

OPINIONS

The opinion page does not reflect the views of the KyNewsGroup.

DRIFTING IN DARKNESS AND FEELING THE TREMBLING OF HEAVEN AND EARTH



Heaven Is A Lot Like Kentucky

By Charles Mattox

“The women of Morgan’s Station had all their calves in a little pen. These calves the Indians all killed, not with their guns but by sticking arrows in them. Every goose about the place was shot in the same way. The station was burnt and yet I escaped and my corncrib was unburned and it had three years worth of dry corn in it.”

James Wade, an early occupant of Ralph Morgan’s Station and one of the lucky few who escaped an attack on the place on April 1, 1793, as is recorded in Volume 12 CC of the Draper Manuscripts, Shane’s interview with James Wade.

Old Mrs. Allington got around with Harry Martin all night under the creek, at the taking of Morgan’s Station. Harry Martin had but the one load in his gun. He told his wife (Sally Martin) to run. She was faint and like persons in such circumstances, was unable to run. He threatened to kill her if she didn’t run and sent his knife close. He cut her petticoat lose and then she ran”

Daniel Deron, Draper Manuscripts, volume 12CC

“It was a great piece of madness to pursue them. I knew they would kill their prisoners. When I arrived, Morgan’s Station was in flames. The Indians kept back spies and I heard them whistling in the night,” John Crawford, former Shawnee prisoner and member of the pioneer force that pursued the raiders of Morgan’s Station. Draper Manuscripts, volume 12 CC.

As I continue my research into the early conflicts between clans of Native Americans and the clans of their pioneer counterparts, I find myself more often than not, in an analytical conundrum.

When you add to that a level of complex, and thoroughly cross-referenced for accuracy and which are the foundations of individual and group acts of incredible examples of vengeance, love, sacrifice and commitment, the results are simply-put, awe inspiring.

I try to sort out the facts from fiction and/ or coincidences, but often without the crispness of clarity.

Case in point: The April 1, 1793 attack by Shawnee, Mingo and Cherokee, warriors on Ralph Morgan’s Station, along Slate Creek, in present-day Bath County, was one of the more horrendous events to have happened along the Kentucky frontier. 18 prisoners were taken and 13 of them killed. Two people were killed during the attack on the fort.

I’ve spent over forty years, examining interviews over, and over, I still can’t understand how men are driven to commit atrocities, such as they did that day and after.

Although evidence points that a Mingo Renegade named Black Wolf was one of the War-Captains who led the attack, there does exist some evidence that indicates the great Shawnee Chief, Tecumseh, (The Panther Leaping Across the Sky) was among the 25 warriors that day.

Some Kentucky frontiersmen who knew him later in life, referred to him as ‘Blackfish the Younger.’

We do know that the group that attacked Morgan’s Station separated shortly after the April 1 morning raid, with the remaining prisoners held for a month in the

Kentucky wilderness by a rogue group of around half a dozen Cherokee warriors, led by a Chief named Tuscarora.

Tecumseh had stolen horses belonging to the fortified station(s) in what would one day be called Fleming County.

On April 2-3 the main group of raiders, which consisted of several Shawnee and Mingo warriors moved north at a very rapid speed.

*They had carried off all the movable plunder; such as clothing and bed sticks... and had gotten every creature that belonged to the place. The horses were well loaded; but if a bed turned, or a pack in a saddle, they didn’t stop to straighten it up, but just cut the cords and let it go”....*That was told to Reverend Dabny Shane, when Shane was doing remarkable historical research .

The small band of 35 Shawnee and Cherokee raiders struck Morgan’s Station with complete surprise on Easter Sunday and after killing two inhabitants and burning the fort, they moved eastward with 19 prisoners, all women and children, whom they had tied and gagged.

James Wade let his gaze sweep around him as he mounted his horse and joined the ranks of the militia, who would be following the raiders.

He was 22-years-old and had grown fond of this land since coming here four years earlier with his oldest brother John. The two Wade brothers had made quite a name for themselves as great beaver trappers and spies along the frontier.

Indians had killed John Wade two years earlier and James had been forced to understand some grim realities.

It had hardened him.

John Crawford and “Jim Ward” Joined forces following the attack on Morgan’s Station, and Ward was worried about his fiancée, a daughter of Peter Forte’s-who lived nearby. Crawford, single at the time, agreed to join Ward to see his beloved and even carried Ward across Slate Creek since Ward could not swim. When the two young men arrived at the Forte home they found it empty.

Crawford was very hungry and found cornbread in an iron skillet and a pitcher of buttermilk, these he greedily consumed.

“And so I ate of my wife’s bread and baking even before I had ever met her,” Crawford would tell Shane years later.

Crawford did in fact met, date and marry, Dorothy (Dolly) Forte, and enjoyed her cornbread for many years, dear reader.

James Wade’s mother had been told that he had been killed.

“We’re never going to catch them,” James quietly told Harry Martin just before they rode off with the others in pursuit. *“They’ll kill the prisoners as soon as we start getting close,”* he added.

“I know,” Harry Martin said as he patted James on the shoulder and then adjusted his butcher knife in his waist belt. “But... Maybe not.”

But in the end James had been mostly right.

All of the prisoners except for four young women and a young boy would be tomahawked and scalped, nine of them were found in what would one day be called Menifee County along a tiny stream that still retains the name Murderer’s Branch.

Before riding off with the men and dozens and dozens of dogs, James counted nine different bullet holes in the stump he’d taken refuge behind as the attack began in earnest.

For a moment he mentally let himself go and drift with the magnetic energy that seemed to swirl all around him. It was as if he was in the water, and he wasn’t resisting any force, but simply... drifting along with the natural current and he was thus able to feel the trembling of Heaven and Earth as he

stood near that section of water on Murder’s Branch.

And from that day onward, each time he visited the ruins of Morgan’s Station he could feel a similar sensation.

There had been so much close-range-shooting at the station, during the initial contact that he couldn’t believe he had escaped without a scratch.

He had sprinted three miles to Troutman’s Station for help, then returned to his parents where he parents were overjoyed at seeing him

Harry Martin had led his wife and two children safely to Montgomery Station. Soon after running out of Morgan’s Station, Sally Martin had crossed Slate Creek and her petticoat became soaked and heavy as lead from the water. She said she couldn’t go on any further and Harry nearly panicked when he saw how closely they were being pursued by two of the warriors.

He had left his shot pouch on the kitchen table when he ran out of the fort and he thus had only one shot in his musket. He took his butcher knife and cut the petticoat from his wife’s body and she ran naked, holding the youngest child the rest of the way to Montgomery’s Station.

I continue to research the events and individuals surrounding the attack on Morgan’s Station.

The Shawnee camp was discovered along Paint Lick Creek on April 4, 1793. The Kentuckians who pursued the group divided into three groups with Captain, Luther Calvin, leading one group, Captain Joshua Baker leading a second and Captain Simon Kenton leading the third, which moved to the rear of the Shawnee camp. The three groups were planning on attacking the camp at the same time and by dividing the forces sought to confuse the enemy and make good their attack with recovering the stolen horses and perhaps more. Kenton gave an explicit order that unless absolutely necessary no one should fire a shot until daylight.

The Shawnee raiders had one central fire and as Kenton’s men made their way through the dense woods to encircle the camp, a lone figure from the Shawnee camp walked to the fire and began tossing pieces of wood onto the flames making the camp brighter.

James Ward was among the men with Calvin as was James Ireland and Moses Fowler. As the Shawnee figure continued to stoke the flames Ward raised his gun to fire but Fowler quickly turned to him and whispered, *“Captain, It’s a squaw.”*

Ward squinted toward the figure and noted that Fowler was correct and the “squaw” seemed to be a mere teenage girl. The girl eventually went back to sleep and moments later a dog from the camp began barking toward some of Calvin’s and Baker’s men who eased closer to the camp. Again a lone figure came to the fire and peered into the darkness and began walking toward where Calvin, Ward, Ireland and Fowler, were hiding in the darkness. As the figure came closer the men had no choice and they all fired. The Shawnee warrior fell into the fire.

Confusion erupted across the woods. Kenton’s men were not in place and many of Calvin’s men had fired their weapons and were reloading. Tecumseh, recognized the attack for what it was; a disorganized venture from the Kentuckians who had partially surrounded his camp. He shouted encouragement to his warriors and burst from the camp straight into Calvin’s men, striking Sam Barr with his war club and killing him instantly. Calvin’s men panicked and complete chaos ensued.

Calvin tried to rally his men but soon joined in the

retreat and in the darkness ran straight into a large tree with his musket, which jammed the ramrod into his gun barrel as he was actively reloading at the time. The ramrod became stuck and Calvin lost both of his front teeth in an effort to use them to extract the ramrod in the darkness.

The Kentuckians retreated and regrouped as morning dawned with the loss of several personal items and the additional loss of several horses. They did not recover any stolen horses either and had left the body of their companion, Sam Barr, where he fell.

Alexander McIntyre was among the group and refused to continue back toward Maysville without either taking a scalp or an Indian horse and told his companions as much as he set off alone, back toward the Shawnee camp. No effort by his friends could dissuade him.

He was never seen again and it was learned later he was captured and killed by the Shawnee raiders.

But the story, though interesting does not stop there.

John Ward, an older brother of James Ward, had been captured by Shawnee raiders in 1758 and was adopted into the tribe, having procured the name of “White Wolf.”

It was White Wolf, or John Ward, who had been shot by members of Calvin’s group and it was later learned after peace was declared almost two decades later that the young female who was almost shot initially was White Wolf’s daughter, a niece of James Ward.

Efforts were made by the Ward family to return this niece to her Mason County family after hostilities ceased between the two groups, several years later, and through great efforts she did come to Mason County and live for a time with the Ward family, before returning to her Shawnee family, the only family she had ever known.

These stories provide me with much joy and motivation for further research especially when there are so many possible facts-or-simply... coincidences found out along the way.

Was Tecumseh part of the deadly raid on Morgan’s Station or was he simply leading a horse-stealing raid at the exact same time period in nearby Kentucky communities?

As I continue my research into the early conflicts between clans of Native Americans and the clans of their pioneer counterparts, I find myself more often than not, in an analytical conundrum.

They found Abraham Becraft’s wife and his youngest child, a little boy only eight-months-old within ten miles of Morgan’s Station. The mother and son had been killed and scalped because Mrs. Becraft couldn’t keep up with the relentless pace of the Shawnee and Mingo raiders.

James Wade, like several present at that place and that time, wept aloud without control when his neighbor, Abraham Becraft, cradled the bodies of his wife and youngest child in his lap. When others encouraged Abraham to stay put and tend to his wife and child, Abraham insisted on going ahead with the rest of them because he still had five other children among the prisoners.

They found the bodies of four of those children amid the others, along a small stream that ran into the Licking River.

They were tomahawked, scalped and left where they fell. Dear, sweet Mrs. Craig still held the lifeless hand of her young son, and nearby, they found two of Abner Baker’s children. They were facedown, lying next to four of the Becraft children and Joseph Young’s boy.

Wade thought of how just two days before he had seen them all playing tag and chasing birds in the lower

meadow near Morgan’s Station

They were found in what would one day be called Menifee County along a tiny stream that still retains the name Murderer’s Branch.

As the men had gathered at Morgan’s Station, just before the pursuit of the raiders, James counted nine different bullet holes in the stump he’d taken refuge behind as the attack began in earnest.

There had been so much close-range shooting he couldn’t believe he had escaped without a scratch.

He had sprinted three miles to Troutman’s Station for help, and then returned to his parents where he parents were overjoyed at seeing him, believing him dead.

Harry Martin had led his wife and two children safely to Montgomery Station. Soon after running out of Morgan’s Station, Sally Martin had crossed Slate Creek and her petticoat became soaked and heavy as lead from the water. She said she couldn’t go on any further and Harry nearly panicked when he saw how closely they were being pursued by two of the warriors.

He had left his shot pouch on the kitchen table when he ran out of the fort and he thus had only one shot in his musket. He took his butcher knife and cut the petticoat from his wife’s body and she ran naked, holding the youngest child the rest of the way to Montgomery’s Station.

Teenager, Clarendia Allington was the first prisoner taken. She was the last to be released, a decade and a half later.

Betty Becraft was the last prisoner taken. She was the first to survive the captivity, having been left for dead after being tomahawked and scalped. She was resurrected from the dead when the militia, including Wade and Martin, found her and Bob Craig’s wife, tomahawked, scalped, and left for deadl.

Betsy Becraft was placed under the care of Dr. Downing of Lexington who performed ‘trepan’ surgery upon her. She regained consciousness, healed, later married George Owens, and raised several children, living a full life.

And just as the one they called, The Messiah, who was also a Jewish Carpenter, once told his followers in a far away land, mere days before being crucified and resurrected, ‘The last were often first and the first, last’.

And so, even along Slate Creek, in that ancient section of northeast Kentucky, so long ago.

‘Many were called, but few were chosen’, dear reader.

The ride back home to the ruins of Morgan’s Station was long and sorrowful beyond description for the men who had chased the three-dozen renegade warriors that had burnt the station and captured 19 of the community’s women and

children.

For some, the ride had been especially difficult.

Abraham Becraft had been in the field plowing when the attack began and jumped over the fence and ran to the Wade house. He told the members of the Wade family that he had personally seen their son, James, killed.

They had lost their son John, two years earlier and the news had devastated them. As it turned out Abraham had only thought he had seen James killed, after all, he knew he had seen over a dozen warriors point their rifles at James while he was only 20 feet away and then he had turned to run and heard all the gunfire.

But, as it turned out, James had fell behind an old tree stump just as the warriors fired and had not been scratched.

When Abraham returned to the station he found his little daughter Ruth, killed during the attack and his wife and all their other children were gone.

His wife Rachel and their eight-month-old child were the first of the 19 prisoners the renegade warriors killed as they fled from Ralph Morgan’s Station and moved eastward.

After traveling over 12 miles, the renegades killed a five-year-old son of Robert Craig.

Later, along a tributary of Licking River, the men found nine more prisoners the renegades had clubbed, tomahawked and scalped. They found Robert Craig’s wife and their infant son. They also found Joseph Young’s infant son.

Abner Baker had been killed during the attack on Morgan’s Station and they found two of the Baker Children and three of Abraham Becraft’s children. A fourth Becraft child, a teenage girl named Betty, was still alive, though tomahawked and scalped; as was Robert Craig’s wife.

The renegades had escaped with prisoners Clarendia Allington, Mrs. Abner Baker and her infant daughter, Mrs. Joseph Young, Rachel Becraft, daughter of Rachel and Abraham Becraft, and her brother, Benjamin Becraft.

It’s hard for any parent or spouse, or family member, or caring neighbor, to imagine what that long ride back home would have been like for those men.

The moans of Robert Craig’s wife and Betty Becraft occasionally filtering up through the ancient woods, from the bloody travois they were being dragged upon, mingling with the lamentations of their loved ones and friends and neighbors.

As we depart the scene, let us remember those who were there that April morning in 1793.

We will join them again, within the confines of this column, if the Good Lord I willing..

Gateway Plumbing
COMMERCIAL & RESIDENTIAL SERVICE

Andrew Ferrell
Master Plumber

Service Area:
Bath, Menifee, Montgomery, Morgan, Powell, Rowan and Wolfe County

(606)768-2730
330 Tower Road,
Frenchburg, KY 40322
Commercial & Residential Service

Invitation to Bid

The Bath County Board of Education will be accepting bids and quotes on the following services: Occupational Therapy, Speech-Language Pathology, Physical Therapy, Orientation & Mobility Therapy, Diesel, Gas, Fire Alarm Services, Fire Extinguisher Services, Elevator Service, Propane, Student and Team Pictures, School Signage, Alarm Monitoring Services, Pest Control Services and Cafeteria Hood Range Cleaning Services. Bids are due to the Board of Education by Friday, April 11, 2025. The bid opening will be scheduled for April 18, 2025, at 2 pm.

For more information, please contact:

Liz Watkins, Brittany Combs, or Phil Dettwiller
Bath County Board of Education
405 West Main Street
Owingsville, KY 40360
606-674-6314

Published in the Bath County News-Outlook 03.27.25 and 04.03.25