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MILLY FRANCIS AND DUNCAN McKRIMMON
AN AUTHENTIC FLORIDA POCAHONTAS

by T. FREDERICK DAVIS

Hillis Hadjo, known in English as Francis the Prophet, was a Creek chief of considerable prominence. When the famous Indian Tecumseh visited the Creek Indians during the opening phase of the War of 1812 to enlist them in the cause of the British, Francis became his convert. He was then living near the Chattahoochee river in the present state of Alabama. In the campaign of General Andrew Jackson in 1813-14 against the Creeks, Francis was driven into Spanish Florida and finally took up his abode near the Spanish Fort St. Marks. He then visited the Bahamas, embarking thence on a voyage to England, where he seems to have been given much attention, for example: In an account of a ball given on board a Russian frigate lying off Woolwich (near London) on the anniversary of the emperor's birth a London newspaper said, "The double sound of the trumpet announced the arrival of the patriot Francis, who fought so gloriously in our cause in America; he was dressed in a most splendid suit of red and gold and by his side he wore a tomahawk, mounted in gold, presented to him by the prince regent; he appeared much delighted with the appearance of the frigate."¹

About the time of Francis's return to Florida from England in June 1817,² friction arose between the United States and the Spaniards and Indians of Florida, fomented, it was thought, largely by British adventurers, the main features of which were Indian attacks on the border settlements of Georgia. Spain was charged with not suppressing them, the

1. *Niles' Weekly Register* (Baltimore), March 15, 1817.

2. James Parton, *Life of Andrew Jackson*, 1860, v. 2, p. 415.

British with furnishing ammunition and supplies, and Francis with having a hand in the trouble. These conditions produced a second invasion of Spanish Florida by an army under General Jackson in the spring of 1818, sometimes called the First Seminole War.

The family of Francis the Prophet at this time were his wife and two daughters. The Indian name of only the younger daughter has been preserved and was said to be Malee,³ phonetically resembling *Milly*, and this was universally adopted in English. All spoke understandable English except the mother. Francis was well-to-do, owning a number of Negro slaves, considerable stock, and other property.

Milly was the heroine of an interesting, appealing and authentic incident that occurred in Florida in March, 1818. She was about fifteen years of age and was described in contemporaneous accounts as being a beautiful Indian girl, of medium height, attractive form, very graceful, and in intelligence decidedly above the average of her race. That is what she was, and this the event that made her famous in our history, namely, her act of compassion and humanity in saving the life of a white man named Duncan McKrimmon, whom her people had captured and were preparing to put to death.

There are two sources of direct testimony covering the circumstances alluded to: an editorial in the Milledgeville (Ga.) *Journal* of November 3, 1818,⁴ undoubtedly based on the testimony of Duncan McKrimmon of Milledgeville; and the account of Milly herself given personally in 1842 to Lt. Col. E. A. Hitchcock, U. S. A. (later major-general), and preserved in his diary or journal.⁵ With these

3. James Parton, *Life of Andrew Jackson*, 1860, V. 2, p. 481.

4. This newspaper is in the files of Univ. of Ga. Library.

5. Found in *Fifty Years in Camp and Field*, Diary of Major General Ethan Allen Hitchcock, edited by W. A. Croffut, Ph. D., 1909, Chap. XXII; and *A Traveler in Indian Territory*, *The Journal of Ethan Allen Hitchcock*, late Major General of the United States Army, edited and annotated by Grant Foreman, 1930, p. 102, *et. seq.*

sources it is possible to construct an unusually complete and authentic account of Milly's rescue of Duncan McKrimmon from Indian vengeance.⁶

MILLY RESCUES MCKRIMMON

Duncan McKrimmon⁷ was a private in Capt. Joseph Watters's company, 2d. regiment, Georgia militia, attached to General Jackson's army which invaded Spanish Florida in 1818. Jackson entered Florida near the mouth of the Chattahoochee river, proceeded along the Apalachicola and arrived at the site of a former fort on the Apalachicola called Negro fort, March 16, 1818. Here a fortification was commenced and named Fort Gadsden. Thence, on March 25th, Jackson marched against the Spanish Fort St. Marks, which surrendered to him April 7th.⁸

While the army was resting at Fort Gadsden, Duncan McKrimmon went fishing one morning and in attempting to return to camp became confused, missed his way and was several days lost in the surrounding wilderness. After wandering about in various directions he was espied and captured by a party of hostile Indians and taken to the town of Francis the Prophet on the Wakulla river. Francis appeared in his elegant uniform of a British brigadier-general, with a brace of pistols buckled around his waist, and held in his hand his British commis-

6. The story by James Parton in his *Life of Andrew Jackson*, 1860, v. 2, pp. 431-32, 454-57, 480-83, should be used with caution by the careful historian, as it contains important errors of fact. A purported soldier of Jackson's army related the story to Parton, who unquestionably used it in good faith but without investigation.

7. Variouslly spelled in records-McKrimmon, McCrimmon, McReamon, &c. The form "McKrimmon" was used by his home town newspaper, the Milledgeville *Journal*, which is presumed to be correct.

8. Records of the War Department.

sion which he exultantly displayed to the prisoner. Having obtained the information they wanted regarding the strength and position of the American army, the captors began to prepare for the intended sacrifice.⁹

Milly and her sister were playing on the bank of the river when they heard a war-cry which they understood to signify that a prisoner had been taken. They immediately went in that direction and found a white man, entirely naked, tied to a tree, and two young warriors, with their rifles, yelling and dancing around him preparing to shoot him¹⁰ - as was their right, for it had been given out that if any Indian caught a white man he had the life of the captive in his power and no chief could interfere.¹¹

The prisoner was a young man and seemed very much frightened, doubling himself to screen himself from the gaze of the Indians that had assembled there, and at the same time looking anxiously around as if to ask if there was no one to help him. Milly responded and spoke to her father, telling him that it was a pity that a young man like that should be put to death, for he had no head to go to war (meaning that he was not old enough to engage in war upon his own account). Her father replied that he could not save the prisoner and advised her to speak to the captors. She did so. One of them was very much enraged, saying he had lost two sisters in the war and would put the white man to

9. Hitchcock Diary-Croffut ; Hitchcock Journal-Foreman.

10. Milly specifically pointed out to Col. Hitchcock that they were going to shoot McKrimmon and not burn him at the stake or tomahawk him as stated in early accounts. There is an illustration in Henry Trumbull's *History of the Discovery of America*, 1833, showing McKrimmon surrounded by fagots ready for lighting-an incorrect historical interpretation according to Milly's statement.

11. Hitchcock Journal-Foreman.

death. Milly told him that this would not bring his sisters back, and so talking to him for some time she finally persuaded him.¹²

Milly then went to McKrimmon and told him that his life would be spared if he would permit his hair to be cut off and then remain with them (probably meaning not try to escape). He thrust his head out, saying "Yes, yes, cut it all off if you choose." His head was shaved, all but the scalp-lock on the top, and he was loosed and dressed.¹³

McKrimmon was held by the Indians several days, during which time Milly continued to perform acts of kindness towards him. He was then taken to Fort St. Marks, where negotiations were opened for his ransom to the Spanish commander Luengo. This was accomplished for seven and a half gallons of rum.¹⁴

MCKRIMMON SEEKS MILLY IN MARRIAGE

As we have already seen, Jackson's army appeared before St. Marks early in April, 1818. It had been preceded the day before by a United States squadron of two schooners sent to cooperate with the army in the attack on Fort St. Marks. The boats proceeded up the Appalache river¹⁵ and as they approached the Fort, the identity of their nationality being concealed by stratagem, Francis

12. Hitchcock Diary-Croffut ; Hitchcock Journal-Foreman.

13. Hitchcock Journal-Foreman.

14. The Milledgeville *Journal* account, *op. cit.* The ransoming of McKrimmon was also mentioned by Luengo in a letter to his superior at Pensacola, May 14, 1818; Luengo to Masot, *American State Papers, Military Affairs*, Vol. 1, p. 712.

This incident fully authenticated as it is and one of the most interesting resulting from our long contact with the Indians in Florida, should be better known, especially it might be featured in our school histories. -Ed.

15. That part of the St. Marks river below its juncture with the Wakulla was in that day called the Appalache river.

and another chief, Homathlemicco, who happened to be in the vicinity at the time, thinking the vessels British paddled out and went aboard. Both were detained. When Jackson was informed he forthwith ordered them hanged and his orders were carried out without further ado.

It is not clear from published accounts whether McKrimmon was in the Fort when it surrendered to General Jackson or had been permitted by the Spanish commander to embark in a small boat for the Apalachicola, meeting the American squadron en route; both versions have been advanced. However, it is certain that he rejoined the army and served with the Georgia regiment until it was released and sent home several weeks later.¹⁶

We have no incontestable record of the family of Francis during several months following his execution. It is said,¹⁷ and was probably so, that Milly occasionally visited the Fort and was always petted and kindly treated by the American officers, her act of saving the life of McKrimmon having become generally known to the army.

On or about August 27, 1818, a body of 188 Indians from the region of St. Marks, being in a starving condition, surrendered themselves to Lieutenant Colonel Arbuckle, commander of Fort Gadsden. The family of Francis, including Milly, was among them.¹⁸ Colonel Arbuckle did all in his power to relieve their immediate needs. When Duncan McKrimmon was informed of Milly's situation he set out for Fort Gadsden. Said the *Milledgeville Journal* of November 3, 1818: "McKrimmon appears to have a due sense of the obligation he owes to the woman who saved his life at the hazard of her

16. Indicated in War Department records.

17. Trumbull, *History of the Discovery of America*, 1833, p. 256.

18. Col. Arbuckle to Agent Indian Affairs—See *Milledgeville Journal*, Sept. 29, and Oct. 13, 1818.

own-he left town last week to seek her and as far as may be in his power, to alleviate her misfortune. It is also his firm determination, we understand, if she will consent, to make her his wife, and reside, provided he can prevail upon her to do so, within the settled parts of Georgia."

A letter from Colonel Arbuckle to the editor of the Milledgeville *Journal*, dated Fort Gadsden, December 1, 1818, stated: ¹⁹ "Duncan McKrimmon is here-Milly, the Prophet Francis's daughter, says she saved his life, or used such influence as she possessed to that effect, from feelings of humanity alone, and that she would have rendered the same service to any other white man similarly circumstanced-she is, therefore, not disposed to accept of his offer of matrimony, which has been made as an acknowledgment of gratitude. The donation presented through me by the citizens of Milledgeville to Milly, has been delivered, and she manifested a considerable degree of thankfulness for their kindness." Soon afterwards, Francis's family, together with other Indians, began their journey to Arkansas for resettlement. The story of Milly's benevolence had preceded her and she was shown much kindness and given a great many presents. ²⁰ Then the mist of oblivion came down upon her ; when it lifted it was disclosed that she had married one of her own race in the West. ²¹

Research and correspondence have failed to throw light upon the career of Duncan McKrimmon after Milly refused him in marriage. In later life he seems to have been called "Captain" McKrimmon, but whether this was a military or an honorary title is not known.

19. Published in Milledgeville *Journal*, Dec. 22, 1818.

20. Hitchcock *Journal-Foreman*..

21. See, 28th Congress. 1st Session. Report 149, H. R. Feb. 15, 1844, as to her marriage.

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CONGRESS ACTS IN MILLY'S BEHALF

In January, 1842, Lt. Col. E. A. Hitchcock, U. S. A., (later a major-general), while traveling through the Indian territory of the Southwest on an official mission, learned that Milly Francis was living near the Arkansas river (in the vicinity of the present city of Muskogee, Okla.), and being nearby he sent for her to come in. She appeared, dressed somewhat on the order of white women.

Milly related to Colonel Hitchcock that she had come to this country "many years" before, that her husband was dead, as were her mother and sister. She had two sons and a daughter living of eight children, the eldest a boy of fourteen. She was living in considerable poverty, her children being too young to be of much assistance to her. Though her life had been hard she was still a good looking woman of about forty years, remarked Colonel Hitchcock in his diary, and must have been a beautiful girl. Milly talked freely about saving the white man's life in Florida and at times became quite animated. Her version of the incident has already been told above.

Upon his return to Washington, Colonel Hitchcock immediately became active in procuring aid for Milly through Congressional enactment. After considerable delay for Committee investigation, Congress passed the following act:²²

Be it enacted . . . That the Secretary of War be, and he is hereby authorized and directed to pay to Milly, an Indian woman of the Creek nation, and daughter of the prophet Francis, a pension at the rate of ninety-six dollars per annum, payable semi-annually during her natural life, as a testimonial of the gratitude and bounty of the United States, for the humanity displayed by her in the war of one thousand eight hundred and seventeen and one thousand eight hundred and eighteen in saving the life of an American citizen, who was a prisoner in the hands of her

22. United States Statutes at Large, Private Laws, vol. 6, pp. 928-9.

people and about to be put to death by them; the said pension to commence and take effect from the fourth day of September, one thousand eight hundred and forty-three.

Section 2. And it is further enacted, That the Secretary of War be, and he is hereby authorized and directed to procure, and transmit to the said Milly, a medal with appropriate devices impressed thereon, of the value of not exceeding twenty dollars, as an additional testimonial of the gratitude of the United States.

Approved June 17, 1844.

Three years elapsed before material action was taken for the fulfilling of the award of Congress. In June 1847, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs proceeded with the preliminaries necessary to carry out the provisions of the act.²³ In the course of another year a warrant for \$20 was issued by the Treasury Department for a medal for Milly,²⁴ "with devices that would probably be gratifying to her and at the same time be best adopted to commemorate the circumstances for which it was granted by Congress."²⁵ Likewise there was delay in the issuance of the pension certificate.

AID ARRIVES TOO LATE

During the years of delay in Washington Milly struggled for existence and contracted tuberculosis. When the benefit authorized by Congress reached her she was beyond the need of it, as the following correspondence will show.²⁶

Creek Agency, June 1, 1848.

Sir :

I had the honor to receive on the 7th Ultmo, your communication, with enclosure, of the 7th of April last relating to the Act of Congress, granting to Milly, daughter of the Prophet Francis a pension for her generosity in saving the life of a White man. The same day I received information that she was laying dangerous ill - I immediately visited her, & found her as I was informed, in dying circumstances, and I regret to say in a most wretched condition. I immediately procured medical aid,

23. Office of Indian Affairs, 6-18-47, letter book No. 39.

24. OIA: Creek file T-85, Treasury Dept., 1848, 3-16-48.

25. OIA: 6-18-47, letter book No. 39.

26. OIA: Creek file R-223-270-271. Choctaw Agency, 1848, R-270.

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& done all that was possible to alleviate her sufferings. - I read your letter to her, (she comprehending English perfectly) at which she was so highly elated, that I flattered myself she was recovering-but my hopes were fallacious, her disease was consumption, she died on the 19th Ulto, being about fifty years old.²⁷ She died a *Christian*, a devout member of the Baptist Church, has left, two sons and a daughter the Youngest of the boys, is at present at Col. Johnsons Academy in KY - She informed me, that at the time the act was rendered which saved the life of Capt McCrimmon, she never expected any pecuniary reward. her family were rich, she did not require it. she had however become very poor-& she was very grateful for the notice taken of her by the Govt, &c, &c-

I beg leave to ask for information as to how, I shall procure the Amt, of the Pension in arrearage - & how I am to dispose of it.

I am Sir
Very Respectfully,
Your Obdt, St. [Servant]
James Logan, Creek Agent

Honl, W. Medill
Commissioner Indian Affrs
Washington City

The foregoing communication was forwarded to Washington by the Superintendent of the Choctaw Agency and was replied to by the Commissioner of Indian Affairs as follows :²⁸

Office of Indian Affairs
July 17, 1848

Saml. M. Rutherford Esq
Choctaw Agency.
Sir:-

I have had the honor to receive your letter of the 19 ultimo enclosing one from Col. Logan, Creek Agent, communicating intelligence of the death of Milly, a Creek woman, for whom Congress had provided a pension ; and asking how the money shall be obtained and what disposition shall be made of it.

It will be necessary that some person shall administer on Milly's estate, who can draw the money and apply it for the benefit of the heirs at law. I should suppose that the Creek Agent would be the proper person to administer on the estate and see that the money coming to the heirs is properly applied. Indians are generally so improvident that it is running a great risk to trust money in their hands. In the present case, after the Agent has received, the money he will ascertain whether either of Milly's children is of age & if so whether he is competent to take charge of his own affairs and proper care of money. If he is, then his proportion of the pension might be paid to him, otherwise to be

27. Milly was born c1803 and was therefore around 45 years of age at her death May 19, 1848.

28. AIO: letter book No. 41.

expended for his benefit, from time to time, as it may be required. In the case of those under age the money should remain in the administrators hands to be used as they require it and if any balance shall remain at the time they become of age it should be paid over to them if they are fit persons to receive it. In either case the Agent will be expected to account for the money in a separate account to be rendered quarterly to this office.

The Delegation²⁹, now here, will take charge of the medal which was voted by Congress to Milly to be handed to you for the purpose of being placed in the hands of the proper person, whom I should suppose to be the eldest child. You will, however, before disposing of the medal, ascertain something of the character of the heirs and report to this office your opinion as to the propriety of disposing of the medal in the way proposed. When your report is received you will be instructed what to do.

W. M. [William Medill]

The record of the medal ends here; the report called for as to its final disposition is not to be found in the files of the Office of Indian Affairs—and this is not strange when it is remembered that there have been a number of removals of the archives as well as a fire in the files years ago, both of which contributed to the loss of many papers. Nor has diligent search of departmental records revealed a description or design of the medal as minted. This is unfortunate, for the award is unique, being the only instance in United States history that Congress by specific act has awarded a woman a special-minted medal with its own distinctive devices.³⁰

AT REST

Francis's town, to which McKrimmon was taken for the sacrifice, was on the bank of the Wakulla

29. A Creek delegation from Arkansas: OIA, 4-7-48, letter book no. 40.

30. The standard devided Congressional Medal of Honor was not introduced by Congress until 1861, and is the earliest United States decoration now in existence. Two women have been recipients of this decoration, namely, Dr. Mary Walker for services rendered in the War Between the States, and Jane Arminda Delano (awarded posthumously) for Red Cross work in World War I—Wyllie, *Orders, Decorations and Insignia, Military and Civil*, 1921. Several Medalic Histories of the United States have been published, but none lists the Milly Francis award.

river about seven miles above the Spanish Fort St. Marks; it was possible for schooners drawing seven feet of water to ascend the Wakulla to the town.³¹ After the execution of Francis and the resettlement of his people in the West, the site quickly assumed the characteristics of abandonment. An officer of the U. S. detachment sent to occupy Fort St. Marks in July 1821, upon the transfer of Florida by Spain to the United States, remarked: "We came down on the west bank of the Waukulla to the place where was the famous prophet Francis' (or Hillis Hadjo's) town. The thistle now raises there its lonely head, the rank grass waves in the wind and 'the fox might look out at the window' but no such vestige remains of the abode of the unhappy chief."³²

Far away towards the setting sun, somewhere between the city limits of Muscogee, Oklahoma, and the Arkansas river, the body of Milly Francis was consigned to earth.³³ The precise location is now beyond identification. Maybe there, as at her Florida homesite, the "grass waves in the wind," or vines or wooded growth hides the spot. She was a child of nature; perhaps she would have wished it thus.

31. John Lee Williams, *A View of West Florida*, 1827, p. 23.

32. *Pensacola Floridian*, Jan. 7, 1822.

33. Annotation of Grant Foreman, *Hitchcock Journal*, 107 n. *Acknowledgments* : For their interest and assistance in furnishing (1931) copies of official records, the author desires to thank: J. Henry Scattergood, Asst. Commissioner, Office of Indian Affairs; C. H. Bridges, Major General, The Adjutant General, War Department; Edward C. Wynne, Acting Historical Adviser, Department of State; H. C. Cocke, Captain, U. S. N., Superintendent Naval Records and Library, Navy Department ; and Florence S. Hellman, (1939) Chief Bibliographer, Library of Congress.