

HISTORY OF THE BRUCE FAMILY

Written by Major William Bruce in his 75th Year

Reproduced from the Vincennes (Indiana) Capitol

The Capitol is pleased to publish the history of one of the oldest families in Knox County. In 1851, in Major Bruce's 75th year, he wrote a history of the Bruce family, which has never been published until now. It will be of deep interest to hundreds of citizens in Knox County as the Bruce family is one of the largest and most prominent in the county.

It is a thrilling story of the hardships and privations endured by our early pioneers, their fights with the Indians, and how the early settlers struggled in those days. It is historical from beginning to end and will be of much interest to hundreds of Capitol's readers.

My first recollection that I have of my ancestors is hearing my Grandfather, James Bruce, telling that himself and a younger brother, George Bruce, came from Scotland about 1740. My Grandfather located in Winchester, Virginia. He was a house carpenter by trade and I have heard him say that he built the first frame house tht was ever built in that town, about 1744. He married Margaret McMahan and moved to the North branch of the Potomac in Maryland; He continued there following his trade and farming until he raised a large family of children. My father, William Bruce, was the eldest; He was born February 14th 1745, he had two sons younger than my father, and six daughters; Elizabeth married Thomas Anderson, Margaret married David Cox, Jane married William Marshall, Nancy married Samuel Perciful, Ann married Samuel Glass, James married Polly Runyun, George married the widow Perciful, and Sallie, the youngest sister, married Joshua Carman, a Baptist preacher, a man of excellent character and a pleasant speaker; They moved to the state of Ohio about 50 years ago, raised a large

family and died in the good old age of 85. From the above enumeration of uncles and aunts, there has sprung an almost innumerable multitude of people. They mostly moved to Kentucky in an early day, and settled in Nelson county.

My father, soon after marrying my mother, moved to the Monongahela and settled about 14 miles above Pittsburg, between the mouth of Peter's Creek and Newell's store (now Elizabethtown). It was the haunts of Indians and forts were the only place of safety for the families of those hardy pioneers. I had two sisters older than myself, born in the fort, and myself, the third child, soon after they ventured to their farms.

I was born the 6th day of August 1776, one month and two days after Independence was declared. I can with the Apostle Paul say "I am free born" while our forefathers had to obtain their freedom by their blood and treasury. During the revolutionary war my father was frequently called upon to perform military service. The first time that I recollect of him talking about was being stationed at a place then called Catpirk, called after an old Indian chief, near a place now called Washington and not far from a place on the Monongahela then called Red Stone. My father served therein the capacity of a Lieutenant. The next service he performed was under General George Rogers Clarke, he commanded a company under that veteran soldier at Louisville and was absent from home for several months.

As to my mother's side I have very imperfect knowledge; Her maiden name was Polly Lucas, her first husband was rich, his name was Perciful. After his death she married my father. My Grandfather on mother's side was William Lucas. What my grandmother's maiden name was I never knew, she died about my first recollection. Grandfather Lucas died before I was born, all I know about him is, he was a seafaring man. I remember an uncle, Robinson Lucas and

At the age of twenty-two I married the third daughter of Captain Charles Polk of Shelby County, Kentucky. She was the youngest of four children of his who were taken captive by the Indians when they took, and burned the fort. He had been called away with his company of militia from Simpson Creek where his fort stood, it was believed that the enemy was about to make a descent on the forts on Bear Grass, from the signs that had been discovered, but the wily savages, after they found that the principal part of the men had been called away, changed their course and nearly one hundred Indians attacked Polk's station. They killed several whites and took the rest prisoners, after burning the Fort. Among the many prisoners was my mother-in-law and four children, also William Polk, who had been a very conspicuous character from the early settling of Knox County, Indiana, until his death about eight years ago, having filled various important places. He was one who helped frame the first constitution for Indiana in 1816. He was commissioner of the Michigan Road for a number of years. He frequently served in the Legislature of the state and was Registrar of the land office at Ft. Wayne, at the time of his death.

His eldest sister married Captain Spier Spencer, who fell in the battle Tippecanoe while fighting Indians, his death was much lamented. The second sister Nancy, married Peter Ruby, some of their children are still living in Knox County, The third sister Sallie, became my wife October 23, 1798; I then bought a small farm when an older claim took it away from us; I then packed up what little plunder I had and took my wife and four children on horseback and moved to Vincennes, Knox County, Indiana. In the spring of 1805 I rented five acres of ground to raise corn on, for which I paid \$25.00. Pretty tough times; That summer I purchased 200 acres on which Bruceville now stands; I built us a log cabin and in October the same year, moved to it. We had a very few white neighbors and quite a number of Red Skins hunting and traveling through all parts of our county, but at that time they were entirely friendly and continued so until Tecumseh commenced

Indiana, my sister is still living and is in her seventy-eighth year, two years older than myself.

My brother James who is fifteen months younger than myself, married Polly Foreman in Kentucky; They had a large family, James has been dead eighteen years.

My youngest sister, Polly, married John Glasscock, they had but three children. She is still living in her seventy-first year.

As I have before mentioned when and who I married and when I moved to this state and where I settled, I will now inform you of the increase in my family; In the first place I have had twenty-five children, fifteen boys and ten girls, only sixteen of whom are now living, five died in their infancy and four since they arrived at maturity. My eldest child Charles Polk Bruce married Angeline Wright, from Ohio, they had three children. After her death he married Nancy P. Harrison, daughter of the late Joshua Harrison, of Montgomery County, his last wife has had ten children; Charles died last summer. William D. Bruce married Betsy Polk, they have had six children, four of whom are still living, William died fifteen years ago this month, his widow married again and lived on the Illinois River. My eldest daughter Delilah married Jno. A. Holmes, brother of my second wife, they have had twelve children, eight of whom are still living, they live in Ogle County, Illinois, near Buffalo Grove.

My third son, now living, Spear Spencer, married Rachael Chambers, by whom he had nine children, his wife and three children are now dead, his second wife was the widow Light, they live in this County.

My second daughter, Polly, married Squire Bruce, they also live in Ogle County, Illinois, they have had twelve children, seven of whom are living. My third daughter Betsy, married John

have always been blessed with sufficient food and clothing to get along comfortably. I was never burdened with wealth nor distressed with penury.

My sons and sons-in-law have all been sober, industrious men, they are all doing reasonably well; they, with their wives, are almost all professors of the Christian religion and most of them belong to the Christian Congregation of Disciples.

The living number of my family is:

Children.....	16
Grand children, husband and wives.....	98
Great grandchildren.....	17
Myself and wife.....	2
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	133
Dead.....	30
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Total.....	163

Today I am seventy-five years old, August 6th 1851, thus far has the good Lord prospered me. I have endeavored so far as my fallible nature would permit to pursue an upright and honest course and the Lord has been my helper and in His merits is my trust. I am now at the advanced age of 75, and I have never known one day without something to eat and comfortable raiment. I have enjoyed uncommonly good health, I have never been confined to my bed a whole day in my life, altho I feel the outer man decaying very sensibly, yet my health is very good; my energy is falling fast, my sight has become so dim that I do not know one of my own family across the house, but still I can see to read and write without glasses. How great that blessing is.

About the year 1800 my first wife and I united with the Baptist Church on Cox's Creek, Nelson County, Kentucky, we

continued our membership there until the spring of 1805 when we received our letters of dismissal and moved to Knox County, Indiana (then territory) about the fall of 1807, we collected twelve or fourteen scattered Baptists and organized a church under John Tyler and William Keller of Kentucky. The constitution was formulated at our house. We called it the Wabash Church. We still gathered a few, some by letter, some by baptism. We increased until we were strong enough to build a comfortable log house to worship in, on the same ground that the Presbyterian church now stands on the road from Bruceville to Vincennes.

Some years after this, a number of my wife's family and other Baptists moved on Maria Creek and concluded to be organized into a church there. My wife and I received letters of dismissal and went into that church, we called it Maria Creek church. Our membership continued there until my wife's death in 1818. The church prospered greatly for several years; I think when a few of us (say nine persons) from Bruceville petitioned for letters of dismissal, their number on the church record was 170 members.

A suspicion got afloat that we intended to organize into a church constituted on the Scriptures without any other Creed or Confession of Faith. The persecution immediately commenced, the day we organized into a church, some twenty or more of their number broke off from there and came with us, from that time the old members kept leaving them and coming to us until at last fifty had withdrawn.

Our congregation increased under the ministry of Brother Maurice R. Trimble and Brother Warford until we had over one hundred members. We have left off constitutions and parts of constitutions and still number over 100; but the persecuting spirit of old Maria Creek church against us and others that left their form of belief, and the Scriptures a sufficient rule for our faith and practice, has reduced them to a mere skeleton.

Thus far I have given a correct history of my ancestors and my own family, or as nearly correct as my imperfect memory would permit, together with length of time and want of records. I regret that my progress in life has been so limited.

William Bruce.

Bruceville, Indiana July 12, 1853.

In perusing the pioneer women of the west I was struck with force about the capture of Captain Charles Polk and family had escaped their notice. In 1779 they moved to Kentucky then a wilderness inhabited only by buffalo, deer and other wild beasts of the forest. The Northern Indians as well as the Southern kept it exclusively for a hunting ground where they often met in deadly combat, the victors carrying the trophies in scalps returned to their homes, while the vanquished had to return mourning.

The suffering that Mrs. Polk underwent in her captivity was very great. The presence of mind that she manifested in all peril ruled her life as well as that of her four children.

In the early settling of Kentucky it was common to picket in a square sufficient to enclose a number of small cabins, for the convenience of those who were to occupy them. Two block houses at opposite corners projected several feet beyond the line so one could see better from the port holes.

In the cabin that Captain Polk lived, whether from a belief that no danger was near at hand, or from lack of experience, I do not know, the chimney was outside the pickets, as it was nothing but logs notched one on another, it was not difficult to tear away, the opening made a convenient passage for the savage foe under the fort; Some days previous to attacking of the fort and butchering of the inhabitants and the burning of the fort, an order was received from the commanding officer at Louisville, by Captain Polk, to

repair with his command in all haste as only a few days before there had been seen about one hundred Indians passing through what is known as Shelby County, Kentucky, now believed to be going against the fort on what was then called Bear Grass, now Jefferson County.

Whether it was desined or some other circumstances caused a change in their plans, is not known, but it is well known that by the time Polk's command had reached the Bear Grass settlement, Polk's fort was invested by the whole troupe of savage warriors; The above mentioned chimmney offered no resistance to the ingress of the enemy, all of them entered the fort through it.

Mrs. Polk could have made her escape with her two youngest children to a field of standing corn, that surrounded the fort, but found it impossible to awaken the oldest two. The strong mother love would not allow her to leave one half of her children to the merciless tomohawk of the savage. She quietly seated herself on the side of the bed where her children were sleeping all unconscious of harm; When the Indians had made a slaughter of the inhabitants sufficient to satisfy their thirst for blood, and had secured what plunder they desired to carry with them, and had set fire to the fort, they passed out of the fort the way they came in, taking Mrs. Polk and her four children prisoners.

Be it remembered that the British officers at that time in command at Detroit gave the Indians \$30.00 for a prisoner and \$20.00 for a scalp. With their avaricious dispositions this was inducement to save all those who could be cared for by them without much trouble on the march.

Reflect a moment reader, and think of the sorrowful sight when Captain Polk came home and found the fort burned to the ground and some human bones among the ruins, each one uncertain and wondering, "Is this my wife or my child, my father or my mother, my brother or

my sister?" All was conjecture, nothing definite. Hope alone helped to buoy up each sinking heart as he said, Perhaps my dear ones are still safe as prisoners and I shall once more have the satisfaction of hearing from them and enjoying their company again.

August 12, 1853.

WILLIAM BRUCE.

The following account was written by James Polke son of Charles Polke Junior, who was born at the fort at Detroit, Michigan on the 20th of October 1782.

Charles Polke Senior succeeded in getting all of his family from the Indians in a year from the time they were taken captive.

In the month of August, 1782 Mrs. Delilah Polke and four small children were all taken prisoners, to wit, William seven years old, Elizabeth who later became Mrs. Spencer, Nancy who married Mr. Ruby and Sally who married William Bruce.

The Indians departed in haste to get back to their comrades over the Ohio river, which they reached the third day after the burning of the station known as "the Burnt Station", with their prisoners. In their haste to get across the Ohio river, the weather being warm and grass along the narrow traceway, they killed some of their prisoners.

Mrs. Delilah Polke being "enocinte" gave out and refused to go farther, her feet had swollen and falling into a sink hole she refused to try to travel further on foot, her captor, who claimed her for his prisoner ordered her to go, she shook her head refusing and the Indian drew his tomahawk waving it over her head and was in the act of giving the fatal blow when the brother of the savage came forward and took her in his care, thus she narrowly escaped with her life.

They crossed the Ohio river with their prisoners and booty, they had provisions in abundance, with their Indian ponies, etc.

When Mrs. Polke removed her moccasins from her feet they were fearfully swollen and the leather thongs or buckstrings were imbedded in the flesh and her toe nails several of them came off with her moccasins.

Here were encamped a large body of Indians and they considered themselves safe on the western shore of the Ohio river. After a short stay they slowly and leisurely returned towards their towns.

Mrs. Polke was cared for by her new owner and rode on horseback, she traveled by the Maumes (Fort Wayne) and down the same to Lake Erie and from thence to Detroit, Michigan which at that time was held by as a British Garrison. Mrs. Polke and a part of her children were taken to the garrison (or fort) and there remained and in this fort my father, Charles Polke Junior was born on the 20th of October 1782, about two months after the capture of his mother and her children near Bardstown, Kentucky distant three or four hundred miles.

My Grandfather Charles Polke Sen. spent his time in traveling and trying to find out the fate and fortune of his wife and children.

I have often heard him tell of coming out to the "Old Post" Vincennes in the year 1783 and here I presume he got first word of their safety at Detroit Michigan, about eleven months after their captivity by the Indians. He immediately set out for Detroit and there about one year after their capture he had the good fortune of meeting and greeting his wife and children again and in addition the little stranger Charlie, about ten months old.

Elizabeth the oldest girl was left back on the shore of Lake Erie and adopted into the family of her captor among the Potawatamie Indians, but my Grandfather ransomed her with a horse and secured all the family again. After remaining at Detroit for a time, it being now the closing of the revolutionary war, the British officer in command of the garrison, General Depaister, gave him every assistance for his safe return to Ky. The General secured the services of Simon Girty a white man who had taken up Indian habits of life and well acquainted with the wilderness round the eastern shore of Lake Erie to the panhandle Virginia near Wellsburg, which they reached in safety and after a short stay in the region of country from whence they had left for Kentucky.

From thence he came down the Ohio river back to Bardstown Ky. with his family, poor and penniless for everything was burnt up in the fort, and such is the fate of border life.

There were born eleven children, five sons and six daughters, William, Charles, Edward, Thomas and Robert, the daughters were Elizabeth (P) Spencer, Nancy (P) Ruby, Sally (P) Bruce, Eleanor (P) Hollingsworth, Christiana (P) McCoy and Polly (P) Bell.

Mrs. Delilah Polke died in Nelson County Ky. about the year 1798 when about forty years old. Charles remained in Kentucky about ten years after his wifes death and then came with his son Wm. Polke to Knox County, Indiana Territory in 1808 and lived until 1823 and died at the advanced age of 79 years. Charles Polke Sen. remained a widower after his wifes death.

Copied from reproductions, at Eugene, Oregon, 4/25/59

by W. R. Robertson

Great great grandson of William and Sally Polk Bruce