Indian Peter an Indentured Servant

By Kaye Rizzuto

Many people living in Great Britain were too poor to pay their way to go to the New World. Land owners in the American Colonies needed workers. A system was set up to bring these poor workers over to the colonies called indentured servitude. The wealthy landowners in America would pay for the ship passage of the people in England. In return, the people would work as indentured servants for a set period of time which usually lasted for seven years. The servant would get a place to live and food to eat during the seven years while the contract lasted. These indentured servants would work on the land or in the home of the rich owner in many different ways. They usually did the hard physical work. When the contract ended after seven years the indentured servant was freed and given certain items that were in the original contract. These items sometimes included clothes, food, money, a gun, and land. They were able to then start their own life in the American Colonies. The indentured servants lived most often in the colonies of Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Delaware, and New Jersey.

Sometimes people who committed crimes in England were given a punishment to come to the American Colonies as indentured servants instead of going to jail. Some people were even kidnapped in European countries and brought to the American Colonies as indentured servants. One boy, Peter Williamson, was kidnapped at the age of eight and brought to the American Colonies as an indentured servant around 1743. He was sold to a man named Hugh Wilson for sixteen pounds and Peter had to work for him for seven years. Hugh had also been kidnapped and forced as an indentured servant, so he did his best to treat Peter with kindness. At the end of seven years Hugh gave Peter a lot of money, a horse and saddle, and some clothes.

It appeared that Peter’s fortunes had changed. He was able to marry the daughter of a wealthy plantation owner and set up his own farm. On the night of October 2, 1754 a group of Delaware Indians attacked his farm and kidnapped Peter. Once again, he was taken away from his home and forced to work for someone else! Peter was used as a pack horse and had to do whatever the Indians told him. After several months, Peter was able to escape and made his way back to his Pennsylvania farm. He found that his wife had died while he was gone.

Peter decided to join the British Army and fight in the French and Indian War. Once again he was again captured, but this time by the French. The French army used Peter as an exchange prisoner to get one of their soldiers back. They sent him back to Plymouth, England. Peter had hurt his hand in his capture, so when he arrived in England he was discharged from the army. He decided to walk the length of Britain to his hometown of Aberdeen. As he made his way, he told people of his experiences in the colonies and of his time with the Indians. He was given the nickname, Indian Peter. People were interested in his stories of being kidnapped first from Aberdeen and then later by the Delaware Indians. Peter decided to write a book. To get people to purchase his book, he would dress up like an Indian and tell his stories. He finally made it back to his hometown in 1756, fifteen years after he had originally been kidnapped.

Peter married a second time and moved to Edinburgh, Scotland and set up a coffee shop. He would dress up as an Indian and he continued to sell his book.

Works Cited

http://www.digitalsilver.co.uk/TimeGun/indian\_peter.html