

The Wandering One

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When Cornwallis surrendered at Yorktown in October 1781, the defeated and humiliated British sailed away to Manhattan, their stronghold in North America.

By contrast, the transmontane lands of Virginia burst increasingly into fire, with pillage and scalping throughout. The English garrison in Detroit poured fuel onto the flames by offering a cash bounty for every white scalp. The lonely settlers in remote valleys called plaintively for militia protection, which was scant at best for this vast hinterland that extended in the west to the Mississippi and northwards to the Great Lakes.

Among the militia from Lexington, Virginia, which had fought with distinction at Yorktown, there tramped a sergeant Jeb Hager, a blond hulk, who had deserted from the Hessian mercenaries after their Christmas disaster at Trenton in 1776. At Lexington he earned his keep as a hired hand to Squire Hoard, **an** elderly landowner and Burgess.

The young wife of the Squire was expecting their first child, to the surprise and delight of the musty husband. This event brought forth his proclamation that the household slave force be increased with a young Negress to help in the kitchen and to tend her pregnant mistress. Months earlier, the wife, Ven by name, had enjoyed secret liaisons in the woods with Jeb, and now she was relieved to attribute the pregnancy to her decrepit mate. The Squire ordered his New England overseer to the Charlottesville slave auction to buy a pleasing Negress, a task which the man undertook with zeal, since his own wife was spare and frigid.

In the Lexington countryside slavery was not prevalent. The local farmers had generally migrated from the coast after serving their indenture. For labor they relied on family and hired help, who in rum took off for the West to claim land of their own. The Shenandoah Valley land provided ample harvests of grain, fruit and pasturage for livestock, in contrast to tidewater tobacco which denuded the soil and demanded intensive slave labor.

Scruggs, the overseer, and Jeb loaded a farm wagon and headed for Charlottesville. It was a long drive but worth it, for the auction provided high quality and diversity of slaves from the estates of retiring and deceased planters. Jeb hated slavery with a passion, which was fed by his boyhood as a forester's son in feudal bondage to a

brutal German nobility. He knew the dark despair and lassitude of enforced labor. One honestly hired hand outperformed three slaves who had no motivation except the whip.

The slave market in Charlottesville smelled foul. In the midst of the crowd the pompous auctioneer presided with pretensions of gentility and affected bonhomie. While he was aware of his status as a scorned yet essential part of slavocracy, his gelatinous familiarity extolled the virtues of his wares. Yet everyone knew his profit lay in a percentage of the price.

Among his wares, he paraded a young wench, who caught the fancy of Scruggs. The short fat auctioneer with dirty fingers stripped the slaves naked, as if that would improve the bidding. He stroked their breasts and thighs while turning their bodies for leisurely viewing. "A trained house servant" he crooned. "How about those breasts? As good for milk as in bed." Scruggs bought her for \$900, a price above average. A profitable phase in Virginia slavery was breeding youngsters for the southern fields, either for rice or latterly for cotton.

Next, the auctioneer paraded her brother, a sturdy muscled youth, who was experienced in herding cattle. The pudgy auctioneer dropped the slave's trousers, fingering up each inguinal canal, and shouting, "See, no ruptures." With a quick flourish he pulled back the foreskin while drooling, "no sores or clap." Scruggs was impressed and bought Big Dick for \$700, not out of compassion for brother and sister but because the plantation needed a herdsman.

Once the all important paperwork had been completed, Jeb, the overseer, and the slaves, each in leg irons, climbed into the wagon for the long drive to Lexington. Jeb more than ever was repulsed by the evil images of slavery. When home, he turned to militia duty to be cleansed, and as always the settlers needed protection.

For Indian braves, war parties provided recreation and a chance for warrior status. Reputations were built on the number of scalps at the belt. Warriors also stole horses to rebuild their herds and carried off women and children to strengthen their tribes. Hence, it was then custom to kill male settlers and abduct progenitors and their young. A famous Shawnee Chief, Blue Jacket, had been captured as a German adolescent and had risen to tribal leader. Captives were assigned to the deserving warrior, and as such were, in a sense, slaves. But this lasted only for some years, after which the owner could sell his captives or let them join the tribe.

The Virginia militia responded to appeals from all directions, only to find a burned farmstead and scalped settlers/When faced with militia rifles, the Indian war parties faded into the forest, taking along whenever possible captives and livestock. For Jeb, still revulsed by the slave auction, militia duty meant freedom and the spice of war games. Striding along with companions in the open country lightened his being. Breaths came full and deep. With rifle on his shoulder and pack on his back he bounded over the earth in cadence with his load. In the pack he carried his food, shelter and ammunition, and thus was self-sustaining and yet had the comfort and strength of a bonded military group. Each man knew what to do if faced with Indian fire. This was the comradeship of life and death. Exhilarated, they swung on and on without pining for hearth or home. Some of them might be wounded or killed. That was a given. Always it would be someone else. So they walked smartly and with a light step. It was a contented squad that moved through the hills and valleys of western Virginia. At the same time, each soldier knew to avoid, at all cost, capture by the Indians because this meant running the gauntlet and burning at the stake.

Among the militia, Sergeant Jeb stood out as a handsome giant who with others shared a longing for land of their own, even where Indians ferociously roamed. One day while the squad was traversing a ravaged area, all of a sudden without a word every man dropped flat in the tall grass as bullets whizzed overhead. Jeb murmured, "Let's circle around them. In the center I'll draw their fire. Don't shoot 'til you see their lair." After some minutes Jeb placed his hat on the tip of his rifle. Sure enough it drew two shots. He cried, "Get em Zack. Get em for sure." Zack, the best sharp shooter in the group, rarely missed. His rifle replied while the others lay still. At last he grunted, "Got one, and they seem to be pulling out." Since some stolen horses might be left behind in their hurry to retreat, Jeb called to Jake, "You're the best tracker. Take a couple of guys and bring back what horses you safely can. Watch out for ambush. That settler back a piece will know the owners if they're still living." Such was a typical day's work, he mused.

Colonel Williamson from Pittsburgh had gathered at Fort Wheeling a hundred soldiers and enraged settlers in response to the Indian attacks. An emotional fury among the men called for revenge. They cried, "Do something, anything to make the Indians pay sorely for their raids." What this campaign would do was not clear.

The nearest Indians were those Delawares who had joined the Moravian Missions along the Tuscarawas River some fifty miles to the northwest. That these groups of

Indians had been Christianized and engaged in peaceful agriculture and never in war parties mattered not at all. They were easy targets for revenge that would sate the blood-lust of the settlers.

Once across the Ohio the settlers upped their rancor and indiscriminate hatred of all Indians on finding remains of women and children left hanging on trees by the retreating war parties. Thus inflamed, the Pittsburgh force rushed to the Gnadenhutten Mission and after several days of deceitful talk, murdered in cold blood some hundred men, women and children, who were peaceful and unarmed. This unopposed massacre set off immediate revulsion among red and white alike. The Indians heightened their zeal for war, and settlers braced for increased raids. This macabre event provoked vivid and unrelenting enmity among the Ohio tribes, lasting some thirty years until their final defeat by the Americans and the death of Tecumseh in 1813 at the Battle on the Thames in Canada opposite Detroit.

During the winter of 1782, the Virginia militia troops stayed south of the Ohio River and thus escaped blame and scorn for the Gnadenhutten massacre, but they experienced the brunt of exacerbated Shawnee raids. Late that summer, an American Army from Pittsburgh, emboldened by the slaughter at the Moravian Missions, was annihilated in northern Ohio by the enraged Indians. The American leaders were slowly burned at the stake.

When the Virginia militia finally plodded into Lexington, they found fear of more Indian raids and an economic depression. Trade and commerce were sick, not only locally but in all the Continental States, cut off as they were from the Mother Country. The States printed paper money which rapidly became almost worthless, and coins became scarce.

Jeb was not surprised when the overseer told him that the Squire could no longer afford his wages; so Jeb left the comfort of the plantation for odd jobs with local farmers. Through this work, he learned carpentry skills and the rudiments of building a solid house. The adze taught him to fashion logs, and he became skilled in running a small sawmill. Here he turned out timbers, rafters and siding. As a forester's son, he respected the structure of trees, their texture, grain, knots and branches. Cedar for foundations and shingles, hardwood and pine for risers and floors, poplar for interiors, and for furnishings handsome cherry and walnut. He, being the hunter and now the builder, could provide for man's two prime needs, food and shelter.

With his new skills, Jeb still wanted no part of established Virginia, even if he could afford it. His heart told him to go West and North to the Ohio lands, where the Indian war parties chose to live. There must be sound reasons for this choice. To learn why, he might best join an Indian tribe in the area. From his stay with the Moravians in Bethlehem, he had begun his understanding of Indian customs. He admired their ability to live from their surroundings, their wandering ways, their knowledge of plants and nuts, their harmony with wild life, and their agricultural skills in growing grain and vegetables for the winter. In addition, their self governing methods often outdid the ways of the white man. So to the Ohio country he would go.

Most settlers moving west from Virginia took the longer but safer route to the southwest along the Appalachians until they came to the Cumberland Gap and then headed into Kentucky. The wealthy travelers on their way West chose to float down the Ohio on flatboats, a quicker and easier trip. However, in so floating, they were relatively defenseless against Shawnee war canoes and thus a source of scalps, livestock, gun powder, and of course liquor.

Jeb went West on foot with his rifle, tomahawk, knife, and pack. He followed the Kanawha and crossed the Ohio at Pt. Pleasant, where he found an old, supposedly well-hidden canoe. He now was in Shawnee land with war parties coming and going, and they wouldn't hesitate to lift a solitary scalp and pick up a good rifle. He avoided Indian trails and added to the duress and time of travel by striking off into trackless forest. His goal was the Scioto Valley; and his hope was to join a wandering tribe that was bent on peaceful survival, made possible by paying tribute to the powerful Shawnees.

In the rough country of southeast Ohio, the going was slow away from the trails. Without compass, an experienced woodsman relied on innate sense of direction governed by sun, wind, and terrain. Jeb himself after several days without sign of Indians felt secure in shooting a deer for food, which he dressed and hung in a tree before slipping off to find a campsite near water. On returning to his cache, he sensed from a distance some voices celebrating their find. He retreated silently, fully aware that the Indians would soon spread out to hunt him down. If one of them were a skilled tracker, the white man would have scant chance of escape. There was little time for safety as he set off through unbroken forest. Coming to a creek, he walked down its middle for a half mile or so, a favorite way of covering one's track. A large sycamore branch hung over the creek. Without hesitation, he jumped for it with rifle and pack. With ape-like agility,

he gained the main trunk and propelled himself upwards. In this virgin forest, huge trees interlaced their branches and allowed Jeb to move to a towering oak, where he climbed to the safety of a broad crotch, and became hidden by a screen of leaves. Once settled in his aerie bower, he soon heard warriors splashing in the creek, searching for a track but never looking upwards. Such is the power of habit. Though the braves found no hunter, they did have venison for supper, while Jeb munched parched corn with his scalp intact.

To Jeb, these trees were mystic divinities beyond human ken. In the new world, virgin monsters soared in size and variety, true giants of the forest. Venerable trunks of oak, hickory, beech, ash, poplar, maple, and sycamore towered above the under story, creating subservient areas of small brush lacking in sunlight. Some said a squirrel could travel from the Chesapeake to the Mississippi without ever touching earth. American settlers looked on trees as hostile to agriculture and community, good only for building cabin and fort. To Jeb, they were a living refuge and protector, and if harvested should be cherished as noble shelter and handsome furniture.

Jeb knew full well that to find peaceful Indian bands which survived on hunting and farming, he needed to reach open bottom land where they, the Indians, could raise crops. At the same time he would have to escape the dreaded war parties that infested the Ohio country.

To reach the Scioto Valley, Jeb's powerful arms and legs sent him up at night to the safety of the huge boughs to be lulled by the rustle of leaves and awakened by bird songs. An arboreal creature, he truly was, as he traveled westward, until one day the skies lightened. Through the trunks came glimpses of green bottom land. Furtively he dodged along the edge of the forest, scanning for likely Indian habitat. Without warning a lone brave appeared from behind. Suddenly the Indian was there, impassive and non-threatening. With hand and facial gestures, they exchanged greetings, bolstered by Jeb's rudimentary native tongue. The stranger proved to be a young hunter from a small band of Delawares that suffered torment from the Shawnees despite paying tribute. The brave, named Red Turkey, had been shadowing Jeb for an hour, until he decided that this white man was friendly. The men shot two deer and carried the carcasses to the band's camp. This gained the white man a guarded welcome and led to more hunting with Red Turkey, son of the band's chief. After a while Jeb was provisionally accepted and assigned to a family wigwam.

He stayed with this band for a year, while he hunted, trapped, and gathered food.

He learned more than mere survival in this wilderness, gaining a measure of so called prosperity. The band admired his skill with rifle. His nose sharpened to the smell of deer and his eyes to its tracks.

From the Indian underground Jeb first heard that the Continental Congress had awarded to Virginia a Military District in the Ohio country running from the Scioto to the Little Miami Rivers and north to the headwaters of both. This territory was mandated as payment in acres to soldiers of the Commonwealth who had fought in defense of the nation and of settlers during the Revolutionary War, which was finally ended by the Peace Treaty of December 1783. Jeb had to act quickly to establish claim to a favorable piece of land, and within days he left the Delaware band to walk to Richmond, the new capitol of proud Virginia. On the way he stopped at Lexington for proof of his military service.

In Richmond, he located the Land Claims office in a shabby cabin near where the Burgesses met, and manned by a priggish fop, the son of a finagling Burgess. In frontier garb, Jeb waited stolidly for the young official's condescension, which changed abruptly to desire when face to face with Jeb's handsome frame. He was told to meet the official later at a local tavern to receive the land claim. At twilight they met, and Jeb began to understand why. The priggish official did produce a Virginia draft for 160 acres, phrased in legalese, which Jeb hardly understood, but the fop withheld the document.

"Let's have more rum," he gurgled. Jeb agreed and unnoticed poured his drink under the table. By then, the fop noticed only his own cup. "Where're you sleeping tonight," he mumbled. "Just stay with me. Plenty of room." Jeb nodded assent, well aware of the intent. After more drinks Jeb retrieved his precious document from the fop's nodding grip and slipped away on pretext of answering nature's call. Jeb knew he had to move quickly, because when the official recovered his wits, he would likely order Jeb's arrest on a spurious charge of robbery. Without delay, Jeb left the village of Richmond, walking into the night. After some twenty miles, he curled up at daylight in a hidden spot. Later he was awakened by the clanking of a mounted patrol on the road. "Probably looking for me," he thought.

In those days a determined walker could cover thirty to forty miles on open road, before seeking shelter and food, often gained in return for labor at isolated farms. Indians used a network of well trodden paths connecting camps with hunting grounds and serving war parties in their forays.

Jeb followed a lonely course to the Scioto, waiting till dusk to fish or shoot before lighting a sheltered fire. Dried meat and parched corn filled the gap between hot meals. He crossed the Ohio at night in a canoe, sequestered on his trip to Richmond.

When at last in the Scioto valley, he headed to old Chillicothe, once the chief Shawnee town and now a center for white settlers and traders. The Commonwealth of Virginia had established in that town a claims office for its Military District. Jeb himself had already scouted the region for a proper piece of bottom land on the edge of hardwood hills. He planned to set up a water powered sawmill on a spring-fed creek and provide finished lumber for houses and furniture that the spate of settlers would need.

Meanwhile savage war parties still roamed the area, spawned by the large Indian population to the north and lured to borders of Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Kentucky. The British in Detroit spurred on this warfare with ammunition and money for scalps.

Jeb found his familiar band of Delawares in the upper Scioto valley, and they welcomed him for his hunting skills. In his absence, a related family had joined the band, headed by a middle aged elder named, Diving Beaver, who in former times had earned status as a warrior with white scalps and their captive children. On warm afternoons, the Indian women often bathed in the river, their brown bodies flashing in playful, diving release from the pace of daily chores. Among the seething bathers one figure caught Jeb's eye for her grace and auburn hair. She, he learned, was a captive member of the newly arrived family. And so Jeb was drawn to Diving Beaver's wigwam where he paid his respects to the family head with Virginia tobacco and deferential words. In Indian culture polite discourse moved solemnly and slowly. The object of Jeb's attention, he was told, was a mature teenager named Blue Eyes, captured as a young girl by Diving Beaver. He had raised her to tribal status and for eventual sale.

The guest and family engaged in suitable confab and then a leisurely meal around the fire. Jeb as a guest was offered the Indian hospitality of an overnight stay and of a sleep mate since one was available, namely the captive Blue Eyes. The headman volunteered, "She works hard and is clean, but no good for having babies."

When Jeb was settled on a deerskin pallet, Blue Eyes slid silently to his side. Lean, muscular, and strong breasted, she turned her naked back to his side and stayed so. At last he murmured in Delaware, "Is this your usual stance?" "Yes," she answered, "Unless I'm forced to roll over." With this reply he lay next to her back without asking her to roll.

The next morning, as she tended the fire, he asked, "How do you keep from having babies?" "If forced, I use herbs to keep me empty. And thank you for not forcing me."

For several days Jeb hunted with Diving Beaver and usually they returned with a deer, cleaned, skinned, and ready for the pot. With a buck the head man claimed the privates as his special privilege. Finally one night Blue Eyes came to Jeb's deerskin and this time joined herself to him. She did so again and again. "Are you using herbs?" he asked. "Oh yes," she replied, "It's too soon for babies."

All fall Jeb hunted with the Delaware band to supplement their harvest of crops and nuts. Whenever possible he sought the company of Blue Eyes, and she responded with joy. When snow fell he asked Diving Beaver if he could buy Blue Eyes, his captive. Indians didn't believe in permanent slavery; so the head man would have to dispose of her shortly. This started hours of smoking and rumination. "You know," the head man said, "She's no good for babies, but she's a worker." Procreation ranked high among Indians, and this decreased the value of the girl.

Jeb knew money would talk. "How about ten dollars in coin?" That would buy a lot of liquor.

"No, she's worth more than that."

"Well, what about fifteen?"

"Let me think about it." In the end they agreed on fifteen, Jeb's tentative price from the start.

After the price had been settled, the man and woman were formally united in tribal fashion. Both were cultural outcasts, he self-exiled from Virginia and the Hessian army, along with giving up his name, she torn from her Scotch Irish family and thrown into an alien life style. Yet here in the wild they found each other, consecrated and blessed by their ability to survive in nature's wilderness, far from the ways of the West. As price for their freedom they were faced with creating a family from scratch without relatives, neighbors or tradition. It would be something entirely new, alone and unsupported, save for tribal connections.

North American Indians used no writing in their lives; so Blue Eyes could neither read nor write, and Jeb began by teaching her the alphabet and numbers. She made fast progress in mastering English as she pulled together scraps of memory from early childhood, but spelling from pronunciation made no sense, "enough, through, though" all

ending in "ough" but pronounced differently.

Above all, Jeb wanted a Christian marriage, and for that Blue Eyes would need a Christian name. She couldn't recall her family name because at the time of capture a blow on her head blackened her memory. "I think it was Mac something" she murmured.

"Fine enough" he chuckled. "Your name will be MacQueen, because you are my queen. How about Sylvia for a first name, in honor of the forest that shields us?"

They were told that an itinerant minister would spend time in Chillicothe for church services and saving souls. Perhaps he could marry them. So the couple walked to Chillicothe. At the price of a few fiery sermons and \$25, they were married by this minister, who gave them a flowery testimonial, duly dated, for the marriage between Jebidah Hager and Sylvia MacQueen. This was a proud possession for their new home.

On Jeb's land, they built a wigwam, their nuptial castle. She scoured the woods for edibles, nuts, and herbs, and together they raised corn and gourds in Indian fashion on their bottom land. Jeb hunted and fished, and in this way they survived as native generations always had.

What had become of Jeb's dreams to be a prosperous land owner and a successful mill wright?" And what of the excitement of militia fighting in defense of white settlers? These and other questions drifted away into the distant mist of the night as the slumbering pair lay entwined in erotic embrace on their warm bearskin bed in the comfort of their native wigwam. In the dark of the night and in the rapture of bed they heard not, indeed heeded not the war parties of angered Shawnees as they silently sped by on their embattled, scalp hungry way to the dark brown banks of the blood stained Ohio.

The lonely wigwam stood tall and untouched.