



Photouring Florida

By HAMPTON DUNN



INDIAN CHIEF'S HEAD DRESS WAS LIGHTHOUSE REFLECTOR

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PONCE INLET --- The colorful history of the Ponce de Leon Lighthouse dates back to the territorial days of Florida and is tied in closely with the events of the Seminole Indian War.

One of the yarns told about the light concerns the fearless Indian leader Coacoochee, better known as "Wildcat," whose little daughter was held for ransom by white soldiers which led to his capture.

The first lighthouse had been completed in 1835 at the outbreak of the Indian War. Nature (a gale) and the red men combined to attack the tower and it eventually collapsed. The story goes that Wildcat utilized one of the lighthouse reflectors as a head dress!

The tall (168 feet) red brick conical tower today watches over Ponce de Leon Inlet near New Smyrna and guards the Atlantic Ocean and the Halifax River.

The New Smyrna area had become a flourishing sugar plantation area by the time Florida became property of the U.S. The planters and sea captains asked Congress for a lighthouse. The petition, dated March 30, 1830, "Respectfully sheweth that we are suffering considerable privations, and difficulties, in the trade to this quarter in consequence of there being no Light House..."

After the first Light House was destroyed, there was no immediate replacement. Late in the 1870s, after a series of shipwrecks in the area, agitation again started for a lighthouse and the present structure was built, completed in 1887. It underwent renovation in 1907.

