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Letter of General L.V.

Bierce to Judge John Barr:

Letter of Hon. F. Wadsworth
to Seth Day, Esq.

F. Wadsworth,
Lucius Verus Bierce

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Captain Brady's escape from the Indians during the war of the Revolution, by jumping the Cuyahoga river at Kent, is a feat well chronicled in border history. Those who examine the place at this time declare it to be impossible, and place the accounts of it among the excusable fictions of the Indian wars. Such persons should take into consideration the changes that have been wrought by bridges and mill-dams, and by the construction of the Pennsylvania and Ohio Canal, since the days of Brady. In its natural state the river ran for about a mile in what was an impassable gulf, even in low water. From a point below the cotton mill, nearly up to the old glass works of 1825, or the upper village, it rushed through a straight, narrow channel, with natural walls of rock twenty to thirty feet high, fringed with overhanging trees. In many places the breadth was not much greater than the depth. When the river was in a flood the water was very deep, coursing swiftly through the dark chasm, with resistless power, made more sombre by its chocolate color. This chasm was produced by the wearing action of the water upon the rocks during incomprehensible periods of time. In the lower part of the present village, there must have been in the early ages a cataract twenty or thirty feet high over the edge of the conglomerate. Particle by particle it has been carried away, the channel receding up stream, until it let off the water from a natural basin above the old village, through a cut merely wide enough for the discharge of a full river. A short distance above the present bridge at Main street, there was left standing a natural column of rock in the middle of the channel, with a dwarf pine

on the top, known as the "Standing Stone." It was nearly round, its surface nearly on the level with the banks, and not quite as large around as a hay-stack. The waters surging by it, slowly wore away its base; but it was still strong and firm when the Pennsylvania and Ohio Canal was constructed. The engineers made slack water of this portion of the gorge, by means of a dam and locks. They demolished the "Standing Stone," and cut down the craggy edges of the east bank for a tow path. This accounts for the apparent impossibility of a man jumping the Cuyahoga at this point.

In the earliest history, this place, the "Standing Stone," a name suggested by the natural monument which I have described, was well known as the crossing place of an ancient Indian trail, leading from the Ohio river at the mouth of Beaver, up that stream and up the Mahoning river, over the Summit, a short distance south of Ravenna, down the Breakneck creek, to a ford over a ripple in the upper village. From there the Indian road had two main branches. One led north, directly to the Cuyahoga, at the mouth of Tinker's Creek; the other continued through Stow near the centre, past Cuyahoga Falls, to the "Old Portage," three miles north of Akron. Here the great trail, or "carrying place," from the Tuscarawas came to the Cuyahoga river from the south, and from thence there was free navigation for canoes to the lake at Cleveland. These were well beaten paths used by Indians and traders, on foot and with ponies, visible long after the settlement of the country in places, where the forest had not been cut away. The first road from the western part of Portage county to Ravenna, crossed at the upper

ford, near where the red man had his crossing; but eventually a more direct route became necessary, and a bridge was built near the spot of "Brady's leap," because here it was most narrow. Before the bridge there was a crossing for foot passengers, on a tree felled across the chasm. On the eastern bank, the shelving rock just above the bridge had fallen, forming a pile of rough stones with bushes growing out of the crevices. The stringers of the first bridge were said to be twenty-seven feet long.

With these explanations, the impossibility of the leap is wholly removed. A stout man, stimulated by an unlifted tomahawk in the hands of a savage, or the still more horrid expectation of death torture by fire, would quickly take the risk. He is reputed to have sprung from the edge of the west bank, twenty-five feet above the water, and descending as he went, to have landed on the broken stones on the east side near the water level. By the help of bushes and roots he scrambled out of the gorge and reached "Brady Lake," before his red foes overtook him.

The letters of Gen. Bierce and Mr. Wadsworth explain the principal incidents of this, the most exciting foot race yet chronicled in Northern Ohio. c. w.

GENERAL BIERCE'S LETTER.

Judge Barr, Cleveland:

The numerous traditions respecting "Brady's Leap" across the Cuyahoga river, and many other "hair breadth escapes" and adventures of that old frontiersman grow more and more vague and conflicting, with lapse of time.

Even those which have been published at various times in the newspapers and elsewhere, do not agree with each other, nor with the most reliable oral tradition. The following, the origin of which is explained, has been kindly furnished me by F. Wadsworth, Esq. It is unnecessary to say that Mr. Wadsworth has faithfully given what he learned by his own investigation, and it seems probable, that his sources of information are as worthy of confidence as any that have been accessible since the death of the actor himself. Mr. Day, to whom the letter is addressed, settled in Ohio, I believe, in 1800; Mr. Wadsworth in 1802. Yours, respectfully, L. V. BIERCE.

MR. WADSWORTH'S LETTER.

AKRON, Feb. 26. 1856.

Seth Day, Esq. :

MY DEAR SIR—During the two very pleasant days we spent together last week in going to and from Pittsburg, among other topics of conversation, was the first settlement of Ohio; for both you and myself were residents of Ohio whilst it was yet a part of

the Northwestern Territory. Amongst other things, you said you had been applied to by some gentleman, (from Philadelphia, perhaps,) that he had once called on you at Ravenna, to get, if possible, some history of Brady's expedition into the Indian country, particularly his much talked of leap across the Cuyahoga river. You said that on inquiry amongst the oldest settlers in Franklin township, in your county, where the leap was said to have been made, you could learn nothing satisfactory about it. I promised you on my return home I would relate to you all that I knew or had heard upon the subject, and now I sit down to do it. I will certainly relate to you nothing but what I have heard, and nothing but what from circumstances which took place, I believe to be substantially correct. Do with this communication what you please. If you think it of sufficient interest to send it to the gentleman who applied to you for information, you will of course do so. If not destroy it, for I have received ample remuneration for the few hours I devoted to the subject, by its bringing fresh to my recollection circumstances which had transpired more than half a century ago.

I find there is some little confusion in my recollection of the cause given me for Brady's deadly hostility to the Indians; but in substance what I give you is correct. Permit me to say that this is the first time I ever thought of placing these transactions on paper.

In the year 1802 I went to Pittsburg and resided there three or four years. Brady (I believe his christian name was Samuel) died a number of years before (six or eight years, if I am not mistaken,) but from his very noted character as an Indian hunter, he was much talked about, and I soon became very much interested in his history, and became acquainted with a man by the name of John Sumerall, who had for a long time resided in Pittsburg. He was an intelligent, observing man, and had been an intimate friend of Brady. He described Brady as not being uncommonly large, but as a powerful strong man; kind hearted, but an uncompromising and deadly enemy to the Indians. He gave this in substance, as the reason for Brady's undying hostility to the whole Indian race: When Brady was quite a youth he lived with some of his father's connections, an uncle perhaps, somewhere in Pennsylvania. The Indians made an incursion on the settlement and killed almost the whole of the families where he resided. He escaped by some means, and then swore eternal enmity to the whole Indian race. During his whole after life he never forgot his oath. I believe none of the family were taken prisoners excepting a boy, who had been taken when

quite an infant into the family and adopted as a son. His name was Simon Girty, and as he was not found with the others that were killed, he was supposed to have been carried off by the Indians, which afterwards proved to be correct.

I have listened with intense interest to Sumerall's relations of the incidents attending on Brady's excursions into the Indian country, and of his desperate and deadly fights with the Indians. When there was open war between the whites and the Indians, Brady would sometimes bring in Indian prisoners, but in times of peace he always killed them. He was arrested and tried two or three times in Western Pennsylvania for killing Indians in times of peace, and although the proof was positive against him, he was always permitted to escape without severe punishment.

Sumerall gave me the history of a number of fights which Brady had with the Indians, on what is now called Brady's Run and Brady Hill, in the western part of Pennsylvania, in Beaver county. But from the length of time which has elapsed, I cannot call the circumstances with sufficient distinctness to my recollection to relate them. He also related to me the circumstances attending a number of fights he had, in what is now Portage county, Ohio. There is a small lake in the township of Franklin, Portage county, O., which still retains the name of Brady's Lake. Sumerall gave me many of the particular transactions of a battle Brady had with the Indians immediately on the south side of that lake. He had collected a force of some twenty men to go with him on an expedition against the Indians in the Sandusky country. He appears not to have proceeded on this expedition with his usual caution and secrecy, for the Indians by some means obtained information of his movements, and, with a much superior force, waylaid him at Brady's Lake, and cut off his almost entire force. If I mistake not, Sumerall informed me that the whole party were killed, with the exception of Brady and one other person.

A number of years after I left Pittsburg, I went to reside at Ravenna, Portage county, Ohio, and with a number of others, I went and examined at Brady's Lake, for the place where the action had been fought, and found the place to be precisely where Sumerall had described it to be, immediately on the south side of the lake. By scraping the leaves and loose earth away, we found many human bones scattered over an acre or two of ground. We took to Ravenna a number of skull bones, as well as many other human bones. A basket hilted sword was found;

the blade had rusted off, so that it was only six or eight inches long. I left the sword with Jonathan Sloane, Esq., at Ravenna, with a promise that it should be kept safe. A few years afterwards, on inquiring of Mr. Sloane, the sword could not be found.

I did suppose you were with us when we made the examination, but you inform me you was not. You recollect seeing the sword at Mr. Sloane's.

The lake was named partly from this fight, and from Brady's having at another time secreted himself from the Indians in it. I will give you the history of this transaction as related to me by Sumerall. I cannot pretend to give the dates, although in every transaction related to me by Sumerall, he gave the year in which they took place.

Brady started from Pittsburg or its neighborhood with a small force with him, not more than three or four. He preferred always to go alone, or to have but one or two with him, although at times he was persuaded to have a much larger force. He started on a scout toward the Sandusky villages, and had arrived in their neighborhood, when he was discovered by a party of ten or twelve Indians, and after a sharp fight he was taken prisoner. Those that were with him were killed, and five or six of the Indians. Brady was taken to the Sandusky villages; and as he was, and had been for years, the most noted and feared white man, there was great rejoicing amongst the Indians at the capture of Brady, and great preparations and parade were made for torturing him. Runners were sent to all the neighboring Indians, with the news that Brady was a prisoner and every Indian that got the news was there on the day set for his execution. A very large body of Indians, old and young, were collected together. Brady said that when he was first taken to Sandusky, there was something in one of the chiefs which struck him very forcibly. He soon became satisfied that he had somewhere seen him before. And after close observation and examination, he became satisfied that this person was Simon Girty, the boy who was brought up with him as a brother. He took the first opportunity he could get, to say to him that he knew him as Simon Girty. He told him who he was, and related transactions that took place when they were boys, that he could not possibly have forgotten for some time. Girty refused to know him, or even to understand a word of English; but at last he owned himself as Simon Girty. He was at this time a noted chief amongst the Indians, and was noted as being the most savage amongst the savages. Another tradition of Girty, was that Brady and he were young

together, and intimate acquaintances and associations; that Girty was at one time a leader in the excursions against the Indians, but for some reason he left the whites, joined with and became a celebrated and savage chief amongst the Indians. Brady plead with Girty at first to assist him to escape: that he could do it without the fear of detection; that from their early associations and friendship he was bound to do it. He used and urged by every reason and argument he could think of to induce him to do so, but without effect. Girty would have but little conversation with him, and refused to assist him in the least. As the time for Brady's execution drew nigh he begged of Girty to furnish him with the means to take his own life, and escape the tortures preparing for him, but all without effect. The time for his execution arrived; the fires were lighted, and the excitement among the Indians became intense. Their pow-wows had commenced, and the circle around him was drawing closer, and he began sensibly to feel the effects of the fire. The withes which confined his arms and legs were getting loose by the effects of the fire, and he soon found he could at any time free himself from them. He watched his opportunity, when in the excitement of the scene, a fine looking squaw, a squaw of one of the chiefs, ventured a little too near him for her own safety, and entirely within his reach. He, by one powerful exertion, cleared himself from everything by which he had been confined, caught the squaw by the head and shoulders and threw her on the top of the burning pile, and in the confusion that followed made his escape. And Brady said when he was twenty rods ahead he had no fears for the result. He felt the bad effects of having been confined for a number of days, but as he said, not knowing what might happen, he had used every means in his power to keep his blood in circulation during his confinement. During the excitement of getting the squaw out of the fire, Brady was enabled to get a considerable distance ahead. The Indians, however, were soon in hot pursuit after him, and a number of times came very near catching him, before he arrived at the Cuyahoga river, a distance of more than one hundred miles from the Sandusky villages. When he arrived near the Cuyahoga river, in Franklin, Portage county, Ohio, (now Kent,) he found the Indians were getting very near to him. He had intended to have crossed the Cuyahoga at a very noted place, known as the Standing Stone, on the Indian trail from Sandusky to the Salt Springs, a few miles south of Warren, in Trumbull county, Ohio. The Standing Stone is about

a mile above the present village of Franklin, but he found the Indians would head him, and get there before he could. He then steered his course down the river, intending to cross it below the present village of Franklin, where the bed of the river was wide, and the water shallow, but soon found his pursuers had headed him there, too; and they were already on the bank of the river both above and below him, and when he got to the river, he found himself at the narrow gorge, in the now village of Franklin, and the Indians close on his track behind him. He had not a moment to spare, and as it was life or death with him, he made the famous Brady's leap across the Cuyahoga river. The river, as you well know, at that place is, or was, very narrow. It used to be for some distance, from twenty-five to forty feet wide. It is, I should suppose, from the surface of the rock to the water, some twenty feet; and the water is, I have been told, from twenty to thirty feet deep.

Many years ago, being in that neighborhood, I went with a man who lived in Franklin, by the name of Haymaker, to examine and satisfy myself, if I could, where Brady had jumped across the Cuyahoga. Mr. Haymaker was formerly from the neighborhood of Pittsburg. He had been personally acquainted with Brady, and had heard him tell the story, which agreed well with what Sumerall had told me. We measured the river where we supposed the leap was made, and found it between twenty-four and twenty-six feet; my present impression is that it was a few inches less than than twenty-five feet. There were bushes and evergreens growing out of the fissures in the rock on each side of the stream. He jumped from the west to east side; the banks on each side of the stream were nearly of the same height, the flat rock on the west side descending a very little from the west to the east. He caught the bushes on the bank and fell some three or four or five feet before he recovered, and got out; by this time the Indians were within a few rods of the river, and when they saw him on the opposite bank of the river they set up a terrible yell; but none of them attempted to follow in jumping the river. Three or four of the Indians fired at him, and wounded him slightly in the leg. Very soon Brady found that the Indians had crossed the river at the Standing Stone, in hot pursuit; and when he arrived at the small lake (Brady's Lake), about a mile east of the Cuyahoga river, he found the Indians were gaining on him, and as the wound in his leg was troubling him a little, he must either secrete himself in the lake or be again taken prisoner. He went into the lake, and

secreted himself under water, amongst the lily pads, or pond lilies. He found a hollow weed which he could breathe through, with his head under the water. This was in the fore part of the day, and he remained in the lake until the next morning. He heard the Indians about the lake all day and until late at night.

The Indians followed him no farther, but said afterwards that they had no doubt but when they shot at him across the river, they had mortally wounded him, and that he had gone into the lake and sunk, as they had tracked him into the lake but could find no tracks out.

In the fall of the year 1805, I went from Pittsburg to Kentucky. Mr. Sumerall, the man referred to above, was going to Cincinnati with some boats, and I embraced the favorable opportunity of going with him. We were eight or ten days in going from Pittsburg to Limestone, or Maysville, in Kentucky, where I left him. It was during this trip that I heard from him the history of Brady's exploits, more in detail than I had ever heard before. A very short distance below Wheeling, Virginia, Mr. Sumerall pointed to the remains of a log cabin, on the Ohio side of the river, the roof had fallen in but the body of the cabin was still standing. He said that in the last Indian war Brady brought to that house five Indian prisoners. Brady when he started on the expedition to his friends at Wheeling that he was on an Indian expedition, and should bring in prisoners instead of scalps. He was gone from Wheeling some two or three weeks, and returned with five prisoners; an Indian and his squaw, a boy eight or ten years old, a girl five or six, and a papoose. Sumerall gave a long and very circumstantial history of this expedition, which I cannot pretend to do. Brady would suffer no one to go with him. Sumerall pointed the direction Brady went, a little north of west from Wheeling. He went to two Indian villages represented as being situated on the west and northwest side of an alder swamp. He arrived there in the night and secreted himself in the swamp, and remained there the whole of the next day. He saw where the family of five, mentioned above, in the evening went into a cabin which was a small distance from the other cabins in the village. In the night when all was still about twelve or one o'clock, he went to the cabin, broke open the door, and told them he was Brady; that if they made the least noise he would kill every one of them. The Indians knew enough of Brady, to know that he would do as he said. He told them if they would go peaceably he would take them without injury to Wheeling. He

pinioned the Indian and squaw safely; made the squaw carry the papoose, and drove them all before him. Brady traveled with his prisoners only in the night. He had selected his places to stay during the day, some fifteen or twenty miles apart. He was pursued as he expected to be. He had selected his places to stay during the day, at places he could reach by traveling either up or down in a stream of water, a mile or two, so that his pursuers could not possibly track him. Sumerall described the location of the villages, the swamp in front of them; the location of the cabin from which Brady took his prisoners so accurately that five or six years afterwards I was traveling through the State of Ohio, in going from Mansfield, in Richland county, to Wooster, in Wayne county, (there were no white inhabitants between Mansfield and Wooster,) and I had not until then heard of the Indian villages of Green and Jeromes Towns; yet when I came to those villages, Sumerall's description of them was so correct that I knew them at once, and I could not have given a more correct description of them than I had received second hand from Brady five or six years before.

Brady, as I had before stated, had a number of fights with the Indians on Brady's Hill and Brady's Run, in Western Pennsylvania. I cannot recollect any of them with sufficient distinctness to pretend to relate them. I, however, recollect the conclusion of one of them, which, as far as fighting was concerned, ended on Brady's Hill. He started from Pittsburg with three or four with him on an expedition towards the Sandusky villages, killed a number of Indians; but on their way back were overtaken by the Indians all killed or taken prisoners with the exception of Brady. He succeeded in getting back as far as Brady's Hill, not wounded, but almost dead with fatigue. Sometime before he arrived there he had discovered by some means that the Indians were still in pursuit of him. He was so much fatigued that he knew well if he could not by some means get the advantage of his pursuers he must be overtaken by them before he could get back to the settlement. And he fell on a plan which proved successful. He selected his place, a tree blown down, of sufficient height to sit comfortably upon. He went carefully back in his tracks for, say, half a mile, then turned about and again went in his old tracks to the fallen tree, making his tracks quite plain. He then selected his place for concealment within a good rifle shot distance from the fallen tree, being very careful to make no marks from it to his place of concealment. He said that he expected when the Indians arrived at the

end of his tracks, they would stop for consultation, and would seat themselves on the fallen tree, which proved to be correct. After he had been secreted two or three hours, three Indians came up in hot pursuit. They closely examined for the continuation of his tracks, but not finding them they seated themselves on the fallen tree, as he had expected they would. He had selected his place for concealment, so that he could rake the body of the tree with his rifle, which he did most effectually. The whole three fell when he fired; one was shot dead, and the other two severely wounded. He clubbed his rifle, knocked one in the head, and tomahawked the other, took the three scalps, and then proceeded slowly but safely to Pittsburg.

The present generation cannot probably realize the satisfaction and real enjoyment that many of the old pioneers and hunters (of what used to be called the Western country) took in hunting and killing Indians, in the early settlement of this country. I became well acquainted with many of them, and particularly so with Adam Poe, who was quite noted for his fight with, and killing the celebrated Indian chief Big Foot. I have often heard him relate the circum-

stances attending that transaction, or fight the pursuit of the Indians, his overtaking Big Foot on the banks of the Ohio river, and his finally killing him in the river. He appeared to regret, more than for any other thing that took place, that Big Foot sun before he could take off his scalp. He has often showed me the scars of the wound he received, being shot entirely through the body. He was also severely wounded in other places, by the scalping knife of Big Foot. His relation to me of the transaction did not materially differ from the account you have seen published. Mr. Poe was a very old man when I was first acquainted with him, but he would become very much excited and animated when relating his old hunting stories. I recollect well the last time I saw him, at the close of a long evening's conversation, when he had told me many of his old hunting stories, he put his hand on my shoulder and said: "Mr Wadsworth, no man ever took more satisfaction in hunting deer, bear, wolves, and buffalo than I have, but the greatest enjoyment I ever took in hunting was in hunting Indians."

Yours truly,

FRED'K WADSWORTH.