

The Story of Mary Draper Ingles

Mary Draper Ingles was only twenty-three and pregnant when Shawnee Indians invaded the peaceful Virginia settlement where she, her husband and children lived. Taken captive, she lived with the Shawnee for months until she finally escaped at Big Bone Lick, Kentucky by following a thousand mile trail to freedom. Read on for more of the extraordinary story about this pioneer woman who risked her life to return to her people.

Mary Draper Ingles was 23 years old in the early summer of the year 1755 when she and two of her children were kidnapped during a Shawnee Indian raid on her small community in Draper's Meadows, Virginia. While many of her neighbors and relatives were being slaughtered; Mary, her sons and several other women and children were forced to begin the long journey back to the Shawnee country in what is now Ohio.

Mary was over 8 months pregnant at the time of the raid. Within a few days she gave birth to a girl in the woods next to the trail. Mary understood the Indian's respect for strength and ability to bear pain. During her labor she gained their admiration by not crying or screaming. She also told her boys not to let the Indian's see them cry. This turned to her advantage later when she, her children and the other captives finally arrived at a thriving village known as Shawnee Town or Scioto Town. This town was near the junction of the Scioto and Ohio rivers.

In Scioto Town there were many white captives. Mary witnessed men running the gauntlet and saw several horribly murdered at the hands of the mob. There was an auction and many of her friends were sold off and removed further into Indian country. Mary, and her two boys, however, were claimed and protected by the Indian brave who had captured them and who later adopted her sons.

Although women were not considered valuable to the Shawnee, Mary was fortunate to meet up with 2 French traders living in the town and began to work for them sewing highly sought-after shirts of red cloth. This work increased her value and further insured her safety.

Mary waited for her chance to escape. She had carefully memorized the number of tributaries on the way to the Ohio country so she could find her way home. Between Scioto Town and freedom lay the mighty Ohio River; an insurmountable obstacle for a person who could not swim. Following along the north side of the Ohio to the crossing place near Buffington Island was out of the question as it was heavily traveled by Indians and she was sure to be found.

After many months of living as a slave to the Shawnee and French traders, the opportunity for escape arrived when Mary and an old Dutch woman were taken on a salt making expedition to Big Bone Lick. Mary found that although the lick was over 200 miles further away from home, it had the advantage of being on the south side of the Ohio River in what is now Kentucky.

Mary's sons were left with their new father in Shawnee town. Although she had taken the infant daughter with her on the salt making trip, she realized that she would be forced to leave her behind, also. The child would not survive the trip she hoped to make.

Mary and the old Dutch woman (name unknown) waited for their chance to slip away unnoticed from the camp.

When they began their trip to the east it was already late October. At first the wide fields along the banks of the Ohio provided occasional unharvested corn and squash and the two women would carry as much as they could in their skirts. It was not good eating by any means as they had no way to make fire and no tools. As time wore on and the miles became hundreds, the weather deteriorated as well as the food supply.

To make the journey even longer and more arduous, they were forced to travel up the tributaries of the Ohio until they could find a place to walk across as neither of the women could swim. After crossing they had to walk back down the far side until they reached the Ohio again. On some of the bigger rivers, this could mean a 100 or 200 mile detour.

They eventually passed into the depths of what is now West Virginia. The steep gorges of the Kanawha and New Rivers are filled with boulders tumbled down the mountain sides by rushing waters. Logs jam and tangle along the banks and are slippery with moss and spray from the endless roaring waters. Climbing and crawling were required every step of the way. Cold, raining days taxed their spirits and strength. They were freezing and starving. Their clothes eventually totally disintegrated and they carried absolutely nothing with them. Yet somehow they went on and on; living like scavengers on dead animals, snails, earthworms, leaves, bark and lichen.

After 43 days and over 1000 miles through incredibly rough country, these two women actually made it back to Draper's Meadows. Mary's hair had turned completely white although she was only about 24 years old when she crawled out of the woods at the edge of a neighbor's clearing. At first no one even recognized the naked, scratched, bleeding and nearly skeletal white haired woman who could not speak a coherent word. The old Dutch woman also survived the journey and was last seen leaving for the Dutch colonies in Pennsylvania after a recovery period at Draper's Meadows.

Mary and her husband tried to buy their two sons back from the Shawnees for many years. Eventually, they discovered that the younger son, about 2 years old at the time of the raid, died in captivity shortly after being separated from his mother. The older boy, Thomas, lived on with the tribe and was finally bought back after 13 years for about \$150.00. It is unknown what happened to the daughter.

Mary lived to 83 or 84 years and had several more children. Records state she remained vigorous and robust until her dying day.

Mary's Son Thomas

Thomas had a hard time readjusting to the white world and fluctuated between the two cultures for a number of years. Eventually he was educated at Albermarle County, Virginia, and became acquainted with Thomas Jefferson, James Madison and Patrick Henry. He moved his home and family numerous times and stayed on the forefront of the white expansion into the wilderness.

Ironically, 27 years after his experience of being captured as a boy with his mother, he witnessed his wife and two children captured and hauled off into the forest by a raiding party. Unarmed, he was as unable to prevent their capture as his father had been before him. Thomas managed to rescue his wife after five days of hot pursuit; but his two children

were murdered and his wife injured by a tomahawk blow to the head.

The Draper and Ingles descendants have carefully preserved their family history to this day.

The memory of Mary and her journey through the mountains shows the incredible strength, spirit and determination that is possible when a need or desire is greater than any physical adversity.

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