

**The Kinney Odyssey:
From Sereno to Geronimo**

By Bill Baillie

Among the stream of materials donated to the Society, usually each week there is at least one item that poses a mystery or piques volunteers' curiosity. One such item recently was a folder recording the history of a branch of the **Kinney** family. The letters and newspaper reprints in that folder tell a story that stretches westward from the village of Sereno in Pine Township all the way to New Mexico and the exploits of the famous Apache warrior Geronimo.

The folder's highlight is its copies of six letters, dating from 1878 to 1885, written by John Morris Kinney (1856-1885) and his younger brother Henry James Kinney (1862-1925) to their family in Pine Township. The letters show the young men following the advice to "Go West!" from Pennsylvania to Iowa and finally to New Mexico Territory.

John Morris Kinney was born in 1856 to a farming couple in Pine Township. His father, James Vincent Kinney (1832-1909), was the grandson of Simon Kinney (1780-1850), who by 1799 had come to this area of central Pennsylvania from Warren County, New Jersey. James owned a 260-acre farm on a hilly upland about a mile northwest of Sereno, and John grew up there along with his seven siblings.

John and his siblings probably attended the Central District one-room school a mile from their home. John learned to read and write, but his letters show only marginal literacy. Typical is this opening from an 1878 letter:

Father I take my pen in hand to in forme you of our jenery [journey] we have had a dilighful ride [by railroad] I can no tell you all that I wish four my mind [is] on meny thoughts.

As was customary in rural districts, John left school by age 14; the 1870 census shows him working as a farm laborer and boarding with a farmer in Mount Pleasant Township. The next we know of him is that 1878 letter, written on March 13th from "Rinebeck, Gundy Co. Iowa" {Reinbeck, Grundy County}. He and his brother Henry, then only 16 years old, had set out westward to "vew the country" and look for work. They had recently arrived in Reinbeck after a "delightful ride" by train, traveling by way of "mishend" {Michigan?}. John reports that he has found good job prospects in Reinbeck, where "wages are from \$18 to 20."

John and his brother didn't stay long in Iowa, however. The urge to "vew the country" and rumors of gold and silver discoveries in far-off New Mexico Territory drew them irresistibly westward. The next surviving letter, dated January 29, 1879, was posted from Willow Springs in the northeast corner of New Mexico Territory. That letter is almost impossible to read now, so we learn little of the men's life in that locale.

The remaining four letters were all posted from various spots in Grant County in the southwestern corner of New Mexico. This was the key mining area in the Territory, as is suggested by the name of its major town, Silver City. John writes from Burro Mountain ("Burrows") west of that city in February 1883; he is hauling wood for fuel for copper smelters and under a contract is earning \$72 weekly, very high pay at the time.

The last three letters were written by John's brother Henry in 1884-1885. On May 6, 1884 Henry reports from the village of Gila that he is farming on half-shares for John Chenoweth, while John and a third brother, Charles, are at nearby Bullards Peak "keeping a feed and livery stable"; the three brothers are in a partnership and finding that "this country is good Deal." (It isn't apparent when Charles came to join his brothers; he was age 14 in 1884.)

A year later Henry reports that he is at Bullards Peak cutting and hauling cordwood for the Blackhawk mine, while John is at the Rose mine building a boarding house. Brother Charles isn't mentioned, and it seems that he had returned to Pennsylvania.

The last of the six letters, written from New Mexico on December 7, 1885 by Henry and addressed to his brother Clinton, bears "sad news" that brings us to the end of the Kinney odyssey:

Dear Parents Brothers and sisters I am well at present But feell Bad for all for there was sad news come to me this eving I was on my way to meet John but from what I have heard I never will see him no more the sad news come to me this eving that he was killed by the Indians yesterday him and another man by the name Miller I will go tomorrow to look after the mules one of them is shot they say I am now at John chenowet on the Gila river. Well I will not write no more until I go to see about John.... I shall not uncover him unless it is your request.

The story is told in more dramatic style by an article in the Silver City *Enterprise* on December 11, 1885:

More Murders!
Double Killing at Cactus Flat, on the Mogollon Road. The Soldiers As Usual Come Up in Time To Bury the Dead.

Indian News from Various Sections:

Upon the arrival of the Alma coach on Tuesday, the horrifying news of two more murders by [General] Crook's pets was brought in. A freighter [wagon-driver] named George Kinney, well known in Grant county, proved to be one of the victims; while the other was a barber named Charles Clark.... The men were killed on Cactus Flat, 56 miles northwest of this city, on the main traveled road, and were evidently surprised in the act of repairing their wagon. Both were shot several times and a number of stray shots were found to have gone through the wagon-box and blankets. About 8 o'clock Sunday morning Mr. Elliott, a cowman employed by Isaac Siggins on Dry creek, while out hunting cattle, saw six well-mounted Indians driving six pack mules.... Subsequently he heard a number of shots fired rapidly and concluded that a portion of the same band had evidently come upon the men whom he knew were in the neighborhood, hence the firing. [The cowman reported the event at Pleasanton, five miles away.] A party was immediately organized to return and investigate, and when they reached the spot they found the bodies of the two men. The [copper ore] concentrates that Kinney was hauling in and had probably taken from the wagon in sacks while repairing it, were scattered all over the ground, and partly covered the bodies of the murdered men.... The party prepared to take the remains of the dead men to Pleasanton where they were afterwards buried.

The newspaper report doesn't identify the Native American raiders, except to call them [General] "Crook's pets," but later researchers have identified them almost certainly as Apache warriors under the leadership of Geronimo. As the headline "MORE MURDERS!" suggests, this Apache band had been raiding and killing throughout southern New Mexico for the past two months, and would continue their rampage until finally they surrendered to U.S. troops in September, 1886.

Geronimo's warriors had been placed with many Apache groups on the San Carlos Reservation in Arizona, but on three occasions (August 1878, September 1881, and May 1885) he led his followers on a "breakout" and roamed widely through New Mexico and northern Mexico, raiding settlements and killing whites. He was pursued by thousands of U.S. and Mexican troops, and achieved numerous remarkable escapes and battle victories.

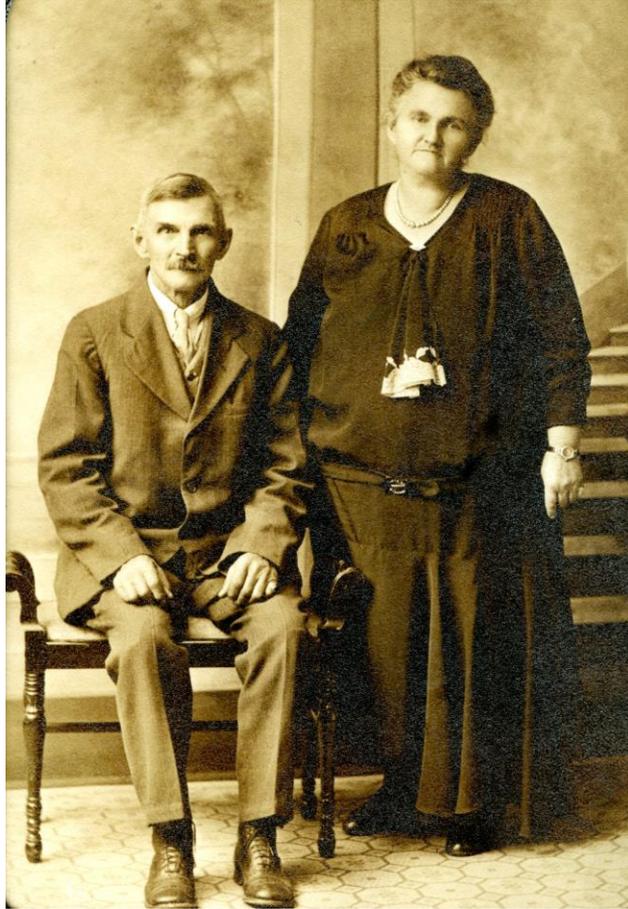


Geronimo in 1887

John (or "George") Kinney and Charles Clark (or "Miller") were among the victims in the very last murderous raiding by Amerindians. His brother's letter telling the "sad news" of John's death is a relic of the end of hostile Native American warfare against the all-powerful United States.

Both Charles and Henry returned to Columbia County and survived their brother John by many decades. Henry was partially disabled—when he went to recover John's wagon, he lifted the heavy wagon and began to hemorrhage from his nose and mouth. He later owned half of the homestead farm in Pine Township and died in 1925. Charles lived and worked in Bloomsburg and Millville and died in 1945.

NOTE: The Kinney materials were donated by Elaine Rex of Mountain Home, Idaho; the materials include transcriptions of the letters by her grandmother Evelyn (Kinney) Rex (one of twelve children of R. Clinton Kinney) and helpful notes by her father Kenneth S. Rex.



Robert Clinton Kinney and wife Della Blanche Lyons