

Indian Captives

presented by Jonathan Hagee | Kentucky History & Genealogy Conference | 8-2025

During the mid-late 18th century (1700's), an increased clash of cultures occurred between the Native American (Eastern Woodland) Indians and the Westward moving settlers, often lead by the Scots-Irish.

As the European wars spread to the New World, each "tribe" was forced to take sides. To a great extent, during the French & Indian War (1754-1763), the Indians sided with the French against the British & their American colonies. In the later time period (RevWar 1775-1783), the Indians were encouraged to fight against the American settlers. This often included arms and rewards for scalps.

Upon this backdrop, not only disease & tribe against tribe, but these European Wars caused higher death rates and sparked raids into Kentucky for purposes of Adoption.

Raids were a combination of military incursions, gathering of goods & horses and replacing lost warriors.

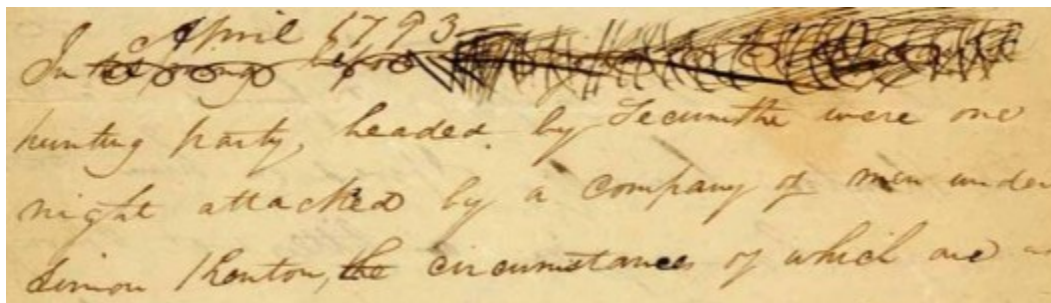
But not every settler was adopted. Many were killed during the raids. Some were held captive for various reasons, and then later killed or sold.

The land known as Kentucky was a unique land. Largely vacated by the Indians after 1755. And with the Ohio River as a broad, but treacherous highway, as well as Boone's Trace leading through the mysteriously created Cumberland Gap into the heartland. Kentucky served as a spearhead into the "Western Waters".

Wonderful, but not without its dangers. Through their own words, captives relate their experiences.

Indian Captives

- 1776 Jemima Boone, Betsy & Fanny Callaway
- 1779 Simon Kenton, Captured in his mid-20's. Celebrated Prisoner, Escaped.
- 1779 Major Moses Van Campen, Age 22 (Spy/Disguised as Indians, Running/Whipping Gauntlet)
- 1780 Stephen Ruddell, age 12, Best Friend of Tecumseh. (Capture, Fight with Kenton.)
- 1780 Little Johnny Lail, (2 Yr old toddler captured in 1780 from Kentucky) Rolled Down the Bank.
- 1780 Sarah / Sally Conway, taken on her 7th Birthday, Captive for 9 years.
- 1782 Dr. John Knight (Death Account of William Crawford)
- 1782 John Slover 2nd Capture, (also ages 8-20), The Blacked Man, Gauntlet, British/No Prisoners, 12 Men from Kentucky [Blue Licks?], Faith & Resolve, As the Fire Began to Blaze, Escape)
- 1789 John Tanner (Tanner's Station/Blue Licks, Disobedient Child/Captured age 9, Adoption Ceremony, Accident w/spear, Bad adoption, Good adoption, Pistol incident)
- 1790 Charles Johnston (Good Samaritan / Duchouquet, Demise of John May, Surveyors)



First-hand account by Stephen Ruddell, aka Sinnanatha (Big Fish), Tecumseh's best friend. 15 year Shawnee captive.

Bibliography

- Frontier Folk / RAMSHA Research Site http://www.frontierfolk.net/ramsha_research/ramsha.html
- Captured By The Indians, 15 First-hand Accounts 1750-1870 by Frederick Drummer
- Tecumseh / Stephen Ruddell <https://www.americanjourneys.org/aj-155/>
- Life and Times of Simon Kenton by Edna Kenton

Jon Hagee: Kenton Kin Co-Founder / former President. RAMSHA founder. Frontier reenactor over 30 years. Several frontier ancestors; settlers, hunters, scouts for Fort Boonesborough, Harrod, Hinkston, Ruddles - captured by Indians, scalped, adopted, gauntlets. Involved with movies, founded historic/genealogy organizations, run historic events, reenactor education/facilitator. Lectures include: 10yr Univ. of KY "History of KY"; Early American / British Isles Music; Scots-Irish origin, Indian Captives, Simon Kenton. McConnell Springs Historic Site Board Member. Colonial musician since 2009. Avid reader, sci-fi, cave explorer, IT guru, church music, Founder Frontier Folk, Cabin builder, Beekeeper.