



BLUE AND GRAY DISPATCH

The Paul Revere of the South—John Wisdom—and the Forrest Streight Raid

By Norman Dasinger, Jr., April 10, 2020

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John Henry Wisdom, famous for his Civil War ride to save his mother—and the citizens of Rome, Georgia



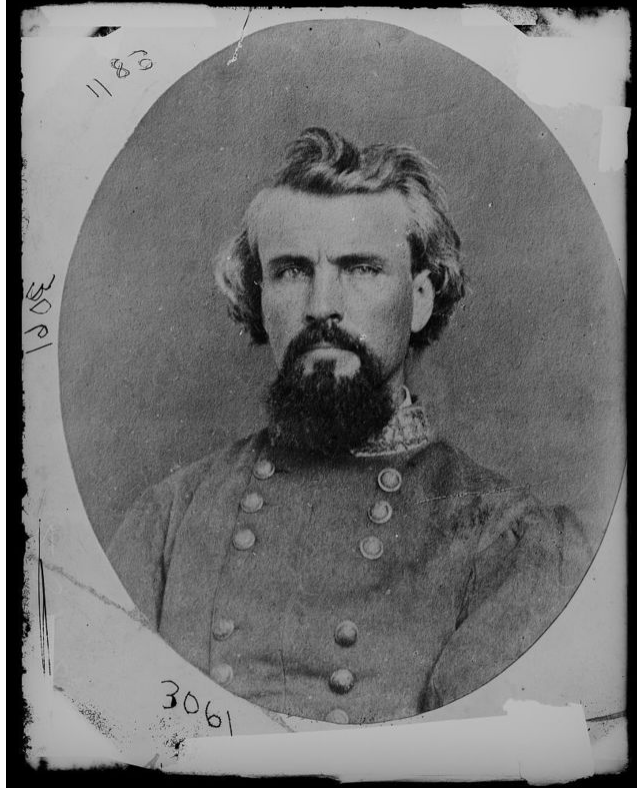
John Wisdom's silver, given to him by the people of Rome in appreciation of his courageous ride

John Wisdom is considered one of the best-known local heroes of the Civil War in northeastern Alabama.

At 3 o'clock on the afternoon of May 2, 1863, John finished his work day after delivering corn to a mill on the south side of the Coosa River on the opposite bank from the city of Gadsden. The Wisdom family operated a ferry crossing of the river near what is today City Hall. John arrived to learn that Yankee Col. Abel D. Streight and over 2,000 of his mounted soldiers had just exited Gadsden. Streight's men had done minimal damage to the town but did vandalize the Wisdom family ferry.



Col. Abel D. Streight | LOC

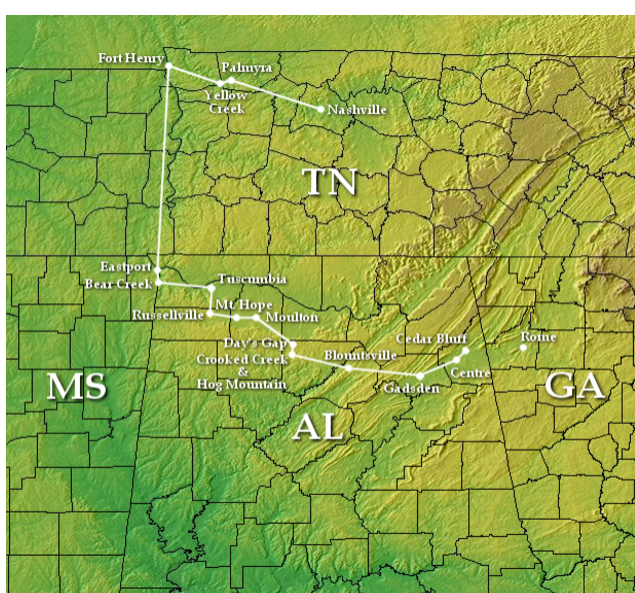


Gen. Nathan Forrest | LOC

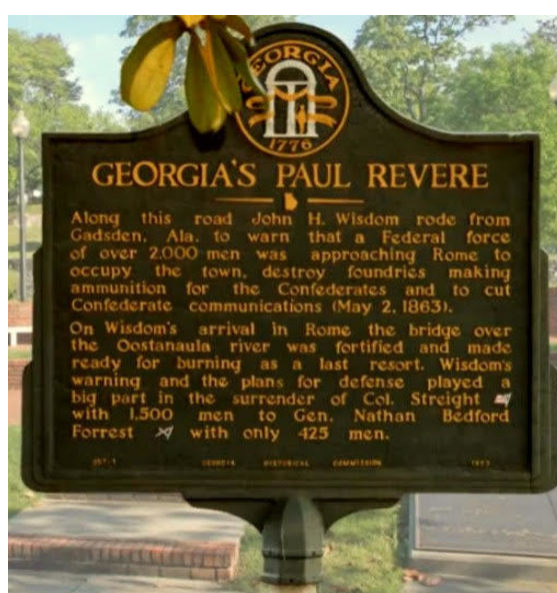
John yelled to a friend across the river asking as to the intended destination of the Yankees and was told that Streight was headed for Rome, Georgia, with the objective of burning all of the war-related industries located there. John's mother lived in Rome and he felt she might be in danger! So, he decided to travel from Gadsden to Rome—67 miles—to warn the citizens of the town and save his mother.

He did not know, however, that Confederate Gen. Nathan B. Forrest and almost 400 of his best cavalry were hot on Streight's trail.

John began his journey using his one-horse delivery buggy until the horse gave out at Gnatville, 22 miles east of Gadsden. He then borrowed a lame pony from a Mrs. Hanks and made the 5 miles into Goshen (near present-day Piedmont, Alabama). Simpson Johnson then gave John a fresh horse and even rode with him for 11 miles to the Rev. Joel Weems home near Spring Garden, Alabama. Next, he saddled a mule for the 11-mile trip into Cave Spring, Georgia. There, John Baker loaned him a horse and finally 6 miles from Rome a man named Jones provided the last mount he needed to enter the city where he found most everyone asleep.



Streight Raid Route | Wikipedia



Historical sign, Rome, Georgia

Arriving in Rome around midnight, he alerted the militia commander, George Black, of the impending Yankee raiders. Then, exhausted, he found his mother's house near the Desoto Hotel on Broad Street, woke her up, and then he went to bed as the citizens hurriedly prepared for the defense of their town. All in all, John rode 67 miles in nine hours and used six different animals.

In part, some due to John's Ride, Streight and all his men were captured on May 3 by Forrest's troopers near Cedar Bluff, Alabama.

BGES will host a [tour of the Forrest Streight Raid](#) in June. This tour will include sites associated with John Wisdom. Brian S. Wills, professor at Kennesaw State University, and Norman Dasinger, Jr., will be the tour leaders. Stories associated with this compelling cavalry raid abound. Come along if you can!

All photos courtesy of Rome Area History Center collection in Rome, Georgia, unless otherwise indicated.



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