

The Killing and Capture of John Robert's Family By Emory L. Hamilton

From the unpublished manuscript, *Indian Atrocities Along the Clinch, Powell and Holston Rivers*, pages 11-15.

After leaving Ft. Blackmore, Logan, and his followers traveled through Big Moccasin Gap to the neighborhood of King's Mill on Reedy Creek, in Sullivan Co., TN, near the present Kingsport. Here they attacked the home of John Roberts, on Saturday, September 24, 1774, the day after their attack on Blackmore's Fort, John Roberts, his wife, and children were killed and scalped, except the eldest child, James, a boy of ten years of age, who was carried into captivity and later exchanged.

The massacre of the Roberts family is best told in a manuscript (1) left by John Anderson, relative of Roberts, and a near neighbor. He states: The author of the underwritten remarks, John Anderson, (2) was born in Cecil County, state of Maryland, 19th of February, 1765. While he was young his parents emigrated to this part of the country where he now lives to this day in Sullivan County, Tennessee. Him and his parents arrived in this country in the fall of 1773, when there was but few settlers here, at that day, of what might be termed a wilderness. Valleys that now appear dry and unpleasant was then closed with verdure and beasts, both wild and tame, might be seen browsing on the berries and leaves in those wild; extensive valleys. We lived in peace and happiness for some better than one year when the Shawnee Indians, that then, lived on the north side of the Ohio paid us a very unpleasant visit.

It was on the 16th of October, 1774, (3) that my father and his family was awakened by a neighbor man in the night who informed us that John Roberts and his family, that did not live far distant, was murdered by the Indians, and it was thought there was a vast quantity of these near about us. The neighbors thought it best for all the families near to go to the top of a high ridge, not far distant from us, where they knew was a deep sink hole on said ridge. (4). Accordingly, there was about six families did repair to the aforesaid sink hole on ridge, and the author of these remarks was one among the rest, and as soon as day made its appearance, a number of men went well armed to the house of the aforesaid John Roberts, (5) and to their extreme sorrow they found him, his wife, and four children killed and scalped; one of which was tomahawked and scalped and not yet dead, but died in a few days.

The oldest son of the said Roberts, the Indians took prisoner. He was about ten years old. That same year there was a treaty (6) held with the Indians and the prisoners they had taken. They gave him up and he got home to his friends. The author of these remarks often heard the said boy say, after he got back, that he would like to take an Indian scalp, as they had taken his father's and mother's, sister's and brother's, but am apt to think he never put his desires into execution.

The day after said Roberts and family were buried, all the neighbors near where the murder was committed, went to building forts. My father and all of us went to Looney's Fort, (7) and there continued for a considerable time. My father and his family and a Mr. William Neal that lived near us, agreed to move back home. The same night after we came home, we heard there was an Indian seen not far from where we lived. The next morning us and neighbor William started and went to a fort called King's Fort, very near where the said Roberts was killed. There we continued for some weeks. The fort was very strong and well stockaded and strong gates, but the Indians did us no other harm at that time, only kept us from our home. As we came here we heard of them committing depredations on the settlement of Clinch, that lay thirty or forty miles north of us. After being confined in forts for a number of weeks we returned home and there lived in peace for upwards of one year.

Major Arthur Campbell, in a letter to Col. William Preston, written on Thursday, October 3, 1774, (8) makes this statement:

The boy that was scalped is dead. He was an extraordinary example of patience and resolution to his last, frequently lamenting to his last, (that) he was not able to fight enough to save his mammy.

Major Campbell is here referring to the Roberts boy that John Anderson says was found the morning after the massacre, tomahawked and scalped, but still alive, and who soon died. A letter written by Colonel William Christian to Colonel William Preston, dated November 8, 1774, definitely ties the Mingo Chief John Logan, as the leader of the Roberts massacre. He says:

Last Friday was two weeks ago (October 21), Logan, a famous chief went home with a little boy, a son of Roberts on Holston, and two of Blackmore's Negroes. He said he had taken them on the frontier next (to) the Cherokee country, and had killed, I think, either five or seven people. The boy and the Negroes will soon be in. (9)

Captain William Russell writing on November 12, 1774, from Fort Blair, at Point Pleasant, (where his company had been left after the close of the Point Pleasant campaign), to Colonel William Preston, states:

When I took water at Hochocking to come down, two white men and a captive Negro of Blackmore's, with a horse for each man, set out to come by land. They might have been here two days past, but at present there is not the least account of them. I much fear the Indians have killed them, or as the Governor (Dunmore) has a parcel of prisoners taken at Hill Town from the Mingoes, I fear they will try to get as many of our people, to redeem theirs, rather than give hostages, especially if they intend to be troublesome hereafter. (10)

At a court held for Fincastle County, March 7, 1775, is entered this order:

On the motion of William Roberts who having made oath according to Certificate for obtaining Letters of Administration of the estate of John Roberts, deceased, he having with securitys entered into and acknowledged their bond according to law. (11)

(1) Mss in possession of Miss Grace Denny of Bristol, who is a descendant of John Anderson.

(2) John was the son of William Anderson, (born 1736, died Sullivan Co., TN, October 23, 1789(and Jane (nee Bion), (born March 12, 1744, died Sullivan Co., TN, August 22, 1819). His parents were married in April, 1762, in Cecil Co., MD, where their second son, John, was born as Mss states, February 19, 1765. He died in Sullivan Co., TN, November 17, 1850. John Anderson married Rachael Roberts (1175-1831). She was the daughter of William (1732-1816) and Isabella (Graham) Roberts, (1744-1833).

William was a brother of John, Henry, and David Roberts.

(3) Anderson is mistaken here. The Roberts massacre occurred on September 24, 1774. See Draper Mss, letter of Lt. William Cocke, 25 September 1774, Mss 3 QQ 103.

(4) This sinkhole is on what is designed Mill Ridge, TVA Map 197 - SW Indian Springs, TN-VA, will show the sinkhole very clearly. Mill Ridge is located immediately north of Holly Spring Church at the intersection of the Bloomingdale Road with U. S. 11-W near Kingsport, at Silvacola. (Courtesy of Gordon Aronhime, Bristol, VA).

(5) George Christian, Livingston, TN, 25 September 1853, says: "John Roberts who was murdered had two brothers Henry and William. (Draper Mss 15 DD 39).

(6) The treaty signed at the end of Dunmore's War.

(7) This was the residence of Moses Looney on the Island Road, about one and one half miles due south of the mouth of Boozy Creek (North Fork of Reedy Creek) and approximately where the source of Fall Creek touches the Island Road. See Fincastle Co. Court Order Book for 6th January 1773. Courtesy Gordon Aronhime, Bristol, VA.


(8) Draper Mss 3 QQ 111

(9) Thwaites and Kelloggs, *Dunmore's War*, page 305, and *Calendar of Virginia State Papers*.

(10) Thwaites and Kellogg, *Dunmore's War*, page 309

(11) Fincastle Co., VA Court Orders

This file contributed by: Rhonda Robertson

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