

The Recalling of an Indian Tragedy

By Rev. R. Frank Getty, in Presbyterian Banner, Nov. 12, 1906

With the death of Mr. Crow, of Crow's Mills, Greene County, Pa., a short time since, there is brought to mind the history of a most interesting family, and the recalling of a most cruel Indian tragedy in connection with the same. Mr. Crow was one of those old fashioned fathers in Israel, in that his Christian life was one of that simple, trusting faith, like Abraham's and his concern for the unsaved was the dominant thought in his mind. Like Abraham, he was a man that commanded his children and his household after him, and they are still keeping the way of the Lord. Of his seven sons and two daughters, four of his sons are or have been ruling elders in the Presbyterian church; another was a professor in several leading colleges, a noted Greek scholar, a philologist and archaeologist, traveling extensively, investigating, by special permission the ancient ruins in Greece, Asia Minor and the Holy Land; another is a prominent lawyer, and everyone of the children, a strong Christian character.

Mr. Crow was born on the farm on which he died, ninety years ago. It is a large tract of land comprising six hundred acres, and has been in the Crow name for over one hundred and forty years. His childhood was lived amidst stirring times. When he was four or five years old, the Indians killed one of their neighbors, some little distance away, and two of his older brothers went to bury the murdered man, taking him with them. Finding a recent trail of the Indians, they left him in a vacant cabin, all alone, and followed the Indians in hot pursuit, to avenge the murder of their neighbor. So engrossed were they in their pursuit that they forgot all about their little brother, who was the sole occupant of the cabin for three days and nights in the depths of the forest, whose solitude was only broken by the howls of the wild animals. This was one of his early experiences. He grew to be a man of wonderful vitality, working on the farm in the daytime, and in the old grist mill during the night. He would fill the grain bin with wheat, and the turn on the water power. As he would sit down in the millers chair to rest he would fall asleep in his weariness, till the empty bin and the change of the machinery's rumbling would arouse him, when a new supply of grain would be put in and the grinding process continued through the night. Being the only mill for grinding flour for miles around in early days, Crow's Mills became widely known and patronized, and has had a halo of sacred recollections and history attached to them, even to the present time, though the mill site is only marked by the foundation and some of the old-time framework. The departure of the aged father was like that of Abraham who "died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years; he was gathered to his people," and his sons buried him in the family vault which he had built several years ago, in the field of his father.

With his death we are taken back in history, well on to one hundred and fifty years, into the latter half of the eighteenth century, when the Indians were still around and liable to appear unexpectedly at any time. As the writer went from one historic point of interest to another on the old Crow homestead, he felt that he was treading on historic ground, indeed. There are several Indian mounds which can be recognized as such, at first sight, and when first settled there was a large circle very much like a circus ring,

giving evidence that it was an Indian rendezvous where they doubtless engaged in their war dances and other seasons of festivity. On this account many valuable relics were found till within a few years ago, giving this old home a highly intensive interest. But at the time spoken of, the Indians had been driven west of the Ohio River, save the renegade Indians that would prowls around, or make occasional raids through this region. Jacob Crow, the grandfather of the deceased, was born in Germany, and came to this country about the year 1765, and on landing was sold for debt to pay for his passage. He served his purchaser till his debt was paid, and some time later he came to a point in what is now Greene county, near the Washington county line, in extreme Western Pennsylvania, the point which interests us, and took up a large tract of land, which he bought or traded for. Here in the virgin and trackless forest, a clearing was made, a house of logs was erected, and the foundation of the historic Crow family was laid. Of this great family, from across the deep there were eleven children, four boys and seven girls. Three of these boys, now young men Rooseveltian in their love of the hunt, went down into Wetzel County, West Virginia, where they had heard that there were still some elk. Here they fell into a band of Indians. One of the brothers received a volley of five or six bullets in his breast, showing that there was quite a band of them and was instantly killed. A second brother had the lower tip of one ear shot off, while the third received a ghastly wound under the right arm. The latter two escaped and later returned and buried the brother killed. Thus from the very beginning the history of this family has not only been interesting, but it is seen that they lived in exciting and hazardous times in the primeval forests.

But these exciting times and sad experiences pale into insignificance in comparison with the sadder and most cruel tragedy, which followed. Two years after this, on a beautiful Sabbath morning, May 1st, 1791, four sisters of these brothers went up the creek which flowed through their land to visit an aged couple who lived at some distance. When they were about a mile and a half from their home, they were examining some strange object in the creek ford which they were crossing. As the writer stood on this historic ford a few days ago it certainly was a most romantic place and a place of beauty, as one looked down or up the stream, with its silver sheen, the lofty hills on either side, the ponderous rocks, the waving evergreen, the beautiful fall foliage, with gorgeous hues and colors, a sight most beautiful, charming and entrancing indeed. But what must it have been on that beautiful May morning, with the virgin forest clothed in its spring garb of foliage of living green, the beautiful May flowers, the dainty violets, the rich velvety buttercups and the Indian pinks. Such was the scene, such were the surrounding, and such the engagements of nature sufficient to charm and entrance the sisters on that beautiful morning on God's holy day, as they went on their errand of sunshine and love. But how innocent they were of the danger that was lurking about them, and the awful tragedy of which they would be the principles within the next hour. While they were thus occupied in the ford, they were joined by their younger brother, who was just returning with one of the horses which had strayed away. He talked with the sisters for quite a little season. As he started to go home he insisted on his younger sister, a girl of twelve or thirteen years of age, getting on the horse behind him, but she unwilling for some reason to do so. All the time he was talking with his sisters his horse was very uneasy, prancing around, sniffing the air, and showing signs of great uneasiness and fear. Giving his horse the reins, he started off on a gallop and was soon out of sight. No sooner was he out of sight

that two Indians and a white man by the name of Spicer came from behind a large rock, where they had been in hiding, and advanced upon the four helpless sisters, gesticulating and shaking their tomahawks at them, thus warning them to make no outcry. This explained the strange behavior and uneasiness of the brother's horse, which had scented the Indians in their wild state. The white man who was with them had been stolen by the Indians when he was a little child. A whole family had been massacred years before, save two little children, and this white man was one of these children. Hence, being raised by them, he knew nothing else than Indian customs, ways and life. He was even more cruel than the Indians themselves, as was told by the sister, who escaped, and this cruelty was due, doubtless, to the prostitution in his wild life of his inborn superior talents.

After seizing the sisters and putting them under a bond of silence they marched up from the creek ford several hundred feet to a level place where there was a fallen tree, upon which they made them sit down. One of the Indians started after the brother who had just left on horseback, to overcome him or to make sure that he would not come back. In the meantime, the white man and the other Indian took their places between the girls on the tree, and holding them by the hands, plied them with questions as to the number of settlers, their strength, arms and amount of ammunition, getting all the information possible from them, the white man doing the questioning, since he was better able to speak English. The Indian who had pursued the brother, being gone quite awhile, the white man and Indian began to get very uneasy, and to keep a sharp lookout on all sides. Finally their companion returned and we come to the saddest part of the story.

The sisters, doubtless, felt from the beginning that their doom was sealed. And it makes ones heart ache, even after 117 years, as we think of the helplessness of these sisters, and each unmistakable move taken by their captors. Their combined strength and weaponless was nothing in comparison with these muscular savages with guns and tomahawks. All they could do was to wait in fear and trembling, the brutal savage attack of their captors. The suspense and agony of those passing minutes which would seem like hours would be almost unendurable. Face to face with death, and that in a most brutal and horrible manner. Would that some power had seized these fiends incarnate before they could have carried out their diabolical brutality, After the return of the other Indian and a hurried conversation, the white man and one of the Indians took one of the sisters each, while the other Indian took the two remaining, one of whom was the youngest. Placing the hands of the two sisters together, he clasped them in his hand and with the other he used the tomahawk. All together they began their attack upon the helpless girls, striking them on the head with their tomahawks. In striking one of the sisters, who was quite strong, she was not completely stunned, and engaged in a life and death struggle with her brutal assailant. In the midst of the excitement and struggling, the sister next to the youngest, by a quick jerk of her hand as the Indian raised his tomahawk to strike, slipped his grasp and succeeded in breaking away and started to run. Starting after her the Indian overtook her and struck her in the back with the muzzle of his gun, when she fell on her face.

Supposing he had knocked her senseless, and that he could return later and complete his bloody work, he hurried back to the help of the other two, who were

struggling with the other three sisters. Noticing that for some reason the attack was not followed up, the fallen sister turned her head to see where her assailant was, and saw him hurrying back to help the others. Springing to her feet and seeing the savages tomahawking her sisters, she ran for her life and reached her home in a breathless and terrorized condition. It was some time before she could speak and give an account of her awful experience and the awful sight of the killing of her sisters. Knowing from what the escaped sister saw that it was too late to save the others, a general alarm was given. The parents, carrying a four year old child, with the brother Michael and the escaped sister Christina, made their escape to a block house at Lindsey's Mills, about twenty miles away.

The next day a rescuing party came back and found two of the girls dead, and the third sister most terribly wounded. She had been left for dead, and she had slept, as it seemed to her, from the time of the attack, ten o'clock in the morning, till the dawn of the next morning, when the first sound to greet returning consciousness, was the gobbling of a the wild turkey. She managed to drag herself to the creek nearby to quench the thirst of her feverish condition, and then dragged herself back on the bank to the root of a tree. A man of the rescuing party named Enlow found her, and was holding her in his arms when her brother Michael, who had left them in the ford, came up. As soon as she saw him she said: "Michael, why didn't you come sooner?" How pathetic and heartbreaking this would be. Surviving the awful cruelty of the savages, and to lie in her wounded condition so long without attention. She was taken home and a doctor was sent for to Wheeling, a distance of some twenty miles, through an almost trackless forest. In scalping her a piece of the skull was broken out and stuck to the scalp, leaving the brain exposed. The Indian who had scalped her, stuck her scalp in his belt as a trophy of the attack upon the white man.

In going through a clump of bushes the long hair of the scalp caught in them and was found and sewed on and every effort made to save her life, but she died on the third day. The doctor stated that the hot rays of the sun had affected the unprotected membrane of the brain and that it was next to impossible then to save her life. Thus three of the four sisters died, and their bodies rest in the family burial plot on the original homestead not far from the scene of the tragedy of these early days. Two of the sisters who were killed outright were buried in one grave, while the third sister was buried by their side. Their graves are marked by two plain, undressed field stones, with the year of the tragedy and the initials of their name, 1791, "L. C.," 1791, "S. C., K. C.," traced thereon.

Source: Cornerstone Genealogical Society (www.cornerstonegenealogy.com/)