

William Morris Chapter

Daughters of the American Revolution

Pratt, Kanawha County, West Virginia

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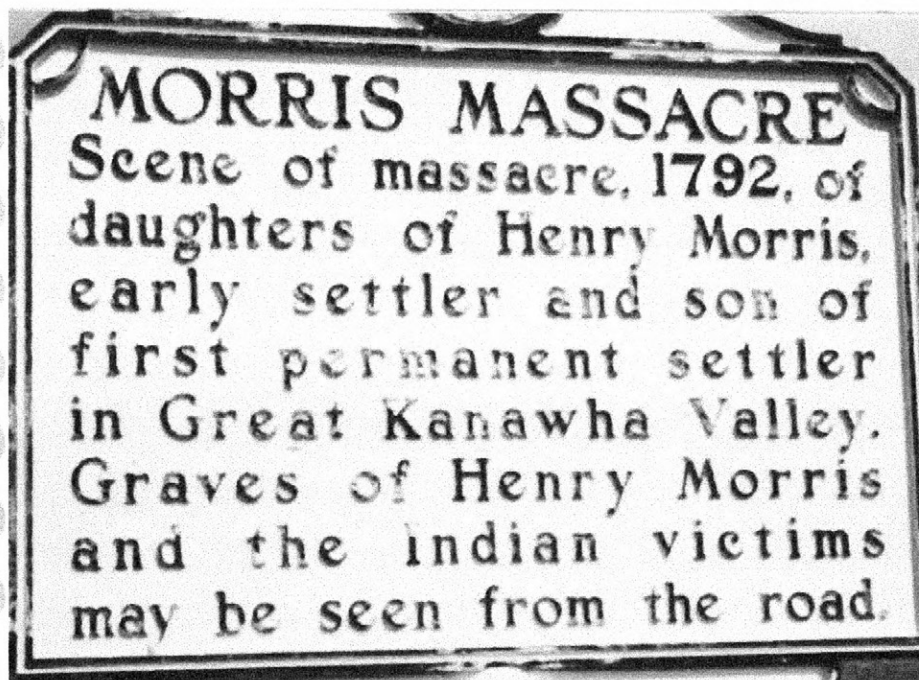
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The Morris Massacre

Henry Morris was the first settler on Peter's Creek, which is now in Nicholas County. In the fall of 1791, a man came to his house and introduced himself as Mr. Allen and asked if he could stay with him all winter and hunt. There was a lot of bear, deer, elk, buffalo and small game in the area at that time. Mr. Allen said he had been with the Indians and had learned to hunt from them. Mr. Allen moved in with Henry and his family and they hunted together that winter and killed a lot of game.

Henry had a good bear dog at that time which he called Watch. Together they had caught several bears that winter. Henry had his dog with him when he was scouting for Indians, while in the Kanawha Valley, and the dog had learned to distinguish the scent of an Indian from any other scent. When he smelled the scent of an Indian, Watch would run around Henry, with his hair raised as if he were afraid.

During the last of March or first part of April 1792, Henry Morris traveled to the Kanawha Valley on business. While he was there he stopped to visit friends and relatives. He was talking with a group of friends and telling them about the man who had stayed with him and his family all winter. He told them Mr. Allen had learned to hunt from the Indians and was a very good hunter. A man who was listening asked Henry what Mr. Allen looked like and Henry described him. The man then said the description matched Simon Girty, who had murdered numerous women and children. He told Henry that he had been acquainted with Girty before he deserted the white people. Henry didn't believe it.

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The man then continued to describe Simon Girty. Henry said he couldn't have described Mr. Allen any better if he had been looking at him. He said Girty had a scar on his head at his hairline. He told Henry which side of his head the scar was on and advised him to look when he got home.

It was late that evening when Henry got home. When he saw Mr. Allen, he knew he was in fact Simon Girty. When confronted he denied it. Henry then pushed the man's hair up and there was the scar as the man had described it.

Henry told him he was going to kill him. Girty still denied his identity and began to plead for his life promising he would leave in the morning. Henry was still determined to kill him but Henry's wife, Mary, asked him not to kill him because he might not be Girty and he had promised to leave the next morning. Henry relented but sat guard all night with his gun on his lap.

The next morning Girty left. When leaving, Girty tried to take the Morris's dog, Watch, with him. Two of Henry's daughters, Margaret "Peggy", 14 and Betsy, 12, called the dog back. Girty got angry, cursed the girls and said he'd get even with them.

About two or three weeks after the incident with Girty, Henry was returning home one evening, and at the head of Line Creek, which adjoined Peter's Creek, Watch began to growl and circle around Henry, behaving as he did when Indians were close. Henry continued home without seeing the Indians, but by the actions of the dog he knew they followed him closely. They were afraid to attack Henry for he was very good with a gun and he could load his rifle as he ran.

When Henry got to his house, John Young was there. He asked his wife where the girls were. Mary said she had sent them to the other side of the farm to get the calves. Henry told her Indians had followed him home.

Henry asked John if his gun was loaded and he said it was. Henry said he would reload his gun and they would go after the girls. As he stepped into the yard he heard the girls scream. He ran in the direction of the scream and yelled for John to follow. Henry beat John to the first girl, Peggy. She had outrun the Indian for fifty or sixty rods and would have gotten away, but she tripped. She had been tomahawked, scalped and her back was broken but she was alive and able to talk.

Henry asked her who did this to her and she said a red man and the man that stayed at their house last winter killed Betsy.

Henry asked her which way the Indian went. She told him and he started after the Indian but Peggy begged him not to leave her. When she finally agreed to let him go after the Indian he ran the way Peggy said the Indian had gone and finally saw him. He was setting sight on him and was about to pull the trigger when the Indian jumped over the bank of the creek behind some laurel. If he had been a few seconds earlier he would have gotten him. He went back to where Peggy was and he and John Young looked and found Betsy. She was dead, murdered by Girty. She was scalped and stabbed four times with a large butcher knife. The knife had gone entirely through her body three times making seven places.

Henry and John carried the two girls to the house. Peggy died before morning.

The next day the neighbors gathered and buried the two girls in the same grave. The coffin was made of puncheons, a heavy, broad piece of roughly dressed timber with one side hewed flat. One was laid in the grave and the bodies of the two girls were placed side by side on it. Smaller pieces were cut and placed at each end and another puncheon placed over them.

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The day after the girls were buried, Henry, his family and the other settlers went back to the Kanawha Valley. This was the second or third time Henry had to leave Peter's Creek because of the Indians.

The militia of Greenbrier was then raised. There were about one hundred men in the company. It was two weeks or more before they were ready to trail the Indian and Girty. They searched but were unable to find them so they returned to the Kanawha Valley. Henry and the settlers brought their families back to Peter's Creek. The Indians never again bothered them.

About ten years after the massacre an Indian came up the Kanawha River on his way to Lewisburg. He stopped at a settlement in the Kanawha Valley where people were gathered for a logrolling event. Whiskey was plentiful and soon the old Indian began telling his war tales. He told about killing "an old pale-face up the river here." That man was Walter Kelly, who was killed at the mouth of the creek now named after him, Kelley's Creek. He also told how he and Simon Girty had killed the two Morris girls up the river. He said one of them ran so fast she would have got away if she had not been tripped by a grapevine and thrown down. He said the Morris girls were the only red scalps he had ever gotten.

Henry's brother, Ben Morris, was there and he wanted to kill the Indian at once, but the other men would not permit it. When the men had finished their day's work they returned to their homes and the Indian stayed there until the next morning at which time he started on his way to Lewisburg. Not long after he left a gunshot was heard up river. It was given no thought, as it was a common thing in those days to hear the sound of shooting.

There was a mail route from Lewisburg to the Kanawha Valley by which mail was brought through once every week or two. The mail carrier came through a day or two after the Indian left. The mail carrier was asked whether or not he had seen the old Indian. He replied that he had not met him. They began to suspect that Ben Morris had killed him and they began looking for him. About a quarter of a mile from where he stayed that night, they found him in a pawpaw bottom, shot through the heart by a large bore gun. They examined the bullet hole and decided that he had been shot with Ben Morris' hunting gun.

When and where Simon Girty died is not known. Henry Morris died in 1826, and was buried beside his two daughters. Their graves are located at Lockwood, Nicholas County, West Virginia.

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