Profile of Capt. John Parker

Spessard Stone

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/sunlandtribune

Recommended Citation
Available at: http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/sunlandtribune/vol17/iss1/5

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Sunland Tribune by an authorized editor of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact scholarcommons@usf.edu.
PROFILE OF CAPT. JOHN PARKER

By SPESSARD STONE

Capt. John Parker, a pioneer settler of South Florida, was an Indian fighter, cattleman, and civic leader.

John Parker was born October 16, 1818 in Sampson County, North Carolina. With his parents, Luke and Sophia Parker, he moved about 1831 to that part of Alachua County, Florida, which on February 4, 1832 became Columbia County.

During the Second Seminole War, John Parker served as a private from May 22, 1836 to June 5, 1837 in the companies of Captains Martin, Reed, and Niblack. He also served as a sergeant in Capt. Brown’s Company from June 16, 1837 to December 18, 1837.

In Columbia County on December 12, 1839, he married Mrs. Jane Elizabeth (Smiley) Hooker, widow of Stephen Caswell Hooker (1808-1837). By the marriage John became the stepfather of William John and Stephen Poleman Hooker, for whom he was appointed guardian on August 12, 1850.

Under provisions of the Armed Occupation Act of August 1842, John Parker received permit number 651 for 160 acres in Simmons Hammock (Seffner) in Hillsborough County, Florida and moved there in 1843. The Parker family was listed in the Simmons Hammock Settlement in the 1850 census.

John was a cattleman, but he also held several offices of public trust in Hillsborough County. In 1845 he was elected as sheriff and also acted as ex-officio tax collector. He was a justice of the peace for several terms. On November 3, 1847 he was selected for a two-year term and qualified November 30. Again chosen on May 29, 1849, he qualified on November 19, 1849. His final term of selection was May 25, 1853. On October 24, 1849 he was elected to the Board of County Commissioners for a term of two years and qualified November 19, 1849.

On July 17, 1849 Captain George S. Payne and Dempsey Whidden were killed and Mr. and Mrs. William McCullough were wounded by a party of Seminoles at the
IN THE NAME AND BY THE AUTHORITY
OF THE
State of Florida.

TO ALL TO WHOM THESE PRESENTS MAY COME-GREETING:

Whereas, John Parker

has been

elected

according to the Constitution and Laws of this State, to be

Lieutenant Colonel of the Twentieth Regiment

of Florida militia

on the 17th day of May, 1838

to continue during good behavior, as well his

office and his

commission.

Wherefore, I, John Parker,

Lieutenant Colonel

of the Twentieth Regiment, Florida militia

In Testimony Whereof, the Governor of said State

has signed this Commission, and I, the Secretary of State, to be affixed thereof, at the

City of Tallahassee, on the 17th day of June, A.D. 1838, and of the Independence of the United States the

54th year.

By the Governor:

Samuel M. Hays

Secretary of State

In Testimony Whereof, I, Samuel M. Hays,

Secretary of State

do hereby certify, according to the

Constitution of this State, that I am duly qualified, according to the

Constitution of this State, to discharge the duties of which I have been duly elected,

the Constitution of this State, and of the United States.

John Parker

Samuel M. Hays
Kennedy-Darling trading post on the banks of the Charlo-Popka-Hatchee-Chee (Little Trout Eating Creek), which became later known as Payne’s Creek. The post was located about one-half mile south where Fort Chokonikla was afterwards established on October 26, 1849, southeast of present day Bowling Green.

F. C. M. Boggess in his autobiography, A Veteran of Four Wars, related his version of the attack and John Parker’s reaction to it:

“A man by the name of Payne opened up a store to trade with the Indians. He had employed Dempsey Whitton (sic) and had employed Win. McCullough and wife to keep house and cook for him.

"The Indians came in and began to drink and Payne refused to let them have any more whiskey. While at supper they shot a volley killing Payne and Whitton (sic), McCullough sprang for his shotgun and he and his wife left. Mrs. McCullough was wounded by the Indians while running and McCullough would urge her to go ahead. She had a baby one-year-old to carry as McCullough had to fight the Indians back and then run up to his wife. The Indians were too cowardly to rush on him and when he could see one he pointed his gun and the Indian would jump behind a tree. They followed him some miles and went back to rob and burn the store.

"McCullough and wife had to travel fifty miles with nothing to eat except birds without salt. He had to carry the baby and gun and lead his wife. The whole country fled to forts and a party went and took up Payne and Whidden's bones and buried them. A tombstone now marks the site of the store and remains of Payne and Whidden. Mrs. McCullough soon recovered.

"Capt. John Parker, who had been all through the seven years' war with the Seminoles from 1835 to 1842, at once began to recruit a company to fight the Indians at his own expense. He mounted and equipped a company and began to scout for the Indians. There is no question but his prompt action in enlisting and equipping a company and hunting the Indians prevented a general outbreak and a long and bloody war.

"Captain Parker was a great Indian fighter and he was always among the first to respond if any fighting was to be done and he has led several detachments of volunteers to the relief of the whites that were penned up in houses or forts."

A deposition given on August 11, 1849 by the McCulloughs at Tampa differed slightly from Boggess' account. It had the Indians, four in number, had falsely pretended to want to trade skins which were across the Peas Creek (Peace River). No mention was made of a demand for whiskey. The attack at supper had also resulted in Mr. McCullough's being wounded in the left shoulder. (McCullough's wife, Mary Ann, was a sister of Dempsey Whidden.)

Billy Bowlegs and Sam Jones, Seminole chiefs, did not want a war. On October 18, 1849 they surrendered three of the murderers to General Twiggs. A fourth had attempted to escape and was killed; his severed hand was turned over to the general as evidence. A fifth had escaped but was being pursued. (An earlier attack had occurred on July 13 1849 near Fort Pierce by the band.)

During the Third Seminole War, John Parker served as first lieutenant from January 3, 1856 to August 20, 1856 in Capt. William B. Hooker's Company, Florida.
Mounted Volunteers. He was enlisted at Fort Meade but was on detached service at Fort Green for most of his tour. At Manatee on October 7, 1856, he enlisted as a private in Lt. Whitaker’s Detachment, and was, subsequently, on November 18, 1856 elected as captain of the company, thereafter known as Capt. John Parker’s Company. He was mustered out at Tampa on December 17, 1856.

Capt. Parker was an early cattle king of this area. In Hillsborough County on April 12, 1852, he registered his brand: swallowfork in one ear, undersquare in the other, brand "JP." On December 23, 1854 in Hillsborough county, he registered: staplefork in one ear, crop and split in the other, "SS." About 1856 he moved to Manatee County and settled in the area of present-day Ona. In Manatee County on May 28, 1860, he registered: crop and two splits in one ear, swallowfork and underbit in the other. In 1855 he had 1,700 head of cattle; 4,000 head in 1861; and 1,000 head in 1866.

In Manatee County Capt. Parker took an active interest in political affairs. On January 10, 1859 John Parker, John Platt, and Joab Griffin were appointed road commissioners and ordered to build a road from Manatee Village to Horse Creek. On November 22, 1859 John Parker was selected as a justice of the peace for a two-year term and qualified February 4, 1860. In April of 1859, he, Daniel Carlton, and Enoch Daniels were appointed trustees of Manatee County School District No. 3. Capt. Parker represented Manatee County in the Fla. House of Representatives in 1860 and 1861. On May 77 1860 he was elected lieutenant colonel of the 20th Regiment of Florida Militia and was commissioned by Governor Perry on June 11, 1860. On February 9, 1863 the Board of County Commissioners appointed John Parker and five others as a committee to buy and dispense provisions to the wives and children that were struggling to get by during the time the heads of households were away in the war.

During the Civil War, Capt. Parker had three members of his family to serve in the Confederate cause. His oldest son, Lewis H. Parker, had enlisted in April 1862 in Co. E, 7th Fla. Infantry and served until war’s end. William John Hooker and Stephen Poleman Hooker, his stepsons, both enlisted as privates in Co. E, 7th Fla. Infantry in April 1862. Stephen (who was married to Sallie Carlton) died January 7, 1863 at Morristown, Tennessee. William (who was married to Charlotte Albritton) was promoted to 2nd lieutenant on November 28, 1863 and was later killed in battle.

After the war, John Parker settled at Homeland in Polk County. In the 1870’s he began disposing of his cattle. During the decade, he sold 3,000 head to his sons, Thomas 0. and Jasper N. Parker, and 2,000 head to his brother, Streaky Parker.

Tradition has that Capt. John Parker died via poisoning of a drink of liquor that he had with someone at a camp meeting near Bartow. He died on November 10, 1881 at the home of P Dzianlynski at Fort Meade and was buried at Homeland Cemetery. He had been a member of Bartow Lodge No. 9, F. & A. M. and the Methodist Church. Jane Parker, who was born on April 9, 1809, died on May 1, 1891 at the home of her son, Lewis H. Parker, at Joshua Creek and was buried at Joshua Creek Cemetery.

Capt. and Mrs. John Parker had the following children:

1. Martha J. Parker, born September 22, 1840; died November 17, 1843.
2. Lewis Henry Parker, born May 26, 1842; died March 4, 1901; married on February 1, 1866, Lydia Elvira Starnes.

3. Louisa Sophia Parker, born June 14, 1844; died October 16, 1906; married on February 5, 1866, Dr. Alexander Smoot Johnston.

4. Thomas Owen Parker, born May 20, 1846; died May 11, 1918; married on January 2, 1870, Sarah Louisa Blount.

5. John M. H. "Jack" Parker, born May 28, 1848; died December 28, 1868.

6. Jasper Newton Parker, born April 13, 1851; died August 27, 1896; married on July 8, 1869, Rhoda Jarrett Crum.

Special reference: Kyle S. VanLandingham and Virginia Westergard, *Parker & Blount in Florida*; also *Roster of Commissioned Officers*.

This article originally appeared in the Wauchula *Herald-Advocate*, June 9, 1988.