

# ECHOES



The  
Escambia  
County  
Historical  
Society,  
Founded  
1971

**The August 2021 Newsletter**  
The August Regular Meeting will be  
**Tuesday, August 24, 2021**  
**at 3:00 pm in the Meeting Room**  
**in the Museum**  
**at Coastal Alabama College in Brewton.**



## The Program: In Response to Audience Requests, A Reprise of Karen Duke Shaver's Program on Andrew Jackson.

This time using her collection of pictures from her experience as an historical interpreter at Andrew Jackson's home, the Hermitage, Nashville, Tennessee, Karen will tell us more of the story of Andrew and his wife Rachel.

**Karen Duke Shaver**

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**The January 8, 1825 ball given for Andrew and Rachel Jackson (left) by John Quincy and Louisa Adams (right), depicted 47 years after the event. (Harper's)**

Her life, in direct relation to the scandal of her bigamy, caused Rachel Jackson to withdraw from society's glare. Although she confessed that she preferred to confine her public appearances to religious services, she joined her husband during his most important political endeavors to Pensacola Florida, New Orleans, Louisiana and Washington, D.C. She was in the capital for the House vote in the contested 1824 election and despite what some considered a backwoods manner marked by her smoking a long-stem clay pipe, she was befriended by the urbane First Lady Elizabeth Monroe.



Portrait of  
Andrew Jackson

Volume 48 No. 8  
August 2021

**The locket with the late Rachel Jackson's portrait which the President wore around his neck.**



## Peggy Eaton, Andrew Jackson, and the Petticoat Affair

*The following article is taken from Wikipedia at <[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Petticoat\\_affair](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Petticoat_affair)>:*

### Introduction

The Petticoat Affair (also known as the Eaton Affair) was a political scandal involving members of President Andrew Jackson's Cabinet and their wives, from 1829 to 1831. Led by Floride Calhoun, wife of Vice President John C. Calhoun, these women, dubbed the "Petticoats," socially ostracized Secretary of War John Eaton and his wife, Peggy Eaton, over disapproval of the circumstances surrounding the Eatons' marriage and what they deemed her failure to meet the "moral standards of a Cabinet Wife."

The Petticoat Affair rattled the entire Jackson Administration and eventually led to the resignation of all but one Cabinet member. The ordeal facilitated Martin Van Buren's rise to the presidency and was in part responsible for Vice President Calhoun's transformation from a nationwide political figure with presidential aspirations into a sectional leader of the southern states.

### Controversy

Jackson was elected president in 1828, with his term set to begin on March 4, 1829. He was reportedly fond of Peggy Timberlake and encouraged Eaton to marry her. They were wed on January 1, 1829, only nine months after her husband's death. Customarily, it would have been considered "proper" for their marriage to have followed a longer mourning period.

Historian John F. Marszalek explains his opinion on the "real reasons Washington society found Peggy unacceptable":

She did not know her place; she forthrightly spoke up about anything that came to her mind, even topics of which women were supposed to be ignorant. She thrust herself into the world in a manner inappropriate for a woman. ... Accept her, and society was in danger of disruption. Accept this uncouth, impure, forward, worldly woman, and the wall of virtue and morality would be breached and society would have no further defenses against the forces of frightening change. Margaret Eaton was not that important in herself; it was what she represented that constituted the threat. Proper women had no choice; they had to prevent her acceptance into society as part of their defense of that society's morality.

When Jackson assumed the presidency, he appointed Eaton as Secretary of War. Floride Calhoun, Second Lady of the United States, led the wives of other Washington political figures, mostly those of Jackson's cabinet members, in an "anti-Peggy" coalition, which served to shun the Eatons socially and publicly. The women refused to pay courtesy calls to the Eatons at their home and to receive them as visitors, and denied them invitations to parties and other social events.

Emily Donelson, niece of Andrew Jackson's late wife Rachel Donelson Robards and the wife of Jackson's adopted son and confidant Andrew Jackson Donelson, served as Jackson's "surrogate First Lady." Emily Donelson chose to side with the Calhoun faction, which led Jackson to replace her with his daughter-in-law Sarah Yorke Jackson as his official hostess. Secretary of State Martin Van Buren was a widower and the only unmarried member of the Cabinet; he raised himself in Jackson's esteem by aligning himself with the Eatons.

Jackson's sympathy for the Eatons stemmed in part from his late wife Rachel being the subject of innuendo during the presidential campaign, when questions arose as to whether her first marriage had been legally ended before she married Jackson. Jackson believed these attacks were the cause of Rachel's death on December 22, 1828, several weeks after his election to the presidency.

Eaton's entry into a high-profile Cabinet post helped intensify the opposition of Mrs. Calhoun's group. In addition, Calhoun was becoming the focal point of opposition to Jackson; Calhoun's supporters opposed a second term for Jackson because they wanted Calhoun elected president. In addition, Jackson favored and Calhoun opposed the protective tariff that came to be known as the Tariff of Abominations.

U.S. tariffs on imported goods generally favored northern industries by limiting competition, but southerners opposed them because the tariffs raised the price of finished goods but not the raw materials produced in the south. The dispute over the tariff led to the nullification crisis of 1832, with southerners — including Calhoun — arguing that states could refuse to obey federal laws to which they objected, even to the point of secession from the Union, while Jackson vowed to prevent secession and preserve the Union at any cost.

*(Continued on page 3)*

## Peggy Eaton, Andrew Jackson, and the Petticoat Affair

(Continued from page 2)

Because Calhoun was the most visible opponent of the Jackson administration, Jackson felt that Calhoun and other anti-Jackson officials were fanning the flames of the Peggy Eaton controversy in an attempt to gain political leverage. Duff Green, a Calhoun protégé and editor of the United States Telegraph, accused Eaton of secretly working to have pro-Calhoun Cabinet members Samuel D. Ingham and John Branch removed from their positions.

### Resolution

Eaton took his revenge on Calhoun. In 1830, reports had emerged which accurately stated that Calhoun, while Secretary of War, had favored censuring Jackson for his 1818 invasion of Florida. These reports infuriated Jackson. Calhoun asked Eaton to approach Jackson about the possibility of Calhoun publishing his correspondence with Jackson at the time of the Seminole War. Eaton did nothing. This caused Calhoun to believe that Jackson had approved the publication of the letters. Calhoun published them in the Telegraph. Their publication gave the appearance of Calhoun trying to justify himself against a conspiracy, which further enraged the president.

The dispute was finally resolved when Van Buren offered to resign, giving Jackson the opportunity to reorganize his Cabinet by asking for the resignations of the anti-Eaton Cabinet members. Postmaster General William T. Barry was the lone Cabinet member to stay, and Eaton eventually received appointments that took him away from Washington, first as governor of Florida Territory, and then as minister to Spain.

On June 17, the day before Eaton formally resigned, a story appeared in the Telegraph stating that it had been "proved" that the families of Ingham, Branch, and Attorney General John M. Berrien had refused to associate with Mr. Eaton. Eaton wrote to all three men demanding that they answer for the article. Ingham sent back a contemptuous letter stating that, while he was not the source for the article, the information was still true. On June 18, Eaton challenged Ingham to a duel through Eaton's brother in law, Dr. Philip G. Randolph, who visited Ingham twice and the second time threatened him with personal harm if he did not comply with Eaton's demands.

Randolph was dismissed, and the next morning

Ingham sent a note to Eaton discourteously declining the invitation, describing his situation as one of "pity and contempt." Eaton wrote a letter back to Ingham accusing him of cowardice. Ingham was then informed that Eaton, Randolph, and others were looking to assault him. He gathered together his own bodyguard and was not immediately molested. However, he reported that for the next two nights Eaton and his men continued to lurk about his dwelling and threaten him.

He then left the city and returned safely to his home. Ingham communicated to Jackson his version of what took place, and Jackson then asked Eaton to answer for the charge. Eaton admitted that he "passed by" the place where Ingham had been staying, "but at no point attempted to enter ... or besiege."

In 1832, Jackson nominated Van Buren as minister to Great Britain. Calhoun killed the nomination with a tie-breaking vote against it, claiming his act would "...kill him, sir, kill him dead. He will never kick, sir, never kick." However, Calhoun only made Van Buren seem the victim of petty politics, which were rooted largely in the Eaton controversy. This raised Van Buren even further in Jackson's esteem. Van Buren was nominated for vice president and was elected as Jackson's running mate when Jackson won a second term in 1832. Van Buren thus became the de facto heir to the presidency and succeeded Jackson in 1837.

Although Emily Donelson had supported Floride Calhoun, after the controversy ended, Jackson asked her to return as his official hostess; she resumed these duties in conjunction with Sarah Yorke Jackson until returning to Tennessee after contracting tuberculosis, leaving Sarah Yorke Jackson to serve alone as Jackson's hostess.

John Calhoun resigned as vice president shortly before the end of his term and returned with his wife to South Carolina. Quickly elected to the U.S. Senate, he returned to Washington not as a national leader with presidential prospects but as a regional leader who argued in favor of states' rights and the expansion of slavery.

In regard to the Petticoat affair, Jackson later remarked, "I [would] rather have live vermin on my back than the tongue of one of these Washington women on my reputation." To Jackson, Peggy Eaton was just another of many wronged women whom over his lifetime he had known and defended. He be-

(Continued on page 4)

# Peggy Eaton, Andrew Jackson, and the Petticoat Affair

(Continued from page 3)

lieved that every woman he had defended in his life, including her, had been the victim of ulterior motives, so that political enemies could bring him down.

## Legacy

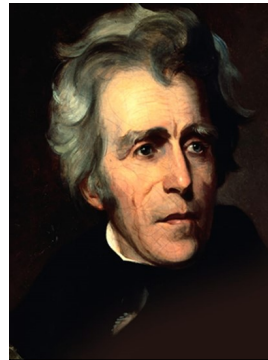
Historian Robert V. Remini says that "the entire Eaton affair might be termed infamous. It ruined rep-

utations and terminated friendships. And it was all so needless." Historian Kirsten E. Wood argues that it "was a national political issue, raising questions of manhood, womanhood, presidential power, politics, and morality."

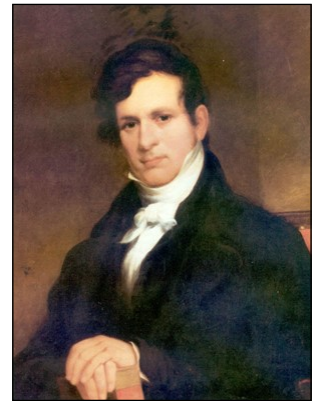


A cigar box exploiting Peggy O'Neal Eaton's fame and beauty, showing President Jackson introduced to Peggy O'Neal (left) and two lovers fighting a duel over her (right)

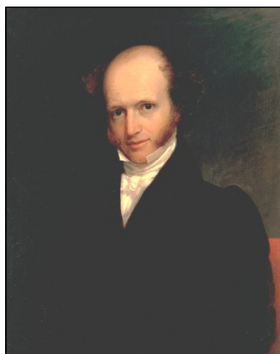
## Cast of Characters in the Petticoat Affair



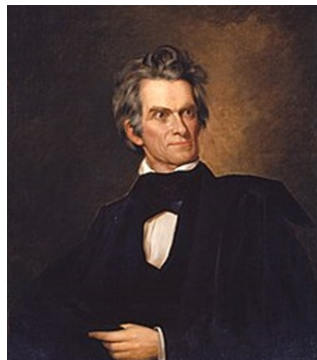
Andrew Jackson



John Eaton



Secretary of State Martin Van Buren supported the Eatons, aiding in his rise to the presidency.



John C. Calhoun



Floride Calhoun, wife of Vice President John Calhoun and leader of the "anti-Peggy" Washington wives.



**Jackson's White House Hostesses**  
On the Left, His Daughter in Law Sarah Yorke Jackson who served after Jackson Dismissed His Niece-Daughter in Law, Emily Donelson, Pictured on the Right. Emily Was His First Hostess.



## News and Announcements



### Piano Used at Downing Schofner Industrial School To Be Donated to the McMillan Museum

Helen Kerins, who is donating the piano, writes: "This is the way it came out of the school. Mother did have the ivory key covers replaced when they became so chipped and broken. The piano still plays but keys stick.

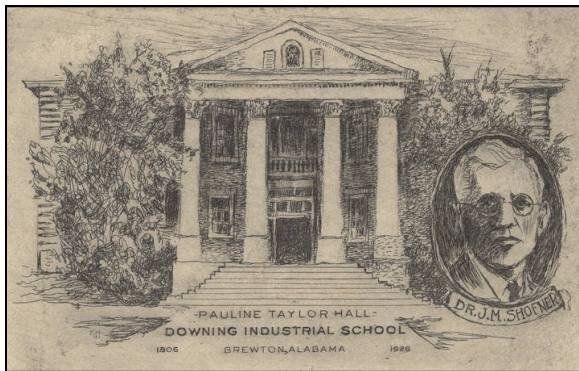
"I'll have to verify make and year the next time I go to my daughter's house. It is an 1800's model."

### About the Downing Shofner School:

Founder J. M. Shofner (1853-1926).

According to the article "Schofner Founded Girls' School," by Lydia Grimes, Rev Schofner, while serving a church in Tallassee, Ala., conceived the idea of a school. He saw the need for education for both boys and girls, but girls he saw as being the most disadvantaged. He believed that if a girl was educated, she would later see that her own children were also educated" (*Brewton Standard*, Feb. 24, 2004).

The article notes: "The school opened Sept. 24, 1906 with nine girl students, three teachers and a matron." It operated until 1943



(1928)

**Sketch of Pauline Taylor Hall at the Downing Industrial School for Girls in Brewton, Alabama, and of Dr. J. M. Shofner, the school's founder.**

*From Alabama Department of Archives & History*



**Fort Mims Reenactment**  
**Aug. 28-29**  
**9:00 am – 3:00 pm**  
**Tensaw,**

The weekend will commemorate the bloodiest battle between Creek Indians and settlers in American history. It took place at Fort Mims in Tensaw, Alabama.

### Schedule of Events

- Opening Ceremony: Saturday 9:00 am
- Daily Re-enactments on site:  
Burnt Corn 11:00 am  
Fort Mims 2:00 pm

### Location

North Baldwin County, 12 miles north of Stockton on Hwy 59. From Hwy 59 drive west 3 miles on Co. Rd. 80. Finally turn right on Ft. Mims Road.

### Activities and Concessions

- Enjoy 1800's Crafts & Living History
- Concessions available 9:00 am – 3:00 pm

### Contacts for More Information

- Visit <fortmims.org> & Don't Forget to "like" Fort Mims on Facebook
- For more info contact North Baldwin Chamber at 251-973-5665



**Reconstructed Stockade Fort Mims**



**Restored Blockhouse & Well**  
**Bodies were found during the excavations of the original well.**

(Continued on page 3)

## News and Announcements

### Alabama Historical Association Fall Pilgrimage to Historic Blakeley State Park Saturday, October 2, 2021



**Sunset at Blakeley**  
*Courtesy of John Stamish*

#### **HISTORIC BLAKELEY STATE PARK:**

Gulf Coast Gem

*By Mike Bunn – Director*

Historic Blakeley State Park, named for the early Alabama town which once stood on the site, encompasses approximately 2,100 acres of the largest National Register Historic Site in the eastern half of the United States.

Within the park's grounds are the site of the last major combined-forces battle of the Civil War; the site of the important early Alabama town of Blakeley; colonial era homesteads, and American Indian settlements. dating to over 2,000 years ago.

The park is situated within the Mobile Tensaw Delta, sometimes referred to as the "American Amazon," a vast region of wetlands through which drain numerous large rivers including the Tombigbee, Alabama, Mobile, Middle, Tensaw, Apalachee, Raft, Spanish, and Blakeley as they make their way towards the Gulf of Mexico through an enormous estuary forty-five miles in length and roughly sixteen miles wide.

The Delta encompasses over 300 square miles of some of the richest and most diverse natural habitat in the nation, and the park contains exceptionally diverse plant and animal life as a consequence.

**For Complete Information on the Fall Pilgrimage go to the online Alabama Historical Association Fall 2021 Newsletter at**  
**<<https://www.alabamahistory.net/newsletters>>.**



**Wehle Center**  
**34745**  
**State Hwy 225**  
**Spanish Fort,**  
**AL 36527**  
**251-626-0798**

#### **Schedule of Activities - Saturday, Oct. 2**

**9:00 – 10:00 a.m. -**

Registration, coffee, and book sales

**10:00 a.m. -**

Welcome from Park Director Mike Bunn and local officials

#### **Civil War Panel Featuring:**

Mike Bailey, Fort Morgan State Historic Site, retired

Paul Brueske, University of South Alabama

Paula Lenor Webb, University of South Alabama

John Sledge, Mobile Historic Development Commission

**11:30 a.m. - Lunch**

**12:30 - 2:00 p.m.**

#### **"Civil War on the Eastern Shore"**

Boat Cruise with Mike Bunn

(Max capacity is 49. A second cruise will be offered at 2:15 p.m. if needed.)

**NOTE:** Tickets are \$25 for the boat cruise. See registration form for details.

**12:30 – 1:30 p.m.**

**Battlefield Tour**, guided by Ranger Brian Descrochers

**2:15 – 3:15 p.m.**

**Battlefield Tour**, guided by Ranger Brian Descrochers

**2:15 - 3:45 p.m.**

**Second "Civil War on the Eastern Shore"**  
Boat Cruise (if needed)

#### **Pre-Meeting Options - Visits To**

- Battle Memorial Park—2703 Battleship Parkway, Mobile, Alabama 251-433-2703
- Daphne History Museum - 405 Dryer Ave., Daphne, AL 36526 251-621-9620
- Fairhope Museum of History - 24 N. Section Street, Fairhope, Alabama (251) 929-1471

# The ECHS *Journal* Section

## History of the Fort Mims Massacre

*The following history of the Fort Mims Massacre is taken from the Fort Mims website at <<https://www.fortmims.org/history.html>>*

### Introduction

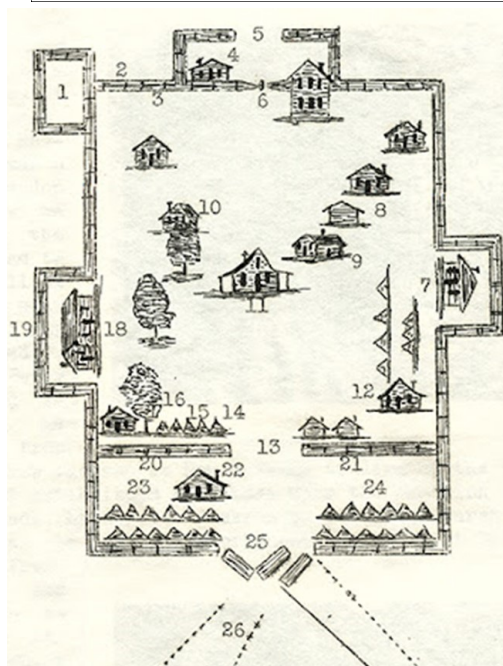
The conditions and events that led up to the Creek Indian War, which resulted in the Fort Mims massacre on August 30, 1813, began before the start of the War of 1812. In the early 1800's, the loosely confederated tribes of the Creek nation numbered somewhere between 18,000 to 24,000 persons and primarily inhabited present day Alabama and western Georgia. Their territory was generally bounded by the Tennessee

River on the east and the Tombigbee River on the west and north and comprised about 300 square miles.

In the years following the American Revolution, the United States, Great Britain, and Spain and France all sought alliances with the Creeks as they attempted to diminish the others' influence in the region. The Creeks had signed four treaties with the new American government by 1805, but the continual international intrigue in the Alabama backwoods and the animosity between England and America would spark the Creek War as an extension of the War of 1812.

Situated on relatively high ground on the east bank of Tensaw Lake, Fort Mims began as the fortified home and outbuildings of Samuel Mims. The lake was formed from an old channel of the Alabama River and was connected to the river by a navigable

**Diagram of Fort Mims**



- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1. Block House   | 14. Ensign Chambliss' House                 |
| 2. Pickets cut away by the Indians                               | 15. Ensign Gibbs'                           |
| 3. Guard's Station   | 16. Randon's                                |
| 4. Guard House   | 17. Captain Middleton's                     |
| 5. Western Gate, but not up                                      | 18. Captain Jack's Station                  |
| 6. This Gate was shut, but a hole was cut through by the Indians | 19. Port-holes taken by Indians             |
| 7. Captain Bailey's Station                                      | 20. 21. Port-holes taken by Indians         |
| 8. Steadham's Hose   | 22. Major Beasley's Cabin                   |
| 9. Mrs. Dyer's House   | 23. Captain Jack's Company                  |
| 10. Kitchen  | 24. Captain Middleton's Company             |
| 11. Mims' House  | 25. Where Major Beasley fell                |
| 12. Randon's House   | 26. Eastern Gate, where the Indian entered. |
| 13. Old Gate Way-Open  |   |

passage The fort consisted of 17 buildings, including one block-house and a log palisade.

By early August 1813, about 440 settlers and slaves from the surrounding area had crowded into the tiny stockade. A number of friendly Indians and half-breeds had also sought protection within the fort. Before the massacre, the Creek nation had generally peaceful relations with the white settlers, and intermarriage was not uncommon. In fact, many of the settlers who died at Fort Mims were of mixed blood.

### The Opposing Forces

Brig. Gen. Ferdinand L. Claiborne of the Mississippi

territorial militia was in charge of military affairs in the region and divided his forces to garrison the frontier outposts. He sent Maj. Daniel Beasley and 140 men of the 1<sup>st</sup> Mississippi Volunteers to defend the Fort Mims area. Maj. Beasley posted 120 men, mostly Louisianans, in

Fort Mims and scattered the balance among other smaller area posts including 40 soldiers stationed at Fort Pierce located on Pine Log Creek about two miles south of Fort Mims.

Maj. Beasley had no military experience and was a lawyer in the territory's Jefferson County when Gen. Claiborne, a close personal friend, used his influence to have him appointed a militia major in February 1813. Beasley had been at Fort Mims only a few days when Gen. Claiborne inspected the post

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# The ECHS *Journal* Section

## History of the Fort Mims Massacre

*(Continued from page 7)*

on August 7, 1813 and recommended that at least two and possibly three additional blockhouses be built. "To respect our enemy, and to prepare in the best possible way to meet him, is the certain means to ensure success," Gen. Claiborne wrote in orders to Beasley after the inspection,

However, Maj. Beasley was slow to strengthen Fort Mims' defenses, apparently believing there was no danger of imminent attack. The defenders did however, construct a second defensive wall a few yards inside the stockade and facing the main gate on the east side of the fort. "We are perfectly tranquil here." Maj. Beasley wrote Gen. Claiborne on August 12, 1813, "and are progressing in our works as well as can be expected considering the want of tools. We shall probably finish the stockade tomorrow."

On August 13, 1813, about 50 of Beasley's men at Fort Mims were sent to Mount Vernon, a cantonment on the Mobile River a few miles west of the fort. "It is with regret that I send them as it weakens my command very much," Maj. Beasley wrote to Gen Claiborne, who had ordered the movement. Yet the loss of these troops, which left Beasley with only 70 militiamen in addition to the volunteers among the settlers, did not cause the major to hasten work on the fort's defenses

Adding to Beasley's tranquility were reports – supplied by supposedly friendly Indians and believed by militia leaders, including Gen. Claiborne – that the Creeks were massing for an attack on Fort Easley, located on the Tombigbee River about 30 miles northwest of Fort Mims. Maj. Beasley's post seemed to be out of the immediate danger.

On August 24, 1813, Gen. Claiborne led about 80 men to reinforce Fort Easley, writing that if the Creeks attacked there he would "give a good account of them." Whether the hostile Creeks intentionally mislead the militia leaders in order to divert reinforcements from Fort Mims is a question that may never be answered.

The hostile Creek Indians, known as Red Sticks, learned of the weakness of the Fort Mims garrison from their scouts and gathered from 750 to 1000 warriors for an attack on the pioneer stronghold and Fort Pierce. A half-breed prophet, Paddy Welsh, was

chosen to lead the attack but William Weatherford, also known as Chief Red Eagle, was instrumental in the planning.

By August 20, 1813, Welsh and Weatherford had hidden their main force in the woods and tall grass about six miles from the unsuspecting outpost, where soldiers and settlers were enjoying a supply of whiskey that had arrived that day. Sometime during the day, two young slaves tending cattle outside the stockade were surprised to see war painted Creeks in the forest near the fort. They hurried back to the fort and informed Maj. Beasley. He quickly ordered a mounted patrol of about 10 men to check out the sighting.

Two of these scouts apparently rode within 300 yards of the Creek attack force without seeing the concealed warriors. Indian accounts stated that two of the militia men, talking between themselves, passed along a road leading to the fort with the Creeks watching from the brush. Since the patrol reported no Indian activity in the area, Maj. Easley ordered the slaves to be whipped for bringing false information and took no other defensive precautions.

By nightfall of August 29, 1813, the Creeks had advanced to within one mile of the unsuspecting fort. During the night, Weatherford and two warriors silently crawled up to the walls and peered through the fort's firing ports (loopholes) which were cut into the palisade timbers about four feet from the ground. The sentries were playing cards and evidently never saw them.

### **The Massacre**

On the morning of August 30, 1813, few of Fort Mims' defenders stirred in the steaming heat. In the forested shade, the Creeks watched and waited. The fort's main gate, located on the east side of the stockade, had not been closed by the garrison troops and was lodged open by a shifting bank of sand. Some historians believe Weatherford and his night scouts may have piled the dirt to hold the gate ajar. No sentries occupied the blockhouse.

During the morning, Maj. Beasley dispatched a message to Gen. Claiborne, unaware that he had only a few hours left to live. Beasley described the "false alarm" spread by the slaves. He added that while he had been initially concerned because other slaves

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# The ECHS *Journal* Section

## History of the Fort Mims Massacre

*(Continued from page 8)*

sent to a nearby plantation to gather corn had reported seeing Indians “committing every kind of havoc,” he now doubted the truth of that report.

“I was much pleased at the appearance of the soldiers here at the time of the alarm yesterday when it was expected that the Indians would appear in sight; the soldiers very generally appeared anxious to see them,” Beasley wrote in his last dispatch. “I have improved the fort at this place and have it much stronger than when you were here,” Beasley continued. With more than a hint of frustration, he noted that his initial force had been so divided among the other outposts that he would be relegated to defense if attacked and “utterly unable to leave the fort and meet any number of the enemy.”

Before noon, Maj. Beasley received one last warning, but also ignored it. James Cornells, a scout, galloped into the fort and shouted to Beasley on the parade ground that he had seen hostile Creeks approaching. Beasley told him that he had only seen a few red cattle and mistaken them for Indians. Witnesses stated that Cornells yelled to Beasley that the red cattle would “give him a hell of a kick before night.” Beasley ordered Cornells arrested, but the scout galloped away, leaving the outpost and its occupants to its fate.

At noon a drummer sounded the call to mess, and the soldiers and settlers headed for their midday meal. Some of the girls and young men were dancing, and the soldiers were playing cards as they waited for their food. The rattle of the drum was the Creek’s signal to attack and the death knell for most of the settlers and militia. Hundreds of Red Stick warriors, hidden in a ravine only 400 yards from the fort, stormed across the open field and crowded through the open gate, their war whoops mingling with scattered musket shots from the soldiers and screams of terror from the pioneer women and children.

Before the attack, the prophet Welsh had performed a magical ceremony to make four braves impervious to bullets. Those warriors were to lead the attack through the gate and divert the defenders’ attention long enough for other Red Sticks to occupy the stockade’s loopholes and open fire on the whites running for cover inside the fort. Within minutes of the initial attack, the Creeks had also seized the

unoccupied blockhouse.

Maj. Beasley, who, according to some accounts, was drunk at the time of the attack, drew his sword and vainly sought to close the gate, but was quickly clubbed to death in the Creek’s initial onslaught. Dixon Bailey, a half-breed who had been elected captain of the fort’s volunteers, took command and led a group of riflemen who fired at the attackers from the loopholes not occupied by the Indians. Other militiamen set up a hasty defense behind the inner wall and among the fort’s buildings.

By surprise and sheer numbers, the Indians quickly established a foothold inside the palisade, and slowly pushed all of the frontiersmen back behind the secondary defenses. The militiamen and pioneer riflemen poured fire into the Creeks, but were overwhelmed by the sheer numbers of screaming warriors rushing into the stockade.

Despite their manpower advantage, the Red Sticks, most of whom were armed with only tomahawks, clubs, knives, and bows and arrows, suffered heavy losses. Many of the fort’s defenders, however, were killed by the Indians firing into the fort through loopholes behind the defender’s positions. The Creeks set fire to most of the fort’s buildings using flaming arrows. Many settlers, including numerous women and children were burned alive. The fort’s powder magazine, located in one of the cabins, exploded, ignited by the raging flames.

Yet by 3 p.m., the battle was far from decided. The Creeks were exhausted and many were ready to quit the fight. Most of the surviving settlers and militiamen had sought refuge in a loomhouse and another log building against the fort’s north wall and were grimly holding out. The Creek leaders rallied their braves, who now set these last two structures ablaze. Some settlers died in the flames, but others were forced out and were immediately killed by the warriors. Bailey was mortally wounded in these closing moments of the battle. Some settlers, mostly men, were able to hack their way through the northern stockade wall and make their escape. A few found a flatboat and floated down the river to Fort Stoddert near Mobile.

The Creeks apparently spared most of the slaves to serve them, but this reprieve was to be short lived. During the Battle of Horseshoe Bend, Alabama which

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# The ECHS *Journal* Section

## History of the Fort Mims Massacre

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was fought on March 27, 1814, the Indians mainly used these slaves as a human shield, but attacking soldiers under Gen. Jackson quickly killed them. While the slaves were spared during the massacre, the Indians showed no mercy to the whites. By some accounts the Creeks slaughtered the settlers including brutalizing the women, some of whom were pregnant, and children. Some of the wounded and dead bodies were thrown into fires.

Weatherford apparently was horrified by the gruesome spectacle and vainly tried to stop the slaughter, but the Red Sticks, angered by the deaths of many comrades and in a killing frenzy, could not be stopped. The Creeks also believed a false rumor that British officials in Pensacola offered 5 dollars for every white scalp. Many of the victims at Fort Mims were scalped before they were killed. However, not all of the Creeks participated in the slaughter. One survivor told of a friendly Creek named Johomobtee, who shot three Red Sticks who were killing women.

Another survivor, as she watched her husband being killed, decided to bravely meet her own fate. Taking two children by their hands, she walked into the middle of the carnage, expecting to die any moment. She was startled to see a blood stained Creek calling to her. She recognized him as Dog Warrior, an Indian she had known when he was a child. Dog Warrior led her and the children to safety out of the fort. However, these actions were the exception.

A slave who escaped told authorities he and others including Dixon Bailey's sister were in Mims' house when the hostile Creeks entered. A warrior asked the woman if she was related to anyone in the fort. The woman pointed to the body of her brother and said, "I am the sister of that great man you have murdered there," whereupon the warrior knocked her down and mutilated her.

About 3 miles away, the 40 soldiers and about 150 settlers at Fort Pierce listened to the sounds of the chaos through the day and nervously waited for an attack. "The firing and yells of the Indians were heard at this post until after four o'clock in the afternoon when the firing ceased," wrote militiaman Lieutenant Andrew Montgomery, who commanded Fort Pierce. "It was impossible to render them any assistance with my small force."

By 5 p. m., the battle was over, and the Creeks and their captives left the blazing ruins and dead behind.

A soldier who had served under Major General Wayne along the northern frontier, was wounded but escaped from the fort and gave an account of the massacre. He ran into the forest and shot a brave who confronted him then hid beneath the lake bank as darkness settled over the fort. To the soldier's horror, some of the Creeks from the war party camped near his hiding place. The next morning, the Red Sticks threw the bodies of three people into the lake and departed. In the abandoned camp, the soldier found a young boy's body sprawled on an animal hide.

The fort's assistant surgeon, Dr. Thomas G. Holmes, escaped from the burning fort and hid in a hole by the roots of a fallen tree. He wandered through the wilderness for nine days before being found by a friendly settler.

The frightened defenders of Fort Pierce remained on the alert through the night of August 30, and saw bands of warriors in the distance but the expected attack never came. About noon on August 31, Lieutenant Montgomery made plans to abandon the outpost. Thwarted in an attempt to find a boat to help evacuate the fort, Montgomery waited until dark and led the militia and refugees out of the fort headed for Mobile about 35 miles to the south. In a grueling march through the wilderness, Montgomery's party reached Mobile early on the morning of September 4 with no losses.

### Casualties

Exact casualty figures will never be known, but most authorities agree about 250 to 400 settlers and militiamen died at Fort Mims. A settler who returned to the grisly scene four days after the battle to search for his family reportedly saw about "250 dead bodies and the women in a situation shocking to behold or relate."

Many accounts state the death toll exceeded 500, but this apparently does not take into account the approximately 100 to 175 slaves who were captured by the Creeks. However, among the bodies were the remains of about 20 slaves. Additionally, a few white women and children may have been taken prisoner.

Militia Major Kennedy commanded a detachment sent to the gruesome site to bury the dead three weeks

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## History of the Fort Mims Massacre

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after the massacre. The soldiers were horrified to find throngs of vultures and wild dogs which had been attracted to the corpses. Major Kennedy reported he found and buried the bodies of 247 men, women and children. "Indians, Negroes, white men, women and children lay in one promiscuous ruin," wrote Kennedy. "All were scalped, and the females of every age, were butchered."

In the charred remains of Mims' house, the soldiers found the bones of many victims. In the woods nearby, the militiamen found the graves of about one hundred Red Sticks. In a letter of September 4 to Territory Governor David Holmes, General Claiborne wrote that about 200 Creeks were believed to have been killed in the attack. Some historians believe the Creeks lost 300 to 400 warriors in the fight.

### **The Aftermath**

In the months after the massacre, a Fort Mims survivor named Zachariah McGirth, was overjoyed to see his wife and seven daughters, whom he believed had been killed, arrive at the Mobile wharf. McGirth and two of his slaves had left the fort about two hours before the attack to go to his nearby farm to gather provisions. As they paddled their boat down the Alabama River, they heard gunfire and saw flames and smoke from the fort rising above the trees. Knowing that he could do nothing to help his family McGirth and his men hid in a bayou near the blazing outpost through the night.

McGirth entered the ruins early on the morning of 31 August to search for his family but did not find them or their bodies. Unknown to him, a Red Stick named Sanota, whom he had adopted, as a hungry, orphaned boy had taken his family, except for McGirth's only son who was killed at the fort, captive. Sanota kept his adopted mother and the girls in a Creek village, providing for them and protecting them from the other warriors.

When Sanota was killed in battle a few months after the battle at Fort Mims, the McGirths set out on foot for the nearest pioneer outpost. After days of struggling through the wilds, a militia major found the family and took them to Mobile where they were reunited with McGirth.

News of the Fort Mims massacre spread quickly,

shocking and outraging the American nation.

General Claiborne was widely criticized for his handling of the frontier defenses, but Major Beasley's carelessness appears to be more to blame for the Fort Mims massacre. The Creek victory raised the confidence of the Red Stick warriors as much as it panicked the settlers along the entire western frontier.

The Americans soon struck back defeating the Creek nation even though the Americans fought a gangling, uncoordinated campaign. By October 4, 1813, about 1,300 mounted Tennessee volunteer troops under the command of Major General Andrew Jackson had moved into northern Alabama. After a series of battles, General Jackson's army annihilated the main Creek force on March 27, 1814 at Horseshoe Bend on the Tallapoosa River in eastern Alabama.

Weatherford eventually surrendered to General Jackson who was impressed by Red Eagle's bearing and bravery. With the Red sticks essentially destroyed, Weatherford helped persuade remaining the groups of warriors to surrender. Red Eagle also convinced Jackson of his futile attempt to stop the Fort Mims slaughter. "I exerted myself in vain to prevent the massacre of the women and children at Fort Mims," Red Eagle reportedly told General Jackson. "I am now done with fighting."

On August 9, 1814, several Creek leaders signed the Treaty of Fort Jackson, which ceded some 20 million acres of Creek land to the United States. For his actions in the war and forcing the treaty on the Creeks, General Jackson earned the first measure of fame that would lead him to the presidency.

After the war, Jackson released Weatherford, who was allowed to settle in Monroe County Alabama, to lead a peaceful existence until his death in March 1824. A Cairn marks Red Eagle's grave located about a mile from the site of Fort Mims.

**ECHOES**  
THE NEWSLETTER FOR  
THE ESCAMBIA COUNTY  
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