Indian Raids of 1856 From Capt. J. T. Lesley's Diary

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(Editor’s Note: This interesting recital of an event during the last Indian War is excerpted from Twenty-Four Years in Florida by Harry A. Peeples, published in 1906 by the Tribune Printing Co., Tampa)

Late one evening during the Seminole war, in the year 1856, Capt. L.G. Lesley and Jno. T. Lesley, started out from Tampa, where they had spent a day or two on business, connected with the service, to meet their command then stationed at Alafia, now known as Old Alafia Post Office.

Just about where the water tank now stands on the A.C.L. Ry. they met several negroes belonging to a Mr. Cross, who had a plantation near Turkey Creek. The negroes said they had heard shooting near the Carney place, and had seen Indians running through the woods.

Capt. Lesley gave the negroes a note to some friends who were still in Tampa telling them to follow at once. They then hastened on in the direction of the Carney place and arrived there about nine o’clock at night. Before they got within a quarter of a mile of the place, they could hear the dogs howling most pitifully. One of that silent, solemn crowd remarked it was a bad omen. When they rode up to the house, although perfect strangers to the dogs, they met them with a friendly whine and tried to lick their hands. There being no light about the place they hallooed, and receiving no answer, dismounted, went into the yard and knocked at the door but no response came.

They then decided to strike a match, but to their surprise neither of them had a match. Capt. L.G. Lesley then suggested his son, Jno. T. Lesley, climb in a window and feel all through the room for a dead body, while he, the captain would stand guard at the window. It was anything but a pleasant task to the young man, yet he could not afford to refuse. Taking his pistol in his hand, he climbed into the room, which was pitch dark. No moon, not even a star, to furnish a glimmer of light in that dark and gloomy room. He crawled all over the room on his hands and knees, even searching the corners, expecting every minute to hear the crack of
a rifle from the hand of some savage hidden around the premises. As he came out from the room, they, knowing it was useless to search longer in the dark, remounted their horses and rode on toward their camp. They had gone about one mile, when they came to the Cross plantation. Here was discovered a small light, and silently they approached, and were hailed by one of the guards. Recognizing the voice they made themselves known, and found it to be a detachment from their company. They laid down for the night, and arose with the dawn of day. After feeding their horses and breakfasting, at sunrise they started back for the Carney place. About two hundred yards before they reached the field of Mr. Carney they beheld the gruesome sight of a dead man lying stretched out, face downward. It was the dead body of John Carney. His
scalp had been taken, and was then probably dangling from the belt of a savage, who was smiling with pride over his gruesome trophy of cowardice, having killed a defenseless man, as he walked between his plow handles, and left a helpless widow and orphans in that humble but God-loving home.

**FAMILY PRAYER**

The trail of the Indians was followed all that day, then the party began to scatter, each one going a different direction, with the understanding to meet at a certain time and place.

A few days after, they and the other commands were notified the Braiden home on the Manatee river had been visited by a band of Indians; that negroes, mules and provisions had been taken, and the Indians were journeying northward. These troopers hastened to the Braiden home, to learn that two nights before—a dark, rainy night—the family, consisting of Dr. Braiden, his wife, son and two daughters, the latter aged thirteen and fifteen years, respectively, and the old house servant, were all inside of the dwelling house, a two-story house built of mortar and shells.

They were a very religious family. It was a custom each night for one of the family, taking it by turn, from the oldest to the youngest, to lead in prayer before going to bed. On this eventful night the youngest daughter was kneeling with her face toward was one of the west windows of the upper story of the house. She was an especially bright, intelligent Christian child.

Just before closing her prayer her attention was attracted by a slight noise at the window she was facing. Looking up, she beheld a savage, bedecked in hideous warpaint, with his tomahawk ready in his hand, bent on massacre. She also heard others, they having placed ladders against the house, and were climbing up to the windows. Instead of this little Christian child of God screaming out, as most grown people would have done, she clasped her hands above her head and prayed more earnestly than ever before. Calling upon her maker to protect that almost defenseless home from the cruel savage foe. Again looking up she saw the window partially open. Instead of going, according to habit, and kissing her mother good night, she hastened to her father, and told him what she had seen. He, of course, was inclined to make light of it and treat it as imagination. He started to the window, but she held him back, and begged him not to go, as he would be killed, saying, "Father, I am not excited. I know what I saw." He then saw the open window and the ladder, and knew there was no mistake. He and his little sons got their guns and closed and barricaded the doors and windows as best they could. Naturally, they sat up the remainder of the night.

The next morning every thing seemed quiet, but after cautiously coming out they discovered three mules, four or five negroes and a lot of provisions were missing. These things the troops learned on their arrival at the Braiden place. The troops at once hastened on. At noon they neared Oak Creek, which is east and south of Peace Creek. Here they halted in the pine timber to consult as to what was best to do.

Seeing a smoke across the creek or river and there being an open prairie between the creek and the troops, they decided to divide into three squads, one going to the right, one to the left and one straight ahead. Then on they rushed. Strange to say, the Indians never seemed to have heard them until they
were right among them, shooting and yelling. The Indians, instead of putting up some show of fight, began jumping into the creek to save themselves, but out of eleven Indians ten were killed. The negroes and mules were secured and returned to Mr. Braiden, and others to whom they belonged.

One Indian escaped, but a little later was shot and captured. He confessed that he was one of the party who went to the Braiden home. On being asked why they did not massacre the family, he shook his head and said: "No killie Piganinnee when she talk to the Great Spirit. Good Spirit, same to red man as to white man."

On returning some time after to the place where the ten Indians had been killed, it developed that the members of the tribe had buried them and put poles around the graves. Also a small copy of the New Testament was placed on the graves, showing that savages though they were, they still had faith in the Word of God.