

LARCENA PENNINGTON PAGE SAGA.

Larcena Pennington was born on 10 January 1837 in Nashville Tennessee to Elias and Julia Pennington. She had seven sisters and four brothers. The family had been living in Texas and after her mother died, her father decided to move the family to California. While traveling west with a wagon train in 1857, Larcena became ill with mountain fever and the family had to leave the train at Fort Buchanan. On December 12, 1859, when Larcena was 22, she married John Hempstead Page who was managing the lumber operation in Madera Canyon for Bill Kirkland. Larcena was also employed by Kirkland as a private teacher for his ten-year-old ward, Mercedes Sais Quiroz. After the wedding, Larcena remained in Tucson while Page still lived at Canoa Ranch (owned by Kirkland) so he could be closer to the lumber operation (13 miles). After about 11 weeks, Page finally got permission to move Larcena to Canoa Ranch and Mercedes moved with her. When Larcena became ill with a possible recurrence of malaria, it was decided that the higher elevation of Madera Canyon might help in her recovery. The plan was to build a cabin so they could live close to the lumber mill that was located near the “Big Rock“(near the current location of the Madera Kubo Gift Shop).

In March of 1860, Larcena and Mercedes accompanied Page and William Randall (Page’s partner) to Madera Canyon and they set up camp about two miles down the canyon from the mill. The next morning, after Page left for the lumber camp and Randall went to hunt for deer, five Apaches looted the camp and took Larcena and Mercedes prisoner and headed toward the Catalina Mountains. Larcena attempted to leave a trail by tearing off bits of cloth from her dress and bending twigs until the Apaches noticed what she was doing. Just before nightfall when they reached the area that would become Helvetia, the Apaches saw that they were being followed and tried to hurry. When Larcena was unable to keep up, they forced her to remove her skirt, corset and shoes. She was struck in the back with a lance and fell down the side of the hill. The Apaches followed, thrusting their lances at her and striking her with rocks that knocked her out. Thinking her dead, they dragged her behind a tree and left her for dead. When she heard the rescue party came by shortly thereafter, she was too weak to call out. One of the Apaches had put on Larcena’s shoes and the rescuers followed his trail until they lost it on the other side of the Catalina Mountains. After three days Larcena, who was covered with bruises and cut with 11 lance wounds, regained consciousness and started her incredible journey back to her camp. She crawled during the day and tried to rest at night by crouching on her hands and knees because of the wounds in her back. She subsisted on seeds and other edible vegetation she found. It took her about 12 days to work her way back to her old campsite where she found some flour and coffee that had been spilled during the looting of her camp. She dined on bread and coffee and slept at the camp overnight before heading for the lumber camp the next morning. Her husband was in Tucson organizing another search party to look for his wife when he got the news of her survival, 16 days after her capture.



Larcena Pennington Page
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Larcena was rushed to Tucson where she was treated by Dr. C. B. Hughes. Over the next few

months, she made a slow but steady recovery. Mercedes was found in the Pinal Apache camp at Arivaipa. Mercedes was returned unharmed in exchange for the freedom of some Pinal Apaches who were being held at Fort Buchanan. Larcena was pregnant with her first daughter when Apaches killed her husband in 1861. During the next few years, Apaches killed her father and two brothers and two sisters died of illnesses. When the rest of her siblings decided to move back to Texas, Larcena decided to remain in Tucson. She married William Fisher Scott in August 1870 and they had two children, a son and a daughter. Larcena died 31 March 1913.

Summarized by T. Johnson from "The Nature of Madera Canyon" by Douglas Moore, the 31 October issue of the Arizona Daily Star and various web sites. Article updated January 2010. Photo provided through the courtesy of the Arizona Historical Society.
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