

Shawnee Indian Attack of 1774

- Snidow Massacre -

Account of John Lybrook



I think that it was about the year 1775, when the Indians made an incursion in to this country. My grandfather was then a boy about ten or twelve years old, living with his father on New River. During the summer of that year, on a Sunday morning, the children of my great grand father, (some half dozen or more), the children of another family named McGriff who lived on the place and some children that were there on a visit (two Snidow boys among them) went to the river, not more than a hundred yards distant from the dwelling and my great grandfather to his mill on the spring branch near the river bank. The girls, all small but one, went to the river above the branch and got into a canoe and were rowing about when the Indians made their appearance.

The boys, seven in number I think, went about two hundred yards below the spring, where a rock protruded above the surface of the water, about twenty feet from the edge of the water, it being so shallow that small boys could wade and play in it without danger of drowning. Three of the boys (a Snidow and Baltzer Lybrook) were from fifteen to eighteen years of age and could swim very well. They went beyond the rock spoken of and were swimming, while the other four small boys, two Snidows, McGriff, and my grandfather, John Lybrook, were playing in the water between the rock and the bank of the river. The bank of the river was about ten feet high, perpendicular, leaving a space between the water and the foot of the bank about six or eight feet wide. There were some narrow paths cut into the bank, suppose to have been done by deer going to water, which were sandy from the top down to the river and the only places of ascent from the water to the top of the bank.

While the boys were playing and swimming, an Indian was discovered on top of the bank at one of the paths, in the act of shooting at the larger boys beyond the rock. Immediately the alarm was given and the boys dived under the water to shield themselves from the Indian's arrows, and on coming to the surface again, made for the opposite side of the river, swimming on their backs so that they could watch the Indian and dodge his arrows when he attempted to shoot, by diving under the water and thus made their escape unhurt to the bank where they were shielded by the large trees.

The little boys made no attempt to escape but simply climbed upon the rock and sat there, except my grandfather, who made several attempts to get up the bank by the paths cut into it, but was always met by an Indian on top, and would then retreat and try another path only to be met by an Indian to receive him. The Indian was, during this time, still shooting at the boys in the river as opportunity presented. While thus engaged, my grandfather succeeded in getting on top of the bank. There was a path from this point to the Fort, one and a half miles below on the river, along which my grandfather assayed to make his escape. The alarm having been made in the direction of the house, he was afraid to run in that direction and also having the Indian between him and the house.

From one hundred and fifty yards below this point, the heavy rains had cut out a ditch about eight feet deep and about as wide as deep. He had just begun to race to the fort when he discovered the Indian in pursuit. He then remembered this deep ditch that lay across his path, but knowing that this path was the only way of escape, he made up his mind to leap it or fall into it. The Indian gained on the boy from the beginning of the race until he reached the ditch when he cleared it a bound. The Indian's lasso striking him on the back as he landed on the opposite side. The pursuit ended and the Indian went back to the boys who were still sitting on the rock and led them away.

My grandfather, after leaping the ditch and running a short distance, stopped and stood still, having as he said up to this time felt no fear. By this time the large boys had gained the opposite shore, and under cover of the trees, were enabled to take a view of the condition of things on this side of the river, and seeing my grandfather in the path, hollowed to him to run. He then for the first time took fright and said that he scarcely knew how he reached the fort, but did get there and gave the alarm.

In the meantime, another Indian went to the mill and shot my great grandfather, breaking his arm. He got to the house and out of danger, but how, I never knew.

While these exciting scenes were transpiring below, the girl (she may have been my great aunt) was in a canoe on the river some distance above the spring with four or five little girls, children of my great grandfather and McGriff, hearing the noise below, became frightened and went to the shore. She was in the rear of the canoe, rowing it, and the children

were in front of her. When the canoe reached the bank, an Indian stepped out of the high weeds that lined the bank, and deliberately entered the front end of the canoe and proceeded to knock the children in the head and take their scalps. The girl was so frightened that she sat still until the Indian had killed and scalped all save one that sat next to her. Seeing that her time was near, she drew her end of the canoe to the bank, which she succeeded in doing just as the last child was finished and she jumped to the bank. The cries from the children brought a large dog from the house to the scene of action. Just as the girl started to run to the house, the Indian started after her. She had not gone far when the Indian overtook her and she called on the dog to catch him, which he did instantly. Two or three fights ensued between the dog and Indian before he gave up the chase of the girl. She finally succeeded in reaching the house and saved herself, by the aid of the dog, from capture or being murdered.

The three small boys (*this refers to Jacob & Theophilus Snidow and Thomas McGriff*) were taken away and traveled thru woods for several days, I do not know how long. The Indians, only four in number, having ceased to watch them closely, and they having opportunity to converse with each other upon their situation, were led to determination to escape. They laid their plans which were acted on by two of them but failed with the other. Their plan was to lie down as usual at nite, but not to sleep, to be as quiet as if they were asleep, until they were sure that the Indians were sound asleep. They were then to get up and start on their long lonesome and perilous journey towards the east their only guide, the moon and stars, and can we help believing, the God who watches over the destinies of Nations, guided these little wanderers thru the wilderness in safety to their homes again? They had no food to subsist upon but the roots perhaps the insects. When the time came for them to make the start, one of the Snidow boys had fallen so soundly asleep, the others could devise no plan by which they could awaken him. After pinching, scratching, and pulling



him for some time to no effect, the two concluded to forsake him and try to make their way home without him. Accordingly, they quietly left the camp and had not gone far when they discovered a large tree that had fallen down which suggested the idea of concealment and being afraid of pursuit, they crept into this hollow trunk and had just secreted themselves when the Indians discovered their absence and raised the howl and began searching for the boys. They took circles around the camp, enlarging the circle each time they went around and were up on the log in which the boys were concealed, several times. After some hours, they gave up the search and returned to camp. When quiet was again restored, the boys left the log and cautiously pursued their journey. They arrived home about two weeks afterward and were nearly starved. The other boy (*this refers to Theophilus Snidow*) remained with the Indians about fourteen years and by some arrangement was then restored to his people, but had contracted Indian habits and tastes and back home too estranged from civilization that he was never satisfied or happy among his people and soon sickened and died.

This is the story. I remember hearing it told by my father many years ago. ~John Lybrook

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(Webmaster's note: John Lybrook was the grandson of John Lybrook (the boy in the story above) and Anne Chapman Lybrook, and the great-grandson of Balzer Lybrook and Catherine Reihm Lybrook who came to VA from Pennsylvania circa 1755, locating at the mouth of Sinking Creek in now Giles County. See the 2008 Snidow Newsletter for the John Lybrook article.

Although David Johnston, author of Middle New River Settlements, stated that Philip Lybrook came to VA from PA before 1755, Judge John Kelly, in his extensive research, noted that the progenitor of the Lybrook family of Giles Co. VA was not Philip but Balzer Lybrook. Balzer and Catherine had a son Philip, b. 1757 in VA. See the Lybrook Lineage link on our Snidow Web Site Map. Balzer (Leibrock) arrived Philadelphia in August, 1750 on the Ship Bennet Galley (not Gallery). He was from Germany).

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The Indian Attack story is well documented and thus we know that the attack took place on Sunday, August 7th, 1774. We also know that after Theo returned home, he did serve briefly in the American Revolution before his death. The Indian Attack story also appeared with pictures and a map of the location in our 2006 Snidow Newsletter (see our Newsletter web page). Snidow Newsletter Editor's note followed: An account of the story is given in Pendleton's History of Tazwell County and Southwest Virginia with this additional information. Under orders of Co. William Preston, Major James Robertson and a scouting party of 20 men were sent to Crump's Bottom in Summers County, West Virginia to build a fort. On August 1, 1774, he wrote to Col. Preston, "As John Draper came down yesterday, he surely seen the tracks of five or six Indians, he says on Wolf Creek, and they made their way to the settlements." Evidently, these were the same Indians who attacked the Lybrooks and Snidows. On August 12, he again wrote to say, "this morning our scouts met with a couple of poor little boys between this and Blue Stone, one a John McGriff, the other a son of Widow Snidow..." News of the massacre was widespread, and in effect, retarded the planned march of troops to Ohio because men were afraid to go and leave their families exposed to Indian attacks.