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TOM QUICK

The Infection Spreads

It is a matter of conjecture whether Quick's murderous rampage continued beyond these six victims. Perhaps it did not. Over the past two hundred years, experience and science have taught us that the kind of person who dehumanizes his victims in his mind begins to get a taste for blood it is unlikely that he will stop killing until someone makes him stop. Still, it is possible that Quick slaked his thirst for blood and revenge that day at Butler's Rift.

The legend, however, would not have it so. On his deathbed in Jacobus Rozencranz' cabin, the legend claims, he is said to have boasted of having killed 99 Indians and pleaded that just one more be brought to him so he could make it an even 100.

In all likelihood, historians say, that is a tall tale. It is also probably only a legend that he died of small pox.

But legends have a way of articulating an inner truth, of incorporating metaphor as fact, and often they can make a far more subtle point than the authors of the legend ever intended or even realized.

The last legend of Tom Quick is illustrative of that.

The way the story goes, after Tom Quick's death, his remains were buried in a family plot not far from Shohola. There, one night, under cover of darkness, a group of Indians who had escaped him in life crept to his grave and unearthed his remains. They divided them up and passed them around as trophies or as proof of their enemy's death. They were carried back to far-flung villages. The Indians didn't know, or understand that, just like Amherst's blankets, the bones were infected with smallpox, and so, even from the grave, the legend goes, Tom Quick continued to kill.

That too is in all likelihood a tall tale. There is no evidence that Tom Quick carried any disease, or that the contagion spread from him after his death.

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