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TOM QUICK **Death, Be Quick** *By Seamus McGraw*

Tom Quick was in the grip of the fever.

His body was covered with pustules and his breathing was shallow. A few friends and family members gathered around him as he lay there, sweating under a handmade quilt. Candlelight flickered against the old chestnut logs of Jacobus Rozencranz' cabin and the tiny, rustic room was filled with the scent of tallow.

But for Quick's labored breathing and a few mumbled prayers, it was quiet and dark. The candlelight only served to heighten the deathly pallor across Quick's pockmarked face. The settlers on the northern frontier along the Delaware River were all too familiar with this kind of slow and painful death. After all, smallpox was just one more of the brutal facts of life on the frontier.

The disease didn't discriminate. It took women and children and young men in their prime. If they survived, they were scarred for life. More often, they died.

Perhaps when he was younger and stronger, a strapping, broad-shouldered man, Tom Quick could have fought off death. But not now. He was 62 years old, ancient by the reckoning of the frontier, and the fever was about to take him.



Tom Quick

For four decades, as the legend goes, Quick had managed to buy off death, feeding it Indian men, women and children instead. In his mind, he had gotten a bargain; his life in exchange for a multitude of lives that, in his estimation, were worth nothing more than a handful of beads and shells.

Though most historians now say the number is exaggerated, Tom Quick is said to have bragged that he killed 99 Indians in his lifetime, Munsees all of them, members of a tribe considered so peaceful by the other members of the Iroquois Confederacy that they were sometimes referred to as "women" and who employed their talent for fashioning compromises to settle disputes between the nations. Among those he killed was his childhood friend, who had, it was said, helped to kill Quick's father.

And now, as he lay dying, he had one last request.

"Bring me one more Indian," he is said to have asked, "so I can make it an even 100."

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