



Emma Sansom: A Very Brave 15-Year-Old

By Norman Dasinger, Jr., May 15, 2020
blueandgrayeducation.org



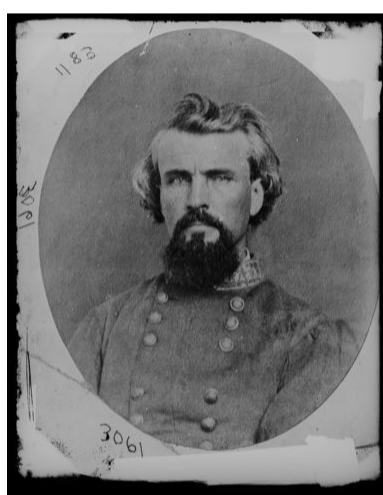
Emma Sansom guides General Forrest, detail of bronze map on lawn of Alabama Department of Archives and History | alabama.gov

In 1863, Emma Sansom and her family lived near Gadsden, Alabama. On the morning of May 2, almost 2,000 Union soldiers under the command of Col. Abel Streight arrived at the Sansom farm with the intent of crossing nearby Black Creek and moving into Gadsden. They had been on a mounted infantry raid all the way across Alabama since April 28. Their goal was to reach Rome, Georgia, and destroy military installations and parts of the railroad in or near that town.

Emma was small, slender, round faced, with auburn hair and dark blue eyes. Her family had moved to Gadsden in 1852 from Georgia. Her father was dead, but living in the house with Emma that day were her mother Levina, her sister Jennie, a neighbor girl Mary, and an enslaved girl, Fannie. Her brothers were serving in the Confederate Army.

Once the Yankees arrived, they began to search the house for food and guns. They demanded the girls give them some water and then posted a guard at the house. Soon, all the troopers made their way to a nearby bridge over Black Creek. This bridge was located approximately 200 yards from the Sansom home

Pursuing Confederate cavalry commanded by Gen. Nathan Bedford Forrest shortly arrived. Forrest asked if there was an alternate crossing of Black Creek, since Streight had posted a guard and had partially burned the only bridge. Emma revealed the existence of a little-known cattle ford on their property. By utilizing this ford, Forrest could flank the Yankees at the bridge and threaten the bulk of their command then in Gadsden. Emma told General Forrest she would personally escort him to the site. Emma's mother was outraged and refused to give her permission. The general assured Levina that he would take care of her daughter and no harm would become her.



Gen. Nathan Bedford Forrest | LOC



Emma Sansom | Alabama Department of Archives and History

But all the time, young Emma had moved out of the house and into the yard to prepare to assist Forrest. She was going no matter what her mother said!

Emma fulfilled her mission, and the Confederates chased the Federal rear guard into Gadsden, and Streight and his command had to retreat quickly. Eventually, Forrest and 300 of his calvary would capture all of Streight's nearly 2,000 men near Cedar Bluff, Alabama, the next day.

Emma would marry Christopher Johnson in 1864. She and her husband and their children moved to Texas in 1876. Emma died in 1900 and is buried in Upshur County, Texas.

On October 2-4, 2020, the Blue and Gray Education Society will present a tour of the Forrest Streight Raid, All's Fair in War, Streight's Raid and Forrest's Bluff, guided by world-renowned Forrest expert Brian S. Wills, that will include a visit to the exact location of this secret crossing site. Please go [here](#) to sign up for this unique tour.



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