



Jacob Brake

And The Indians

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(Footnotes added by Perry Brake, 5G grandson of Jacob Brake, Sr., June 2004)

Captivity and life among the Indians was an interesting topic of conversations among the backwoodsmen. When an account of Indian captivity appeared in print, it was usually reprinted many times and had a wide circulation. One of the most interesting captivities relating to Western Virginia was that of Jacob Brake. Except for a brief mention in one account little seems to be known of him.

The Brake family was among the first settlers in Western Virginia. When Washington visited the South Branch Valley in 1748 he made notes on the settlement and mentioned the grist mill owned by Peter Reed. When or

how the Brake family came into the picture is not known.¹ Soon after that the locality was known as Brakes' mill. The records of the county have been lost or destroyed for that period.

Original Settler

Kercheval, in his history of the valley, states the original Brake settler was named John.² There is no other mention of this name and in the last few years evidence has been produced to indicate his name may have been John Jacob.

Jacob Brake, Jr. was the Indian captive. During the French and Indian war, the Indians were raging the South Branch of the Potomac, burning homes and killing every one that could not defend himself. When they approached Brake's mill, they found the men away from the house. Mrs. Brake must have had some knowledge of their coming for in some way she hid three of her children and they escaped the Indians.

There is a tradition in the family that she dropped her youngest child in a thicket and it escaped. Mrs. Brake was killed and scalped. Jacob Brake was eleven years old at this time (1758³) and was taken captive.

Three of the Indians were brothers and had lost a fourth at a previous battle at Romney, and the captive was to take the place of the brother that had been killed. One of the men had Mrs. Brake's scalp tied to his belt, and with this bloody trophy of war in front of his eyes, the son made the long march to north-western Ohio. He later stated the expedition was three months returning to the homes of the Indians. He was treated kindly on the trip as he was to be adopted into the family of the fallen Indian.

¹ From a ledger of *Hampshire County Deeds (1757 – 1786)*: “6 May 1763; Peter HAAS to Jacob BRECHTEL 680 acres for £180 land said HAAS purchased from Peter REED being tract No.1 on the South Fork of the Wappacomo.” “Brechtel” was Anglicized as “Brake.” This is Jacob Brake, Sr., son of Johann Jacob Brake, and father of Jacob “The Captive” Brake (see Footnote 2). “Wappacomo” is now the Potomac.

² The eldest Brake (Brechtel) to emigrate from Germany was Johann Jacob Brake, who had a son also named Johann Jacob. The latter is often referred to as John Brake, and sometimes as Jacob Brake, Senior.

³ The year of Elizabeth Cooper Brake's (Mrs. Brake, above) death is questionable. She is thought to have born two children after 1758, Isaac in 1760, and Abraham in 1763.

Escapes

Arriving at their destination, a celebration was held and Jacob was beaten when he ran the gauntlet. He finally escaped to the wigwam of his foster mother and was protected by her. Later elaborate ceremonies took place for the adoption.

Not all the captives of that time were that lucky. A short time after Jacob was adopted, another boy was brought into camp. He was stupid and could not get along with his captors. The boy was sent after some horses that had wandered away. After the third day's unsuccessful search, he was taken into the woods and killed.

It is a curious fact that boy captives soon learned to like their life with the Indians. Even with his mother's scalp hanging in the wigwam, Jacob enjoyed the outdoor life and he acquired characteristics that never left him for the rest of his life. In the same camp were three white women who had been captured while small. They seemed to be satisfied and stated they did not want to return to their own people. They had forgotten their own language and ways and were Indian in every way except color.

Jacob was a strong boy and soon became a favorite of the camp. He enjoyed wrestling and was soon champion of his class. On one occasion he threw another boy in the fire and nearly lost his life. The Indian crawled out of the fire with hot coals sticking to his back. He watched for an opportunity and threw his tomahawk at the captive and Jacob later stated "it was too close for comfort."

Another Accident

Several years after he had been captured, he nearly lost his life in another incident. A boy from another camp invited Jacob to accompany him on a hunting expedition. He had wounded three deer the previous day and wanted to find them if possible. Jacob's Indian mother objected, saying the other boy intended to kill him, and had a bad reputation. She was over-ruled and the boy went into the forest. Two of the deer were found dead and partly eaten by the wolves. The third deer was found and killed. While skinning the deer, Jacob accidentally struck the Indian with a leather strap and the short tempered boy attempted to kill him. Jacob had taken the precaution to keep his gun handy and, pointing it at the Indian, ordered him to take his share of the meat and go home. He later stated

to his family he would have tried to escape at that time if there had been no snow on the ground.

He soon learned to brag like the other Indians, and on one occasion it nearly got him in trouble. He challenged another boy to a foot race, stating he could beat him with a rail on his shoulder. He won the race but made another enemy.

On one of their raids, the Indians captured some cows. Jacob was the only one who knew how to milk them and fell heir to the job. A Bible was also brought into camp and given to the boy, as he was the only one who could read it. He had learned his letters in the South Branch Valley School and could figure out the words. He later stated his only education was obtained in reading his Bible while with the Indians. That was probably the one thing that kept reminding him he was a white man. While he enjoyed the life of the wild men, he never gave up the idea of returning home.

First Contact

After the treaty of 1763, Jacob made his first contact with the white people of the east. A trader found him with a small band of Indians on a hunting expedition on White Woman's creek and promised to inform his family.

White Woman's creek is a tributary of the Muskingum River in Ohio. Christopher Gist stated it was named for an Indian captive by the name of Mary Harris. She was captured about 1710 by the French and Indians and was ten years old at the time. Gist saw her in 1750 and said she was about fifty years old. She had married an Indian and had several children.

Pontiac went on the war path and stopped all communication with the east and it was not until after the restoration of peace in 1765 that Jacob was able to see another trader who sent word to his people.

Jacob's brother, John, immediately hired the trader to go with him to Pittsburgh and make arrangements for the return of the captive. The previous treaty with the Indians stated all captives were to be returned. John arrived at Pittsburgh a month before the deadline set for the return of the captives and, being impatient, he and the trader pushed on into the Indian country. When they arrived in camp, they found Jacob was to have left the following day on a hunting expedition. This was their annual

fall hunt and would have lasted several weeks, and if John had been two days later, it is doubtful if the rescue could have been carried out at that time. John had no trouble getting Jacob's release. However, he had to leave his pony with the Indians. It was not near the camp and John thought it best to not delay their departure.

Scalp?

We wonder what they did with their mother's scalp. Was it taken with them back to the settlement or left with the savages?

Life with the Indians had spoiled Jacob. He was glad to be back with his people but did not get along with them. He was moody and would not talk to anyone if he could help it. He tried to wear shoes once but almost immediately removed them, and from that time on made his own moccasins. He could move through the woods as silently as an Indian. He had acquired a mean disposition and would fly into a rage over some imagined insult.

Life in the settlement in the valley soon became unbearable, and Jacob headed for the Ohio valley. It is evident he had no intention of returning to the Indians, for he made some sort of a clearing and settlement at what is now Buckhannon in Upshur county in 1776. In 1781 a certificate was issued to him for four hundred acres of land to include his settlement made in 1776. The Indians had been troublesome and he was unable to stay at his settlement. He returned to the South Branch valley, to the old homestead of his father.

Jacob Jr.

It is not known just what part Jacob Jr. had in the Tory uprising in the South Branch valley. Some seem to think he had no part at all, and the Jacob Brake mentioned in the Calendar of Virginia state papers was Jacob Sr. The son did serve his country in the Revolutionary War. His war records have been lost but the pension application of John Cutright states he served under Lieutenant Jacob Brake.

When Jacob was a captive he learned of a large deposit of copper in the wilderness. The Indians had carefully concealed the fact from the whites but the captive knew of it. In later life a company organized to mine the copper, and Jacob Brake was promised a large part of the enterprise for showing them the location of the mine.

When near the location of the deposit of copper, he became suspicious of the character of his companions and refused to show them the location of the deposit. His companions searched for the location but never found it. In later life, Brake returned to the location of the mine, but because of the changed condition of the country, it could not be found. The Indian brothers of Jacob made at least one raid into the Buckhannon settlement after the release of the captive. Two white men were killed in this raid. Jacob was not in the settlement at the time, but when he was given a description of the savages, he stated they were his Indian brothers and he could have prevented the massacre if he had been present. This raid occurred in 1781 or 1782.

In 1785 he married Mary Slaughter, the brother of Jesse Slaughter. Little is known of her people.

Jacob Brake Sr., believed to be Johann Jacob Brecht⁴, the original settler of the family in the valley, died in 1809 and is buried near the old Brake mill twelve miles south of Moorefield in Hardy County.

Settled in Buckhannon

Jacob Jr. and his wife settled on his farm in north Buckhannon and lived the rest of their lives in that locality. The chimney of their cabin can still be seen. He was one of the five men who organized the Baptist church in Buckhannon that was used as late as 1853. A marble slab marks the spot.

Jacob and Mary had five children; Leah married Major Abram. Reger; Mary Magdalen married Isaac Reger; (name unknown) married Joseph Shreves; Abram married Elizabeth Jackson, and John's wife's name is unknown.

Jacob Brake, the Indian captive, died in 1831 and was buried in the Heavener cemetery near Buckhannon where so many other old Indian fighters were laid to rest. A marble slab marks the location of Jacob and his wife, Mary. At his funeral he was taken to the cemetery by a slave boy by the name of Dick Howard. Sixty years later, this man related the story to Albert R. Brake, a grandson of Jacob. The slave was owned by the Gibson family of Buckhannon. He was forced against his will to take the corpse to the cemetery in a cart drawn by a yoke of oxen.

⁴ Brechtel, as already established in Footnote 1.

Members of the Brake family are numerous in West Virginia. They are all descendants of the old Baron of the South Branch valley who raised the flag of Great Britain over his grist mill and defied the infant republic. There is one family of Brakes that cannot be traced today. James Brake was born in the South Branch valley about 1800 and moved to the Buckhannon area. He married Anny Mumford and they had three children, Nimrod See, Cyrus B., and Jacob B. James was killed about 1825 by a falling tree, and was buried on the Bill Post farm on Turkey Run. No one seems to know who the parents of James were. His wife later married Anson Young.

In later life, Jacob seemed to get along better with his neighbors and forget more of his Indian ways, but his captivity still left its mark on him, as it did on every other captive who returned to the ways of the white man.