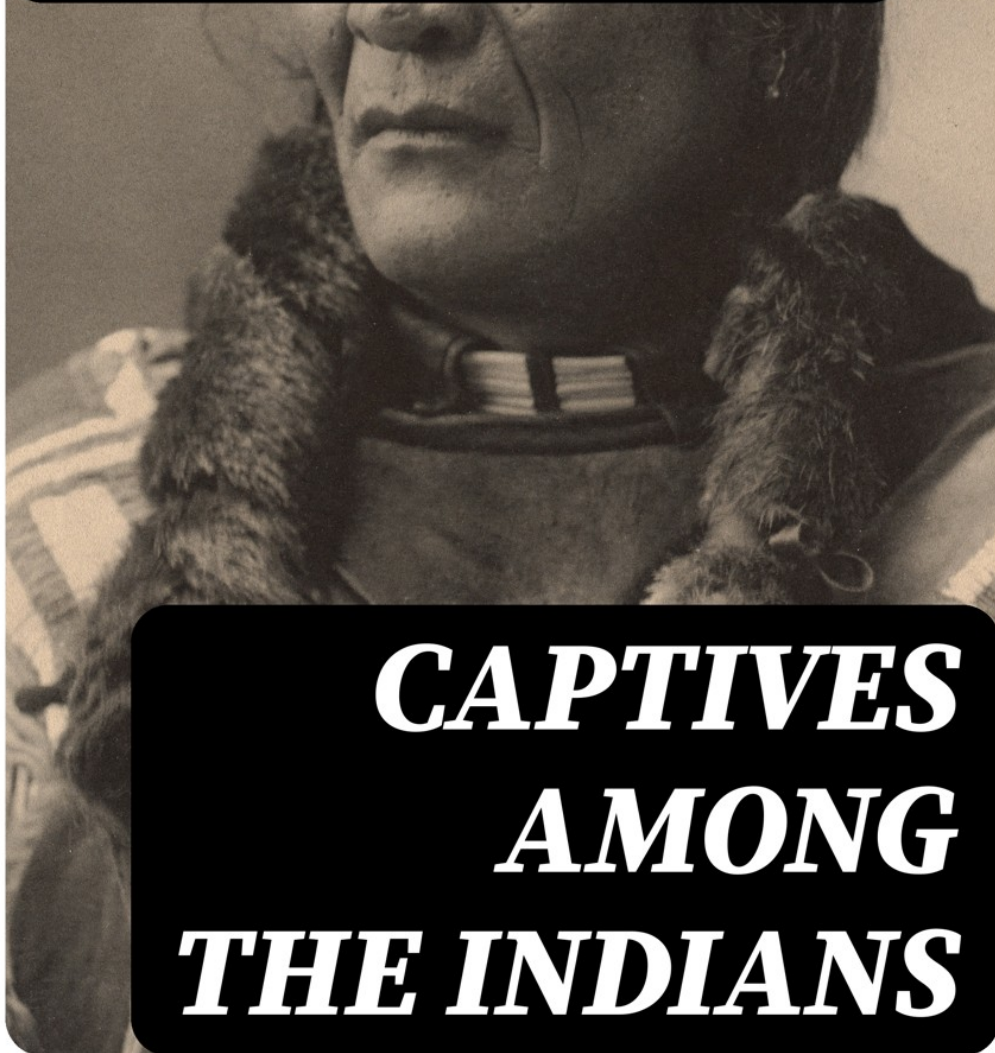


***JAMES SMITH,  
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AMONG  
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Giuseppe Bressani**

# **Captives Among the Indians**

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## **COL. JAMES SMITH'S LIFE AMONG THE DELAWARES, 1755-1759**

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James Smith, pioneer, was born in Franklin county, Pennsylvania, in 1737. When he was eighteen years of age he was captured by the Indians, was adopted into one of their tribes, and lived with them as one of themselves until his escape in 1759.

He became a lieutenant under General Bouquet during the expedition against the Ohio Indians in 1764, and was captain of a company of rangers in Lord Dunmore's War. In 1775 he was promoted to major of militia. He served in the Pennsylvania convention in 1776, and in the assembly in 1776-77. In the latter year he was commissioned colonel in command on the frontiers, and performed distinguished services.

Smith moved to Kentucky in 1788. He was a member of the Danville convention, and represented Bourbon county for many years in the legislature. He died in Washington county, Kentucky, in 1812.

The following narrative of his experience as member of an Indian tribe is from his own book entitled "Remarkable Adventures in the Life and Travels of Colonel James Smith," printed at Lexington, Kentucky, in 1799. It affords a striking contrast to the terrible experiences of the other captives whose stories are republished in this book; for he was well treated, and stayed so long with his red captors that he

acquired expert knowledge of their arts and customs, and deep insight into their character. (*Editor.*)

In May, 1755, the province of Pennsylvania agreed to send out three hundred men, in order to cut a wagon-road from Fort Loudon, to join Braddock's road, near the Turkey Foot, or three forks of Youghiogheny. My brother-in-law, William Smith, Esq., of Conococheague, was appointed commissioner, to have the oversight of these road-cutters.

Though I was at that time only eighteen years of age, I had fallen violently in love with a young lady, whom I apprehended was possessed of a large share of both beauty and virtue; but being born between Venus and Mars, I concluded I must also leave my dear fair one, and go out with this company of road-cutters to see the event of this campaign; but still expecting that some time in the course of this summer I should again return to the arms of my beloved.

We went on with the road, without interruption, until near the Alleghany mountain; when I was sent back in order to hurry up some provision-wagons that were on the way after us. I proceeded down the road as far as the crossings of Juniata, where, finding the wagons were coming on as fast as possible, I returned up the road again towards the Alleghany mountain, in company with one Arnold Vigoras. About four or five miles above Bedford, three Indians had made a blind of bushes, stuck in the ground as though they grew naturally, where they concealed themselves, about fifteen yards from the road. When we came opposite to them they fired upon us, at this short distance, and killed my fellow-traveller, yet their bullets did not touch me; but



my horse, making a violent start, threw me, and the Indians immediately ran up and took me prisoner. The one who laid hold on me was a Canasatauga, the other two were Delawares. One of them could speak English, and asked me if there were any more white men coming after. I told them not any near that I knew of. Two of these Indians stood by me, while the other scalped my comrade; they then set off and ran at a smart rate through the woods, for about fifteen miles, and that night we slept on the Alleghany mountain without fire.

The next morning they divided the last of their provisions which they had brought from Fort Du Quesne, and gave me an equal share, which was about two or three ounces of mouldy biscuit; this and a young ground-hog, about as large as a rabbit, roasted, and also equally divided, was all the provision we had until we came to the Loyal Hannan, which was about fifty miles; and a great part of the way we came through exceeding rocky laurel-thickets without any path. When we came to the west side of Laurel hill, they gave the scalp halloo, as usual, which is a long yell or halloo for every scalp or prisoner they have in possession; the last of these scalp halloos were followed with quick and sudden shrill shouts of joy and triumph. On their performing this, we were answered by the firing of a number of guns on the Loyal Hannan, one after another, quicker than one could count, by another party of Indians who were encamped near where Ligonier now stands. As we advanced near this party, they increased with repeated shouts of joy and triumph; but I did not share with them in their excessive mirth. When we came to this camp we found they had plenty of turkeys and other

meat there; and though I never before ate venison without bread or salt, yet as I was hungry it relished very well. There we lay that night, and the next morning the whole of us marched on our way for Fort Du Quesne. The night after we joined another camp of Indians, with nearly the same ceremony, attended with great noise, and apparent joy, among all except one. The next morning we continued our march, and in the afternoon we came in full view of the fort, which stood on the point, near where Fort Pitt<sup>[1]</sup> now stands. We then made a halt on the bank of the Alleghany, and repeated the scalp halloo, which was answered by the firing of all the firelocks in the hands of both Indians and French who were in and about the fort, in the aforesaid manner, and also the great guns, which were followed by the continued shouts and yells of the different savage tribes who were then collected there.

As I was at this time unacquainted with this mode of firing and yelling of the savages, I concluded that there were thousands of Indians there ready to receive General Braddock; but what added to my surprise, I saw numbers running towards me, stripped naked, excepting breech-clouts, and painted in the most hideous manner, of various colors, though the principal color was vermilion, or a bright red; yet there was annexed to this black, brown, blue, etc. As they approached, they formed themselves into two long ranks, about two or three rods apart. I was told by an Indian that could speak English that I must run betwixt these ranks, and that they would flog me all the way as I ran; and if I ran quick, it would be so much the better, as they would quit when I got to the end of the ranks. There appeared to



be a general rejoicing around me, yet I could find nothing like joy in my breast; but I started to the race with all the resolution and vigor I was capable of exerting, and found that it was as I had been told, for I was flogged the whole way. When I had got near the end of the lines I was struck with something that appeared to me to be a stick, or the handle of a tomahawk, which caused me to fall to the ground. On my recovering my senses I endeavored to renew my race; but, as I arose, some one cast sand in my eyes, which blinded me so that I could not see where to run. They continued beating me most intolerably, until I was at length insensible; but before I lost my senses I remember my wishing them to strike the fatal blow, for I thought they intended killing me, but apprehended they were too long about it.

The first thing I remember was my being in the fort amidst the French and Indians, and a French doctor standing by me, who had opened a vein in my left arm: after which the interpreter asked me how I did. I told him I felt much pain. The doctor then washed my wounds, and the bruised places of my body with French brandy. As I felt faint, and the brandy smelt well, I asked for some inwardly, but the doctor told me, by the interpreter, that it did not suit my case.

When they found I could speak, a number of Indians came around me, and examined me, with threats of cruel death if I did not tell the truth. The first question they asked me was how many men were there in the party that were coming from Pennsylvania to join Braddock? I told them the truth, that there were three hundred. The next question was, were they well armed? I told them they were all well

armed (meaning the arm of flesh), for they had only about thirty guns among the whole of them; which if the Indians had known they would certainly have gone and cut them all off; therefore I could not in conscience let them know the defenceless situation of these road-cutters. I was then sent to the hospital, and carefully attended by the doctors, and recovered quicker than what I expected.

Some time after I was there, I was visited by the Delaware Indian already mentioned, who was at the taking of me, and could speak some English. Though he spoke but bad English, yet I found him to be a man of considerable understanding. I asked him if I had done anything that had offended the Indians which caused them to treat me so unmercifully. He said no; it was only an old custom the Indians had, and it was like "how do you do"; after that, he said, I would be well used. I asked him if I should be admitted to remain with the French. He said no; and told me that as soon as I recovered, I must not only go with the Indians, but must be made an Indian myself. I asked him what news from Braddock's army. He said the Indians spied them every day, and he showed me, by making marks on the ground with a stick, that Braddock's army was advancing in very close order, and that the Indians would surround them, take trees, and (as he expressed it) *shoot um down all one pigeon*.

Shortly after this, on the 9th day of July, 1755, in the morning, I heard a great stir in the fort. As I could then walk with a staff in my hand, I went out of the door, which was just by the wall of the fort, and stood upon the wall, and viewed the Indians in a huddle before the gate, where were

barrels of powder, bullets, flints, etc., and every one taking what suited. I saw the Indians also march off in rank entire; likewise the French Canadians, and some regulars. After viewing the Indians and French in different positions, I computed them to be about four hundred, and wondered that they attempted to go out against Braddock with so small a party. I was then in high hopes that I would soon see them fly before the British troops, and that General Braddock would take the fort and rescue me.

I remained anxious to know the event of this day; and, in the afternoon, I again observed a great noise and commotion in the fort, and though at that time I could not understand French, yet I found that it was the voice of joy and triumph, and feared that they had received what I called bad news.

I had observed some of the old-country soldiers speak Dutch: as I spoke Dutch, I went to one of them, and asked him what was the news. He told me that a runner had just arrived, who said that Braddock would certainly be defeated; that the Indians and French had surrounded him, and were concealed behind trees and in gullies, and kept a constant fire upon the English, and that they saw the English falling in heaps, and if they did not take the river, which was the only gap, and make their escape, there would not be one man left alive before sundown. The morning after the battle I saw Braddock's artillery brought into the fort; the same day I also saw several Indians in British officers' dress, with sash, half-moon, laced hats, etc., which the British then wore.

A few days after this the Indians demanded me, and I was obliged to go with them. I was not yet well able to march, but they took me in a canoe up the Alleghany River to an Indian town that was on the north side of the river, about forty miles above Fort Du Quesne. Here I remained about three weeks, and was then taken to an Indian town on the west branch of Muskingum, about twenty miles above the forks, which was called Tullihass, inhabited by Delawares, Caughnewagas, and Mohicans.

The day after my arrival at the aforesaid town a number of Indians collected about me, and one of them began to pull the hair out of my head. He had some ashes on a piece of bark, in which he frequently dipped his fingers in order to take the firmer hold, and so he went on, as if he had been plucking a turkey, until he had all the hair clean out of my head except a small spot about three or four inches square on my crown; this they cut off with a pair of scissors, excepting three locks, which they dressed up in their own mode. Two of these they wrapped round with a narrow beaded garter made by themselves for that purpose, and the other they plaited at full length, and then stuck it full of silver brooches. After this they bored my nose and ears, and fixed me off with earrings and nose jewels; then they ordered me to strip off my clothes and put on a breech-clout, which I did; they then painted my head, face, and body in various colors. They put a large belt of wampum on my neck, and silver bands on my hands and right arm; and so an old chief led me out in the street, and gave the alarm halloo, *coo-wigh*, several times repeated quick; and on this, all that were in the town came running and stood round the

old chief, who held me by the hand in the midst. As I at that time knew nothing of their mode of adoption, and had seen them put to death all they had taken, and as I never could find that they saved a man alive at Braddock's defeat, I made no doubt but they were about putting me to death in some cruel manner. The old chief, holding me by the hand, made a long speech, very loud, and when he had done, he handed me to three young squaws, who led me by the hand down the bank, into the river, until the water was up to our middle. The squaws then made signs to me to plunge myself into the water, but I did not understand them; I thought that the result of the council was that I should be drowned, and that these young ladies were to be the executioners. They all three laid violent hold of me, and I for some time opposed them with all my might, which occasioned loud laughter by the multitude that were on the bank of the river. At length one of the squaws made out to speak a little English (for I believe they began to be afraid of me), and said *no hurt you*. On this I gave myself up to their ladyships, who were as good as their word; for though they plunged me under water, and washed and rubbed me severely, yet I could not say they hurt me much.

These young women then led me up to the council-house, where some of the tribe were ready with new clothes for me. They gave me a new ruffled shirt, which I put on, also a pair of leggings done off with ribbons and beads, likewise a pair of moccasins and garters dressed with beads, porcupine quills, and red hair—also a tinsel-laced cappa. They again painted my head and face with various colors, and tied a bunch of red feathers to one of those locks

they had left on the crown of my head, which stood up five or six inches. They seated me on a bearskin, and gave me a pipe, tomahawk, and pole-cat skin pouch, which had been skinned pocket fashion, and contained tobacco, killegenico, or dry sumach leaves, which they mix with their tobacco; also spunk, flint, and steel. When I was thus seated, the Indians came in dressed and painted in their grandest manner. As they came in they took their seats, and for a considerable time there was a profound silence—every one was smoking; but not a word was spoken among them. At length one of the chiefs made a speech, which was delivered to me by an interpreter, and was as followeth: "My son, you are now flesh of our flesh, and bone of our bone. By the ceremony which was performed this day every drop of white blood was washed out of your veins; you are taken into the Caughnewaga nation, and initiated into a warlike tribe; you are adopted into a great family, and now received with great seriousness and solemnity in the room and place of a great man. After what has passed this day, you are now one of us by an old strong law and custom. My son, you have now nothing to fear—we are now under the same obligations to love, support, and defend you that we are to love and to defend one another; therefore, you are to consider yourself as one of our people." At this time I did not believe this fine speech, especially that of the white blood being washed out of me; but since that time I have found out that there was much sincerity in said speech; for, from that day, I never knew them to make any distinction between me and themselves in any respect whatever until I