

The Kerr's Creek Massacres (1759-1763)

Share

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Overview

With the influx of early settlers into the Augusta County area, tensions between the Shawnee Indians (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shawnee_Indians) (who had lived there for many years) and those early settlers, reached a flashpoint in the mid-1700's. The trouble began around the time of the French & Indian War (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_%26_Indian_War) (1756-1763), when the French began to use the Indians as a "buffer" against the unwanted British expansion. On the other side, the Scotch-Irish (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ulster_Scots_people) settlers of early Augusta County were lured into the area with the promise of free land and unlimited possibilities. Both the Indians and the "feisty" Scotch-Irish settlers became unknowing pawns in a game of high-stakes chess between the French ambitions and British expansion.

As the French & Indian War progressed through the frontier, the French (and their Indian allies) secured victories against the British at Fort Duquesne

(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fort_Duquesne) (now Pittsburgh), against a young George Washington who surrendered at "Fort Necessity" (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Fort_Necessity) " and also against British General Braddock (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward_Braddock) , in the wilderness below Duquesne. Later, in 1757, the British turned the tide against the French and won key victories in several areas, eventually driving the French back to Montreal, which the British captured in February 1763, and resulted in the "Treaty of Paris" ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treaty_of_Paris_\(1763\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treaty_of_Paris_(1763))) ", which marked the conclusion of the French and Indian War and hostilities between the two, until the end of the American Revolutionary War (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Revolutionary_War) .

The hostilities at Kerr's Creek (called "Teas Creek" in earlier Augusta County records before abt. 1750) between the Shawnee Indians and the Scotch-Irish settlers of early Augusta County came during the height of this conflict. The stories of the conflicts at Kerr's Creek have been passed down through generations and are still discussed by the current residents of modern-day Rockbridge County. As it was told, the Shawnee leader "**Cornstalk**" and many of his men viciously attacked, killed or kidnapped several early settlers in the Kerr's Creek (also called "Teas Creek") area on two occasions in 1759 and 1763.

First



Marker at Kerr's Creek, in Rockbridge County, Virginia

Massacre

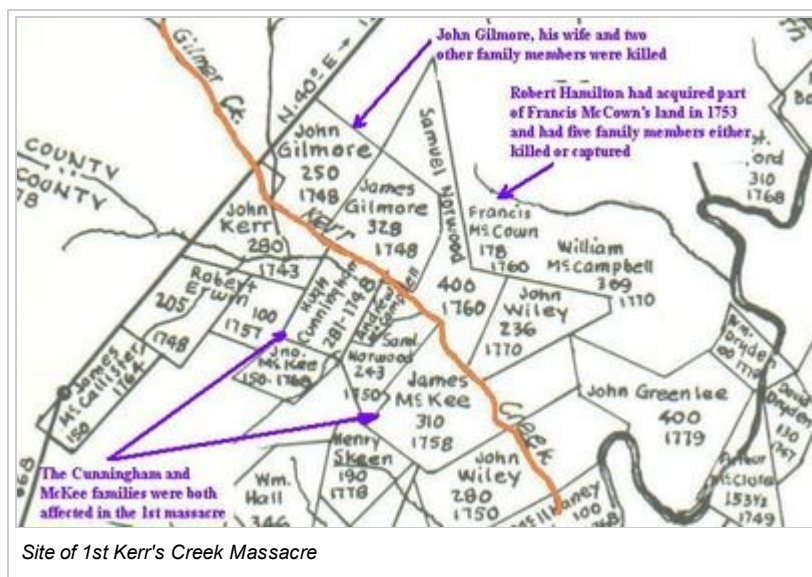
In the fall of 1759, the two Telford boys walked home, possibly from school. Their walk turned into a run. Breathless, they told of a naked man they saw hiding behind a tree. No one thought twice about their tale until later. Several weeks passed. The trees topping North Mountain and House Mountain bled 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 (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/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 (**Note: other sources indicate that Charles Daugherty was killed in the 2nd Kerr's Creek Massacre**). 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 "Jennie" (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 (**Note: Thomas Gilmore and his wife actually were killed in the second raid on Kerr's Creek**), Gray (no first name listed), five **Robert Hamilton** family members, James McKee (McGee), Alexander McMurdy, **Robert Ramsey**, 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.

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.)

Second Massacre

Scarcely
had the

treaty
(Treaty of Paris) ink dried before a powerful Ottawa chief named Pontiac began uniting the tribes throughout the Ohio. Said to have been instrumental in

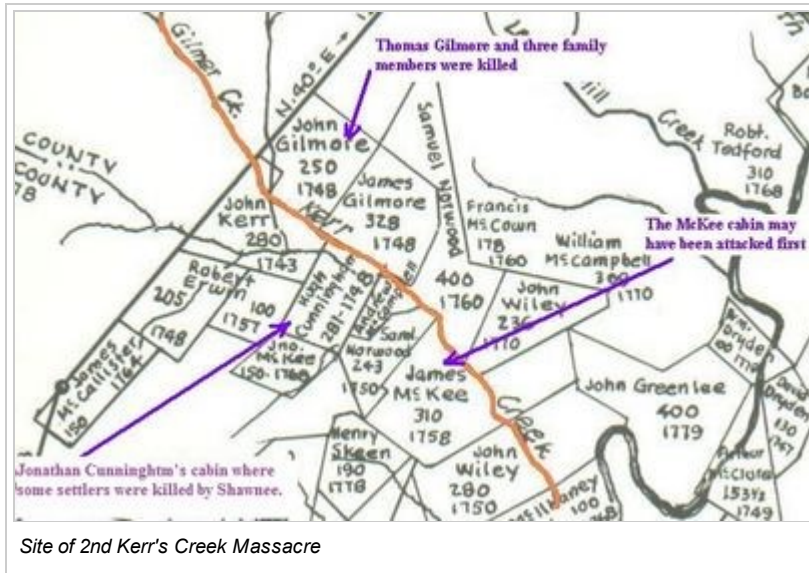
Braddock's defeat near the opening of the French and Indian War, Pontiac had become a brilliant strategist who realized that without a united front the Native Americans were doomed. In a short time, he'd recruited from all the tribes from Lake Superior to Mexico. Each tribe in the confederation was to 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 Alleghenies, 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.

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.

Massacre at Muddy Creek, Prelude to 2nd Kerr's Creek Massacre:

The massacre on Muddy Creek in 1763, which occurred just prior to the 2nd Kerr's Creek Massacre, completely destroyed one of Greenbriers' first settlements. A stone marker in a field on a hill marks the site of the massacre. Frederick See's name, spelled "Sea" is listed. The graves of the victims may



still be seen in what is known as the McKee burying ground. In 1772 a lone man, **Samuel McKinney**, built his cabin near this tragic spot. Others soon followed and two years later there were enough settlers to warrant the building of Fort Arbuckle on Muddy Creek for their protection.

When the Shawnee Indians attacked Settlement of **Archd. Clendenning (Clendenin)**, (who was killed along with two of his sons) and Muddy Creek Settlements they also killed **John Williams** and took *[his wife]* Mary, Nancy (age four) and David (age two) captive to their villages on Scioto River in Ohio. Thomas, Richard and John were not at home and escaped captivity or death. [Greenbrier County, West Virginia Heritage, S. Grose, pg. 183].

After the massacre at Muddy Creek "they (the Indians under **Chief Cornstalk**) proceeded to the Big Levels, and on the next day, after having been as hospitably entertained as at Muddy Creek, they reenacted the revolting scenes of the previous day. Every white man in the settlement but Conrad Yolkom, who was some distance from his house, was slain, and every woman but Mrs. Glendenin. Yolkom, when alarmed by the outcries of the women, took in the situation and fled to Jackson's River telling the story.

The people were unwilling to believe him, till convinced by the approach of the Indians. All fled before them, and they pursued on to Carr's Creek in Rockbridge, where many families were murdered and others captured." [Source: Narrative of John Stuart 1798 in WMQ Vol 22 No 4 Apr 1914].

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All fled before them, and they pursued on to Carr's Creek in *[then Augusta, current]* Rockbridge *[County]*, where many families were murdered and others captured. [Source: History of Augusta County, Virginia, pg. 138]

Second Kerr's Creek Masacre:

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. Out running 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. Although some reports claim that before torching the Cunningham cabin, the Shawnees killed Jonathan Cunningham and his wife, Jonathan's will written in 1769, naming his wife Mary, clearly contradicts those reports. 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. (Source: *When Blood Flowed In Kerrs Creek*, By Deborah Sensabaugh) The graves of the victims of this massacre may still be seen in what is known as the "McKee burying ground," near Big Spring, about seven miles north of Lexington, Virginia. (Source: *Cornstalk the Shawnee*, Chronicles of Oklahoma, Volume 9, No. 1, March, 1931, By Dr. W. B. Morrison)

Mention of 2nd Kerr's Creek Massacre in Augusta County records

The following deposition taken by William Patton describes the 2nd Kerr's Creek Massacre:

** Vol 2: Page 269. - 1806 November 7 Page 145--Wm. Patton, aged 64, deposes, in Rockbridge, 7th November, 1806, he has lived in Rockbridge 56 years since last May. After the Revolution there was a rapid increase of immigration from the North. James Wardlaw and deponent's father were intimate. James had a son Hugh and a son Robert. There were Indian troubles for about 10 years. Fifty years ago there was a fort at McClung; the last incursion was 43 years ago, when 16 or 17 people were killed. Deponent helped bury them and they were attacked at the burial. These were very early settlers, viz: James, Alexr. Saml. Walker, **James Moore**, Saml. Coalter, Jno. Wallace, **Archd. Rhea**, James Rutherford, **James Buchanan**, Andrew and Charles Hays. Deponent was born September, 1742. McDowell was killed Christmas or New Year's, after his birth.*

Victims

Many of those listed in these Chalkley's records are suspected to be included in those killed in the 1st Kerr's Creek Massacre, (first records of administration after the massacre):

- Page 338.--21st November, 1759. Robert Hall's bond (with Jno. Bigham, Saml. Tencher) as administrator of **Ro. Ramsey**.
- Page 339.--21st November, 1759. William Gray's bond (with Patrick Hays, Saml. Paxton) as guardian (?) to Benj. Gray, orphan of John Gray.
- Page 340.--21st November, 1759. George Kinkade's appraisalment, by James Ward, Andrew Gillespie, Robt. Allen.
- Page 342.--22d November, 1759. Thomas Gilmore's bond (with William Elliott, Jno. Gay) as administrator of **John Gilmore**.
- Page 344.--22d November, 1759. Saml. Campbell's bond (with James Carlile, Geo. Wilson) as administrator of Wm. Campbell.
- Page 344.--28d November, 1759. Daniel Smith's bond (with Jno. Christian, Jno. Scott) as guardian (?) to Jane Scott, orphan of Samuel Scott.
- Page 345.--22nd November, 1759. John Conrad's appraisalment, by Abram Smith, Mathew Patton, Michael Mallow.
- Page 345.--__ October, 1759. Henry Lawrence's appraisalment, by same as above.
- Page 346.--6th December, 1758. John Wilson's appraisalment, by Wm. Wilson, Saml. Steel, Jno. Fulton.
- Page 346.--30th August, 1759. Elizabeth Robertson's appraisalment, by Archibald Hamilton, Wm. Baskins, Geo. Anderson.
- Page 347.--23d November, 1759. Jno. Smith's bond (with William Preston, Jno. Stevenson) as administrator of Benj. Davis.

2nd Massacre Victims

Many of those listed in these Chalkley's records are thought to be included in those killed in the 2nd Kerr's Creek Massacre, (first records of administration after the massacre):

- **James Buchanan** is listed as a victim of the 2nd Kerr's Creek Massacre according to the deposition of William Patton, listed above.
- Page 276.--20th September, 1763. Ann Kinkead's bond (with Thomas Stevenson, Joseph Kinkead) as administratrix of Burrows Kinkead.
- Page 277.--20th September, 1763. Rebecca Dougherty's bond (with Edward Rutledge, Henry Campbell) as administratrix of **Charles Dougherty**.

- Page 278.--20th September, 1763. Lilley (Lily) Bowen's settlement of estate of Moses Bowen, approved and recorded--Paid Wm. Casil, Rees Bowen, Jane Cunningham, Doctor Loyd. Cash lent Jno. Bowen, deceased.
- Page 278.--20th September, 1763. James Wardlaw's bond (with James Steel, Andw. McCampbell) as administrator of Thos. Jones.
- Page 279.--20th September, 1763. James and John Gilmore's bond (with James McGavock, Jno. Bowyer) as administrators of **John Gilmore**.
- Page 280.--20th September, 1763. William Gilmore's bond (with Jas. Gilmore, Alex. Dale) as administrator of Wm. Culberts.
- Page 281.--21st September, 1763. Samuel McDowell's bond (with Jos. Lapsely) as administrator of John Woods.
- Page 282.--21st September, 1763. Felix Gilbert's bond (with Benj. Estill) as administrator of John Murphy.
- Page 283.--21st September, 1763. Same, as administrator of John Williams.
- Page 284.--21st September, 1763. Same. as administrator of **Lawrence Huntsman**.
- Page 285.--21st September, 1763. Patrick Frazier's bond (with Jno. Davison) as administrator of James Underwood.
- Page 304.--16th November, 1763. **Michael Dougherty's** appraisement (by Jos. Culton, Jno. McKee, Jno. Gilmore, William Edmondston). Recorded--Cash due by Wm. Christy. *(Note: it is thought that because this record appears shortly after the 2nd Kerr's Creek Massacre that killed Charles Daugherty, that this Michael was probably the father of Charles. According to sources, Charles Daugherty and several family members were killed in the 2nd Massacre).*
- Page 318.--21st March, 1764. Charles Lynch's bond (with Wm. Thompson, Alex. Thompson) as administrator of Valentine Yoacum.
- Page 319.--21st March, 1764. Same, bond as administrator of Frederick Sea.
- pge 364. - 20th November 1764, James and Mary Trimble's bond (with James Gilmore, Ben estill, George Moffet, David Trimble) as Administrators of **John Trimble**. Children were: James Trimble.

Other Possible Victims

James Cunningham and his wife Margaret were both slain in the 2nd Kerr's Creek Massacre, according to "Adam and 500 more Cunninghams of the Valley of Virginia", by Betty Cunningham Newman.

Thomas Gardner is listed in Court records as being killed by Indians shortly after acquiring land in Beverley Manor on 14 September 1763. He may have been living near Cathey's River at the time.

Burroughs Kincaid is said by some sources to be a possible victim of the 2nd Kerr's Creek Massacre. He died intestate and his wife **Ann [Calvert]** was named the executrix of his estate in Augusta County on 20 September 1763.

James Sittlington, son of William Sittlington, according to Sittlington family records was a victim of the 2nd Kerr's Creek Massacre.

Thomas Young, son of Hugh Young and Agnes Sittlington, according to Sittlington family records was a victim of the 2nd Kerr's Creek Massacre.

Sources

- *When Blood Flowed In Kerrs Creek*, Deborah Sensabaugh, Nov 29, 1997, in the Weekender, News Gazette, Lexington, Virginia. See:Indian Captivs, Rootsweb (<http://archiver.rootsweb.ancestry.com/th/read/INDIAN-CAPTIVES/2007-10/1193081401>)
- *The Weekender*, Lexington, Virginia (December 6, 1997), p. 1, pp. 4-5.
- *Annals of Augusta County, Virginia, from 1726 to 1871*, by Joseph Addison Waddell, published 1902, C.R. Caldwell, Virginia, pp. 171-172:
- *Cornstalk the Shawnee, Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Volume 9, No. 1, March, 1931, By Dr. W. B. Morrison, Durant, Okla., (<http://digital.library.okstate.edu/Chronicles/v009/v009p013.html>)
- *A History of Rockbridge County, Virginia*, By Oren Frederic Morton, pg. 69.
- *Charles Daugherty and Chief Cornstalk*, by Charles Daugherty, Carbondale, Illinois, as it appeared in "The O'Dochartaigh Clan Association Newsletter, Issue #48, May 2007 (<http://www.odochartaighclann.org/sitebuildercontent/sitebuilderfiles/nl48.pdf>)

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