

1926

Massacre at Indian Key, August 7, 1840 and the Death of Doctor Henry Perrine

Hester Perrine Walker

Find similar works at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq>
University of Central Florida Libraries <http://library.ucf.edu>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by STARS. It has been accepted for inclusion in Florida Historical Quarterly by an authorized editor of STARS. For more information, please contact STARS@ucf.edu.

Recommended Citation

Walker, Hester Perrine (1926) "Massacre at Indian Key, August 7, 1840 and the Death of Doctor Henry Perrine," *Florida Historical Quarterly*. Vol. 5 : No. 1 , Article 5.
Available at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq/vol5/iss1/5>

MASSACRE AT INDIAN KEY, AUGUST 7, 1840
AND THE DEATH OF
DOCTOR HENRY PERRINE

(Narrative of Hester Perrine Walker, a survivor) ¹

[While at Campeachy, (1827-1838), where he served as United States consul, Dr. Henry Perrine, a native of New York City and a physician and botanist, determined to devote the remainder of his life to introducing and endeavoring to acclimatize useful tropical plants in semi-tropical Florida. He studied the matter and made collections of plants and seeds. The United States Congress, by an act approved July 7, 1898, made a conditional grant ² to Dr. Perrine and his associates ³ of a township of land in South Florida, to be selected by him; the Senate Committee on Agriculture having reported ⁴ “. . . . that his services have been great; that his suggestions are important; and that his plans are laudably patriotic and practicable. and his voluminous manuscripts ⁵ alone exhibit a great amount of labor and research which promise to be highly beneficial to our common country.” Dr. Perrine first established a nursery on Indian Key and the keys adjoining and resided there with his family from December, 1838, to the time of the massacre.]

[1838]_____ My Father having resigned his position ⁶ & been for some months engaged in his surveys in South Florida, & his efforts to awaken an interest in the people of Florida to the culture of Tropical Fruits, & also in presenting his reports to Congress (These reports are found in the Reports of the 25th Congress 1838) & they, for his services granting him a Township of Land to be located in South Florida, we prepared to remove there. There were but few vessels running to Southern Ports, & for three long

¹From an unpublished manuscript volume of reminiscences in the form of a journal written by Mrs. Hester Perrine Walker, a daughter of Dr. Perrine, in the year 1885, and now in the collection of The Florida Historical Society.

(All other notes will be found at the end of the narrative.)

months we waited in New York for a sailing vessel that would land us at "Indian Key." Believing the "Seminole War" closed, we had expected to go upon the land at once, & Joel R. Poinsett, the then "Secretary of War", had promised to make it a Military Post, so there need be no fear of Indians. While in New York my Father received a letter from the Sec. saying "The war had again broken out and it would not be prudent to go on the land." Then my Father decided to go to "Indian Key" & remain there until we could go to his land, as there was already established there one of his depots of plants sent from "Yucatan" & under the care of Mr. Charles Howe. We sailed from New York the first week in December 1838, & landed at Indian Key on Christmas morning!

As soon as our vessel came to anchor Mr. Howe came on board, and in his boat we were landed. Our first Christmas dinner was eaten at his hospitable table. How well I remember the curious "Conch Soup", and that Roast of Beef!! Some years before, Captain Houseman the owner of the Island had imported a cow & bull, hoping to raise stock. From some cause the cow died, & he had determined to kill the bull, and hearing that Father was coming, determined to await his arrival, so we could enjoy what was to be to them such a great luxury! forgetting that we were from a land of good beef. The task Mr. Howe had in cutting that roast and our teeth had in masticating it can better be imagined than told!! But the fresh vegetables and delicious fruits made amends.

I cannot forget our delight on first seeing this beautiful little island of only 12 acres. It was truly a "Gem of the Ocean." The trees were many of them covered with morning glories of all colors, while the Waving Palms, Tamarinds, Papaws, Guavas, Sea-side Grape tree, and many others too numerous to mention

made it seem to us like fairy land, coming as we did from the midst of snow and ice.

Our twenty months of life there was a very peculiar one. We were shut out from all social life, with the exception of the family of Mr. Howe. We might have had a great deal of society from the Officers of the Navy and Army who frequented the Island, but as my sister and I were only school girls, my Father would not have allowed, or rather, did not allow us to come into the parlor when they called, & in reply to the question "Are we not to see your daughters sir" my Father would reply, "They are only school girls, sir, and are engaged in their school room." He perhaps would not have been quite so strict, had he not heard, that before our arrival the Officers had been boasting that "they would make the Dr.'s daughters the Belles of the Reef", and while there were a few that my Father would have permitted us to know, there were others that no pure woman would care to associate with, & in our isolated state it was impossible to make invidious distinctions, without creating great enmity. Whenever there were officers upon the Island, we would close our blinds & peep behind them to see them, when they would walk in front of our house, trying to get a peep at us!! They would sometimes come in boats under our windows & serenade us, which would make my Father *furios*. I think as we grew older it became a kind of "hide & seek" game, & as we knew we were not permitted to know them, they should not see us.

We had an abundance of books and papers, but only a monthly mail. This mail we generally had brought in a bushel basket & had our arrangements so made that for at least a week after its receipt our household duties should not seriously interfere with our enjoyment of it. For amusement we sometimes used to fish, learned to use a rifle & pistols, & often

go over to "Lower Maticumba" with Father when he spent the day there attending to his plants. ⁷ We would take our lunch & send the men back with our boat, & at sundown they would return for us. When tired with work, Father would go with me upon the beach to gather shells & other curiosities.

One memorable day, only **three** days before the Indians came to Indian Key! Father and I went over, and he did but little work and then telling me that "he had found a place where it would be pleasant for us to take our lunch" took me about a mile down the Beach & then turning into the Forest soon brought me to a spot where he parted the branches & **there** was a "Fairy Grotto." In the center was a small sparkling spring perhaps ten or fifteen feet across ; various cacti in bloom & fruit, with other flowers upon the banks ; the overarching trees interlacing their boughs, while innumerable air plants in full bloom added brilliancy to the scene, the sun scarcely penetrating. I shall never forget my amazement & delight. In after days, I heard that when the Indians were captured, they told of their having **then** been on that Island, "lying in wait on the back side of the Island, waiting for the vessels of war to leave the Island so they might attack it, and that all **that** day they were following us from tree to tree, and watching our movements, but would not capture us because if we were missing when the boat came for us, there would search be made & **they** would be discovered & captured." A kind Providence again preserved my life.

Of our entire life on the Island I cannot write, but will tell some few amusing and interesting occurrences. One of these was the arrival of Gen'l Harney with a vessel loaded with soldiers on their way to the Caloosahatchie River where they were going to establish a Post & locate the Seminoles on their Reservation, as

another truce & treaty had been made with the treacherous creatures & the War was supposed to be at an end. Gen'l Harney's confidence in their intention to keep the peace **was unbounded**. "Why! Dr., if it was necessary to go alone, with my hands bound behind my back through their country to show my faith in them, I would do it." My Father's reply was, "Harney, they are treacherous rascals, don't trust them too much." That night Harney sent a boat load of his best singers under our window to serenade us, alas! but a few days after their voices were hushed in death!

I do not remember how many days had elapsed, when one evening in taking our usual walk, we thought we would go up into the observatory of Capt. Houseman's warehouse & take a look at the islands about us. While there we saw, far off toward the mainland, a small boat apparently hurrying in our direction. After watching it for some time, & fearing it might be an Indian spy, we hurried down to put the inhabitants upon their guard; after a few hours watching, Gen'l Harney and one man stepped ashore! They & five others having been the sole survivors of that terrible massacre of the Caloosahatchie! Terribly had my Father's fears been realized. ⁸

Soon after our arrival at Indian Key, Judge Marvin, afterwards "Gov. of Florida", & Stephen Mallory, afterwards "Confederate Sec'y of the Navy", came up in a sailing vessel "to pay their respects to the Dr. & his family", but alas for human expectations, the Dr's daughters were not to **be seen!** "My daughters are only school girls sir", was again the reply that doomed the young men to disappointment! While from behind our blinds, my sister & I watched their departure, and mourning over our own failure to **be** the "Belles of the Reef".

At one time we saw a very rare sight. **Three** great water-spouts coming from the south east directly

towards Indian Key & moving with great velocity. A big gun was loaded to fire into and break them before they could reach us, when their course diverted and they broke near the lower end of Lower Maticumba. Had they broken upon Indian Key, we should all have been destroyed.

At another time as we were sitting upon our piazza we witnessed a terrific battle between a Shark and a young Sperm Whale ! Within the Reef and between the Islands at low tide the water is very shallow, but threading their tortuous courses are many deep rivers or channels, never very wide. But a few rods from our house was one of these channels. One evening just before dark our attention was attracted by two large dark forms moving rapidly through the water & as they arrived directly in front of our house the pursuer, which proved to have been a Shark 16 feet long! overtook his game, which proved to be a young Sperm Whale, & catching his tail in his great mouth, bit it off. **Instantly** the waters even up to our steps were deluged with blood, & the whale sent great volumes of water into the air. We had given the alarm & a boat was at once in pursuit and harpooned the whale and brought it ashore, while the shark was allowed to pass on in the narrow channel, as the men knew from his immense size he could not turn in it to escape & they could probably capture him in the morning, as **they** did, & from his liver they dried out **fifteen gallons of oil!**

The theory of the sailors was that the mother of this young whale had been killed in the Northern seas, & this young whale being unprotected, this Shark had been chasing it for some days & they had got inside of the Reef into one of these narrow channels just in time for us to witness a most remarkable sight. (The Sperm Whale is not found in the warmer waters of the Tropics.)

Another remarkable thing that we witnessed I must tell, a mirage, by which the Coast of the Main Land, although **twenty** miles away was brought into sight in mid air, but upside down! It was very beautiful!

With no associates but Mr. Howe's family, we still had many pleasures. We had no church, but every Sabbath evening we would go over to Mr. Howe's & spend the evening singing, to their delight & that of the Slaves who used to gather about the doors & windows. My mother was a very sweet singer & Sarah & I sang pretty well. Thus in a pleasant & primitive way we passed nearly two years. When my sister was taken very ill. For two weeks we had despaired of her life when on the memorable 6th of August, 1840, she began to rally & at night said, "let Father lie in the hammock in the hall & Mother you and Hester go to bed in your room, & put out the light & I believe I can sleep."

Thinking that it would be better for Sarah if we did as she requested, I retired with Mother. Father took his position in the hammock, & before we retired said to Mother, "Wife, there is a song which you used to sing to me when we were young & it has been ringing in my head all the evening, I wish you would sing it to me," & he repeated the first verse of it (Moore's *L e g a c y*).

When in death I shall calm recline
O bear my heart to my mistress dear!

It would seem that a premonition of his speedy death was haunting him, for ere the next day's Sun had risen the murderous Seminoles had done their work. His life was ended.

"History of the Massacre," with the, many little incidents that will interest my descendants, but were not published in the papers. ⁹

The going down of the Moon is the only knowledge we have of the hour of the massacre & this was about two o'clock in the morning. A sailor who lived upon the Island, being very restless, thought he would take his gun & stroll around the Island, thinking he might run across some ducks. As he was on the east side he suddenly came upon the Indians (200 in number) creeping carefully along by Capt. Houseman's garden ; their evident intention being to surround the occupied houses before being discovered! Had they accomplished this, not a soul would have been spared to tell the tale. Realizing the situation at once, he raised his gun and fired among them, giving at the same time an alarming "War Whoop." The Indians separated at once & made a rush for the two largest houses on the Island, Capt. Houseman's and ours!

The front of our house rested upon the land, while the house itself was built over the Sea upon a stone wall, & around that was another wall leaving a moat around the house on three sides. ¹⁰ The piazza on the north side opened on to a long wharf. When Mr. Howe built the house he enclosed the narrow passage leading from the wharf to the cellar with stone & left open the end under the wharf: as also the end of the wharf & kept a boat in this stone passage way, so that in case the Indians should come, they might escape that way. As time passed & the near Island of "Tea Table Key" was made a Naval Station all thoughts of danger passed away. Then Mr. Howe had filled the end of the wharf & separated the wharf from this narrow passage, also by palmetto posts driven down, still allowing the tides to wash in & out of our cellar, which we utilized for Sea bathing. The pen under the wharf was used to confine turtle.

We were aroused from our sleep by the terrific war whoop simultaneously with the crack of Rifles & the falling of the glass from our broken windows. With

strange intuition we sprang from our beds to the head of the stairs & in the darkness with whispered inquiries "if all were there?" found Henry missing. I sprang back, & in passing the window looking into the yard I saw this terrific crowd of Indians dancing & whooping like demons by the flash of their Rifles, & ever will that fearful sight remain with me. My brother had a habit of screaming if suddenly awakened, & instinctively I clasped my hand over his mouth & whispered him to "keep still, the Indians, the Indians." Thinking of the risk I had run in passing before the window from the Rifle balls, we crept back to the head of the stairs where the rest of the family were. Henry's only exclamation was "Oh, my poor Grandmother, what will she do when she hears." My father then told us to go down into the bath room, & "he would see what he could do." Then Mother called back to him. "Husband, there is no ammunition." "I know it" he said, "go down into the cellar."

The Indians had evidently feared to break in at once, as they might have done, probably fearing resistance. By this time a portion of them had run around upon the breakwater wall, & there was no escape from any outside way. With a martyr's heroism he went, out on the piazza & called to them in Spanish, ¹¹ "I am a Physician & will go with you to heal your people." Upon this they gave a great shout & left the house. Father came down then & closed the trap door, telling us to "go on into the narrow passage way, for if we remained in the cellar the Indians might see us through the openings." He then drew a heavy chest of seeds over the door, concealing every trace of its existence. He had scarcely accomplished this when the Indians returned & with their Tomahawks began battering down the door & breaking in the windows, having apparently given up their intention of sparing him. The reasons for his doing as he did were ; a short

time before when a flag of truce was flying the Indians had told the Officers that "they had lain in wait for a long time at Fort Dallas, on the Miami, trying to catch the Dr. away from the fort, as they had a good deal of sickness among them." The ignorant Indians having the same faith in a white Dr. as ignorant whites, have in an Indian Dr!

Knowing that the return of the Indians meant death! Father fled to the Cupola, we think, hoping that he might be able from there to see help coming from the Naval Depot, & that as the door was a heavy one, he might be able to hold out until relief came. (There were probably runaway negroes among them, for when they got inside we distinctly heard one say, "They are all hid, old man up stairs" & then they ran up.) For a few moments after they swarmed up the stairs after him, there was a horrid silence, only broken by the blows of their Tomahawks upon the door, then a crash, one wild shriek, a Rifle Shot, & all was still.

They then came down & commenced pillaging our house. All our trunks, boxes, & barrels of provisions, were dragged over our heads & dumped in confused masses into boats drawn up near to our hiding place. Their bare legs plainly visible to us & our choicest treasures being carried off. As they went into our pantry for a short space there was again silence as they consumed the good things there, for only the day before I had been shewing my skill in baking Bread, Rusks, Pies & Cookies, a goodly store.

After their repast was over they would take first one pile of dishes and then another & throw them upon the floor breaking them to pieces, & they would dance & whoop! So they broke everything in the house before they set fire to it. At first they commenced throwing our books out of the window into the water but soon thought they had a better use for them in piling them under the Cupola and setting

them on fire. Thus our house burned from the top downwards. There was no wind & it burned slowly. Until it had burned so low that the Indians were obliged to leave it, they were constantly swarming on the wall & dancing on the boards over our **heads giv-**ing their terrific war whoops. Soon after daylight the smoke began to come slowly into our hiding place, the tide had risen until there was only room for our heads between the water & the boards, but when it was low there was perhaps a foot in depth. Remember that the hiding place was only four feet wide, four feet high, & ten feet long! then the bank sloped gradually until at the end of the wharf it was about ten or twelve feet. On the end of this wharf about six cords of wood were piled waiting for the wrecking vessels to take it off. Towards ten o'clock (as we thought) the smoke became so annoying that we were obliged to throw the water over our heads to be able to breathe. The Indians heard us & running down to the trap door at the end of the wharf, lifted it & looked down, their shadows upon the water being distinctly visible to us. Had they turned their heads in the slightest they would have seen us, but seeing the numbers of Turtle splashing around must have supposed the noise they heard was from them. Again was the remarkable Providence of God signally displayed toward us! Soon after the fire had progressed so that it became evident the house would soon fall into the cellar. Timber after timber fell, & the smoke & steam became unendurable. The piazza fell in & the flames communicated to the boards over our heads, but we kept them subdued for awhile by throwing water upon them. But when the wharf beyond us & the cords of wood upon it were all in flames, our lives were in immediate danger. My brother had been kept from screaming aloud by my Mother's firm pressure of her hands over his mouth, but he finally broke from her

with the exclamation, "I will go for I had rather be killed by the Indians than to be burned to death." He then struggled through between the narrow passage by the Palmetto posts & passing down to the trap door, made a spring & lifting himself into the opening jumped down into the water & made for the land. Our suspense was intense & we waited with bated breath for the Rifle Shot that would announce his death.

When no sound was heard & we realized that for some time we had not seen a boat pass we hoped that the Indians had gone. We could no longer stay in our hiding place, we could not pass through the narrow space that my brother did, & with her hands my Mother dug away the marl from the foot of one of the posts until she could drop it down & thus we passed through & under the burning wharf, the floor of it burned off at one side so that the burning wood pile was sliding down & the coals fell upon us. When we reached the trap door Mother helped me to reach to the top, then lifting my sick Sister I dragged her up & helped her down to the other side, then reached my hands down & thus helped Mother to get up, we then jumped down & taking my Sister by the arms, Mother on one side & I on the other we started for the land.

The awful silence prevailing there made us feel that (as Mother said) "we should only find the dead bodies of all our friends" & she said "**we cannot go** there, oh **where** shall we go.." At that moment we espied at the side of the wharf a Ship's Launch moored. It was about two or three hundred feet away. We also saw my brother standing in front of Houseman's store & his attention being attracted, we beckoned him to go down on the wharf and get into the boat, & we waded through the water which was then nearly up to our waists. When half way to the boat my Sister sank down exclaiming "I am dying, leave me and escape yourselves." Of course we could not

do that & supporting her under each arm we dragged her to the boat & Henry bending over bent it down so that we could lift Sarah in, & she dropped almost lifeless in the bottom of the boat where she lay until our rescue by the boat that came to our relief.

About three miles from there lay a Schooner at anchor that had come loaded with canoes for the proposed expedition into the Everglades. We of course steered for this vessel. Mother had an Indian paddle, my Brother a pole & I an oar. With these we were making our way rapidly to the schooner, when looking to her & seeing no boat putting out to our help we thought that it must be the Indians had been **there** and massacred all; (We found however that we came so rapidly that they thought it was the crew of a vessel that was being repaired in the Harbor.) Then Mother said "Well we will steer for the Gulf Stream & we shall surely be picked up **there** before we starve," when suddenly it seemed that a miracle had been performed for in the bow of the boat we discovered a barrel of flour, a keg of Molasses, a jug of Brandy, a box of Soap, a box of Tobacco & a Mosquito Bar, just torn from some bed! Our eyes had been strangely held that we had not seen these things until that moment. Had we seen them at first we should not have dared to take the boat knowing there were Indians still there, From Mr. Goodyear, who was hidden in a fig tree, we learned that there were six Indians who had just gone into the store for more plunder & probably stopping to drink, we had just had the time to make our escape. Our boat had only gone around the end of the wharf when they came down with more plunder & supposing their boat had got adrift they ran down to the end of the wharf & discovered us. Their rifles had been left in the store & before they could get them & fire upon us we were beyond Rifle Shot! All of the other boats with the Indians were at the end of the Upper

Matacumba awaiting the coming of this one. When they saw that our boat had turned toward the Gulf Stream they put out in a canoe to chase us, but before getting near they saw the Schooner's boat coming, to our relief & so they landed at Indian Key & **then** set fire to the houses & taking their companions made all speed back, for already small spots on the horizon warned them that the wreckers from Key Gavanier & the three naval schooners were on their way to our relief.

When we escaped from our burning house the whole burning mass excepting one corner beam had fallen into the cellar where there was water to quench the fire, but the smoke & steam were so dense that although clasped in each others arms we could not distinguish faces! The Indians had probably set our house on fire first from the fact of their finding three beds that had been occupied; & only finding Father they thought to drive us out from our hiding place by fire. The other houses they had left to plunder & did not burn until by the sight of the vessels coming to our relief they were warned to flee.

When we first saw the boat from the Schooner coming we feared it was an Indian boat & redoubled our efforts to get out to Sea until it was near enough for us to see that she was rowed and not paddled. Then we knew they were friends & not Indians.

It was then two o'clock in the afternoon! **Twelve** long hours we had been in the midst of these terrible sufferings, but not till then did our courage leave us, or had we shed a tear. But when we **knew** we were safe our oars dropped from our hands & sitting on the bottom of the boat, the blessed tears came to our relief. We drifted with the tide until the Captain's boat overtook us, & as they drew near for the first time we began to realize our nearly naked condition. Sarah had on her night gown, while Mother and I having

taken ours off on account of the warm night, had on but the one garment. Henry was entirely naked, having taken his shirt off & tied it to a pole as a signal of distress to any passing vessel. Quickly Mother took the blessed mosquito bar & tearing it in two wrapped its folds about us just as the Captain & his two negro sailors caught hold of our boat & soon anchoring her, took us in their arms & carefully & tenderly put us in their boat, the negroes begging us not to cry, saying, "Oh, don't cry, Missus ; don't cry ; you are safe now Missus; you are safe now."

We soon reached the Schooner's side & there found to our great delight that nearly all of the inhabitants had escaped. There had been 70 souls on the Island & of these there were but 13 missing. The Indians, by attacking the two largest houses first had given the others a chance to get to their boats & of course all had steered for the Schooner. When safely on the Schooner's deck we were carried to the cabin door & told "to take anything we could find to cover ourselves with." Some had caught clothing as they ran, others were as destitute as ourselves & had used up all of the sailors' clothing. All that we could do was to strip the sheets from the berths & rolling a sheet around our bodies & tying it on with a piece of tarred rope, folded another like a shawl to put over our shoulders & a square of the Mosquito netting tied over our heads completed our attire for the first 24 hours.

After getting on board my Sister gave up entirely & was very sick. Dr. McCreery & Midshipman Murray who were in charge of the Station at "Tea Table Key" brought a cot & a hospital tent on board & placed it in the Stern of the vessel & there we laid Sarah, who was now delirious. About midnight there was a terrific thunder storm & we imagining that we heard guns & Indian shouts wildly insisted upon the Captain's lowering his boat & letting us get into it that

we might go out to Sea. With our own hands we tried to loosen the boat but were finally persuaded & calmed down. The blessed daylight showed us the three Naval vessels & many of the wreckers vessels at anchor near us, they had arrived in the night. The guns we had heard were from the Sentinel on guard at the Post, who saw a floating log on the water & thinking in the darkness that it was an Indian canoe had given the alarm.

Commander McLaughlin at once came on board & tendered "his cabin for our use, & his vessel to carry us wherever we wished to be carried." In the meantime, as the Indians were far away, the inhabitants returned to the Island, as two or three houses had been saved from the flames & some soldiers were put there on guard.

A circular letter had been given to Father when he went to Indian Key by the Secretary of War Joel R. Poinsett, directing the Officers of the Army and Navy "to afford to Dr. Perrine & his family any assistance in their power, at any time, that was consistent with their duty to their Country." Therefore Commodore McLaughlin felt this to be his duty. He offered to take us directly to New York, but Mother desirous that the expedition into the Everglades should not be delayed by us & knowing that a Gov't Steamer was at Miami, told him that she would only ask him to take us there, & let us take that Steamer to St. Augustine. In the mean time a woman who lived with her husband on Key Largo (I think) on Capt. Houseman's plantation there, seeing from their Island the flames of Indian Key, **knew** that the Indians had been there & only seizing a basket of clothes that she had just folded down from her week's washing made all speed with their boat to the Schooner and soon distributed her most welcome burthen. Mr. Howe went back to Indian Key & in his garden found some dresses that had been

scattered, & Mother & I each secured a dress, & a pair of high heeled shoes with large buckles upon them & which the Indians had thrown away from their plunder, fell to my share. The Officers sent us some socks and we used tarred rope for elastics! My dress was one of Mrs. Howe's & as she was so much taller than I & larger around the waist it was lapped nearly under my arms & pinned over (The Officers had by this time sent us pins, combs, brushes & tooth brushes) so that we could make ourselves presentable, & as I walked I held up my dress to keep from stepping on it. Our heads had been so plastered with Marl from the bottom of the Sea to keep our hair from burning that they "looked like a plastered wall." The Sailors drew many buckets of water to cleanse our heads as we hung over the side of the vessel & then to get out the tangles we utilized a bottle of Sweet Oil from the Captain's Stores. All this time my Sister had to keep her berth. On Thursday we had escaped & on Saturday Mother gave her assent to going on board the Commodore's vessel. Just at sunset he came up with his "Gig." Sarah was lowered into it lying upon her cot & covered entirely with a sheet. We all followed & were swiftly borne to "The Flirt." As we passed the two other vessels of War their shrouds were manned by the Sailors, while the Officers stood upon the bowsprit all with their caps in hand & a solemn silence as of the grave. When we reached the Flag Ship steps had been rigged for our accommodation. Henry passed up first, then I & as I stepped upon the vessel in the attire that I have already described! a piece of mosquito bar tied over my head, & a small shawl of the same about my shoulders! you can imagine my consternation at beholding one hundred & fifty marines drawn up in a half circle, with **thirteen** Officers in full uniform in front of them, caps in hand, drawn up to receive us & the silence so intense you might have

heard a pin drop. The thought of our *nearly two* years of "bo-peep" came upon me in full force, & I could scarce refrain from laughing outright. Remember I was *just sixteen!* I have often thought since that these officers must have been inwardly chuckling at our being thrown into their hands.

As soon as I reached the deck, Lieut. now Admiral C. P. R. Rodgers stepped forward and offered me his arm to "go to the Cabin" I thanked him & told him that "I preferred to wait until my Sister and Mother came up" & so I stood "a spectacle". Then the cot with Sarah was brought up followed by Mother with Commodore McLaughlin. The Commodore ordered the sailors to take up the cot, then gave Mother his arm. Lieut. Rodgers gave me his & we went to the Stern followed by all the Officers, who took their places & waited, hoping to see Sarah but Mother very politely asked the Commodore "to ask them to please walk forward while she got her daughter down into the Cabin."

After our three days previous experience this little Cabin (the Commodore's private Cabin) seemed like a little Palace, its appointments were all so perfect, & soon a delightful supper was served to us with the Captains own servant to wait upon us.

The day before we went on board Lieut. Rodgers took my brother & me over to Indian Key, as I hoped I might be able to secure some memento that the Indians might have dropped, but I found nothing but a few water soaked books, which are now treasured mementoes. As I came towards our house several gentlemen and Officers that were upon the Island followed & joined me, & as I walked around upon the Breakwater wall to the place where we had been concealed they came also. As we reached it I said "There is the place." Instantly every head was bared & in silence they stood, not a word was spoken. I then

turned & walked back onto the land when Lieut Rodgers stepped in front of me & with bared head said "Miss Perrine I beg your pardon." "For what sir" I answered. "For having felt that it was impossible for your story to be literally true. I thought your terror had made you exaggerate its dangers, but it is impossible for you to have told the half."

Mr. Howe had had the marl raked & there found all that was left of Father's remains, a thigh bone, a few ribs & a portion of the skull. These he had wrapped in a paper & laid them in my hands. I desired him to have them suitably enclosed in a box & buried under the broad spreading leaves of our Father's awn **Agave** Sisalana at our garden on Lower Maticumba, as being the most suitable place for their resting place.

Sabbath morning the wind being favorable we set sail for Cape Florida & I believe arrived there that night. We anchored in Biscayne Bay and were there a week. The soldiers' wives at Fort Dallas gave us each a dress. Lieut T. W. Sherman came to see us and used daily to send us fruits and watermelons for our comfort. When the U. S. Steamer was ready to sail he detailed Dr. Worrall, a Surgeon in the Army, to accompany us North.

After leaving Biscayne Dr. Worrall handed Mother a letter from the Officers of the Navy & another from those of the Army stationed at "Fort Dallas" each of which contained a sum of money to aid us in our extremity. Our first landing was at Mosquito Inlet. There was a military station & had been the scene of Indian outrages. As we entered the harbor of St. Augustine the captain was surprised at seeing a carriage upon the wharf. The small hotel then there, the "Florida House", was so near the wharf that it was not usual to send a carriage. As soon as the Steamer made fast the proprietor of the "Florida House" came

on board & asked if Dr. Perrine's family were on board, announced that "he was deputized by the citizens to say that there had been rooms prepared at his hotel for our reception, & begging our accepting them at their expense." With great hospitality the citizens had met & appointed a delegation consisting of Dr. Peck, Sen., Dr. Anderson, Sen. & Judge Gould "to meet us and tender to us the hospitalities of the city." We had scarcely arrived before the parlor was filled with ladies & gentlemen to offer their sympathy and help. When evening came servants with baskets of clothing began to arrive. After we had accepted sufficient for our **immediate** necessities **we tried** to decline any more, but they **would** not allow us to do so. Gov. Reid had left word to "be sent for as soon as we arrived" & in the morning he with his beautiful young wife came in such state as became their position, carriage, footmen, etc., to tender to us the hospitality of their beautiful home. We could not accept for a vessel was to sail for the North. There was neither Telegraph nor Steam from Florida in 1840 & we hoped to reach our friends before they had heard. In taking leave of us Gov. Reid with tears in his eyes said to Mother "Mrs. Perrine, always command me as you would a brother, for no one knows as well as I what Dr. Perrine & his enterprise would have been to Florida." Not only clothing but a liberal purse was donated to us by this generous people! Three days we remained there & then took schooner for Savannah & Steamer for Charleston. There some of the citizens came down to the wharf to meet us & we were strongly urged to stay there for awhile & "they, would have a collection made for us in the churches" but we declined with thanks. At Wilmington we found the first Railroad & from there went on to Portsmouth, Va. & took Steamer for Baltimore. Dr. Worrall having to report in Washington we remained there two days to await his return.

At Philadelphia Gen'l John A. Perrine met us & we were with our own friends once more! During all our journey Dr. Worrall had been like a brother. No where on our journey would any one receive a penny for **any** service rendered, & twice when we had paid our fare from some point, when they found **who we** were, it was returned with many apologies!

Notes

² *An Act to encourage the introduction and promote the cultivation of Tropical plants in the United States.* Whereas Dr. Henry Perrine has distinguished himself by his persevering exertions to introduce tropical plants into the United States Be it enacted that a township of land is hereby granted to Dr. Henry Perrine and his associates in the southern extremity of the peninsular of Florida to be located upon any portion of the public lands below twenty-six degrees north latitude that whenever any section of land in said tract shall be really occupied by a boni fide settler, actually engaged in the cultivation of valuable tropical plants, a patent shall issue to the said Henry Perrine and his associates.

³These associates were (1838) James Webb, District Judge, Key West; and Charles Howe, Inspector of the Port (and Postmaster) at Indian Key. The two names are given in an announcement *To the Friends of the Enterprise* appearing in a pamphlet (New York, 1838), apparently published by Dr. Perrine; which contains also *An Act to Incorporate the Tropical Plant Company of Florida*, passed by the Legislative Council of Florida, approved Feb. 8, 1838; an appeal *To Intelligent Philanthropists*; and *Report of Mr. Linn* (Senate Committee on Agriculture). (There is a copy in the library of P. K. & J. C. Yonge, Pensacola.)

⁴Published as Senate Document 300, 25th Cong., 2nd sess. (142 + 24 p.) This publication also contains copies of letters to the committee and to the Secretary of State from Dr. Perrine in explanation of his purpose and plans; meteorological tables in detail, Indian Key, 1837-38, 13 p.; temperature tables, Key West, 1838; botanical notes and index of plants; and twenty-four plates illustrating fibrous-leaved plants with which Dr. Perrine was mainly concerned.

As early as 1832 the State government became interested in Dr. Perrine's project. See *Message of James D. Wescott, Jr., Acting-Governor of Florida to the Legislative Council Jan. 3, 1832*, in Council journal 1832 pp. 5-6. See also *Report of committee to whom was referred petition of Henry Perrine*, in House journal (Florida) 1840, pp. 142-143.

⁵These, with all records of his subsequent investigations, were burned with Dr. Perrine's residence at the time of the massacre.

*U. S. Consul at Campeachy.

⁷In 1907 Professor P. H. Rolfs, a foremost horticulturist of Florida and at that time director of the Florida Agricultural Experiment Station, wrote the Editor as follows: "Dr. Perrine was a very enthusiastic and in some ways a very eccentric man. Some of the plants which he introduced into the region of Biscayne Bay are persisting to the present time. I remember having studied a species of the vanilla plant which was unquestionably introduced by him, since it never produced seed in a native state; but when I put it into cultivation and hand-pollinated the flowers an abundance of pods were produced. These pods when properly fermented and treated produced a considerable amount of vanilline."

⁸On July 22, 1839, Lieutenant-Colonel Harney and his command of twenty-five dragoons were surprised at dawn in their camp on the Caloosahatchee River. Of the entire party of thirty, twenty-four were killed; Colonel Harney escaping by swimming. (See Sprague, *The Origin, Progress and Conclusion of the Florida War*, New York, 1848, p. 233.)

⁹Accounts of the massacre were published in the press throughout the country. In the *National Intelligencer* (Washington, D. C.) Dec. 19, 1840 there appears a *Narrative* signed by Mrs. Walker, as Hester M. S. Perrine and dated Aug. 20. This agrees with Mrs. Walker's journal in all but minor details—except that the Indians after Dr. Perrine spoke to them are said to have then pillaged the other houses and did not return to attack the Perrine house until about daylight. This would seem more probable, and agrees with the account of "an officer of the army" in Sprague, pp. 244-246. See also: Henry E. Perrine, *A True Story of Some Eventful Years in Grandpa's Life*. Buffalo (1885). Another account appears in *The News*, St. Augustine, August 21, 1840, differing only in unimportant details, and giving the names of the seven on the island who lost their lives. In the same issue of *The News* there is an editorial note of appreciation of Dr. Perrine's work in Florida. *The Courier*, Charleston, S. C., which got its story from Key West, is somewhat inaccurate.

¹⁰There is a sketch-plan of the house and wharf in the journal.

¹¹The attack was made by the so-called Spanish Indians. Sprague, (*op. cit.* p. 99) says: "South of Pease Creek and Lake Okeechobee, near the extreme southern point of the peninsular, was a band of Spanish Indians, under an intelligent chief, called Chekika, speaking a language peculiarly their own, a mixture of Indian and Spanish. They numbered about one hundred warriors. They took no part in the war until 1839 and '40, when, finding themselves attacked and pursued, they took arms and resisted." It is likely they had been joined by stray Seminoles and negroes driven southward. This was supposed to be the same band which had massacred Col. Harney's command.

¹²The sisal hemp. Dr. Perrine seems to have considered his experiments with this plant the most important part of his work. In the *Report* (note 4, ante) the plant and its parts

are the subjects of several of the plates. Chapman, in his *Flora of the Southern United States* lists *Agave rigida*, var. *Sisalana*, as a native of the "Sandy coast of South Florida"; while Bailey, *Cyclopedia of American Horticulture*, considers it "naturalized on the keys". It was probably introduced by Dr. Perrine, for he did not find it growing there.

It would seem today that, due to various conditions, Dr. Perrine's project could have proved only a failure. If the cultivation of sisal by mechanical means is ever to be profitable in Florida, its growing then in competition with the cheap labor of Yucatan was impracticable ; and doubtless his other expectations must have failed of realization. He was a pioneer, and, hence the chances of any great success were overwhelmingly against him. Distance and transportation were only a part of the difficulties in his way. His letters (annexed to the Report, ante) indicate the enthusiasm of a visionary more than of a practical man. He is convinced "that the propagation of fibrous-leaved plants on the most sterile districts of all our southern States will be still more important than the cultivation of all their present staples combined on their most fertile soils."

His experiments were only begun at the time of the massacre and the results were nil ; but the circumstances of his work and of his death have given Dr. Perrine a noteworthy place in the history of territorial Florida, higher perhaps than what he might have accomplished had he survived. His project attracted an interest in Washington as well as in Florida ; but what favorable attention the Territory received was negated by his seeming agreement with the then more or less prevalent idea of South Florida's topography and soils. He refers (in the letters mentioned) "to the general opinion of both the Government and of the people of the United States that southern Florida is so sickly and sterile a Ter-

ritory, in consequence of the miry marshes and inundated swamps of the interior, and of the arid sands, untillable rocks, and mangrove thickets of the coasts, as to be unworthy of even the trouble and expense of surveying and sale. He refers to "the undoubtedly great plagues of mosquitoes and sand flies, ticks and scorpions, ants and land crabs, serpents and alligators, and other noxious insects and reptiles." He believed "that the highest estimate of the unsurveyed public lands could not exceed one cent an acre"; but he was certain "that the benignity of the climate and the fertility of the atmosphere will counterbalance the defects of the soil."

It is interesting to note that (*Letters, ante*) "among the other plants especially recommended those which yield india rubber or caoutchoc [sic] (*Siphonia elastica, Castillea elastica*; etc.) are daily becoming more and more important to mankind." However, neither of these plants appear in the list of specimens which he sent to Florida for experimentation. Also - "Various species [of Cacti] would afford impenetrable hedges for fields; formidable outworks around forts; and even boundary walls between nations [!]"

He believed [1834] "that the swampy interior of Southern Florida is more elevated than its sandy shore. Hence, cheap canals may easily be cut from the longitudinal center to the parallel coast to drain the inundated swamps of the interior whose consequent value for the production of sugar alone would amply reward the capital expended. These same canals would constitute lateral channels of communication and transportation and at the same time convey water to irrigate arid sands on the route. In tropical climates moisture is the substitute for manure"

"Looking forward to the period when tropical Florida shall be thoroughly improved and highly cul-

tivated - when it shall combine all the material and mental enjoyments of which it is susceptible we may safely predict that, in population, wealth, and happiness, it will- greatly exceed every other equal portion of the world. The subscriber does not desire any greater honor than the power of passing the brief term of his existence amid the privations and exposures incident to a chief pioneer in the planting and population of tropical Florida." **[Letters, ante]**