

BLACKJACK

Raising Cain Adventures #3

By

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and

GUY VENTURE



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DEDICATION

To the hundreds of friends and acquaintances I left behind in the Buckeye State when I pursued newspaper positions in other states. So many of you have been in my thoughts as I journey back through Ohio's rich history. For those of you who are among my faithful readers, thank you. This one is for you.

PROLOGUE

The Northwest Ordinance of the eighteenth century was a glorious experiment, authored by a Continental Congress that had yet to ratify the U.S. Constitution. It set forth a standard by which unsettled territories west of the Appalachian Mountains would be colonized.

The young nation that would become the standard for democracy worldwide suddenly doubled in size after the American Revolution. With the original thirteen colonies overflowing with citizens, the spirit of independence sparked the flame of adventurism. The untamed lands to the west promised prosperity, and the idea of migration flourished in thousands of hearts.

A handful of Boston entrepreneurs formed the Ohio Company in 1787 and sought to purchase five million acres in what was known as the Northwest Territory. Selling land instead of giving it away to whoever staked a claim was an appealing idea for a new nation that was swimming in war debt.

The Ohio Company paid \$3.4 million for land north of the Ohio River. Ownership stretched from the modern cities of Marietta, Ohio to Huntington, West Virginia. It was a small piece of a massive wilderness that was just a fraction of what was known as the Northwest Territory. The Ohio Company planned to sell acre after acre to settlers who were willing to help build a New England community in the frontier. Adherence to the Northwest Ordinance was a stipulation of the purchase. It guaranteed basic freedom to all who chose to start anew in the “howling west.” The mandates included freedom of religion, a commitment to government-sponsored education, the exclusion of slavery, and the promise native people would not be expelled from the lands they had called home for generations.

The model became a wholesome blueprint for the settlement of much of the lands that now make up the American Midwest. In less than a decade, thousands followed the handful of adventurers who carved the settlement of Marietta. And once the westward migration began, there was no stopping it.

To get to the promised land, some settlers walked and others rode for months through treacherous mountain passes and raging rivers. Most traveled to the new settlement on the mighty Ohio River. They overcame privation and betrayal aboard flatboats and barges that carted everything they owned to the land of their dreams. When they arrived, more hardship awaited.

They found virgin forests, abundant wildlife, unforgiving weather, and marauding Indians that rivaled nothing they experienced in any of the original colonies. It took determination, hard work, and courage just to survive. Those who endured planted the seeds of greatness that have benefited the generations of Ohioans who have followed.

The “Raising Cain” series is a fictionalized rendition of early Ohioans’ struggles. Their stories are too rich to be forgotten.

PREFACE

Young Billy Cain, orphaned shortly after arriving in the Northwest Territory, has found a home on the sprawling Maxwell Ranch. He has been befriended by a massive blacksmith, “Big” John Terry, and earned an apprenticeship with one of the largest spreads in all of the Ohio Country.

Friendship with a Delaware teen, named *Quingus*, not only saved his life but allowed him to take part in a legendary cattle drive to Zanesburg, where he proved his ingenuity, savvy, and maturity in helping ensure its safe passage. He became an instant hero at “Jeopardy Pass.”

Billy felt his credibility slip when he rescued a trapper, named Jeremiah Peppers. After providing him with a respite from a horrible blizzard, Peppers paid him back by stealing his boss’s prized stallion, Blackjack. He did it not once but twice. The last time he saw him, Peppers and his Cayuga wife, *Witha*, were

riding double aboard *Blackjack* and fleeing an angry mob in Marietta.

Billy and *Quingus* have no other choice but to run down the horse thieves with the help of Delaware chief *Chinow*. It is no easy task. Peppers's woman is the daughter of a Cayuga shaman and far craftier than she appears.

Will Billy and his friends be able to retrieve Maxwell's prized stallion, despite numerous distractions and blizzard conditions in the wilds of the northeast? You'll have to read on to find out.

I hope you enjoy "*Blackjack*"

“Men are not hung for stealing
horses, but that horses may not be
stolen.”

GEORGE SAVILE,
English statesman and writer

CHAPTER 1

The Getaway

It was an arrow from the bow of Delaware *Chief Chinow* that claimed the life of the unscrupulous Jeremiah Peppers, trapper, horse thief, and assailant of women. He died slowly in the arms of his Cayuga wife, *Takakwitha*, in the wilds of the Northwest Territory. With his final breath, he begged his partner not to let his body fall into the hands of the vengeful Delaware Indians. He was afraid his remains would be desecrated, and his spirit would be left to wander aimlessly throughout eternity.

To the only person who'd ever loved the frontiersman, his final wish became an obsession. *Witha*, the pet name Peppers gave his native partner, had lived a solitary life until the trapper befriended her. From that day on, her devotion took seed. It grew like an ugly weed, trying to suck out every ounce of nourishment nature offered. She gladly would have traded her life for his, but it was too late.

Her commitment did not dissolve with the nothingness of his final breath; it became the driving force of her existence. It consumed her body and soul.

The native woman had helped her man escape the hangman's noose in the fledgling settlement of Marietta, located in the Northwest Territory and where he had been convicted of thievery and assault. She created a stampede in the middle of town and rescued Peppers from atop a gallows that was built to bring an end to his life. Riding double, they raced out of Marietta aboard the very stallion he had stolen in the first place.

Tears flowed as she pressed the dead man's body to her bosom in sorrow. She rocked him in her embrace and cursed the enemies who'd hastened his death. She chanted songs of hatred and retaliation and prayed the spirits would listen.

Finally, she vowed to take his body home, where his spirit had joined with hers for two winters. "I will oversee your safe journey to the Great Beyond, Jeremiah," she promised in a whisper.

To that end, she went about protecting their getaway. She let his body rest in the rocky escarpment that concealed their whereabouts. *Witha* needed to hide any tracks that might point to their flight. She knew the white men and the menacing Delaware might be in hot pursuit.

The Cayuga and Delaware had long been enemies. The elders sang songs of their great battles for control of the Great Lakes region of the Northwest Territory. The Cayuga aligned with the Iroquois to drive the Delaware from their lands and preserve the rich trapping trade that was bolstered by the French in the seventeenth century.

The Delaware migrated south to the Ohio River region and built alliances with some of the one dozen other tribes that shared the land that stretched from the mountains of Pennsylvania to the Mississippi River. They were somewhat nomadic, moving their summer villages to the foothills of the Appalachians in the winter.

Of course, there was no peace for any of the tribes who called the Northwest Territory home once white settlers began to arrive en masse. Before it was all over, the influx of settlers

marked the beginning of the westward migration of almost all the tribes.

■ *The Delaware were proud descendants of the Lenape Indians, who were among the first Native Americans to come in contact with European explorers in the early 1600s. Their very name is derived from the settlers who arrived in Jamestown. At the time, the tribe lived along the Delaware River, which was named after Lord de la Warr, the governor of the Jamestown Colony. Thus, the native people became known as the Delaware.*

Among the tribes who resided along the Eastern Seaboard, the Delaware were known as the “Grandfather” tribe because they were peacemakers, who often were called on to settle disputes between warring nations. They also were fierce and tenacious fighters whenever peaceful alternatives seemed impossible. Delaware warriors were feared by all.

The Delaware were among the first tribes to grant the new settlers permission to reside on their land in exchange for worthless trinkets and mirrors. They had no idea the white men intended the gifts to be a payment for their land.

All native people believed the land could not be owned. It belonged to the Creator, who permitted them to shelter and feed their people from His bounty.

As Europeans continued to invade their rich lands and food became scarce, the Delaware had no choice but to move. The Northwest Territory became their new home. They joined with the region's other tribes to drive the settlers out of the rich Ohio Valley. The Delaware aligned with the Miami and Shawnee to overrun military troops, who were not trained for wilderness warfare. Their victories were short-lived, though. More white soldiers and settlers traveled down the Ohio River. Eventually, most of the native people fled west to the territories of Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, and beyond.

The Bear Clan was one of the last Delaware villages to remain in the Northwest Territory in 1801. They were tired of war and sought peace, which was brought about by an unlikely friendship between a white teen, Billy Cain, and *Quingus*, son of Delaware *Chief Chinow*, a

powerful warrior who was second in command in his village.

The teenagers' friendship blossomed into accord between his Delaware village and a white rancher by the name of Clayton Maxwell, one of the richest, most powerful, and largest landowners in the Northwest Territory. After the Delaware ensured the safe passage of a cattle drive to Zanesburg, located in the foothills of the Allegheny Mountains, an olive branch of peace was exchanged. The two entities agreed to live peacefully as neighbors.

When Peppers trampled on the laws of both societies, the odd union joined hands to ensure his conviction in an Ohio court. His surprising escape was one thing; survival was another. He and *Witha* were able to flee the white man's justice, but not the arrows of the subchief of the Delaware. Two of *Chinow's* arrows struck Peppers in the back, one close to his heart, and brought an end to his abysmal existence and set his female partner on a trail of vengeance.



WITHA'S VISUAL impairment did not slow her down when she went about obscuring the

hoofprints left by the big stallion that had carried her and Jeremiah to the safety of the wilderness beyond Marietta. The direction they had traveled was clear, and she used the leafy branches of a severed spruce limb to erase any sign that might lead pursuers to their hiding place.

The Cayuga woman was born with one eye that was crossed, and the other was clouded and provided only blurred vision. It is where her name, *Takakwitha*, originated. It means “stumbles” or “bumps into things.” She had bumped into many things, but there was little to cause her to stumble as she swiped the spruce branch over the tracks the stallion had made.

Ironically, she rode a horse named Blackjack, one Jeremiah had been found guilty of stealing from Maxwell. It was a prized thoroughbred that allowed her to distance them from their pursuers, even though he carried two riders. He would provide her with transportation to her home, far north in the region of the big lake, *Erielhonan*.

Witha's devotion was resolute. She would carry Jeremiah's body to their home in The Ledges, taking a circuitous route through the

Appalachian foothills instead of a direct path. It would be harder for anyone to find her if she stuck to the animal trails of which only the native people were aware. They would be required to travel hundreds of miles to reach their destination. Her will would be stronger than the treacherous country or the unpredictable weather. She was determined to provide a suitable farewell to the love of her life.

She had no idea the horse she was riding was the coveted prize of one of the richest men in all of the Northwest Territory and didn't care. It was the finest animal she had ever ridden. The stallion showed he had stamina and speed as they fled the massive white village of Marietta. Next, he would provide them with passage to their home. Then, she would reward him with his freedom. She called the stallion *Jogrihs* because of his sleek, black color and the fact he could run as fast as a hawk could fly.

Other than a knife, *Witha* was defenseless. The pistol she'd used to cause the stampede was left behind. Of course, Jeremiah had been stripped of his weapons when he was taken into custody. So, she gathered a collection of small and mid-sized stones—flint, obsidian, and chert—from

which she would forge weapons for her protection. Depending upon the weather, she estimated it would take more than a month for her to reach her canyon home. She needed a spear and points for arrows.

As afternoon turned to dusk, she began her journey west with Peppers's body draped across the shoulders of the mighty stallion. Even though he no longer breathed, she wanted his body close, so she could protect his spirit. She giggered the stallion forward and said, "Let's go home, *Jogrihs*."



GIVING CHASE to the fugitives was Billy Cain, a Maxwell employee, and his Delaware friends, *Quingus* and *Chinow*. They left Marietta with the promise of returning Blackjack to his owner. *Chinow*, whose skills surpassed those of the two teens, was an expert tracker and followed the trail of the fugitives with caution and quiet determination. Like Cain, he wanted to return the stolen horse to the wealthy ranch owner, but his desire for vengeance was a driving force, too. Peppers needed to answer for crimes committed against his village. Given he had escaped the white

man's justice, Delaware laws demanded restitution.

Peppers's violations against the Delaware left a smoldering blemish on his village. While they sought peace, justice was the only thing that would keep overzealous young warriors from charging down the Tuscarawas River and creating mayhem among the white settlers. He would show wisdom and strength by apprehending the fugitive and preserving peace.

Billy questioned the chief's slow but cautious pursuit. "Why are we not rushing after Peppers and the Indian woman? At this pace, they will get away and we may never catch them."

Chinow didn't answer; he just scowled and focused on the tracks before them.

"Do not worry. Your boss's horse carries twice the load; they will not get away. My father can follow the path of fish in water. You must have no doubts," his young friend advised.

"Sorry, I didn't mean to offend," Billy said, nodding to the elder Delaware, who was ignoring the boys' conversation. His focus was intense.

“Peppers managed to escape the white man’s justice; he will not be able to elude the vengeance of my people. My father has sworn this to our elders. No matter how long it takes, Peppers and his woman will not escape again,” *Quingus* explained.

“Where do you think they are headed?” Billy asked.

“The woman is Cayuga. Her people live far to the north,” *Quingus* stated.

“Yes, I remember Peppers saying he set his traps along the Crooked River, in the Lakes region,” Billy said.

“It is far from here,” his friend said.

Billy grimaced and pulled his heavy coat tighter around his neck. *Chinow* noticed and said, “Do not worry. We will catch.”

“Good, because I don’t want to fail my boss. He loves that stallion,” Billy said, and they rode slowly into the unknown.

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