

# Indian Encounters Along the Blue Ridge

by Kelly Coffey



Numerous archaeological sites in North Carolina's northwestern mountains and foothills reveal that Native Americans lived here for thousands of years. Some locations were seasonally occupied; others had established villages. When the first Europeans arrived, i.e. the Spanish in the 1500s, they found a thriving Indian settlement in the Burke County foothills. But the Spanish were transient and made no attempts to live here long-term. Almost 200 years passed before other Europeans entered the region, claimed land, and established homes. These people, primarily from the British Isles and Central Europe, found no Indians living in the territory they were settling. Diseases from Europe unknown in the Americas had spread quickly and wiped-out Indian populations even before Europeans entered an area.

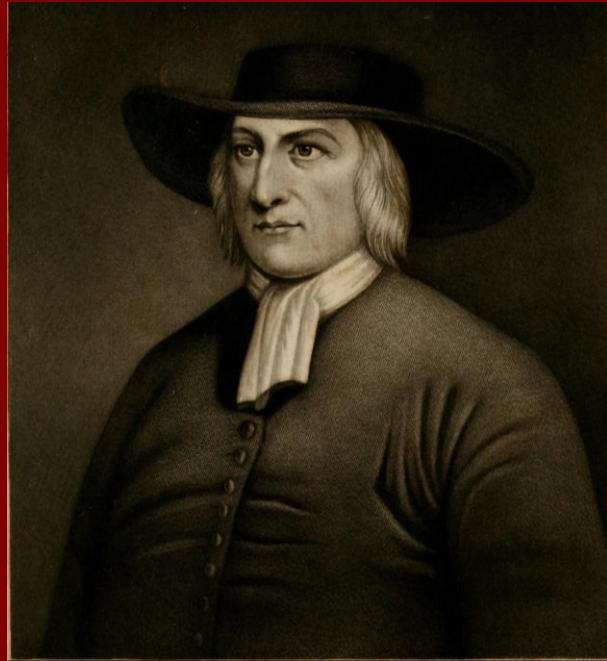
While Indians did not make the area their home, that doesn't mean they were absent as white people moved in. They hunted, travelled through, traded, and, at times, violently attacked early European settlers. The Cherokee lived in far western North Carolina, as well as parts of South Carolina, Georgia, and Tennessee. They ventured into our part of the state, and so did other Indians from as far away as the Ohio River valley (i.e. the Shawnee).

The historical record of Native American interactions in northwestern North Carolina is anecdotal, i.e. presented as isolated incidents in scattered records, and usually without reference to the broader historical events that created the incidents. These anecdotes are interesting, even entertaining, but in isolation they don't convey the scope and full impact of Native American interactions with early settlers. In this article, I have brought these

anecdotes together in a single narrative and placed them in context of the larger historical movements taking place on the continent.

## **Peaceful Encounters**

Dr. Thomas Whyte, an archaeological professor at Appalachian State University, says that the region was criss-crossed by numerous trails used by Indians hunting or traveling to other regions. According to tradition, Quaker Meadows in present-day Burke County was so named because a Quaker used the location as a meeting point to trade furs with Indians. The deerskin trade was a major economic activity in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century, so nonviolent business relationships with Indians was customary. Native American visitors mixed with the white population in towns and rural areas to the extent that their presence was unremarkable.<sup>1</sup> Deerskins were “the currency of Indian economies”; i.e. the only way they could get the goods that they had become dependent on, such as guns, iron implements, cloth, etc.<sup>2</sup>



*Image of a Quaker*

Historian Lyman Draper stated, “The Indians often visited the new settlements of the Yadkin, temporarily pitched their camps at some convenient spot, and drove something of a barter-trade with their white neighbors. They lived on terms of peace and good will with the new settlers. Occasionally some mischief was committed, but it was invariably done by the northern Indians in their warlike forays against the Catawbias and other southern tribes.”<sup>3</sup>

Ferguson native Margaret Martine says that one of her ancestors named Coffey lived in a log cabin in the Globe. According to family tradition, one day while he was out hunting and his wife was alone in the house, an old Indian chief traveling through the area stopped at their cabin, looked through a hole



<sup>1</sup> Blackmon, Richard D., *Dark & Bloody Ground: The American Revolution Along the Southern Frontier* 2012, xxii.

<sup>2</sup> Blackmon, xix.

<sup>3</sup> Digitizing Daniel Boone, File: 2B2.DR1.

in the chinking, and said, “I see you Coffey!” The wife was terrified, but no harm was done.<sup>4</sup> He was just passing through and saw an opportunity to have a little fun at her expense.

Such peaceful encounters were common, but violent incidents were more likely to be remembered and appear in the historical record, in the same way that crime and violence make headlines today. Precipitating causes of conflicts varied, but there were two consistent underlying grudges the Indians held against whites: intrusion on their land and unfair trading practices; i.e. high prices for goods and low prices paid for deerskins in exchange.<sup>5</sup> Further, most Indian attacks occurred in the context of: 1) the French and Indian War, and a sub-conflict at the same time known as the Anglo-Cherokee War; 2) the Cherokee War; and 3) random attacks by rogue Indians unconnected to any larger conflict or strategy. Moravian August Spangenberg observed a breakdown in Indian/white relations in 1752, even before these wars. He wrote (in a counterpoint to Margaret Martine’s ancestor),

*If they come to a house and find the man away they are insolent, and the settler’s wife must do whatever they bid. Sometimes they come in such large companies that a man who meets them is in real danger...Every man living alone is in this danger, here in the forest. North Carolina has been at war with the Indians [perhaps a reference to the Tuscarora War in eastern North Carolina, 1711-1715] and they have been defeated and have lost their lands. So not only the tribes that were directly concerned, but all the Indians are resentful and take every opportunity to show it. Indeed they have not only killed the cattle of the whites, but have murdered the settlers themselves when they had a chance.<sup>6</sup>*



*Modern Cherokee reenactor*

<sup>4</sup> Interview of Margaret Martine, March 31, 2022.

<sup>5</sup> Blackmon, 2.

<sup>6</sup> Digitizing Boone, File: Fries.NT1



## French & Indian War

The French and Indian War occurred at a time when settlement was just beginning to take place in western North Carolina. People lived along the Yadkin and Catawba Rivers and tributaries in the foothills, but there is little evidence of settlement west of the Blue Ridge. One exception was Andrew Baker who lived in present-day Watauga County. The threat of Indian violence forced him out, but he eventually returned. There was danger of French-allied Indian raids from the north, particularly the Shawnee. The Cherokee, however, originally allied themselves with North Carolina colonists, which deterred the Shawnee. “Without Indians to oppose Indians, we may expect but small success,” said George Washington during this conflict.<sup>7</sup> This observation reverberated throughout American history down to the time of Indian wars in the trans-Mississippi west.<sup>8</sup> Approximately 1,000 Cherokees provided many and varied services for the British in their fight against the French, including scouting, raiding, and diplomacy to other tribes. They trained the whites in Indian warfare and developed cross-cultural friendships as a result.<sup>9</sup>

That situation changed dramatically in April 1757 when French-allied Indians raided



<sup>7</sup> Tortora, Daniel J., *Carolina in Crisis: Cherokees, Colonists, and Slaves in the American Southeast, 1756-1763*, 2015, 44.

<sup>8</sup> Historians widely recognize that subduing the western Indians in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century would have been extremely difficult for the U.S. Army without the aid of Indian scouts who were enemies of the warring tribes. *The Real West*, The History Channel.

<sup>9</sup> Tortora, 44.

southwestern Virginia, killing many whites and taking prisoners. Consequently, Virginia frontiersmen saw *any* Indian as an enemy and killed 37 Cherokees who had been assisting the British, i.e. their own allies.<sup>10</sup> In addition, in late 1758 the Cherokee had joined a campaign to the north to capture Fort Duquesne. They “were very dissatisfied with their treatment during the campaign and returned home angry with the colonial forces.”

In January 1759, a deer hunter named Hamilton and his partner were in the Brushy Mountains when they came upon two Cherokees who they invited to camp with them. While the Indians were asleep, the two white men murdered them with a tomahawk, and went on to kill a white person in an apparently unrelated incident. They blamed the murder on the Indians, and said that Indians were murdering all “the white people that came in their way.” Incidents such as this further alienated the Cherokees and contributed to the war that followed.<sup>11</sup>



As a result, the following April and May, the Cherokee attacked settlers along the Catawba and Yadkin, killing as many as 20 persons. Forts had been built at the Moravian settlement of Bethabara, and 120 people took refuge there, besides the Moravians.

“Forting”, as they called it, was common in the years 1759-1761.<sup>12</sup>

In one incident, the Cherokee attacked William Fish and a man named Thompson at the mouth of what came to be named Fish’s River (now Fisher River in Surry County), while they were riding horses through a canebrake. Fish was killed and Thompson was wounded by two arrows, but he escaped to Bethabara. Fish was later found and buried by Daniel Boone. In another attack, a 13-year-old girl with the last name Lashley was milking cows when nine Indians went after her. She ran and hid in the canebrakes until dark, then made her way into the fort. Her father, Barnett Lashley, and a man named Robison had been killed that morning near the fort.

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<sup>10</sup> Tortora, 48, 59.

<sup>11</sup> Fort Dobbs Gazette, December 2023. A letter from Samuel Wyly to Gov. William Lyttelton, Jan 14, 1759.

<sup>12</sup> Digitizing Daniel Boone, File 2B2.DR1



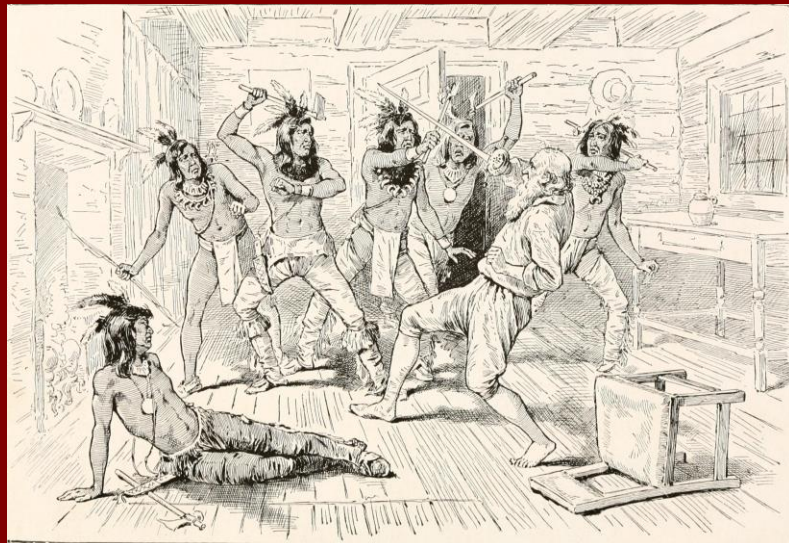
## **Hero Dog**

Then again in January and February 1760 the Cherokee “swept through the backcountry settlements, killing everyone they found.”<sup>13</sup> Fights took place almost every day. In March, a group of 30 settlers near the Catawba River were out scouting for Indians when they came upon a group of 40 Indians dressing a beef near a deserted house. A shoot-out ensued, with the Indians taking refuge in the house. The shooting continued for several hours. Frustrated, John Perkins proposed setting the house on fire. Perkins had previously had some family members killed by Indians and thus was motivated to show no mercy. He and another man risked the gunfire to set the structure ablaze. The Indians ran, and seven were shot, with one perishing inside the burning house. One of the wounded jumped in the river, followed by John Perkins’ dog. The dog “seized him, and held him fast till he was drowned.” Several of the wounded Indians were later found dead in the woods. The uninjured attacked Fort Dobbs near Statesville, but were unsuccessful in taking it. Of the 40 Indians involved in these incidents, only one survived.<sup>14</sup>

## **Hero Indian**

In one campaign, the Cherokees, in several detached groups, set off into the western North Carolina settlements in unison with an aim to attack many whites all at the same time. One group of approximately seven braves was discovered by settlers and followed to an abandoned cabin which the Indians entered to stay the night. Some of the whites positioned themselves behind outbuildings and haystacks while others threw fire on the roof. The Indians realized they had no chance to escape until one proposed sacrificing himself. He ran from the cabin, drawing the fire of all the whites, and was killed straightaway. Before the whites could reload, the rest of the Indians rushed out of the cabin and disappeared into the woods.<sup>15</sup>

Such attacks drove half of the settlers in western North Carolina to the coast or Moravian forts. Daniel J. Tortora notes, “The initial success of the Cherokee offensive and the continued Cherokee presence on the frontier triggered a massive refugee crisis. When the attacks abated, fear, destitution, and despair remained.”<sup>16</sup>



<sup>13</sup> Tortora, 112-13.

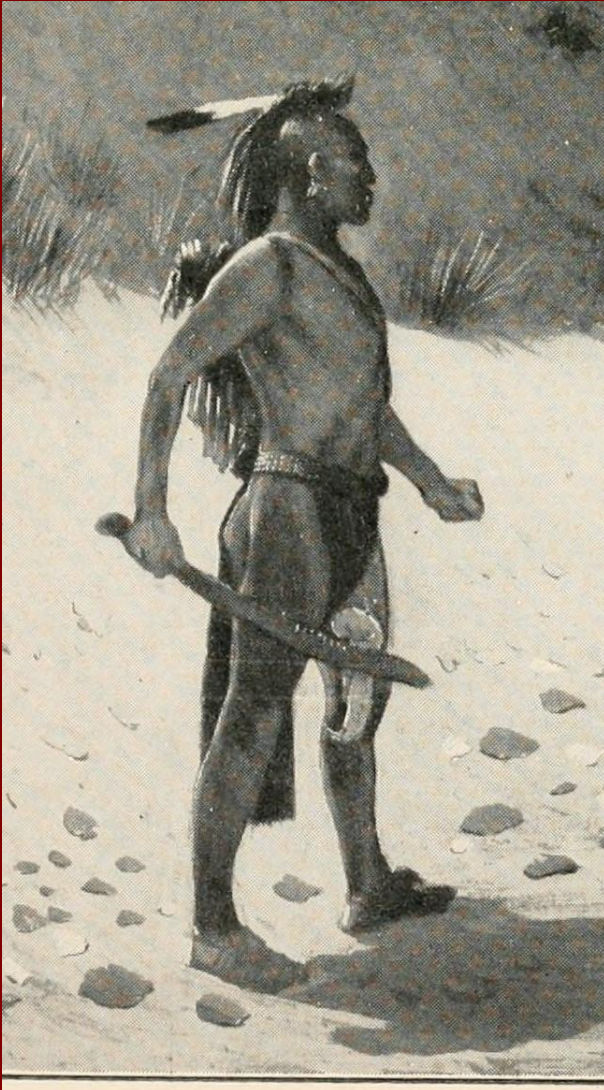
<sup>14</sup> Digitizing Daniel Boone, File 8C1.DR1, South Carolina Gazette, 04/09/1760

<sup>15</sup> Digitizing Daniel Boone, File 8C1.DR1, Natural and Aboriginal History of Tennessee by Haywood, 1822.

<sup>16</sup> Tortora, 112-113.

## Surviving a Scalping

One incident involved the children of Thomas and Sarah Burchfield, who lived a few miles northwest of the present-day town of Marion. They were alerted that Cherokees were on their way to raid the area, and so they and other settlers headed to Fort McDowell about 2 miles northwest of present-day Morganton. This fort, built in 1756-57,



measured 80 feet x 50 feet. Twenty armed men led the group, followed by boys driving livestock. Behind them were girls riding horses or oxen pulling sleds with their supplies. Next in line was women with small children. Bringing up the rear was 35 armed men and older boys.

Along the way, the cattle got out of hand and ran away. The men left to get the cattle, while the women and children stopped to rest. Suddenly, seven Indians appeared, each grabbing a child, and running away. Two of the Burchfield children were taken- Lydia, age two and Mary, who was five. The other five children came from different families.

Hearing the screaming, the men hurried back, but the Cherokees were gone. Uncertain about how many Indians might be waiting in the woods to attack again, they decided to continue on to Fort McDowell, which they reached in the morning after traveling all night. This was the first time the fort had been used in a long time, so they had to repair the structure because it had deteriorated. Finally, three days after

arriving, about 15 men set out to find the children. Not far from where they had been taken, the men found five of the children dead and one- Lydia- barely alive. All six had been scalped. Scalping itself is not fatal, but it is usually done with such violence that it results in head injury that causes death. The five dead children had fractured skulls, but Lydia had only been scalped.

The men gave her something to eat, cleaned her wound, and one of the men hurriedly took her back to her mother on his horse.

The men set out to find the missing child, who was Mary. They followed the Indians' trail up the North Fork of the Catawba River to McKinney Gap at the crest of the Blue



Ridge in what is now Mitchell County. There they met a hunter who had seen the Indians two days previous, with one of them carrying a white girl. The search party camped that night with the hunter and set out the next morning. But they soon lost the trail of the Indians and gave up the search.<sup>17</sup> The fate of Mary Burchfield was never known. Frequently, Cherokees took captives, especially women and children, to replace lost tribal members. They were fully assimilated into the tribe and became no different from a native-born member.<sup>18</sup>

Lydia recovered but kept her head wrapped at all times. A few years after this incident, about 20 Indians raided the Burchfield house to steal what they could find. Lydia's head covering slipped off, and her bare skull surprised and intrigued the Indians. Lydia's great-grandson describes the story as she told it to him, "The oldest Indian made her stand on his hand and commenced a doleful ditty of unearthly sounds. The others made a circle and joined in the song and dance, which they kept up for some time. They committed various depredations in searching for hidden articles and took all they could find to eat, then left, each one shaking hands with Lydia." When tensions with the Indians eased, they frequently came to visit Lydia and "treated her with reverential care."

Lydia fully recovered, grew up, married, and had children. She always wore a covering over her head. She lived to be 83 years old.<sup>19</sup>

## **Repercussions**

In response to these attacks, the colonists organized successful expeditions against the Cherokee, who eventually gave up and signed a peace treaty in December 1761.<sup>20</sup> After 1762, South Carolinians quit the Indian deerskin trade and concentrated on selling other commodities like indigo and cattle. Thus, the Cherokees no longer had economic value for the colonists, which in turn meant that they had little value to the colonists for any reason.<sup>21</sup> In spite of the recent war, Cherokee relations with the British (but not the colonists) actually improved after 1763. They wanted British help in keeping colonists off their land. The British couldn't afford another Indian war, so they had an interest in keeping the Cherokee satisfied.<sup>22</sup>



<sup>17</sup> Fossett, Mildred B. *History of McDowell County*, 1976.

<sup>18</sup> Tortora, 102.

<sup>19</sup> Fossett

<sup>20</sup> R. Jackson Marshall III, *French and Indian War* [www.ncpedia.org](http://www.ncpedia.org) 2006

<sup>21</sup> Tortora, 180

<sup>22</sup> Tortora, 188



Nevertheless, white settlers continued to occupy Cherokee lands, and, to compound their troubles, the northern Indian superintendent pressured Iroquois and Ohio Valley Indians to attack Indians in the south.<sup>23</sup>



*It is difficult to overstate the significance of the deerskin trade to the Cherokee. It allowed them to purchase a multitude of goods that they could not produce themselves.*

## **The Cherokee War**

The French and Indian War ended with the establishment of the Proclamation Line of 1763, a boundary that was essentially the Blue Ridge escarpment. The British declared that land west of this line was Indian territory and white settlers were forbidden to cross it. The British recognized the right of the Indians to use force if they did. American colonists mostly ignored the boundary and moved west. This action set off a series of extremely violent conflicts between the Americans and the Cherokee which lasted from 1776 to 1795. As the dates indicate, the Cherokee War coincided with the Revolutionary War. The Cherokee and British were natural allies, given the desire of both parties to keep Americans east of the Blue Ridge. A third party on the British side was the American Loyalists. Hundreds of them took refuge in Cherokee towns to avoid harassment from the patriots. They even joined the Cherokees in attacking their former neighbors, and went as far as dressing like the Indians and wearing war paint.<sup>24</sup>

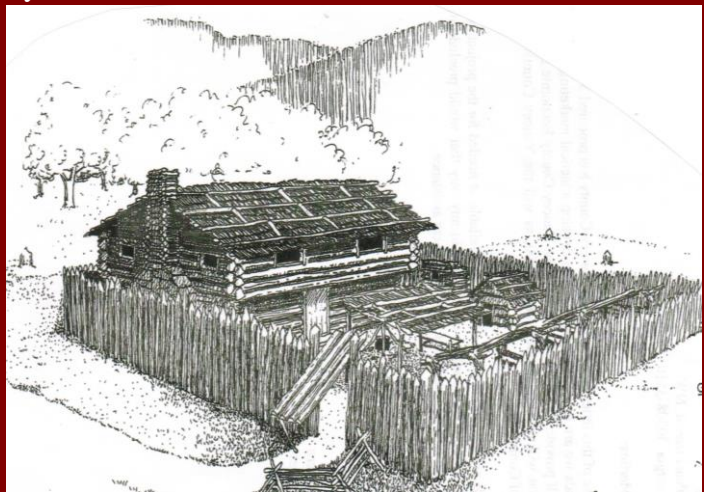
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<sup>23</sup> Tortora, 188.

<sup>24</sup> Blackmon, 61, 88.

In response to Cherokee aggression, a string of forts was constructed in locations at the base of the Blue Ridge escarpment and at least a couple west of the Blue Ridge. They included:<sup>25</sup>

- Fort Crider (Grider or Cryder) in present-day Lenoir. The site was once Lenoir High School, now residential apartments.
- Cathey's Fort near Turkey Cove at the confluence of Cove Creek and the north fork of the Catawba River in McDowell County. Built by William Cathey.
- Fort Defiance in Caldwell County (Hwy 268) near the Yadkin River. Following the war, William Lenoir built his house near the site and called it by the same name.
- McDowell's Station at Quaker Meadows.
- Davidson's Fort. The fort for which the town of Old Fort was named. It has been partially reconstructed on Lackey Town Road.
- The Black House in Wilkes County. The origin of the name is unknown. It was burned by Indians and a second fort was built on the same site and given the name the Red House.<sup>26</sup>
- A fort was located at Mouth of Wilson (creek), a community in Grayson County Virginia not far from the Ashe County line.<sup>27</sup> This fort was kept by Enoch Osborne. His brother, Soloman Osborne, was killed by Indians in present-day Watauga County while



*Typical fort during this time period along the Carolina frontier.*

<sup>25</sup> [www.northamericanforts.com](http://www.northamericanforts.com)

<sup>26</sup> *Historical Sketches of Wilkes County*, John Crouch, 1902

<sup>27</sup> *Heritage of Ashe County*, xi



- hunting there in 1772.<sup>28</sup>
- A pension application refers to a fort “on New River, near the mouth of Peach Bottom Creek. No Peach Bottom Creek is shown on modern maps, but Peach Bottom Mountain is located in Alleghany County, so it was probably in that vicinity.”<sup>29</sup>

## **A Wild Ride**

A man named James Logan, his wife, and children lived in McDowell County. In January 1780, they were warned by a neighbor that Indians had been seen nearby. Logan sent his family to Cathey’s Fort while he hid the family’s cow and some gold than he had panned in a nearby stream. Then he joined them at the fort.

After a few days, Logan decided to go back for the cow, and took his young son John. Logan loaded a pony with corn to use for feed, and placed John on the pony. He had the foresight to tie John’s legs to the pony because if the pony got excited, it would buck John off. James led the cow while John and the pony followed. After going some distance, they were fired on by Cherokees. As expected, the gunfire scared the pony, and it took off running toward the fort, but John was securely fastened in place on its back. Arrows whizzed by his head, but he made it safely to the fort. Unfortunately, his father did not. The men at the fort set out to help James fight the Cherokees, but they found him dead and scalped, with no Indians in sight.<sup>30</sup>

One of the first settlers in Altamont (Avery County) was hunting one day along a ridge and saw below a group of Indians kill two white men who were hiding out in that area to avoid service in the Revolutionary War. The Indians then trampled their bodies “beyond sight” in a mud hole. The hunter hurried to his cabin a half mile away and took off with his wife and child to Fort Crider. It must have been a long and difficult journey, as they had to eat their small pet dog which had followed them.<sup>31</sup>



*Pisgah Church pictured here with the rock cliff on the wooded hill above.*

<sup>28</sup> *Heritage of Ashe County*, xi

<sup>29</sup> Pension application of James Cox, 1833

<sup>30</sup> Fossett, 22-23.

<sup>31</sup> Arthur, John, *History of Watauga County*, 1914, 16.

In the same community a group of patriot Revolutionary War soldiers chased “a party of marauding Cherokees to the rock cliff just above Pisgah Church” but were forced to retreat because the Indians were overpowering them.<sup>32</sup> Probably the same group of Indians that murdered the two white men in the same community.

Incidents such as these compelled the local militia leader to ask William Lenoir to organize a ranger unit. The rangers would patrol the area between the Yadkin and New Rivers for signs of Indians before they arrived in the more thickly settled areas. Lenoir complied and put together approximately 50 men, assigning them to territories along the Blue Ridge crest. However, there is no record that they ever saw Indians.<sup>33</sup> Lenoir later joined an expedition that took the fight to the enemy, i.e. a military assault on the Cherokee homeland in far western North Carolina.

There were several raids by militia from the Carolinas into Cherokee territory in retaliation for the attacks. Cherokees used an ambush tactic effectively during these invasions. “At every opportunity, small war parties would attack straggling or separated militiamen. Almost daily...Cherokees inflicted casualties.” The militias were traveling through tight, mountainous terrain that made being ambushed horrifying, as running away was difficult, if not impossible. The Cherokees then disappeared before the militias could counterattack. As a result, militiamen were afflicted with what today is called posttraumatic stress disorder. “The terror of ambush is the most common and striking feature recorded in first-hand accounts of the expeditions.”<sup>34</sup>



Several interesting anecdotes came out of these raids. One expedition included Catawba Indians who allied themselves with the white settlers and served as

guides. They examined tree bark for evidence that Cherokee scouts had climbed them, meaning that the Cherokee would have known that the militia was on its way. Catawbans

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<sup>32</sup> Arthur, 17.

<sup>33</sup> Shrader, Richard *William Lenoir*, PhD dissertation, UNC Chapel Hill, 1978, 34-35; Digitizing Daniel Boone, File 4B3.DR1

<sup>34</sup> Blackmon, 90-91



sometimes wore buffalo hoofs on their feet to prevent the Cherokee from knowing they were nearby. In another group, the militia was following an Indian war party through a “thick, towering entanglement of wild pea vines.” Suddenly, the Indians turned and fired on the militia, who quickly retreated. However, running through the pea vines was impossible until they somehow discovered that somersaulting every 30 feet or so freed them from the vines so that they could continue running.<sup>35</sup> I find the notion of frontiersmen flipping head over heels through the forest amusing and somewhat unbelievable were it not well documented. The image just seems more at home in a James Bond chase scene than on the Carolina frontier.

One expedition included an old trader named Brown, who served as a guide. They approached three Cherokee scouts, who turned and ran. Brown and others pursued them. The Indian Brown was chasing fell over a fallen tree and was so wounded that he could not move. Brown caught up with him, and the two realized that they knew each other, probably from past trade transactions. The Cherokee pleaded, “Don’t have me killed?” Brown turned away and left him alone.<sup>36</sup> This incident reveals the close interactions Cherokees had with settlers before the war.

In a presentation given at Fort Defiance, National Park Ranger William Caldwell said, “Of all the pensions and service records I’ve studied of men who journeyed to the Battle of King’s Mountain, about two-thirds of them talk about serving against the Indians in some way.” Some described themselves as being Indian spies, i.e. actually dressing like Indians, conducting surveillance on Indian villages, and looking for any sign that they might be planning an attack. Others served as rangers on the frontier, guarding against Indian incursions. Some were involved in expeditions to destroy Indian villages.<sup>37</sup>



<sup>35</sup> Blackmon, 67-68; Digitizing Daniel Boone, Draper Manuscripts, Wellborn Coffey, 1884.

<sup>36</sup> Blackmon, 77.

<sup>37</sup> Presentation by William Caldwell, June 10, 2023



*While the vertical sides of Linville Gorge seem almost impenetrable, the bottom of the gorge along the river was relatively easy to traverse on foot or horseback. Following the river to the head of the gorge allowed one to cross the Blue Ridge with less difficulty than that found at other locations along the ridge. These geographic features are the setting for the following story.* Photo source: Shutterstock

## **The Premonition**

William Linville lived in the North Carolina Piedmont and was related by marriage to Daniel Boone. In July 1766, he was 56 years old and not feeling well. He thought a hunting trip in the mountains would improve his health. He set out with his son John and a 16-year-old boy named John Williams, who he had hired to keep camp and cook for them. They followed the Yadkin River to its head in Watauga County. William had brought along a young horse that was not well-broke in order to tame it by packing it with furs that they hoped to obtain. No details are given about the hunt or how long it lasted, but they headed home following a well-known path that ran along the Linville River in the gorge (called an “Indian Road” on maps). The hunting party camped for the night near Shortoff Mountain, about ten miles below the falls.

Early the next morning, just before daylight, the boys were abruptly awakened by William, who was very agitated. By the dim light of the dying campfire he said he had dreamed that Indians were about to attack any second now, and demanded that the boys flee without him, as he was unable to keep up, given his health. At that moment, a group of Indians appeared and fired their rifles at the party. William was hit and again begged



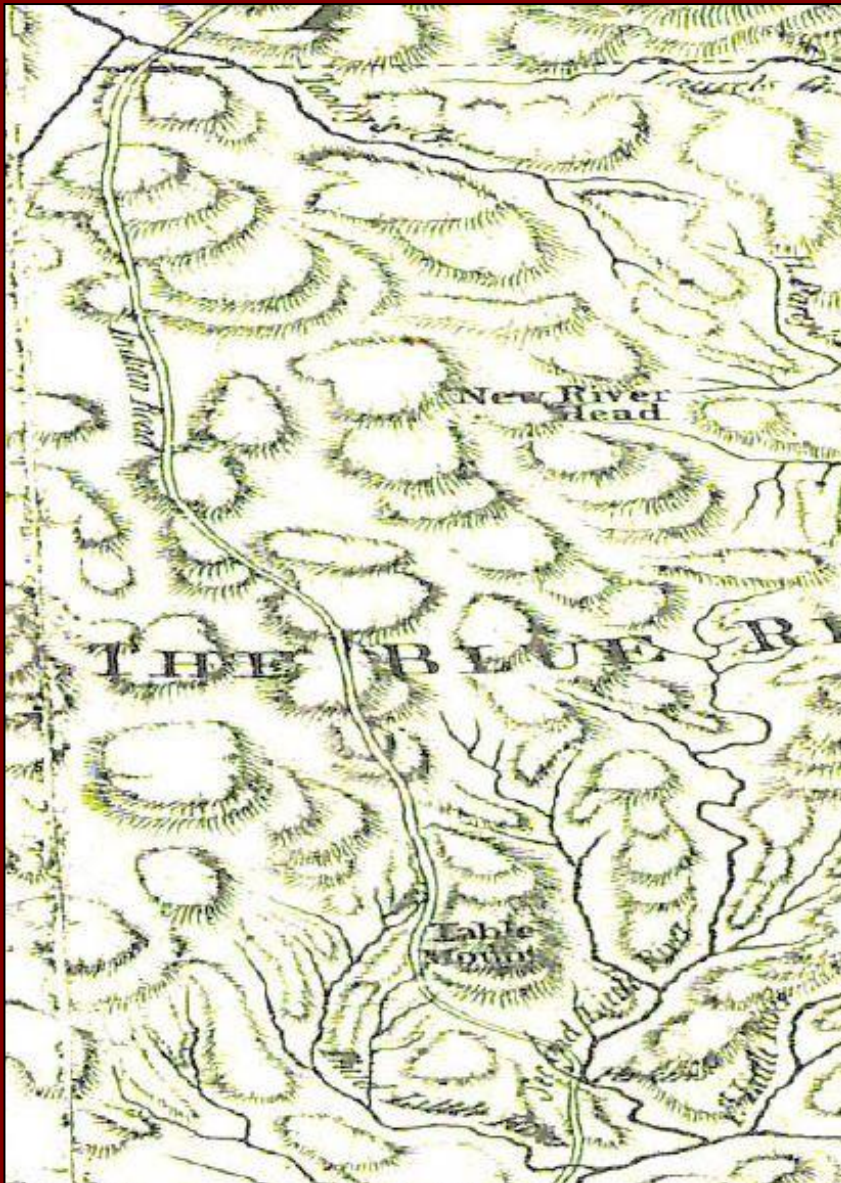
the boys to take off. They reached for their guns as the Indians fired again, killing John Linville. A bullet struck John Williams' thigh, fracturing the bone. He managed to run off in the darkness, but soon fell down, completely breaking the bone in two.

At daylight, the Indians began gathering the horses and goods in the camp, but they were unable to catch the untamed horse. After scalping the Linvilles, they took off with their plunder, the wild horse following the others at a distance. Williams crawled back to camp, expecting to die beside his friends. He had not been there long when, amazingly, the wild horse returned to camp and let Williams slip a discarded bridle on and mount him. They set off for home, sixty miles away, but had gone hardly a mile when the horse was spooked by the crack of a stick, threw the rider, and ran off.

Williams again crawled back to camp. He found that the Indians had returned while he was gone, probably looking for the wild horse, but gave up and left again. Therefore,

even though the horse threw him, it had saved him from slaughter. Unexpectedly, the horse returned a second time, allowed him to mount, and the two made it home without further incident, though the trip must have been excruciatingly painful for Williams.

After telling the



*This excerpt from Henry Mouzon's 1775 map shows an "Indian Road" running through Linville Gorge, which can be identified by "Table Mount" (i.e. modern Table Rock). Before it was named after the murder victim, Linville River was known as Third Little River, as shown on the map.*

details of the tragedy, a group of men set out toward the mountains to bury the Linvilles. From then on, the river was known as the Linville River in memory of the men who died there. Williams recovered from his injury and “became a man of influence.” Mrs. Linville gave him the horse that had saved his life.

The Indians in this incident were Shawnee who lived north of the Ohio River, but frequently traveled south to attack their enemies, the Cherokee. In fact, a short time later these same warriors attacked and killed a group Cherokee picking berries. It seems apparent that they killed the Linvilles for their horses.<sup>38</sup>

## **Captured by the Indians**

In 1800, the Walters family and other pioneers crossed the Blue Ridge in a wagon train, heading for their new settlement on the South Fork New River near what is now the Watauga/Ashe County line. Eleven-year-old Lydia Walters and her younger brother were walking alongside the wagons when Indians attacked the group. The settlers were apparently well-prepared for such an incident as they were able to drive the Indians away with their superior firepower. They proceeded on, with the two Walters children running ahead of the wagons. Unfortunately, the threat was not over as another group of Indians



was hiding farther along, and ambushed the two children when they reached their position. The Indians carried them away, and shortly scalped the boy and left him behind. He later died of other wounds. Lydia was kept as a slave, and traded from one Indian to another. She learned their language, and was given the responsibility of keeping wild animals out of their corn crop, even sleeping in a tree so as to better keep watch. She went hungry in the winter at times, and was often forced to steal corn in the summer.

One summer during a drought, the Indians dug a well. Lydia was in the service of an Indian who was lazy and did not help with the labor. Nevertheless, after the well was dug, he sent Lydia to fetch some water from it. The unfairness of sharing the water with

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<sup>38</sup> The Life of Daniel Boone, Lyman Draper, 191-192. Murphey Papers, Vol.II, p. 386



the lazy Indian enraged the others and they jumped on Lydia, pulled out her hair, and branded her neck. When her hair grew back, it was white.

After two years, the Indians and the settlers agreed to a peace treaty and an exchange of prisoners. She was brought to the New River and released. Lydia waded across and set out to find her family. When she reached the Walters', they did not recognize her because of her white hair, branding marks, and the fact that she was two years older. She remembered the name of the family horse, and called out his name- Fox- as she pointed to him. This convinced the family that she really was Lydia.

Lydia married Benjamin S. Brown, had many children, and lived out the rest of her life at a couple of locations in Ashe County.<sup>39</sup> She died in 1859 and was buried in the Meat Camp Baptist Church cemetery in Watauga County.

No historical background exists to put this story in context. The year 1800 is late for an Indian attack along the Blue Ridge. There was no larger conflict between whites and Indians that would have set off this incident, and no record of a treaty resulting from such a conflict. Yet the numerous details and a named individual give the story an air of credibility. It was likely an attack by an isolated band of rogue Indians, unconnected to any larger, organized hostilities.

## Consequences

Northwestern North Carolina- a region with no Indian inhabitants at the time- was yet plagued by Indian attacks off and on for nearly four decades. The latter half of the 1700s was a dangerous time to be living in this area. Peaceful trade and friendly interactions with Indians gave way to violent attacks on settlers. Time normally spent making a new home and establishing communities was taken up in constructing and occupying forts. Spying on, ranging for, and counterattacking Indians drew men away from productive tasks, such as clearing land for a farm or operating a grist mill. People lost property, family members, and neighbors. The psychological trauma of living in a constant state of anxiety because Indians could attack at any moment must have been debilitating.



*Modern Cherokee reenactor. Note war club in his hand.*

<sup>39</sup> *Heritage of Ashe County*, 26.

The fear of death was exceeded only by the fear of being captured alive and slowly tortured by the natives. However, troubles didn't end when hostilities ceased. It wasn't just militia men who suffered after returning home from the battlefield, but the sufferers also included women and children who fled to forts and returned to find that their own homesteads had been battlefields. Many whites seemed to have absorbed the barbarity of the conflicts. "Respectable people acquired such vicious habits that when the war was over the backcountry [was in] a constant state of anarchy, disorder, and confusion." They "despised labor and became pests of society."<sup>40</sup> Rebuilding lives and communities in such circumstances must have seemed futile at times. People struggled with grief, poverty, despair, and mental illness. Many who lost family and friends had no one to turn to for comfort. Alcohol would have been readily available for "relief" as consumption of it was already exceedingly high in colonial America, which, of course, only compounded their mental anguish as alcohol usually does. Conversely, perhaps it is more than a coincidence that a religious revival known as the Second Great Awakening swept through the backcountry after the Indian wars. These religious meetings were sometimes characterized by the maniacal reactions of participants- running, jumping, shaking- that might have been, in some cases, manifestations of lingering mental disorders from the Indian wars that found an outlet as a religious exercise. Perhaps we will never know the depth of their suffering, as they left no record of their feelings. Nevertheless, they apparently recovered sufficiently to rebuild their lives, families, and communities.

The raids by the white settlers destroyed Native American villages and crops. Yet many Cherokee recovered, adopted white man ways, and prospered to some degree. But the white man's desire for land led to the removal of most to Oklahoma. The Indians never bounced back and flourished as the white people did.



<sup>40</sup> Digitizing Boone File BYLN2.NT1 The Colonial and State Records of North Carolina





Site of Fort Crider in Lenoir. The building was once the town high school, now converted to residential apartments.