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# Perilous times for county's pioneers - PIONEERS

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The Seminole Wars defined the lives of many of the early pioneers of Columbia County, and this certainly proved to be the case for Henry Monroe Harrington and Polester Raulerson. Polester (whose name is often spelled Pelester in historical records) was born September 2, 1818, in Wayne County, Ga. She moved to Columbia County around 1823 with her mother,

Fanny Raulerson. Polester's youngest brother, David Raulerson, is recorded as having been born in Columbia Co. in 1824.

By 1830, Fanny is listed as the head of household for the Alachua County Census with eight minors living with her. In 1835, Polester and her brother Liberty Franklin were two of the first 10 students to attend school in Columbia County under teacher Daniel Gillett. In 1838, the families of Fanny Raulerson and George Gillett moved into cabins on the north side of Ocean Pond.

When the families relocated, the Second Seminole War had been raging for almost three years. Although fighting commenced in 1835, North Florida had only seen sporadic conflict and attacks. That changed drastically after the Battle of Okeechobee on Christmas Day in 1837. During the fighting, 450 Seminoles handily defeated the American forces under Zachary Taylor. Combined with the repeated failures of Gen. Thomas Jessup to bring about a decisive battle with the Seminole tribe, many Seminole and Creek bands escaped north in search of food and security.

A steady stream of Seminoles fled toward bullets into his back, both

passing through his body. As recorded in the memoirs of George Gillett Keene, Fanny Raulerson screamed to Mrs. Gillett, “Come, Tempy, let’s go.” Mrs. Gillett responded, “No I would not desert my husband in life, and I won’t forsake him in death.”

Fanny was so excited that she forgot her son William as she fled with four African Americans when the Indians commenced to killing the Gilletts. The warriors shot Mrs. Gillett and her three-year-

the Okefenokee Swamp, moving up the spine of the state and raiding farms for food and guns. This migration caused a heightened period of conflict between American settlers and the Seminoles, who took what was needed. These events served as a backdrop that would come to define the lives of an entire generation of Floridians who were left to defend themselves in the wake of a U.S. Army that was neither manned nor equipped to deal with the guerrilla tactics of the Seminole and Creek nations.

Seven weeks after resettling in Olustee, Fanny Raulerson with her son William went to visit George and Tempy Gillett at their cabin on the evening of March 16, 1838.

The Gillett's daughter Lydia went to spend the night with the Raulerson children, who lived half a mile away. Just after dark, Indians raided the Gillett house, killing George Gillett by shooting two old daughter and killed five-year-old, William. William was sitting in a rocking chair when he was hit with a tomahawk. he never fell out of the chair.

Fanny went home and gathered up her remaining children, including Independence, Polester, Franklin and David, as well as Lydia Gillett. They along with the Gillett's four slaves, walked for hours through the wilderness, to the nearest settlement 15 miles away.

They tried to cut a route through the woods but got lost. When they arrived, each were cut in over 500 places, having been torn by the briars and bushes. The search party noted that they had just enough clothes to say they had on a few rags.

That morning, a party of men started to Jacksonville, intending to take

dinner with the Gilletts. When they arrived, they found the family dead. The Indians took all the silver money, but left \$400 of paper money on the table. The visitors buried the dead.

The Raulersons relocated to the neighborhood of Corinth, which was more densely populated. It is at Corinth that Polester would meet and marry Henry Monroe Harrington in 1839. It is uncertain when Henry arrived in Columbia County; he may have lived in the area as early as 1828. The first time his name appears in a document in connection with the area is with the Second Seminole War. Henry was born on June 2, 1819, in Wayne County, Ga., to unknown parents.

He is recorded as having lived in Liberty County, Ga., before resettling in Florida. He first appears in Florida on June 22, 1836, enlisting for four months, from June 22 to October 22, 1836, with North's Company 1 Regiment, Florida Mounted Militia, where he served as an orderly sergeant. He was mustered on April 8, 1837, at Fort Gilliland.

His pension records note he was greatly distinguished during this period for his services and exploits in several brilliant affairs against the Creek

Indians, who were killing civilians along the Florida and Georgia frontier as they moved south to join the Seminoles.

Henry enrolled for a second tour on July 12, 1838, under the Company of William B. North's Regiment of the Florida Volunteers, commanded by Col. Charles Rinaldo Floyd. He served until he was discharged on January 12, 1839, at Fort Gilmore, Ga. Following this tour, he married Polester on October 30, 1839, at her mother's home in Columbia County. They were married by Isaac Daniels, the justice of the peace. During this period, an attack on Corinth killed neighbor Joseph Howell's family, with Seminoles scalping his wife, cutting out her fetus and tomahawking six of his children. Lt. Henry Harrington, a young 17-year-old, was ordered by Capt. William B. North to scout out and locate the tribe. After tracking down the band, he and Lt. Sam Cannon led an offensive that killed 20 Seminoles and captured one prisoner. They used their captive to track down the Indian encampment in the swamps and then attacked the hideout. They killed the remaining 40 Indians at the camp, using the handles of their guns to beat their attackers to death when they ran out of ammunition.

Henry did not lose a single man in the attack. Following the skirmish, he was ordered to track down and arrest two soldiers who had deserted their post on November 15, 1838. Upon locating them, they shot him in the left

shoulder while trying to make the arrest. After eventually apprehending the suspects, the bullet was removed without any medical supervision,

and he returned to duty.

Henry enlisted for a third tour joining on November 29, 1840, in Capt. Asa A. Stewart's Company, 2nd Regiment of Florida Foot Militia and mustered by Col. F.L. Dancy for service in the Seminole Indian War. He joined along with Liberty Franklin and David Raulerson.

Henry served until February 28, 1841, when he was discharged at Fort Lancaster, Alligator Settlement, East Florida. He enlisted again, as did both brothers-in-law, on April 5, 1842. This fourth tour of duty was in Capt. John J. North's Company of Mounted Volunteers. He was enrolled at Blount's Ferry on the Suwannee River under the command of Gen. Thomas Hilliard, from which command he was discharged on April 29, 1842. These tours garnered him the nickname "the Daniel Boone of Florida" by many of his fellow citizens in Columbia County.

George Gillett Keen described him as “one of the bravest men I ever saw in my life and as good an Indian fighter as ever shaded the earth.”

Following his service in the Second Seminole War, Henry returned home and started his family with Polester. His eldest son, William Jasper, was born in 1841. Eight other children followed including Sarah Ann (1842), Mary A. (1845), Missouri Ann (1847), John D. (1849), Henry M. (1851), Liberty Franklin (1853), Susan (1855), and Lilly Dell (1858).

After settling down, Henry was among the first Florida voters in the first statewide election, casting his ballot at the Columbia

County Courthouse in Alligator on May 26, 1845. Henry received his first allotment of land for his military service in the Florida Mounted Militia on April 4, 1854, with a grant of 160 acres, land patent signed by President Franklin Pierce.

An additional 140 acres of land were acquired on April 1, 1859, land patent signed by President James Buchanan. In the 1860 census, Henry and Polester are recorded as owning 300 acres of land valued at \$900. The family herded livestock on the open range with their herd valued at \$2,000.

Another 200 acres were purchased on November 14, 1883, from daughter Sarah Ann Harrington and son-in-law Jones Curry for \$400 dollars. Because the family's herd was left to free range in the forest, all members of the family had their own markings and brands. Henry, Polester, and son, William Jasper, each registered their markings at the Columbia County Courthouse in September 1883.

Henry Monroe continued his military service when hostilities with the Seminoles recommenced in the late 1840s. He was commissioned as a first lieutenant on August 7, 1849, by the U.S. government, serving with the First Company of Volunteers from the 9th Regiment of the Florida Militia. When the Third Seminole War broke out, in the 1850s, he served two more tours of duty. His first tour was with A.J. T. Wright's Company of Mounted Volunteers, with whom he acted as a bugler, serving along with brother-in-law, 1st Lt. Liberty Franklin Raulerson. Both were discharged on May 17, 1856, after having enrolled April 28, 1856.

Son William Jasper served as a private under Asa A. Stewart, at the same time. Polester's brother, David Raulerson, with whom they had served two prior tours died in the line of duty near Port Tampa. On the 14th of July 1857, Henry

M. Harrington, William H. Cone and ASA A. Stewart each raised companies and went to the Big Cypress. Capt. Henry Harrington's company was part of the First Regiment of Mounted Florida Volunteers, commanded by Col. Samuel St. Geo Rogers and called into service on May 28, 1857, at Alligator. They served for six months and were mustered out on January 22, 1858, at Fort Brooke (Tampa). During the war, future son-in-law Jones Curry served under Capt. Henry as a corporal while son William Jasper served as his bugler from May to October 1857. During the conflict, Capt. Harrington's units served in the Everglades and Big Cypress.

Following the Third Seminole War, records indicate that Henry was a prosperous farmer and rancher in Columbia County. He died on October 18, 1889, and was buried in Corinth Cemetery located eight miles north of Lake City. His wife, Polester, continued to ranch their farm until she died April 12, 1907. She is buried alongside Henry at Corinth. Descendants of

Polester and Henry Monroe Harrington include: William Jasper Harrington (b. 1841,

d. 1883) who married Amanda M. Clemons in 1860 and had five children. Sarah Ann Harrington (b. 1842, d. 1926) married Jones Mitchell Curry in 1861 and had 14 children. Mary A. Harrington (b. 1845, d. 1916) married James Oliver Green and had six children. Missouri Ann Harrington (b. 1847,

d. 1913) married George Washington Green in 1866 and had 10 children. John

D. Harrington (b. 1849,

d. 1925) married Emily Cason in 1877 and had eight children. Henry M. Harrington (b. 1851, d. 1930) married Martha A. Roberts in 1884 and had eight children. Liberty Franklin Harrington (b. 1853, d.1930) never married. Susan Harrington (b. 1855, d. 1923) married John Logan McCall

in 1876 and had nine children. Lilly Dell Harrington (b. 1858,

d. 1926) married William Blackstone Mershon and had 11 children.

CARL MCKINNEY/Lake City Reporter Henry Monroe Harrington and his wife, Polester (née Raulerson), had nine children and 71 grandchildren.

Above, some of the pair's descendants gather for a family get-together.

Henry Joseph Harrington and son. COURTESY PHOTOS Captain Henry Monroe Harrington, 'the Daniel Boone of Florida.' P.G. Harrington, Carrie Lee Parrott and Julian Parrott. Minnie Lee Harrington and children. Will and Mattie Lee Harrington.

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