

# Cunningham and Others Killed by Shawnee

## CUNNINGHAM

### THE ACCOUNT OF THE INDIAN RAIDS

The story of Rebecca Jane [Moore] Baker's family having all been killed in an Indian raid in Virginia has been handed down in my family and as a child I assumed the story was about her immediate family the Moore's but when I started researching I found that it was not the Moore family that had been killed but the Cunningham family which, included her grandparents, uncles and aunts and many cousins. Rebecca Jane's mother had survived simply because by the time of the raids she had married Hugh Allen & they were living in another nearby district that was not attacked.

The following story recounts the Indian Raids during which the Cunningham's were among those killed, James' three sons, Hugh, Jacob, Isaac, and some of his grandchildren were killed in the first raid. It is believed that James and Margaret were killed during the second Indian Raid.

Most of the story is from the *"Weekender" of Lexington, Virginia* appearing December 6, 1997. The Weekender story came to me by piecemeal but I believe that it is complete but may be mixed with another account. I reprint the story with permission of the editor of the Weekender, they did not have a copy of the story from which I could give a complete and accurate reproduction.

**"Rockbridge County, Va., what I call "God's Country" is a serene area consisting of several small cities and towns with many hamlets scattered here and there. But, it was not always calm and peaceful, for in the early 1700's Rockbridge County was in the budding stages of development and many Indians lived there. The true story of the "Kerrs Creek Massacre"**



James

## Cunningham

1695 - 1759

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When James Cunningham was born in 1695 in Donegal, Donegal, Ireland, his father, Alexander, was 32 and his mother, Rebecca, was 27. He married Margaret Ann "Mattie" Graves in 1718. They had 12 children in 44 years. He died in 1759 in Augusta, Virginia, at the age of 64, and was buried in Rockbridge, Virginia.

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Contributed by Janet Winans

**(pronounced Carr) has been handed down through the generations. Although it's been over two hundred years ago many folks in Rockbridge County still talk about it as if it happened yesterday.**

**From an entry in the old family Bible of J. T. McKee's grandfather, as follows: His wife Jennie died July 17th, 1763. She was killed in the first invasion. The second visitation of the savages was a little more than two years after the first, on the tenth of October, 1765.**

**The number of Indians in the first visit was twenty-seven, as counted by Robert Irvine, who was on a bluff near the road at the head of the creek. Both invasions were of the Shawnee tribe, who, most of all the savages, harassed the whites. The first band of these blood-thirsty warriors who visited Rockbridge in 1763, I think I have satisfactorily ascertained, were a part of a much larger company who had been on a war expedition against the Cherokees or Catawbas of the South, and were then on their return to their towns north of the Ohio River. They came up byway of the Sweet Springs and Jackson's River. Some knowledge of their approach had been obtained, and they were met by a company of men under the command of Capt. Moffit, at or near the mouth of Falling Spring Valley Allegheny County.**

**The Indians, who were aware of the approach of the whites, had posted themselves in ambush, behind the comb of a ridge along which Moffit's men were moving, and suddenly their whole force opened fire from their concealed position. The whites were taken by surprise, thrown into confusion and a total defeat followed. A number of men were slain, amongst whom was James Sitlington of Bath County, an uncle of the families of that name, at present living in that county. He was a recent immigrant from Ireland, and was highly**

**esteemed and useful, on account of his intelligence and exemplary life. After the rout, all of the Indians went some miles down Jackson's River, and came up the valley of the Cowpasture.**

**On the plantation owned by Colonel Thomas Sitlington, there lived a black-smith by the name of Daugherty. He and his wife barely made their escape to the mountains with their two children. The house and shop were burned, with all their contents, except a flax hackle, which the Indians took out of the house and laid on a stump. Daugherty removed to the South, and in after years rose to considerable distinction.**

**In one of General Jackson's military reports, he is favorably mentioned as the "Valuable General Daugherty." After the burning of his house, the Indians came up on the river where Old Millboro now stands and where they divided their company, the larger part setting out for the Ohio River, and the smaller one of twenty-seven turning their faces for the destruction of the peaceful settlement or Kerr's Creek.**

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### **Writer Tells Of Origins Of Kerrs Creek Massacre Story**

**When delving into the mid-1700s, especially on the Virginia frontier, one becomes accustomed to unanswered questions. People were too busy trying to**

**survive to keep records. So many times, the researcher must admit there's just no way to resolve the unknown.**

**But in looking back to the Kerr's Creek Massacre, more than one crucial question makes this a puzzle with numerous missing pieces.**

**Historians in the late 1800s and early 1900s, apparently the first time anyone thought to confine the legends to paper, couldn't be certain of the dates of the two Indian raids.**

**Both the Rev. Samuel Brown (possibly the son of Mary Moore Brown who spent three years in captivity after her family was killed in Southwest Virginia) and Rockbridge County History author Oren Morton disagree.**

**Possible dates are Oct. 10, 1759, for the first raid and Sunday, July 17, 1763, for the second raid, or the 1763 date for the first raid and October 1764 or 1765 for the second raid, or even a third raid.**

**For everyone, the 1763 date seems agreeable for the Big Spring massacre story. But Brown says the McKee family's tragedy occurred in conjunction with the big massacre at the spring, while others say the McKee incident came at the end of the first (or last) raid. Everyone agrees that the Shawnees, under Chief Cornstalk, invaded Kerrs Creek twice.**

**Looking at the dates and the scope of action, the Kerrs Creek raids possibly tie our area with all three wars in the last half of the 1700s – the French and Indian War (1756–1763), the Pontiac Conspiracy (1760–1763) and the American Revolution when the influence of the Kerrs Creek incidents incited a local militiaman to sneak into a blockhouse and assassinate the imprisoned Cornstalk in 1777.**

**While I have tried to be sensitive to the Native American's part in this story, this was a land at war in**

**the 1700s. As in all wars, political factions often take advantage of simple folks on both sides who'd rather live in peace. On both sides, the forgotten dead are the heroes.**

**So much of what has been written about that time is from legends told and retold around supper tables and fireplaces. While the facts may not all be true, the honor paid to the lives lived and lost create a legacy that reminds us where we have been and makes us think about who we are.**

## **When Blood Flowed In Kerrs Creek**

**By Deborah Sensabaugh**

**Editors note: This is the first of two parts on the early history of the Kerrs Creek area of Rockbridge County which, in the mid 1700s, was the site of two Indian raids that left many early area settlers dead.**

**They barred their doors on Kerrs Creek in 1759. What with the howling wolves and the fall leaves crunching into October, the distance between the two and three-room cabins. They primed their flintlocks and latched their shutters, straining at soft footfalls outside. A snuffling bear, a snorting buck, a painted Shawnee brave with ready tomahawk.**

**And they died on Kerrs Creek anyway. War on the frontier showed no favorites, granted no mercy.**

**The talk up and down the settlement had been of war more than crops or new babies or acres cleared. That and the families already moved eastward or south to the Carolinas where the dreaded Ohio River and its tributaries ran red with French and British blood.**

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Trouble began in 1754 when the French crept south from Detroit to Montreal. Already posted along the Mississippi to New Orleans, they had only to secure the trans-Alleghany frontier to form a barrier to all British expansion. Then, using their Indian allies, they could push Britain and her colonists into the sea.

Pawns in a game of colonial domination, the naïve Native Americans and the feisty Ulster Scotch-Irish were lured into place. The English had battled the Irish and Scots for years. With an offer of free land on the frontier, the tenacious Scotch-Irish would die defending hearth, home and British land investment.

Meanwhile, over peace pipes, cheap trade goods and watered whiskey, the French bought the Indians with promises. Help us destroy the settlements and we'll return your land. We don't want to colonize, but to build trading posts.

The French and Indian War blazed up and down the frontier.

At first, British losses stacked like cordwood in winter. Virginia Governor Robert Dinwiddie had sent a young surveyor, George Washington, to warn away the French in what is now western Pennsylvania.

In 1754, the French captured a half-finished fort at the Ohio triangle, named it Fort Duquesne (now Pittsburgh). In July, Washington surrendered his hastily constructed fort called Necessity. A year later, British General Braddock was defeated in the wilderness below Duquesne.

But in 1757, the tide turned when William Pitt took charge of the British war effort in the Colonies. For two years, his troops conquered fort by fort across the frontier. In 1759, Wolfe defeated Montcalm. By 1760 the British captured Montreal and by February 1763, the Treaty of Paris ended the French and Indian War.

**But the treaty wasn't signed soon enough to save the settlers on Kerrs Creek.**

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**When Joseph Tees, founder of Waynesboro, followed the old Indian trail toward the Alleghany Mountains, he and his sons William and Charles paused in a breathtaking valley opening at the foot of a long western ridge. Meandering in a shallow S-curve along a bold creek, the valley contained enough flat land to invite settlement. Later Francis McCown received a patent of 928 acres on Tees Creek. In 1746, he sold parcels to Hugh Martin, Robert Erwin and Samuel Norwood.**

**Other early settlers at the foot of North Mountain were the Gilmores, McKees, Hamiltons and Logans. Three Cunningham brothers arrived with their families – Hugh, James and John. The eldest, Hugh, bought a tract from Benjamin Borden in 1748 near John Carr's. He called it Big Spring after the numerous springs that gathered into a pond and created an ideal cabin site. In 1762, he sold the land to his son, Jonathan, who had married Mary McKee.**

**In the fall of 1759, the two Telford boys walked home, possibly from school. Their walk turned into a run. Breathless, they told of a naked man they saw hiding behind a tree. No one thought twice about their tale until later. Several weeks passed. The trees topping North Mountain and House Mountain bled down the hillsides in red and gold, as a party of 60 Shawnee warriors followed their chief, Cornstalk, from the Ohio. Winding through the mountains, they split outside the Greenbrier settlements. Acting friendly, the larger band worked their way down the Greenbrier, gaining the settlers' confidence before attacking and killing most of them.**

**From what is now Millboro in Bath County, 27 of the warriors slipped over Mill Mountain about two miles north of the present Midland Trail near where Interstate 64 now cuts toward Clifton Forge. A pile of stones said to be placed there by Indian warriors through the years marked the mountaintop. The stones were dozed away with the building of 64. Workers hoping to find graves or artifacts under the rock pile were disappointed.**

**Near the head of the creek atop a bluff, Robert Irvine scarcely breathed as he counted the war party on the trail.**

**At the first cabin along the creek at present day Denmark, Charles Daugherty (husband of *Rebecca Cunningham*) and his family was killed. Next was the Jacob Cunningham cabin. With Cunningham away, his wife was killed, his 10-year old daughter knocked unconscious and scalped. She later came to and survived to face the Indians a second time on Kerr's Creek.**

**Next came the home of Thomas Gilmore, the elderly Gilmore and his wife were leaving to visit a neighbor when they were killed and scalped. The rest of the Gilmores escaped.**

**Five of the ten members of the Robert Hamilton family next fell victim. By that time, the community was alerted to the danger, with residents scrambling for safety everywhere.**



**Harry Swisher, who owns the old Laird homestead that previously was the McKee farm, says the old log cabin still exists under the clapboards of a renovated 1910 farmhouse. “The logs are huge,” Swisher says, spreading his arms to illustrate early log construction. When he and his family remodeled the old house, they discovered the central log portion. With two rooms up and down, a shallow fireplace and a ladder to a loft, the cabin appeared easily fortified. A small window between the floors allows a view of the hillside behind, and Swisher says from the round top of the hill, the entire valley, with Big Spring, is visible.**

**“I remember my dad saying survivors scrambled up that hill where they could see where the Indians were going. They could hide there,” Swisher says.**

**Since the house is up a hollow where U.S. 60 now comes from Lexington, Swisher believes the old house could be the McKee home spoken of in the raid stories.**

**John and Jane, or “Jenny,” Logan McKee had six children whom they’d sent to Timber Ridge for safekeeping.**

**When the alarm sounded through the neighborhood, the McKee’s fled their home (one account says up a wooded hillside in back, agreeing with Swisher’s**

**father's story). One account says their barking dog gave them away, another said a black servant sounded the alarm with her cries of fright. Mrs. McKee could not run quickly (one account says she expected a child) and John had left the house without his gun.**

**As the Indian pursuit neared the McKee's, Jenny begged John to run on. "Otherwise, our children will have no parents."**

**It's said McKee paused, helping his wife to hide in a sink hole on the Hamilton farm. His parting words were "God bless you, Jinney." It's also said as he looked back from his race, he saw the tomahawk fell his wife.**

**With Indians almost close enough to catch him, and encouraged by his wife's sacrifice, he bounded on.**

**When the Indians gave up chasing him, McKee hid until dark when he returned to find his wife. She lay in the sink hole, having survived long enough to wrap her kerchief around her head wound. He buried her where she lay and wrote her name in the family Bible.**

**John McKee lived to rear his motherless children whose descendants were numerous along Kerrs Creek and in westward expansion.**

**Another account, published in “The McKees of Virginia and Kentucky,” related John was at a neighbors tending to some sick children. When he returned home, he found his wife killed and scalped.**

**The settlers listed in the cemetery records as killed in the first raid on Oct. 10, 1759, and possibly interred in the McKee Cemetery near Big Spring are: *Isaac Cunningham, Jacob Cunningham (son of James and Mattie), the Charles Dougherty family, four of the John Gilmore family, Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Gilmore, Gray (no first name listed), five Robert Hamilton family members, James McGee, Alexander McMurty, Robert Ramsay, James Stephenson, Thomas Thompson, Samuel Wilson and John Winyard.***

**Since most accounts stress that no captives were taken on Kerrs Creek during the first raid and many men were killed, perhaps many of the men took a stand while their families escaped.**

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**Charles Lewis of the Cowpasture raised three companies of militia (about 150 men). Charles Lewis led one company, John Dickenson and William Christian headed the other two. These three companies of militia went after the Indian warriors. They overtook the tribesmen near the head of Back Creek in Highland County. The Captains decided to attack at three points.**

**Two white scouts were sent ahead as an advance. They were ordered to shoot if the enemy realized the soldiers were nearby. The scouts came upon two braves, one leading a horse, the other holding a buck across the back of the horse. In an attempt to get the**

upper hand, the scouts fired and Christian's company charged with a yell. The other companies were still miles behind the advance group. The Indians escaped with very little loss. The militia companies caught up with the Shawnee at Straight Fork, four miles below the present West Virginia line, their campfires revealed their location. About twenty Indians were killed. The booty they were carrying was retaken and sold for \$1200.00. Thomas Young was the only white man killed, and Captain Dickenson was wounded.

Source: *The Weekender, Lexington, Virginia (December 6, 1997), p. 1, pp. 4-5.*

## **Death Stalks The Banks Of Kerrs Creek**

**By Deborah Sensabaugh**

Nearly 30 years ago, Clarence Tardy decided to clean out Big Spring, make a pond there, get rid of the overgrown marsh, let the many springs flow freely.

**“We moved 30,000 yards of mud,” recalls Tardy. “Know what the workmen brought up? Pieces of big old logs, all black where they had been burned.”**

**Tardy saved some of those pieces, all that's left of the *Cunningham* cabin the Shawnees burned in 1763.**

**As log cabins went on the frontier, Cunningham's was**

**one of the sturdiest around. Some historians refer to it as a blockhouse, big enough to afford some protection to a number of settlers.**

**Tardy surmises it sat near the edge of the spring, not where the brick Federal style house sits now.**

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**When the Treaty of Paris ended the British and French struggled for Colonial domination, the French pulled out. The British claimed all the territory east of the Mississippi except for some French Caribbean islands. As the French retreated, tribes along the Great Lakes and through the Ohio Valley watched their chances shrivel. The British long advocated colonization and the Indian nations had felt the squeeze. Scarcely had the treaty ink dried before a powerful Ottawa chief named Pontiac began uniting the tribes throughout the Ohio. Said to have been instrumental in Braddock’s defeat near the opening of the French and Indian War, Pontiac had become a brilliant strategist who realized that without a united front the Native Americans were doomed. In a short time, he’d recruited from all the tribes from Lake Superior to Mexico. Each tribe in the confederation was to choose its best warriors. In May, 1763, the warriors were to attack 14 British garrisons along the frontier. Of those 14, all but four were captured. One of the four was Detroit, Pontiac’s personal goal. That summer, war raged up and down the frontier.**

**Once again, the Shawnee Chief Cornstalk was assigned the area he knew well, the eastern Alleghanies, the Cowpasture and Jackson rivers, Botetourt, Kerrs Creek, Augusta. Small forts dotted the frontier from the French and Indian War. A confident Cornstalk knew he could take them all.**

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**As the warriors gathered supplies and weaponry and set their faces south and east, the Kerrs Creek farmers broke ground for the ’63 season. They’d rebuilt the last**

**cabins burned in 1759. Families stowed empty chairs in lofts or along walls, and realized the frontier belonged to the living. In the little cemetery overlooking the spring, mounded graves sank level with the thick grass.**

**But in many cabins, visions of death and destruction still replayed in the dark, woke children, sent shivers through the stoutest settler.**

**June greened the young crops. July scattered fireflies among the trees at the edges of farm clearings. Nights hummed with cicadas.**

**Atop North Mountain again, Cornstalk's warriors lounged beside a spring and watched the comings and goings in the valley. Some historians believe they were waiting reinforcements. The final total of warriors is estimated between 40 and 60. Someone from the settlement saw moccasin tracks in a cornfield and told everyone what he found. Next, a hunter spied the Indian encampment from the top of a hill and rushed to spread the alarm. That's when the warriors swooped toward Big Spring.**

**July 17, a Sunday, marked special meetings at the Timber Ridge Presbyterian Church. Many of the settlers had traveled there. But other accounts say the special church meeting was at *Jonathan Cunningham's* cabin. Still others say the settlers had fled to Cunninghams and were saddling horses and organizing a flight to Timber Ridge where the men carried their guns to church. No one knows for sure, but other than the McKee cabin, which could have been attacked first, the Shawnees seemed intent on the Big Spring farm.**

**William Gilmore and another man turned toward the mountains to scout for Indians. Concealed nearby, the Indians shot the two men, and swooped upon the nearly 100 men, women and children milling around. Two or three younger men advanced toward the enemy, and lost their lives immediately.**

In one account, when the Shawnees sprang from cover, Mrs. Dale grabbed a stud colt that had never been ridden and swung onto its back. Managing to balance her baby and cling to the horse, she fled the pursuing Indians. Outrunning them, she dropped her baby in a rye field and hid herself in the brush, obviously sending the horse on. Later, she returned and found the baby unharmed in the rye.

She said the terror-stricken people ran in every direction, trying to hide. The Indians chased first one, then another, killing everyone in their path. Another account says even the cattle were shot, bristling with arrows.

Mrs. Dale recounts that some people threw up their hands, entreating for mercy. The Shawnees killed most, spared some. Any man resisting was shot immediately. Some whites fled for the spring pond, hiding both in the water and in the weeds along the banks. The warriors found them, killed them and tossed the bodies in the pond.

Thomas Gilmore had died defending his family. His wife, Jenny, stood over his body, grappling with a tomahawk-wielding Indian. When a second ran up to kill her, the first threw up his hand, sparing her life for her bravery. She was led off, with her son James, and two daughters, into captivity.

Before torching the Cunningham cabin, the Shawnees killed *Jonathan Cunningham* and his wife. Cunningham had a distillery, and the Shawnees carried off all the whiskey they could find.

Margaret Cunningham, (Jacob's daughter) the 10-year old girl who survived scalping in the first raid, was captured along with James, Betsy and Henry Cunningham.

One account says when she arrived at the Shawnee town, a warrior brought out a scalp and sat it on her head, communicating that it was her hair.

Also taken were Archibald, Mary and Marian Hamilton. Another account, however, says Mary Hamilton was among the dead. When her fiancé John McCown discovered her body, he went into a depression and died two years later of a broken heart. His family buried him beside her on the little hillside in the McKee cemetery. Another account says Mary Hamilton had a baby in her arms when captured. She dropped it in the weeds, and later, when she was ransomed and returned home, she found its bones.

During the church service at Timber Ridge, rumor was given of trouble at Big Spring, but in an age of slow communications, rumors often were disregarded. When someone else rushed breathlessly into the service and told of the raid, the settlers rushed about gathering family and friends. Many fled into the Blue Ridge Mountains, since no one knew where the Shawnees might hit next.

One account says the Indians paused for the night at the spring near the head of Kerrs Creek where they had been camped. There the prisoners spent the night listening for rescuers. After drinking Cunningham's whiskey, the war party would have offered little resistance to a rescue party, but the area had been thrown into so much confusion no militia was raised at that time. The next day, William Patton and others ventured to the Big Spring to bury the dead. They were attacked by Indians, but Mrs. Dale said one of the burial party rode up the valley, and a small party of Indians shot at him.

The Shawnees marched their captives toward the Ohio. Those later returned told of the march, during which one fretful infant was killed and thrown on the shoulders of a girl. She was killed the next day. Another infant was impaled on a spear and left as a threat to pursuers as the captives walked on.

The afternoon of the massacre, the Indians returned to their camp on North Mountain. They sat around and drank the whiskey they had stolen from Cunningham's



still. They became so intoxicated they could have put up little resistance. There was little to fear, most of Rockbridge was in a panic. On the following day, two Indians went back, either to see if they were being followed, or to look for more whiskey. Mrs. Dale saw them shoot at a man as he rode up the valley. The man wheeled his horse and the Indians clapped their hands and shouted.

At one of the encampments, some of the prisoners found some leaves of a New Testament, and being anxious to preserve them, were drying them at the fire, when one of the Indians snatched them up and threw them in the fire, no doubt thinking they were some communication which they wished to send home. However, a few days later, Jenny Gilmore was asked to sing a hymn. She chose Psalm 137, singing "On Babel's stream we sat and wept, When Zion we thought on, In midst thereof we hanged our harps, The willow trees thereon; For then a song requested they, Who did us captive bring, Our spoilers called for mirth, and said A song of Zion sing."

Numerous captives from the Cowpasture (Bath and High county areas) were brought as more returning Shawnees swelled their ranks with plunder.

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Years later, the Rev. John D. Shane interviewed Mrs. Jane Stevenson about the Kerrs Creek raids. She told one story of some children on Kerrs Creek who were out picking haws. One child lagged behind. When the others were taken by the Indians, she was not discovered. . .

Mrs. Stevenson says the raid took about two hours since the Indians had the land "all spied out." Jane Stevenson lived seven miles from Kerrs Creek and her mother, Jane Warwick, was killed by Indians in 1759.

She also told of James Milligan, captured at Kerrs Creek. He escaped on Gauley Mountain (now in West Virginia) and said he counted 450 total prisoners from

**the region.**

**Once on the Chillicothe, the Shawnees separated to their villages, with the captive Kerrs Creek families separated as well. Jenny Gilmore and her son John were sent to one village, her two daughters to another. She never saw them again.**

**For the Shawnees and Delawares, Pontiac's war ended when Colonel Bouquet treated with them on Nov. 9, 1764. In August the next year, Pontiac's other allies treated at Oswego, confirming the treaty up and down the frontier in 1766.**

**Conditions of the treaty included return of all white captives. Jenny Gilmore had been sold to a French trader at Fort Pitt. She came home. Her son, John, who had been living with the Shawnees, was brought back to Bath County by Jacob Warwick. Eventually John and his mother reunited and moved back to the Gilmore homestead on Gilmore's Creek, which empties into Kerrs Creek near Big Spring.**

**The fate of the other captives and families is not known.**

**With the treaty signed, the Delawares moved their villages further west. The American Revolution was around the corner, during which most Delaware tribes sided with the British in a last attempt to regain conquered lands. The Shawnees were among the last to bury the war hatchet with the whites.**

## **Kerr's Creek Carnage May Have Led To The Birth Of Rockbridge County**

By Deborah Sensabaugh

**Editors note: This is the final part of a look at the early**

**history of the Kerrs Creek area of Rockbridge County which, in the mid-1700s, was the site of two Indian raids that left many early area settlers dead.**

**Big Spring is still a good place for going back. Melancholy in winter, the lapping water gropes like fingers toward the banks where the cabin stood, where the people fell like broken dolls. In the mist you think you see them, and then realize it's only cedar trees.**

**The graves on the hillside, the tales of school children, fear driven to run past the blood fields. Suddenly the crow calls are the cries of the lost and a warm breeze turns chill across the interstate, cutting east on the Midland Trail.**

**In 1777, Kerrs Creek's past seemed determined to prove the Biblical adage "Those that live by the sword shall die by the sword." For the Shawnee sachem Cornstalk, death rode seven bullets from a Kerrs Creek gun, and maybe gave rise to a new county that proved to the frontier she would take care of her own.**

**Once the treaty at Oswego (New York) ended the Pontiac Conspiracy in 1765-66, border warfare skipped like wildfire here and there. Kentucky, newly opened for settlement, came under attack, as did Southwest Virginia, the Ohio Valley and the Conococheague Valley in what is now western Maryland. The lack of a concentrated Native American federation, however, made skirmish and guerrilla warfare the norm.**

**Then, in 1744, British influence began growing on the frontier. In October, armies under Andrew Lewis (from Lewis settlement, or Staunton, later founding a settlement at Salem) and Charles Lewis (Bath County) marched from Fort Union (present Lewisburg) to Point Pleasant where the Kanawha empties into the Ohio. Other colonial forces, under Virginia Gov. Dunmore (British agent), were to converge from Fort Pitt (now Pittsburgh) and squeeze the Indians away**

**from the western Virginia settlements.**

**Kerrs Creek's old archenemy, now a great strategist and chieftain, drew warriors from near and far. Cornstalk was ready to meet the foe with an ace in his headband. Lord Dunmore, unbeknown to the frontier militia, had agreed to stay away from the Point Pleasant rendezvous point. (The Battle of Point Pleasant will be addressed in another volume, "The Ancestors of Richard Hansen")**

**Instead, the Lewis army engaged the enemy, and while the militia finally won the day, more than 70 died. Cornstalk lost 20. Some historians consider this the first battle of the American Revolution, since the British supposedly had conspired with the Indians against the colonists. While that point is debated by many, history indicates the struggle for Indian allegiance progressed rapidly from that point. The British, like the French, knew if they could make enough political promises to the Ohio Valley nations, those warriors would fight the colonists to the death.**

**At Point Pleasant, Fort Randolph was constructed and garrisoned as the Revolutionary War loomed over the Transalleghany.**

**By 1777, the British had united the Ohio Valley tribes, with the exception of the Shawnees whose overall chief was none other than the Kerrs Creek nemesis. For some reason, however, Cornstalk opposed uniting with the British and warring with the settlers.**

**Later, Cornstalk's sister, known as the Grenadier Squaw, petitioned both Indians and Whites for an end to the war. She often warned settlements of impending Indian attacks, and her contemporaries accepted she was a Christian who had come to believe war was wrong. No one knows whether her brother also had accepted her faith, but in his later years, Cornstalk had an unexplainable change of heart that set him at odds with his entire nation and led to his death.**

**When Cornstalk saw even his influence wouldn't keep**

the Shawnees from allying with the British, he left for Fort Randolph with Red Hawk (possibly a Delaware) and another Indian.

Capt. William Arbuckle received the Indians and heeded Cornstalk's warning that "as the current set so strongly against the colonies, even [the Shawnees] would float with the stream in spite of [Cornstalk's] endeavors to stem it." The chief was adamant. The hostilities would begin immediately.

Arbuckle made two quick decisions. He detained Cornstalk, thinking a hostage wouldn't hurt possible negotiations. And he told the troops that Virginia's new government was rising, and that all hell was about to break loose on the frontier. The preceding month, the official cry for volunteers had seen companies raised, reluctantly on the settler's part, for Fort Randolph.

Locally, Col. George Skillern led three or four companies. The Botetourt and Augusta militia included men from Kerrs Creek, Colliers Creek and the Buffalo. Locals were under command of Capt. James Hall from the Buffalo. They combined with Capt. John Paxton's men from Short Hill, rendezvousing at Collierstown on Oct. 7. They marched into Fort Randolph on Nov. 5, and they were spoiling for a fight.

At Fort Randolph, the volunteers awaited General Hand, who was to march from Fort Pitt with men and supplies for war on the Ohio Valley nations, much as Lord Dunmore had planned three years earlier.

Imprisoned in comparative comfort in a cabin in Fort Randolph, Cornstalk drew maps and acquainted the officers with all the Ohio country. Cornstalk's son, Ellinipico, concerned at hearing nothing from his father, arrived at Randolph and moved in.

Next day, supplies being short, two of Hall's men crossed the Kanawha to hunt. Their names were Robert Gilmore and Hamilton, and it is likely their families had been in the middle of the Kerrs Creek

**carnage. After the hunt, Gilmore and Hamilton returned to their canoe on the riverbank when two Indians who had been hiding opened fire. Gilmore fell and was scalped.**

**Captain Arbuckle and Captain Stuart of the Greenbriar company stood on the opposite bank wondering why the hunters were shooting so close to the fort when they had been commanded not to. At that moment, Hamilton ran down the bank, crying that Gilmore had been killed. Hall's men immediately sprang into action. Leaping into a canoe, they paddled furiously to Hamilton's rescue, retrieving both him and Gilmore's corpse. Even before they landed on the Fort Randolph side of the river, the cry, "Let us go and kill the Indians in the fort" arose. They assumed the warriors on the riverbank had accompanied Cornstalk's son.**

**Hall led his men when Arbuckle and Stuart stepped in front of them, they drove them back with drawn muskets. With Hall were William Roane, Hugh Galbreath, Malcolm McCown and Adam Barnes.**

**The interpreter's wife had recently returned from Indian captivity and had exhibited great respect for the Shawnee chief. She ran to the cabin to warn Ellinipsico and Cornstalk. Ellinipsico denied the Indians on the riverbank had accompanied him.**

**Ever the dignified chief Cornstalk reassured Ellinipsico. "My son, the Great Spirit has seen fit that we should die together and has sent you here to that end. It is His will and let us submit; it is all for the best." Cornstalk then turned to meet Hall and his men. Tall and commanding, the 50-year old chief opened his shirt to present a symbolic target to the soldiers. He was shot seven times and fell without a sound. His son, likewise, accepted his fate with dignity. Red Hawk, hiding himself in a chimney, was found and killed as well.**

**It is said Cornstalk had a premonition of his death. Just the day before, he had spoken in a meeting with the officers, "When I was young and went to war, I**

often thought, each might be my last adventure, and I should return no more. I still lived. Now I am in the midst of you, and if you choose, may kill me. I can die but once. It is alike to me, whether now or hereafter.”

His Shawnees, upon hearing of his fate, resolved to avenge their chief, and immediately side with the British. Another bloody war was about to begin on the frontier.

Within days, General Hand arrived from Pitt, but without the troops and supplies. The militia disbanded. The volunteers returned home. But, for Captain Hall, the return home was bittersweet. He had led the soldiers who killed the perpetrator of the Kerrs Creek massacres, personally participating in the second. But Hall also had disobeyed the orders of the fort’s commandant and had led his men in the same. He was to be tried far from home, in Fincastle, where the memory of the mutilated bodies on Kerrs Creek fields meant little.

In October that year, the Virginia legislature granted that Rockbridge County be formed from Botetourt and Augusta lands. On April 7, 1778, the first Rockbridge court was held at Samuel Wallace’s home. Captain Hall was called for examination. He didn’t show. On April 28, however, Hall came to court. This time, there were no witnesses for the commonwealth, and he was acquitted.

The Cornstalk incident supposedly took place in November, with Rockbridge being approved as a county in October. But the Philadelphia Record says the whole scheme was to keep Hall’s trial among those who remembered Kerrs Creek firsthand.

Kerr’s Creek, fate and a great Shawnee chief who found wisdom too late became tied in one bundle with ropes of hatred, revenge and a group of men pushed too far in a terrible war.”

“Writers note: In recounting this story, I used several references. I’ve found inaccuracies in some, but when dealing with events in the distant past, accurate records are few. Sources used: Withers’s “Chronicles of Border Warfare,” Morten’s “Rockbridge County History,” Strickler’s Roanoke Times “Death of Indian Had Part In Founding Rockbridge,” Dunlap’s 1936 “Scrapbook,” a 1944 Hart newspaper account (including Rockbridge court records), and the Diehl papers from the Washington and Lee Leyburn Library collection.

Source: *The Weekender, Lexington, Virginia (December 13, 1997), pp. 1-3.*”

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