

The Scalping of Mrs. Johns in 1836
(Author not know)

Thus far, the summer quarters contemplated by General Scott, have proved more destructive to the health, and more productive of fatigue and death, than the most active campaign. All the posts between Tampa Bay, and Black Creek, could not, in the month of August, muster one hundred and fifty men fit for duty.

On examining the state of the fort at Micanopy, Major Pierce found that there was not sufficient provision, to last until the train of wagons could go to Black Creek and return; but four days' forage for the horses, that most of the garrison were sick, and the heat of the weather, and want of necessaries, were destroying the troops. Under these circumstances, he, with the unanimous advice of his officers determined to abandon the place. The wagons were loaded with the sick and the stores, and the whole removed to Garey's Ferry, on Black Creek.

On the 3d of September, Maj. Pierce escorted a train of wagons, with provisions and ammunition, to Newnansville, and reinforced the garrison of Fort Gilleland. No Indians were seen, although they had for some time past been prowling around that post in considerable force.

On the 15th, a party of Indians attacked the house of Mr. Higinbotham seven miles from Jacksonville. They slept in an out-house close by the dwelling, and at day light, as Mr. Thomas was striking a fire, they commenced an attack upon the house. The door was closed, and the fire returned by Messrs Higinbotham and Thomas, with nine guns. The Indians retreated carrying off the saddle and bridle from the out-house. Mr. H left Mr. Thomas and two women, Mrs. H. and T. to defend the house, and sick man, while he rode to Jacksonville to give the alarm. Major Hart, at the head of twelve men, immediately went in pursuit. On reaching Mr.Higinbotham's, they found Mr. Thomas and the two women guarding the house, with guns in their hands, ready to repel an attack. A young lady in the house had risen early in the morning, and gone to a brook for water; she had passed the Indians without discovering them, when they fired on her. The balls pierced through all her clothes without touching her body. She ran and hid herself, until an opportunity arrived that enabled her to gain the house. Major Hart took the Indian trail which led to the Tallahassee road, and on that rode ten miles, to the house of M. Cormick, occupied by a Mr. Johns. This house was a heap of smoking ruins, in which was the remains of a human being burnt to a cinder; near to the house was a quantity of female hair. The pursuing party finding fresh horse tracks still on the great road, they pushed on expecting to overtake the enemy at Lowder's, seven miles ahead. On reaching this house it was abandoned, but no traces of the savages were seen. They pushed on to Sparkman's, four miles further; it was night. This family was in great distress. Mrs. Johns was there, still alive. Her arm and neck pierced with balls and her head, as far as her hair extended deliberately skinned. The poor woman had her senses perfectly, and related the circumstances of the assault of their house. Mr. and Mrs. Johns were about twenty yards from the house, at about ten o'clock in the morning, when they perceived the Indians in the corner of a fence very near to them; they fired and shot Mr. Johns in the breast, both fled to the house and closed the door. The Indians followed close, firing on the house, and at length looked in between the logs, in English told them to come out, and said they would not hurt them. Johns refused, but begged the Indians to save their lives. An Indian then gave an order to charge the house. They burst in the door and

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shot Mr. Johns through the head; he fell dead, and his wife fell upon him. An Indian dragged her to the door, and told her to go; she asked where, he pointed towards Black Creek. At that moment, she saw another Indian level his rifle at her; she raised her arm, the Indian fired, the ball cut the flesh of her arm lengthwise, and passed through her neck. They then dragged her into the house, and tearing the string and comb from her hair, with a large butcher knife skinned all her hair off her head, as the butcher would skin an animal. They then plundered the house, and among other things they took a portranteau that contained one hundred dollars, and other valuable articles. Finally they set fire to the house, one Indian applying a torch to the clothes of the poor bleeding victim. They then raised the war whoop, and hurried off in the direction of Black Creek. Feeling the fire of her clothing burn her leg, the poor woman seized handfuls of her own clotted blood to quench the flames. When the savages were gone, she raised herself up, saw the house in flames, and her husband bleeding on the floor; she crawled from the flames slowly, and frequently fainted with pain and the loss of blood. She reached a swamp, got some water, and laid down to die; but the eye of a kind Providence was upon her, and she was preserved. About two o'clock P. M. Mr. Johns, sen., with two of his neighbors, rode up to the burning house, where lay the roasted body of his son. On further search, Mrs. Johns was discovered in the swamp. They took her on a horse, and conveyed her to Mr. Sparkman's together with Mr. Lowder's family, whose house they passed. It was the trail of Mr. Johns and his party, that misled Major Hart thus far from the direction of the savages. Eight Indians, and one negro, were seen at Mr. Johns house, besides those who took charge of the horses, nine of which, they had stolen and taken with them. They tried to catch Mr. Higinbotham's horse, but he was frightened and kept out of their way. Early next morning, Major Hart, with his party, took the woods in the direction of Black Creek, struck the Indian trail early in the day, and pursued it to the head of Black Creek; but the enemy travelled all night, and had six hours the start of them. The chase was given up with great reluctance.

A notice of the attack had been sent to Black Creek, and Major Pierce sent several parties of men to intercept the savages; he also headed one detachment himself, and pursued their trail near to Santaffe, but without effect. The horses they had stolen were the best in the country, and they pushed them to their utmost speed. From the trail they came, and from other discovered signs, they had been a week or ten days in the neighborhood of Ewbanks and Higinbotham's. Mrs. Johns has since been removed into Jacksonville, and placed in a comfortable boarding house, where medical attendance, and the humane attentions of the citizens, have promptly administered to her necessities, and relieved many of her sorrows; she is in a fair way of recovery.