

Scarlet Fever Epidemic

This was a period of misfortune for Jacksonville, as a severe epidemic of scarlet fever was raging in the town when the fire occurred. There were two versions as to how the fever started here. One is that the infection was introduced by means of a letter written by a lady while holding a baby sick with scarlet fever in her lap. The other is that the nurse one day took little Ally Dell, daughter of Philip Dell, down to the boat yard and it is supposed that the child played with sailors from a vessel lying at the wharf and on which there was a case of scarlet fever. In a few days she was taken desperately ill. Mrs. Mary Turknnett nursed this child and it died in her lap. This was in February, 1854. The attending physician diagnosed the case simply as one of fever, but when the little corpse was prepared for burial, scarlet fever symptoms were noticed in the peeling skin. Mrs. Turknnett shrouded the body, at that time wearing a black woolen skirt. When she returned to her home she hung the skirt up in a closet and did not wear it again for nearly a month. Then she wore it, and in a few days scarlet fever broke out in the family.^b

The disease spread through the town and the type was most malignant. Numbers of persons died, the Turknnett family in particular being afflicted, five grown sons dying within a space of eight days, April 2 to 10, two of them on the same day and were buried from the same bier.^c

Yellow Fever Quarantine

Thus twice had Jacksonville suffered from diseases introduced from outside sources, so when the yellow fever broke out in Savannah in the summer of 1854, the citizens determined to keep it from coming to this place at all hazards. The authorities prohibited the Savannah steamers stopping or even passing by on their way up the river, as it was thought that the yellow fever might be introduced in that way. Captain Nick King, of the Savannah steamer, carried the mail, and he laughed at the proclamation of the citizens prohibiting the passage of steamers by Jacksonville, and passed by heedless of the warning. A party of citizens then got an old condemned cannon, took it to the river bank at the foot of Catherine Street, and loaded it with a 32-pound shot.