

Chapter IV. 1775 - 1794 (Part 6)

A History of The Middle New River Settlements and Contiguous Territory.

By David E. Johnston (1906).

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In the fall of this same year of 1789, a body of Indians came into the Bluestone and upper Clinch settlements, crossed the East River mountain on to the waters of the Clear fork of Wolf Creek, prowled around for several days to find, as afterwards ascertained, the home of George and Matthias Harman, they supposed they had killed Captain Henry Harman in the fight on the Tug the year before. Late in the evening of the first day of October, 1789, they suddenly appeared at the door of the cabin of Thomas Wiley, on Clear Fork, at what is now known as the "Dill's Place." Mr. Wiley was from home, they took his wife, Virginia, and five children prisoners, plundered the house, and moved off up Cove Creek, where they killed all of Mrs. Wiley's children, crossed the East River mountain by the farm owned by the late Walter McDonald Sanders, down Beaver Pond Creek, by where the town of Graham, Virginia, is now situated, striking Bluestone, and across Flat Top mountain by way of the Pealed Chestnuts, and down the north fork of the Tug Fork to the Harman battle ground, (a part of the same Indians that captured Mrs. Wiley, were in the fight with Harman.) On the battlefield they gathered together some of the bones of their comrades who had fallen in the fight, and bemoaned and bewailed their loss, and finally the leader of the party said to Mrs. Wiley, "Here I killed Old Skygusty," the name they had given Captain Harman; Mrs. Wiley replied, "No you didn't for I saw him last week." The Indian, apparently nettled at her reply, said, "You lie, you Virginia Huzza, you lie, for when I shot him I heard him call on his God." Mrs. Wiley was taken to the Indian town at Chillicothe where she remained until the last days of September, 1792, when she escaped; a full history of which will be given later on when we narrate the events occurring in year of 1792. This incident is taken in part from a letter of Mr. Armstrong Wiley and from a report made by Colonel Robert Trigg to the Governor of Virginia which will be found in the Virginia Calendar Papers.

A marauding party of Indians entered the Bluestone and upper Clinch settlements, in the year of 1790, which greatly alarmed the settlers, who took prompt measures to repel and punish them. They committed no other outrage than to steal a large number of horses from the people, which they succeeded in getting away with. At the coming of the Indians in this year of 1790, an event happened in the neighborhood of the Davidson-Bailey Fort, which was deeply impressed upon the minds of those conversant with what is about to be related. John Bailey, son of Richard, the settler, had married a daughter of

John Goolman Davidson, the settler, and the buildings at the fort being so crowded, and Mr. Bailey desiring to set out for himself, had on Boyer's Branch, about three-fourths of a mile north-east of the fort, erected him a fairly good one room log house to which he took his young wife, and there in summer of 1790, was born his first child and eldest son, Jonathan, who was only four days old when the Indians entered the neighborhood. The young mother seized her babe, mounted a horse and rode to the fort, from which she seemed to suffer no injury or inconvenience. If such were to happen in this our day there is at least a probability there would be a funeral or a heavy physician's bill to pay.

Jonathan Bailey long lived, dying in 1770, (*Note: as printed in the book*) leaving behind him a numerous progeny of as good people as live in any community.

The General Assembly of Virginia in October, 1789, created the county of Wythe within the following boundaries: All that part of Montgomery which lies south and west of a line beginning in the Henry line at the head of Big Reedy Island, from thence to Wagon ford on Peek Creek, thence to the Clover bottom on Bluestone, thence to the Kanawha line, shall form one distinct county, and to be called and known by the name of Wythe. Court for Wythe to be held at the house of James McGavock." By this same act a part of the western part of the County of Botetourt was added to Montgomery. The western line of Wythe was the same as had been the western line of Montgomery County viz: from the second ford of Holstein above the Royal Oak to the west end of Morriss' Knob and then to the head waters of the Sandy at Roark's gap. And this remained unchanged until the county of Tazewell was created in 1800.

Andrew Davidson, son of John Goolman Davidson had married Rebecca Burke, granddaughter of James Burke, the reputed discoverer of Burke's Garden, and had made his settlement at the head spring of the East River, less than a half mile from what is now the east limits of the city of Bluefield, West Virginia. The spring of 1791 being late, Andrew Davidson having some important business at Smithfield (Draper's Meadows) from which his father and family had removed about ten years before, set off from home in the early part of April leaving at home his wife, his three small children, two girls and boy, and two bound children, orphans, whose names were Bromfield. Mr. Davidson had requested his brother-in-law, John Bailey, to look after his family. Shortly after Mr. Davidson's departure, perhaps two or three days, and while Mrs. Davidson was gathering sugar water from sugar maple trees close by the house, there suddenly appeared several Indians, who told her she would have to go with them to their towns beyond the Ohio. There was no alternative although she was in no condition to make such a trip, as she was then rapidly approaching motherhood. Taking such plunder as they could carry, they set fire to the house and with their prisoners departed; the Indians helping along with the children. Only two hours relaxation from the march was allowed her and they again pushed on. The little stranger after a day's time, they drowned. On the fateful morning on which Mrs. Davidson and her children were captured, John Bailey being at the fort informed his people that he must go over and look after Andrew Davidson's family, whereupon one of his sisters, (he had but two), told him to get her a horse and that she would go with him, to which he assented and secured the horse for her. They set out on the journey, going up Boyer's Branch to the gap in the ridge, where the livery stable of Mr. J. C. Higgenbothen now stands inside the city limits of Bluefield, and which spot has

now been selected for the site of the Federal building shortly to be erected. On reaching this gap Mr. Bailey discovered a heavy smoke from the direction of the Davidson house, and thereupon told his sister to remain on her horse in the gap and watch while he went forward to a piece of ground in the valley, (the hill on which lately stood the Higgenbotham residence, but which hill has been recently removed). He hurriedly returned, reporting the house on fire, and that evidently the Indians had been there and taken the people, as no one could be seen about the house. Mr. Bailey and his sister rode rapidly to the fort, gave the alarm to the neighborhood, and a party gathered as quickly as possible and pursued the Indians, but the leaves being dry the savages had left but few, if any marks, and the party was unable to overtake them. On arriving at the Indian town, the little girls of Mrs. Davidson were tied to trees and shot to death before her eyes. The boy, her son, was given to an old squaw, who in crossing a river with him upset the canoe and the boy was drowned. As to what became of the two bound children, was by the white people never known.

Mrs. Davidson was in captivity from April, 1791, until a date subsequent to Wayne's victory over the United Indian Tribes at Fallen Timbers in August, 1794. Mr. Davidson made the second trip in search of his wife before he found her. He had before his second trip received information through an old Indian which led him across the Canadian border, and stopping at a farm house to obtain a meal, observed a woman passing him as he entered the house, to whom he merely bowed and went in. Shortly the woman came in with a load of wood and laying it down, looked at the stranger for a moment, then turned to her Mistress, (for she had been sold as a servant to a Canadian French farmer), and said, "I know that man;" "Well, who is he?" said the French lady. "It is my husband! Andrew Davidson, I am your wife." Mr. Davidson was not only astounded, but joyfully and more than agreeably surprised, for when he last saw his wife, she was a fine healthy looking woman, her hair as black as a raven's wing, but had now turned to snowy white. Mr. Davidson returned, bringing with him his wife, and they settled at the mouth of Abb's Valley on a farm now owned by A. C. Davidson, Esq. Mr. and Mrs. Davidson raised another family of children, she long lived, and when she died, her remains were removed to and buried in the Burke burying ground at the Horse Shoe farm on New River in the now county of Giles. At the time of the capture of Mrs. Davidson in 1791, the place where she was captured was then in that part of Wythe County, which is now Mercer County, West Virginia.

Major Robert Crockett was for a number of years including 1791, and for some years later, the military commandant in Wythe County and for a good part of the time made his headquarters on the Clinch at Wynn's Fort.

A band of Indians from the Ohio country came in July, 1792, into the Bluestone and upper Clinch settlements and began their depredations--stealing horses, which they had found to be a profitable business. They stole the horses of the settlers, and ran them over into Canada, where they sold them at remunerative prices.

Major Crockett assembled forty men at the place where stands the residence of the late Captain Thomas Peery. Among the number who obeyed the call of Major Crockett were Joseph Gilbert and Samuel Lusk, the latter a youth of about sixteen years, but with quite

an experience as an Indian spy and scout, having made a number of trips with the said Joseph Gilbert, who was a noted Indian scout and hunter.

The late Captain James Shannon of the county of Wyoming, West Virginia, when about ninety three years of age, related to the author, that he rode behind his father on a horse to the assembly ground, and well recollected Joseph Gilbert as an active athletic young man, and that he also saw Lusk on the same occasion.

Major Crockett moved off with his men to follow the Indians, having no time to prepare provisions for the journey. They took the route down Horse Pen Creek, and to the head of Clear fork, and down to the Tug and on to the mouth of Four Pole, then crossing the dividing ridge between the waters of the Sandy and Guyandotte Rivers. They sent Gilbert and Lusk forward to a Buffalo lick on a creek flowing into the Guyandotte, to secure if possible a supply of game. It appears by the report of Major Crockett, found in the Virginia Calendar Papers, that this was on the twenty fourth day of July that Gilbert and Lusk set out for and reached the lick, where they found and killed a deer and wounded an elk, which they followed, some distance; being unable to overtake it they returned to the lick to get the deer they had killed. On passing along the Bullalo path, near which they had left the deer, Gilbert in front, discovered a stone hanging by pawpaw bark over the path. Gilbert in an instant discerning what it meant called on Lusk to look out. He had scarcely uttered the words, when the Indians fired, a ball from one of their guns penetrating the hand of Lusk, in which he carried his gun, which caused him to drop the same. The Indians immediately began to close in on them, Gilbert putting Lusk behind him, and holding the Indians off by the presentation of his gun. Gilbert and Lusk kept retreating as rapidly as they could with safety. Lusk's wounded hand was bleeding freely, and he became sick from the loss of blood, and begged Gilbert to leave him and get away; this Gilbert refused to do, saying, that he promised his, Lusk's mother, to take care of him. Finally the Indians got close enough to knock Gilbert down with their tomahawks, which they did, and an Indian rushed up to scalp him, when Gilbert shot him dead, but another one of the Indians dispatched Gilbert, and Lusk became a prisoner. The Indians immediately hurried with their prisoner down the creek to Guyandotte, and then down the river to the mouth of Island Creek, and went into camp behind a rocky ridge called Hog Back at the present day. Major Crockett instead of following the tracks of Gilbert and Lusk to the lick, had turned to the west, and crossed a ridge onto the right fork of Island Creek, and reached and camped at a point within two miles of the Indian camp, but without knowledge of his proximity to them. During the night Lusk suffered much with his hand until an Indian went off and brought some roots which he beat up into a pulp, made a poultice, and bound his hand which afforded relief. Early on the morning of the 25th the Indians took to their canoes, which they had left at this point on their way to the settlements, and rapidly descending the river to its mouth crossed the Ohio. On reaching the northern bank, they placed their canoes in charge of some of their party and taking Lusk with them crossed the country.

The Indians had learned some things from their contact with white men, among them was to wear a hunting shirt, a loose garment which they fastened around the waist, leaving it open and loose above the waist. These Indians that had Lusk in charge had donned the hunting shirt. On the way across the country, on the evening they crossed the Ohio, and

before halting to camp, they passed through some prairie country, and Lusk observed that they kept now and then stooping down taking something from the ground, and putting inside of their hunting shirts. When they had reached their camping place, and had built a fire, they went off and brought a large iron kettle, put on the fire, and put into it a considerable quantity of water, and when it began to approach the boiling point, the Indians gathered around the kettle and began to take something from the inside of their hunting shirts and throw into the water, and seemed to be in high glee and indicated by their laughter. Lusk ventured up to see what it meant, and found it was dry land toads they had gathered on the route and were putting into the hot boiling water. They were preparing supper, and when they had reduced the water and the toads to the consistency of a good thick mush, they took the kettle from the fire and permitted the mush to cool; they then took wooden spoons, offering one to Lusk, which he refused, and gathered around the kettle and began to eat. Finding that Lusk would not eat with them, one of their numbers went off and procured some jerked buffalo meat and furnished it to Lusk. The journey was resumed the next morning, and during the day their town of Chillicothe was reached, where Lusk met and made the acquaintance of Mrs. Virginia Wiley, who had been captured on the first day of October, 1789, as herein before related.

Lusk's wounded hand rapidly healed, and the Indians put him to work in their corn fields, and later to aid in building some new cabins for the winter. He appearing to be an expert at what is termed carrying up a corner, while so engaged and notching down a piece of timber, his axe threw off a large chip of wood, which struck a stout young Indian about Lusk's size and age in the face, which made the young fellow very angry. Believing or pretending to believe, that Lusk had intentionally caused the chip to strike him, he thereupon challenged Lusk for a fight, which challenge Lusk accepted, came down from the house, and gave to his challenger a fearful thrashing. The other Indians stood by and praised Lusk, and made fun at the other fellow, who though whipped, was yet very angry. He went off and secured two large knives came back offering one to Lusk, and challenged him to mortal combat. The older Indians advised Lusk not to take the knife, but to keep out of his way, and at the same time shake his fist at him, which he did only adding insult to injury; but finally by the interposition of the older heads the matter was adjusted. In September the Indians planned and made ready for their annual fall hunt in the region of the lakes. It was towards the latter part of the month when the hunting party left Chillicothe going north, leaving only the squaws, the children, and an old Indian Chief in charge of the town, and the prisoners Lusk and Mrs. Wiley. Lusk determined to make his escape, and made known his intention to Mrs. Wiley, who declared that she would go with him. He sought to dissuade her as she could probably not keep up with him in traveling, and might very much hinder and embarrass him if they would be pursued. Up to the time of the departure of the hunting party, Lusk had made himself helpful to his captors, but expressed himself as delighted with his new made acquaintances, and expressed a desire to remain with them, whereby he ingratiated himself fully into their confidence, so much so that they seemed not to have the slightest doubt of his sincerity. Not so as to Mrs. Wiley, who had frequently shown signs of uneasiness and inclination to go away; so that when the hunting party was about to depart Mrs. Wiley was placed in charge of the old Indian Chief with directions to keep close watch on her.

In the course of events it so happened late one September evening near the last of the month, and just before the sun was setting, that the old Indian Chief, who was lying on the ground, required Mrs. Wiley to sit down beside him; he drawing the skirts of her dress far enough towards him that he could lie on the same which he did; turning his face from Mrs. Wiley, he went to sleep. He had on his belt his scalping knife, the squaws were busy about their house work, when Lusk made known to Mrs. Wiley, that he was ready and about to go, and she determined to go with him, and reaching over the body of the old Chief she secured his scalping knife, cut that portion of her dress underneath him from the other portion on her body, and hurrying down the bank of the Scioto, where Lusk had a light canoe in readiness, they entered the same and immediately and as quietly as possible set off swiftly and rapidly down the river for the southern bank of the Ohio, fifty miles away, Lusk using the pole and Mrs. Wiley the paddle. They reached the southern bank of the Ohio about daylight the next morning where they abandoned their canoe, and immediately set out up the Ohio. Lusk believing they would be pursued, and afraid to follow up the Sandy or Guyandotte waters for fear of either being over taken, or meeting with some roving bands of savages, he steadily kept his course up the southern bank of the Ohio to opposite Gallipolis, where a few French people lived, crossed over into the village and found a place of refuge, where he and Mrs. Wiley could hide away until the danger of recapture had passed.

In a few days a pursuing party of Indians reached Gallipolis, but failing to find the runaways soon departed. Mr. Lusk determined to take no risks by attempting to return through the Virginia Mountains, and finding some men passing up the Ohio in a push boat bound for Pittsburg, he secured passage with them, leaving Mrs. Wiley, who declined to go in the boat, with her kind protectors in Gallipolis. In a few days after Lusk's departure, Mrs. Wiley made up her mind to endeavor to make her way home by the Kanawha and New Rivers, which she did after many days, and a long tiresome, and dangerous journey, finally reaching her husband's brother and family at Wiley's Falls on New River in the now County of Giles, Virginia.

Lusk made his way to Pittsburg and from thence to Philadelphia, where he accidentally met Major Joseph Cloyd, of Back Creek, and came home with him some time in October, about one month after his escape from the Indians at Chillicothe.

The Davidson Family.

John Goolman Davidson, born in Dublin, Ireland, a cooper by trade, came to America about 1755, and settled in Beverly Manor, in what was then Augusta County. Subsequently he removed with his family to the Draper-Meadow's Settlement, and from thence in the year of 1780, he removed and located at the head of Beaver Pond Creek, in what was then Montgomery County, Virginia, now Mercer County, West Virginia. During the same year he was joined by Richard Bailey and family, and they erected a block house, or fort, a short distance below the head of Beaver Pond Springs. From John Goolman Davidson has descended all of the people of that name now in this and the

adjoining counties. A portion of the city of Bluefield is built on lands formerly the property of Mr. Davidson. His descendants, or quite a number of them, have been prominent in civil affairs in the Counties of Mercer and Tazewell. Honorable A. C. Davidson (*Note: Died December 19, 1905.*), of Mercer County, is a great great grandson of John Goolman Davidson.