

SCALPED BY INDIANS

*Ferguson*

In a few years the little settlement had spread over the rich lands on Fishing and Rocky Creeks, the dwellings being gathered in clusters, of which there were some three or four within a short distance of each other. Not a great way from Steel's and Taylor's Forte was another settlement consisting of a few families, among which were those of William McKinney and his brother James.

In the summer of 1761, sixteen Indians, with some squaws, of the Cherokee tribe, took up their abode for several weeks near what is called Simpson's Shoals, for the purpose of hunting and fishing during the hot months. In August, the two McKinneys being absent on a journey to Camden, William's wife, Barbara, was left alone with several young children. One day she saw the Indian women running toward her house in great haste, followed by the men. She had no time to offer resistance. The squaws seized her and the children, pulled them into the house, and shoved them behind the door, where they immediately placed themselves on guard, pushing back the Indians as fast as they tried to force their way in, and uttering the most fearful outcries.

Mrs. McKinney concluded that it was their intention to kill her, and expected her fate every moment. The assistance rendered by the squaws, whether given out of compassion for a lonely mother, or in return for kindness shown them, proved effectual for her protection till the arrival of one of the chiefs, who drew his long knife and drove off the savages. The mother, apprehending another attack, went to some of her neighbors and entreated them to come stay with her. Robert Brown and Joanna, his wife, Sara Ferguson, her daughter Sara, and two sons, and a young man named Mica Melbury, came in compliance with her request, and took up their quarters in the house. The next morning, Mrs. McKinney ventured out alone to milk her cows. It had been her practice heretofore to take some of the children with her, and she could not explain why she went alone this time, though she was not free from apprehension. It seemed to be so by a special ordering of Providence.

While she was milking, the Indians crept toward her on their hands and knees - she heard not their approach, nor knew anything till they seized her. Sensible at once of all the horror of her situation, she made no effort to escape, but promised to go quietly with them. They then set toward the house, holding her fast by the arm. She had the presence of mind to walk as far off as possible from the Indians who held her, expecting Melbury to fire as they approached her dwelling. As they came up, he fired wounding the one who held Mrs. McKinney; she broke from his hold and ran, and another Indian pursued and seized her. At this moment, she was just at her own door, which John Ferguson imprudently opened that she might enter. The Indians without shot him dead as he presented himself. His mother ran to him and received another shot in her thigh, of which she died in a few days.

Melbury, who saw that all their lives depended on prompt action, dragged them from the door, fastened it, and repairing to the loft, prepared for a vigorous defense. There were in all five guns; Sarah Ferguson loaded for him, while he kept up a continual fire, aiming at the Indians wherever one could be seen. Determined to effect their object of forcing an entrance, some of the savages came near the house, keeping under cover of an outhouse in which Brown and his wife had taken refuge, not being able

on the alarm, to get into the house. They had crept into a corner and were crouched there close to the boarding. One of the Indians coming up leaned against the outside, separated from them only by a few boards, the crevices between which probably enabled them to see him. Mrs. Brown proposed to take a sword that lay by them and run the savage through the body, but her husband refused. He expected death, he said, every moment, and did not wish to go out of the world having his hands crimsoned with the blood of any fellow creature. "Let me die in peace", were his words, "with all the world." Joanna, though in the same peril, could not respond to the charitable feeling. "If I am to die", she said "I should like first to send some of the redskins on the journey!" "But we are not so sure we have to die. Don't you hear the crack of Melbury's rifle? He holds the house. I warrant you that redskin looked awfully scared as he leaned against the corner here. We could have done it in a moment."

Mrs. McKinney, meanwhile, having failed to get into her house, had been again seized by the Indians, and desperately, regardless of her own safety, was doing all in her power to help her besieged friends. We would knock the priming out of the guns carried by the savages, and when they presented them to fire, would throw them up, so that the discharge might prove harmless. She was often heard to say afterwards that all fear had left her, and she thought only of those within the building, for she expected neither for herself deliverance nor mercy. Melbury continued to fire whenever one of the enemy appeared; they kept themselves, however, concealed for the most part behind trees or the outhouse. Several were wounded by his cool and well directed shots, and at length, tired of the contest, the Indians retreated, carrying Mrs. McKinney with them. She now resisted with all her might, preferring instant death to the more terrible fate of a captive in the hands of fierce Cherokees. Her refusal to go forward irritated her captors, and when they had dragged her about half a mile, near a rock upon the plantation now occupied by John Culp, she received a second blow with the tomanawk, which stretched her insensible upon the ground. When after some time consciousness returned, she found herself lying upon the rock, to which she had been dragged from the spot where she fell. She was stripped naked, and her scalp had been taken off. By degrees the knowledge of her condition and the desire of obtaining help came upon her. She lifted up her head, and looking around, saw the wretches who had so cruelly mangled her pulling ears of corn from a field nearby to roast for their meal. She laid her head down quickly again, well knowing that if they saw her alive they would not be slack in coming to finish the work of death. Thus she lay motionless till all was silent, and she found they were gone. Then with great difficulty she dragged herself back to the house. It may be imagined with what feeling the unfortunate woman was received by her friends and children, and how she met the bereaved mother wounded unto death, who had suffered for her attempt to save others. One of the blows received by Mrs. McKinney had made a deep wound in her back; the others were upon her head. When her wounds had been dressed as well as was practicable, Melbury and the others assisted her to bed.

Brown and his brave wife having then joined the little garrison, preparations were made for defense in case of another attack. The guns were all loaded and placed ready for use, and committing the house to the care of the Browns, Melbury sallied forth, rifle in hand, and took to the woods. He made his way directly and as quickly as possible to Taylor's Fort at Landsford. The men there, informed of what had happened, immediately

set about preparations for pursuing the treacherous Indians who had thus violated the implied good faith of neighbors by assailing an unprotected woman. The next morning a number of them, well armed, started for the Indian encampment at the shoals. The Cherokees were gone, but the indignant pursuers took up the trail, which they followed as far as Broad River. Here they saw the Indians on the other side, but did not judge it expedient to pursue them further or provoke an encounter.

In the meantime, William McKinney had reason for uneasiness in his absence from home, for he knew that the Indians had been at the shoals some time, nor was the deceitful and cruel character of the tribe unknown to him. He was accustomed long afterwards to tell of the warning conveyed to him while on his road to Camden. Two nights in succession he dreamed of losing his hat, and looking upon this as an omen of evil, became so uncomfortable he proceeded no farther. Taking one of the horses out of the wagon, he mounted and rode homeward at his utmost speed. Reaching his own house a little after dark, he was admitted by the women as he made himself known. The scene that greeted his eyes was one truly heartrending; the slain man, John Ferguson, still lay there, and in the same apartment the dying mother and Mrs. McKinney, more like one dead than living, mangled almost past recognition, the blood still coming from her wounds and drenching the pillows on which she lay. No fictitious tragedy could surpass the horrors of this in real life. The wounds in Mrs. McKinney's head never healed entirely, but continued to break out occasionally, so that blood flowed from them, staining the bed at night, and sometimes fragments of bone came off. Nevertheless, she lived many years afterwards, and gave birth to several children. Her daughter, Hannah was born three months after this attack, and she was plainly marked with a tomahawk and drops of blood as if running down the side of her face. Hannah McKinney married John Steadman, and was living in Tennessee in 1827. The McFaddens in Chester County are descendants of Mrs. McKinney.

(Reference: Mrs. Ellet's "The Women of the American Revolution".)