

The Spicer Massacre

"In the beginning" of pioneer life in the territory now within the boundaries of Greene county a man by the name of Spicer was "lord of all he surveyed," from the summit of the range of high hills separating waters of Dunkard from those of Big Whiteley creek. The exact location of his fatal cabin cannot be certainly ascertained. Some traditions locate it in the head of Deep run, which flows into Dunkard creek a short distance above Bob Town. Some would have it on the old Dave Keener farm on the head waters of a branch of Meadow run. Others place it on the old Eberhart Farm, now belonging to Stephenson Garard, I believe, which lies in a cove at the head of a considerable run which flows into Big Whiteley on Sebastian Keener's farm, near a mile below the Willow Tree post office. However, these three streams have their source so very close together that the locality is defined sufficiently accurate by either or all of them. Indeed it is said that there were two cabins, which was probably the fact, one at the source of Deep run and the other on the Eberhart farm and both belonging to Spicer.

In one of the cabins, with a wife and seven children, he was living a quiet, unobtrusive life. There is no evidence that any neighbors lived within neighboring distance, in the very midst of the unfathomed forest alone they dwelt. 'Twas in the early summer of 1774, about the 5th day of balmy June, when Spicer was chopping wood hard by. His daughter, Elizabeth, a sprightly twelve year old lass, was ironing the clothes. William, a nine year old lad, was setting traps to catch the gray squirrels that were preying upon the tender corn, and doubtless each of the other members of the household were pursuing some useful calling or innocent amusement. A more tranquil home can hardly be imagined, when suddenly Logan, the enraged and desperate Mingo Chief, with a party of warriors made their appearance, Intent on murder and thirsting for blood. Upon observing their presence Spicer stuck his axe in the log, walked to the house, took his seat and calmly awaited their coming. An Indian took up the ax, followed into the house, and deliberately clove him down. His wife and two little children shared a similar fate. Three other children were found or chased over on the Meadow run side, and fell victims of the reeking tomahawk and scalping knife. But Elizabeth, better known as Betsy, ran with great celerity, and for some distance carrying the Iron in her hand, not taking thought to throw it down. Finally, however, she landed it in a brush heap, and finding her brother William, she thought to get him away with her, but on account of his sullenness and apparent indifference, she was overtaken in the vain endeavor to get him over the fence. The two were carried into captivity.

Devereux Smith, in a letter dated Pittsburgh, June 10, 1774, says "The 6th of this month we had an account from Muddy creek, which empties into the river Monongahela near Cheat river, that the Indians had killed and scalped one man, his wife and three children, and that three more of the same man's children were missing. We suppose this to be Logan's party, and that they will do more mischief before they return. On the 12th he adds a postscript: "We are this day informed that the three children before mentioned that were missing near Muddy creek were found dead and scalped." He undoubtedly refers to the Spicer massacre localities not being very well defined at that day. The same writer adds, "And two men were killed in sight of a fort lately built on Dunkard Creek, up the Monongahela, all supposed to be done by Logan's party." Who these two men were I am as yet unable to determine. In another postscript added to this letter on the 13th of the month, this writer gives a rumor of the battle fought on the Ten Mile, a short distance west of the present site of Waynesburg, an account of which will appear in a subsequent sketch.

John Crawford, in his recollections of a hundred years ago, whose father collected a party and went out next day to bury the murdered family, describes the scene as a pitiable and dreadful sight, so much as that one of the party who had never witnessed the like before became terror stricken and wanted the party to clear itself, lest it meet a similar fate from Indians still lurking near in the weeds. Crawford relates that Capt. Logan sent on the prisoners and plunder with the main body, whilst he and another Indian named Snake went over on Big Whiteley Creek and killed or mortally wounded a man named Keener, whose body was not found till the buzzards, by their circling flight, indicated the spot where it lay. Keener was buried in the bottom, now the famous meadow of John Lantz. And it was this same party, I have no doubt, that were attacked and routed by a company of savages on Rees's hill, above Waynesburg.

But to return to Betsy Spicer. She and her little brother were carried away to the haunts of the Indians beyond the Ohio. But Lord Dunmore's war, as that of 1771 was called, having been brought to a successful issue, a treaty was entered into in the month of November of the same year, by which it was stipulated that all prisoners of war should be delivered up, and in December following, Col. Wilson was commissioned to proceed to the appointed place, somewhere on the Ohio frontier to receive them. As he journeyed to that appointment he passed through the present site of New Geneva, and was so enamored with the situation that he afterwards returned to it and improved the farms now owned by Judge Crow, Michael Franks, J. T. Springer, J. F. Gans and James Hess, dubbed the acquisition "Elks Hills," settled upon them, built a fine mill and founded "Wilson's Fort," since New Geneva. He procured the release of Betsy along with the other prisoners on Christmas Day, and returned her to her friends. But, the boy William had been borne into another tribe still farther away and could not be released. He never was retrieved, spent all his life with the Indians, married a squaw and it is said became a chief. Upon one occasion he was induced to return in order to give his legal assent to the disposition of certain property in this sister's favor, but he could not be induced to quit his life in the woods for one of civilization.

Betsy was a girl of more than ordinary mind. Her perceptive faculties were very quick, and her powers of observation extraordinary for one of her years. Short as was her captivity she had learned the language of her captors so as to readily interpret their words. She gathered also many facts as to the medicinal properties of roots and herbs and the Indian method of treating diseases that rendered her services invaluable in case of prevailing sickness in the neighborhood in which she lived. Having married a man by name of Bowen and living to the advanced age of 81 years, she was familiarly known to many who live to read this sketch as the kind hearted nurse and good old "granny Bowen."

After Betsy returned to her friends she visited the site of the awful tragedy where she was rendered an orphan child, and remembering that one of the Indians, finding himself overloaded with plunder, had concealed some things under a log, she repaired to the spot and among other articles found her father's scalp, which she religiously preserved all her life with the intention of having it enclosed in her own coffin when she should be called to that "bourne whence no traveller returneth." She also remembered where she had thrown her smoothing iron when endeavoring to escape, and found it and it is yet preserved by her descendants as a sacred relic and memento of their historic relative.

She related that she heard Captain Logan telling his braves that he and Snake were lying behind the fence close to Jenkins' fort (now Garard's, I presume) that night when the party which buried the Spicers came in; that he heard a woman with a shrill voice call, "Who will turn out and guard the women while they milk the cows?" A long string of men came out with guns on their shoulders and frequently pointed them in different directions. Several times they pointed towards him so directly as to put him in the notion of running for his life, but hoping they did not see him lie laid still till night, when he and Snake stole noiselessly away.

In this connection it may not be amiss to note that John Crawford states that the next day Logan and Snake went to Muddy creek to the cabin of James Flenniken where they killed a mare and pet wolf, thence to the cabin of John Crawford where they cut in pieces some bags of rye and stuck a tomahawk through a copper kettle; thence to Thomas Hughes' where they broke up the furniture and cooking utensils; thence to James Moredock's where they did similar mischief; thence to near Vanmeter's fort where they killed and scalped a man named Way. He says mischief was also done on the waters of Ten Mile, which I presume has reference to the light alluded to above.

Mrs. Betsy Bowen died in the year 1845, within the recollection of the writer hereof. Her life was one of kindness and charity, dispensing blessings on every hand. She lived and died in the neighborhood of her early misfortunes. She raised a large family of children, one of whom, Mrs. Nancy Steel, is still living, aged 74 years, who is the mother of Mrs. Azariah Stephens, near Garards Fort, from whom I have ascertained many interesting facts concerning this thrilling amid sorrowful incident.

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