

THIS SPRING-FED lake at Big Spring Farm is believed to be near the site of Cunningham's Fort, where the second raid by Shawnees took place in 1763. (photo by Larry Spurgeon, looking north)



JANE T. MCKEE (1754-1800) is buried in the McKee Cemetery by Big Spring Farm. Her family witnessed both the loss and resilience among the earliest settler communities in western Rockbridge. A tour of the cemetery will follow the RHS program. (photo by Pauline McKee).

RHS Program Examines Kerrs Creek Raids

Editor's note: The following story is written by Larry Spurgeon, past president of the Rockbridge Historical Society, with contributions by Eric Wilson, RHS executive director, and Pauline McKee, head of the McKee/Big Spring Cemetery Association.

The Rockbridge Historical Society will present its next free public program about the "Kerrs Creek Raids" on Sunday, March 30, at 2 p.m., at New Monmouth Presbyterian Church, 2348 W. Midland Trail.

To open the program, Larry Spurgeon will explain the historical context of those 18th-century events, and contrast the traditional narrative of what happened to information from primary source documents. Pauline McKee will then discuss the work that she and other descendants and local residents are doing to preserve the McKee Cemetery at Big Spring. Following their presentations and questions from the audience, guests are invited to drive one mile to the cemetery for a walking tour led by McKee and other family members.

RHS Executive Director Eric Wilson noted how both the community welcome and site of the program are meaningful, with New Monmouth Presbyterian having been established in the heart of this area.

"We're excited to return to Kerrs Creek," he said, "and to this historic church and congregation. In 2019, our last program in this sanctuary focused on a broader sweep of oral histories and generational narratives that have marked local families and farmsteads from the 18th to 21st centuries. Here, we will center on a narrower cut, revisiting this seminal sequence of events that would hold lasting impact on the shaping of the Virginia frontier, and the emergence of a post-Revolutionary community."

The People

Daugherty, Cunningham, Gilmore, Hamilton, McKee - early settlers along Kerrs Creek, and the families who suffered the greatest loss from Shawnee raids more than 260 years ago. Family names that still remain common in our area, today.

The Kerrs Creek "Massacre," as it was long called, is a paradox in local history. Most area residents have heard about it, but the details, passed down through the generations, are vague and inconsistent. Two historical markers near the intersection of U.S. 60 and Fredericksburg Road illustrate the confusion.

The older marker, erected in 1929 by the Blue Ridge Committee of the Colonial Dames of America, refers to one raid, on Oct. 10, 1764. Shawnees from Ohio attacked a fort and killed 50 to 60 people, "the last attack by Indians upon the white settlers in this section of Virginia."

The second marker, from 2015, de-

scribes two raids, the first in October 1759, during the Seven Years War (known in America as the French and Indian War). The second, also by Shawnees, "possibly led by Cornstalk," was on July 17, 1763, during Pontiac's War. The marker simply states that a "number of inhabitants were killed, while others were captured and taken to Ohio." The hesitation to be more specific is understandable - nothing about the raids was officially documented.

Oral history is important to the community ethos, by keeping alive its stories, but it must be placed in perspective. The paucity of records from that time, the vagaries of human memory, and the inevitable embellishment that comes from the retelling of stories, combine to challenge the parsing of fact from myth - leaving many questions.

Was there one raid, or two? When and where did the raids occur? What happened? Which Native Americans conducted the raids, and why? How many people were killed and captured? What were their names?

The Accounts

No written account by an eyewitness is known. The only contemporary sources that mention the raids by name are newspaper reports, and a single reference in Augusta County court records. Public documents, such as wills and deeds, provide circumstantial evidence to corroborate some of the facts, but almost all the information found in local history books, 20th-century newspapers, blogs, genealogy sites, and other sources, is taken, directly or indirectly, from a single source - the Rev. Samuel Brown II.

In 1872, the Rockbridge Citizen printed Brown's three-part series called "The Indian Massacre on Kerrs Creek." He began by observing, "It is a matter of surprise that no account of this awful scene has ever been published. Thus a full and satisfactory history of it has been lost." He had heard that Dr. Campbell had written an account, likely a reference to Dr. Samuel Legrand Campbell (1765-1840), trustee and briefly rector of Washington Academy in Lexington. If so, it was never published, and "after much inquiry" Brown was unable to locate it.

The articles were based upon notes "gathered more than twenty years since, from the most authentic sources to which I could find access, namely; conversations with aged people living on the Creek and elsewhere, a number of whom were descendants of those who suffered." Considering that Brown had to rely on oral histories from a generation or two removed, and that he wrote the articles 20 years after the interviews, he did a commendable job.

And he was well suited for the task, as a minister who served churches in Rockbridge and Bath counties for more than 50 years, including New Monmouth Presbyterian Church from 1862 to 1873.

His father, the Rev. Samuel Brown, was a minister at New Providence Presbyterian Church near Brownsburg, and his mother was Mary Moore Brown, one of the children captured by Native Americans in Tazewell County in 1786, featured in the book "The Captives of Abb's Valley."

There were two raids, Brown noted, "a fact which is not generally known," but he erred in the dates. The McKee family Bible gave the death date of Jane "Jennie" McKee as July 16, 1763. Brown was told by J.T. McKee, her grandson, that she died during the first raid, and that the second raid was in October 1765 - some people said 1766. Brown acknowledged that "in the most traditional account, it is not always possible to say whether the thing related occurred at the first or second invasion." As a result, he conflated the names of victims and the details of each raid.

Brown's version became the template for later works. Two local histories, Joseph Waddell's "Annals of Augusta County" (1902), and Oren Morton's "History of Rockbridge County" (1920), relied on Brown almost exclusively.

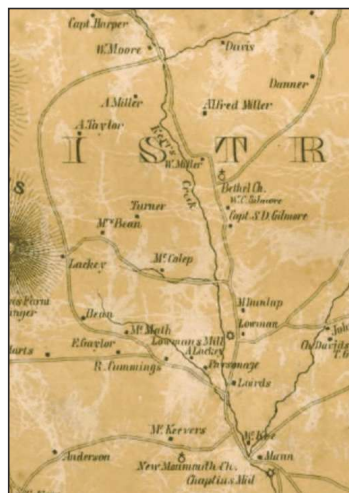
According to the collective narrative, during the first raid the Shawnees attacked a series of cabins along Kerrs Creek, from about Denmark to just west of Fredericksburg Road, killing an unknown number of people but taking no captives. In the 1763 raid, the Shawnees attacked the Cunningham Fort near Big Spring, where 100 people had gathered. Fifty to 60 were killed, and many were taken captive to Ohio. A partial list of those killed was provided: the family of Charles Daugherty, Thomas and Jennie Gilmore, five members of the Robert Hamilton family, Jennie McKee, Jacob Cunningham and his wife, and two other Cunningham men.

The March 30 program will show these attacks were not random, rather they were sparked by the events of the French and Indian War and Pontiac's War. Information from deeds, estate records, and newspapers will be presented to help identify some of the victims, and to clarify some of the details. Maps with approximate boundaries of the original tracts will be shown. Finally, the names of some captives who were later released by the Shawnees were found in newspapers and in the papers of a British officer who negotiated their release.

The Cemetery

Spurgeon's slideshow will illustrate and expand on these period details, the human specifics behind some of the veils of history and legend. By complement, remarks about contemporary efforts to preserve and sustain those legacies in a different form will be shared by co-presenter Pauline McKee, who is herself a descendant of families affected by those historic attacks. Indeed, the "McKee Cemetery" sits on what was then the

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THIS EXCERPT from an 1860 map made by VMJ's Maj. William Gilham shows Kerrs Creek running from the west (top) to east. Today, Big Spring Farm, near the site of Cunningham's Fort, is located where the McKee farm is marked at the confluence at the bottom, and just north of New Monmouth Church. Several cabins along the creek, over a span of nearly four miles, were attacked.



HOKOLESKWA (Cornstalk), a Shawnee leader, is believed to have led the attacks on the Kerrs Creek community. He is buried at Point Pleasant, W.Va., near the site of the battle in October 1774, where the Virginia militia defeated Cornstalk's men. Three years later he and several other Shawnee men were killed at nearby Fort Randolph by several Virginia Militia soldiers, including three men from Rockbridge. (photo by Larry Spurgeon)

Frontier

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McKee farm (see map), now operating as an event venue at Big Spring Farm.

McKee now serves as director of the McKee/Big Spring Cemetery Association, a new nonprofit dedicated to the preservation of the burial ground, which holds the remains of others from the area, and descendant generations, above and beyond the noted family. Partnering with other descendants and local residents, she has been working to enlist volunteers, financial support, and research with ground-penetrating radar. Until recently, neighboring New Monmouth Church had taken on responsibility for the maintenance of the ground, before those arrangements and care were transferred to this preservation organization.

Now living in North Carolina, McKee said, "Descendants and volunteers have joined together to serve this historic cemetery. Buried here are the early pioneer settlers of Kerrs Creek and Rockbridge County. In this program, and through this continuing project, we want to preserve their history and honor their

contributions."

Connected Histories

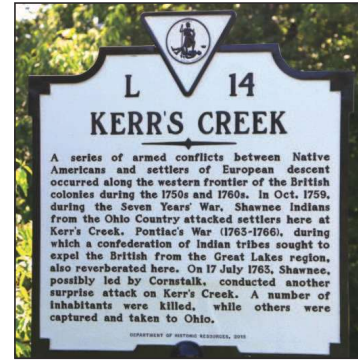
In 2025, this program holds clear ties to the broader arcs of Rockbridge history, but it's also been designed and scheduled with an eye to related RHS programming ahead.

Wilson emphasized that Spurgeon's research provides "a clearer lens, and a timely runway, into the 'pre-Revolutionary era.' While carefully assessing the complexities of an evolving frontier, these explorations of the 1750s and 1760s also afford important perspectives on the coincident founding of Rockbridge and Lexington in 1778. In those lights, we can see not just a steady march of history and growth, but a wartime measure to help secure that frontier, and to better administer a new state government while the country's fate was being tested."

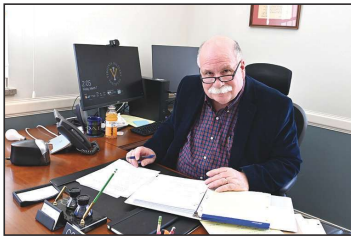
In October, the RHS Museum will be hosting a statewide traveling exhibit, "Give Me Liberty: Virginia and the Forging of a Nation," as part of its

running partnership with the Virginia Museum of History and Culture. In conjunction with those displays, RHS is developing a related fall program on local ties to 1774 Dunmore's War and the early Virginia militia. That last colonial campaign, while often overlooked, helped set the stage for new efforts toward Independence in the years that soon followed.

In discussing the semiquincentennial commemorations collectively known as "VA250 American Revolution," Wilson explained that "this event – like last summer's anniversary program on Thomas Jefferson's 1774 purchase of Natural Bridge – signals other key historic horizons ahead, tied to some of the significant landmarks and events in our own local history. With the range of rich legacies here, we see the upcoming 250th anniversaries clustered around 1776-1778 as opportunities to both celebrate, and to critically reconsider, those pivotal years that established the foundations of this country and this county, respectively."



THE VIRGINIA Department of Historic Resources erected this historical marker in 2015, which describes two raids on settlers in the Kerrs Creek area, one in October 1759 and the second in July 1763.



COL. ANDREW LUNA

VMI's Luna Receives Best Paper Award - Again

Col. Andrew Luna, director of the Office of Institutional Effectiveness (OIE) at Virginia Military Institute, holds the distinct honor of being the only person to receive the Southern Association of Institutional Research's (SAIR) Best Paper Award five times since its inception in 1980.

Luna presented the most recent paper at the annual SAIR conference last September, but was only recently notified of his winning achievement.

Luna co-authored the paper titled, "The Matrix Revisited: How a Popular Assessment Tool Can Be Used in Higher Education," with Jodi Carrier, a doctoral student and schoolteacher in Clarksville, Tenn.

According to Luna, the paper describes how the Boston Consulting Group Matrix, a successful business strategy tool used since the 1970s, can identify both market growth and market share of academic programs.

"For example, in the soft drink industry, market growth relates to how a particular company's soft drink sales do against its competitors," he said. "With market share, the company is interested in how their soft drink sales compare to other products they sell. For attaining a degree of higher learning, market growth relates to how a college's degree attainment compares against attaining the same degree in the same subject among other comparative colleges. Within market share, we compare degree attainment in a certain subject with the other degrees the college offers. This can reveal the internal and external strengths of each academic program. This type of analysis can help a college strategize for future growth and success."

As part of the Best Paper recognition, both Luna and Carrier have been invited to present the paper at the national Association for Institutional Research's annual conference in Orlando, Fla., in May.

"This is quite an honor, and I am very thankful that I was able to work on the paper with a very good graduate student. I am also excited that colleges and universities across the country are realizing the significance of our paper," shared Luna.

Luna came to VMI last September and also serves as the Institute's liaison officer during VMI's comprehensive review process every 10 years to maintain accreditation. The mission of the OIE is to promote a culture of continuous improvement at VMI by providing evidence-based information for the purposes of decision making, planning, and resource allocation.



Live From Ukraine

Russian readings (with English subtitles) from the works of Ukrainian journalist and blogger Anna Gin will be presented by language students from the East European and Russian Studies Program at Washington and Lee University's Stackhouse Theater this Friday, March 21, at 7 p.m. The program is entitled "Anna Gin's Diaries: Flowers from Ukraine the Unbroken." Gin has remained in Kharkiv, Ukraine, throughout all three years of the Russian-Ukrainian war, enduring relentless shelling by the Russian army. She will Zoom from Ukraine to answer questions about her readings and interact with the audience and language students.

Hull's Opens Season With 'Snow White'

Hull's Drive-in Theatre will kick off its 2025 season on March 21-22 with a double feature showing of "Snow White" (Rated G, 2025) and "Mufasa" (Rated G, 2024). Gates will open around 6 p.m. with the movie starting around 7:45 p.m.

Tickets are \$12 for adults, \$6 for children and can be purchased online at hullsdrivein.com or at the door with cash, Visa, MasterCard and Discover all accepted.

Hull's also announced a concert series as part of their pre-movie entertainment in 2025. The drive-in is partnering with the Virginia Opry to bring 13 local and regional artists and bands to the Buddy Derrick Memorial Stage. The concerts begin in May and run through October and entrance is included with the movie ticket, so residents can come early for some great tunes and stay for the movie. For more information on the concert lineup, visit hullsdrivein.com.

Hull's Drive-In Theatre, founded in 1950, is one of the seven drive-in theaters still currently operating in Virginia. It is one of only two nonprofit drive-in theaters in the United States.

For more information, visit Hull's Drive-In Theatre online at hullsdrivein.com, or on Facebook or Instagram.

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