

EARLY INDIAN WARFARE IN SEVIER COUNTY

By J. A. Sharp

From the time of the first settlements in Sevier County in 1783 until the end of the century Indian attacks and raids were frequent here, as elsewhere on the Tennessee frontier. In describing such attacks in Sevier County Dr. J.G.M. Ramsey, Tennessee's second historian, stated: "Every spring, every fort, every path, every farm, every trail, every house, nearly, in its first settlement, was once the scene of danger, exposure, attack, exploit, achievement, death." The Knoxville Gazette, Tennessee's first newspaper, is the best contemporary source of these early Indian depredations. Photostatic files of this newspaper in the McClung Room of the Lawson-McGhee Library, Knoxville, records that on Dec. 22, 1792 the entire family of Richardson family, with the exception of Mr. Richardson, consisting of Mrs. Richardson and two children and two neighbors, Mrs. Foster, Miss Schult, were killed by Indians "on Little Pigeon, twenty-five miles from this place."

A similar story, appearing in the Gazette of March 23, 1793, is quoted:

"On Saturday the 9th instant, James Nelson and Thompson Nelson (brothers) were killed and scalped by Indians, on Little Pigeon, about twenty-five miles from this place. The Indians had formed an ambuscade on a path near Mrs. Nelson's house. These young men were struck by eight balls; from which it is conjectured that there were that number of Indians; and were headed by a fellow called Towahka, who also headed the party that killed Richardson's family. By this barbarous and bloody deed, an aged mother is bereaved of her only support, in her declining years."

Also, in the same issue of the old paper: "On Wednesday the 20th instant, on Pigeon, . . . thirty miles from this place, _____ Taylor was fired on and killed, by a party of Indians, who had formed an ambuscade on a path he was travelling, near a station. The number of guns fired by the Indians, at that time, was such as to induce the people out of the station to believe it was attacked by a considerable party."

The exact site of the Richardson home is unknown to this writer, but it was undoubtedly in Richardson's Cove. The Nelson brothers and their mother also may have lived in the same "East Fork" section of the County. Since Taylor was killed near a "station," this could well have been near Wear's Fort at the mouth of Walden's Creek on the "West Fork" of Little Pigeon, where Colonel W. Samuel Wear, Sevier County's most prominent early citizen, settled between 1783 and 1785, and built his log house which became the fort or "station." Later, "stations," or blockhouses, for the protection of the settlers, were erected in both Richardson's Cove and Jones' Cove, but it is not believed any were there in 1793 at the time of the murder of the _____ of the above Taylor.

On June 19, 1793, Wear's Fort was the scene of a major Indian raid, and the Gazette of June 29, 1793 reported that "in the night, a large party of Indians came into Wear's Cove, on Little Pigeon, . . . and cut down much corn, stole ten horses, and killed another, killed two

cows and three hogs, which they skinned, for provisions, took seven bags of meal out of Wear's mill and broke sundry parts of it."

Thus it would appear that the first "Wear's Cove" was the lower section of Walden's Creek and the valley of the "West Fork" near the mouth of this Creek. In 1808 Colonel Samuel Wear obtained a Tennessee grant on an "improvement and occupancy" claim for almost 500 acres of fertile level land which extended from the mouth of Walden's Creek up the river almost to the present Pigeon Forge, but if Colonel Wear owned land or lived in the present Wear's Valley no proof of it has been found. Perhaps the first people in Wear's Valley were the Crowsons, and the place was first called "Crowson's Cove."

On June 21, two days after the attack on Wear's mill, a small force of regular militia under one "Lieutenant Henderson," followed these Indians and "retook the horses and meal and three of the enemy's guns, killed two... and wounded a third." Apparently, the Indians resisted when they saw the small force of whites commanded by Henderson, and nine of the militiamen were wounded.

Not satisfied with this result, sixty of the aroused and angered Sevier County settlers met, probably at Wear's Fort, and chose Colonel Wear to command them. This was the beginning of the Tallassee campaign, one of the major Indian expeditions of the period, and which was composed entirely of Sevier County men. The use of such volunteers in offensive operations against the Indians had been forbidden by the territorial governor, William Blount, who had received his orders from the War Department of the newly established United States government. Only the regular militia could be used, and, if used at all, only in defensive operations. Nevertheless, "Lieutenant Henderson" and his militiamen joined the angry and defiant Sevier County volunteers under Colonel Wear, who, in the words of the Gazette of July 13, 1793, "lamented the too long neglect of succour from the general government of the United States." Continuing from the Gazette, this entire force:

"marched to the mountains, where they discovered several trails, winding various ways, which at last terminated in one plain beaten path, leading to Tallassee, a town situated in the mountains boasted of by the Indians, as inaccessible to the white people. Near this town they overtook an number of Indians on the North bank of the Tennessee, when a heavy fire began on both sides; but the Indians soon leaped into the river, on which the white men ran to the bank, killed fifteen fellows, and took four squaws prisoners, which they have brought in with them, and wish to exchange for the property taken from them. During the engagement on the North, a sharp fire was kept up by the Indians from the South side of the river. It is to be regretted that a squaw was by accident killed in the water."

Colonel Wear's Tallassee expedition doubtless followed the branch of the Indian War Path from the French Broad that "went up the west fork of Little Pigeon, and crossed some small mountains, to the Tuckaleeche towns, and so on to the Over-hill villages of the Cherokees." Tallassee was an "Over-hill" town on the Little Tennessee river just

below the present Calderwood. To reach Tallassee from Wear's Fort the logical route was through the present Wear's Valley, Tuckaleechee Cove and Cade's Cove. This was probably the route of the War Path as well as Colonel Wear and his men in 1793.

Indian depredations in Sevier County continued after the Tallassee expedition. The Gazette of May 23, 1794 contained this brief announcement: "On Tuesday the 5th instant Peter Pearcefield was killed by the Indians near Wear's Cove...." Then in the issue of June 5, this sequel appeared:

"On the 11th of last May, Joseph Evans, Thomas Sellers, and James Hubbard, junior, set out in pursuit of a party of Indians, who had murdered Pearcefield to take satisfaction; but not falling in upon their trail, they made towards Big Tellise town, where they discovered a large encampment of Indian warriors; in the night they went into their camp, and killed four fellows, asleep on the ground, and immediately retreated, and got safe into the settlement on the 21st- Evans and his party were dressed and painted like Indians."

For 157 years this story of the murder of Pearcefield was only a tradition in the Crowson family of Wear's Valley, but the above record confirms the old story. Mrs. R.W. Crowson, age 90, who has lived in Wear's Valley all of her life, remembers a slightly different and more detailed version of this story, which was told to her by Richard Crowson, her father-in-law. Recently she stated to this writer that Aaron Crowson, father of Richard Crowson, and a man named Pearcefield came from North Carolina to Wear's Valley to select homesteads, and that they, riding on their horses, were attacked by the Indians in the gap of the mountain on the old Walden's Creek road. Pearcefield was shot, but Crowson escaped on his horse down Walden's Creek to Wear's Fort. Later he and other men returned and found Pearcefield's body which was buried on the Crowson land in Wear's Valley. Today an uninscribed stone and a tree marks the site of this first grave in the Crowson family cemetery.

Very few Indian attacks in Sevier County, or elsewhere on the Tennessee frontier, were reported in the Gazette after 1795. Sevier's expeditions against the Lower Cherokee towns in 1793, and Major Ore's destruction of Nickajack and Running Water almost broke the warlike spirit of the Cherokee. Yet, the issue of March 6, 1797 contained the following: "Just as this paper was going to the press, we received information, that on the 4th instant, Thomas Shields was killed by the Indians, in Sevier County, as appears by the deposition of Arnet Shields. They cut his head nearly off, took out his bowels, and otherwise shockingly cut and mangled him." Thomas Shields was a youth who lived with his parents, Robert Shields and Nancy Stockton Shields, early settlers in the upper Middle Creek section of the County.

Perhaps the last Indian murder in Sevier County was in 1800. Sometime in that year an Indian killed a boy named Tannever Runyan, who is believed to have been the son of Barfoot Runyan and Margaret Rambo Runyan, early settlers on the West Fork of Little Pigeon. Mr. R.M. Runyan, recently deceased, remembered the family tradition that this boy was killed in a field while searching for the family's horses. Again,

as in 1793, when Colonel Wear led his unauthorized expedition against Tallassee, the aroused and indignant Sevier County settlers were on the verge of independent hostile action. The presence of Governor Archibald Roane, Tennessee's second chief executive, was required to quieten the people.

In 1798 peace was consummated at Tellico Block-house, where Governor John Sevier and United States commissioners met the Cherokee head men. The Treaty of Tellico extended the Tennessee area for white settlement almost to the junction of the Tennessee and Clinch rivers. After this Sevier County no longer occupied such an exposed position on the frontier, and the people were enabled to lead a more peaceful lives.