

## From Russell Dyche's *History of Laurel County, Kentucky* (1954)

### McNitt Defeat

By J. J. Dickey

This is a story of "The Defeated Camp," or the McNitt Defeat, the worst Indian massacre in the history of Kentucky, as related to Rev. J. J. Dickey by C. B. Faris and Mrs. Levi Jackson. It was first published in *The Mountain Echo*, October 2, 1896, lacking one day being the 110th anniversary of that massacre, which occurred on the night of Oct. 3, 1786.

C. B. Faris was grandfather of Mrs. J. T. (Nell McKee) Jones, a grandson of Isham Faris, and great nephew of John Farris, members of the Company of men who came from Crab Orchard to bury the dead. He remembered particulars of the event as related by his grandfather when he was ten years old, and often repeated till his death at the age of 97. After placing the scene at 'The Defeated Camp' on the east bank of Little Laurel creek, Mr. Faris wrote in a statement dated June 18, 1896:

"After partaking of supper and while pleasantly singing and chatting around their camp fires, doubtless rejoicing that, as they believed, the worst was over; that they had passed through Cumberland Gap, had crossed the river and would soon arrive at Crab Orchard station, Logan's fort or some place of safety, suddenly they were surprised by the report of a rifle. Immediately a sentinel, who had been placed as a guard at a certain point, came running into the camp and fell fatally wounded. The savages were in close pursuit and a considerable band of them, who with tomahawks and knives fell upon the emigrants and thus butchered them indiscriminately. The emigrants were completely surprised. Outnumbered by the Indians, they made but feeble defense. About twenty of the number were killed and a few made their escape in the darkness of the night and hid in the woods. One young lad, a cripple, who could not walk, crawled away and hid in the brush and thus concealed himself until the Indians had left the camp.

"A few of the men hurried on to Crab Orchard station, it being the nearest place of protection, where a company of men, armed and equipped for the occasion, started for and soon reached the scene of action. The said Isham Faris, being one of the company of rescuers, said that when they reached the camp they found some twenty dead--men, women and children, tomahawked and butchered in the most cruel and inhuman manner.

"After the savages had destroyed such of the chattles as they could not conveniently carry away, they left. Before the company of rescuers arrived a few of the concealed emigrants had ventured into the camp of blood and were silently weeping over the dead bodies of their friends and relatives. One woman had gathered her four small children and laid them out together; all of them had been tomahawked and she was almost crazed with grief.

"The company immediately began work. They dug two large pits, or graves, into which they placed the bodies of the dead and covered them up in as decent a manner as they could under the circumstances, after which they conducted the surviving emigrants to Crab Orchard station....The graves, two sinks in the earth, are plainly visible, besides some marks upon large oak trees nearby, all of which is still in woodland, never having been cleared up or cultivated at that place.

"The undersigned, writer of the foregoing, was born and raised at what is now known as Faris station (Fariston), and has been at the Defeated Camp, one mile north of said station. I am now near 76 years of age and have lived in Laurel county all my life.

"C. B. Faris"

### **Mrs. Levi Jackson's Version**

Mrs. Jackson, widow of Judge Levi Jackson, gives the following, which she heard from the lips of Isham Faris and his daughter Dicie, concerning the massacre of McNitt's company, known all over this country as Defeated Camp:

“There were fourteen families in camp. They were moving to central Kentucky, and had been in the habit of putting out a guard every night, but they had not been molested, and it seems from their conduct that they must have thought themselves beyond danger, for they engaged in drinking and dancing until a late hour. Only three escaped--a man, a woman and a little child, a girl. The woman was sick and awoke when the attack was made. She ran as far as she could and then took shelter in a hollow tree, where a child was born to her that night. The child lived. Dicie Faris saw it afterwards at Stanford, where the goods which the Indians failed to take were sold at auction. At this auction her father, Isham Faris, bought a book and a tucking comb for his daughter, which she kept for many years.

“The man who escaped carried with him a bag of silver and gold, and fearing he might be overtaken he threw it under the roots of a tree that was blown down and kicked some leaves over it. It was a pastime in early days to search for this bag of coins.

“There were all sorts of goods left by the Indians--dry goods, feather beds, bed clothing, bolts of linen goods, hanks of flax thread ready to be woven, clothing--in fact, everything that people would want in their new homes. The Indians had cut the feather beds open and the feathers were scattered all over the earth.

“The captain of the company coming to bury the dead had the men bend down saplings and put on quilts and other goods to preserve them from the wild beasts till they could return and get them. He instructed the men not to take a heavy load, as they might be attacked by Indians and the goods would be in the way of either fighting or fleeing. The proceeds of the auction were given to the survivors, after paying for their rescue.”

Mrs. Jackson knew Isham Faris from her earliest recollection till his death, when she was over 20 years old. He was a near neighbor of her father, John Freeman, as was his daughter Dicie, and from these and others she heard these things repeatedly. It is evident that these historical and traditional accounts refer to the same event.

### **From the website:**

**[http://www.foresthhistory.org/ASPNET/Publications/region/8/daniel\\_boone/chap21.htm](http://www.foresthhistory.org/ASPNET/Publications/region/8/daniel_boone/chap21.htm)**

One of the major massacres on the Boone Trace took place on the night of **October 3, 1786**. A party of 30 travelers on their way to Fort Boonesborough camped for the night at a spring in what is now the Levi Jackson Wilderness Road State Park near London, Kentucky. The leaders were the prominent **McNitt**, Ford and Barnes families and their servants from Virginia.

During the night a band of Chicamauga Indians attacked the camp, killed and scalped 21 persons, took five women prisoner and carried away all horses, cattle, and household goods. Items they did not carry off they destroyed. Pillows and bedticks were torn open and the feathers scattered over the ground.

It is told that one woman hid herself in a hollow tree during the attack and, while hidden there, gave birth to a child. They were found the next day and taken to the settlement where she was reunited with her husband who had escaped the attack. At that time Colonel Whitley was absent from his home on a trip to Virginia, and the Indians were not followed.

**FROM the website:**

**<http://parks.ky.gov/parks/recreationparks/levi-jackson/history.aspx>**

### **McNITT'S DEFEAT**

One of the most tragic events in the history of Kentucky took place within the confines of the modern park on October 3, 1786. A group of fourteen families were moving to central Kentucky. They made camp one night and failed to post a guard. Throughout their journey they had taken every precaution against Indian attack. On this particular evening they felt that since they had traveled this far without attack they could relax. The families danced and drank until late that evening. After they had retired for the night, the Indians attacked the camp and massacred all but three members of the group. A man, woman, and little girl survived the slaughter. Twenty-four people are known to have perished in the attack. The site became known as Defeated Camp or McNitt's Defeat.