

A Vivid Account Of Indian Massacre Of Kerr's Creek Settlement, July 17, 1763

Indian raids were a constant menace in the early days of Augusta. In unbelievable contrast to our present security, it is difficult for the tales handed down to seem real to us. Our ancestors, their fearful experiences, fortitude and persistence in rebuilding their shattered homes and lives seem remote as characters in novels or histories of another land.

Here in Augusta and its neighboring counties, where we live and work and have our peaceful being, all these happened, in many cases to our own forefathers. One such tragedy was the Indian massacre on Kerr's creek, now in Rockbridge county but at the time a part of Augusta. This account is republished from the "Rockbridge Citizen" of January 1872.

There were two invasions of Kerr's creek by the Indians, little more than two years apart. In the traditional account, it is not always possible to say whether the thing related occurred at the first or second invasion.

The story of the Bloody Tragedy as Related by the Descendants of those who suffered. (By Rev. Samuel Brown.)

Among the families then located on the Creek and in its vicinity were: Cunningham at the "Big Spring," where S. W. McKee now lives; McKee where Laird now lives; Hamilton where Dunlap now lives; Gilmore where his descendants of that name now live; Cunningham where Moore and Harper now live. There were also Dales, Stilsons, McConnells, Blacks, Logans, Irvines, and others, some of which families became extinct by the massacre.

I am able to fix the precise date of the first invasion 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 10th 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 exposed frontier settlements. The first band of these blood-thirsty warriors, who visited Rockbridge in 1763, were a part of a much larger company, who had been on a war expedition against the Cherokees or Catawba of the South, and were then on their return to their towns north of the Ohio river. They came up by way 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. Moffitt, at or near the mouth of Falling Spring valley, in Alleghany 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 Moffitt'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 the

men were slain, amongst whom was James Sitlington, of Bath county.

... After the rout, the Indians went some miles down Jackson's river and came up the Valley of the Cowpasture. On the plantation now owned by Colonel Thomas Sitlington there lived a blacksmith by the name of Daughtery. He and his wife barely made their escape to the mountain 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. Daughtery 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 "venerable General Daughtery." After the burning of this house, the Indians came on up the river to the neighborhood where "Old Millboro" now stands, and here they divided their company, the larger part setting out for the Ohio river, and the smaller one of twenty-seven, turning their faces for destruction of peaceful settlement of Kerr's Creek. After leaving Millboro, the larger party killed a man whom they met in the narrows of the river bluff of the Cowpasture, at the Blowing Cave. He was on a rock at the edge of the water, and his body fell into the river. They crossed the Warm Spring mountain where the toll-gate now stands, and, passing over to Back creek, encamped on the land now owned by the Hickman family. A company of men had been hastily raised under Captain Christian, . . . and found the Indians in their encampment at, or near, the head of Back creek. Being undiscovered themselves, their plan was to surround the encampment before the alarm was given; but while they were carrying this into effect one of the men saw an Indian passing close to him and carrying a deer which he had killed, into camp. . . . He could not resist giving him a fire. This gave the alarm too soon; but the men, making the best of it, rushed upon the camps. The Indians were routed, a number of them were killed, and nearly all the camp equipage was taken. . . .

Captain Dickenson, of Bath county, the grandfather of John U. Dickenson, of Millboro, was wounded. He is said to have been brave amongst the bravest. John Young, who resided in Hebron congregation, in Augusta county, where he raised a large family was another. He is said to have wounded an Indian, and running up to dispatch him with his sword, the Indian threw up the barrel of his gun to ward off the blow. Young, striking with great force, cut his sword deep into the gun barrel, which broke the blade. Exasperated at the loss of his sword he literally hewed the Indian to pieces with the remaining part. Some of the brave Lewises of Augusta were also in the party of Christian. . . .

They brought back a number of scalps, which were recognized by their friends, amongst the rest was the scalp of James Sitlington, known by his flowing locks of red hair.

The Indians, who made their escape, were again met by a com-

coin to be made into spoons, and were charged for the labor of making. * * *

First Newspaper

"The first newspaper in H—was printed in—a large log house on the N. W. corner of the main street, on the second floor in the S. end. The Editor, Mr. Wartman, was proprietor, printer and everything else. He had a small folding press on a table in the middle of the room—in either hand he held a leather ball, which was used to ink the type. Then he placed the dampened paper on the type, and turning over the top of the press, screwed it down tight, until the impression was taken—removed the paper and went on in this way until one side of the edition was finished—then he set the type for the other side of the paper, and proceeded in the same manner until the whole edition was finished. On Saturday, Harvey, his son about ten years old, would deliver the papers to the subscribers—I do not think there were more than one hundred. New Years some one would write an address for Harvey to deliver to the subscribers and receive a small amount of money from them.

"Mr. Gamble, Clerk of the Court for years, built a brick house two miles N. of H—, and sold his town residence to Mr. Jacob Yost. * * * The next house N. was a large frame, used by Mrs. Thornhill as a school for children. The next house was a poor one, occupied by Somers, * * * who made very fine shoes. When I wanted a pair I was sent to him to have my measure taken, it was at least six weeks before I got them, although I called daily on my way to or from school. Next door was another of the same trade named Kelly. The two shoemakers knew everything going on in town, as soon as it was light they started out to retail the news. The first store that was open got the news—for a gill of whisky. * * *

"Mr. McGahey was the next tenant after Dr. George Clark—he moved from there and founded—McGaheysville." She also mentions a dry goods store run by Mr. William Sites, a saddlery shop, by Mr. Welsh, another store used also by Mr. Fawcett as his residence, "a tavern kept by James Duff, with a sign of a swan," a lawyer, Thomas Clark.

She went to school in a two story log house kept by Mr. Richmond Fletcher. "Black's Run was on the N. side of the house with a foot bridge for passengers. Sometimes the Run would rise and it would be impossible to cross the bridge. My Grandmother would tell Uncle Dav. to take me to school on the horse seated in front of him, a lunch was prepared for me and after school he would come to take me home. The school hours were eight to twelve, and two to five—recess was never known at that time—we were allowed to go out once in the morning and once in the afternoon. Girls were very seldom punished, if ever, very slight—boys frequently were whipped or kept in after school. We were taught Reading, Spelling, Writing, Arithmetic, Grammar and Geography. A pupil who had gone through Pike's Arithmetic, Morse's Geography, Murray's Grammar.

pany of white men coming up the South branch of the Potomac, where a number were killed, and the remainder driven into the fastness of Cheat mountain. . . .