

ECHOES

The Newsletter of the Escambia County Historical Society

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Editor: Ranella Holley

The January meeting will be held on the fourth Tuesday of January, 01-28-03, at the Thomas E. McMillan Museum meeting room on the campus of Jefferson Davis Community College. The time is 3:00 pm. All members and the public are invited to attend. Our speaker will be Sue Beasley of RSVP (Retired Senior Volunteer Program).

Sue is a long-time resident of Escambia County and has directed the activities of the RSVP for a number of years. We are excited to have this very busy woman take time from her arduous schedule to talk to us about her typical day of arranging events and engagements, recruiting volunteers, and administering a program that benefits all retired seniors of Escambia County.

We encourage all members to attend this important talk by Sue, as we expect to hear all the things about RSVP that few people know. A question and answer session will follow her presentation.

Refreshments will be served in the Historical Society parlor following Sue's talk. Hostess at the refreshment table will be Lynn Wixon and Louise Stone

The scheduled speaker for February will be Chief Lawrence Weaver of the Brewton Fire Department.

Other Informative Information

Miss Emma Sansom

In the spring of 1863, the Army of the Cumberland under General Rosecrans lay in Murfreesboro. General James A Garfield, who afterward became President of the United States, was General Rosecran's chief of staff.

At Rock Run in Cherokee county was a furnace that supplied quantities of iron to the Confederate government. General Garfield felt sure that it could be captured and destroyed together with the line of railroad and the Confederate supplies about Rome, Georgia. Colonel Abel D. Streight was selected to lead the raiding force of about 2000 picked cavalymen. General Garfield was in high glee, counting upon nothing but the

success of his plan.

Colonel Streight and his troops started from Tuscumbia. They passed Mount Hope in Lawrence county on April 27 at the time when Forrest and Roddy were preparing to contest the advance of the Federals under General Dodge. The next day Dodge's forces were repulsed at Town Creek.

General Forrest, "the Wizard of the Saddle," heard of Streight's advance through the mountains, guessed his purpose and began pursuit. A little after midnight in the morning of April 29, Forrest left Courtland. About the same time Streight was passing out of Moulton, 16 miles away. Early on the morning of April 30, he was overtaken and attacked by Forrest. In the terrific skirmish battle that followed, the Federals, who had secured the better position, succeeded in capturing two pieces of artillery.

Streight hurried on into Blount county, knowing that Forrest would attack again as soon as the main body of his troops could catch up. The Federals scattered along the route of their retreat much booty and baggage. As night came on they had to fight again. Forrest recovered the two pieces of artillery, which they had captured in the morning, and drove the Federals towards Blountsville.

At Blountsville Streight discarded his wagons and packed a portion of his baggage on mules that he might move the faster. He fired his wagons, but Forrest came up in time to save much of the abandoned stores. Then began a constant running fight, Streight trying his best to get away, and Forrest determined to capture him and his whole command. Streight succeeded in crossing the Warrior river at Rocky Ford, but several captured pack mules and dead Federals showed how hotly Forrest was pursuing.

The Confederates were tired and stopped to rest. While in camp two young girls, carrying three guns, leading three horses, and guarding three Federal prisoners, came up. A horse was given to each of the girls, and they both went home in delight with their steeds and the story of their soldier experience.

At Black Creek, a mile or so west of Gadsden, Forrest found the bridge on fire and guarded by Federal sentinels. Streight had crossed. The creek was swollen. Mrs. Sansom, a widow living near, accompanied by her daughter, Miss Emma, a girl of 16 summers, had gone toward the bridge to put out the fire. They discovered Federal pickets on guard and were returning home when Forrest met them and inquired about the crossing of the creek. Miss Emma offered to guide him to a ford. Her mother objected, but the brave girl insisted, and, climbing upon the corner of a fence, she leaped behind Forrest and started with him to the ford. Shot and shell were soon flying all about them.

When they approached the ford in the creek, they dismounted. Miss Emma stepped in front of Forrest and spread out her skirts to protect him, believing that the Federals would not fire on a girl. Forrest, however, would not consent to this. "Excuse me, Miss," he said; "I am glad to have you for a pilot, but I am not going to make breastworks of you." A volley of muskets sent a bullet through her skirts, when she exclaimed, "They have only wounded my dress," and waved her bonnet at the Federals. The brave fellows discovered her and sent her a round of cheers, ceased firing, and permitted her to get out of the reach of danger.

Miss Sansom's heroic assistance helped the Confederates to get across the creek promptly and continue the hot pursuit. On the morning of May 3, Forrest overtook Streight at Lawrence in Cherokee county. Forrest had only about 600 men, but he boldly demanded an immediate surrender. By skillfully placing his troops and giving orders to imaginary forces, he outwitted and captured Streight with 1,460 men and sent them to Richmond over the very road they had come to destroy. When Streight learned of Forrest's actual strength, he said, "I am sold."

The next day Forrest captured Colonel Russell and 230 men, whom Streight had sent forward to seize the bridge across the river at Rome.

Streight's purpose to destroy all public works and to burn the city of Rome would have been accomplished if Miss Emma had not piloted the Confederates to the ford, and thus, as General Forrest himself said, "facilitated pursuit by at least two hours."

Miss Sansom afterward married C. B. Johnson. She lived for many years in Calloway, Texas, and died there August 22, 1900, a widow and the mother of several children.

As a testimonial of appreciation of her heroic service, the legislature of Alabama in 1863 voted her a gold medal and a section of land. This land was sold for Confederate money, which was soon worthless. In 1899, by a vote almost unanimous, the legislature again donated to her a section of land; but as all the State lands have been used for other purposes, her heirs have never receive anything from the State.

John Trotwood Moore has vividly described the incidents of this episode in Alabama history in his beautiful Ballad of Emma Sansom. One stanza reads:

"Do you wonder they rode like Romans adown the winnowing wind,
With Mars himself in the saddle and Minerva up behind?
Was ever a foe confronted and captured by such means
Since days of old and warrior bold and the maiden of Orleans?"

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Researched and compiled by the Escambia County Historical Society from an Alabama History

textbook dated October 1901 (Publisher unknown)

To our Members -- January is the month for renewing dues. Annual dues are \$10.00 per person. Membership dues are used entirely for publishing newsletters, journals, maintaining facilities at the Alabama Room, and to sponsor our annual Christmas dinner. Please send your dues to Peggy G Bracken, 602 Edgewood Dr, Brewton, Alabama 36426

Anyone wishing to add a loved one to our memorial plaque should send your request and a donation of \$25.00 or more to the treasurer. A notice of the memorial will be placed in the newsletter at the time the name is added to the plaque. Those members wishing to make a tax-exempt gift to the Society may send the gift to the treasurer.

If you know of any person or business who would like to sponsor the publication of a newsletter or journal please contact Ranella Holley at the telephone or e-mail address noted below.

Books now available and on sale:

History of Escambia County, \$50.00 - 55.00 (mailed)

Headstones & Heritage, \$35.00 - 40.00 (mailed)

Escambia County Historical Society Cook Book -- \$7.50 - \$10.00 (mailed)

Heritage of Escambia County, \$64.80 - \$70.00 (mailed)

2003 Escambia County Historical Society Journal, Issue #. 1 - \$5.00 - \$7.00 (mailed)

Get in Touch with Us

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