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SEMINOLE ATTACKS NEAR NEW SMYRNA,
1835-1856

I was the daughter of George and Jane Jenkins Murray. The early records of our family were burned here in New Smyrna during the Indian War. My father was an engraver in Philadelphia, being employed by the U. S. Government to engrave the first bank notes they issued. In 1803 he with his young wife came to Florida and took up 600 acres, known as the Geo. Murray Grant on the McDugal plantation, situated a few miles south of New Smyrna, where F. Packwood now lives. They lived here but a short time, as the Indians became too troublesome. They went to St. Augustine, where after a stay of a year or two they returned to Philadelphia.

During their residence in Florida two children were born to them, Clementina and John. During their sojourn in Philadelphia, on Sept. 1st, 1813, I was born, making me over seventy-six years old. The family moved back to Florida in 1829. In the following year they took up their residence at Mandarin, on the St. Johns River. On May 8th, 1832, I was married to John Dwight Sheldon, and in October, 1835, removed with him and my mother to New Smyrna. Mr. Sheldon was placed in charge of the Cruger and Depyste property, in the absence of their manager, occupying their residence on the Hill, known as the Turnbull Castle.¹ On the morning of December the

Note-This narrative was dictated in the year 1890 by Mrs. Jane Murray Sheldon to her daughter Mrs. R. S. Sheldon. A copy was later given to The Florida Historical Society. It was published during that year in the *New Smyrna Breeze*, a weekly newspaper of local circulation. Footnotes are now added by Professor R. Lee Goulding, of New Smyrna.

¹This is the site of the present Old Fort foundations in the heart of the modern city of New Smyrna.

24th of that year [1835] my servant girl told me that she had been to a dance, on a Mr. Hunter's plantation one mile north of us, and that "there were nine Indians present with their faces painted" which was an indication of hostilities. Mr. Hunter, soon after came in and advised Mr. Sheldon to get the negroes and household goods away as soon as possible. Two lighters were loaded, and by sunset we left and went across the river to Capt. Dummett's place,² expecting to stay there until morning.

Captain Dummett and Mr. Hunter were with us. During the night a large body of Indians came into New Smyrna, and burned all the residences. Becoming fearful that the Indians might cross the river, at 3 P. M. Capt. Dummett and Mr. Hunter left in their small boat leaving orders for the negroes to follow with the lighter as soon as the tide was favorable. Mr. Sheldon having only a very small boat, took my mother and myself and put us on a schooner that was at the Inlet until he could go back to Capt. Dummett's place, to get our trunks. Upon nearing the place he found that the negroes that were left in charge of the lighters and large boat had started to return but were met by the Indians, who were crossing on a raft. They took the boat from the negroes, and came on across the river and landed and Mr. Sheldon could see them breaking open the trunks and destroying the goods.

He returned to us at the schooner with the sad news that we had lost everything we had except the clothes we had on. The Captain kindly gave us breakfast and a lunch, and we started up the Halifax in our small boat hoping to get to St. Augustine. As the Indians were busily destroying every plantation on the mainland we kept as close as possible to the eastern

² The site of the Dummett place is one block south of Flagler Avenue in Coronado Beach.

shore. We did not reach Bulow's landing until the day following, spending a most disagreeable night on the peninsula.

On our arrival at Mr. Bulow's plantation ³ we found all the inhabitants of the Halifax collected there, being afraid to attempt to go to St. Augustine without protection. They sent a messenger to St. Augustine for protection, but there were no troops there when he arrived; so, as no assistance could be had from that quarter, it was decided to picket in and protect themselves in case of attack.

After remaining here six weeks our stock of provisions was about exhausted and the men decided to go down to Dunlawton (present Port Orange). The buildings were not burned, and at daylight they found a large herd of cattle in a pen, which the Indians had gathered with a view of driving them away. These were turned out and about sunrise the Indians, who were camped back in the swamp, came out in large numbers and made a savage attack on all sides. Our men resisted as long as possible, but were finally compelled to retreat to their boats, which unfortunately the receding tide had left a long way from the water, and before they could get them afloat and out of the range of the Indians' rifles, nearly every man was wounded more or less. Capt. Dummett's servant, a negro, was the only one killed. He was shot while wading out with the boats. A young man, a Mr. Gould, swam out to an island where he was captured and tortured to death in their most fiendish manner. My husband had one ball in his right arm above the elbow, and another spent ball struck him in the head between the eyes. The wind being favorable they arrived at Bulow's at 4 P.M. where, luckily, there was a physi-

⁵ Bulow's plantation was situated on what is now known as Bulow's Creek, north of the Tomoka River. The remains of the Bulow buildings may still be seen.

cian who cared for the wounded. He took the ball out of my husband's head, a very painful operation ; but the one in the arm being only in the flesh it was not removed but remained there his whole life.

It was found necessary to get the wounded men to St. Augustine as soon as possible, so they were put in the plantation wagons and at 10 P.M. of the second day after the fight we started for Matanzas River, eleven miles distant, where we arrived at daytime the next day and took boats for St. Augustine, where we arrived at twelve that night. It rained all the way and we were without the least protection. The wounded were so well cared for that only two died. Some had friends in the place who cared for them and the others, ourselves being among the number, went to hotels, we going to the Livingston House, where we were kindly cared for, and remained two weeks, while Mr. Sheldon's wounds were healing; after which we took rooms in a private house, the government furnishing rations to all the refugees.

As soon as Mr. Sheldon was able to do anything he was employed by the U. S. Army officers as a guide, leaving my mother and myself alone, but we soon found many friends who were as kind as friends possibly could be.

Mr. Sheldon remained with the army until the latter part of May, having guided them over a great part of South and West Florida. He was in many severe battles, but escaped any further injury and arrived home just a few days previous to the birth of our twin boy and girl, on May 31st.

We remained in St. Augustine two years, during which time I saw many Indian prisoners, who were brought in to be sent West. There were a good many negroes captured with them, and it came to light that the negroes were in sympathy and had aided them in the first outbreak. I saw a number of the Cruger and

Depyste slaves and from them learned that they had secreted the Indians near there until the main body came up. But they were glad enough to get away from the Indians as they treated them very cruelly.

As there had been no depredations done by the Indians north of St. Augustine, we decided to return to our old home at Mandarin, when one evening one of our neighbors came in hurriedly and informed me that the Indians had killed a family two miles from us (Mr. Sheldon was in Picolata at the time), and that I should take my children and go into the village as soon as possible, as it was feared that the Indians would continue their work of destruction, and would probably come to our place, as we lived on the road. I took my two children, the youngest a babe of ten months, and walked a mile to the village, where I arrived about nine o'clock and found all the inhabitants collected preparing to go aboard an old condemned schooner that was anchored in the river, for it was feared that the savages would attack the village that night. We saw fires burning in the neighborhood where they had killed the family.

There were two other families near who had heard the firing and yells and had fled into the swamps, where they remained all night. We did not know of this and there was much anxiety as to the fate of our neighbors, and one man finally volunteered to ride out to see what had been done. He met the Indians about half way, coming into the village, but they became frightened and turned back. The next morning the men armed themselves and went out to see what damage had been done, and a most sad sight presented itself to their view. The farms had all been destroyed, and four persons had been killed at the first house and burned in it. Their charred bodies were collected and given decent burial.

The Indians took an old negro man, belonging to the family they killed, and kept him with them all night, but released him the next morning, and it was from him we learned of their cruelty and depredations. There were eighteen of them and after loading themselves with plunder they started immediately for their homes.

An express rider was sent to St. Augustine to the troops, hoping they might overtake them, which they did, capturing the most of them not far from Picolata. All the families slept on the old schooner for a week, but not being molested, we returned to our homes, where we remained in security until after a treaty was made with the Indians.

In December, 1843, we moved back to New Smyrna and commenced clearing our land on the Murray Grant, I with the three children living in a tent, until we could get a log-cabin built.

There were three companies here cutting live-oak, and Mr. Sheldon was employed as pilot for their vessels, which enabled us to get material for a new house from New York, and before the end of a year we had a comfortable two-story house of six rooms, built on the hill where Mr. Packwood now lives.⁴ My husband planted out an orange grove, and we lived very quietly for a number of years, raising much of our provisions on the place. Game being very plentiful, we were abundantly supplied.

In the summer of 1849 I made a visit to my sisters in Jacksonville, leaving my mother to keep house and take care of my children. At that time there were a few settlers at Fort Capron, near the mouth of the Indian River, on lands that were above the boundary line of the lands assigned the Indians. The latter lived in harmony with them, coming into the settlement to

⁴ The Packwood place is about eight miles below New Smyrna.

trade, until they became dissatisfied with the whites through trading. They made an attack upon the settlers, killing one man, a Mr. Barker, and wounding another, Mr. Russell. The families made their escape in their boats and came up to our house, but Mr. Sheldon, becoming alarmed, took our family and accompanied the refugees up to Dunlawton, where he found a small schooner upon which he placed them and sent them to me, in Jacksonville. After a time troops were sent to New Smyrna, and Mr. Sheldon wrote me to return, thinking the troops would remain and we would be protected.

In October I found that a government steamer was going to Smyrna direct, so I hastened to avail myself of the opportunity of getting back to my home, not stopping to notify my husband of my coming. On my arrival I found that the troops had been sent down to Fort Capron, and that Mr. Sheldon had gone with them as guide. The stores and few remaining troops were taken on board the steamer and went on to Fort Capron.

I was landed on the hill, the site of Turnbull's Castle, then owned by Mr. Stamps,⁵ and left alone with my children, without food and with a constant dread of an attack from the Indians. My feelings on that day may be imagined, but they cannot be described. I spent a sleepless night and the following day I found an old boat sunk in the creek, and with the help of my children raised it and corked it with rags, placing some boards on the seats to keep the children out of the water, my little eleven-year-old daughter and myself each taking a slat from the bedstead as a paddle, and with the little colored girl with a water pail to bail with to keep the boat from sinking, we started

⁵ Mr. Stamps, of South Carolina, was one of those who attempted to develop the sugar industry near New Smyrna. It was he who converted the old mission there into a sugar mill.

out on the river, thinking only of getting away. from the mainland and going over to the mangrove islands to remain over-night. But the tide being fair and we were getting along so nicely that we ventured to cross the river to Capt. Dummett's place, where we landed safely and found a colored family who furnished us with food and shelter.

Mr. Sheldon soon returned, but did not think it safe to return to our home, and as he was soon after appointed Deputy Collector of Customs, which necessitated his being near the Inlet, he purchased Mr. Stamps's place, which we made our permanent home.

Troops were kept at Fort Capron for a number of years, while they were fighting the Indians further south. As the Indians had not been known to come further north than Capron, we had no further fears of them.

In December, 1856, a Mr. Shine with wife and two children from Philadelphia moved out and rented our old home eight miles south. They came intending to settle permanently. On the 23rd of December my two sons were returning from the Lagoon with a quantity of wild ducks which they had shot, and thought they would stop and give Mr. Shine some. As they neared the place they saw the house was gone. Still thinking it had burned by accident, they went up to the landing, when to their horror they saw Mrs. Shine and the little girl lying dead near the water. Then they thought it the work of the Indians and returned to warn Mr. E. K. Lowd and John Lowd and their uncle Arad Sheldon, who were the only settlers at Oak Hill, and then came home and told the news.

The neighbors got together and went down to investigate further. They found Mr. Shine's body back of the hill and the bones of the little boy, who had been burned in the house. The bodies were horribly mutilated. They were brought to New Smyrna and

buried, and a despatch was sent over to Melonville to a company of Volunteers, who came over and followed the Indians 70 miles, but they having several days start, were not overtaken. As near as they could judge there were nineteen Indians. They packed themselves with so much of the goods, clothing, etc., that they had to leave much of it on the way.

This created much excitement, and all the settlers for a distance around came to our house, expecting to try, in case of an attack from the Indians, to resist them, but that was their last raid in this part of the country.

After this we had no further trouble until the Civil War, which brought to me the sorest trials and greatest sorrows of my life.

JANE MURRAY SHELDON