

The History of Hardy County 1786 – 1986
by Richard K. MacMaster

A Book Report by Perry Brake, Tacoma, WA

Richard MacMaster's *The History of Hardy County 1786 – 1986*, Wadsworth Press, Inc., 1986 was written under the auspices of the Hardy County Bicentennial Commission, the Hardy County Commission, and the Hardy County Public Library Commission. Its title implies that the historical record begins in 1786, but that apparently is for convenience in tying it to West Virginia's bicentennial celebration...the historical account actually begins with John VanMeter's first expedition into the South Branch area of the Potomac River in around 1725. The book is well researched and written, and gives a vivid description of life in times past in what is now Hardy County.

The author seems to have emphasized activities of common citizens of the county as opposed to concentrating on those who had a more significant impact on state or national issues as some historical records are prone to do. The 338-page, hard bound book has two indices, one covering events and places, and the other devoted to names. Just about every surname this reviewer has heard of with regard to early Hardy County history is included in the index. This book report summarizes those sections of the book in which Brakes are mentioned.

The first reference to a Brake (p. 40) is in the discussion of The Battle of the Trough in April 1756. The text says "Some fourteen Indians struck without warning on the South Fork of the South Branch. They carried off two young married women. They killed John **BRAKE**'s pregnant wife when she could not keep up with their pace. They hurried their other prisoner, Mrs. Neff (Neafe), down the South Fork towards Fort Buttermilk and the Town Fort." John (better known as Jacob, Sr.) Brake's wife in 1756 was Elizabeth Cooper (Kiefer) Brake. Other accounts have mentioned her capture and death in conjunction with the Battle of the Trough, but she is also said to have borne sons in 1760 (Isaac) and 1763 (Abraham). Also, Jacob, Sr., did not remarry until just before the 1777 birth of his son, Michael, by his second wife, Catherine Stump. Could Elizabeth have been captured in 1774 during Dunmore's War? Although a bibliography is included with each chapter of the book, there is no reference cited for MacMaster's account of the Battle of the Trough to support his claim that Elizabeth was captured and killed during that encounter..

The next reference to a Brake (p. 71) is in the section on Claypool's Rebellion in 1781. Following a very detailed account of causes for the tax revolt by several South Branch residents leading to the arrest of many, the account mentions "The house and mill of John **BRAKE** [the same John, or Jacob **BRAKE**, Sr. mentioned above] on the South Fork, about fifteen miles upstream from Moorefield, was a stronghold for the insurgents. But Colonel VanMeter described Robert Smith, Thomas Stacey and Michael Boulger (Bulger) as 'the principal conspirators' and these three men all lived...near Petersburg [in present Grant County]." Nevertheless, the account continues "The army proceeded up the South Fork to John **BRAKE**'s. He had a fine farm with extensive meadows, a mill, large distillery, and many fat hogs and cattle.

Morgan's men halted there for two days, living on the best the farm could supply, while their horses fed on Brake's meadows and oat fields. Colonel VanMeter's mounted infantry rode about the country taking other rebels." Several South Branch citizens were indicted which prompted supporters to petition for clemency. "The signers of this petition included Samuel Lourie from Lost River. The rest lived on the South Fork or the South Branch. Jacob **BRAKE** [this is John, or Jacob **BRAKE**, Sr.'s son, Jacob **BRAKE**, Jr.] , whose name headed the petition..." Although death sentences were meted out for many conspirators including Jacob Brake, Sr., all were eventually pardoned, the last four in June 1782.

A section titled *The Protestant Episcopal Church Revives* (p. 96) mentions the Reverend Mr. Reynolds being appointed rector of the Hardy Parish in 1796. He "celebrated 16 other weddings in 1796-1797, marrying members of the Inskeep, Machir, Pancake, McNeill, Harness, Stump, Williams, Seymour, **BRAKE**, Welton, See and other families who may have been members of his church." MacMaster doesn't mention who this Brake is. The only offspring of Jacob **BRAKE**, Sr. who would have been in the right age group to have married in 1796-1797 (for a first married, anyway) would be Michael **BRAKE**, born 1770. Michael is known to have married Elizabeth Dasher on May 22, 1803...could this have been his second marriage?

A section titled *Many Slaves Have Been Imported* (p. 135) reports as many as seven slaves belonging to two South Branch families in the 1786 – 1795 period (Joseph Nevill and Jacob VanMeter). Several other families are reported as having had a lesser number of slaves with "John **BRAKE**, Jacob Baker, Conrad Carr, Jacob Chrisman, Adam Fisher, James Green, Thomas Littler, Anthony Miller, Abraham Shobe, Nicholas Swisher, George See, Daniel Tevebaugh, William Warden, William Wilson, Solomon Wilson, Jonathan Welton, John Welton, Robert Darling, Elizabeth Harness, James Ryan, John Scott, George Seymour, and Widow VanMeter each" having paid taxes on one slave.

A discussion of *Farming and the Cattle Business* says (p. 191) that in 1850 "Dasher [Isaac] cut 24 tons of hay, raised a small amount of flax and sorghum and made 160 pounds of maple sugar. His immediate neighbor was Leonard **BRAKE**, whose farm of 600 acres, with 150 cultivated, was valued at \$3,075. **BRAKE** grew 180 bushels of wheat, 480 bushels of corn and 40 bushels of oats. He raised no flax, but he produced the same amount of sorghum molasses and maple sugar as Dasher did. Both neighbors had horses, milch cows, beef cattle, sheep and swine. Each man had 8 or 9 horses and cows, 28 sheep and **BRAKE** owned 25 swine to Dasher's 60 hogs. Dasher had 34 beef cattle and **BRAKE** owned 9 beef cattle."

A large section on the Civil War does not mention any Brakes, but it does mention the following interesting fact that was previously not known to this book reviewer: "Colonel [later General] John D. Imboden, who had been a Staunton Lawyer before the war, organized the 1st Virginia Partisan Rangers [Confederate unit] in September 1862. Imboden's men were mounted riflemen, and combination of cavalry and infantry, prepared to strike quickly and decisively where the Northerners least expected. They had their camp on the South Fork, sixteen miles south of Moorefield" and later it says in April 1863 "General Imboden was camped on the South Fork, some 15 miles above Moorefield, with 1,000 men." This account puts Imboden's sizeable force either on or adjacent to Leonard Brake's farm during the entire winter of 1862-63 and apparently through September 1863 as MacMaster reports (p. 223) that "Captain J. H. McNeill and his

Rangers moved from Brock's Gap to join Imboden on the South Fork" in September 1863. This seems interesting given that Leonard and others in the area had been taken prisoner in the spring of 1862 for having reported movements of Rebel troops to Union forces but escaped within days and returned to their farms on the South Fork. One would imagine that Imboden's forces must have kept a very close eye on the activities of Leonard Brake and others residents of the area.

In summary, MacMaster's *The History of Hardy County 1786 – 1986* is a must for families researching ancestors who passed through or remained in the Hardy County area.

County histories have a special way of connecting the past with a particular place, and this volume is no exception. Those readers familiar with Franklin County as well as those who are not will come away from this book with a solid sense of Franklin's distinctive historical character. The authors have compiled a huge amount of material from a wide array of public and personal sources. Though the chapters follow a chronological sequence, many are topical, such as "Religion and Education" and "Social Problems." The fascinating chapter on local bootlegging deserves speci