

Indian Massacres in Laurel County

by Shirley Landen

Several Indian massacres took place in Laurel County in the late 1700's. Among the better known are the McNitt Defeat in the Levi Jackson State Park, the McFarland Defeat on McWhorter Road, Raccoon Springs, Moore, Drake, and others.

Recently a first person account from March 30, 1858 by Rev. Joseph Brown of Fort Nashboro (Nashville, TN) was found by the Laurel County History Museum. The reason this account had never been located was that the transcription identified Little Laurel River as Little "Sorrel" River. Upon reading the account, identifying landmarks mentioned, and reading the original handwriting, it was readily apparent that the attack took place in Laurel County.

Following is the original first person account which mentions some of the other massacres and details the killing of the postman at Little Laurel River:

[The contents of this manuscript was published in the "Banner of Peace", Aug 5th, 1858, occupying four columns of that paper.]

Rev. Joseph Brown, March 30, 1858 – this narrative was sent to a Colonel Putman by its author, Rev. Brown, who details the events surrounding an attack on his party by unnamed Indians during a return trip from Knoxville to Nashville. He further explains that he later was told the story how those very Indians who attacked his party were ambushed and killed by white men. Brown's account was published in "*Banner of Peace*" August 5, 1858 and a note on the document indicates that this is the original manuscript:

If I live to the second day of August next, I shall be 86 years old. So I hope you will excuse my interlining and etc., but _____ fogg has attempted to give a history of the mercy of God to so unprofitable a mortal as I have ever been to society there is one part which has never been penned, is as strange as that has been penned.

I went to East Tennessee on business in the winter of 1793 and on my return got in company with Colonel Robert Hayne a brother in law of Gen. Jackson and when we got to Knoxville the night before a trader and William Blunt or Sevier, then Governor, I do not which was governor of the territory at that time. This Cherokee trader informed them that a large body of Indians was about to start to waylay the _____ company coming to Nashville and we had better turn and come by Kentucky. We done so and the second night we got within three miles of the last house and I had a Negro woman along and we concluded to not eat breakfast. But when we went to start, the horse the Negro road was badly foundered. A gentleman along said if I would bleed him at the edge of the hair around his feet he would be well in a mile or two. I requested him to do it for me, he attempted to do so but the horse was very wild and jerked up his foot and the knife went into the artery in front of his foot and I made the woman ride my horse and I walked and drove the foundered one to the last house. He bled all the way and while the company was eating I got some cobwebs and held on it and stopped the blood on it.

We then started up Clinch Mountain Road , but before we got half way up the mountain it broke to bleeding as fast as ever and I knew I should lose my horse if I went on. I observed to Colonel Hayse that I would be glad he would take charge of the Negro woman as I had to stop with my horse and she had provision enough to do her to Nashville but he would have to buy some corn for the horse in

Kentucky. He said he would do so cheerfully for my brother William had saved his life two years before at Emorys River probably twelve miles from Kingston East Tennessee. A large body of Indians fired on them about daybreak as they awakened out of sleep. The Indians rushed on them, it was a three fourths of a mile to Emorys River. They ran to the river. My brother was shot in the back of his right hand and the ball came out at his right wrist but he got his clothing off and tied them with his handkerchief to a chunk but not being tied good and the rippling of the water, the handkerchief came loose and at that instant Colonel Hays was a sinking just before him he caught his shirt in his teeth and he being a good swimmer gave his chunk to Hays and by that means both lives were saved, though my brother had lost three fine horses and all his clothing but his shirt. But it was only twelve or fifteen miles to the settlement after Hays gave the above information the company started and I stayed with my horse and held the wound till it began to swell, and then I lead him back to the fort and stayed there one week till my horse got well.

The postrider, Thomas Ross and Colonel Friley came along and as they lived in Kentucky concluded if they could go safe I could, accordingly we started the next morning and went on all day very well but the second day about two o'clock on the east side of Little Laurel River we were fired on by a party of Indians. We dashed forward to the river. It did not _____ at the ford. The road led up the river through a little distance from the river and in about the one fourth of mile it came near the road again and at that place the Little Hurricane [tornado] had crossed the road the summer before but the guard that went through to protect the traveler had cut the limbs of fallen trees so that the pack horses could get along.

Ross's creature (horse) could outrun my horse I think he was a rod ahead of me. Just as we entered the fallen timber an Indian from behind a tree fired at him and I suppose shot his creature through the ear for she was shot through the ear, she wheeled back and as they fired on Ross and me, Friley said there was twenty or thirty guns fired at us too. For Friley was forty yards behind but our horse was scared at the screaming of the Indians and the guns and dodging they missed us both.

We dashed back and met Friley and we all came in abreast to the large fallen tree and I was on the left and Ross in the middle and as Ross's mare charged the log her four feet went into the ground so she fell on her breast and then on her side and he went over her head and his gun fell out of his hand he sprang to his gun and looked at his mare and I suppose he thought she was killed so I expected mine to fall every minute. He kept missing me so much and that I was the last I seen of him. I then reigned my horse to pass the bend of the river and Friley hollered at me not to go there for he said when they fired on Ross and me in the Hurricane he seen the trees all lined with Indians between me and the river.

I then made for the river and when I came to it it was a high caving bank. I turned down the river but it got no better four or five feet to the water Friley hollered to me that he was wounded and for me to charge my horse down the bank or they would have us I answered him that I was wounded also and turned my horse toward the river he sailed off as though it was level ground the first plunge took me round the middle in swimming water and then he took down the river with me and all I could do I could not turn him. At length I hit him with my left hand on the side of his head and that turned him as my right arm fell dead when the ball struck me and I would have left him in the river but I was fearful I could not swim out with one hand having my overcoat on and I was fearful the horse was shot and dying but I thought I would try to make him carry me to the shore and when he got to the bank it was slate bank.

He got about half way up the bank and fell and I thought he was dead and sprung off him and shoved my overcoat off the point of my shoulder to run and at that moment I seen Ross's mare nearing the

bank. I caught my coat again and pulled it up and made for Ross's mare and as she passed me I got hold of the bridle. It was among her feet though not tangled I put it over her head and sprung on her and came off on her and as I raided the bank I seen Friley going over the hill more than a hundred yards ahead although he went after me in the river and it did not swim him and he had a low bank to rise if my horse would have gone straight across he would have the same low bank but as I mounted Ross's mare I started the course I seen Friley going and after going fifty or sixty yards I look round to see if I could see any of the Indians that first fired on me on that side of the river and discovered my own horse at my heels I checked my mare a moment to he passed me and I swam after him and turned him the way I seen Friley go and directly struck his trail.

It was post oak land and the Indians had burnt the leaves off the ground and his mare had thrown up the white clay so I could see his trail for thirty yards ahead. I could see the blood on bushes where he passed and in about a fourth of a mile I overtook him. He had stopped in a little sunk place and he said he was so sick he would be obliged to get down. I observed to him if you get down you never will get up again for the Indian will be here in less than five minutes and besides that your horse is shot in his thighs and he may not carry you twenty minutes shove him as long as you can he then observed I will try to keep up.

I went off east probably a mile and turned north and struck the river again at some Buffalo licks which I was informed after I got in the settlement, was five miles from the ford where I had crossed the river there was a small stream not belly deep on our horses and after I had crossed I seen that my horse had stopped to eat some cane that was on the bank I then turned back and caught my own horse he had lost the reins of my bridle I then pulled the bridle off Ross's mare and put it on my own horse and drove the mare through the river and requested Friley to drive her after me, he said he was so sick he could not but she would follow us. She had the mail on and his blanket just as he left her.

I went on a westerly course and in less than a mile we struck the road. Friley was so deranged he wanted to take the wrong end of the road I informed him that I would not keep the road any further. I enquired to him the course to the settlement of Kentucky as I had never been there. He said it was about a sunset course if I know which way that was a beautiful clear day and at that place the road was a going right north. I went right across the road took up a long hill and just as I got to the top of the hill I struck a path leading westerly which I thought was a buffalo path leading to a lick and from there I could get a path leading almost any course for miles but after I had followed it probably half a mile it began to give out and supposed the main path was to the right and took down a point of the ridge and had not gone more than half a mile before I seen a fresh parcel of logs pulled up beside a big log I conclude some Indian had died and they had covered him up there and I would go and see but when I got there I got down and seen it was a white man I then looked over on the north side of the hill and seen where the Indians had emptied the feather beds of a company they had defeated at that very place the Monday week before and there was a man in that company a running off with another man's wife and the woman had her little daughter about seven years old a riding behind her and when the Indians fired on them the horse threw the woman and little girl and the man sprang off his horse and gathered the woman and threw her on his horse and sprang behind her and left the little girl a laying there the man's name was Drake and the woman the wife of Web Nance.

Friley said to me we had better take the road as we were so near it for there was a Dutch man three or four miles from there that had a good block house and a good horse pen near the doors and a number of guns and dogs. We then made for the road and went as fast as our horses could carry us I kept _____ to I got in a mile of the house and was very sick.

The Dutch man was kind took my horse and put it in his pen dressed my wound found a piece of the socket bone of my shoulder in my shirt and put some sugar and whiskey to my wound and give me a deer skin to lay down on which I occupied for two nights and a day with a high fever and several times in the day they informed me they believed my horse would die as we had fed us with the corn they had been carrying on their backs just before the Indians fired on us and my horse was getting over a founder and straining him for ten or twelve miles foundered him over again but he was the only one man or beast but was killed wounded or lost or taken as Friley lost one of his that he had a pack on and his mare that was shot in the thigh proved to be a slight wound and his wound was above and below his elbow only in the flesh but he bled so much that he was very sick too we got near the road where Drake was defeated the second night about midnight a company of three men and two women came through after us and had stopped at Little Laurel River to camp as it was getting dark and found poor Ross stripped naked and his head cut off and that alarmed them.

They mounted their horses and came twelve miles to where I was. The next morning my fever had subsided and my horse had got up. I plead with those thieves, as I learned afterward that was their character in Georgia and were then a running away, to pack my horse and let me ride one of their pack horses but they refused and said I could not go. I replied there was no could not with me as I must go where I could get medical aid and nourishment and directed the Dutch man to put my saddle on my own horse, that the road was as free for me as any other person but I did not go over a quarter of a mile before I discovered Ross's mare again but she had lost her mail and saddle I rode round her and one of those men did help me to catch her and put on my saddle on her and I got on her.

She was a delightful riding animal and it was called forty miles to Crab Orchard the first settlement and we got there before dark but I was very much exhausted and there was a doctor a brother in law of Ross that lived sixty or eighty yards of the fort. I of course went to the Doctors and they treated me with a great deal of kindness and tenderness for six weeks before I felt able to start home and the doctor would not suffer me to eat meat but kept me on sweetened vinegar and water and bread for it was in March and the cows generally had their calves with them in the cane but Colonel William Whitley in three miles and in about three weeks I got so I could ride and I went to Whitley's every other day to get me a cup of buttermilk they were very kind to me and the next summer come a year Colonel Whitley came to Nashville with a large company of men to go with Major Orr of East Tennessee and the volunteers around from Nashville to take the town of Nickajack where I had been a prisoner by the Cherokee six years before.

Course I went along although the wound was still a running in both sides and pieces kept coming out for two years and at that time there was a hole clean through my shoulder and on that campaign a nephew of Colonel Whitley give me information of judgment of heaven on the very Indians that wounded me. A trader had just come in from the northern Indians who said there were sixty from one town that came out to waylay the road from Kaintuck to East Tennessee the winter and spring before and after they had defeated different family on the road they took a fort on Slate River and took prisoners and was followed by a company for some distance in some stony grounds the Indians had scattered so that their trail could not be followed.

The company returned and Simon Kenton who had been a prisoner by the Indians then commanded the company observed he thought that he knew what Indians they were from the course they were going, and if his men would go with him he would follow them. His men were willing to go and they started and just before night he struck a large trail and followed to be found he was near them he then stopped his men and went on himself to he come to their camp and found they had more camps then he had men.

He then informed his men of the danger and thought they what better get as far back as possible that night for the Indians could see their trail in the morning and follow them then they turned home and just before day he came in sight of a fire. He stopped his men and went and examined the camp and seen where there was parcel of people that was covered with white peoples clothing, he then went back and informed his men that they were the very Indians that they were a hunting but it would not do to fire on them if they did the Indians would Tomahawk the prisoners, but they must get as nigh as they could and lay still to it was light enough to see to shoot a man ten steps and then run upon them with their Tomahawk and then as they run shoot them and by that means they would save the prisoners, and they done so and they thought they had killed all of them and there they got the mail that I left on Ross' mare and the prisoners that was taken when McFarlen was defeated the next Tuesday after I was defeated and the prisoners that was taken when they took the effort so that we knew it was the same Indians that had done all the mischief the Trader said there was one only got back out of sixty that had started from that town I will now give a relation of McFarlens women and children and as McFarlen was a East Tennesean they requested him to command them while in Wilderness.

He agreed to do so and had passed where I was defeated and near where drake was defeated and he seen a small rock by the side of sapling on a bank and he said he thought that had not grew there glanced his eyes closely on it and discovered the muzzle of the Indian gun on the top of the rock. He cried Indians and sprung off his horse and drew his sight to split the fellows head as soon as he raised t but he supposed the fellow seen him between the rock and the sapling and spring off to come round him. He ran even with the fellow forty or fifty yards and about forty yards apart and he seen the fellow was about stopping and he thought he could out shoot any Indian but the indian gun fired first and shot through McFarlen clothing on the one side, but he killed the Indian he jumped behind a tree and loaded again just a that time another indian came running round and he run with him and run forty or fifty steps and he the fellow was about stopping and he still thought he could outshoot any indian but that fellows gun fired rather first and shot threw McFarlen clothing on the other side but he dropped him then got behind another tree and loaded again and a third fellow came round and he looked like a white man or a very fair half breed and McFarlen and him had a similar race as the fellow stopped the both fired and the fellow shot off McFarlen Charger and through his shot pouch strap, but McFarlen dropped him. McFarlen loaded and no others came.

He then ran back and could see but one of his men and he was a quarter mile off and a crowd of Indians had taken the women he said he then thought it was not worthwhile to throw away his life. He then left four of his men dead on the ground and the fifth one dead by my side of his wound a company went to bury the dead with McFarlen and before they got to the place they seen a pack horse standing some distance from the road, they dashed out and there was a little girl laying near him asleep. Some of them said there was one little girl dead but their coming waken her she look up and smiled to see the white men and there was hardly a man but shed tears. The pack horse run off with her in the fight and had there got his bridle fastened to again and had been near three days.

McFarlen went on to the battleground and showed where he stood and where the Indians stood and there was the blood where the fellows lay but the Indians had taken them away about two hundred yards off. In a tree top the last man he shot was covered and he was a white man. By finding the pack and little girl they went back along the road and found the track of Nances little daughter that was taken when Drake was defeated and they followed it by where I was defeated and it was called twelve miles from there to big Sorrel [Laurel] River and it was a deep bold stream probably forty yards wide. They followed her there and seen she had went down to the water and came up again and they went up and down the river in search of her.

At night they found her about three fourth of a mile from the ford down the river. She was a very pretty little girl with red hair and she said the Indians went everyday to watch the road, and there was three white men with them and one day they had been shooting at the road and came back a great while before night and only two of the white men came back and one of the Indians had a very sore leg, and they cried that evening very much and the next morning they cried again and then started and came back the same way they went to the camp. Near the place she was taken and in a few days they began to shoot at them again and the Indians that was at the camp with her hoped and was might glad and all run off to the road and left her by herself and she said she thought she would go to Hazel Patch for she knew she had only passed the Hazel Patch a little when she was taken by the Indians. But she took the wrong end of the road and said she gather leaves every night to the side of log and lay in them as she had been near three days that she had eat nothing when she was found and all the other children that was brought in was frostbitten but here I am now done with the narrative and as Mrs. Fog found me with one of her books and will have the foregoing published in the history Joseph Brown as a second edition, I will take a dozen or two of them if I am alive. The facts contained in the history are correct except (Buckhana) for the history says 14 miles from Nashville when it is only about 4 miles if the above cannot be published in the 2nd editions of the history of Joseph Brown by, Mrs. Fogg or the editor of the Banner of Peace or on the Methodist's editor you will please return it by mail to me, Pulaskie Giles County.

And oblige yours
Jos (Joseph) Brown