yelling at my heels. The mare had got the scent of them and needed no whip or spur. She fairly flew across the pine woods with the Indians in hot pursuit. She soon distanced them, but not before I heard the ‘sing’ of several rifle balls as they went by me. In order to stick to the bare-backed mare I had dropped my gun and powder-horn, but strange as it may appear the Indians did not find them in the long grass, and we recovered them next day. I headed straight for the McDougal and Pickett settlement on the east, and reached there about dusk or just before. My father came in during the night; the Indians did not discover his trail, and failing to find the bodies of mother and the children, he had hidden between two old fallen trees in the swamp of the branch, and after he heard the Indians leave he crawled out and escaped. Before they left they robbed the house of all they could carry, ripped up our feather beds and scattered the feathers every-

where, shot eight or ten head of fat hogs and wounded a fine colt, then burned the house.

"Immediately upon my arrival a courier was sent to the camp of volunteers near Jackson's Bluff. They reached Picketts early next morning, and we all proceeded back to what had been our home. The scene there presented beggars all description. The finding of the murdered remains of my mother and sister and the little innocent babies I can never forget. I am an old man now, but that sight will never fade from my memory. The volunteers made immediate pursuit, and later on a detachment of the regulars joined in, but the Indians made good their escape. They never captured one of them. A year or such a matter afterward a treaty was made, and all the Indians came in and surrendered. The old chief said through an interpreter that a white boy killed his son up on the Tallogee, and had it not been for his death the war would have been continued. So you see I may say that I was the cause of the Creek War coming to an end. I am receiving pension of only eight dollars per month, which is not sufficient for my support, if my sons did not take care of me."

I listened with breathless attention while the old man gave me the foregoing thrilling adventures, but no words of mine can convey the interest or describe the dramatic recital as it fell from his lips. One must see the grizzled old hero, watch his gestures and note the flash of his eye to enjoy the narrative as I did.

I hope this may fall under the eye of one of our Representatives in Congress and that they will endeavor to secure for him an increase of pension. Surely he deserves it, and there are few of these old pioneers now left.

After dinner the old man showed me the bow which had belonged to the young chief whom he killed. This he preserves with religious care as a priceless relic.

Then we walked down into the field, and he showed me first where the little house had stood, and I picked up some broken fragments of old-fashioned crockery and a few pieces of charcoal, all that remained of the settler's cabin of the long ago.

A clump of gnarled and giant pines, which must be at least a hundred years old, stand silent guardians of the spot. They looked down upon the thrilling tragedy of that April morning, sixty-two years ago, and as I stood with uncovered head beneath the pendant moss that

clung to their weather-beaten limbs, the summer breeze stirred the long needles in their emerald crowns and a soft, sad whisper, sweeter than the music of an Aeolian harp, floated out upon the sunlit day, a fitting requiem for those who perished there, and I, too, whispered "Rest in peace."

Then the old gentleman grew reminiscent again, and among other interesting facts connected with the early history of Quincy, he gave me the following:

"The first Methodist preacher," said he, "who ever preached in Quincy was a man by the name of Tarentine, and he preached there in 1827. The first Presbyterian minister was named Blackstock, who preached there the same year.

"The first court of justice was held in the bottom, near where the Bruce house now stands, just west of the Seaboard Air Line depot. The Judge was Dr. White, who was a judge, a physician and a preacher. I think he was the father of present Judge P. W. White. There was no courthouse, but the Judge sat on the stump of a recently felled pine tree, and the jury retired to the other end among the branches to make up their verdict. The first Justice of the Peace was Thomas Linson, and the first Sheriff was a man named Robert Forbes."

But it was now long past noon, and I was due in Bristol, the capital of Liberty, that night, and so thanking the venerable hero for the genuine pleasure he had bestowed upon me by his deeply interesting narrative, I got into my buggy and drove away speculating upon the wonderful changes which had occurred since the day the old man fought the Indians— the Mexican War, the great Civil strife, the developments of steam and the wonders of electricity— and through it all he had lived quietly near the scene of his life's epoch and could now sit upon his piazza at the age of eighty-two and look down upon his battlefield.

Verily, truth is sometimes stranger than fiction.