

The Red-Headed Warrior



In the 1700s, one of my relatives became one of the most feared figures east of the Mississippi. An Indian warrior, he was described as having red hair, fair complexion, and a good command of the English language. He could, and in fact often did, pass as a white man. Robert Benge (aka Capt. Benge; aka The Bench) was the son of a Scots-Irish trader named John Benge who, while being married to Elizabeth Lewis, was at the same time married to and having children with a Cherokee woman named Wurtah (allegedly the mother of famed Cherokee linguist Sequoyah which would make them half-brothers). When the Lewis family found out about John's Indian family, they had the marriage dissolved and Elizabeth was free to remarry.

Capt. Benge lived amongst the Cherokee for most of his life and grew to become respected by his fellow tribesman for his leadership abilities, his courage, and his ferocity in battle. He had a great dislike for white settlers and vowed to remove them from his land by any means possible. His reputation grew to the point that white mothers would invoke his name to threaten their children, saying if they weren't good "Capt. Benge will get them."

He conducted many raids against white settlements whose residents often, when hearing that Capt. Benge was heading their way, would abandon their homes and farms never to

return. In April of 1794, he raided a settlement in Southern Virginia and, on his way back to the Cherokee camp with his prisoners, he was intercepted, shot and killed by a militia of thirteen men who were in pursuit. The militia took his scalp and sent it to the governor of Virginia who had it forwarded to President George Washington. Vincent Hobbs, the man who fired the fatal shot, was awarded a rifle for services rendered.

Robert Benge was the nephew of my 2nd cousin, Susannah Lewis.

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