

## The Story of Jonathan Dickinson

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Jonathan Dickinson, an English planter from Jamaica, took passage with his wife and child on the ship *Reformation* in 1696. The *Reformation* was part of a convoy headed for Philadelphia in the colony of Pennsylvania. It never got there. On September 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> a terrible storm out of the northeast broke up the convoy. The *Reformation* ran aground on the coast of Florida near today's Jupiter Inlet. Its twenty-five crewmembers and passengers made it safely to shore. But they would not be safe for very long. Dickinson helped the commander of the *Reformation*, Joseph Kirle, gather together provisions and build shelter. The other survivors consisted of the ship's crew (six men), the master's boy, a slave named Ben who belonged to Captain Kirle, Dickinson's wife Mary, their baby boy, their relative Benjamin Allen, another passenger named Robert Barrow (a Quaker preacher), and ten slaves belonging to Dickinson (four men, a boy, and five woman). There was also an Indian girl.

These people were all in a great deal of trouble. They were deep in the Indian territory of Florida and far from help. The nearest European settlement, the Spanish town of St. Augustine, was 230 miles away on foot! And the Indians living around Jupiter Inlet, a people known as the Jobe (pronounced HOBE), were not happy to see strangers in their land. They seized all the survivors, stripped them of their cloths, and took everything else that washed ashore from the wreck. "Nickaleer, Nickaleer" they kept shouting out ("Englishmen! Englishmen!"). The survivors of the *Reformation* were terrified the Indians would kill them. They decided to pose as Spaniards. Solomon Cresson, a sailor who could speak Spanish, told the Indians that the *Reformation* was not an English ship. They were all Spanish settlers, he said, and wanted to go to St. Augustine. This made some difference. The Indians did not completely believe Cresson, but they did not want any trouble from the Spanish soldiers and settlers living in St. Augustine. They decided not to harm the survivors and told them they should go south toward Havana, Cuba, to find help. This the passengers would not do. They told the Indians they needed to go north and find St. Augustine. The Indians did not seem pleased with this. Eventually, though, they let the captives go.

So began an ordeal that would go on for 49 days (from September 28<sup>th</sup> until November 15<sup>th</sup>) as Dickinson and the others struggled up Florida's east coast. They managed to salvage a boat from the *Reformation*. It leaked, but could hold five or six people. Part of the group—the injured, the weak, and those who knew how to sail or paddle—went by boat along the coast. The others walked along the beach within sight of the boat. It was a hot Florida September and everyone grew weak from thirst. Sometimes the Indians would hold one or two people back, and the group began to break up into different parties.

For almost a month, they traveled like this, passing into the lands of another Indian people, the Ais (pronounced Ah-EES), and stopping when they could at Indian towns. But whenever they reached an Indian town, the people accused them of being “Nickaleers” and would help them only a little. The Jobe had taken most of the group’s cloths. The men had only breeches and bits of sailcloth for shirts. The women had some of their clothing from the ship, and some deerskins they received from the wife of an Indian chief. By late October, as the weather was becoming chilly, exposure to cold became a problem. At night they slept in the open, with no coats or blankets to keep warm, and no fire if it rained. It was hard to find food and fresh water, and everyone grew thin and sick. The land, too, changed. They had to walk barefoot through marshes and swamps.

Week after week, they pushed on, the sick and injured taken by boat, the rest on foot. One day they passed the wreck of another ship. The Ais had taken the survivors— six men and a woman—as prisoners. They would not release them because they were “English”—enemies. So, more than ever, the survivors of the *Reformation* had to convince all the Indians they were Spaniards. Otherwise they too might face death.

The long journey was especially hard on the women and children. On November 13<sup>th</sup>, still two days away from safety in St. Augustine, people began to die. Benjamin Allen, a relative of Dickinson’s, collapsed with fever and cold. Two male slaves, Jack and Cesar, and a woman slave, Quenza, died from exposure. Hagar, another of the woman among the slaves, carried the dead body of her young son until he could be buried. Dickinson’s own wife, Mary, spent part of the journey trying to keep others on their feet, but she also had to carry and protect their baby boy. By the time the group finally stumbled into St. Augustine on November 15<sup>th</sup>, they were close to dying.

All of this Dickinson later wrote down. His book *God’s Protecting Providence* was published in 1699. It is one of the first “true adventure” stories of American history and today is usually known as “Jonathan Dickinson’s Journal.”

#### Sources:

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See the entire “Journal” online (1759 edition)

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Excerpts from “Jonathan Dickinson’s Journal”