

## 'Tales of the Van Cleave Elders' - historical Western reference

Ol' Fashioned Girl · Mar 4, 2007

Forums > Forums > Writing Genre > **Western**



**Ol' Fashioned Girl**

Hand? What hand?



Kind Benefactor

Super Member

Registered

Joined: May 31, 20...

Messages: 15,640

Reaction score: 6,8...

Location: Last Star...

Website: [www.jen...](http://www.jen...)

Mar 4, 2007

#1

Festus has requested that I post an excerpt from my 'Tales of the Van Cleave Elders'. This was one of his favorite chapters. I'm not sure it really belongs here, but it doesn't belong in 'Share Your Work', 'cause it's not really my work. If it needs to be moved...

The following story of the attack on Bryant's Station, is from:

**THE VAN CLEAVE FAMILY  
THE McMULLEN FAMILY  
THE TAYLOR FAMILY**

compiled by Errett Van Cleave, San Francisco, CA, 1946; from notes left by his Uncle James Wm Van Cleave of Brown's Valley (near Crawfordsville), Montgomery, IN (who apparently relied heavily on "the Elders" Uncle Jonathan & Aunt Betsy Van Cleave & Uncle Matthius Mount Van Cleave).

<<Note from Jen: Uncle Jonathan (due to intermarriage of the Van Cleave clan) was both 1st and 2nd Cousin three times removed to Howard Oregon Van Cleave (Ol' Boy's grandfather) .>>

"The early history of the Van Cleave family lies in much obscurity. From the traditions of the Elders we learn that the progenitor of the family in America came from Holland some six or seven generations ago. His name was Aaron, and from him sprang all the families of Van Cleave in America. Aaron seems to have come to America some two or three generations before the Revolutionary War."

"Aaron, the elder, and a brother probably named John [Jan] came over. The rest of the family remained in Holland where the older brother would inherit the estate of their father. The younger sons, seeing that they would be left penniless, concluded to emigrate to the New World, then much talked of. We know not whether the elder brother set his younger brothers adrift or not; but it seems that way, at least they seem to have had a falling out and left the country never to return. It is said that the elder brother never married, so the estate is there yet, the family never claiming it. The occupation of the younger brothers seem to have been sailors and fishermen. Younger brothers often followed those occupations. Those were a stout, hardy race of people. They first came to Monmouth, New Jersey where they settled."

"Uncle James starts his narrative with Aaron Van Cleave, Sr. as the original emigrant and seems to be confused by others of the same name which he cannot identify. As a matter of fact old Aaron, Sr. was the son of Isabrant Van Cleef and the grandson of Jan (John) Van Cleef who came to the New World from Holland. Aaron Sr. left his brothers and cousins in Long Island and the coast of New Jersey and moved to Rowen [sic] County, North Carolina, at the forks of the Yadkin River, about 1750. He became a neighbor of Squire Boone, Sr., the father of Daniel Boone and Squire Boone, Jr., and Aaron's daughter Jane, married Squire Boone, Jr. There are records in the Court House at Salisbury, North Carolina of the family in that County."

"Sometime during the first half of the Revolutionary War [1776-1779] the five Van Cleave brothers, Aaron, Benjamin, John, Billy, Ralph and their sister Jane emigrated to the territory of Kentucky. This was a vast wilderness inhabited by ... Indians and wild beasts, the prowling panther, the wild cat and the catamount, huge buffalo, deer and elk, as well as bear. It was the perfect paradise for the hunter and those fond of adventure. ... Their mode [of] travel is not given but it is evident that they traveled on horseback, carrying their bedding on pack horses, probably some road [sic] and some walked part of the time. It was a long journey, crossing the mountains into the territory of Kentucky. They camped at night along the trail. There is but one incident given during the entire trip. One morning as the women were getting breakfast by the campfire, a deer dashed up and stood near the fire, so, Aaron, son of Benjamin snatched up his brother's (Sammy) 'little shot gun' and taking a rest between the forks of a small tree, shot the deer. The distance was short and it fell dead. This is the only incident remembered of the entire journey."

"It is not known at what time the Van Cleaves arrived in Kentucky, but they had a long and tiresome journey over the mountains, through the valleys and the dark woods ... but at last they arrived at [Ft] Boonesboro, their journey's end, and went to live with Daniel Boone. He had erected a fort there on the South bank of the Kentucky River."

"When once established in Kentucky the Van Cleaves ... helped clear the land and planted the fields in corn for their subsistence. ... It is also related that they were at [Ft] Boonesboro at the time that [Daniel] Boone's and [?] Callaway's daughters were captured by the Indians ..."

"During the troublesome times in Kentucky, Squire Boone, a brother of Daniel erected a station [Squire Boone's Station] near Shelbyville and dwelt there with a party of hardy pioneers. ... in April 1781 they were alarmed by the appearance of Indians in the vicinity, so they moved to a settlement on Bear's Creek and while going there were attacked by Indians and defeated with considerable loss."

"The Van Cleaves were living at Bryant's Station, at least two of the brothers were, Benjamin and John, who evidently had been there for some time, and were living there at the time of the siege, so they said, and took part in the defense against the Indians. They used to tell of that fearful time. Save for their personal experiences it was like the history gives of the attack."

"Detachments of Indians came in advance of the main army. Captain Estill, a brave man

was sent out against them. He encountered an equal number of Indians and a sharp attack ensued, resulting in the death of Estill and half of his men. The Indian chief was also killed in the fight. The battle lasted two hours. The [Indian] army destined to the conquest of Kentucky, assembled at Chillicothe early in August. A detachment from Detroit reinforced them. Simon Girty made a speech to them enlarging on the ingratitude of the 'long knives' in rebelling against their 'Great Father', the British King, across the waters. He described in flowing terms the fertility of Kentucky exhorting them to recover it from a group of 'long knives' before they became too strong for them. Six hundred warriors, the flower of the Northwestern tribes made what they knew to be their last effort to drive the settlers from their fertile hunting grounds. Various parties preceded the main body, appearing in different places, creating confusion in the minds of the settlers in regard to the place where the blow would fall. An attack on Holt's Station resulted in two boys taken prisoners. The Indians, twenty in number, were pursued by Captain Holden with seventeen men and he was defeated near Blue Licks, the fatal spot for the settlers, and obliged to retreat with the loss of four men."

"The news of the disaster reached Bryant's Station, situated on the Elk Horn near the road from Lexington to Maysville, on the 14 of August. Men were preparing to march to the assistance of Holt's Station. Some had been up all night getting ready for an early start. Had the Indians arrived only a few hours later they would have found the fort occupied only by old men, women and children, who could not have successfully resisted their attack. 'The supreme influence of fortune in war was never more strikingly displayed.' The Indians could hear the bustle of preparations and see lights from the blockhouse and cabins during the night. All continued tranquil and Girty silently concerted the plan of attack. The Indians had advanced with secrecy and celebrity peculiar to themselves. Through the woods, without giving the slightest indication of their approach, on the night of August 14th, 1781. They appeared before Bryant's Station as suddenly as if they had arisen from the earth (see McClung's History), and surrounded it from all sides and awaited the dawn of day. At the break of day, August 15th, the garrison which consisted of some forty to fifty men in arms, were preparing to open the gate and march off, as already mentioned, when they were alarmed by a furious discharge of rifles, accompanied by yells and screams they struck terror into the heart of the women and children and even startled the men. All ran hastily to the picketing and beheld a small body of Indians exposed to open view, running and yelling and making the most furious gestures. The appearance was so unusual and different from their usual manner of fighting that some of the more wary and experienced of the garrison instantly pronounced it a decoy party and restrained the young men from sallying out and attacking them, and some were strongly disposed to do [so]. The opposite side of the fort was instantly manned and several breaches in the picketing were rapidly repaired."

"The garrison was supplied with water from a spring some distance from the fort on the Northwest side, a great common error of most of the stations, which in a closed in continued siege suffered dreadfully for water. The most experienced felt confident that a powerful party was in ambush near the spring, but at the same time they reasoned that the Indians would not unmask themselves until the firing from the opposite side of the fort was returned with such warmth as to induce the belief that the feint had succeeded. Acting upon this impression and yielding to the urgent need for water, they summoned all the women, without exception, and explained to them their circumstances in which they were

placed and the improbability that any injury would be offered them until the firing had been returned from the opposite side of the fort. They urged them to go in a body to the spring and each bring up a bucket full of water. Some of the women, as was natural, had no relish for the undertaking and asked why the men did not bring up the water, as well as themselves, that they were not bullet proof and that the Indians made no distinction between male and female. To this was answered that the women were in the habit of bringing the water every morning to the fort and that if the Indians saw them engaged as usual it would induce them to the belief that their ambuscade was undiscovered. The Indians would not unmask themselves for the sake of firing on a few women, when they hoped by remaining concealed for a few minutes longer, to obtain complete possession of the fort. That if the men should go down to the spring the Indians would immediately suspect that something was wrong and would despair of succeeding by ambuscade and could instantly rush upon them, follow them into the fort or shoot them down at the spring."

"The decision was soon made. A few of the boldest women declared their readiness to brave the danger and the younger and more timid rallying in the rear of these veterans marched down to the spring and a body within point blank shot distance of more than five hundred Indian warriors. Some of the girls could not help betraying symptoms of terror, but the older women, in general, moved with a steadiness and composure which completely deceived the Indians. Not a shot was fired. The party was permitted to fill their buckets, one after another, without interruption. Although their steps became quicker on their return, and near the gate of the fort degenerated into a rather unmilitary celebrity attended with some crowding in passing the gate, yet not more than a little of the water spilt, and the eyes of the youngest had not dilated to more than twice their usual size."

"At the head of the procession of women going to the spring marched Ruth [Munson] Van Cleave, wife of Benjamin [Van Cleave], (Ol' Boy's 5th great-grandparents) and daughters Rachel and Jane were said to be along, but I think Rachel was too young, being only ten years old. Also Mary [Shepherd Van Cleave], the wife of John Van Cleave, brother of Benjamin, marched with them and probably her eldest daughters, Polly (or Mary) and Elizabeth. These women used to tell how they all marched [out] of the fort to get water at the spring. They marched at the head of the procession of women and when they arrived at the spring and were dipping water they could see Indians all about. They were fearful for their lives, but did not exhibit fear lest the Indians discover that they knew they were there. They finally all got back to the fort without giving any alarm to the Indians. Ruth and Mary and their daughters, as well as the other noble women were heroines of the day, and their deed of daring has been told in story and song."

"Being amply supplied with water the garrison sent out thirteen young men to attack the decoy party with orders to fire with great rapidity and make as much noise as possible, but not to pursue the enemy far. The rest of the garrison took post on the opposite side of the fort, cocked their guns and stood in readiness to receive the ambuscade party as it unmasked. The firing of the light party on the Lexington road was soon heard and quickly became sharp and serious, gradually becoming more distant. Instantly Girty sprang up at the head of his five hundred warriors and rushed rapidly upon the western gates, ready to force his way over the undefended palisades. Into this immense mass of dusty bodies the garrison poured several rounds of rifle balls with destructive effect. The consternation

[sic] of the Indians may be imagined. With wild cries they dispersed and in two minutes not an Indian was to be seen. At the same time the party that had sallied out on the Lexington road came running into the fort at the opposite gate in high spirits, and laughing hardily at the success of their maneuver. A regular attack in the usual manner then commenced without much effect on either side until ..."

A lengthy description of the siege on Bryant's Station [which must have lasted about a month], including several battles with reinforcements coming into the fort from all directions & how several members of the Van Cleave family, including the women, did whatever was necessary to help defend the fort during that long siege.

"Now that the battle was over and the Indians had fled, 'Big John' Van Cleave [son of John-AIJ] went out to the stump where he shot at the Indian standing upon it to see the result of his long shot. John found no Indian at the stump where he had seen him fall, for the Indians had borne the body away and tried to hide the evidence of his death by killing a hog and dragging it around the stump to obliterate all trace of the dead Indian. Indian tracks were thick about the stump. John searched down around the roots and found a silver half-moon with a short buckstring attached to it. The upper end had been cut off with a rifle ball, for the color of lead was still upon it. He knew then that this was what had glittered on the Indian's breast. John kept the silver half-moon the rest of his life but it is not known what became of it. John said that during the siege of the fort they became very hungry for the garrison had not enough time to gather provisions before the siege. He was so hungry that he gathered up grains of corn from the cow dung, washed, parched and ate them with relish."

Here's an artist's rendering, from Wikipedia, of the women's bravery.





### Festus

No limits to  
imagination

Super Member

Registered

Joined: Feb 12, 2007

Messages: 1,254

Reaction score: 402

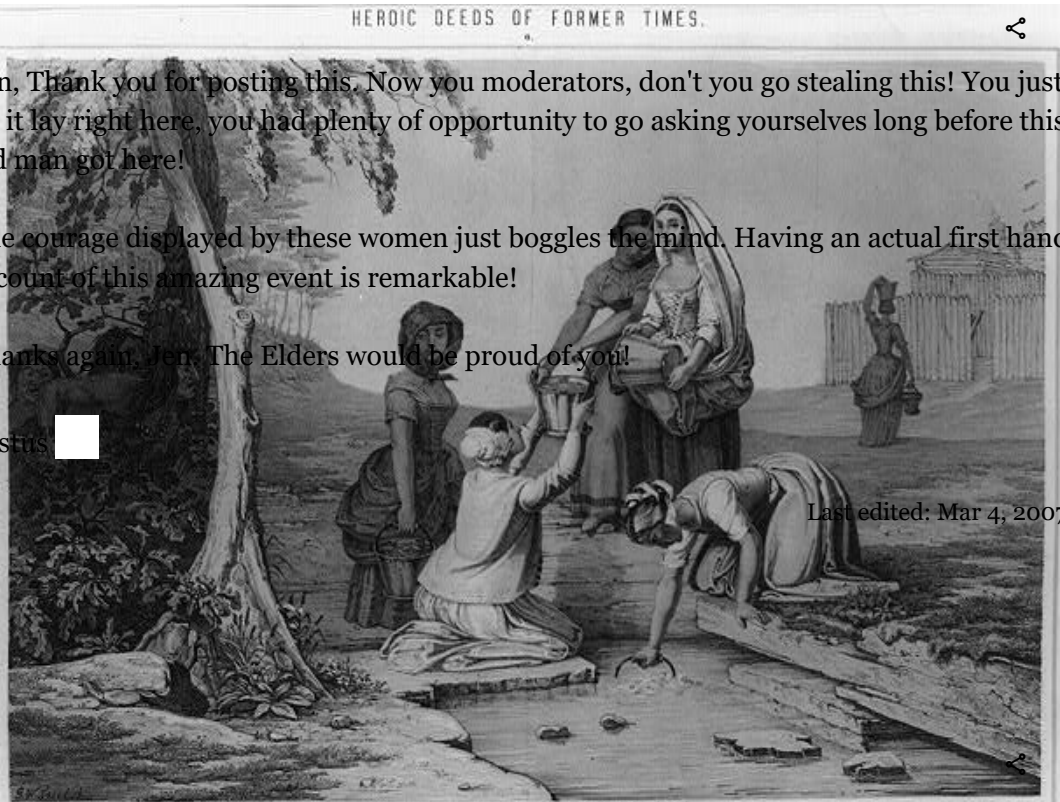
Location: Hattiesb...

Jen, Thank you for posting this. Now you moderators, don't you go stealing this! You just let it lay right here, you had plenty of opportunity to go asking yourselves long before this old man got here!

The courage displayed by these women just boggles the mind. Having an actual first hand account of this amazing event is remarkable!

Thanks again, Jen. The Elders would be proud of you!

Festus



Last edited: Mar 4, 2007

### 'Joseph Van Cleave Memoirs' excerpt

The Women of Bryant's Station Ky. supplying the Garrison with Water.

Here's another excerpt from the memoirs posted on my website. These are from the 'Joseph Van Cleave Memoirs':



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### INDIAN MASSACRE, 1857

During the later half dreadful stories of Indian massacres came in to the effect that the Indians had broke out up north on the Big Sioux River and killed all the white settlers of that river. The Indians were at first provoked and also insulted by the men living on the Little Sioux River. The Indians got to drinking and were drunk, and the men took their guns and knives and hid them until they sobered up. This was an insult to the Indians. The men were afraid that the Indians would attack and kill them in their drunken rage. The Indians belonged to the Ti-tink-a-ta-ma-dhoe (see notes) band and there were about sixty of them, had broke away from the rest of the Sioux tribe, became a renegade band. They had sworn to have revenge on the "whites" for the depredations done by them and now the opportunity had arrived. The insulted Indians next marched to the settlement on the Big Sioux River, farther north. There the whites were afraid of the Indians. There Indians took everything away from them, scalped the people, took all the blankets and quilts in the houses; made the men hitch their horses to their sleds, took piles of plunder on the sleds and drove away. They took the feather beds out into the wind and ripped open the feather ticks and scattered the feathers into the air, laughing to see the feathers fly. Then they next attacked the men killing them. At one house they met a man who fought bravely, he used a broad axe on them. When dead they took the broad axe and cut him into (sic), and thus killed some of the women. The children they killed by taking them by the feet and dashing their brains out against the chimney jam (sic), scattering their blood and brains all over

the floor. At one place they attacked a boy ran out of the house behind the wood pile and stretched out on a log. An Indian fired at him, but missed, and the boy rolled off behind the log, so they thought him dead, never looked for him. His father and mother were murdered with the rest of the family. Afterwards the boy made it to the nearest settlement and was saved.

### MRS. THATCHER

The Indians attacked (see notes) Mrs. Thatcher, they knocked Thatcher on the head, stunned him and he ran out of the house - ran away - until he fell in the snow where he lay for a long time unconscious (sic: unconscious). In the meanwhile the Indians killed some of the family, took Mrs. Thatcher a prisoner (sic: prisoner), destroyed the house, then went away leaving the dead to be (de)voured by the wolves. The Indians had other prisoners (sic) they carried away. Then the Indians went to a settlement on Spirit Lake (see notes) and killed all the settlers at that place in a most inhumane manner, slew the children in the usual way; they took at that place many women prisoners (sic) and treated them in a brutal manner. I think the daughter of Mrs. Jordan was one of the prisoners (sic). The Indians took them to a cabin and outraged them as they liked; the victims unable to resist them. Then they marched away with their prisoners (sic), seven in number. Their last attack was at Mr. Thomas's. Mrs. Jordan was there, her daughter, a young woman and an Irishman. And old friendly Indian came up towards the cabin as he had before, but now he was sent as a decoy. The savage foe lay in ambush and had sent the old friendly Indian forward to decoy the family from the house. They saw the old Indian who had been at their house many times, had eaten salt with them, had slept before their fire. While he was singing and dancing going through his usual performance the son of Mr. Thomas went out behind the house to greet the old Indian, the rest of the family stood at the door. When the Indians that lay in ambush fired upon them, Mr. Thomas had his arm broken. His son was shot out behind the house where he had gone to greet the old Indian. Mrs. Jordan's daughter received a ball in her breast (sic), so all were disabled but Mrs. Jordan and the Irishman. They succeeded in barricading the door before the Indians rushed it. Then commenced a siege and the Indians fired upon the house. Then the Irishman did the firing while Mrs. Jordan loaded the guns, at last she succeeded faster than he shot and then seeing an opportunity she loaded an old musket by throwing in a hand full of powder and shot and taking aim at an Indian that stood out by a tree; she fired on him and he dropt, filled full of buckshot. Then the Indians abandoned the siege, carried away their dead. It was supposed that they killed nine of the Indians for they counted nine bloody places in the snow indicating where a dead Indian had layed (sic). The Indians tried to disguise the number killed by killing some pigs and dragging them around. Great was the praise bestowed upon Mrs. Jordan for help in defense of the house; many said the government should give her a quarter section of land. I saw Mrs. Jordan after that summer as we were going from Des Moines to Fort Dodge. She was moving south in a covered wagon her daughter was along. She seemed not recovered from the gun shot in her breast yet. Father talked to her, then she went on her journey and I saw her no more.

In the meantime a relief of men were marching to the aid of the prisoners (sic). A company was formed at Fort Dodge. Some of the men living on the creek insisted that

father enlist his services for he had some acquaintance with the Indians; but he had to stay home to care for his family. Major Williams went, headed a company at Fort Dodge and upon Lizzard Creek. Silas Van Cleave enlisted, so they marched to the relief of the frontiersmen. Other companies were raised in other sections. The march was through deep snow and the snow got soft and there was slough (see notes) to wade through and the men had to camp out in the snow at bed time.

The Indians half starved the women prisoners (sic), they offered them but little food, they ate of the feet of the hares that were killed, by crisping them over the fire and eating them, eating the scraps after the Indians were done eating. So they were weak and half famished and urged along by the threat of death.

Mar 13, 2007

#4

**'Joseph Van Cleave Memoirs' excerpt (II)**

This selection is from the same source - Joseph Van Cleave Memoirs:

DEATH OF MRS. GARDINER

The Indians attacked Mrs. Gardiner's house while he was away after provisions. He was returning home and was overtaken by the storm and deep snow and was delayed. When he arrived home he found the Indians had attacked his house, taken his wife prisoner (sic) and slaughtered his children and his house broke up. He went in pursuit of the Indians to liberate his wife. He was in sight of the Indians as they were crossing the Little Sioux River. The woman was heavily loaded and weak, famished like and she fell off a log in the river. She was swimming out when one of the treacherous Indians shot her and she sank away. Mr. Gardiner and friends found her body below the river. They took it out and gave her burial beside the river in the wilderness far from her native home.

DEATH OF TITONKA-TA-NACHEE

Mr. Gardiner swore to be revenged for the death of his wife and family. The perpetrators were Titonkatanachee and his son and some others of his predatory band. How well he kept his oath the sequel will tell. He as a very brave and fearless man. He kept on their trail like a sleuth hound until he came up with them. Afterwards he went out to Fort Dodge, Father saw him there. He was not inclined to say very much about his revenge but he told Uncle Press Van Cleave about it. He showed nine scalps. This larger scalp, said he, is Titonkatanachee's, so he was avenged of the murder of his wife and children.

Mar 13, 2007

#5

it's sweet of you to post some of your stories here. I enjoy reading them, quite a family you have there girl.



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