

Lavisa's Ruse



There are many stories told involving the Bowens of Virginia and Tennessee. This one features Lavisa Smith, wife of Lt. Rees Bowen, Revolutionary War hero, and a 6th great grandmother of my niece's husband.

Rees and Lavisa were among the first whites to settle in Tazewell County, Virginia. To protect themselves and other families from Indian attacks, Rees built a strong stockade around his house which grew to encompass other structures. It eventually would become the historic Maiden Springs Fort. Hearing that the Ohio Indians were on the warpath and heading towards Maiden Springs, killing and scalping any inhabitants along the way, the men of the area left the fort to meet the Indians and keep them from attacking their women and children. When they were several days away from the fort, the men were horrified to find that the Indians had slipped past them and were headed straight for their settlement and their defenseless families.

Lavisa was outside of the fort's walls, driving the cows to their milking area and, while passing over some marshy ground, noticed fresh moccasin prints. Immediately realizing their dire circumstances, she managed to keep a cool head and after she finished with the cows, informed the other women that they should dress in men's clothing and march around the palisade to make the Indians think their husbands were in the fort,

armed and ready. Not one woman was willing to risk exposing themselves in such a manner.

So Lavinia dressed the only woman over whom she had authority, a large negro woman, in her husband's clothes, while she, being of diminutive stature, dressed in her son's clothes. Carrying sticks to simulate rifles, they marched in military fashion around the fort all night. Her ruse worked for when the men arrived back home, they found their families safe and secure. Lavisia had surely averted a massacre from taking place for they found the Indian's camp ground on the side of Short Mountain, overlooking the fort, where they opted not to carry out their attack plans based on what they could see.

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