

Jackson County Civil War History

When the Civil War history of Chipola Country is mentioned, the conversation usually dwells on the Battle of Marianna and the men that fought it. While the battle is certainly of great importance to our rich heritage, there were many great men from our area that served the Southern cause with-out ever firing a shot. Instead of Chipola Country's history for the years 1861-1865 from a military standpoint, let us mention the "unsung heroes" of our past, the civil and politicians of Chipola Country.

The tension between North and South had been building for many years over the slavery issue. Several compromises postponed actual conflict for a time, but the election of Abraham Lincoln as president in 1860 was the spark that actually touched off the secession from the Union of South Carolina in December 1860. Florida called for delegates to meet in Tallahassee on March 3rd 1861, to decide whether or not to secede. The delegates that were chosen to attend from Chipola Country were: S.S. Alderman, Joseph A. Collier, Adam McNealy and James L.G. Baker of Jackson County, Simmons Baker of Calhoun and W.S. Gregory for Liberty County. On January 7th 1861, a committee was chosen to write a secession ordinance to be submitted. Simmons Baker of Calhoun County was appointed to represent the Chiploa Country in writing the ordinance. The ordinance was written and placed before the entire body of delegates for a vote on January 10th 1861. It passed 62 yes to seven no. Four of Chipola Country's delegates voted yes, but James Baker of Jackson County and W.S. Gregory of Liberty County voted no. Florida had become the second State to secede, with Chipola Country's delegates playing a major role in the decision.

War broke out three months later and the people of Chipola Country responded to the call of arms magnificently. Most of the men in the area went off to war, leaving Chipola Country in the hands of the very young and the very old. But the Chipola Country resident who became the most famous during the war didn't march off to battle.

Chipola Country's own John Milton was elected Governor in November 1861. Governor Milton faced the impossible task of guarding almost 2000 miles of coastline from a strong Union Navy with practically no Navy of his own. Also, protecting the interior of the state became harder each passing month as more and more of Florida's troops were sent North to fill the dwindling Confederate ranks in the Armies of Virginia and Tennessee.

As the years 1862 to 1864 went by, things became steadily worse for Governor Milton. The Yankees captured Jacksonville, Pensacola and Tampa. Then Apalachicola, St. Marks and St. Augustine fell. But in 1864 and early 1865 Governor Milton's Florida troops stopped the Federal Army dead in it's tracks at Olustee, Marianna and Natural Bridge. Although these Confederate Victories saved Tallahassee from being captured, Governor Milton knew that it was only a matter of time before the Confederacy was starved into submission. Returning to his home near Marianna, Governor Milton shot

himself just a few days before General Lee's surrender to prevent the Yankees from capturing him, and possible executing him as a traitor to the northern states.

The Civil War had ended. Not only did the people of Chipola Country give Florida their best men as soldiers for the war, Chipola Country had given the State a great man to steer a course for Florida through the most tragic War in our history.