

A fictional reconstruction, based on several accounts, of the death of Jane “Jenny” Logan McKee, though unknown whether it occurred in the first (1759) or the second (1763) Native American raid on Kerrs Creek. She was the wife of Pioneer John McKee.
By Sarah Clayton

Jane Logan McKee didn't see the Indian silhouetted on the hill above her home, until she was halfway to the cow shed. The milk bucket dropped from her hand. The other clutched her belly as if to protect her unborn child. Thank God her other six children were at Timber Ridge ten miles away, was her first thought. Husband John had sent them only yesterday. An Indian had been sighted in the neighborhood in the past few days by the Telford boys coming home from school and seeing a “naked man”. But no alarm had been raised. The Indians, though long since gone west over the Allegheny mountains and into Ohio Valley, often wandered through the valley from time to time. After all this had been their communal hunting ground. One Indian wasn't cause for alarm. For a moment her fear subsided. Then he raised his arm and Jane could easily see the outline of a tomahawk.

“John!” she screamed. “Indians!” Her mouth went as dry as the creek bed in front of her snaking its way up the hill, her legs as heavy as the rocks strewn down its steep-sided center. Her husband came around the side of the barn.

“Jane!” The sinkholes. Make for the sinkholes!” She started forward, slipped, caught herself and stumbled up the hill behind their house. John caught up to her, took her hand and pulled her forward. The ground was uneven and the rock loose. She grabbed her skirts up in one hand as a cry came from behind. “Miss Jane! Mr. John! Don't leave me.” Jane turned to see their black maid struggling up behind them. “Please don't leave me!”

Then a yell, the likes of which Jane had never heard, rent the sweet-scented summer air. There had been times, many times, she'd been scared in this wild frontier land—bears, wild cats, unknown illnesses, hunger—but now she was blood-cold terrified. A surge of adrenalin shot through her. Another glance round and she saw the Indian starting up the hill. There was no way they could outrun him and John didn't have his gun, not being in the mind to take it out on his early morning rounds of the farm. Certainly he had in their early days but that was 30 some years ago, back in the late 1730s when they'd first arrived on the Kerrs Creek. If they could only make it to Jacob Cunningham's block house by the Big Spring. But it was a quarter mile over open fields. They would be an easy target and who knew what they might find down there where the old Indian path came through. Thoughts churned in Jane's head. It hurt to breathe. The hill got steeper. She knew what she had to do.

"John, go on," she panted. "Go on without me."

"Jenny, I'm not leaving you." He gripped her hand tighter and tried to coax a faster pace. For a moment, hearing her nickname, the term of endearment he used at their most intimate moments, gave wings to her feet but she couldn't sustain the pace. Her belly ached. She slowed.

"Go John," she gasped, "Leave me. Otherwise our children will have no parents." She slipped her hand from his. And stood on the slope clutching her stomach. He looked at her. Their eyes held in a moment that spoke of the eternal. Then he whipped around and bounded ahead. Before plunging into the thicket near the top of the hill, he looked back one last time. "God bless you, Jenny," he called out. As he stared at his wife, clambering up the steep pitch on all fours, he was torn by the decision he'd made

and considered returning to her side. Just then, the Indian bounded into view and, without slowing, brought his tomahawk down on Jane's head, an image that would forever burn in John McKee's head. He turned and ran. He had six children to protect.

McKee could hear the Indian, grunting as he scrounged around in the tangle of blackberry canes and downed trees near the top of the hill, searching for him. McKee's heart thrummed against the earth, and the musty smell of mushroom and leaf mold filled his nose as he pressed into the rich loam of the forest floor, trying, praying to be invisible. The grunts faded but still McKee didn't move. He forced himself to breathe. Shallow, silent breaths. The light began to fade and the caw of crow coming in to roost for the night in the tall oaks around him, assured him he'd outlasted his enemy. As furtively as a fox scouting a chicken coop, McKee rose to a crouch, remained motionless, and listened. The wind had picked up, souging through the cedars at the edge of the woods. The frogs at the spring house were tuning up for the night. Though it was July, McKee shivered and with dread-heavy heart headed back down the hill to where he'd last seen his wife.

The over-hanging cedars slapped his face and he stumbled on the rocks. His ears rang with the thrum of numb disbelief of all that had happened since he and Jenny had sat down to their porridge together this morning.

He arrived at the spot where he expected to see Jane's body. It...she...wasn't there. He looked up and down the creek bed, and hope stirred. Was it possible the blow hadn't killed her?

"Jenny?" he called out softly, moving slowly around the edge of the site "Jenny? You there?" A few drops of blood stood out against the deepening gloom of

approaching night. He followed their trail, ducking under the tangle of tree limbs. An edge of linen skirt caught his eye and McKee rushed forward joyfully, knelt down beside her and took her hand. It was cold and unnaturally taut. He squeezed it tenderly, but she stirred not. Sticking out from beneath the kerchief she'd managed to wrap around her head, were strands of blood-damp hair. A sob rose so deep within him as to take tangible form, like a volcano, and burst out of his mouth like a stream of fiery pain. He pulled her into his arms, and rocked her back and forth, pushing the fragments of hair back from her grey face. Of all the blows and challenges the frontier had thrown at him since he first arrived in Ker's Creek in 1738, this was the only one he'd never imagined, could never imagine. For a long while he sat there, whispering her name, and licking away the salty tears that caught in his mustache.

The yip of coyote, answered by another and then another brought him back. He knew he couldn't sit there, wishing her back to life. If he didn't get her buried, the night animals, the coyotes and foxes, the wolves, would get her. Or more Indians. Who knew what the situation was. He laid her back on the soft, warm earth and went to get a shovel.