

# Tazewell County Free Press

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## Historical marker dedicated

by Warren Hinkle

FREE PRESS STAFF

A light dusting of snow and cold temperatures added to the feeling of remembrance among those gathered to dedicate a historical marker honoring the James Roark Family.

Members of the Tazewell County Historical Society, along with descendants of the Roarks, gathered at what was once known as Roark's Gap, at the head of "the jumps" in Baptist Valley. The ceremony commemorated the loss of life of James Roark's wife and seven of his children who were killed on March 18, 1780 during an Indian attack on their cabin. The event was unanticipated by the settlers because snow covered the ground.

The event was sad but very historic, according to Dr. Tom Hatcher, president of the historical society.

"This was the first documented incident in Tazewell County," Hatcher said. "This was then Wythe County. For this family it was a sad occasion but there were several in this county and the atrocities continued for several years."

During the French and Indian War (1754-1763) and the American Revolution (1775-1783), European powers encouraged their Indian allies to attack frontier settlers. Such conflicts took place as settlers moved into lands that were once Indian territory. During the winter of 1780 a food shortage caused hardship for people and animals.

While Roark, an early settler, and two of his sons went on a hunting trip, Indians attacked his home.

Historians believe the Indians were

Shawnee from Ohio who followed the Ohio River to the Tug River on to the Sandy River to the Dry Fork then "right up the jumps to Roark's Gap, now known as Cochran's Hollow."

The group was told they should celebrate the values of a family who suffered tragedy because they came to this place to raise a family and live out their dreams. Their families left a land of conflict to find freedom and dignity, came here and discovered that while they had left a clash of cultures they had come into another clash of cultures.

The various speakers stated that the Roark family deserved to be honored for the values they brought to the area that still endure — a commitment to family, willingness to work, a drive for freedom. They were willing to face the risks and backed it up with courage and faith.

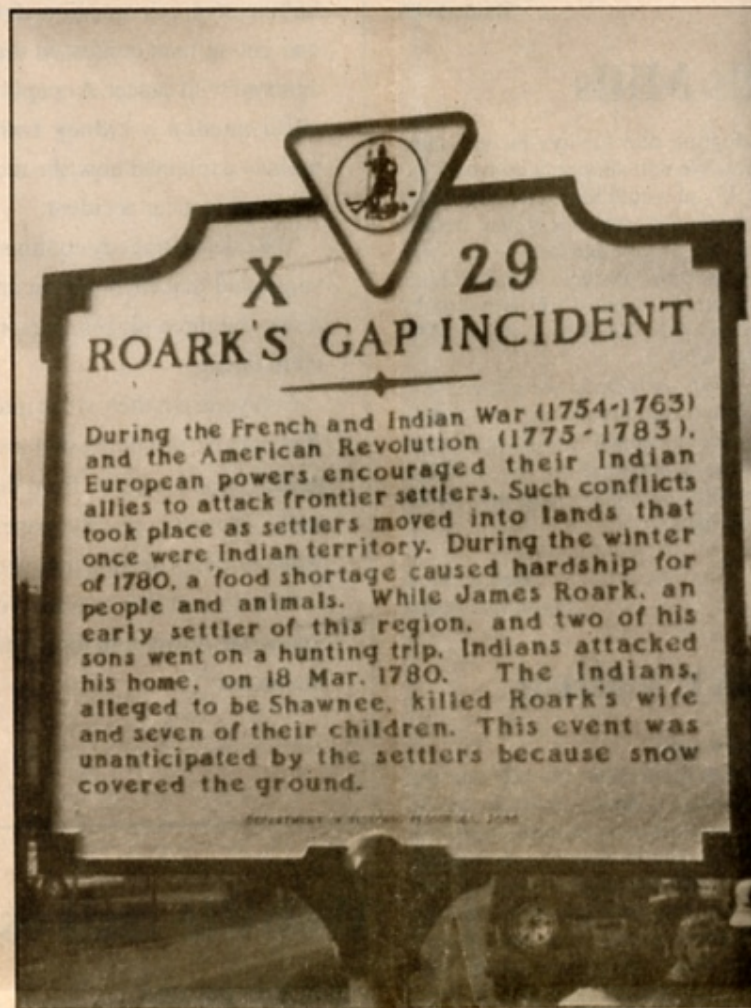
Hatcher told the group that the native Americans were a displaced people and that the British encouraged the settlers to move into the territories to add a buffer between themselves and the Indians.

An early history of Tazewell County states that, "James Roark lived at the gap of the dividing ridge between the waters of the Clinch and Sandy rivers through which passed the Dry Fork Road, now known as Roark's Gap."

In addition to the loss of life, the Indians also took seven horses from the homestead.

The group was told that the native people also suffered during the hard winter and no one could know the "depths of their pain."

The marker was placed in front of



Free Press Photo by Warren Hinkle

This historical marker was recently erected in Baptist Valley to honor the James Roark Family.

Yost Chapel Freewill Baptist Church by the Roark-Conner Association. This national organization meets an-

nually and around 25 family members attended the unveiling and dedication of the marker.