

# The Simpson Family in America 1688 – 1880

FROM MARYLAND TO NORTH CAROLINA TO THE OREGON TRAIL

by Kirke Wilson



*A new map of Virginia, Maryland, and the improved parts of Pennsylvania & New Jersey by Christopher Browne, 1685*



# The Simpson Family in America



1688 – 1880

*(From Maryland to North Carolina to the Oregon Trail)*

A collection of the research and writings of *Kirke Wilson*

Published 2024

## Relatives Involved with this Publication

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**NOTE:** Three Richard Simpson descendants came together to produce this reprint of the historic research of Kirke Wilson.

Don Healy created a family website in 1996 or 1998, okay, near the end of the last century. See: [www.bdhhfamily.com](http://www.bdhhfamily.com)

It still exists and combines much of Kirke Wilson's research as well as the research of Don Healy, Dr. Lynn Beedle, Carol Healy, and Dr. Jim Tillotson. Kirke had self-published five books in addition to assorted magazine articles about the Simpson family. The individual books have long been out of print.

Many people researching their ancestry have found the site. Recently, Diane Eubanks

discovered it and she encouraged Don and his brother David to help her collect and reprint Kirke Wilson's works.

With Kirke's permission the project began. Don and Diane pulled together scans of the older printings and David ([healy1.com](http://healy1.com)) created the cover design and worked on the production and has aspirations for a digital version. Also, many thanks to Fran at The Printing Factory ([tpfprinting.com](http://tpfprinting.com)) for her patience with this project.

See the back cover for the biography of Kirke Wilson.



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**VOLUME 1**

# **The Simpson Family in Maryland, 1688-1760**

A MOST HEALTHFUL AND  
PLEASANT SITUATION:

**THE SIMPSON FAMILY IN  
MARYLAND, 1688-1760**

Kirke Wilson

San Francisco, California  
1991

... this country of Mary-Land abounds in a flourishing variety of delightful Woods, pleasant Groves, lovely Springs, together with spacious Navigable Rivers and Creeks, it being a most healthful and pleasant situation.

George Alsop, 1666



## INTRODUCTION

The story of the Simpson family in North America is also the history of the settlement and development of what is now the United States. Over two centuries and six generations, the Simpsons moved from the Chesapeake Bay shoreline of colonial Maryland to the frontier in North Carolina, Tennessee, Missouri and Oregon. In the first two generations, Richard Simpson and his son Thomas established farms and families in the tobacco-growing area near what is today Aberdeen and Havre de Grace, Maryland. In the third generation, another Richard Simpson moved his family to the North Carolina frontier north of what is now Greensboro. In the fourth generation, another Thomas Simpson moved his family to Warren County in middle Tennessee for fifteen years and then to Howard County and Johnson County in Central Missouri. William Simpson, in the fifth generation, and his son Benjamin in the sixth, moved their families to the Platte Purchase in Western Missouri and, with infants of the seventh Simpson generation, across the overland trail to Oregon in 1846.

The geographical progress across the continent was not, for the Simpson family, accompanied by noticeable economic progress. The Simpsons and the families they married were often among the earliest settlers in their areas. They suffered relatively few of the common frontier disasters of war or early death but failed to achieve the level of economic security that would enable them to remain, beyond one or two generations, in Maryland, North Carolina, Tennessee or Missouri. The Cooper family, with which the Simpson family married in the nineteenth century in Missouri, displayed a similar pattern in Virginia, Kentucky and Missouri before moving to Oregon and California in 1846.

In Part I of For We Cannot Tarry Here, I described the life and movements of the Simpson and Cooper families in Virginia, Kentucky and Tennessee from 1750 to 1820. During that period, their lives were marked by military and political events, including the French and Indian War and the Revolutionary War. On the frontier, the wars were largely fought against Indian surrogates or allies of the French or British. The lives of the frontier settlers seem to have been shaped in fundamental ways by the interaction with the Indians and the interaction with the natural environment.

Looking back more than two centuries, it is difficult to define with any certainty the mix of experiences and expectations that would motivate a family or clan to move over the mountains to the frontier. In Maryland of the seventeenth and eighteenth century, motivation seems more accessible. Richard Simpson appears to have come to North America during the 1680s, most likely as an indentured servant. Like many of his neighbors, he worked off his indenture and probably worked for wages for several years while accumulating the capital to establish his own farm and family. For the next eighty years, Richard Simpson and two generations of descendants continued as small farmers near Chesapeake Bay. Although they were among the early settlers, they do not appear to have expanded their holdings or achieved much economic security. They appear to have lived and farmed quietly for three generations before moving to North Carolina sometime after 1750.

In contrast to the frontier experiences of the Cooper family in Kentucky and Missouri, the Simpson family in Maryland had little or no experience of Indians or military campaigns. Their lives were peaceful but characterized by sustained hard work as small farmers and little to show for it beyond large families. By the 1750s, prospects

for economic improvement were declining for the Simpson family in Maryland and Western North Carolina offered an opportunity to begin anew. The restlessness that emerged repeatedly in the nineteenth century, began for the Simpson family in the eighteenth century when the third and fourth generations of the Simpson family moved from Maryland to North Carolina.

In a subsequent chapter, I will describe the Simpson family experience in North Carolina from the 1750s to 1810 and the move to Tennessee. I will also attempt to resolve questions about whether or not Thomas Simpson who signed the Watauga Petition in 1776 was the same person who moved with his family from Rockingham County, North Carolina to Warren County, Tennessee in 1804.

As I had hoped, the distribution of the 1750-1800 part of my narrative in 1990 led me to genealogists in the Simpson family who had been investigating the Simpsons in North Carolina and Maryland. I am deeply indebted to my remote cousins Wenonah S. Williams and Donald Ray Simpson, as well as others for the painstaking genealogical research that provides the framework for my investigations in frontier social history. I am in their debt.

The effort to place the Simpson family in the context of time and place is entirely my own and is exceedingly dependent on the libraries that have preserved primary and other records and scholars who have devoted their careers to the colonial period in the Chesapeake region. The Library of Congress, the Library of the Mechanics Institute in San Francisco, the Enoch Pratt Free Library in Baltimore and the library of the Maryland Historical Society in Baltimore have been particularly helpful.

172 Hancock Street  
San Francisco, California  
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COLONIAL MARYLAND, 1688-1760

...take these western discoveries in  
hande, and plant there.

Richard Hakluyt, 1584<sup>1</sup>

In family legend, Thomas Simpson (1739-1833) is a mythic figure. He was born in Scotland where, according to some stories, he may have left a valuable estate. He knew General Washington, fought in the Revolutionary War and lived to be more than 100 years old.<sup>2</sup> Contrary to the legend, he was neither born in Scotland nor more than 100 years old at the time of his death. It is unclear whether he fought in the war and doubtful that he knew General Washington. Thomas Simpson was born in 1739 in Baltimore County, Maryland where his family had lived since the late seventeenth century. With his father and other relatives, he moved to North Carolina sometime before 1759. Thomas Simpson married twice and raised a large family in North Carolina before moving to Tennessee in the first decade of the nineteenth century. It is possible but not certain that he was the Thomas Simpson who signed the Watauga petition at the beginning of the Revolutionary War in what later became Tennessee.<sup>3</sup>

## The Maryland Colony

In June 1632, King Charles I granted a large tract of land which he named Maryland to Cecilius Calvert, second Lord Baltimore (1605-1675). Calvert's father, George Calvert, the first Lord Baltimore (1580-1632), had been a loyal supporter of *King James I* serving as secretary of state and member of the privy council until his public declaration of Roman Catholic faith made him unable to continue service in the Stuart court. In gratitude for his service to the crown, *King James* had made Calvert a knight. After the death of James I, his son, Charles I elevated George Calvert to the Irish peerage as baron of Baltimore in County Longford. Like other members of the embattled English Catholic aristocracy of the seventeenth century, Calvert was developing lands in Ireland while exploring opportunities to establish colonies in North America. Calvert attempted to form a colony in Newfoundland where he had been granted the Province of Avalon in 1623. In 1628, he moved his family to the new colony but abandoned the project after one bitterly cold winter and returned to England seeking a royal grant of lands that would be warmer and more hospitable to settlement.<sup>4</sup>

Although the first Lord Baltimore died before the Maryland grant was completed, he was able to persuade King Charles to approve a charter in which Calvert, as Lord Proprietor, would have virtually unlimited power over ten million acres of land north of the Potomac River on Chesapeake Bay. The grant included all of what is now Maryland and Delaware as well as the southern part of what is now Pennsylvania and that part of

Virginia on the Delmarva peninsula. The grant was unbounded on the West. In the charter, the king granted,

...the now Baron of Baltimore, and his Heirs, the true and absolute Lords and Proprietors of the Region...as ample Rights, Jurisdictions, Privileges, Prerogatives, Royalties, Liberties, Immunities and royal Rights, and temporal Franchises whatsoever, as well by Sea as by Land, within the Region, Islands, Islets, and Limits aforesaid, to be had, exercised, used, and enjoyed, as any Bishop of Durham, within the Bishoprick or County Palatine of Durham, in our Kingdom of England, ever heretofore hath had, held, used, or enjoyed, or of right could, or ought to have, hold, use, or enjoy.<sup>5</sup>

The Lord Proprietor, as Count Palatine, acquired feudal rights that had not been granted by any English king since Edward I at the end of the thirteenth century. The rights included authority to declare war, regulate trade, administer justice, appoint local officials, impose and collect taxes, punish criminals and grant pardons. The charter authorized subinfeudation, the creation of subordinate and dependent feudal lands, as well as the granting of lesser titles of nobility. The only limits on the authority of the proprietor were that laws enacted in the province must be,

...of and with the Advice, Assent and Approbation of the Free-Men of the same Province, or the greater Part of them, or of their Delegates or Deputies...[and] consent to Reason, and be not repugnant or contrary, but (so far as conveniently may be) agreeable to the Laws, Statutes, Customs, and Rights of this Our Kingdom of England.<sup>6</sup>

During times of emergency, the proprietor could declare martial law and was not subject to the limitations described in the charter.

The royal charter granted Maryland to Lord Baltimore and his successors,

...in free and common Socage, by Fealty only for all Services, and not in Capite, nor by Knight's Service. Yielding therefore unto Us, our Heirs

and Successors Two Indian Arrows of these parts, to be delivered at the said Castle of Windsor, every Year on Tuesday in Easter Week.<sup>7</sup>

In addition to the symbolic annual payment of two arrows, the proprietor also agreed to pay the king one-fifth of any gold or silver discovered in the new province. As it turned out, there was no gold or silver in Maryland.

By November 1633, Lord Baltimore had appointed his brother Leonard Calvert (1606-1647) to be the resident governor and recruited 130 adventurers and servants to sail to Maryland. The first colonists arrived in March 1634 and established a settlement at St. Mary's on the southwestern shore of Chesapeake Bay where they purchased land from the Indians. The first settlers, like the proprietor, were Catholic but their servants were primarily Protestants who traded several years of indentured service for passage to North America. As an inducement to attract settlers, the proprietor offered free land. Called "concessions" or "conditions of plantation", Calvert offered 100 acres of land for each adult settler in 1633 and 2000 acres for each "adventurer" who brought five servants. In later years, the incentives were reduced somewhat although 1648 concessions added manoral rights as part of grants of 2000 acres or more.<sup>8</sup>

Despite offering generous incentives, the Calverts were unable to attract the number of settlers necessary to make the colony profitable. The small population also left Maryland vulnerable to invasion by its neighbors. Susquehannock Indians successfully raided the Maryland settlements for a decade beginning in 1642 and settlers from Virginia invaded Maryland in 1644, 1645 and 1646. With enemies on every side,



Lord Baltimore entered an alliance with Puritans who were opposed to the established church in Virginia. When Leonard Calvert died in 1647, Lord Baltimore appointed a Protestant from Virginia to be governor of Maryland.

Large numbers of Puritans moved to the Severn River area of Maryland after 1647 to escaping the intolerance of the Church of England in Virginia. Taking advantage of the religious freedom allowed in Maryland and the chaos resulting from the civil war in England, the Puritans allied themselves with other opponents of the Calverts and deposed the proprietary government in 1652. Three years later, factions supporting and opposing the Calverts clashed in the Battle of the Severn where Calvert militia was defeated and the governor captured. In 1657, civil war in Maryland was ended with a compromise in which the Calvert government was restored to power, Protestants were guaranteed religious freedom and the insurgents were granted amnesty and the right to keep their weapons. In 1675, Maryland militia joined militia from Virginia in a successful campaign against the Susquehannock Indians. The campaign united former adversaries in a war against Indians with whom each colony had been allied at various times. The Indian war resulted in Bacon's Rebellion in Virginia but permanently ended the Indian threat in the Chesapeake Bay region of Maryland.<sup>9</sup>

By 1675, the population of Maryland was approximately three-quarters dissenting Protestants, one-sixth Church of England and one-twelfth Roman Catholic. In spite of their differences, the various denominations lived together in relative peace from 1660 to

1690. During this period, the economic structure of the colony began a process of transformation. The feudal system based on land grants and indentured servants was gradually replaced by a plantation system based on slave labor. By 1697, wealthy Maryland planters were buying slaves directly from Africa.<sup>10</sup> The growth of the plantation and slave economy, as it had in the Virginia tidewater, resulted in restricted opportunities for small farmers. Children of small farmers, unable to support themselves in the tobacco economy, struggled to survive or moved to the frontier where land was available and slaves did not dominate the labor force.

#### Life in the Maryland Colony

With settlement scattered along the shore of Chesapeake Bay and its many tributaries, life in Maryland was precarious, isolated and primitive during the seventeenth century. There was religious tolerance far beyond that which existed in any other part of North America at the time and there was religious conflict which sometimes led to bloodshed. Learning from the early experience in neighboring Virginia, the Maryland colony attempted to avoid unnecessary conflict with the Indians and starvation during its early period. While the first colonists were able to feed themselves, they were unable to avoid the consequences of near-total dependence on tobacco production. With a single-crop economy, Maryland was vulnerable to the fluctuating prices in the London tobacco market. During the period after 1680, when tobacco prices were severely depressed, Maryland suffered a long period of economic hardship.

The many rivers and creeks provided Maryland planters direct access to English shipping but resulted in an economy that had strong vertical relationships with markets in London but little horizontal relationship with other parts of Maryland or North America. As a consequence, there were few roads, few markets, no towns of any size and little development of indigenous crafts or industry. In contrast to New England, where towns were self-contained economic units offering a variety of skills and functions, the plantations of Maryland were almost exclusively devoted to the production of tobacco for export and food for their own consumption. Apart for the basic skills necessary for survival, colonial Maryland was dependent on trade with England for manufactured goods.

Despite the vigorous efforts of the Proprietor to attract settlers and increase his rental income, the population of Maryland grew slowly during the early years and depended on continued immigration. Recent scholarship has calculated that total European migration to Maryland during the 1634 to 1680 period was less than 40,000 persons.<sup>11</sup> The immigrant population was young, relatively unskilled and disproportionately male. The immigrants encountered diseases and died young. During the first decade of settlement, there were six male immigrants for every female. The ratio of men to women improved somewhat during the 1640-1680 period when there were three men immigrants for each woman immigrant, but the lack of women remained an obstacle to the formation of families and the internal growth of the colony until

sometime in the eighteenth century. As late as 1700, there were twice as many men in Maryland as women.<sup>12</sup>

In addition to the shortage of women, living conditions in the Chesapeake Bay region were poor. Immigrants had adequate diets but were exposed to diseases that killed many new arrivals and shortened life expectancy. Malaria, typhoid fever, dysentery, smallpox, pneumonia and influenza were the result of primitive living conditions but were part of the "seasoning" process that newcomers to the tidewater encountered in the seventeenth century and a major obstacle to the formation of families and the establishment of farms. One scholar, attempting to quantify the high death rate in Maryland during the early colonial period, estimated that 17 percent of the immigrants who reached age twenty-two died by age thirty and 41 percent died by age forty.<sup>13</sup>

During the first fifty years of the Maryland colony, the majority of the settlers, more than 70 percent, were persons who had originally immigrated as indentured servants. They were predominantly men, particularly during the early years, but also included women who were transported to North America as indentured servants. In either case, the servants tended to be young people with limited skills and limited prospects for advancement in seventeenth century England. Averaging seventeen years of age when they arrived in Maryland, the indentured servants exchanged several years of free labor for transportation to North America as well as food, clothing and shelter

during the period of indenture and the payment of "freedom dues" upon the completion of the contract.<sup>14</sup> The indentured servant agreed,

To do such service and employment as he...shall employ me in, not absenting myself at any time without my said master's privity, and consent. And also I...do hereby bind myself to observe my aforementioned master's command and also to keep his lawful secrets, not purloining any of my said master's goods...<sup>15</sup>

Indentured service was onerous. Servants worked long hours. If they refused orders or ran away, they were subject to harsh punishment, including whipping or, in some cases, an extension of the period of indentured service. Like slaves, they could be purchased, sold and inherited. Terms of indenture varied depending on the age and skills of the servant. As an inducement to prospective servants with skills needed in Maryland, recruiting agents in England would offer shorter terms of service, specific working conditions or increased payments at the completion of the contract service. In Maryland, the typical indenture was for a period of four to six years.<sup>16</sup> In contrast to slaves, who had almost no rights, indentured servants could use the Maryland courts to enforce the conditions of their contracts and reduce abuses by their masters.

Indentured servants, called redemptioners at the time because they were working in exchange for their transportation, left little record of their experience. Few of them had the opportunity, means or skills to write about their lives. One exception was George Alsop, an Englishman who was transported to Maryland in 1658 and served a four-year indenture on the plantation of Capt. Thomas Stockett at or near Oakington in the Swan Creek area of Old Baltimore County on the shore of Chesapeake Bay. Alsop

completed his contract service and returned to England in 1663, where he published poetry and a pamphlet promoting the Maryland Colony. He reported that conditions were good and that his master provided adequate food and clothing. He explained that

"servants here, in Mary-Land of all Colonies, distant or remote Plantations, have the least cause to complain either for strictness of Servitude, want of Provisions or need of Apparel."<sup>17</sup>

Also reported that the work week was five and one-half days in the summer but that there was relatively little work in the winter beyond hunting and cutting firewood.

Upon the completion of the indenture, the servant was paid "freedom dues." These usually included food, clothing and tools. In some cases, they also included a plot of land. Servants and recruiting agents could negotiate their own arrangements or could follow the "custom of the country." A 1638 Maryland law defined the customary payment,

...three barrels of corn, a hilling hoe and a weeding hoe, and a felling axe; and to a man servant one new cloth suit, one new shirt, one pair of new shoes, one pair of new stockings, and a new monmouth cap; and to a maid servant one petticoat and waistcoat, one new smock, one pair of new shoes, one pair of new stockings...<sup>18</sup>

Also confirmed the benefits that the servant would receive upon the completion of his indenture and optimistically described his transition to independence and self-sufficiency:

He that lives in the nature of a Servant in this Province, must serve but four years by the Custom of the Country; and when the expiration of his time speaks him a Freeman, there's a Law in the Province, that enjoyns his Master whom he hath served to give him Fifty Acres of Land, Corn to serve him a whole year, three Sutes of Apparel, with things necessary to them, and Tools to work withall; so that they are no sooner free, but they are ready to set up for themselves, and when, once entred, they live passingly well.<sup>19</sup>

While the former servant was free to leave at the completion of his indenture, the transition to independence was difficult and the former servant often chose to continue working for the same master as a hired laborer. Wages for free labor were relatively good, because of the chronic shortage of workers, and former servants often worked as hired laborers or tenant farmers for a few years while accumulating the capital to establish their own farms and families.

The settlers who served out indentures in Maryland included young people seeking to improve their lives as well as people on the margins of English society. During the period before 1660, when economic conditions in England were poor, the immigrants were primarily single men between the ages of 16 and 25 from middling social levels, including the sons of tradesmen, artisans and small farmers, as well as unskilled youth from the lower classes. As economic conditions in England improved, the immigrants were increasingly recruited from the ranks of the lower classes, including vagabonds, orphans, criminals and the unemployed.<sup>20</sup> Robert Beverley, an early historian of Virginia, described the settlers as, "...persons of low circumstances...chiefly single men, who had not the encumbrance of wives and children..."<sup>21</sup>

An analysis of fragmentary land records suggests that indentured servants, including both women and men, accounted for about 70% of the total immigrants to Maryland during the period 1634 to 1681. Of the free immigrants during that period, about 30% were single men, 20% were men with families, 20% were women and 30%



were children. It appears that all free women immigrating to Maryland during this period were traveling as part of a family group headed by a man.<sup>22</sup>

In most respects, the living conditions of indentured servants were similar to that of their masters. They lived in the same crude houses, ate the same food and suffered from the same diseases. When servants completed their contracts, they were free to leave. Because most former servants had only their "freedom dues," they sought temporary arrangements as hired farm workers, sharecroppers or tenant farmers while saving to buy land, tools and seed. During the period that land was cheap, the former servant could acquire land within a few years. As land became scarce, the capital formation period extended to ten years or more.<sup>23</sup> The increasing cost of land also proved to be an obstacle to small planters attempting to expand their holdings or to acquire more productive land.

Religious life in the Maryland Colony was more diverse than other parts of North America where a single denomination was dominant, and others were excluded. Although the Maryland Colony had been established and governed by Catholics as a refuge for their co-religionists, the predominance of Protestants among immigrants from England and Virginia required a policy of religious tolerance to protect the Catholic minority. In 1649, at a time when the Lord Proprietor was welcoming Protestant dissenters from Virginia, Maryland adopted a law protecting diverse religious beliefs and practices:

...no person or persons whatsoever within this province...professing to believe in Jesus Christ, shall, from henceforth, be troubled, molested, or

discountenanced for or in respect of his or her religion nor in the free exercise thereof...nor any way compelled to the belief or exercise of any other religion against his or her consent.<sup>24</sup>

The 1649 law reassured Protestant settlers in Maryland, both women and men, that they would be able to practice their religion without interference.

In 1657, as part of the agreement to end civil war in Maryland, the Lord Proprietor promised never to overturn the 1649 law establishing religious freedom in the colony. Catholics, Quakers, Presbyterians and others established congregations, constructed churches and supported a resident clergy. The Church of England, although it would become the official religion of the colony in 1692, was slow to send ministers to organize congregations. As late as 1676, the Church of England had but three ministers in all of Maryland. One of the three, the Reverend John Yeo, in desperation, appealed to the Archbishop of Canterbury for relief. Yeo described the "Deplorable estate & condition of the Province of Maryland for want of an established Ministry." According to Yeo, religious toleration had fostered the growth of "Papery, Quakerism or Phanaticisme" and had made Maryland "a Sodom of uncleanness and a pest house of iniquity."<sup>25</sup> The Church of England was unaccustomed to a missionary role and indifferent about the need to support clergy in the colony.

In 1692, The Church of England, although its congregants were but a minority of the population, became the official religion of Maryland by royal proclamation. The act establishing the church prohibited "any bodily labor or occupation upon any Lord's day,

commonly called Sunday" by anyone including "children, servants or slaves" and also prohibited "drunkenness, swearing, gaming, fowling, fishing, hunting, or any other sports, pastimes or recreations whatsoever."<sup>26</sup> To provide the financial support necessary to build churches and maintain a resident Anglican clergy, the 1692 Act established a government structure to collect taxes from all residents, regardless of their religious beliefs. The law imposed an annual tax of forty pounds of tobacco on "every taxable person within each parish...to be collected and gathered by the sheriff of the county."<sup>27</sup>

Old Baltimore County:

The upper Chesapeake Bay shore had been known since 1608 when John Smith and a small party of Virginia settlers charted the bay, its inlets and tributaries. Smith and his companions explored as far as the Susquehanna River at the north end of the bay and recorded the physical descriptions Smith used in his 1612 "Map of Virginia".<sup>28</sup> Although the bay had been thoroughly explored early in the seventeenth century, initial settlement was concentrated in the southern part of Chesapeake Bay and expanded northward slowly as new settlers arrived. Fur buyers like William Claiborne and Edward Palmer established temporary trading posts on islands at the North end of Chesapeake Bay in the 1620s but settlement remained below the Patapsco River until the late 1650s.<sup>29</sup>

In 1659, Old Baltimore County was formed at the north end of Chesapeake Bay. The county included an area of 3000 square miles from the Patapsco River on the western shore of the bay to the Chester River on the eastern shore and north into what is now southern Pennsylvania.<sup>30</sup> The county was unpopulated in 1659 when Nathaniel Utie obtained land grants near present-day Aberdeen. A political refugee from Virginia who had graduated from Harvard College in 1635, Utie received patents for the 800 acre Oakington Plantation in February 1659 and the 2300 acre Spesutie Island in August 1661.<sup>31</sup> During the same period, Matthew Goldsmith settled on Swan Creek about three miles from Spesutie Island and Thomas Stockett settled between Swan Creek and Chesapeake Bay.<sup>32</sup>

George Alsop, who had been an indentured servant on the plantation of Thomas Stockett between 1658 and 1661, described the area,

...this Country of Mary-Land abounds in a flourishing variety of delightful woods, pleasant Groves, lovely Springs, together with spacious Navigable Rivers and Creeks, it being a most healthful and pleasant situation.<sup>33</sup>

Alsop remembered the herds of deer and swarms of hogs in the woods, as well as plentiful swans, geese and wild turkeys available to the hunter.

The two land grants to Utie were among the largest and earliest in what is now Harford County. In the same area, Godfrey Harmer received a patent for 200 acres called Swantown in 1659 and William Palmer received the 500 acre Swan Harbor Plantation in 1675.<sup>34</sup> All of these plantations were along the Chesapeake Bay shore in

the area southwest of the mouth of the Susquehanna River. Spesutie Island, a few hundred yards offshore, was variously defined as "Utie's Refuge" or "Utie's Hope," and is today part of the 80,000 acre military installation at Aberdeen Proving Ground. The wider area, including what is today the Proving Ground and the nearby cities of Aberdeen and Havre de Grace, was called Spesutia in the seventeenth century. Spesutia was the only manor granted in the area and Utie had the title and authority as lord of the manor. He erected a proper manor house at the north end of the island and engaged in the Indian trade while also serving in civil and military positions.<sup>35</sup>

As the settlements along Chesapeake Bay advanced toward the mouth of the Susquehanna River, colonists and Indians collided in brief but bloody encounters. In April 1661, two canoes of armed Seneca Indians were spotted coming down Bush River toward the settlements along the Bay. Six colonists armed themselves and sailed in two small boats to intercept the Indians. The little armada challenged the Indians and traded threats until a settler's dog, impatient with the negotiations, bit an Indian. The Indian shot the dog in retaliation and set off an exchange of musket fire that left five Indians and one settler dead.

On May 13, 1661, the colonial governor convened his council at Spesutie Island to investigate complaints against the Indians as well as Indian complaints against the settlers. The Council heard testimony from participants about the Bush River battle with the Seneca and about Indian raids attributed to the local Susquehannock. One settler

testified that Indians had raided his Gunpowder River home in April killing his wife, plundering his cabin and butchering his livestock. Another settler reported that ten Indians, including one woman, had arrived at the plantation at Foster's Point where they stole goods worth one thousand pounds of tobacco and engaged in a three hour battle in which one settler was killed and one wounded. After negotiation, the Maryland Council agreed to a treaty of peace and mutual assistance with the Susquehannock. As part of the treaty of 1661, the settlers agreed to assist the Susquehannock to construct a fort in what is now Pennsylvania to protect the tribe against marauding Seneca from the north.<sup>36</sup>

Two years later, Indian raids resumed in Old Baltimore County. Two settlers were killed at the head of the bay, one was killed on the Patapsco River and two boys were kidnapped. The following year, colonists discovered a band of twenty-two Seneca on the Patapsco River and captured one Indian. The settlers' Susquehannock allies identified the prisoner as a fierce Seneca warrior and advocated his immediate execution. The colonists refused to kill the prisoner but held him hostage to discourage additional raids by the Seneca. In 1667, Major Samuel Goldsmith and Sheriff George Utie enlisted a company of thirty-six men from Baltimore County to join a colonial expedition against the Wicomico Indians. Later that year, Baltimore County residents joined the Susquehannock in an expedition against the Seneca.<sup>37</sup> In 1687, Nanticoke Indians complained that a member of their tribe had been murdered by three white men on Bush River. The Indians identified one of the alleged killers but were impatient with the

failure of the local authorities to punish the man they had identified. Soon after, a group of Indians attacked and killed a family on Middle River. The settlers responded by building a string of fortified cabins across the northern frontier from Garrison Forest to the Susquehanna River.<sup>38</sup>

After the early flurry of Indian incidents, the little colony prospered. Settlers paid the proprietor to buy the land and paid semi-annual quitrents to the proprietor. Settling in the lowlands around the Bay, the seventeenth century Maryland colonists grew tobacco which they shipped to England. Planters would germinate tobacco in seedbeds during March and April. By June, when the danger from frost had past, the tobacco was transplanted to little hillocks in distant rows.<sup>39</sup> The colonists had cleared land by girdling trees and they planted the tobacco in little hills four feet apart among the stumps. During the humid summer, field workers would tend the tobacco, hoeing, weeding and thinning the plants, as well as pinching off small leaves growing on the stalks of the plants. By the middle of September, the colonists began cutting and drying the tobacco in sheds. After about six weeks, the tobacco was sufficiently cured and workers would strip the leaves from the stalks and pack them in hogsheads for shipment to England during the winter or spring.<sup>40</sup>

The tobacco industry stimulated active commercial traffic on Chesapeake Bay as colonists traded tobacco for manufactured goods from England and New England. Also remembered:



Between November and January there arrives in this Province Shipping to the number of twenty sail and upwards, all Merchant-men loaden with Commodities to Trafique and dispose of, trucking with the Planter for Silks, Hollands Serges, and Broad-clothes, with other necessary Goods...<sup>41</sup>

He contrasted the Maryland tobacco trade with England with coastal trade with the New England colonies. The New England merchants arrived earlier in the year in smaller boats and appear to have transported more practical goods than luxury goods. In contrast to the British, who traded for tobacco, the New Englanders preferred to trade for pork. Also described the New England merchants:

Medera-Wines, Sugars, Salt, Wickar-Chairs, and Tin Candlesticks is the most of the commodities they bring in: They arrive in Mary-Land about September, being most of them Ketches and Barkes, and such small Vessels, and those disappearing themselves into several small Creeks of this Province, to sell and dispose of their Commodities, where they know the market is most fit for their small Adventures.<sup>42</sup>

The settlers also produced corn, wheat, oats, barley, rye and peas as well as pork and beef. The grains and meats they produced were primarily for their own use and for local consumption. In 1692, as part of an effort to encourage diversification of the tobacco economy, these commodities were, like tobacco, authorized for payment of debts and taxes in the colony.<sup>43</sup>

Meanwhile in England, the long struggle between Protestants and Catholics, between hereditary royal succession and constitutional government, resulted in the revolution of 1688. King James II abandoned his throne and fled to France as British leaders invited the Protestant King of the Netherlands, William of Orange and his wife, the eldest daughter of James, to the British throne. The bloodless revolution in England

resulted in a similar transformation in Maryland where, between 1689 and 1692, the proprietary government of Lord Baltimore was replaced by the colonial government of the British. In 1690, the Crown revoked the Maryland charter to the Calvert family and formed a colonial government that repealed the laws of Maryland and relocated the Maryland capital from the Catholic community at St. Mary's to the Puritan settlement at Providence later called Annapolis.<sup>44</sup>

The transfer of authority from the proprietors to a colonial government required the formation of rudimentary local government in Maryland. The Religious Act of 1692, which established the Church of England in Maryland, also described the procedures to be followed to organize local government in the colony. In consultation with local land owners, commissioners and justices were directed to:

divide and lay out their several and respective counties into several districts and parishes...to be laid out by metes and bounds and fair certificates of each parish...<sup>45</sup>

In each parish, the freeholders were ordered to select six men to act as a vestry responsible for the parish treasury and for the construction of a church building. The structure of local government, with its counties, districts and parishes, was organized to collect taxes to support the Church of England but became the basis for all local government in the colony.<sup>46</sup>

The smallest unit of local government was the "hundred". Although described by geography, the hundred was defined by population and would change as population

patterns changed. The hundred was the area inhabited by approximately one hundred families and was the basic unit for taxation and the administration of justice. One or more hundreds comprised a parish and one or more parishes a county.<sup>47</sup> To assure that taxes were uniformly and fairly collected, the 1692 law required local constables to visit every household in the hundred each year and prepare a list of taxable persons. As defined in 1692, taxables included:

...all Male Children...shall be taken and Accompted Taxables at the Age of sixteen years and upwards, and all male Children Servants...at the age of sixteen years and upwards...And all Slaves whatsoever, whether Male or Female Imported or born within this Province at or above the Age of sixteen years...And that all freemen...shall be taxables above the Age of Sixteen years.<sup>48</sup>

The 1692 law, explicitly exempted "Clergymen and such poor & Impotent persons that receive Alms from the County."<sup>11</sup> By elimination, the law exempted all children under the age of sixteen, whether free or bonded, and free women of any age. In 1715, a similar law also exempted from taxation, "...all such slaves as shall be adjudged by the County Court to be past labor..."<sup>49</sup>

### The Simpson Family in Maryland

Simpson was a common family name in 17th century England and Scotland and several Simpsons were among the early settlers of Maryland. Between 1646 and 1680, 31 people named Simpson arrived in Maryland. Of these, 26 were men and 5 were women. The first Simpson recorded in Maryland was Anslowe who immigrated in 1646 and died in Maryland about 1649. The other thirty Simpsons, the largest number of whom arrived

during the 1660s, included 21 who were transported and became indentured servants, four who were servants of other immigrants, four who immigrated, like Anslowe Simpson, paying their own transportation as well as one indentured servant brought from Virginia and one sailor. The five women named Simpson arrived in Maryland between 1664 and 1680. They all appear to have been unmarried at the time they were transported and presumably all had to work as indentured servants to repay the expenses of their transportation.<sup>50</sup> It is possible that one of the 26 male Simpsons was an ancestor of the Simpson family that lived in Old Baltimore County in the 1690s but no connection between the later Simpsons and the earlier arrivals has been established.<sup>51</sup>

The first record of Richard Simpson is in Old Baltimore County, Maryland in the late 1680s. Fragmentary early records show a Thomas Simpson living on property called Jacob's Point on the south side of South River in November 1676. Simpson paid rent of 5 1/4 shillings for the 21 acre property owned by James Smith.<sup>52</sup> The name Thomas was commonly used among the Maryland Simpsons and there was a long association between Simpson and Smith families in Maryland but there is no evidence linking the Jacob's Point Simpson of 1676 with the Richard Simpson family. Among the thirty-one Simpsons who arrived in Maryland between 1646 and 1680, three were named Thomas. These included one who arrived as a servant in 1649 or 1650. He may have been the Thomas Simpson who arrived in St. Mary's County in July 1649. The other two were "transported" and arrived in Maryland in 1651 and 1673. Any of the three could have been the Thomas Simpson at Jacobs Point in 1676.<sup>53</sup>

In July 1688, Richard Simpson (c. 1663-1711) had 53 acres surveyed in Old Baltimore County. Called "Simson's Choice", the land was at the head of Swan Creek and was subject to a quitrent of 2 shillings 1 1/2 pence. Richard Simpson's Swan Creek property was occupied by "Emmanuel Smith's orphans" at the time of the 1688 survey.<sup>54</sup> Swan Creek is located in what is now Harford County, Maryland approximately thirty miles northeast of Baltimore.<sup>55</sup> The small creek drains a suburban area southwest of Havre de Grace and forms a sheltered cove in Chesapeake Bay at the northeastern corner of Aberdeen Proving Ground. While the upper part of Swan Creek flows through a steep and rocky area, the lower three miles of the creek flows through fertile and rolling countryside near the bay.<sup>56</sup>

Baltimore County of 1692 had a population of approximately 500 families scattered along a forty-mile shoreline and inland up to four miles. To govern this large but thinly populated community of shoreline farms, the county was divided in 1692 into three parishes and five hundreds. St. George's Parish was established about 1671 in the eastern part of Baltimore County. One of thirty original parishes of Maryland, St. George's comprised the area along Chesapeake Bay from Bush River on the southwest to the Susquehanna River on the Northeast and North to the boundary of the colony in what is now Pennsylvania.<sup>57</sup> Spesutia Hundred was the area northeast of Gunpowder River to the Susquehanna River and "as farre as the County extends."<sup>58</sup>

The original parish church was called Spesutie and was built of wood in about 1671 near Red Lion Branch of Delph Creek at a place called "Gravelly" about a half mile southwest of Michaelsville. As settlement moved inland from the bay shore, Spesutia church was rebuilt in 1718 at a new location about four miles away on donated land along the Old Post Road near the town of Perryman.<sup>59</sup> In 1726, St. George's Parish acquired 200 acres on Swan Creek to serve as a parish glebe. The Rector of the parish described the land in 1851,

...it was located on "Swan Creek" and is now the most productive land in Harford County.<sup>60</sup>

The glebe land was neglected and subsequently sold. Richard Simpson was a resident of St. George's Parish and Spesutia Hundred but there is no evidence that he or his family were active members of Spesutia Church.<sup>61</sup>

Richard Simpson married twice. With his first wife, whose name is not known, he had a son, Richard, Jr, born sometime before 1690.<sup>62</sup> By 1690, Richard Simpson had married Anne Gilbert (c.1670-c.1715), the daughter of Spesutia Hundred neighbors Thomas and Elizabeth Gilbert. In 1691, Richard and Anne Simpson had their first child, a son Thomas, born November 5, 1691 "near to Susquehanna River" in St. George's Parish, Old Baltimore County.<sup>63</sup> The Susquehanna River flows into Chesapeake Bay at Havre de Grace and is today the boundary between Harford County and Cecil County. The city of Havre de Grace, originally known as Harmer's Town, was first laid out at the time of the Revolutionary War on land that slopes gently into Chesapeake Bay. Godfrey Harmer owned land in the area in 1659, when he sold a parcel to Thomas Stockett. In

1688, Stockett sold his land to Jacob Looten. John Stokes bought the Looten land in 1713, and by 1734 had acquired 619 acres, including a property known as "Symson's Hazard."<sup>64</sup> William Simpson, one of the sons of Richard Simpson, had sold the 100-acre "Simpson's Hazard" in 1726.<sup>65</sup> Robert Young Stokes, a great-grandson of John Stokes, laid out and named the city of Havre de Grace in 1781. The city was destroyed by British troops May 3, 1813, as part of the War of 1812.

Richard Simpson and his family were residents of Spesutia Hundred when the first tax lists were prepared in 1692. He appears as Richard "Sympson" in the 1692 list, one of 128 taxables.<sup>66</sup> At the time, there were 51 households in Spesutia Hundred including nine households with a total of twenty-eight slaves and forty-two households without slaves.<sup>67</sup> In 1695, Richard Simpson was living on 150 acres of land called "Gilbert Adventure" owned by his father-in-law Thomas Gilbert for which he paid an annual quitrent of 6 shillings.<sup>68</sup> Although Richard Simpson and his family were farming in Old Baltimore County at the end of the seventeenth century when slaves were replacing other forms of labor, there is no record that they owned any slaves during the period between 1692 and 1706. Richard Simpson continued to live in Spesutia Hundred until at least 1706.<sup>69</sup> Thomas Gilbert, Sr. and his son Thomas, Junior were taxpayers in Spesutia Hundred from before 1699 to 1706.<sup>70</sup>

Richard and Anne Simpson had at least ten children born between 1691 and 1707 in Old Baltimore, County. The first four children, those born between 1691 and 1697,

Were registered as having been born on or near the Susquehanna River. Since the births were registered in St. George's Parish, the Simpson family was likely to have been living near the mouth of the river in the general vicinity of present-day Havre de Grace. Since the Simpson births over a six year period are listed together in the parish records, it is likely that Richard Simpson and his family were not members of the church and may have lived several miles away.<sup>71</sup> By 1698, Richard and Anne Simpson appear to have left the land near the Susquehanna River and returned to the Swan Creek property. In September 1698, their fifth child was born, "at the head of Swan Creek" and Richard Simpson was listed as "of Swan Creek."<sup>72</sup>

By 1699, the Richard Simpson family appears to have returned to "the Bay Side near to the mouth of the Susquehanna River" for the birth of their sixth child.<sup>73</sup> The same "bay side" designation is used to describe the location of the Emanuell Smith family.<sup>74</sup> In 1708, the Richard Simpson family listed seven living children in the St. George parish register including four sons and three daughters. From the 1708 register, it appears likely that Richard and Anne Simpson had a total of ten children between 1691 and 1707 of whom three had died in infancy.<sup>75</sup>

At about the same time that the Simpson family was registering seven children in the parish register, Richard Simpson was testifying in the probate of a Swan Creek estate. Thomas Browne, a planter who died January 24, 1707/8, left his Oakington



Plantation to his son John Browne. Richard Simpson was one of three neighbors testifying.<sup>76</sup>

Richard Simpson died in 1711 leaving his widow Anne Gilbert Simpson and seven children between the ages of two and twenty as well as, Richard, Jr., an older son by a previous marriage. In his will, dated March 9, 1710/11, he left "...my boy Richard Simpson the sum of twelve pence sterling" and specified:

"...my whole Estate both Real and personall be equally divided amongst my seven Children which I had by my last wife called Anne and that every one of them have equall share alike in both my land and moveable Estate..."<sup>77</sup>

Richard Simpson appointed his son Thomas, then twenty years old, executor of the estate and guardian of the younger children. The will directed Thomas to:

"...keep the small Children til they come to Age and to be ruled by hime and to pay them their equall portion as they shall come of Age."<sup>78</sup>

By 1715, the widow Simpson was having difficulty supporting herself and her family. With the consent of her son Thomas, the two youngest Simpson children, Anne, ten years old, and Elizabeth, eight, were "bound" to John and Elizabeth Clarke who raised and cared for the girls in exchange for housework.<sup>79</sup>

Thomas Simpson (1691- n.d.) married twice. With his first wife, Eleanor, he had a son Richard born December 26, 1714 in St. George's Parish. On February 13, 1717/18, in St. George's Parish, Thomas Simpson married Mary Smith, the daughter of Emmanuel Smith. Thomas and Mary Simpson had seven children between 1718 and 1737 of whom

one died in infancy.<sup>80</sup> In 1722, Thomas Simpson and his wife sold 120 acres of land at Sister's Discovery to Joshua Wood.<sup>81</sup>

Richard Simpson, the only child of Thomas and Eleanor Simpson, married Elizabeth Reese and had three sons and three daughters. The oldest of the six children, Thomas, was born September 23, 1739 in Baltimore County, Maryland and may have signed the Watauga petition 37 years later on the frontier.<sup>82</sup> Sometime in the 1750s, Richard Simpson and his family left Maryland, where they had lived for three generations, and moved to the frontier of North Carolina.<sup>83</sup>

#### Family Life in Old Baltimore County

The St. George's Parish register, with its record of births, marriages and deaths, provides a great deal of information about family life in Spesutia Hundred during much of the century after 1692. With early settlement completed, Maryland residents of this period were beginning to stabilize family life and build permanent communities. Tidewater residents had overcome the high mortality rates and the scarcity of women which had impeded family formation a generation or two earlier, but the colonists continued to live in relatively primitive conditions and suffer economic hardship due to depressed tobacco prices. Spesutia, although it was settled somewhat later than other parts of Chesapeake Bay, was typical of the living and economic conditions of that time in the Maryland colony.

Compared to twentieth century families, the Spesutia families were large. The 123 families listed in the parish register had an average of 5.2 children. Despite the large families, young adults appear to have delayed marriage, presumably until they had established themselves sufficiently to support families. The average man was 27 years old when he married and the average woman was nearly 22 although approximately one-third of the women had their first child before the age of twenty. Spesutia mothers of the eighteenth century appear to have had children at two year intervals which suggests that they nursed their own children rather than using slave wet nurses.

The parish records include no mention of divorce or separation but list 42 births to unmarried women during the 1681-1765 period including one unmarried woman who had three children and two unmarried women who, like Susanna Simpson, each had two children before they married. While there is no record of punishment or sanctions for unmarried mothers, the parish vestry would sometimes order unmarried couples to "cease cohabitation." Although living conditions were primitive in Colonial Maryland, infant deaths in St. George's Parish were relatively low. Parish records, while probably underestimating infant mortality, show that 2718 children were born between 1703 and 1761 and that only 48 were recorded as infant deaths.<sup>84</sup>

Housing on the Maryland tidewater was crude and crowded during the seventeenth century. Except for a few brick buildings erected by wealthy planters, the small, wood-frame houses of the colonists were similar to the rural cottages they had left

in England. The houses were one story with a gable roof and a sleeping or storage loft. They were often a single room or divided into two tiny rooms. The walls of the house were homemade clapboards split from nearby trees and nailed to vertical posts set in the ground. The floors were usually compacted dirt and the interior walls were plastered with wattle and daub, essentially mud applied to twigs, to fill gaps as the green lumber used for clapboard dried.

A fireplace at one end of the tiny building provided the heat for cooking throughout the year and heating during the winter. The chimney was on an exterior wall at the gable end of the little house and was also commonly constructed of mud that had dried on twigs. Some Maryland colonists used thatch roofs of the type they had used in England. The weight of the thatch, the skills required and the scarcity of appropriate straw and grasses contributed to the early use of shake roofs in Maryland. Wooden shakes could be riven during the winter when the colonist was otherwise unoccupied, but required tools to make and nails to install. The houses were dark and poorly-furnished. The small windows had no glass but were closed with shutters which neither protected against the cold in winter nor against mosquitos and other insects in summer. The tidewater settlers of this period appear not to have used curtains. Because the houses were poorly constructed of rough materials, they required frequent repair and were often abandoned after a few years because colonists believed it was easier to build a new house than to renovate the existing house.<sup>85</sup>

Like the houses, the furnishings were crude but practical. The poorest houses were furnished with beds, benches, tables and chests, as well as cooking and eating utensils. Of the poorest households in Maryland during the 1656-1719 period, more than 90% had beds and cast iron cooking pots or kettles. Nearly 60% had iron frying pans or skillets, while 29% had books, and only 24% had chairs. The poorest colonists, including particularly servants and slaves, slept on beds of straw or "flock" mattresses stuffed with bits of wool. As colonists advanced in economic status, they acquired bed frames with feather mattresses on a rope grid. The most wealthy planters had large beds with curtains for privacy and extensive investment in feather pillows and woolen blankets.

Colonists used cheap earthenware pottery for dishes and bowls but relied on the more-expensive but more-durable pewterware for beverage containers like the tankard or drinking pot a family would share at meals. Colonists also used woodenware bowls, plates and trenchers, as well as wooden utensils. Among the poorest families, spoons, soap and spinning wheels were rare and forks were not used. Because of the need for expensive equipment, it appears that most lower-income families in Maryland did little oven baking and no weaving during the period before 1700. Because of the poor quality of the wool from Maryland sheep, the "countrymade cloth" produced locally was coarse and considered inferior to imported wool. The Chesapeake settlers, unlike their contemporaries in New England, appear not to have dipped their own candles or made their own soap.

Recent scholarship has concluded that the free women of colonial Maryland had rather traditional responsibilities in the families of small planters. They appear to have been exempt from the most arduous part of agricultural work but certainly had responsibility for tending the vegetable gardens and dairy cows that enabled the family to survive between tobacco crops and during the years when tobacco prices were depressed. In addition, women had the primary responsibility for the "inside" tasks of cooking, laundering and child-rearing. It is likely that the "outside" responsibilities of women were greater during the early years of marriage and during periods when low tobacco prices forced families to expand production. Because of the work of women, Maryland families generally produced enough food to be self-sufficient but were dependent on the proceeds of the tobacco crop to buy the clothes, shoes, tools and other manufactured goods they were unable to provide for themselves.<sup>86</sup>

The diet in the Maryland tidewater of the seventeenth century and eighteenth century was similar to the diet throughout the English-speaking colonies of North America. It was narrow, repetitive and relied heavily on Indian corn, prepared in a variety of forms, augmented by the produce of the garden and meat from domestic animals or hunting. Maryland settlers grew their own corn, ate it fresh-roasted, ground or pounded it by hand, and prepared it as corn bread, corn pone or corn porridge or mush. Meals were often of the one-pot variety, with corn, vegetables and any available meat boiled together into a thick soup. The meal would often be accompanied by some form of corn cake or corn bread. The colonists, learning from the Indians, also grew

beans, squash, sweet potatoes and other vegetables. As they became settled, they planted orchards growing peaches and pears and particularly apples to be eaten fresh, cooked or squeezed into sweet cider, or allowed to ferment into hard cider.

In Maryland, the diet of corn products was also augmented with meats, including particularly various forms of salt pork.<sup>87</sup> Chesapeake Bay settlers, during the early period, relied on hunting and fishing for much of the protein in their diet. They hunted deer, squirrels and raccoons, as well as quails, turkeys, ducks and geese. They also ate seafood, including fish, oysters, crabs and turtles. In that latter part of the seventeenth century, the proportion of game and fish in the diet declined as farmers shifted their diets to cattle, chicken and swine. Throughout the 1660-1710 period, a majority of Chesapeake households raised chicken, cattle and hogs for domestic consumption. Sheep, for their meat or wool, appear to have been rare until after 1690, when the risk of loss to wolves and other predators had abated.<sup>88</sup>

For all but the richest settlers, the quality of tidewater life was dreary and characterized by hard work and continued decline in real income as tobacco prices slipped. Because tobacco rapidly depleted land, planters were forced to shift to new land, leaving tobacco land fallow. This may have contributed to the impermanence of much of the housing and the widespread grazing of livestock on exhausted tobacco land. While the housing was practical and economical, it was crowded and uncomfortable. Sanitation was primitive. More than 90% of Maryland houses owned no chamber pots

and it appears that there was no effort to dig pits or latrines for garbage or human waste. Since hogs were running loose outside the houses and water was drawn from nearby streams, disease was common.

Inside the houses, there was little comfort, culture or beauty. In one sample of 606 Maryland estates between 1656 and 1719, only thirty-three had window curtains. Of the poorer families, only 24% had chairs, 3% had warming pans and 2% had soap and washtubs. While 29% of the poorer families had one or more books, most frequently a Bible or other religious book, musical instruments were rare. An analysis of 700 Maryland estates identified only eight with musical instruments, including eight violins, one flute and one jews harp. Although earthenware pots were cheap and widely available, not even the richest households had a container for flowers.<sup>89</sup>

By the early eighteenth century, disparities in economic conditions began to emerge among the Chesapeake colonists. Lord Baltimore, emulating the social structure of England, had envisioned a society in which wealthy landowners would maintain social stability through heredity control of courts, tax collection and the legislative council. The inability of the proprietor to attract and retain aristocratic immigrants and the conflict between religious groups resulted in a society that was somewhat more egalitarian than the original design. The early settlers had encountered obstacles to family formation and often died before they were able to accumulate significant wealth. After 1700, this



pattern changed and, with the shift from indentured servants to slave labor, disparities in wealth and social position reemerged.

The shift from indentured labor to slave labor in Maryland took place at the end of the seventeenth century during a period of improving economic conditions in England and extended depression in tobacco prices. The improved conditions in England resulted in a declining supply of workers willing to emigrate under contracts of indenture, while the depressed tobacco prices reduced the capacity of small and middling planters to expand operations by buying land and hiring labor. The large planters, in contrast, could afford the investment required to purchase slaves and additional land. The initial investment in a slave was two and a half times greater than the cost of an indentured servant. As a consequence, the ratio of servants to slaves in the Maryland tidewater was two to one before 1685, about even in 1690, and nearly one to three by 1700. Despite the chronic need for workers in the labor-intensive tobacco industry, most families had neither slaves nor indentured servants. During the period 1656 to 1719, 80% of the estates in the six Maryland counties around Chesapeake Bay owned no slaves and 61% owned neither slaves nor servants.<sup>90</sup>

While the affluent planters owned more slaves, larger houses and more furniture, their lives were rather similar to that of the small and middling planters. They had more possessions with greater value than their neighbors but their fortunes were governed by the same dependence on the tobacco economy and they shared the same lives of hard

work, monotonous diet and limited cultural enrichment. In contrast to the aristocratic planters of the Virginia tidewater, the successful Maryland colonist was still struggling to establish himself and his family in 1700.

The children of colonial Maryland, particularly at the beginning of the eighteenth century, had limited opportunities for education. A few wealthy planters engaged tutors for their children and accumulated libraries of books imported from England. Most residents however received little or no formal education. At best, they obtained irregular guidance or tutoring from clergymen, the best-educated group in the colony. Although there was little formal schooling, several of the early settlers maintained personal libraries of religious and other books. On the remote Chesapeake Bay shore that would later become Harford County, the first private library was organized twenty years before the first permanent settlement. Edward Palmer, who had a fur trading post on an island at the mouth of the Susquehanna River, brought books with him for his personal use. Palmer's library was lost before 1659 when Old Baltimore County was established and settlers moved into the area.

Apart from sporadic tutoring by preachers augmenting meager incomes, there was no school in the area until after 1710. According to one account, the first Spesutia schoolmaster was hired in 1711.<sup>91</sup> By the early 1720s, the rector of St. George's Parish, an Oxford graduate, organized a school at Spesutia Church near Perryman. In 1723, the Maryland General Assembly required each county to establish a "Free School" and set

aside one hundred acres of land in each county to provide firewood and rental income to support the school.<sup>92</sup>

During the same period that the first schools were being formed, the Rev. Thomas Bray was promoting the formation of lending libraries in each parish in Maryland Colony. Bray purchased and sent packages of books from England to Maryland in the 1690s. These books were intended "For Instruction in All Things Necessary to Salvation" and included Bibles, prayer books and books of sermons. Bray also sent multiple copies of tracts like the "Preparative Discourses...to take Care of the Soule" and "Dr. Asheton's pieces against Cursing, Swearing, Blasphemy and Drunkenness" for distribution in Maryland and other colonies. After a visit to Maryland, Bray returned to England in 1701 and sent a collection of more than 800 copies of 36 religious books to St. George's and ten other parish libraries in Maryland.<sup>93</sup>

In addition to the books available in the parish libraries, clergymen often maintained substantial personal collections. The Rev. Evan Evans, an Oxford graduate, died in 1721 at St. George's Parish and left a library of fifty-five volumes. While Rev. Evans' library was primarily religious in nature, it also included several books on British history, a biography of the Duke of Marlborough and a volume of Maryland laws.<sup>94</sup>

The four generations of the Simpson family who lived in Maryland in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries experienced enormous change in less than one

hundred years. In the 1680s, settlement was scattered along the Chesapeake Bay shoreline, a shortage of women made it difficult to form families and slaves from Africa had not yet replaced indentured servants in the tobacco economy. By the middle of the eighteenth century, when the Simpson family decided to leave Maryland, the population had grown and the economy had changed. The scattered, shoreline farms of the 1690s had been replaced by large plantations, small towns, diverse agricultural production and growing urbanization. The town established at Baltimore in 1729 had emerged as a major commercial center and the primary seaport for Maryland and Pennsylvania.

By 1742, St. George's Parish in Harford County had grown to 991 taxables and an estimated population of 4,000.<sup>95</sup> The Maryland Colony got its first newspaper in 1745 and, by 1748, had a population of 150,000 including 42,764 slaves.<sup>96</sup> Harford County grew in population to 12,765 by 1776, when there were 3342 slaves in the county, which the Simpson family left in the 1750s. The area in which the Simpsons had lived, by then called Spesutia Lower Hundred, had become the most prosperous part of the county. Land throughout Harford County had an average value of \$1.36 an acre in 1786 but land in the 21,000 acres of Lower Spesutia had an average value of \$2.37 an acre. Whether the cause of the local prosperity or a result of that prosperity, Lower Spesutia also had an high proportion of slaves. Where the slave population was 26% throughout Harford County in 1776, it was 45% in Lower Spesutia.<sup>97</sup>

By 1776, the character of Spesutia Hundred had changed with the growth of wealth and the expansion of slave labor. The 1776 census found 1440 people in Spesutia including 790 whites and 650 blacks. Of 167 households, 54 owned slaves and 22 owned no slaves but had white servants. Of the 54 households with slaves, 37 also had white servants. In contrast to the Spesutia of 1692, where 18% of the families owned slaves, 32% of the Spesutia families of 1776 owned slaves. The average slave-owning family of 1692 had three slaves while the average was twelve for the slaveowning families of Spesutia in 1776. Of the 167 Spesutia households in 1776, 113 were families including one or two parents and at least one child.<sup>98</sup>

The documentary record of the Simpson family in Maryland is incomplete. It is certain that the elder Richard Simpson arrived in Maryland sometime before July 1688. There is no evidence whether he, like many of his neighbors, had arrived in Maryland as an indentured servant or whether he had first served out an indenture in Virginia before moving to Maryland. It is also possible, but less likely, that he was born in North America, the son of parents who had arrived a generation earlier. His choice of the St. George's Parish area in 1688 suggests that he had most likely settled in another area and had moved to Old Baltimore County where land was available when he had accumulated the resources to establish his own farm and family.

He settled in the eastern part of Old Baltimore County near Chesapeake Bay between Swan Creek and Havre de Grace at the mouth of the Susquehanna River, in

What is now Harford County. While he appears to have lived at several locations over the next twenty years, he confined his movements to farms within St. George's Parish. Through business transactions and marriage, Richard Simpson established enduring relationships with his Spesutia Hundred neighbors the Smiths and the Gilberts. He married Anne Gilbert and raised at least seven children while farming near the Chesapeake Bay shore. He paid his taxes and supported his family but failed to achieve the level of prosperity to own slaves or to accumulate an estate adequate to support his widow and young children after his death in 1711.

Thomas Simpson, the oldest son of Richard and Anne Gilbert Simpson, continued farming in the St. George Parish area until the mid eighteenth century. He owned land, married twice and raised a large family. Like many of his neighbors, he had been able to support his family through farming in Maryland but his children were unable to remain in Old Baltimore County after the middle of the 18th century. The undeveloped Chesapeake Bay tidewater of the 1680s was thickly populated by the 1750s and offered few opportunities for young families whose patrimony was hard work rather than accumulated land or wealth. The younger Richard Simpson, the son of Thomas Simpson and the grandson of the older Richard Simpson, like many of his Old Baltimore County relatives and neighbors, moved to the new frontier and new opportunities of North Carolina in the mid eighteenth century.

## Colonial Maryland Notes

I am much indebted to Wenonah S. Williams, who has edited and published Simpsons, A Gathering of the Clan since 1985. A newsletter for genealogists and others interested in the Simpson family, Gathering of the Clan has enabled a large number of Simpson descendants to share their research, sources, speculations and frustrations. Nona's newsletter introduced me to the research of Donald Ray Simpson and the Simpson families of North Carolina and led me to the 17th century Simpsons in Maryland.

- <sup>1</sup> Richard Hakluyt, Discourse of Western Planting, 1584 quoted in John Fiske, Old Virginia and Her Neighbors, Vol. I (Boston, 1897), p. 45. The Discourse was prepared at the request of Sir Walter Raleigh to persuade Queen Elizabeth to promote colonization in the New World.
- <sup>2</sup> The primary sources of the family legend are letters written in 1897 by two grandsons of Thomas Simpson. The legend and sources are described in Kirke Wilson, For We Cannot Tarry Here (San Francisco, 1990), pp. 121-125 and pp. 131-133.
- <sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp. 46-47 and pp. 131-132.
- <sup>4</sup> Russell R. Menard and Lois Green Carr, "The Lords Baltimore and the Colonization of Maryland" in David B. Quinn, editor, Early Maryland in a Wider World (Detroit, 1982), pp. 167-215; Fiske, Old Virginia, Vol. I, pp. 255-275.
- <sup>5</sup> The Charter of Maryland Granted to Lord Baltimore, June 20, 1632 in W. Keith Kavenagh, Foundations of Colonial America, Vol. II (New York, 1973), pp. 757-758. The medieval and quasi-regal palatinate rights granted the Calverts vastly exceeded the rights granted in the corporate charter of Virginia or the later proprietorships in North America including Carolina, Maine, New York, Nova Scotia and Pennsylvania.

- <sup>6</sup> Ibid., pp. 758-759. While the charter suggested a modicum of political participation by the inhabitants, the proprietor could exercise control through his power to appoint officials and veto legislation.
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 758. In contrast to other ancient forms of land tenure, socage was free of continuing military or financial obligations beyond the annual rent. Under "free and common socage", the land was held of the proprietor rather than the king ("in Capite") and the grantee was not required, as a condition of the grant, to perform military service ("Knight Service") or provide men and arms at his own expense.
- <sup>8</sup> Herbert L. Osgood, The American Colonies in the Seventeenth Century, Vol. II (New York, 1904), pp.20-21. The 1633 concessions were modified for new settlers in 1636, 1642, 1648 and 1649. Kavenagh, Colonial America, Vol. II, includes Conditions of Plantations: 1636, pp. 1521-1522; 1648, pp.1525-1529; 1649, pp. 1529-1530.
- <sup>9</sup> J. Frederick Fausz, "Merging and Emerging Worlds" in Lois Green Carr, Philip D. Morgan and Jean B. Russo, editors, Colonial Chesapeake Society (Williamsburg, Virginia and Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1988), pp. 47-91.
- <sup>10</sup> Gloria L. Main, "Maryland and the Chesapeake Economy, 1670-1720" in Aubrey C. Land, Lois Green Carr and Edward C. Papenfuse, Law, Society, and Politics in Early Maryland (Baltimore, 1977), pp. 149-150. Fiske, Old Virginia, Vol. II, pp. 148-150.
- <sup>11</sup> Russell R. Menard, "British Migration to the Chesapeake Colonies in the Seventeenth Century," in Carr, Colonial Chesapeake, pp. 101-105. Using a variety of quantitative techniques, Menard concludes that migration to Maryland between 1634 and 1680 was between 23,501 and 40,000 with a best estimate of 31,751.
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 129.
- <sup>13</sup> Russell R. Menard, "Immigrants and their Increase: The Process of Population Growth in Early Colonial Maryland", in Land, Law, Society, and Politics, p. 93.
- <sup>14</sup> Menard and Carr, in Quinn, Early Maryland, p. 204.
- <sup>15</sup> Indenture Agreement of December 14, 1645 between Edward Fisher, master, and Walter Guest, servant, in Kavenagh, Colonial America, Vol. II, pp. 1183-1184. Walter Guest was already in North America, perhaps having completed a previous indenture, when he agreed to three years of bonded service in exchange for 6000 pounds of tobacco.
- <sup>16</sup> Menard and Carr, in Quinn, Early Maryland, p. 205; Menard, in Carr, Colonial Chesapeake, pp. 106-108.



- <sup>17</sup> George Alsop, "A Character of the Province of Maryland" in Clayton Colman Hall, ed., Narratives of Early Maryland, 1634-1684 (New York, 1910), p. 357. Alsop's narrative was published in London in 1666.
- <sup>18</sup> Act of 1638, in Kavenagh, Colonial America, Vol. II, p. 1183.
- <sup>19</sup> Alsop, "A Character of the Province of Maryland," p. 358.
- <sup>20</sup> Menard, in Carr, Colonial Chesapeake, pp. 126-129.
- <sup>21</sup> Robert Beverley, The History and Present State of Virginia, originally published 1705, in The Annals of America, Vol. I (Chicago, 1968), p. 325.
- <sup>22</sup> Menard, in Carr, Colonial Chesapeake, p. 120. The proportion of indentured servants may be far greater than 70 percent because a large number of Maryland immigrants were persons who had served out indentures in Virginia before moving to Maryland.
- <sup>23</sup> Gloria L. Main, Tobacco Colony: Life in Early Maryland, 1650-1720 (Princeton, New Jersey, 1982), pp. 113-122.
- <sup>24</sup> Act Concerning Religion, April 27, 1649, in Kavenagh, Colonial America, Vol. II, pp. 1322-1324.
- <sup>25</sup> John Yeo letter of May 25, 1676 to the Archbishop of Canterbury in Percy C. Skirven, The First Parishes of the Province of Maryland (Baltimore, 1923), pp. 26-27. The Reverend John Yeo, a graduate of Oxford, subsequently served as rector of St. George's Parish, Old Baltimore County from 1683 to 1686.
- <sup>26</sup> Act of June 2, 1692, in Kavenagh, Colonial America, Vol. II, pp. 1324-1328.
- <sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1327.
- <sup>28</sup> William P. Cumming, "Early Maps of the Chesapeake Bay Area: Their Relation to Settlement and Society," in Quinn, Early Maryland, pp. 280-281.
- <sup>29</sup> C. Milton Wright, Our Harford Heritage (Havre de Grace, Maryland, 1967), pp. 17-19. Edward Palmer's trading post was established at Palmer's Island at the mouth of the Susquehanna River about 1622 and subsequently abandoned. The island was later named Watson's Island and, since 1885, when the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad was built through the area, Garrett Island.
- <sup>30</sup> George W. Archer, "Early Settlements on What is Now Aberdeen Proving Ground in Harford County," Harford County Historical Bulletin, Winter 1986, p. 3. Old Baltimore County included what is now Baltimore, Carroll, Cecil and Harford Counties in Maryland and parts of what is now Chester, Lancaster and York Counties in Pennsylvania.

<sup>31</sup> Robert W. Barnes, Baltimore County Families 1659-1759 (Baltimore, 1989), p. 655. Oakington Plantation continues in operation 330 years later.

<sup>32</sup> George W. Archer, The Early Settlements in the Bush River Neck, Introductory to History of St. George's Parish (Bel Air, Maryland, 1890), p. 5.

<sup>33</sup> Alsop, "A Character of the Province of Maryland," p. 378.

<sup>34</sup> Wright, Harford Heritage, p. 20.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>36</sup> Walter W. Preston, History of Harford County, Maryland (Baltimore, 1901), pp. 26-27; Archer, Bush River Neck, pp. 4-6; Wright, Harford Heritage, pp. 23-24.

<sup>37</sup> Archer, Bush River Neck, pp. 6-7.

<sup>38</sup> Preston, Harford County, p. 42.

<sup>39</sup> Alsop, "A Character of the Province of Maryland," p. 363. The description of tobacco growing is from Alsop.

<sup>40</sup> Main, Tobacco Colony, pp. 31-41.

<sup>41</sup> Alsop, op. cit., p. 363.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 364.

<sup>43</sup> Kavenagh, Colonial America, Vol. II, 1274-1275.

<sup>44</sup> Fiske, Old Virginia, Vol. II, pp. 161-173. George I restored the proprietary government of the Calverts in 1715 after the 4th Lord Baltimore became a Protestant. Charles Calvert, 5th Lord Baltimore and his son Frederick, the 6th and last Lord Baltimore, continued as proprietors of Maryland until 1771 when the barony of Baltimore became extinct for lack of legitimate heirs.

<sup>45</sup> Kavenagh, Colonial America, Vol. II, p. 1326.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., pp. 1324-1326.

<sup>47</sup> Fiske, Old Virginia, Vol. I, pp. 227-228. The hundred had been the basic unit of local government in rural England. It was the geographical subdivision for the administration of justice, political representation and military organization. The hundred had a local court serving several rural townships and, in ancient times, had been the area that could furnish 100 armed men in time of war. In eighteenth century Maryland, county government replaced the hundred as the basic unit of local government although vestiges

of the hundred system persisted into the early nineteenth century.

<sup>48</sup> An Act for the Constables Taking a List of Taxables, enacted June 2, 1692 in Skirven, First Parishes, p. 59.

<sup>49</sup> Kavenagh, Colonial America, Vol. II, pp. 1033-1034.

<sup>50</sup> Gust Skordas, The Early Settlers of Maryland (Baltimore, 1979), pp. 419-420.

<sup>51</sup> Several other Simpsons appear in the early records of Maryland. Paul Simpson was a witness in June 1648 when Giles Brent placed two cows in trust for "Mr. Coxe's two children," (Kavenagh, Colonial America, Vol. II, p. 1567). In August 1648, Angel Simpson was a member of a coroner's jury to investigate the death of Thomas Allen at St. Michael's Manor, (Ibid., p. 1615). William Simpson resided at St. Clement's Manor in 1672 where he was fined in a Court Leet and Court Baron for letting his hogs run in the manor lands, (Ibid., pp. 1414-1415). None of these Simpsons appears to have been related to the Richard Simpson family of Old Baltimore County, Maryland.

<sup>52</sup> Robert W. Barnes, Maryland Rent Rolls: Baltimore and Anne Arundel Counties, 1700-1707, 1705-1724 (Baltimore, 1976), p. 183.

<sup>53</sup> Skordas, Early Settlers, p. 420.

<sup>54</sup> Marion Hull Headington and Clifford E. Headington, Maryland Genealogical Notes, Early Parishes and Hundreds (Baltimore, 1954), pp. a-g. Barnes, Maryland Rent Rolls, p. 25, 34.

<sup>55</sup> Neal A. Brooks and Eric G. Rockel, A History of Baltimore County (Towson, Maryland, 1979), pp. 1-3. Harford County was carved out of Baltimore County in 1773. The county was named for Henry Harford, the illegitimate son and heir of Frederick Calvert, sixth Lord Baltimore. When the playboy Frederick Calvert died in 1771 without legitimate heirs, the Baltimore barony and proprietorship expired. Fiske, Old Virginia, Vol. II, pp.168-173.

<sup>56</sup> The Swan Creek area is approximately thirty miles northeast of Baltimore on U.S. 40, called the General Pulaski Highway, between Aberdeen and Havre de Grace. Swan Creek crosses U.S. 40 near the Oakington Road/Maryland Route 132 exit. North of U.S. 40, Swan Creek is a brook through a residential subdivision along Robin Hood Road. The likely site of "Simson's Choice" on the "head of Swan Creek" is south of U.S. 40 near the present location of Havre de Grace Consolidated School and along Maryland Route 132, the "Old Post Road" from Alexandria to Philadelphia. The putative Swan Creek site is 1.3 miles northeast of Aberdeen and 3 miles southwest of Havre de Grace.

Public access to Swan Creek cove is from Oakington Road and Swan Creek Country Club on the east. On the west, the Swan Creek shore is part of Homer's Point

Plantation and a residential area of Aberdeen Proving Ground. There is no town of Swan Creek but the Swan Creek name survives locally at the country club, Swan Creek Farms, Swan Harbor Dell Trailer Park and Swan Creek Point. The Swan Creek area is in Aberdeen (Maryland) Quadrangle, United States Geological Survey map 39076-E2-TF-024.

Swan Creek, identified as "Swane Creek" appears in Augustine Herrman's 1673 map published in London. J. Louis Kuethe, "A Gazetteer of Maryland, AD. 1673," Maryland Historical Magazine, December 1935, pp. 310-324. Other Swan Creeks are in Anne Arundel County and Kent County and there is a Swan Jut in Worcester County. In Chesapeake Bay there are Swan Islands in Dorchester County and Somerset County, as well as a Swan Point in Kent County. There is also a Swan Point in the Potomac River in Charles County. Henry Gannett, A Gazetteer of Maryland and Delaware (Baltimore, 1976, originally published 1904), p. 74.

<sup>57</sup> Skirven, First Parishes, p. 142. As late as 1694, there were only nine Anglican clergymen to serve the thirty parishes of Maryland.

<sup>58</sup> McHenry Howard, "Some Abstracts of Old Baltimore County Records," Maryland Historical Magazine, 1923, p. 3. Since 1918, when the War Department bought 35,000 acres of Harford County farmland to establish Aberdeen Proving Ground, the Chesapeake Bay shoreline between Gunpowder River and Swan Creek has been government property. Surviving remnants of Spesutia include Spesutie Island on the Upper Western Shore of Chesapeake Bay in the restricted area of Aberdeen Proving Ground and Old Spesutie Church built in 1851 to continue service to St. George's Parish.

<sup>59</sup> Savington Warren Crampton, A Brief History of St. George's Parish (Baltimore, 1851), pp. 6, 8-9, 22-23. The Spesutia Church was rebuilt in 1758 and again in 1851 at the Perryman site. The 1851 building remains in use. The Rev. Mr. Crampton was Rector of Spesutia Church in 1851 when the fourth church was erected. Spesutia Church is 3.7 miles west of Aberdeen and 0.8 mile south of U.S. 40 on Spesutia Road in Perryman. The site of the 1671 church at Gravelly is now within Aberdeen Proving Ground. No evidence of the 1671 church survives.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>61</sup> Bill and Martha Reamy, St. George's Parish Registers. 1689-1793 (Silver Spring, Maryland, 1988), pp. 99-100. None of the Simpsons served as vestryman, warden or registrar in St. George's Parish between 1718 and 1790.

<sup>62</sup> Jane Baldwin, ed., The Maryland Calendar of Wills, Vol. III (Baltimore, 1907), p. 206. The 1711 will of Richard Simpson makes a distinction between the bequest to young Richard and the distribution of property among children "by last wife".

<sup>63</sup> Barnes, Baltimore Families, p. 582; Reamy, Parish Registers, p.2. In a 1708 registration, Thomas Simpson appears to have been born in 1690. (Ibid., p. 13) Since the 1697 registration was eleven years closer to the event, the 1691 date is more likely to have been accurate.

A register of births, deaths and marriages, written on parchment, was maintained in St. George's Parish from 1692 and survives nearly 300 years later. Registers for the periods 1692 to 1745 and 1745 to 1799 have been found. The "St. George's and St. John's Register and Vestry Proceedings, 1671-1883" are in six volumes in the Maryland Historical Society Library, Baltimore.

<sup>64</sup> Peter A. Jay, Havre de Grace: An Informal History (Havre de Grace, Maryland, 1986), p. 3.

<sup>65</sup> Barnes, Baltimore Families, p. 582.

<sup>66</sup> Headington, Maryland Notes, p. 7. The 1692 tax list for Spesutia Hundred is folio 228-229 in the Maryland State Archives at Annapolis.

<sup>67</sup> F. Edward Wright, ed., Inhabitants of Baltimore County, 1692-1763 (Silver Spring, Maryland, 1987), pp. 3-4.

<sup>68</sup> Barnes, Maryland Rent Rolls, p. 25.

<sup>69</sup> Headington, Maryland Notes: 1694 is folio 272, p. 10; 1695 is folio 522, p. 17. Raymond B. Clark, Jr. and Sara Seth Clark, Baltimore County Maryland Tax List 1699-1706 (Washington, D.C., 1964), lists Richard Simpson: 1699, p.1; 1700, p.7; 1701, p.14; 1702, p.29; 1704, p.40. There is no listing for Richard Simpson in Baltimore County in 1703, Ibid., pp. 30-38. In 1705, Richard Simpson is listed with his son as Richard "Sampson" senior and junior, Ibid. p.49. In 1706, father and son are correctly listed, Ibid. p.57.

<sup>70</sup> Clark, Maryland Tax List, lists Thomas Gilbert, Sr. and Jr.: 1699, p. 1; 1700, p. 7; 1701, p. 14; 1702, p. 29; 1703, p.30; 1704, p. 40; 1705, p. 49; 1706, p. 58. Thomas Gilbert, probably the junior, died in 1714. Bettie S. Carothers and Robert W. Barnes, Index of Baltimore County Wills, 1659-1850 (Lutherville, Maryland, 1979) p. 26. The Gilbert name is variously spelled Gilbord, Gilburts, Guilbert and Gilbard. Thomas Gilbert, Sr. appears to have lived in Spesutia since 1692 or earlier. Barnes, Baltimore County Families, p. 252.

<sup>71</sup> Reamy, Parish Registers, p. 2. In addition to Thomas born 1691, the register shows Susanna, born April 5, 1693; William, born February 14, 1695; and Elizabeth, born April 5, 1697. The 1691-1697 entries spell the family name "Simson."

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 4. The girl born September 30, 1698 was named Elizabeth suggesting that the Elizabeth born in 1697 had died in infancy.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 5. Jonathan was born November 12, 1699.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 13. The 1708 list includes Thomas (but erroneously lists his age as 17 when he was actually only 16), Susan (correctly listed as 15 years old but with an April 2 birthday) and William (erroneously listed as 14 in February 1707--he was 13 at the time.) The 1708 listing does not mention either the Elizabeth born in 1697 nor the Elizabeth born in 1698 but includes an Elizabeth born seven months before February 27, 1708 (e.g. July 27, 1707). The 1708 listing does not mention the Jonathan born in 1699 but includes an infant Jonathan born November 12, 1707. Since the 1708 register lists siblings born five months apart, it appears likely that the surviving Elizabeth was born in late 1706 or early 1707 but not in July 1707. The 1708 listing also includes a son Mathew (born August 27, 1702) and a daughter Ann (born January 25, 1705).

Susanna Simpson, the oldest daughter of Richard and Anne Simpson, gave birth to two children before her marriage to Thomas Knight in 1719. She was indicted for bastardy in 1711 and named Garrett Close as the father of her child born that June. In 1716, she named James Collins as the father of her daughter Sarah Collins Simpson born the year before. (Barnes, Baltimore Families, p. 582; Reamy, Parish Registers, p. 18) In November 1718, she married Thomas Knight and , in June 1719, gave birth to a son Light Knight. (Barnes, p. 104; Reamy, p. 19) In 1743, Light Knight married Rachel Ruse (perhaps Reese) and had seven children between 1746 and 1760 including Mary Knight born in Old Baltimore County, February 10, 1748. (Reamy, p. 93) This Mary Knight may be the same Mary Knight (c. 1751-1836) who married the second Thomas Simpson (1739-1833) in the 1770s in North Carolina. They would have been second cousins.

<sup>76</sup> Baldwin, Maryland Wills, p. 114. The Oakington Plantation was sold several times before 1935, when it was purchased by Millard Tydings (1890-1961) and others. Tydings represented Maryland in the United States Senate from 1926 to 1950, where his son Joseph Tydings served 1964-1970. The Tydings family continues to own Oakington but sold part of the plantation to the developers of the Swan Creek Country Club. Jay, Havre de Grace, pp. 158-162.

The new calendar proclaimed by Pope Gregory in 1582 was adopted in much of Europe two years later. England continued using the old style Julian Calendar until September 1752. Because the new year began March 25 on the Julian calendar, old style dates between January 1 and March 24 are often presented as 1707/8. Old style dates are twelve days earlier than the same date on the Gregorian calendar.

<sup>77</sup> The will is in the Maryland State Archives at Annapolis. The 1711 will is described in Baldwin, Maryland Wills, p. 206. The will is also listed in James M. Magruder, Jr., ed., Index of Maryland Colonial Wills, 1634-1777, Vol. 3 (Baltimore, 1967), p. 432; Barnes, Baltimore Families, p. 581; Carothers, Baltimore Wills, p. 64. Richard Simpson, Senior, Last Will and Testament, filed Baltimore County, Maryland, June 6, 1711. Baltimore County Wills, Book 1, pp. 88-89. Richard Simpson's neighbors, Garret Garretson and John Brown and his nephew Thomas Gilbert, were witnesses. It appears that neither Richard Simpson nor Thomas Gilbert could sign his name.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Barnes, Baltimore Families, p. 581. Carothers, Baltimore Wills, p. 64. This form of indentured servitude was common during the early colonial period when children, particularly children from families of modest means, were "put out" to learn a trade or simply to obtain care and supervision.

<sup>80</sup> Robert W. Barnes, ed., Maryland Marriages, 1634-1777 (Baltimore, 1976), p. 164, 167; Barnes, Baltimore Families, p. 582; Reamy, Parish Registers, pp. 24-33. It is unclear whether the Smith family into which at least two Simpsons married between 1717 and 1726 was related to the James Smith family that had owned property on which Thomas Simpson had lived in 1676. It is likely that Mary Smith Simpson was related to Samuel Smith, perhaps an older sister. According to Reamy, the children of Thomas Simpson and Mary Smith Simpson included William born 1718, Gilbert born 1724, Mary born 1726/7 and Thomas born 1729/30. Barnes also includes Eleanor, born 1721; Martha, born 1736; Joshua, born 1737. Gilbert died in infancy.

<sup>81</sup> Barnes, Baltimore Families, p. 582 Property in colonial Maryland often had colorful descriptive names.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid. The Thomas Simpson born in 1691 was the grandfather of Thomas Simpson born in 1739. Thomas Simpson of 1691 also had a son Thomas Simpson born in 1729 who was an uncle of Thomas Simpson born in 1739. During the sixty years 1690-1750, related Simpson families in Maryland also named four sons William, three daughters Anne and three sons John or Jonathan while using the names Elizabeth, Mary, Richard and Sarah twice. Unrelated Simpson families in Maryland used many of the same names during the same period. Gathering of the Clan, III:6, pp. 1-4.

<sup>83</sup> The last record of the Richard Simpson family in Maryland is July 1745 when Nathaniel, the son of Richard and Elizabeth Simpson is born in St. George's Parish, Old Baltimore County. Reamy, Parish Records, p. 74; Barnes, Baltimore Families, p. 582.

<sup>84</sup> Ruth Anne Becker, "Spesutia Hundred, 1681-1799: A Study of a Colonial Maryland Parish," unpublished MA thesis, University of Maryland, 1978.

<sup>85</sup> Main, Tobacco Colony, pp. 140-166. See also, Menard and Carr in Quinn, Early Maryland, p. 202. No example of the Chesapeake pole-set frame house of the seventeenth century survives.

<sup>86</sup> Main, Tobacco Colony, pp. 167-189. Main analyzed the personal property of 3,454 men who died in six Maryland counties between 1656 and 1719. The six counties included Baltimore County.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p. 190-205. Main concludes that corn, in all its forms, comprised about half of the diet. The diet of wealthy planters included imported "luxury" items, including wine, spices, wheat flour, sugar and rum, as well as locally-grown fruits, vegetables and meats.

<sup>88</sup> Henry M. Miller, "An Archaeological Perspective on the Evolution of Diet in the Colonial Chesapeake, 1620-1745," in Carr, Colonial Chesapeake, pp 179-195. Miller and his colleagues analyzed the composition of tidewater trash deposits to identify diet trends.

<sup>89</sup> Main, Tobacco Colony, pp. 170, 246-248, 256, 258.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., p. 26, pp. 102-103. p. 276. These data, because they are based on probate records, are likely to overestimate the actual wealth of Maryland families during this period.

<sup>91</sup> Archer, St. George's Parish, p. 21. Rectors of the parish who were graduates of Oxford were Rev. John Yeo (1683-1686), Rev. Evan Evans (1718-1721) and Rev. Robert Wayman (1722-1724).

<sup>92</sup> Wright, Harford Heritage, pp. 230-240.

<sup>93</sup> Joseph Towne Wheeler, "The Laymen's Libraries and the Provincial Library", Maryland Historical Magazine, XXXV (1940), pp. 60-67.

<sup>94</sup> Wheeler, "Reading Interests of the Professional Classes in Colonial Maryland, 1700-1776", Maryland Historical Magazine, XXXVI (1941), p. 186.

<sup>95</sup> Walter G. Leslie, Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland, History of Harford County, 1951 manuscript, Maryland Historical Society, p. 83.

<sup>96</sup> Fiske, Old Virginia, Vol. II, pp. 191, 268.

<sup>97</sup> Wright, Harford Heritage, p. 73.

<sup>98</sup> Becker, "Spesutia Hundred," pp. 28, 44, 71.



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**For We Cannot  
Tarry Here, 1750-1800**

**FOR WE CANNOT TARRY HERE**

FOR WE CANNOT TARRY HERE:

THE COOPER AND SIMPSON  
FAMILIES ON THE FRONTIER

Kirke Wilson  
San Francisco  
1990

For my father, Earl Simpson Wilson, and those Coopers, Simpsons and others whose courage and strength inspire the generations who follow.

For we cannot tarry here,  
We must march my darlings,  
We must bear the brunt of danger,  
We the youthful sinewy races,  
All the rest on us depend,  
Pioneers! O Pioneers!

Walt Whitman

"Song of the Pioneer," 1865

Onward ever,  
Lovely river,  
Softly calling to the sea,  
Time that scars us,  
Maims and mars us,  
Leaves no track or trench on thee.

Samuel L Simpson

"Beautiful Willamette," 1868



History abhors determinism but cannot tolerate chance. Why did we become what we are and not something else?

Bernard de Voto, preface to  
The Course of Empire,  
1952

So it is with a family. We carry dead generations with us and pass them on to the future aboard our children. This keeps the people of the past alive long after we have taken them to the churchyard.

Russell Baker  
The Good Times, 1989

PART I

THE VIRGINIA, KENTUCKY  
TENNESSEE FRONTIER, 1750-1800

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## PREFACE

What follows is the first draft of part of the story of the Simpson family for which I have been collecting information for several years. My interest began as a genealogical investigation simply trying to identify ancestors and plot their travels. As I accumulated more information, I became increasingly interested in how these people lived and why they kept moving. My focus shifted from them to the circumstances in which they lived and I began to realize that their story, the story of common people raising families in uncommon times and settings, might illuminate that part of United States history related to the frontier. The brief family history which I had intended had grown to a broader effort to understand the settlement of the West through the experience of this restless but ordinary family and hundreds of families like them who uprooted themselves repeatedly in the nineteenth century and moved west.

When completed, the story will consist of five sections each comprising several chapters. The first part, which is enclosed, includes the period from the early exploration and settlement of Kentucky and Tennessee in the late eighteenth century. The second part, much of which has been completed, is devoted to the Missouri frontier from 1800 to 1846 and includes chapters on the War of 1812, the fur trade and the Santa Fe Trail. In future years, a third part will follow members of the Cooper and Simpson families across the plains to California and Oregon in 1846. The fourth part will include chapters on the Oregon period 1846 to 1900 including the Cayuse War, the anti-missionary Baptists of William Simpson, the peregrinations of Benjamin Simpson in business, politics and Indian affairs, the activities of Sylvester Simpson as legal scholar and education leader as well as a chapter on Samuel Simpson, the pioneer poet. A fifth part will describe the activities and experiences in California of the Coopers and Simpsons during the last decades of the nineteenth century as the frontier closed.

Throughout the story, I will be using the context of the time and place, as best I can describe it from primary and secondary sources, as a frame within which we can picture these families and their lives. Much of the story takes place on the frontier where literacy is limited and documentation is scarce. During the early period there is little direct documentation of the Cooper and Simpson families except as they participate in wars or buy land. As the story moves west into Missouri and Oregon, the trail becomes rich with letters, contemporaneous recollection and official records. Despite the information available about the families, the places and the times, significant aspects of these pioneer lives are missing. The major gaps are in the everyday lives of the people including particularly the lives of the women and the life in the home. The story follows the families who moved and neglects those Coopers and Simpsons who remained in Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee and Missouri. I am hoping that this preliminary draft will solicit comment and information about sources I may have overlooked and documents of which I am unaware.

Like anyone who inquires about frontier history, I am deeply indebted to the tireless historians of the 19th century, particularly Lyman Copeland Draper and Hubert Howe Bancroft, who preserved the information on which other historians depend by collecting the documents and interviewing the pioneers. I also found myself depending on the work of a group of regional and local historians of the 19th century, many of them anonymous, who had prepared histories at the time of the national centennial in 1876. I am particularly grateful for the assistance and access to historical collections I received at libraries throughout the United States including the Bancroft and Doe Libraries of the University of California, the Boonslick Regional Library in Boonville, Missouri, the California Historical Society, the Culpeper Town and Country Library in Virginia, the Filson Club in Louisville, the Joint Collection University of Missouri Western Historical Manuscript Collection - Columbia and the State Historical Society of Missouri Manuscripts, the Library of Congress, the National Park Service, the New Mexico State Historical Society in Santa Fe, the New

York Public Library, the Oregon Historical Society, the Oregon State Archives in Salem, the San Francisco Public Library, the Tennessee State Library and Archives in Nashville, the Transylvania University Library in Lexington, Kentucky, the United States Archives in Washington, D.C., the Wisconsin State Historical Society and the Coe Collection of Western Americana and the Sterling Memorial Library at Yale University.

Like other contemporaries who have written about the Simpsons, I am the beneficiary of a serendipitous contact with my remote cousin C. Melvin Bliven of Wedderburn, Oregon and his generosity which, among other things, led me to Sam L Simpson's 1981 book Five Couples and Shirlie Simpson's 1982 book, The Oregon Pioneer: Benjamin Simpson and his Wife Nancy Cooper.

My brother Bruce Wilson and my cousin Kevin Wilson have been very helpful in bringing obscure sources to my attention and exceedingly patient in awaiting any product.

San Francisco, California

June 1990

## INTRODUCTION

The Simpson families who crossed the plains to Oregon by wagon in 1846 were descended from pioneer families who had lived on the frontier since before the Revolutionary War. From the frontier of Virginia, they were early settlers in Tennessee, Kentucky and Missouri. They had fought Indians and British to claim lands which they cleared, settled and farmed before moving on to new opportunities on a new frontier. Members of these families fought in the French and Indian War and Lord Dunmore's War while in Virginia, the Revolutionary War and subsequent Indian campaigns while in Kentucky, and the War of 1812 while in Missouri before moving to Oregon where they participated in the Cayuse Indian War.

Members of these families were among the first settlers in Kentucky and Tennessee at the time of the Revolutionary War and among the first settlers in Missouri before the War of 1812. They were among the first parties to successfully travel the Santa Fe Trail and among the first parties to use the Barlow Road across the mountains into the Willamette Valley of Oregon. They were elected to public office in the frontier settlements of Tennessee, Kentucky, Missouri and Oregon and were active in the civic and spiritual life of the frontier. These families, named Simpson, Cooper, Kimsey, Higgins, Knight and Smelser, built homes, planted crops and raised chicken on the frontier while continually moving west.

For these pioneers, the frontier was the opportunity to begin anew and the hope they would do better. It was the attraction of cheap land, cheap if you were prepared to invest the effort to clear it and protect it from Indians, and it was the chance that the new land might produce greater prosperity than the old. After frequent moves in each generation, the lure of the new frontier may have simply been the product of recurring dissatisfaction or restless habit.

The idea of the frontier was a significant factor in the American imagination from the early



days before the distinguished historian Frederick Jackson Turner pointed out its critical role in American history and social development a century ago. The historical pattern was obvious. The country began along the rugged coast of New England and in the fertile lowlands of Virginia and, as the population expanded, pioneers pushed forward into the wilderness and often into serious political disagreements with foreign countries, Indians or even other parts of our own country over land claims and settlement rights. In nearly every case, the pioneers eventually prevailed, the frontier became settled and opportunities lay out on another new frontier where the pattern would be repeated. This history built the country westward, over the first mountains with Daniel Boone, into the great valleys of the midwest and finally across the plains with the wagon trains.

For much of the past hundred years, historians have debated Turner's frontier hypothesis. Some have modified or elaborated the thesis while others, including particularly a new generation of young scholars, have vigorously challenged Turner's formulation. There is little quarrel with the notion that the wilderness created opportunity and required the remaking of democratic institutions out of chaos. The central issue is whether this process of taming the wilderness and settling the frontier resulted in something unique called the American character, that somehow European sophistication was stripped off by primitive simplicity. As critics have pointed out, this romantic view, with its own primitive simplicity, is too grand to reflect the diversity of frontier experience and neglects the frontier roles of women, Indians, traders, trappers and others who fall outside the Daniel Boone archetype. Any contemporary analysis of the frontier experience requires a more complex view of the contributions of those whose history has been neglected and somewhat greater humility about the morality of a process in which Europeans systematically grabbed land from Indians through lies, trickery, force and threat, always resulting in treaties of purchase which were being violated as the ink dried.

As the Cooper-Simpson narrative suggests, the interaction of settler and Indian was formative

seems to be somewhat in conflict with the myth of the independent and self-reliant frontiersman. Like his contemporary counterpart, the frontier entrepreneur saw government as an ally in the achievement of private advantage.

If the frontier hero was far too human and far less independent than the myth, what remains of Turner's notion that the frontier experience contributed somehow to the creation of national character? If that national character is the mix of optimism, independence and willingness to build anew, the myth of the frontier experience may have been far more powerful than the reality of that experience. Whether it was the availability of relatively unclaimed land or the relative absence of traditional social and institutional constraints; the frontier was briefly a place of hope and opportunity. It was also a place where individual effort and risk might be rewarded and where for a time, people might be judged on their own accomplishments rather than the social status of their families. Finally, the frontier was a place where individuals, seeking personal advantage, acted with confidence that they were also advancing the welfare of their communities and nation.

Much of this jumbled 19th century concept of the national character survives. Some of it remains only a myth. Other parts, particularly the optimism and independence, while not necessarily part of some national character, are essential parts of the national myth. They remain powerful, however we may stray, because they provide a unifying sense of national purpose and national ideals. While a relatively small part of the current United States population has any direct claim to the frontier experience, much of the population, including many of the most recent immigrants, deeply and strongly believe the myth and shares its values of independence and optimism. It may be mostly myth but it may also be central to those values, experiences, expectations and mannerisms which unite us as people and set us apart from others.

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE EARLY FRONTIER

As for the West... the limits  
are unknowne.

Captain John Smith  
1624 <sup>1</sup>

The western limits of Virginia were indeed "unknowne" to Captain John Smith and the 100 men and four boys who perched precariously on the Chesapeake Bay shore at Jamestown in 1607. Smith and his companions were promptly attacked by Indians and weakened by disease and starvation. Fifty-one died during the first six months, but they would survive to build the first permanent, English-speaking colony on the North American continent. While the western limits were unknown to the British, they were well-known to the Spaniards. The Spaniards had established colonies in the Caribbean soon after Columbus and explored the southern half of what is now the United States during the sixteenth century while the British remained at sea searching for a mythical passage to the East.

The Spaniards settled Hispaniola Island, now known as Santo Domingo, in 1492, Puerto Rico in 1501, Jamaica in 1510 and Cuba in 1512. Hernan Cortes, with about 500 soldiers, conquered the Aztec Empire 1519 to 1521 and claimed Mexico for the Spanish Empire. Within fifteen years, the Spaniards had completed the conquest of the Inca in Peru and the Chibcha in Columbia. Other Spaniards explored the New World by sea and on foot. Juan Ponce de Leon explored the Florida peninsula in 1513 and Alonso Alvarez de Pineda explored the Gulf Coast in 1519. Panfilo de Narvaez died exploring Florida in 1528 and his colleague Alvar Nunez Cabeza de Vaca spent the next eight years crossing Texas and Mexico to the Pacific (1528-1536).<sup>2</sup>

Hernando de Soto organized an expedition that spent four years exploring what is now the ten states of the southeastern United States (1539-1543) while Friar Marcos de Niza (1539) and

Francisco Vasquez de Coronado (1540-1542) were exploring the Southwest including parts of what is now Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, Oklahoma and Kansas. Coronado's army of ambitious second sons of Spain ranged from the Colorado River through the pueblos of the Zuni and the Hopi to the Indian villages of central Kansas. In the summer of 1540, Coronado's scouting parties included the first Europeans to see the Grand Canyon in Arizona, the Colorado River along what is now the California-Arizona border and the vast herds of bison on the plains. The following year, while returning to New Mexico from Kansas, Coronado's small army was guided along an old Indian trade route which 280 years later would become the Santa Fe Trail.<sup>3</sup>

While the Spaniards explored much of what is now the southern half of the United States during the first half of the sixteenth century, they were slow to establish permanent settlements like those in Mexico and South America. The first Spanish colonies in Florida (1559-1561 and 1566-1576) were unsuccessful and were abandoned. The French, in a bold move to challenge Spanish hegemony in the region, attempted to establish colonies in Florida in 1562 and 1563. The first French attempt failed and the second was wiped out by the Spaniards in 1565. The same year, the Spaniards established St. Augustine, the first European settlement to survive in what is now the United States. During the following decades, the Spaniards established fortified outposts and missions along the Florida-Georgia-Carolina coast and across northern Florida. Seventy years after the Fray Marcos expedition, the Spaniards established a permanent settlement at Santa Fe in 1609.

British exploration of North America began in 1497 when John Cabot (nee Giovanni Caboto), a Genoese in British service, landed briefly in what was probably Newfoundland. After this early start, the British were inactive in the New World for more than half a century until Elizabeth I became queen in 1558 and the British began to assert their sea power. Sir John Hawkins, Sir Francis Drake and Sir Humphrey Gilbert all sailed the coasts of the New World for their queen. Drake interrupted his around-the-world buccaneering expedition (1577-1580) in June 1579 to land on the

California coast where he left a plate of brass and claimed the land he called Albion "...in the name and to the use of Her Most Excellent Majesty."<sup>4</sup>

Sir Humphrey Gilbert sailed to Newfoundland in 1583 and his half-brother Sir Walter Raleigh sent ships to the coast of what is now North Carolina in 1584 and 1585 to assess the prospects for colonization. In 1587, Raleigh sent 117 men, women and children to establish a permanent British settlement at Roanoke Island on the coast of what is now North Carolina. The supply ships that were to have been sent to Roanoke in 1588 were diverted to the battle with the Spanish Armada. By 1590, when the first British ships arrived to resupply the stranded colonists, there were no survivors. The members of the "Lost Colony" had either starved or been killed by Indians.<sup>5</sup>

### The Virginia Frontier

In 1606 investors in London and Plymouth each formed joint-stock companies to establish colonies in Virginia. The Virginia Company of London sent out three small ships and landed 104 settlers on the Virginia tidewater at Jamestown. The colony was weakened by disease and starvation and attacked by Indians. Timely reinforcements in 1609 forestalled plans to abandon the little settlement. The colonists planted gardens to feed themselves and experimented with several export crops including silkworms, flax and hemp. In 1612, they discovered that the Virginia lowlands were particularly well suited to the cultivation of tobacco. With an export crop and source of income, the growth of the colony was assured. By 1618, immigration had increased the population of the Virginia colony to 1000 and the settlers were beginning to spread out along the James River seeking fertile soil for tobacco.

The Virginia colonists, after early skirmishes, lived peacefully with their Indian neighbors for more than a decade. The unsuspecting settlers were shocked one March morning in 1622 when the Indians mounted coordinated attacks at eighty separate locations along a 140 mile line. The Indians were unsuccessful in driving the colonists into the sea but they killed 347 of the 1240 settlers in

Virginia. The surviving colonists consolidated the settlements, strengthened their defenses and organized retaliatory raids against the Indians burning houses and destroying food. In spite of the threat of Indians and continuing problems of disease, the Virginia colony continued to attract immigrants from England. The population reached 3,000 by 1630 and 8,000 by 1640.

In April 1644, the Indians launched a second general attack on the Virginia settlements killing between 400 and 500 colonists. The settlers organized punitive raids which resulted in a 1646 agreement with the Indians. Starting a pattern that would continue across the continent for more than 200 years, the Indians gave up land to the colonists in exchange for assurances that other land would be reserved for Indian use. The Indians of Virginia ceded the Tidewater lands between the York and James Rivers for the English and obtained English recognition of Indian rights to live and hunt without interference in the lands north of the York River.<sup>6</sup>

As the Virginia population grew, the settled area expanded until it reached the "fall line" where rapids and falls prevented coastal vessels from travelling upstream. This line, dividing the settled coastal plane called the Tidewater, from the upland wilderness called the Piedmont, was the Virginia frontier in the last quarter of the seventeenth century. The line also divided the large and slave-dependent tobacco plantations from the frontier farms, many of them owned by families who had served out indentures in the Tidewater.

A frontier Indian incident in 1676 resulted in what has been remembered as Bacon's Rebellion and demonstrated the independence of the frontier settlers as well as the intransigence of the British governor. A dispute over payments due Indians resulted in the murder of a farmer and escalated into a border war. The settlers retaliated with a campaign against the Indians and the murder of five Susquehannock chiefs under a flag of truce. The Indians responded with raids killing 36 frontier settlers.

When the royal governor Sir William Berkeley (1606-1677) vacillated in his response, the frontiersman defied the governor and formed an army under the command of Nathaniel Bacon, Jr. (1647-1676), a recently-arrived, young planter who was a cousin of the governor's wife. Rather than accept the governor's proposal of a defensive strategy, the angry frontiersmen attacked and defeated the Indians in two engagements. Bacon's army turned on Governor Berkeley who fled to safety on the eastern shore of Chesapeake Bay. Bacon's army burned Jamestown but disintegrated in the fall and winter of 1676 after Bacon died of disease. Governor Berkeley returned and reasserted his authority by hanging 23 leaders and repealing laws enacted during the rebellion.<sup>7</sup>

During this period, Virginia tested a variety of methods to protect the frontier settlement against the Indians who had been pushed out of the tidewater. Although the settlers were serving as a buffer to protect the tidewater plantations, the planters were reluctant to allocate money for frontier defense. After the Indian uprising in 1675 and 1676, the Virginia Assembly proposed the assignment of troops to a string of forts located along the fall line. The settlers objected to the fort strategy because it was too passive and too costly. In 1691, the Assembly suggested a second approach deploying mounted rangers to scout for Indians along the fall line.

By 1701, Virginia found an effective but inexpensive solution by offering to subsidize frontier settlement. Virginia offered land grants of 10,000 acres or more, along with exemption from taxes and other military service as well as twenty-year exemption from quitrents for those communities providing, for every 500 acres,

one christian man between sixteen and sixty years of age perfect of limb, able and fitt for service who shall alsoe be continually provided with a well fixed musquett or fuzee, a good pistoll, s.harp simeter, tomahawk...<sup>8</sup>

In addition to providing soldiers to protect the frontier, the new colonists were required to build forts within two years:

with good sound pallisadoes at least thirteen foot long and six inches diameter in the middle of the length thereof, and set double and at least three foot within the ground.<sup>9</sup>

These frontier forts in Virginia with their wooden stockades and militia were the model for the frontier stations in Kentucky in the 1770s and 1780s and the family forts of the Missouri frontier of 1810. The strategy of forts and militia enabled Virginia to push the settlements forward into Indian country.

In a strangely perverse way, the interaction with the Indians may have been the formative factor in frontier life. The constant threat of Indian raids required that the independent and self-sufficient frontier family could not survive alone. Families would have to organize their lives with fortified stockades and militia to protect themselves and their neighbors. The massacres of 1622 and 1644 convinced the Virginians to settle in clusters and protect themselves. A frontier Indian incident in 1675 resulted in Bacon's Rebellion, the first organized and armed defiance of British authority by colonists in North America. The pattern of frontier forts and militia, developed in response to the seventeenth century Indian threat in Virginia, became the model for Kentucky and Tennessee in the eighteenth century and Missouri in the nineteenth century. The organization and cooperation that was essential for frontier survival also provided the basis for self-government as the newly-settled areas matured.

### Culpeper County

By the mid-eighteenth century, the western frontier of Virginia had advanced to the base of the Blue Ridge. The Shire of York, which dated from 1634, had been subdivided repeatedly into counties over the following century. Orange County, formed out of part of Spottsylvania County in 1734, was itself divided in May 1749. The area south of the Rapidan River, then called the Conway, remained in Orange County,

all that other part thereof, on the north side the said Rappahannock and Conway river commonly called the Fork of Rappahannock



River, shall be one other distinct County and called and known by the Name of Culpeper County.<sup>10</sup>

The area bounded by the Rapidan on the South, the Rappahannock on the North and the Blue Ridge on the West became Culpeper County.<sup>11</sup>

The new county was named for Thomas Lord Culpeper, second Baron Thoresway (1639-1689) who had served as Governor of Virginia from 1677 to 1683. Culpeper was the son of one of seven men who were rewarded for remaining loyal to the Stuarts after the execution of King Charles in 1649. The seven accompanied the Prince of Wales into exile in France where, in prolix gratitude,

Charles the Second by the grace of God King of England, Scotland and Ireland Defender of the faith...wee have taken into Our Royall Consideracon the great propagation of the Christian faith together with the wellfare of multitudes of Our Loyall Subjects by the undertakings and vigorous prosecution of Plantations in foreign parts, and particularly in our Dominions of America <sup>12</sup>

he granted the seven 1.5 million acres of land in North America. The land was described by the king's patent as,

lying in America, and bounded by, and within the heads of Tappahannocke als Rappahannocke and Quircough or Patawomecke Rivers, the Courses of the said Rivers and Chesapayoake Bay <sup>13</sup>

Known as the Northern Neck of Virginia, the royal grant included all the lands lying between the Rappahannock and Potomac Rivers from Chesapeake Bay to the "heads" of the rivers. Charles II was restored to the throne of England in 1660 and he confirmed the 1649 grant in September 1661. By 1681, Thomas Lord Culpeper had successfully acquired all but one of the shares from heirs of other patentees. When Culpeper's widow inherited the missing share in 1695, the Northern Neck proprietary was owned in its entirety by the Culpeper family.

Richard (King) Carter, a prosperous Virginia planter acting as resident agent for the proprietors, was able to expand the proprietary to 5.3 million acres by extending claims over the Blue Ridge to the Alleghenies encompassing what is now 24 counties in Virginia and West Virginia

including the county posthumously named for Lord Culpeper. Thomas, sixth Lord Fairfax, Baron of Cameron (1692-1781), the second Lord Culpeper's grandson, inherited the vast Culpeper lands which came to be called the Fairfax proprietary.<sup>14</sup>

St. Mark's Parish, organized in 1731, was located in that part of Orange County which became Culpeper County in 1749. Until 1752, when Bromfield Parish was established, all of Culpeper County was in St. Mark's Parish. In later years, additional counties were formed out of the original Culpeper County. In 1793, the western part of Culpeper County became the new Madison County and in 1833, the northwest part of Culpeper County was organized as Rappahannock County.<sup>15</sup>

At the same time that Culpeper County was being formed, the Cooper family was beginning to leave a record in county life.<sup>16</sup> On August 23, 1749, Lord Fairfax granted 400 acres of Culpeper County land to John Cooper.<sup>17</sup> In March 1750, John J. Cooper was a witness to a land transaction in which Anthony Scott gave 105 acres of land to his daughter Elizabeth and her husband Thomas Corbin.<sup>18</sup> In May 1750, John Smith sold part of his land on the north side of the north branch of Gourd Vine River to Abraham Cooper, a carpenter, for 25 pounds.<sup>19</sup> In November 1750, John Cooper and his wife Judith traded 300 acres of the Fairfax land to John Smith in exchange for 300 acres on the south side of the north fork of the Gourd Vine River. The land on the Gourd Vine was adjacent to a line separating the property of John Smith and Abraham Cooper.<sup>20</sup>

In September 1752, Abraham Cooper was a witness when Anthony Scott gave 80 acres to his grandson Richard Burke.<sup>21</sup> When Anthony Scott died in 1764, his will left his books to his son and his plantation and lands to his wife Jane. In the event that Jane Scott died, remarried or left the plantation, the son was to inherit the land and Scott's daughter Frances, the wife of Abraham Cooper, was to inherit other property. Each of Scott's two other daughters received one shilling. Francis Cooper was a witness when Anthony Scott's will was admitted to probate in 1764.<sup>22</sup> It is

unclear how John and Judith Cooper, Abraham and Frances Cooper and Francis Cooper are related except that they were landowners in the same Gourd Vine River area of north-central Culpeper County and were involved in business dealings with Abraham Cooper's father-in-law Anthony Scott during the 1750s.

Francis Cooper and his wife, whose name is not known, established a household in Culpeper County in the early 1750s. In January 1756, Francis Cooper's wife gave birth to their first son Benjamin A Cooper (1756-1841).<sup>23</sup> Later that year, Francis Cooper served in the Culpeper County militia. He was one of 53 foot soldiers in the company formed in March 1756 under the command of Lt. Col. William Russell and Capt. William Brown.<sup>24</sup> Francis Cooper served 95 days with the Culpeper troops defending the Virginia frontier during the French and Indian War.<sup>25</sup>

In May 1761, Francis Cooper purchased land in Culpeper County from John and Elizabeth McQueen for 30 pounds. The land was in St. Mark's Parish and was located "on a stoney point corner to Richard Tutt, Gent. in John Yancey's line...in Alexander McQueen's line..."<sup>26</sup> In addition to their oldest son Benjamin, Francis Cooper and his wife had several other children including a son Sarshel (1763-1815), as well as at least two other sons and several daughters including one named Betty, who married James Wood.<sup>27</sup> Francis Cooper continued to live in Culpeper County until the Revolutionary War and served in Lord Dunmore's War in 1774.

During this period, Culpeper County had a small number of large plantations, like the 20,000 acres owned by Robert Beverly and the 13,000 acres of Capt. John Strother, and a large number of small and medium-sized farms. In 1764, there were 63 plantations exceeding 1,000 acres and more than 700 farms between 100 and 400 acres. The smaller farms had a log farm house, typically sixteen by twenty feet with a gable roof, surrounded by fields, pastures, orchards and wooded areas. Since plows were not available until late in the eighteenth century, the Culpeper farmer of this period used hoes and other hand tools to grow corn, winter and summer wheat and tobacco. Crops

were grown among the stumps of recently-cleared woods and rotated between grains and pasture as land-productivity declined. The large land owners, using slave labor, planted tobacco and allowed fields to lay fallow when productivity declined.<sup>28</sup>

### French and Indian War

French claims in North America were based on the explorations of Giovanni de Verrazano, a Florentine working for the French king. Verrazano explored the Atlantic coast in 1524 and Jacques Cartier sailed up the St. Lawrence River in 1535-1536. From 1608, when they established an outpost at Quebec, the French had a strong interest in the interior of the North American continent. In 1673, Louis Jolliet and Father Jacques Marquette traveled down the Mississippi River to the Arkansas. Nine years later, Robert Cavalier, Sieur de la Salle explored the Mississippi to the Gulf of Mexico. In April 1682, La Salle claimed the vast area drained by the Mississippi River,

In the name of the most high, mighty, invincible, and victorious  
Prince, Louis the Great, by the grace of God, King of France and of  
Navarre, Fourteenth of that name...<sup>29</sup>

He was uncertain whether the river was Colbert or Mississippi but he called the land Louisiana. By the early part of the eighteenth century, the French had established outposts in the Illinois country at Kaskaskia, Cahokia and Vincennes as well as Gulf coast settlements at Biloxi (1699) and Mobile (1702).

While the French were exploring the North American interior and establishing remote outposts, they were also engaged in intermittent continental warfare with the British and other European countries for nearly a century. The wars of the Old World were named like hurricanes in the New World. The War of the League of Augsburg (1689-1697) was King William's War, and the War of Spanish Succession (1702-1713) was Queen Anne's War. The War of Austrian Succession (1740-1748) was known as King George's War in North America. Each of the European

wars was accompanied by frontier skirmishes in North America. In most cases, Indians under the direction of the French engaged the frontier settlers of the British.

In King William's War, the French and their Indian allies raided the isolated farms along the frontier in Connecticut, Massachusetts and New Hampshire. In Queen Anne's War, the French and Indian attacks in Maine resulted in the killing or capture of 160 farmers and their families and the placing of a bounty of 40 pounds on each Indian scalp. In February 1704, 250 Canadians and Indians attacked the frontier town of Deerfield, Massachusetts where fifty townspeople were killed, 111 captured and seventeen houses destroyed. Nearly half of the captured townspeople, most of them women and children, never returned. By King George's War, forty years later, the British colonies in New England were stronger and better organized. The colonies sent 4000 troops to Cape Breton Island where the "Bastonais" captured the strongly-defended Louisbourg fortress after a siege of six weeks.<sup>30</sup>

By 1748, the population of the English colonies in North America had grown to 1.5 million. The pressures of population growth were pushing the colonists against the mountain barriers and into the Indian territory claimed by the French. After the Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle in 1748, the French remained in control of the interior wilderness. The French strengthened fortifications and their alliances with the Indians along the Appalachian frontier. At the same time, colonists along the Atlantic coast were looking for ways to establish land claims west of the mountains. In 1747, a group of Virginia venture capitalists formed the Ohio Company of Virginia and two years later obtained a grant of 200,000 acres of land between the Appalachian mountains and the Ohio River.

In 1754, a young George Washington (1732-1799) was sent with Virginia militia to build a fort at the Forks of the Ohio, present-day Pittsburgh, to protect the Virginia claims. Finding that the French had erected Fort Duquesne at the forks and controlled the area, Washington and his outnumbered Virginians surrendered and were allowed to return to their homes over the mountains.

The following year, the British dispatched Maj. Gen. Edward Braddock and two army regiments to capture the Forks of the Ohio. With 1500 regular soldiers and 1200 colonial militia, Braddock's army cut a road over the mountains and through the wilderness. On July 9, 1755, the French and Indians surprised Braddock's army on the Monongahela River seven miles from the fort. The British and their provincial allies were decisively defeated in a battle in which Braddock was killed and 976 of his troops were killed or wounded.

The defeat of Braddock's army, along with British failure to capture French forts at Crown Point and Niagara left the French and their Indian allies in unchallenged control of the wilderness and able to organize strikes at any point along the frontier. George Washington, who had served as a volunteer aide-de-camp to Braddock in the ill-fated campaign, wrote soon after the battle,

I tremble at the consequence that this defeat may have upon our back settlers, who I suppose will all leave their habitation's unless their are proper measures taken for their security.<sup>31</sup>

Col. James Innes, the commanding officer at a fort on the Virginia frontier, wrote an open letter, "I have this minute received the melancholy account of the Defeat of our Troops ...it's highly necessary to raise the Militia everywhere to defend the Frontiers."<sup>32</sup>

Robert Dinwiddie, the Lieutenant Governor of Virginia, anticipating a French and Indian invasion, called out the militia in three frontier counties and alerted the militia in nine adjacent counties. In August 1755, when the frontier militia proved ineffective, the Virginia General Assembly authorized a war tax and the formation of a Virginia regiment of 1200 troops to protect the frontier. Governor Dinwiddie appointed George Washington, then but twenty-three years old, Colonel of the Regiment and Commander-in-Chief of the militia.<sup>33</sup> The precocious Commander-in-Chief arrived on the frontier in September where he found that approximately 70 settlers had been killed in Indian raids. By October, the Indians had withdrawn and Washington was able to use the

winter respite to construct four small forts along the 100 mile frontier in the Shenandoah Valley between the Blue Ridge and the Allegheny Mountains.<sup>34</sup>

In March 1756, Indians and their French allies resumed their attacks along the Virginia frontier. Pioneer families, who had been uprooted the previous summer, again abandoned their farms and moved into forts for protection. Realizing that the tiny Virginia Regiment was inadequate, Washington again appealed for assistance from the militia of nearby counties. In April 1756, Governor Dinwiddie, concerned about the possibility of a slave revolt, mobilized half the militia in the eleven Piedmont counties, a total force of 4000 including half the militia from Culpeper County. Dinwiddie wrote the militia commander in Orange County,

The Colo. of the Co'ty of Culpeper must take charge of the militia till a Co'ty Lieut. is appointed. I am well pleas'd y't You took some Powder and Ball out of w't I sent up, and I hope you will be able to supply Culpeper with some of it.<sup>35</sup>

While the Governor was calling out the militia, Washington was also requesting assistance from the nearby counties. He wrote Lord Fairfax,

I advise (if you have not already done it) you would send immediately to Culpeper, with Orders to raise and send such a number of men as you shall judge can be spared from thence; with such Arms, Ammunition, and provision as they can procure; for we are illy supplied with either here.<sup>36</sup>

Washington was disappointed when only fifteen men, some of them unfit for duty, arrived at Winchester by the appointed day.<sup>37</sup>

Two weeks later, still with no sign of the militia, the young colonel was becoming desperate. He wrote the Governor,

Desolation and murder still increase, and no prospects of relief. The Blue Ridge is now our frontier, no men being left in this County except a few that keep close with a number of women and children in forts, which they have erected for the purpose. There are now no militia in this County; when there were, they could not be brought to action.<sup>38</sup>

Within days, the militia from nearby counties began to arrive on the frontier. The first troops appeared from Fairfax County on April 29 followed quickly by units from Prince William County and King George County.

By May 9, Col. Thomas Slaughter approached with 200 militiamen from Culpeper County, including presumably Lt. Col. William Russell's company with Capt. William Brown and Francis Cooper.<sup>39</sup> Washington, suddenly finding himself with more troops than he could use, ordered the Culpeper militia to stop on the road. According to information Washington had received, the Culpeper militia was poorly armed. He wrote, "they had not above 50 Firelocks in the whole."<sup>40</sup> Colonel Slaughter responded that, on the contrary, the 200 Culpeper troops had at least 80 guns.<sup>41</sup> Within a few days, militia from three additional counties joined Washington's troops at Winchester. As the Virginia militia assembled, the Indians who had been harassing the frontier vanished into the wilderness whence they had come.

Although the immediate Indian threat had abated, Washington knew that the calm was only temporary and that the Valley of Virginia could not be defended without fortifications and a reliable, disciplined militia. Instead of releasing the militia so they could return to their homes for spring planting, Washington decided to use the militia to build fortifications. Many members of the militia deserted while others refused orders. As Washington observed, the militia acted as though, they had "performed a sufficient tour of duty by marching to Winchester."<sup>42</sup> To improve morale, Washington increased the daily food ration for his troops from a pound of meat and pound of flour to a pound and a quarter of each and dismissed some of the most troublesome militia. To improve discipline and reduce desertion, Washington ordered the execution of a deserter and a Sergeant who had acted with cowardice in battle.<sup>43</sup>

The remaining militiamen, including much of the Culpeper militia, were assigned to building a chain of what eventually became 81 forts and blockhouses on the Virginia frontier.<sup>44</sup> The



militiamen from Culpeper were assigned to forts near Winchester for several weeks before being released to return to their homes in Culpeper County. A detachment of Culpeper militia under Capt. Williams Brown remained on the frontier through the winter of 1756-1757 and built a fort at Patterson's Creek. For the next several years, Culpeper and adjacent counties sent militia each spring to strengthen the frontier in Winchester and Frederick County.<sup>45</sup>

The hostilities had been underway for two years before England declared war against France in 1756 for the fourth time in less than seventy years.<sup>46</sup> As Francis Parkman described it, the French Governor in Canada "had turned loose his savages, red and white, along a frontier of 600 miles, to waste, bum, and murder at will."<sup>47</sup> In August 1758, Brig. Gen. John Forbes, with a slow-moving army of 6000, began building a wagon road over the mountains toward the French fort at the Forks of the Ohio. Forbes' army, with George Washington as a division commander, ponderously advanced through the wilderness and captured a weakened Fort Duquesne in late November 1758.

Although the war began in the Ohio River Valley, the battleground shifted to Canada where, in 1758, the British captured French forts at both ends of the St. Lawrence River and defeated the French on the Plains of Abraham in 1759. The Treaty of Paris ending the war in 1763 resulted in British control of all of the area east of the Mississippi River and cession of the area west of the river, called Louisiana, to Spain.

### The Proclamation Line of 1763

British victory in the Seven Year's War, known as the French and Indian War in North America, assured that the wilderness between the colonies on the Atlantic seaboard and the Mississippi River, an area that had been under French control for nearly one hundred years, would now be under British jurisdiction. The British were uncertain about how to administer this interior wilderness of Indians, French traders and colonial land claims. The British received conflicting

advice from those who wanted to maintain the wilderness and those who wanted to open the area to settlers or land speculators.

At the same time that Forbes and his army were building the wagon road that enabled the British to capture the Forks of the Ohio in 1758, George Croghan, a respected Indian trader, was representing the British in negotiations with Ohio Indians. In an effort to win the Indians to the British side, Croghan gave assurances, as part of the Treaty of Easton, that the British would reserve the lands west of the mountains for the Indians.<sup>48</sup> In 1761, Col. Henry Bouquet, the British commander in the West, reassured the Indians about the wartime promise by issuing an unequivocal order that prohibited "...any of His Majesty's subjects to Settle or Hunt to the West of the Alleghany Mountains on any Pretense Whatsoever."<sup>49</sup>

The commitments that Croghan had made to the Indians in 1758 and Bouquet had confirmed in 1761 were given royal authority on October 7, 1763, when King George III issued a proclamation forbidding land grants, purchase of Indian lands or settlement west of the Appalachian mountains:

Whereas we have taken into our royal consideration the extensive and valuable acquisitions in America, secured to our Crown by the late definitive treaty of peace concluded at Paris...And we do further declare it to be our royal will and pleasure, for the present as aforesaid, to reserve under our sovereignty, protection and dominion, for the use of the said Indians...all the lands and territories lying to the westward of the sources of the rivers which fall into the sea from the west and northwest...all persons whatever, who have either willfully or inadvertently seated themselves upon any lands within the countries above described, or upon any other lands which, not having been ceded to or purchased by us, are still reserved to the said Indians, as aforesaid, forthwith to remove themselves from such settlements.so

The objective of the royal proclamation was to reassure the Indians while containing the colonists east of the mountains. It prohibited settlement or land purchase west of the mountains and required all western settlers to move east of the line. The boundary was a logical physical barrier. It was

easily described and easily understood but it was inadequate to restrain those people in the colonies who had designs on the West.

George Washington, who had been exploring and claiming western lands for a decade, expressed the attitude of many colonists,

I can never look upon that proclamation in any other light (but I say this among ourselves) than as a temporary expedient to quiet the minds of the Indians and must fall of course in a few years especially when those Indians are consenting to our occupying their lands. Any person therefore who neglects the present opportunity of hunting out good lands...will never regain it...<sup>51</sup>

Always cautious, Washington asked his agent to keep his opinion confidential, "I might be censured for the opinion I have given in respect to the King's proclamation."<sup>52</sup> The Proclamation Line was frequently and broadly violated by settlers and land speculators. The British, although they had reduced their military presence in North America to save money, attempted to enforce the line. British soldiers forcibly evicted settlers west of the line, burning cabins and scattering livestock.

In 1768, the British and Iroquois met at Fort Stanwix to adjust the line. The British obtained land west of the mountains to the Ohio River from Fort Pitt to the Kanawha River. In exchange, the British agreed to retrocede lands occupied by the Iroquois east of the crest. The British paid the Iroquois 10,000 pounds for the lands west of the crest. The lands which the British bought from the Iroquois were occupied by the Shawnee, Delaware and Mingo, who were neither consulted nor compensated by either the British or the Iroquois. The Iroquois, as part of a strategic plan to direct the flow of settlement away from Iroquois lands, had offered to give up lands which the Iroquois claimed but did not use south of the Ohio River. The British accepted the limited cession while reaffirming the Proclamation Line along the frontier in the South.<sup>53</sup> By 1768, 160 years after the first English colony in Virginia, the first pioneers were spilling over the natural and political barrier at the crest of the mountains.

### Early Frontier Notes

1. Captain John Smith, The Generall Historie of Virginia. New England & The Summer Isles, Vol. I (Glasgow, 1907), p. 43, originally published 1624.
2. Dale Van Every points out that the Cabeza de Vaca expedition of 1528-1536 was the first to cross what is now the United States. The second crossing was by Lewis and Clark 269 years later. Dale Van Every, Ark of Empire (New York, 1963), p. 63n.
3. A Grove Day, Coronado's Quest: The Discovery of the American Southwest (Honolulu, 1986).
4. Louis B. Wright and Elaine W. Fowler, editors, West and By North (New York, 1971), p. 169, originally published 1628 in The World Encompassed by Sir Francis Drake. A "plate of brass" was discovered in Marin County, California in 1936 and is displayed by the Bancroft Library at the University of California. After extensive examination, the Bancroft Library has concluded that the "plate" is a clever twentieth century forgery and not Drake's plate from 1579.
5. The exploration and settlement of North America is described in every survey of American history. The textbook The National Experience by John M. Blum and five other distinguished historians (New York, 1963) is among the best. The explorations and settlement of the frontier are recounted in Ray Allen Billington, Westward Expansion: A History of the American Frontier (New York, 1967).
6. W. Stitt Robinson, The Southern Colonial Frontier. 1607-1763 (Albuquerque, New Mexico, 1979), pp. 22-50.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 61-65.
8. Frederick Jackson Turner, The Frontier in American History (New York, 1921), p. 86.
9. *Ibid.*
10. Journal of the House of Burgess, May 10, 1749 in Eugene M. Schell, Culpeper: A Virginia County's History Through 1920 (Culpeper, 1982), p. 28.
11. John S. Hale, An Historical Atlas of Colonial Virginia (Verona, Virginia, 1978); Catherine Linsay Knorr, Marriages of Culpeper County, Virginia 1781-1815 (Pine Bluff, Arkansas, 1954). Culpeper, Virginia is 72 miles southwest of Washington, D.C. in the gently-rolling hills of the Virginia piedmont. From Washington, take I-66 west 33 miles to Gainesville and US 29 south 39 miles, through Warrenton to Culpeper.
12. Douglas Southall Freeman, George Washington: A Biography (New York, 1948), Volume I, Appendix 1-2, pp. 513-519. The original copy of the 1649 patent is Additional Charter 13585 in the British Museum.

13. Ibid. The seven original proprietors were Ralph Lord Hopton, Baron of Stratton; Henry Lord Germyn, Baron of St. Edmundsbury; John Lord Culpeper, Baron of Thoresway; Sir John Berkeley; Sir William Morton; Sir Dudley Wyatt; Thomas Culpeper, Esq.
14. Ibid., pp. 447-513. In a lengthy appendix to volume one of George Washington, Freeman reviews the history of the Northern Neck proprietary. The proprietary comprised most of what is now the Virginia counties of Alexandria, Clarke, Culpeper, Fairfax, Fauquier, Frederick, King George, Lancaster, Loudon, Madison, Northumberland, Page, Prince William, Richmond, Shenandoah, Stafford, Warren and Westmoreland as well as the West Virginia counties of Berkeley, Hardy, Jefferson and Morgan. Charles A Hanna, The Scotch-Irish, Vol. II (Baltimore, 1968), p. 44. Raleigh Travers Green, Genealogical and Historical Notes on Culpeper County. Virginia (Baltimore, 1983), p. 1, originally published 1900, adds Hampton County but omits Alexandria, Clarke and Warren Counties.
15. Hale, Atlas of Colonial Virginia.
16. No earlier record has been found of the arrival of these Cooper families in North America. A century later, Cooper was the 26th most common surname in England. Because it is a "trade" name like Miller or Taylor, the Cooper name is not confined to any particular region of England. Hanna, The Scotch-Irish, Vol. II, p. 420.
17. John Frederick Dorman, compiler, Culpeper County Virginia Deeds, Vol. One 1749-1755 (Washington, D.C., 1975), p. 20.
18. Ibid., p. 23.
19. Ibid., p. 14.
20. Ibid., p. 20.
21. Ibid., p. 41.
22. John Frederick Dorman, compiler Culpeper County, Virginia, Will Book A, 1749-1770 (Washington, D.C., 1956), pp. 96-97. Francis Cooper may have been unable to write since he signed his mark when he was a witness for the probate of the Scott will in 1764.
23. Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty Land Warrant Application Files, National Archives, Washington, D.C., application filed February 25, 1833, at Saline County, Missouri by Benjamin A Cooper. Pension record S 16722. Cooper reported he was born January 25, 1756 in Culpeper County, Virginia. Alice Kinyon Houts, editor, Revolutionary Soldiers Buried in Missouri (Kansas City, 1966), p. 59 uses the date January 25, 1753 but adds 1756 parenthetically. Dorothy Ford Wulfeck, Marriages of Some Virginia Residents, 1607-1800, Vol. I (Baltimore, 1986), p. 148, relying on Daughters of the American Revolution records (DAR No. 47-226) uses the 1756 date. Benjamin Cooper later played a prominent role on the frontier in Kentucky and Missouri.

In an 1889 interview with frontier historian Lyman Draper, Stephen Cooper, a son of Sarshel and grandson of Francis, called his grandfather "Frank", (Draper MSS 11 C 98). The surviving eighteenth century records, all of them official documents, uniformly use Francis.

Historians of the frontier are deeply in debt to the energy and foresight of Lyman Copeland Draper (1815-1891). Draper became interested in the history of the Trans-Allegheny West as a college student and devoted most of his adult life to collecting documents and interviewing pioneers and their descendants. The 500 volume Draper collection of records, letters and field notes of 1200 interviews are at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin in Madison, where Draper served as Secretary for 32 years. The Draper manuscript collection is also available on microfilm at other research libraries. Josephine L. Harper, Guide to the Draper Manuscripts (Madison, Wisconsin, 1983).

24. Militia rosters in Henings Statutes at Large in William Armstrong Crozier, editor, Virginia Colonial Militia (New York, 1905), p. 58. A grandson of Francis Cooper recalled in 1868 that the Coopers were related to the Russell's of Culpeper County. He believed that his grandmother Cooper had been a Russell. Joseph Cooper, Draper MSS 23S137.
25. Lloyd DeWitt Bockstruck, Virginia's Colonial Soldiers (Baltimore, 1988), p. 162, from the Journal of the House of Burgesses. Capt. Brown served 95 days and Lt. Col. Russell served 16 days. It is unlikely that the Culpeper militia engaged in combat during the spring of 1756.
26. John Frederick Dorman, editor, Culpeper County. Virginia Deeds, Volume Two, 1755-1762, p. 64. The 1761 transaction is recorded in Deed Book C, pp. 489-491.
27. The birth date of Sarshel Cooper was reported by Joseph Cooper in Draper MSS 23S124 and the death by Stephen Cooper in Draper MSS 11C1 04 and Mary E. Cavanaugh in Draper MSS 23S251 (see also Chapter 4 of Part II below.) Jesse Morrison reported that there were four Cooper brothers in Missouri in Draper MSS 30C89. (Morrison included Braxton Cooper, a younger brother of Benjamin and Sarshel.) Stephen Cooper described Betty Cooper Wood in Draper MSS 11C101 and mentioned that there were several children in Draper MSS 11C98.
28. Schell, Culpeper History. p. 37. During this period Colonel Richard Tutt, a St. Mark's Parish neighbor of Francis Cooper owned more than 3000 acres in Culpeper County.
29. Samuel Eliot Morrison, editor, The Parkman Reader (Boston, 1955), p. 281, as quoted in Francis Parkman's LaSalle and the Discovery of the Great West, originally published 1869.
30. Morrison, Parkman Reader, pp. 360-433. The "Sack of Deerfield" and two chapters on the siege and capture of Louisbourg are from Parkman's A Half Century of Conflict, originally published 1892. The fort at Louisbourg was returned to the French as part of the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle ending the war.
31. George Washington letter of July 8, 1755 to Robert Dinwiddie in Ralph K. Andrist, editor, George Washington (New York, 1972), p. 56.

32. James Innes letter of July 11, 1755 to "all whom this may concern" in Freeman, George Washington Vol. II, pp. 84-85.
33. Hayes Baker-Crothers, Virginia and the French and Indian War (Chicago, 1928), pp. 82-100 and Freeman, George Washington, Vol. II, pp. 106-114. After 1705, the resident Governor of Virginia had the official title lieutenant governor.
34. *Ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 115-168.
35. Robert Dinwiddie letter of August 20, 1755 to John Spotswood in Schell, Culpeper History. p. 33.
36. George Washington letter of April 1756 to Thomas Lord Fairfax, *Ibid.*
37. Freeman, George Washington, Vol. II, p. 174.
38. George Washington letter of April 27, 1756 to Robert Dinwiddie, *Ibid.*, p. 182.
39. *Ibid.*, pp. 171-174.
40. George Washington letter of May 9, 1756 to Robert Dinwiddie in Schell, Culpeper History. p. 33.
41. Freeman, George Washington, Vol. II, p. 185.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 187.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 192.
44. Robinson, Southern Colonial Frontier, pp. 215-217.
45. Schell, Culpeper History. p. 34.
46. Great Britain declared war May 17, 1756. News of the declaration reached Williamsburg August 7 and the Virginia frontier August 15. Freeman, George Washington, Vol. II, pp. 204-205.
47. Morrison, Parkman Reader, p. 482, from Parkman's Montcalm and Wolfe, originally published 1884.
48. Dale Van Every, Forth to the Wilderness, (New York, 1961) pp. 94-98.
49. Baker-Crothers, Virginia and the French and Indian War, p. 157.
50. W. Keith Kavenagh, editor, Foundations of Colonial America: A Documentary History. (New York, 1973), pp. 2340-2344.

51. George Washington letter of September 21, 1767 to William Crawford in Freeman, George Washington, Vol. III, p. 189.
52. Ibid., p. 190.
53. Van Every, ~~Earth to the Wilderness~~, pp. 276-286.





CHAPTER TWO  
THE FRONTIER BEFORE THE  
REVOLUTIONARY WAR, 1763-1775

Europe extends to the  
Alleghanies; America lies  
beyond.

Ralph Waldo Emerson<sup>1</sup>

During the first 150 years of the colonial period, settlements had remained clustered along the Atlantic seacoast, the coastal plains and the navigable rivers. During this period, the frontier advanced westward at a rate of approximately one mile a year as newcomers, some of them immigrants, and some young adults crowded out of the farms and towns where they had been raised, cleared land and established farms on the edge of settled areas. This incremental advance was deflected by physical barriers or by Indian claims but was generally westward toward the 1300 mile long mountain range on the horizon. In the middle of the eighteenth century, the rate of advance suddenly accelerated as the pioneers flowed down the Valley of Virginia and surged through the mountains on the roads to Pittsburgh constructed by Braddock and Forbes. Although the royal proclamation of 1763 prohibited settlement beyond the mountains, the pioneers were poised to leap the barriers and move west.

Early Settlement in Tennessee

The wilderness over the mountains from North Carolina which later became Tennessee was first explored by Europeans in 1540 during Hernando de Soto's expedition through the southeast. By 1740, Tennessee was visited regularly by long hunters and Indian traders from Virginia and North Carolina. As late as 1768, a traveler described what is now northeastern Tennessee as "nothing but a howling wilderness."<sup>2</sup> On his return through the same area in 1769, the traveler found pioneers clearing land and building cabins. William Bean, with others from Pittsylvania County, Virginia, were

locating on the Watauga River, a tributary of the Holston, in the corner of Tennessee near the Virginia-North Carolina boundary. The 1769 settlement at Watauga was west of the 1763 Proclamation Line but was in a small area that the Cherokee ceded to the British as part of the 1770 Treaty of Lochaber. Within the next few years, hundreds of people from Virginia and North Carolina were moving to Watauga. Some of these were Regulators from the Piedmont region of North Carolina whose armed protest against the colonial government had been crushed at the Battle of Alamance in May 1771.<sup>3</sup>

During 1770 and 1771, pioneers from Virginia and North Carolina established four tiny communities in the mountain valleys at the southwest corner of Virginia. The Watauga settlement was around Sycamore Shoals, present-day Elizabethton, Tennessee. In 1770, Evan Shelby built a station at Sapling Grove on the North Holston near present-day Bristol along the Tennessee-Virginia border. John Carter settled at Carter's Valley, immediately west of the Holston, while Jacob Brown established a fourth community south of Watauga on the Nolichucky River in 1771. The Watauga settlers had believed that they were locating in Virginia and expected to "hold their lands by their improvements as first settlers."<sup>4</sup>

When a 1771 survey found that all the Watauga settlements except North Holston were outside Virginia on Indian land, the Wataugans were,

...disappointed and being too inconveniently situated to remove back and feeling an unwillingness to loose the labor bestowed on their plantations they applied to the Cherokee Indians and leased the land for a term of ten years.<sup>5</sup>

In 1772, the settlers adopted Written Articles of Association in which they established procedures for self-government. These written articles have not survived but the Watauga Association of 1772, on the remote frontier, was the first independent government established by the governed in North America.<sup>6</sup> By 1774, the settlements on the Virginia-Tennessee-North Carolina border were able to

raise four militia companies to march to the Ohio River as part of the army assembled in Lord Dunmore's War.<sup>7</sup>

The following year, although the Royal Proclamation remained in effect, settlers and land speculators intensified their efforts to secure land claims across the mountains. Judge Richard Henderson of North Carolina formed the Transylvania Land Company and negotiated to purchase land from the Cherokee. In the Treaty of Sycamore Shoals, Henderson paid 10,000 pounds to acquire a huge parcel of land reaching to the Ohio River and including much of what is now central Kentucky and north-central Tennessee. With the Cherokee in a mood to sell, the Watauga settlers bought the land they had leased since 1772. The Watauga purchase, completed March 19, 1775, included 2,000 square miles of land on the Watauga and New Rivers. A few days later, Jacob Brown bought a parcel of land, nearly as large as the Watauga purchase, along the Nolichucky River.<sup>8</sup> Not all the Cherokee shared the enthusiasm for land sales. According to legend, Dragging Canoe, the son of a respected Cherokee chief, ominously described the area purchased as a "dark and bloody" land.<sup>9</sup>

### Early Settlement in Kentucky

In the Spring of 1750, Thomas Walker, a physician and surveyor, and five companions traveled from their Virginia homes into the wilderness that would later be called Kentucky. Walker and his party, following the route that the Kentucky pioneers would use a quarter century later, crossed the gap in the Appalachian Mountains they named for the Duke of Cumberland. The party also named a river for the Duke and erected a small cabin, the first in Kentucky, at a location they called "Walker's Settlement." Ambrose Powell, a member of the Walker party and later surveyor of Culpeper County, Virginia, left his own name on one of the rivers they crossed. Walker's party retraced their route and returned to their Virginia homes in July 1750.<sup>10</sup>

Long hunters from Virginia and North Carolina began to visit Kentucky on extended hunting expeditions beginning in the mid 1760's. Daniel Boone (1734-1820) settled first on the Yadkin River frontier of North Carolina. In 1760-1762, when Indian attacks made the Yadkin untenable, Boone moved to Culpeper County, Virginia where he lived for two years and found work driving tobacco wagons.<sup>11</sup> In May 1769, Boone led a party of five long hunters through Cumberland Gap into Kentucky. The hunting party, with some changes in personnel, remained in Kentucky two years despite being captured twice by Indians. When Richard Henderson negotiated the purchase of Kentucky as a part of the Treaty of Sycamore Shoals in March 1775, he immediately engaged Boone to hire a company of men to build a road over the mountains to Kentucky. By early April, Boone and thirty men had blazed the narrow foot trail 200 miles over Cumberland Gap to the Kentucky River where they built Fort Boonesborough. Boone's Trace of 1775, with minor variations, became the Wilderness Road followed by emigrants to Kentucky for twenty years.

#### Lord Dunmore's War

By the early 1770s, the conflicts between Indians and settlers had intensified on the wilderness frontier that Virginia and neighboring colonies claimed. A growing population in the settled areas of Pennsylvania, Virginia and North Carolina was pressing against the natural barriers of the Appalachian mountains and jeopardizing political agreements with the Indians. The fundamental conflict was between the settlers who saw wilderness as something to be cleared and cultivated and the Indians who saw wilderness as something to be left undisturbed. In this early environmental conflict, the developers were pitted against the preservationists.

The interests of the settlers in new and cheap western lands coincided with the interests of powerful land speculators, including patriots like Benjamin Franklin and George Washington as well as British officials like Lord Dunmore, the royal governor of Virginia. The Indian interest in keeping the wilderness undisturbed coincided with the interests of trappers, traders and British policies to

protect the Indians and prevent the formation of coalitions against the British. The Proclamation Line of 1763 and several subsequent boundaries had proven ineffective in restraining the settlers or protecting western lands for the Indians and the Crown.

John Murray, 4th Earl of Dunmore Viscount Fincastle, Baron Murray of Blair, of Monlin, and of Tillimet (1732-1809), was appointed governor of Virginia by the king in 1771. Lord Dunmore quickly recognized the independent spirit of the colonial pioneer. As he later wrote to his superiors in London:

I have learnt from experience that the established authority of any government in America, and the policy of Government at home, are both insufficient to restrain the Americans; and that they do and will remove as their avidity and restlessness excite them. They acquire no attachment to Place; But wandering about Seems engrafted in their Nature;...they do not conceive that Government has any right to forbid their taking possession of a Vast tract of a country either uninhabited or which Serves only as a Shelter to a few Scattered Tribes of Indians. Nor can they be easily brought to entertain any belief of the permanent obligations of Treaties made with those People, whom they consider as but little removed from the brute Creation.<sup>12</sup>

Apart from his private interests as a land speculator, Lord Dunmore was also responsible for maintaining British authority in the midst of the fractious and energetic colonists. In addition, he wanted to protect the land in the West that Virginia claimed from the competing claims of other colonies including Pennsylvania and North Carolina.

The Shawnee had once lived along the Cumberland River in Kentucky. After their conquest by the Iroquois, the Shawnee moved north across the Ohio River to the Scioto Valley where they built towns. Although they lived in what is now Ohio, the Shawnee continued to hunt in the wilds of Kentucky where they encountered growing indications of exploration and settlement. Fierce and proud, the Shawnee had been infuriated by the arrogance of the Iroquois who, to protect their own lands, had sold lands occupied and used by the Shawnee as part of the Treaty of Fort Stanwix. The Shawnee attempted to persuade other tribes to join them in attacking the settlements. Only the

Mingo, an Iroquois band living in Ohio, shared the Shawnee vision of a confederated Indian campaign to enforce treaty rights.<sup>13</sup>

While the reluctance of the Indians to unify allowed the settlements to spread, conflict was inevitable. The Indians trying to maintain their traditional rights and the settlers trying to expand their claims were on a collision course as they had been since the 1622 attacks on the settlers on the James River of Virginia and as they would be for another century until the massacre at Wounded Knee in 1890. In response to increasing incidents between Indians and colonists, Lord Dunmore appointed John Connolly, Captain of the Virginia militia. In April 1774, Connolly responded to the murder of some traders in Indian territory with an open letter warning that the Indians were on the warpath.<sup>14</sup> Needing little encouragement, the settlers responded with unprovoked attacks on Indians.

By June 1774, Lord Dunmore had concluded that the situation on the Virginia frontier was deteriorating and that an organized military campaign would be necessary. In a letter to his country lieutenants calling out the militia, Lord Dunmore reported,

...hopes of a pacification can be no longer entertained, and that these People will by no means be diverted from their design of falling upon the back parts of this Country and Committing all the outrages and devastations which will be in their power to effect.<sup>15</sup>

Dunmore notified the militia leaders to mobilize their troops for local defense or to advance with other units, suggesting the strategic potential of a fort on the Ohio River at the mouth of the Kanawha River. Dunmore also advised that it might be useful to erect small forts on the frontier to protect the settlers while the main body of militia was campaigning elsewhere.

John Connolly quickly issued another proclamation inflaming passions,

...the Shawanese have perpetrated several murders upon the inhabitants of this county which has involved this promising settlement in the most calamitous distress.<sup>16</sup>

Needing little provocation, the settlers went on the warpath. They attacked Indians wherever they encountered them including the brutal massacre of the family of the friendly and peaceful Mingo Chief John Logan. The patient Logan, severely provoked, retaliated, explaining in an eloquent letter,

What did you kill my people on Yellow Creek for. The white People killed my kin at Coneestoga a great while ago, & I thought [nothing of that.] But you killed my kin again...then I thought I must kill too...the Indians is not Angry only myself.<sup>17</sup>

But the conflict was much larger than Logan and his personal revenge.

On July 12, Lord Dunmore ordered Andrew Lewis (1720-1781), the militia commander to call out volunteers for a campaign against the Ohio Indians,

...by no means to wait any longer for them to Attack you, but to raise all the Men you think willing and Able, & go down immediately to the mouth of the great Kanhaway and there build a Fort, and if you think you have force enough (that are willing to follow you) to proceed directly to their Towns & if possible destroy their Towns & Magazines and distress them in every other way that is possible.<sup>18</sup>

Lewis assembled three Virginia regiments and four independent companies at "The Big Levels of the Greenbriar" where the Virginians built Fort Union at the site of present-day Lewisburg, West Virginia. In addition to troops from the settled areas of Virginia, Lewis' command included militia companies from the settlements on the Virginia-Tennessee border under the command of Evan Shelby (1750-1826) and William Russell (1748-1794).<sup>19</sup> Lewis marched his army 140 miles to Point Pleasant, at the confluence of the Kanawha River and the Ohio River in what is now Mason County, West Virginia. Lord Dunmore ordered Colonel Lewis to build a fort at Point Pleasant where he would be joined by Virginia troops under Dunmore's personal command. The combined army would then invade Ohio and attack the Shawnee towns.

While the local militia was marching toward Point Pleasant on the Ohio River, Indians were continuing to threaten the frontier settlements of Southwestern Virginia. William Russell wrote in July that the Clinch River settlers had built three forts but were short of supplies:



The Ammunition is so bad, that the Inhabitants in the Different Forts  
slam easily about it, whether they have it by them or not to make  
Defence, and they are Intirely without, and we have only fifty bit of  
head with the Podder...<sup>20</sup>

Within weeks, the frontiersmen had built a string of seven small forts in Fincastle County to protect the settlements on the Clinch, Holston and New Rivers of southwestern Virginia against Indian raids. By early September, when Indians attacked outlying frontier settlements, Maj. Arthur Campbell reported "the Forts at Glade-Hollow, Elk-Garden and Maiden Spring, has their compliments compleat."<sup>21</sup> These forts were under the overall command of Lt. Daniel Boone.

Francis Cooper, who had served in the Culpeper County militia during the French and Indian War, enlisted in September 1774 in Lord Dunmore's War. Along with Abraham Cooper, Archibald Scott and James Scott, Francis Cooper was among twenty privates who served under Ensign Hendly Moore at Glade Hollow Fort during September 1774.<sup>22</sup> Indians raided the frontier settlements during September killing or capturing members of two families and destroying livestock. The troops in the forts pursued the raiders but were unable to recover any of the captives. Despite a chronic shortage of ammunition, the militia successfully held the frontier settlements during Lord Dunmore's War. The militia served in the forts until the end of the war and the return of the Fincastle County militia.<sup>23</sup>

By the time Colonel Lewis and his army arrived at Point Pleasant on the Ohio River, Cornstalk, the Shawnee Chief, had assembled a confederated army of approximately 1200 warriors. In addition to Shawnee, Chief Cornstalk was accompanied by braves from the Mingo, Wyandot, Ottawa and other tribes. During the night of October 9, Cornstalk and his warriors rafted across the Ohio River several miles upstream and approached the Virginia encampment. The Indians were sneaking up on the Virginia camp when they were discovered by hunters sent out by the colonial troops. The hunters were able to alert the Virginians to form battle lines before Cornstalk and his warriors attacked.<sup>24</sup> One of the participants described the battle:

...a hot engagement Ensued which Lasted three hours Very doubtful the Enemy being much Suppirour in Number to the first Detachments Disputed the ground with the Greatest Obstinacey often Runing up to the Very Muzels of our Gunes where the[y] as often fell Victims to thire Rage...<sup>25</sup>

Without the advantage of surprise, terrain or fortifications, the battle was one of very few in which two groups of wilderness warriors, in this case colonial settlers and Ohio Indians, were evenly-matched. The battle raged most of the day with heavy losses on each side. Col. William Fleming (1729-1795), the commanding officer of the Botetourt County militia was severely wounded at Point Pleasant. He reported,

We had 7 or 800 Warriors to deal with. Never did Indians stick closer to it, nor behave bolder, the Engagement lasted from half an hour after [sunrise] to the same time before sunset. And let me add I believe the Indians never had such a scourging from the English before. they scalped many of their own dead to prevent their falling into Our hands...we tooke 18 or 20 scalps, the most of them principle Warriors amongst the Shawnese...<sup>26</sup>

Late in the day, the Virginia troops attempted a flanking maneuver. The Indians noticed the troop movement but mistakenly interpreted it as the arrival of reinforcements and withdrew from the battle.

Writing from the battlefield, a young Isaac Shelby respectfully described the turning point in the day-long battle and the stubborn resistance of the Indians,

The enemy, no longer able to maintain their ground was forced to give way...the action continued extremely hot, the close underwood, many steep banks and logs greatly favored their retreat, and the bravest of their men made the best use of themselves...Their long retreat gave them a most advantageous spot of ground...<sup>27</sup>

Many of the participants who wrote about the battle mentioned the bravery of the Indian warriors and, as if it were routine, admitted that the Virginians had scalped the Indians they killed. Capt. William Myles recounted,

I cannot describe the bravery of the enemy in battle...Their Chiefs ran continually along the line exhorting the men to "lye close" and

"shoot well", "fight and be strong"...they fought desperately, I believe, and retreated in such a manner as to carry off all their wounded...<sup>28</sup>

Capt. John Floyd, already a pioneer in Kentucky, wrote, about the Indians,

...they were obliged to give Ground which the[y] Disputed inch by inch till at Length the[y] Posted themselves on an Advantagus piесе of Ground Where the[y] Continued at Shooting now and then until night putt an End to that Tragical Seen and left many a brave fellow Waltirring in his Gore...[our] loss of men is very considerable...<sup>29</sup>

By the end of the day, 75 Virginia colonists had been killed and 140 wounded in the Battle of Point Pleasant.<sup>30</sup>

Although the battle was a draw with neither side gaining advantage, the Indians withdrew to Ohio and began peace negotiations. Lord Dunmore, arriving after the only battle in the war that bears his name, marched his troops into Ohio and ordered Colonel Lewis to release the veterans of Point Pleasant to return to their homes. In the Treaty of Camp Charlotte, the Shawnee promised Lord Dunmore that they would cease all hunting east of the Ohio River, stop attacks on Ohio River boats and obey Royal proclamations. The Indians had held their own in the Battle of Point Pleasant but lost their traditional hunting grounds in the treaty that concluded Lord Dunmore's War.<sup>31</sup>

The Virginia militia that participated in Lord Dunmore's War in 1774 provided many of the officers for the Continental Army and state militia of the Revolutionary War. Col. Andrew Lewis, who Lord Dunmore appointed commander of militia in 1774, was a brigadier general in the Continental Army which chased Lord Dunmore out of Virginia in 1775. George Rogers Clark (1752-1818), a militia captain in Lord Dunmore's War, four years later was the commander of a small force of frontiersmen, many of whom had served at Point Pleasant, who captured the British forts in the West.<sup>32</sup> Daniel Morgan later distinguished himself in command at Quebec and the Battle of Cowpens while Isaac Shelby and William Campbell commanded frontier troops, many of them also veterans of Lord Dunmore's War, at the crucial Battle of Kings Mountain.

## Life on the Frontier

Whether it was Virginia, North Carolina, Kentucky or Tennessee, early frontier life was arduous. The first months of settlement were devoted to clearing land, building a cabin and planting the first crops. Sometimes, when circumstances allowed, the father and older sons would arrive in the spring to plant a crop of corn before returning to their homes during the summer to move the family to the frontier. During the early years, the frontier families survived on diets consisting primarily of meat obtained by hunting and the corn and squash from their gardens. Corn was the staple of the frontier diet. When a mill was accessible, the corn was ground into meal and baked into cornbread or cornpone. In the wilderness, where mills did not exist, the pioneers followed,

...the Indian practice - to burn a crude mortar in the stump of a tree and to crack the corn with a log for a pestle. Hominy then could be made.<sup>33</sup>

Joseph Doddridge, who was a child on the frontier of Virginia and Pennsylvania, remembered the tedious diet of "hog and hominy" and the suffering in the early years when the family supply of corn meal was exhausted before a new crop was ready. By necessity the family had to live on wild game and the children were taught to call venison and wild turkey breast "bread." He recalled,

...after living in this way for some time we became sickly, the stomach seemed to be always empty and tormented with a sense of hunger. I remember how narrowly the children watched the growth of the potato tops, pumpkin and squash vines, hoping from day to day to get something to answer in the place of bread.<sup>34</sup>

The frontier cabins, whether they were built within a fort or outside, were small and dark. They commonly were but a single room with a door at one end and a fireplace on the other. In areas where there might be Indian raids, the cabins often had no windows. The doors were built so that they could be secured at night with a cross bar. The cabins were erected quickly and usually had dirt floors at first which were later replaced with puncheon floors of split logs laid side-by-side on the ground. The walls were "chinked" with pieces of wood to fill cracks between logs and

sometimes "daubed" with wet clay to protect against wind and rain. For cooking and heating, the frontier cabins had a fireplace with a "cats and clay" chimney made of wood, mud and the down from wild cattails. If the cabins were built as part of a fort, their rear walls forming the outer wall of the fort, they might be as much as twelve feet high in the rear with wood roofs sloping toward the interior of the fort.

Apart from cooking kettles and possibly some utensils, frontier furnishings were limited to what the settler could fashion with an axe, a saw and an auger. Furniture was crude but functional. Tables were sawn logs, finished on one side with peg legs set in the corners. For chairs, the pioneers used three-legged stools with no backs. The only other furniture would be a bed with a buffalo robe mattress and bearskin covering. Tableware was also limited to what could be carved from available wood including plates, bowls and trenchers. Men wore long hunting shirts, pants and moccasins of buckskin while women made simple "linsey" dresses by weaving and spinning whatever was available including lint from wild nettles and wool from buffalo.<sup>35</sup>

During the early frontier period, the settlers were, of necessity, self-sufficient. Apart from a small number of manufactured goods that were essential to survival like knives, guns and iron pots, the frontier settler either made-do or did without.

Frontier 1763-1775 Notes

1. Ralph Waldo Emerson in William O. Steele, The Old Wilderness Road: An American Journey (New York, 1968), p. 62.
2. Gilbert Christian in Robert E. Corlew, Tennessee: A Short History. 2nd ed. (Knoxville, 1981), p. 43.
3. Hugh T. Lefler and William S. Powell, Colonial North Carolina (New York, 1973), pp. 229-239. The Regulators were Scotch-Irish farmers in western North Carolina who organized between 1766 and 1771 to protest excessive taxation, unfairness of representation in the colonial assembly as well as fraud and corruption among local officials appointed by the royal governor. When the Regulators threatened to withhold taxes, the Governor led 1400 North Carolina militia into a battle in which the Regulators were defeated. According to contemporary sources, 1500 Regulator families moved west to Tennessee in 1772. Although the Regulators were protesting issues of taxation and representation, their goals were to reform colonial government rather than replace it.
4. Watauga Petition in William L. Sanders, editor, The Colonial Records of North Carolina, Vol. X, 1775-1776 (New York, 1968), p. 708, originally published Raleigh, 1890. The Watauga, Holston and Nolichucky Rivers, along with the Clinch, Powell and French Broad Rivers, are all tributaries of the Tennessee River and all originate in the mountains of North Carolina, Virginia and northeastern Tennessee.
5. Ibid.
6. Corlew, Tennessee History, pp. 46-50.
7. Lewis Preston Summers, History of Southwest Virginia. 1746-1786, (Richmond, 1903), p. 150.
8. Corlew, Tennessee History, p. 50.
9. Wilma Dykeman, Tennessee: A History (New York, 1975), p. 44. See also, John Haywood, The Civil and Political History of the State of Tennessee (Nashville, 1891), pp. 58-59, originally published 1823, for a paraphrase of the dissenting speech which, among other things, forecast the eventual removal of the Cherokee nation and its extinction.
10. Steele, The Old Wilderness Road, pp. 15-59. Dr. Walker, the explorer of Kentucky, was an ancestor of Adlai Stevenson, a governor of Illinois and presidential candidate in 1952 and 1956. Harriette Simpson Arnow, Seedtime on the Cumberland (New York, 1960), p. 77.
11. Mary Stevens Jones, "Daniel Boone in Culpeper" in Mary Stevens Jones, editor An 18th Century Perspective: Culpeper County (Culpeper, Virginia, 1976), p. 137
12. Lord Dunmore letter of December 24, 1774 to the Earl of Dartmouth in Reuben Gold Thwaites and Louise Phelps Kellogg, Documentary History of Dunmore's War (Madison,

Wisconsin, 1905), p.371. Thwaites and Kellogg, relying heavily on documents collected by Lyman Draper, is the primary source of contemporary accounts of Lord Dunmore's War and related events.

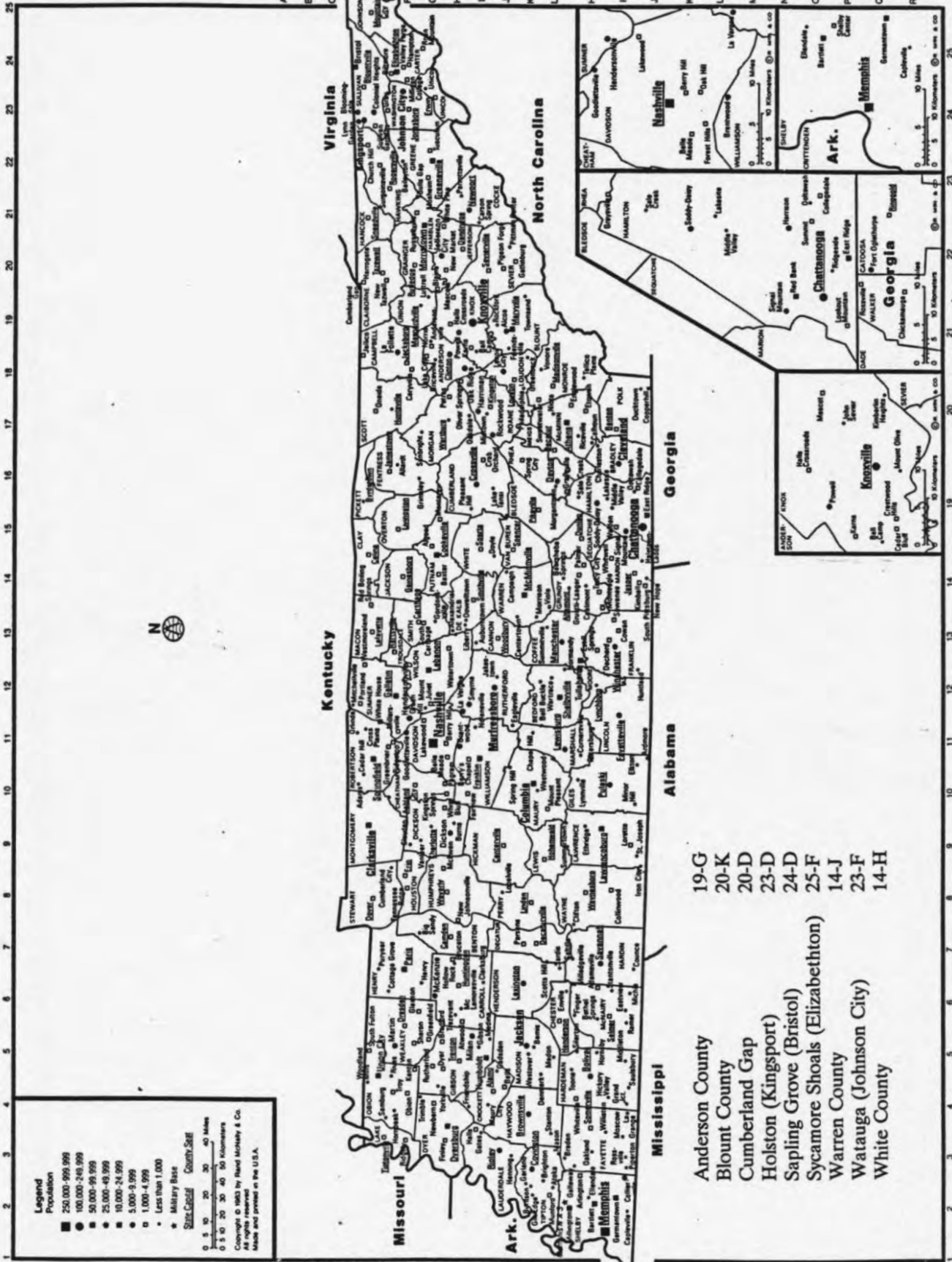
13. Clarence Walworth Alvord, The Mississippi Valley in British Politics, Vol. II, (Cleveland, 1917), p. 189.
14. Ibid., p. 190. Connolly's April 21, 1774 letter has not survived.
15. Lord Dunmore circular letter of June 10, 1774 to the county lieutenants, in Twaites and Kellogg, Dunmore's War, pp. 33-35.
16. John Connolly proclamation of June 18, 1774 in Katherine Wagner Seineke, The George Rogers Clark Adventure in the Illinois and Selected Documents of the American Revolution at the Frontier Posts (New Orleans, 1981), p. 153.
17. John Logan letter of July 21, 1774 from a contemporary copy in Thwaites and Kellogg, Dunmore's War, pp. 246-247.
18. Lord Dunmore letter of July 12, 1774 to Andrew Lewis, Ibid., pp. 86-87.
19. Summers, History of Southwest Virginia, p.748. William Russell was born in Culpeper County, Virginia and was an early settler on the southwestern Virginia frontier. He was the son of the William Russell who commanded a company of Culpeper County militia in the French and Indian War. In addition to his service in Lord Dunmore's War, the younger Russell was a captain in the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War and a brigadier general of Virginia militia.  
  
According to a grandson of Francis Cooper, the Coopers and Russells were related by marriage. Joseph Cooper, Draper MSS 23S137. There is no confirmation of this putative but desirable relationship apart from the common origins in Culpeper County and Francis Cooper's enlistments under two Russells, father and son, in 1756 and 1774.
20. William Russell letter of July 13, 1774 to William Preston in Thwaites and Kellogg, Dunmore's War, pp. 88-91.
21. Arthur Campbell letter of September 9, 1774 to William Preston, Ibid., pp. 192-195.
22. Crozier, Virginia Militia, p. 81, p. 89. Thwaites and Kellogg, Dunmore's War, p. 402. Francis Cooper enlisted September 19, 1774 and, it appears, served until November 18, 1774, when Abraham Cooper and Archibald Woods were discharged.
23. Summers, History of Southwest Virginia, pp. 150-157. The Glade Hollow Fort was located twelve miles east of William Russell's fort in what is now Russell County, Virginia. Twaites and Kellogg, Dunmore's War, p. 194. According to Bockstruck, Virginia Soldiers, 154-155, the Glade Hollow Fort muster roll is from Draper MSS 6XX:106.

24. Historians differ about the date of the Battle of Point Pleasant. Samuel Eliot Morrison uses October 6 in The Oxford History of the American People (1965). Ray Allen Billington in Westward Expansion (1987) and Clarence Alvord in Mississippi Valley (1917) each use October 9 while Dale Van Every uses October 10 in Forth To The Wilderness (1961). The battle began early in the morning of October 10, 1774.
25. William Ingles letter of October 14, 1774 to William Preston, Thwaites and Kellogg, Dunmore's War, pp. 258-259.
26. Undated William Fleming letter (probably October 13, 1774) to William Bowyer, *Ibid.*, p. 256.
27. Isaac Shelby letter of October 6, 1774 in Theodore Roosevelt, The Winning of the West, Vol. I (New York, 1889), pp. 305-306.
28. William Ingles letter of October 14, 1774, Twaites and Kellogg, Dunmore's War, p. 259.
29. John Floyd letter of October 16, 1774 to William Preston, *Ibid.*, pp. 264-268.
30. Elizabeth Meek Fels, "The Battle of Point Pleasant: Its Relation to the American Revolution and to Tennessee", Tennessee Historical Quarterly, Vol. XXXIII, Winter 1974, p. 373.
31. Some historians have contended that the Battle of Point Pleasant, six months before the Battle of Lexington, was the first battle of the Revolutionary War. According to Theodore Roosevelt, "Lord Dunmore's War, waged by Americans for the good of America, was the opening act in the drama whereof the closing scene was played at Yorktown," Winning of the West, Vol. I, Part II, p. 34. Other historians argue that Lord Dunmore manipulated the situation to increase hostility between Indians and settlers and to increase Indian trust of the British. As strange as it may seem, this Machiavellian logic was accepted by the United States Congress in 1908 while appropriating funds for a commemorative monument at the battle site. However sinister Lord Dunmore may have been, the Battle of Point Pleasant was not the first battle of the Revolutionary War but rather the last battle in which the British and the colonists were allied against the Indians.
32. Frederick Palmer, Clark of the Ohio (New York, 1929), p. 71.
33. Freeman, George Washington, Vol. II, p. 105.
34. Joseph Dodderidge in Alden T. Vaughan, America Before the Revolution. 1725-1725 (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1967), p. 67.
35. The description of frontier cabins is drawn from Edna Kenton, Simon Kenton: His Life and Period 1755-1836 (Garden City, New York, 1930), pp. 176-177 and Reuben T. Durrett, Bzyant's Station (Louisville, Kentucky, 1897), pp. 23-27.

Wood buffalo ranged as far east as the Allegheny Mountains. They were woolly, short-haired, black animals without the characteristic hump of the plains bison. The wood



buffalo traveled in herds and made many of the traces later used as trails or roads through the wilderness. Patricia Johns, The Violent Years: Simon Kenton and the Ohio-Kentucky Frontier (New York, 1962), pp. 36-37. The wood buffalo were common in Kentucky and Tennessee during the early years of settlement but were hunted to extinction by 1800.



- 19-G Anderson County
- 20-K Blount County
- 20-D Cumberland Gap
- 23-D Holston (Kingsport)
- 24-D Sapling Grove (Bristol)
- 25-F Sycamore Shoals (Elizabethton)
- 14-J Warren County
- 23-F Watauga (Johnson City)
- 14-H White County

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE REVOLUTION, 1765-1781

...appealing to Heaven for the justice of our cause, we determine to die or be free...

Provincial Congress of Massachusetts, 1775.<sup>1</sup>

The Revolutionary War began at Lexington and Concord in 1775 but the revolution itself began much earlier. John Adams, the second President and a cautious rebel, pointed out many years later that

The revolution was effected before the War commenced. The Revolution was in the minds and hearts of the people...This radical change in the principles, opinions, sentiments, and affections of the people was the real American Revolution.<sup>2</sup>

While the idea of rebellion was new, the idea of liberty was neither new nor foreign, it was part of the legacy of British political theory and practice that had evolved over centuries. For the colonists in North America, the ideals of the Glorious Revolution of 1688 and the ideas of John Locke were part of their political heritage as Englishmen.

#### The Gathering Storm

From the British perspective, it was only logical and fair. The British national debt had doubled during the French and Indian War. Of course the colonies should pay some of the expenses of empire. For the colonies, the response was a deep sense of unfairness, resistance and eventually disaffection. The British began in 1763 by trying to improve the collection of existing taxes on molasses. When the molasses tax proved ineffective, Parliament enacted the Revenue Act of 1764 reducing the uncollectible molasses tax but imposing new taxes on sugar, coffee, wine, textiles and

other imports. These taxes, later known as the Sugar Act, involved extensive paperwork and were enforced in the Admiralty Courts where trials were held without juries. In 1765, the Parliament imposed a stamp tax on legal documents, newspapers and playing cards. Like the Sugar Act, the Stamp Act was enforced, without juries, in the Admiralty Courts. The colonists responded with protests.

On May 30, 1765, the Virginia House of Burgesses, responding to an impassioned speech by a young Patrick Henry, approved five "resolves" asserting that the Colonists have the same rights as the people of Great Britain including the exclusive right to tax themselves. In October, representatives of nine colonies convened in New York where they approved resolutions pledging loyalty to the king but petitioning for the repeal of the Stamp Act. The Stamp Act Congress asserted that "His Majesty's liege subjects in these colonies are intitled to all the inherent rights and liberties of his natural born subjects within the kingdom of Great Britain"<sup>3</sup> including freedom from taxation without representation and the right to trial by jury.

Opposition to the Stamp Act was widespread in the Colonies. On October 21, 1765, sixteen members of the County Court in Culpeper Virginia sent a petition to the Lieutenant Governor of Virginia. The sixteen Justices of the Peace pledged their loyalty to the king but resigned their commissions explaining

...the late acts of Parliament, by which a stamp duty is imposed on the Americans, and a court of vice-admiralty appointed ultimately to determine all controversies...is unconstitutional, and a high infringement of our most valuable privileges as British subjects who, we humbly apprehend, cannot constitutionally be taxed without the consent of our representatives, or our lives or properties be affected in any suit, or criminal causes, whatsoever, without first being tried by our peers.<sup>4</sup>

While some colonists were protesting with carefully crafted resolutions, petitions and letters of resignation, others were protesting with boycotts and mob riots of taxed goods. The students at Yale College, in the spirit of national sacrifice, agreed to forgo imported liquors. The "Sons of Liberty"

organized mob protests in the seaport cities of New York, Charleston, Boston and Newport, Rhode Island.

In March 1766, Parliament recognized the depth of opposition in the colonies and repealed the Stamp Act. Before repealing the Stamp Act, however, Parliament passed a law declaring

That the colonies and plantations in America have been, are, and ought to be, subordinate unto, and dependent upon the imperial crown and parliament of Great Britain, and that the King's majesty...and commons of Great Britain, in parliament assembled, had, hath, and of right ought to have, full power and authority to make laws and statutes of sufficient force and validity to bind the colonies and people of America, subjects of the crown of Great Britain, in all cases whatsoever.<sup>5</sup>

In 1767, Parliament exercised its full power and authority in passing the Townshend Acts imposing import taxes on the colonies on glass, lead, paints, tea and paper. In 1768, the Massachusetts House of Representatives protested that the Townshend taxes were taxation without representation and Boston merchants initiated a boycott of most British imports including specifically tea, paper, glass and paint. By the end of 1769, New York and Philadelphia merchants had joined the boycott.

To enforce British authority, two companies of British troops were sent to Boston in 1768. Snowballs thrown at troops guarding the Customhouse in 1770 resulted in gunfire and the death of five Bostonians in the Boston Massacre. To reduce tensions, British troops in Boston were moved away from public contact. Meanwhile, Parliament began to realize that the Townshend Acts, rather than raising revenue, were stimulating the development of manufacturing in the colonies. In 1770, Parliament repealed all of the Townshend taxes except the one on tea. The Tea Act of 1773, increased tea taxes but reduced the cost of tea to the North American consumer by eliminating the middleman. The colonists recognized the Tea Act as a new tax and protested. In Boston, protesters pitched tea into the harbor.

Parliament responded with a series of laws, known in the colonies as the Intolerable Acts, to punish Boston and suppress the growing rebellion. The first of these Intolerable Acts in March 1774, closed the Port of Boston. Philadelphia and New York issued resolutions protesting the Boston Port Act, sent assistance to Boston and joined in the call for a congress of representatives from the colonies in North America. In September 1774, fifty-five delegates from twelve colonies (Georgia was not represented) convened at Philadelphia in the First Continental Congress. The Congress set out the grievances of the colonies, demanded repeal of the most offensive acts of Parliament and agreed to a unified boycott of British products and trade.

After a decade of peaceful petitions and protests, the dispute between Great Britain and her North American colonies began to intensify as Patriots began to consider armed resistance. The night of April 18, 1775, the British commander in Boston sent troops to destroy military supplies the Patriots were accumulating in Concord. The following morning the troops were confronted by colonial militia calling themselves "Minutemen" at Lexington and Concord. On their return to Boston, the British troops were under fire from hastily-assembled militia hiding behind walls and trees along the eighteen mile route to Boston. On that April morning on the village green at Lexington, a nervous British soldier or an untrained provincial militiaman fired "the shot heard round the world."

### The War in the North

By June 1776 when delegates of the thirteen colonies declared "that these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be free and independent States;<sup>116</sup> armed rebellion against the British had been underway for more than a year. Militia from nearby towns had engaged British troops at Lexington and Concord in April 1775.<sup>7</sup> In May, militia under Ethan Allen and Benedict Arnold had captured Fort Ticonderoga on Lake Champlain while in June, colonial militia were defeated by British regulars at Boston's Breed's Hill, in a battle named for nearby Bunker Hill. The

Second Continental Congress convened at Philadelphia in May 1775 and, more than a year before declaring independence, appointed George Washington of Virginia to command a Continental Army to be formed from the colonial militia.

The British barricaded themselves in the city of Boston as militia from throughout New England gathered in surrounding towns. Using British artillery captured at Fort Ticonderoga, the colonial army besieged Boston until March 1776 when the British evacuated the city and sailed to safety in Nova Scotia. In June 1776, Patriot forces fought off an invasion of Charleston, South Carolina by a British fleet with 2500 troops. By July 1776, when they declared independence, the United Colonies had successfully expelled British troops from Boston, captured forts on the Hudson River and repelled an invasion of Charleston.

### Revolution on the Frontier

The self-sufficient pioneers on the frontier were not inconvenienced by British taxes on luxuries not available on the frontier nor by taxes on documents and publications. While they were aware of the underlying issues of political theory, the frontier settlers were primarily concerned about their land. They were aware of their land claims and concerned about British efforts to maintain alliances with the Indians. On the frontier of Virginia, Kentucky and Tennessee, the Revolution was a war to hold land against the Indians and their British advisors while strengthening land claims west of the mountains.

While the representatives to the Second Continental Congress were debating the Declaration of Independence at Philadelphia during the early summer of 1776, groups of settlers were gathering on the frontier to pledge their support for the rebellion.

In June 1776, representatives of the three Kentucky stations convened at Harrodsburg. Styling themselves the Committee of West Fincastle of the Colony of Virginia, the Kentuckians declared

...we sincerely concur in the measures established by the Continental Congress and Colony of Virginia. And willing to the utmost of our abilities to support the present laudable cause by raising our Quota of men and bear a proportional share of Expense that will necessarily accrue in the support of our common Liberty.<sup>8</sup>

In addition to the commitment to political liberty, the Kentuckians asserted their commitment to the economic liberty of the land they had claimed,

...as the Proclamation of his Majesty for not settling on the Western parts of this Colony, is not founded upon Law, it cannot have any Force...<sup>9</sup>

At the same time, the Tennessee settlers were collecting at Watauga,

...we were alarmed by the reports of the present unhappy differences between Great Britain and America on which report (taking the now united colonies for our guide) we proceeded to choose a committee This committee (willing to become a party in the present unhappy contest) resolved...to adhere strictly to the rules and orders of the Continental Congress and in open committee acknowledged themselves indebted to the United Colonies their full proportion of the Continental expense.<sup>10</sup>

As part of their contribution to the revolutionary cause, the Watauga pioneers organized a rifle company under Capt. James Robertson. The rifle company was offered to assist the colonies but was assigned by the Wataugans to the defense of their own frontier.

The settlers, calling themselves the Washington District, formed a court and adopted the laws of Virginia but petitioned the Provincial Council of North Carolina,

...that you may annex us to your Province (whether as county, district or other division) in such manner as may enable us to share in the glorious cause of Liberty, enforce our laws under authority...nothing will be lacking or anything neglected that may add weight (in the civil or military establishments) to the glorious cause in which we are now struggling or contribute to the welfare of our own or ages yet to come.<sup>11</sup>



On July 5, 1776, 111 settlers signed the Watauga Petition to North Carolina. These pioneers on the Nollichucky and Watauga Rivers included John Carter, William Been (Bean), John Sevier, Charles and James Robertson and others including Thomas Simpson (ca. 1731-1835).<sup>12</sup>

North Carolina, busy with its own problems, was slow to respond to the frontier petitioners. In December 1776, the North Carolina Provincial Congress, including delegates from the Watauga settlements, adopted a Constitution which established the Washington District as part of North Carolina. An ordinance adopted at the same time named 21 Wataugans, including Thomas Simpson, to serve as members of the Washington District Court. It is unclear whether this court ever functioned because a second ordinance was passed in early 1777 establishing Washington County and naming 14 members of the county court. Thomas Simpson was not a member of the second court. The original area of Washington County, North Carolina has subsequently become the 95 counties of Tennessee.<sup>13</sup>

The Thomas Simpson who signed the Watauga petition and who was a member of the first Washington District Court had come to the settlement from Virginia. Thomas Simpson may have arrived at Watauga late in 1775 or early in 1776 since he was not among the settlers allocated land purchased from the Indians in March 1775.<sup>14</sup>

### The War In the Middle Colonies

The British troops, which had been evacuated from Boston in March 1776, were reinforced to 32,000, including 8,000 Hessian mercenaries, and were landed in New York in July. They were part of a British plan to separate the New England colonies from those in the South through coordinated invasions south from Canada and north from New York. The British defeated the Continental Army at the Battle of Long Island in July and captured Manhattan and forts on the Hudson River that fall. George Washington led a retreat across New Jersey while a second British army with 13,000 troops advanced down the Hudson River. Benedict Arnold, at that time a Patriot

leader, lost most of his small fleet on Lake Champlain but successfully stalled the 1776 invasion from Canada. Washington retreated across the Delaware River toward Philadelphia before turning to launch successful year-end strikes on British and Hessian troops at Trenton and Princeton.

When fighting resumed in 1777, the British sent 18,000 troops across New Jersey but were unable to lure George Washington into a major battle. In June the British troops withdrew to New York where they embarked for Chesapeake Bay in a fleet of 260 ships. At the same time, Maj. Gen. John Burgoyne began a second invasion from Canada with 8,000 troops. Patriot militia defeated elements of Burgoyne's army in August battles at Bennington and Fort Stanwix before forcing Burgoyne to end his invasion and surrender 6,000 troops at Saratoga in October. Meanwhile Washington shifted the Continental Army to intercept British troops marching from Chesapeake Bay toward Philadelphia, the Patriot capital. Outnumbered and outmaneuvered, Washington lost at Brandywine and the British captured Philadelphia in late September. By the end of 1777, the British occupied New York and Philadelphia and the remnants of the Continental Army were suffering in winter quarters at Valley Forge.

In February 1778, while George Washington and the Continental Army were at Valley Forge, the French government, encouraged by the Patriot victory at Saratoga, agreed to a treaty of alliance with the new United States and against their common enemy Great Britain. In June 1778, as George Rogers Clark was beginning his campaign into Illinois, the British decided to end their occupation of Philadelphia. With 10,000 troops and a twelve-mile long baggage train, the British moved back across New Jersey toward New York. The Continental Army, drilled at Valley Forge by the self-proclaimed Baron Friedrich von Steuben, followed and attacked the British at Monmouth Courthouse in a confused and hard-fought battle. From Monmouth, the British continued their retreat to New York. By the fall of 1778, the Continental Army and local militia had established positions encircling the British army in New York from New Jersey to Connecticut.

## The War in the South

Frustrated by the failure of campaigns in the North, British strategy turned south in late 1778. In December a British fleet captured Savannah and the British regained control over all of Georgia in early 1779. The large British garrison in New York carried out raids along the Connecticut shore during 1779 while losing battles to Patriot forces at Stoney Point on the Hudson and Paulus Hook on the New Jersey shore. The British withdrew from Newport, Rhode Island and, in December 1779, sent a fleet of 14 fighting ships with 650 guns and 90 transports with 8,500 soldiers south. From March to May 1780, the British bombarded Charleston before the city surrendered along with most of the Continental Army in the South. Within a few months, the British had gained control of South Carolina, organized Loyalist militia and established a chain of forts across the northern part of the state.

To replace the army lost at Charleston, Maj. Gen. Horatio Gates, the victorious general at Saratoga, was sent south with 1400 troops from the Continental Army to oppose the British and Tory army under Maj. Gen. Charles, Lord Cornwallis. Gates blundered at the battle of Camden in August 1780 where most of the Continental Army in the South was again lost. Although Gates and the Continental Army were ineffective, Patriot militia was active in the Carolinas defeating Loyalist militia at Ramsour's Mills in June and Hanging Rock in August. British Maj. Patrick Ferguson recruited 4,000 Loyalists and ranged through the Carolina upcountry rooting out Patriots. In October 1780, an army composed largely of frontiersmen attacked Ferguson and 1100 troops at Kings Mountain near the border between North Carolina and South Carolina. The Patriot frontiersmen decisively defeated Ferguson's troops.

In December 1780, Washington appointed Gen. Nathaniel Greene to replace the ineffectual Gates as commanding officer of the depleted Continental Army in the South. For three months, the masterful Greene, with an army of 1,500 including militia, stayed just beyond the reach

of Cornwallis and his 4,000 troops. Contrary to all military theory, Greene divided his tiny army enabling the resourceful Virginian Daniel Morgan to defeat the British at the Cowpens in January 1781. Greene teased Cornwallis into chasing the Continental Army through the mud and cold of the North Carolina winter. When Cornwallis gave up the chase at the Virginia border, Greene turned and provoked a battle at Guilford Court House. Greene lost the battle but severely weakened Cornwallis who was forced to retreat to the coast for supplies.

During the spring of 1781, the Continental Army continued to lose battles in the South while gaining strength and recapturing territory. By May 1781, the Patriots controlled all of the South except the fort at Ninety-Six and the port cities of Charleston, Savannah and Wilmington. During the same period, British troops were ranging throughout Virginia burning towns and destroying stores of tobacco. In late April 1781, Lafayette arrived with 1,200 Continental troops to strengthen local militia in Virginia. In May, Cornwallis reached Virginia with 1,500 British troops and Clinton sent an additional 1,500 troops from New York. In June, British troops entered Charlottesville and nearly captured the Virginia legislature. In July, Cornwallis moved to Yorktown where his army of 7,000 built strong fortifications.

Since the fall of 1778, Washington and the Continental Army had passively encircled a much-larger British army in New York. In August 1781, Washington left 2,500 troops on the Hudson River to hold 17,000 British troops in New York and sent approximately 2,000 troops across New Jersey toward Virginia. At the same time, Admiral de Grasse and the French fleet, strengthened by French forces from Newport, arrived in Chesapeake Bay. In a decisive naval battle, the French fleet of 24 warships with 1,700 guns defeated a British fleet of 19 ships and 1,400 guns. The French naval victory left Cornwallis and his army of 6,000 facing 8,800 American troops under George Washington and 7,800 French troops under General de Rochambeau. On October 9, allied artillery began shelling British positions. Recognizing that his situation was hopeless, Cornwallis

surrendered the 7,247 soldiers and 840 sailors defending the fortifications at Yorktown on October 18, 1781.

Although British troops continued to occupy New York, Charleston and Savannah, as well as forts along the northern border, the War of Revolution was over. The Continental Army and the colonial militia, with timely assistance from the French fleet and army had defeated a well-trained and well-supplied British army and 30,000 German mercenaries. The war of revolution ended on the York River in 1781 less than twenty miles from the site of the first European colony in Virginia across the peninsula at Jamestown.<sup>15</sup>

### The Revolution Notes

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2. John Adams, "The Meaning of the American Revolution" in The Annals of America Vol. 4. 1797-1820 (Chicago, 1968), pp. 465-466, originally published in Niles Weekly Register, March 7, 1818.
3. Resolutions of the Stamp Act Congress, October 19, 1765, in Commager, Documents of American History. p. 58. Georgia, New Hampshire, North Carolina and Virginia were the four colonies not represented at the Stamp Act Congress.
4. Green, Notes on Culpepper County. p. 131.
5. An act for the better securing the dependency of his Majesty's dominions in America...March 18, 1766, in Commager, Documents of American History, p. 60.
6. Resolution for Independence, adopted by the Second Continental Congress, June 7, 1776, *Ibid.*, p. 100. Identical language was incorporated in the Declaration of Independence adopted July 4, 1776.
7. The military history of the Revolutionary War is drawn from Christopher Ward, The War of the Revolution, 2 vols. (New York, 1952).
8. Committee of West Fincastle petition of June 7-15, 1776 to the Convention of Virginia, James Rood Robertson, editor, Petitions of the Early Inhabitants of Kentucky to the General Assembly of Virginia, 1769 to 1792 (Louisville, Kentucky, 1914), p. 38.
9. Committee of West Fincastle petition of June 20, 1776 to the Convention of Virginia, *Ibid.*, pp. 38-41.
10. Saunders, Colonial Records of North Carolina, pp. 708-709.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 710.
12. *Ibid.*, pp. 710-711. The Watauga petition was received in the North Carolina provincial capital at Halifax August 22, 1776. The original copy of the petition is in the North Carolina archives at Raleigh. It appears that all but two of the signers were able to write their names.
13. Samuel Cole Williams, Tennessee During the Revolutionary War (Nashville, 1944), p. 75.
14. J.G.M. Ramsey, The Annals of Tennessee (Knoxville, 1967), p. 119, originally published Charleston, 1853.
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## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR ON THE FRONTIER

Theirs was to remain a conflict in which victory was beyond the reach of valor.

Dale Van Every, 1962<sup>1</sup>

The major campaigns and battles of the Revolutionary War took place in the settled colonies along the Atlantic seaboard over a six year period. They began in the North, shifted to the middle colonies for three years and concluded in the southern colonies in 1779-1781. These battles and campaigns involved British, German mercenary and French troops as well as the Continental Army, colonial militia, Loyalist militia and irregulars on both sides. While the war in the settled colonies was primarily composed of strategic troop movements punctuated with battles, the war on the frontier was, apart from the Illinois campaign of George Rogers Clark, a series of raids by Indians and their British allies to terrorize the isolated settlements and the families who lived there. Dale Van Every, a frontier historian, characterized the war in the east as "a succession of violent but passing storms" while "there were for the frontier people to be no such intervals, no relief from danger, no surcease from dread."<sup>2</sup>

The British appear to have had two strategic objectives on the frontier during the Revolutionary War. The first was to annoy the settlements sufficiently that frontier militia would be unable to assist the Continental Army on the seaboard. The second objective, as it had been since 1763, was to contain the expansion of the over mountain settlements. While the settlers were primarily involved in the defense of their homes, the British strategy was not entirely effective. Frontiersmen, as they had in Lord Dunmore's War, enlisted in campaigns that took them far from

their families and homes. Frontiersmen from Kentucky and Tennessee were the soldiers of George Rogers Clark's expedition to the Illinois country in 1778-1779 as well as the campaigns against Loyalist forces in the Carolinas in 1780 that resulted in the victories at Thicketty Fort, Musgrove's Mill and King's Mountain. At the same time, despite six years of nearly unremitting terror of Indian raids, frontier communities continued to expand in Kentucky and Tennessee.

Before, during and after these Revolutionary War battles and campaigns, the frontier settlers were defending against Indian raids, some spontaneous but many instigated by British agents and military officers. The war ended in the seaboard colonies in October 1781 but it continued for another year on the Kentucky frontier until the bloody battle at the Blue Licks in August 1782 and the Ohio campaign late that year.

#### Watauga in 1776

At the same time that the Watauga settlers were pledging "to share in the glorious cause of Liberty", the Cherokee from whom they had purchased their lands were organizing a campaign against the settlements of Eastern Tennessee. With encouragement from British agents, 700 Cherokee warriors launched a coordinated attack in July 1776. The Raven led a party against Carter's Valley. The settlers retreated to a fort while the Indians burned cabins and destroyed crops. While The Raven was continuing into Virginia, Dragging Canoe attacked Long Island where the settlers defeated the invaders. A day later, Cherokee led by Old Abram reached Watauga where the 200 settlers packed into a tiny but strong fort. The Cherokee lurked about the fort destroying nearby property but were unable to dislodge the settlers.

The Watauga pioneers survived the Cherokee attacks and were soon reinforced by militia from surrounding states. In September, Virginia, North Carolina, Georgia and South Carolina sent 5600 militia in a retaliatory campaign against the Cherokee towns over the mountains. The militia burned food supplies and the Cherokee quickly agreed to peace terms. The successful campaign



against the Cherokee protected the Watauga settlements and assured that the Wilderness Road to Kentucky would remain open.<sup>3</sup>

### Kentucky in 1776

The frontier families building forts and planting crops at Boonesborough, Harrodsburg and Logan's Station were 200 miles from the nearest settled areas in 1776. The only two routes between Kentucky and Virginia, the Wilderness Road over the mountains and the Ohio River through Pittsburgh, were through Indian country where hunting parties or war parties could use terrain and surprise to intercept the flow of settlers and reinforcements. Of necessity, the Kentucky settlers were largely self-sufficient but they were also aware that they were the most exposed point on the Indian frontier.

When the residents of the three Kentucky stations gathered at Harrodsburg in June 1776 to vote "the support of our common Liberty," they also sought to be recognized as part of Virginia. The Kentuckians elected two young settlers, George Rogers Clark and John Gabriel Jones, to represent Kentucky in the Virginia Assembly. In addition to petitioning for representation in the Virginia legislature, the Kentuckians also sought confirmation of the legitimacy of their land claims. By July, the situation was deteriorating. John Floyd, a frontier leader, wrote from Boonesborough pleading for help.

The Indians seem determined to break up our settlement, and I really doubt, unless it was possible to give us some assistance, that the greatest part of the people must fall a prey to them. Fresh sign of Indians is seen almost every day... The seventh of this month they killed one Cooper on Licking Creek.<sup>4</sup>

It was uncertain whether Virginia, enmeshed in its own fight for freedom, would accept any responsibility for the tiny frontier communities deep in Indian country and beyond the limits of settlement allowed in the Treaty of Fort Stanwix.

Clark and Jones left the Kentucky settlements immediately but were delayed by having to walk when a horse was injured and having to barricade themselves in an abandoned cabin to hide from Indians. By the time the two arrived in Virginia, the Assembly had adjourned. Undaunted, Clark advocated the Kentucky case to Patrick Henry, the revolutionary governor, and the Virginia Council. The Council agreed to provide Kentucky 500 pounds of much-needed gunpowder but left the larger issues of the Virginia-Kentucky relationship unresolved. The Virginia Assembly reconvened in October and refused to seat the two Kentucky delegates but allowed them to argue the case for the defense of Kentucky. In December 1776, after extended debate and deliberation, the Assembly voted to accept Kentucky as a county of Virginia.

The two delegates immediately traveled to Pittsburgh where they claimed the 500 pounds of gunpowder and recruited seven volunteers to assist them floating the critical cargo 400 miles down the Ohio River through Indian country to Kentucky. By January 1777 when the gunpowder arrived at Harrodsburg, Jones had been killed and all but two Kentucky stations had been abandoned but the surviving settlers, for the first time, had the means to defend themselves and their families.

#### The Kentucky Frontier. 1777-1779

By early 1777, when Clark and his companions returned to Kentucky with the gunpowder from Virginia, the British were planning to intensify pressure on the frontier settlements. The previous fall, the British governor in Detroit had proposed unleashing the Indians against the settlements. After deliberation at the highest policy levels in England, Lord George Germain approved the proposal with the understanding that the Indian campaign would be conducted under British leadership to prevent excesses of savagery against the settlers who, after all, were nominally British subjects. Lord Germain rationalized this use of Indians as consistent with the King's order that,

...the most vigorous Efforts should be made and every means employ'd that Providence has put into His Majesty's hands for crushing the Rebellion, and restoring the constitution.<sup>5</sup>

Lord Germain wrote from Whitehall,

It is the King's Command that you should direct Lieutenant Governor Hamilton to assemble as many of the Indians of his District as he conveniently can, and placing a proper person at their Head...restrain them from committing violence on the well-affected inoffensive Inhabitants, employ Diversion and exciting an alarm upon the Frontiers of Virginia and Pennsylvania.<sup>6</sup>

Lord Germain offered 200 acres of land to each frontier settler who remained loyal to the British and promised such presents and other inducements as necessary to assure the participation of the Indians in the campaign.

As described by Lord Germain, the British strategy was to use the frontier Indian attacks to weaken and divide the revolution. The patriots would be forced to abandon the frontier or to divide their little army to protect the settlements against the Indians. While the strategy was somewhat distasteful to the British, it was justified by the nature of the rebellion in the Colonies and the King's order that "every means" be used to suppress the colonial uprising. For the following six years, the pioneer families in Kentucky suffered the consequences of this British policy.

Although there had been a steady stream of adventurers and pioneers into Kentucky during 1775 and 1776, many of the visitors returned over the mountains during the winter, some never to return. During the winter of 1776-1777, while Clark and Jones were on their mission to Williamsburg, all the permanent settlers of Kentucky were huddled for protection at Boonesborough, Harrodsburg and McClellan's Fort near present-day Georgetown. When Indians killed two settlers at McClellan's in December 1776, the survivors moved into Harrodsburg. In the spring, Kentuckians reoccupied the station known as Logan's Fort at St. Asaphs, eighteen miles southeast of Harrodsburg and thirty-five miles southwest of Boonesborough. By the Spring of 1777, when the British-inspired

Indian attacks began, the total population of the three Kentucky forts, including women and children, was less than 300. In these three forts, there were 121 men of fighting age.<sup>7</sup>

The Kentucky pioneers soon experienced the fury of the new British policy. During the spring of 1777, Indians from the British territory north of the Ohio River initiated a season of terror in Kentucky. In March and April, four Indian attacks at Harrodsburg left seven settlers dead and three wounded while two Indian attacks at Boonesborough left two dead and four wounded. For twelve days in May, an Indian war party of approximately fifty braves harassed the tiny garrison at Logan's Fort leaving two settlers dead and one wounded. In July, a party of 200 Indians launched the third attack of the year on the fort at Boonesborough. Raids in Kentucky continued during the summer and fall of 1777 with Indians attacking travelers or forts killing those settlers they surprised and stealing livestock. In addition to the danger to pioneers, the Indian attacks also discouraged additional settlement and interrupted efforts to cultivate crops. The raids declined during the summer when the Kentuckians were reinforced by two companies of militia from Virginia, a total of 100 men under Col. John Bowman, and 57 additional settlers from the Yadkin in North Carolina.<sup>8</sup>

The constant Indian danger during 1777 had reduced supplies from Virginia and prevented salt manufacture in Kentucky. Early in January 1778, when winter weather reduced the Indian threat, Daniel Boone led a party of thirty men from the three forts to an encampment forty miles away at the Lower Blue Licks salt springs. While some acted as guards, others boiled the brine to make the salt necessary to preserve food and hides. A large war party of Shawnee under Blackfish, out to avenge the murder of Chief Cornstalk who had been killed by soldiers a few months earlier while imprisoned by the United States, captured Boone who was away from the camp hunting. When he learned that the objective of the Shawnee was to attack Boonesborough, Boone agreed to arrange the surrender of the salt-makers if the Indians would spare Boonesborough which Boone knew was only partially fortified and weakly defended. The Shawnee, along with four white allies

and advisors, marched Boone and the twenty-seven Kentucky salt makers into Ohio. Some of the captives, including Boone, were adopted by Indian families while others were taken as prisoners to Detroit. In June 1778, after eighteen weeks in Indian captivity, Boone escaped, traveling 160 miles in four days to warn the settlers at Boonesborough that the Shawnee were planning another expedition into Kentucky.<sup>9</sup>

On September 7, 1778, a war party of 440 Shawnee braves, led by Blackfish and the new Shawnee Chief Moluntha, arrived at the gates of Boonesborough with Capt. DeQuindre and twelve Canadians. The Indians demanded surrender of the fort and offered safe passage to Detroit for the inhabitants. Boone engaged in protracted negotiations with Blackfish over three days while the settlers prepared for attack and used various ruses to exaggerate the size of the garrison and its capacity to resist attack. When the negotiations suddenly ended, the Indians and Canadians attacked the fort and its forty able-bodied defenders. After two days of rifle fire was ineffective, the Indians attempted to entice the settlers out of the fort by pretending to withdraw. When that failed, they attempted to set fire to the fort shooting flaming arrows on cabin roofs, throwing lighted torches against the walls of the fort and building fires in piles of flax laid against a fence connecting to the wall of the fort. The Indians also began excavating a tunnel under the walls of the fort.

The defenders, although few in number and with limited gunpowder, water and food, responded by extinguishing fires and digging their own tunnel to intercept the Indian tunnel. During that hot and dry Kentucky September, it rained. The rain prevented the burning of the fort and led to the collapse of the Indian tunnel. On September 18, after the longest siege of a fort by Indians in frontier history, the Shawnee and their Canadian allies began to withdraw leaving two dead and four wounded in the fort.<sup>10</sup> For the first time, a Kentucky fort had survived a sustained siege by a large and well-organized Indian army.

Frontiersmen of this period believed strongly that purely defensive measures, like those used at Boonesborough in 1778, were ineffective against the Indians and that attacks on the Indian towns would be necessary to reduce Indian raids in Kentucky. On May 29, 1779, Col. John Bowman led 296 Kentucky militia across the Ohio River toward the Shawnee towns. Following a strategy that would be repeated in 1780, 1782 and 1786, the Kentuckians invaded the Indian territory destroying crops and housing. Bowman's troop attacked the main Shawnee town of Chillicothe, then located on the Little Miami River between what is now Xenia and Springfield, Ohio.<sup>11</sup> The Kentuckians burned Chillicothe and the Indian corn supply while also recovering approximately 200 horses allegedly stolen from Kentucky.

Benjamin Cooper, a young private who had been sent to Kentucky as part of the Virginia militia, was part of the Kentucky militia that invaded Ohio in 1779. Fifty years later, Cooper recalled,

In June 1779, I with half of our company was marched by Col. Bowman to Chillicothe against the Shawnee Indians and there had a severe battle. We retreated about twelve miles, they persuing. We again gave them battle and here conquered them.<sup>12</sup>

As Cooper suggests, the Indians regrouped and attacked the militia as it withdrew from Ohio. The Indians recovered approximately 40 horses in the engagement. The frontier army became disorganized in the battle losing eight or nine men before retreating. The 1779 campaign in Ohio had mixed results. The Kentuckians returned with 163 horses but the threat of Indian raids continued.

#### George Rogers Clark and the Illinois Campaign, 1778-1779

By the summer of 1777, the British had captured New York and New Jersey and were threatening to capture the Hudson River Valley and Philadelphia. On the frontier, the British maintained forts which the French had built in what is now Illinois, Indiana and Michigan. These forts allowed the British to sustain alliances with Indians on the frontier and to threaten the

settlements in Kentucky. In 1777, George Rogers Clark proposed a bold plan to weaken British influence on the frontier. Simply, he would recruit a small frontier army and capture the British forts in the west.<sup>13</sup>

Clark proposed his audacious plan to Governor Patrick Henry of Virginia, Thomas Jefferson and George Mason. Governor Henry described the plan in a secret letter of instruction:

You are to proceed with all convenient Speed to raise Seven Companies of Soldiers to consist of fifty men each officered in the usual manner & armed most properly for the Enterprise & with this Force attack the British post at Kaskasky...during the whole Transaction you are to take especial Care to keep the true Destination of your Force secret.<sup>14</sup>

Clark returned to the frontier where he was only able to recruit a small number of volunteers to the Falls of the Ohio, present-day Louisville, Kentucky, where they drilled briefly. On June 24, 1778, Clark and 178 men left Kentucky by boat floating down the Ohio River to a spot below the mouth of the Tennessee.

Hunters he encountered persuaded Clark to approach Kaskaskia by land. The little army had no horses so they carried what they could and hiked 130 miles through what is now southern Illinois. Clark's army celebrated the second anniversary of Independence by capturing the old French trading town and fort of Kaskaskia using surprise rather than force. Two days later, a detachment from Clark's army captured the town and fort at Cahokia 60 miles away on the Mississippi River, across from present-day St. Louis. Learning that the British fort at Vincennes was only defended by local militia, Clark sent a detachment the 180 miles to the Wabash River to capture the fort. Within six weeks, Clark's tiny army had captured three British forts without losing a man.

In October, Lt. Col. Henry Hamilton the British commanding officer at Detroit, mobilized a force of 175 whites and 60 Indians who traveled by boat following the Maumee-Wabash portage. As he approached Vincennes, Hamilton was joined by two or three hundred Indians. On

December 17, Hamilton and his army recaptured the fort at Vincennes which had been defended by two men from Clark's army. Clark responded by marching 127 men across 180 miles of flooded and frozen prairie in midwinter. Wet, cold and hungry, Clark's army reached Vincennes February 24, 1779 and attacked the fort. The following day, Hamilton surrendered the fort and its garrison of 79 defenders.

Clark was never able to obtain the troops, supplies or authority required for a campaign to capture the British fort at Detroit. In a March 1780 letter, Thomas Jefferson, the Governor of Virginia, explained to Clark,

Many reasons have occurred lately for declining the expedition against Detroit. want of men, want of money, scarcity of provisions, are of themselves sufficient, but there are others more cogent which cannot be trusted to a letter. we therefore wish you to decline that object. <sup>15</sup>

Jefferson wisely did not make explicit the "more cogent" reasons, as the letter to Clark was intercepted, but he did warn Clark that it might be necessary to abandon the Illinois forts altogether in order to suppress the Loyalists in the highlands of the Carolinas.

Clark continued to maintain garrisons at the western forts until 1781 and he commanded punitive expeditions against the Indians in Ohio in 1780 and 1782. He also led an unsuccessful campaign against the Indians in Indiana in 1786. Many years later, Clark assessed the importance of his 1778-1779 invasion of Illinois,

Had not those measures been taken, it is easy to Conceive what would have been the Consequence of four or five thousand Indian warriors, with all the assistance Brittain could give them, let loose on our frontiers for the course of seven years. Might we not with propriety suppose that part of the Blue Ridge would have been contended for, and all the assistance you have received from the Valuable frontier country...have been lost to you?<sup>16</sup>

Historians disagree about the significance of Clark's Illinois campaign. For some, Clark's boldness and resourcefulness preserved the West for the United States and guaranteed its eventual



expansion to the Mississippi River. They point out that his success diverted British attention and weakened the alliance between the British and Indians allowing the survival of the Kentucky settlements. Other historians point out that the forts north of the Ohio River were back in British control by the end of the Revolutionary War. In either case, Clark and his little frontier army, 1000 miles from Virginia and 400 miles from Kentucky, strengthened United States claims west of the Alleghany mountains.<sup>17</sup>

### The Invasion of Kentucky 1780

By 1780, the war on the Atlantic seaboard was stalled. The British continued to occupy the city of New York but, despite several military victories in the middle colonies, had little to show for five years of warfare. On the frontier, the British had been humiliated by George Rogers Clark and his little army of frontiersmen. To isolate Clark on the far frontier, the British in Detroit organized a military campaign to attack the settlements in Kentucky.

Capt. Henry Bird organized a militia force of 140 volunteers and draftees from Detroit to invade Kentucky.<sup>18</sup> Bird's army included experienced Tory frontiersmen like Simon Girty and Alexander McKee as well as several hundred, perhaps as many as 1000, Indians. Slowed by several small cannon, Bird's army crossed Lake Erie and followed the Maumee and Great Miami Rivers south. By May, Maj. Arent de Peyster at Detroit was reporting "The Delawares and Shawaneese are... daily bringing in Scalps, and Prisoners, having at present a great field to act upon..."<sup>19</sup> The British plan had been to float down the Ohio River and capture the fort George Rogers Clark had built at the Falls of the Ohio. The Indians however insisted on attacking the frontier settlements near the Licking River rather than Clark's fort. As Alexander McKee later explained,

...the Indians could not be prevailed upon to come into it, and in a full council of the Chiefs of their several Nations, determined to proceed to the nearest Forts by way of Licking Creek giving for their reason that it could not be prudent to leave their villages naked & defenseless in the neighborhood of those forts.<sup>20</sup>

On June 24, Bird's army surrounded Ruddle's Station and used a cannon to force the surrender of the small fort. Bird reported to his commanding officer,

When they saw the Six Pounder moving across the field, they immediately surrendered...the conditions granted That their Lives should be saved, and themselves taken to Detroit, I forewarn'd them that the Savages would adopt some of their Children...whilst Capt. McKee and myself were in the Fort settling these matters with the Poor Peopled, they [the Indians] rush'd in, tore the poor children from their mothers Breasts, killed a wounded man and every one of the cattle, leaving the whole to stink.<sup>21</sup>

Bird's army marched to Martin's Station where the cannon was again effective in forcing a surrender and where "The same Promises were made & broke in the same manner, not one pound of meat & near 300 Prisoners."<sup>22</sup> Bird's army burned Martin's Station and withdrew with the prisoners and no food toward Detroit. Bird arrived in Detroit August 4, 1780 with 150 prisoners from Kentucky and the report that the Indians would be bringing 200 additional prisoners.

The Kentucky settlers quickly organized a retaliatory campaign against the Indians in Ohio under George Rogers Clark. On August 1, 1780, 998 members of the Kentucky militia collected at the mouth of the Licking River, present-day Covington, to invade Ohio. Benjamin Cooper, a member of the Lincoln County militia, recalled the 1780 invasion many years later,

We then proceeded from Lincoln County, Kentucky to Chillicothe in the state of Ohio and to the Shawnee and Pickaway towns where we were commanded by General George Rogers Clark. At this place, we had a severe engagement where we defeated the Indians and destroyed a great quantity of their com.<sup>23</sup>

The militia crossed the river and built a fort at present-day Cincinnati to protect boats and supplies for the return trip. Leaving a small detachment to guard the fort, Clark marched his army 70 miles north to the Shawnee town of Chillicothe where he burned the Indian supplies of com and beans before advancing to on the Big Miami on August 8.

At Piqua, the Kentucky militia found 300 Shawnee, Mingo, Wyandot and Delaware warriors waiting for Clark's army. The Indians fought stubbornly from defensive positions before the

Kentuckians were able to use their cannon to dislodge the Indians. Clark's army routed the Indians and destroyed buildings and supplies. As Clark reported,

...having done the Shawanese all the mischief in our power; after destroying Picaway settlements, I returned to this post, having marched in the whole, 480 miles in 31 days. We destroyed upwards of 800 acres of corn, besides great quantities of vegetables...<sup>24</sup>

The Kentucky militia lost 20 killed and 40 wounded with Indian casualties estimated at 73 killed. The Kentuckians were too late to rescue any of the prisoners captured by the Indians at Ruddle's and Martin's stations in June.<sup>25</sup>

### Kings Mountain

While the Kentucky pioneers were repelling the British Indian invasions from the North, the settlers on the Tennessee frontier were responding to British advances in the Carolinas. With the surrender of Charleston in May 1780, the British army and its Loyalist militia were freed to pursue and suppress Patriots throughout the South. In July 1780, the frontier settlements in Virginia responded to a call for help from North Carolina and sent 200 riflemen from Washington County under Maj. Charles Robertson and 200 from Sullivan County under Col. Isaac Shelby.

The backcountry militia joined others under the command of Col. Charles McDowell and attacked a Loyalist stronghold at Thicketty Fort in South Carolina. British Capt. Patrick Moore and his Tory volunteers had used the fort as a base to terrorize Patriots in the area. The Patriot army surrounded the fort and forced the surrender of the British officer, his 92 Loyalist troops and 250 stands of arms.<sup>26</sup> The victorious Patriot army moved on to engage 200 Tories August 18 at Musgrove's Mill where they won a second battle. Learning of the disastrous defeat of Gates at Camden, McDowell's army was disbanded and sent home in late August.<sup>27</sup>

Within a few weeks, the Watauga frontiersmen were again mobilizing. Inspired and exhorted by a rousing sermon by the Reverend Samuel Doak, a Presbyterian preacher trained at

Princeton,<sup>27</sup> an army of 1040 backcountry volunteers set off September 25 under Col. John Sevier, Col. Isaac Shelby and Col. William Campbell of Virginia. From Sycamore Shoals at 1580 feet above sea level, the frontier army climbed over Carver's Gap at 5512 feet and over the Blue Ridge at the Bald of the Roan. Alerted that the Watauga army was marching, Capt. Patrick Ferguson of the British army sent a proclamation on October 1 to stir backcountry Loyalists into action. He warned that the Wataugans had crossed the mountains and suggested that the alternative to action would be "to be pissed upon forever and ever by a set of mongrels."<sup>28</sup> After four years of bitter and brutal fighting among Loyalists and Patriots, feelings were intense.

By October 4, the Wataugans had been joined by other Patriot militia to bring the total army to 1500. The army learned that the obnoxious Ferguson had resorted to a defensive position at King's Mountain, a narrow and steep ridge with a flat top in South Carolina near the North Carolina border. Ferguson had 1125 men including 100 experienced Tory soldiers and 1000 Loyalist militia under his command. The Patriot army marched all night and most of the following day to King's Mountain. On October 7, they surrounded the mountain and attacked from every side. The battle was fierce and close. Repeated Patriot attacks were repelled with Loyalist bayonet charges before the Patriots overpowered the defenders and gained the top of the ridge. Ferguson was killed and the Loyalists surrendered. The British lost 157 killed, 163 wounded and 698 captured. The Patriots lost 28 killed and 62 wounded.<sup>29</sup>

Using the trees and terrain for cover, the long rifles and wilderness tactics of the frontier Patriots prevailed over the quick-loading muskets and disciplined bayonet attacks of the Carolina Tories at Kings Mountain.<sup>30</sup> In contrast to the Continental Army which had lost a series of battles from Charleston to Camden, the frontier militia from Watauga decisively defeated a large and entrenched Tory army. While limited in strategic importance, the battle was critical in destroying

the Loyalist partisans in the Carolinas and restoring hope among Patriots after Charleston and Camden.<sup>31</sup>

### Life on the Frontier During the Revolutionary War

The pioneers of the 18th century frontier were often families with children. These families struggled to survive while living with continual uncertainty about their safety and that of their children. They were aware of the Indian practice of "adopting" captive children and they were aware of the danger inherent in their daily lives. For women, frontier life involved hard work, child-rearing under harsh conditions and the possibility of early widowhood or capture by the Indians.

Ann Kennedy, for example, was born, married, widowed and remarried on the Virginia frontier before moving to Boonesborough in September 1775 with her husband and five children. Her second husband was killed in 1778 leaving her at Harrodsburg, a widow with six children. She remarried in 1781. Her third husband was killed at the Blue Licks the following year. Three times a frontier widow, she married a fourth time and lived for many years in Kentucky. In an 1844 interview, one of relatively few with a woman pioneer, Ann Kennedy remembered the reaction of the children to the violence of the frontier. When the old man who maintained the spring for the fort was killed and beheaded by Indians, she reported,

The little children were for a long time after fearful to go to the spring of evenings lest they should encounter the headless ghost..<sup>32</sup>

Ann Kennedy remembered Mr. Pendergrass limping back to the fort and killed as his family looked on helplessly. She told the stories of two women whose husbands had been given up for dead after being captured by Indians. The two men returned after having been gone for a year. One wife did not recognize her lost husband. The other was preparing to remarry.<sup>33</sup>

While the pioneer women and their children remained in the limited security and comfort of the frontier forts, the pioneer men ranged outside the forts to hunt, make salt or fight. J.F.D. Smyth, an Englishman who traveled on the frontier during this period, observed,

...with his rifle upon his shoulder, or in his hand, a back-wood's man is completely equipped for visiting, courtship, travel, hunting, or war...he finds all his resources in himself...with his rifle he procures his subsistence; with his tomahawk he erects his shelter, his wigwam, his house, or whatever habitation he may chuse...<sup>34</sup>

Smyth was particularly impressed with the frontier practice of "blazing" trails in the wilderness. The pioneers used tomahawks, "an instrument that serves every purpose of defence and convenience; being a hammer at one side and a sharp hatchet at the other,"<sup>35</sup> to mark routes with cuts that were visible at a distance and according to Smyth, could be followed at night through the woods. Smyth appears unaware that many of the wilderness roads had long been used by the Indians and, in some cases, had initially been routes traced by animals moving toward streams, salt licks or seasonal feeding areas.

### The Coopers in Kentucky

Beyond its military and political dimensions, the Revolutionary War was also a source of change for many of the families it touched. Like other wars in United States history, the Revolution provided opportunities for young men to travel, learn about other places and acquire experience that would later prove valuable. For the Cooper family of Culpeper, Virginia, the Revolution was a period of dramatic change. They began the war living, as they had for a generation, in the settled rural community of Culpeper County. Francis Cooper had twice left his home to fight on the Virginia frontier but had, each time, returned to his family and farm in Culpeper County. In 1776, his son Benjamin followed his father's pattern by enlisting as a private in the militia of Washington County, Virginia where he served under Capt. Daniel Smith, Lt. William Bowman and Ensign

William Cowen. For three years, Benjamin Cooper was part of a ranger company patrolling and defending the frontier settlements on the Clinch and Holston Rivers of southwestern Virginia.<sup>36</sup>

In 1779, Benjamin Cooper was part of a company under Capt. John Duncan which was marched from Virginia to Boonesborough on the Kentucky frontier. In Kentucky, Isaac Ruddle replaced Duncan as captain of the company with Col. John Bowman and Maj. James Harrod in command. The company patrolled the area from Boonesborough to the Blue Licks and the Forks of the Licking River. Cooper participated in the 1779 campaign against the Shawnee towns in Ohio and returned that summer to the fort on the Licking River, perhaps Smith's Station, which the ranger company had occupied. In September 1779, Cooper requested and obtained a furlough from Capt. Ruddle to return to his home in Virginia.<sup>37</sup>

At the same time Benjamin Cooper was traveling from Kentucky to Virginia, the Kentucky settlers were petitioning Virginia to establish a land office in Kentucky and issue land grants for settlers. In the hyperbole of the frontier, the Kentuckians explained,

"...exposed to all the Barberous ravages of inhuman savage, whose savage disposition being animated by the rewards of Governor Hamilton has enabled, them to hold up a constant war this four years, which term has reduced many of us so low that we have scarce cattle amongst us to supply, our small Family's and many of us that brought good stocks of both Horses and cows, now at this juncture have not left so much as one cow for the support of our familys...many of our inhabitants both married and single, have been taken by the Indians and carried to Detroit others killed and their wives and children left in this destitute situation not being able as yet even to support their indigent family's..."<sup>38</sup>

The petition requested that Virginia grant the Kentucky pioneer "some compensation in Land for his loss, trouble and risk."<sup>39</sup> In response to the pleas of the settlers, Virginia established the Kentucky land law in 1779 enabling pioneers to claim the land for which they were fighting.

It is unclear whether Benjamin Cooper's September 1779 visit to Culpeper County was planned as part of a family move to Kentucky but sometime that fall, in spite of the dangers, Francis

Cooper and his family moved to Lincoln County, Kentucky with Benjamin Cooper.<sup>40</sup> The Coopers were not among the 46 residents of Fort Boonesborough who petitioned for land under the new land law in October 1779.<sup>41</sup> It is likely the extended Cooper family arrived in Kentucky late in 1779 or early the following year. Because he had been part of the militia in Kentucky in 1779, Benjamin Cooper is listed among the 627 "pioneers at Fort Boonesborough" whose names were inscribed on a marble monument erected at the site of the reconstructed fort in 1981.<sup>42</sup>

The 1779 land law granted 400 acres and rights to 1000 additional acres to pioneers who had raised a crop of corn in Kentucky by 1776. Settlers who arrived by 1779 had the right to purchase 400 acres at a nominal price. To adjudicate land claims, the governor of Virginia appointed a commission composed of Col. William Fleming, who had been disabled since the Battle of Point Pleasant, Col. Stephen Trigg, who would be killed leading troops in the Battle at the Blue Licks in 1782 and two others. On January 29, 1780, the land commission convened at Harrodsburg and, among several claims, approved the preemption claim of Benjamin Cooper for

...400 acres of Land at the State price in the District of Kentucky on Account of Making an Actual settlem't in the Month of April 1779 lying on the South fork of Coopers run Waters of Licking Creek about 2 or 3 Miles above the forks of the s'd Coopers run Satisfactory proof being made to the Court they are of Opinion that the s'd Cooper has the right of a preemption of 400 Acres of land to include the above location...<sup>43</sup>

The land commission issued a certificate for the 400 acres. It is unclear who paid the fees but appears likely that Cooper immediately sold the land on Coopers Run as the deed was delivered to William Williams.

Soon after his return from Virginia, Benjamin Cooper enlisted in the Lincoln County militia under Capt. Samuel Scott and Col. Benjamin Logan. In the Spring of 1780, the militia elected Benjamin Cooper lieutenant of Capt. Scott's company.<sup>44</sup> In early 1781, the Country Court, the



administrative body governing Lincoln County, recommended the names of several local settlers, including that of Benjamin Cooper, to the Governor of Virginia for appointment as militia officers.<sup>45</sup>

In addition to his service on the Virginia frontier 1776-1779 and Kentucky 1779-1780, Benjamin Cooper also participated in the Battle of the Blue Licks and invasion of Ohio in 1782 as well as the Indiana campaign of 1786. In 1833, a 77 year old Benjamin Cooper living in Missouri recounted his service in an application for a Revolutionary War pension. To qualify under the 1832 pension law, Cooper had to show a minimum of six months service in the Continental Line, state militia or volunteers. He claimed continuous service from 1776 to 1782 and requested a pension of \$320 a year based on his salary as a lieutenant of militia.

The War Department, unconvinced by the 1833 affidavit, requested additional proof of Cooper's claims. Cooper's lawyer sent a sworn statement from Samuel Brown confirming that he had served 48 months, beginning October or November 1781 in Capt. Samuel Scott's Company where Benjamin Cooper had been the Lieutenant. In January 1834, the Pension Office denied Cooper's application explaining "it is hardly probable he could have been in service so long...he should also have in mind the War of the Revolution closed the 30th of September 1780."<sup>46</sup> Cooper and his lawyer responded by sending a sworn statement from Samuel Teeter confirming Cooper's service as a lieutenant in Ohio in 1782 and 1783.

Despite the earlier denial based on excessive service and the premature end of the war, a year before Yorktown, the War Department reversed itself and approved an annual pension of \$320 to Benjamin Cooper for Revolutionary War service.<sup>47</sup> Many years later, the federal land office at Richmond allocated 2666-2/3 acres of land to ten surviving heirs of Benjamin Cooper "for his services as a lieut. in the Illinois Regt. for three years ending with the war." The military land warrant was originally approved in 1835 and issued to the surviving Cooper heirs in 1851.<sup>48</sup>

Benjamin Cooper appears to have been the only member of his immediate family who served in the Kentucky militia during the Revolutionary War. His father Francis Cooper, a veteran of the colonial militia in Virginia, arrived in Kentucky accompanied or followed by his sons Sarshel and Braxton.<sup>49</sup> In addition to the sons of Francis Cooper who were early Kentucky settlers, at least one Cooper daughter was also a Kentucky pioneer. Betty Cooper married James Wood who built her a cabin in Kentucky. One day in 1783, Wood was away from his cabin overnight on a hunting trip. He returned the following day but, as he opened the cabin door, he was shot and killed by Indians hiding near the cabin. By the time Betty Wood was able to close and bar the cabin door, one of the Indians was inside. Betty Wood and her children fought the Indian until Wood's twelve-year old daughter grabbed an axe and killed the Indian. The widowed Cooper later married a man named Jesse or John Peak.<sup>50</sup>

By the time the Revolutionary War began to shift toward the colonist side, two generations of the Cooper family of Culpeper County, Virginia were settled on the frontier in Kentucky. Like many similar families, they were drawn by the availability of land and the opportunity to build a new community. They were beyond the settlement line proclaimed in 1763 by the British king and they were in a region that remained exposed to invasion by the British and their Indian allies. While the fight for independence was moving toward conclusion, the survival of Kentucky remained in doubt. As he had since 1776, Benjamin Cooper would continue to be called upon to defend the Kentucky settlements and assure their survival and growth.

Revolution on the Frontier Notes

1. Dale Van Every, A Company of Heroes (New York, 1962), p. 3.
2. Ibid. Much of the background for this chapter is drawn from Jack M. Sosin, The Revolutionary Frontier, 1763-1783 (New York, 1967).
3. Corlew, Tennessee History, pp. 62-67.
4. John Floyd letter of July 1776 in Otto A Rothbert, "John Floyd-Pioneer and Hero," The Historical Quarterly, Vol. II, July 1928, p. 171. The man killed by Indians was James Cooper for whom Cooper Creek was named. He does not appear to have been related to the Coopers of Culpeper, Virginia.
5. Lord George Germaine letter of March 26, 1777 to Sir Guy Carleton, the British Governor of Canada, in Seineke, Selected Documents, p. 196.
6. Ibid.
7. Charles Gano Talbert, Benjamin Logan, Kentucky Frontiersman (Lexington, 1962), pp. 25-45. At this time, there were 84 able-bodied men at Harrodsburg, 22 at Boonesborough and 15 at Logan's Fort.
8. Ibid.
9. Michael A Lofaro, The Life and Adventures of Daniel Boone (Lexington, 1978), pp. 70-78. Stephen Hancock, whose daughter Ruth later married Sarah Cooper, was one of the salt-makers captured at the Blue Licks in February 1778. Like Boone, Hancock escaped from the Indians and returned to his family at Boonesborough during the summer of 1778, Draper MSS 11C92 and 30C56. According to a Kentucky historian, Stephen Hancock was "a gallant soldier of the frontier...one of its most intrepid Indian fighters." He later established his own station in Madison County. E. Polk Johnson, A History of Kentucky and Kentuckians, Vol. I (Chicago, 1912), p. 57. A deposition by Stephen Hancock is in "History of Circuit Court Records" Register of the Kentucky Historical Society, Vol. XXXII (1934), p. 8.
10. Lofaro, Boone, pp. 80-89. Stephen Hancock was among the Boonesborough settlers who negotiated with the Indians and defended the fort during the siege of 1778.
11. Talbert, Logan, pp. 74-76. The Shawnee town named Chillicothe, in addition to its 1779 location on the Little Miami River, was also, at various times, located on the Scioto River, the Big Miami and the Maumee River.
12. Benjamin A Cooper, Revolutionary War Pension Application S 16722. There is no other record of Benjamin Cooper's participation in the Ohio campaign of 1779.
13. The major sources for George Rogers Clark and his western campaigns are: John Bakeless, Background to Glory: The Life of George Rogers Clark (Philadelphia, 1957);

Temple Bodley, George Rogers Clark (Boston, 1926); Palmer, Clark of the Ohio, Seineke, Selected Documents. The military aspects of the campaign are drawn from Ward, The War of Revolution, pp. 850-862.

14. Gov. Patrick Henry orders of January 2, 1778 to George Rogers Clark in Martin Ridge and Ray Allen Billington, America's Frontier Stozy (New York, 1969), pp. 188-189.
15. Gov. Thomas Jefferson letter of March 19, 1780 to George Rogers Clark in Seineke, Selected Documents, pp. 426-427.
16. George Rogers Clark letter of June 16, 1783 to Gov. Benjamin Harrison in Bodley, George Rogers Clark, p. 234.
17. Temple Bodley attributes British concessions in the Treaty of Paris to Clark's campaigns (p. 253). Samuel Flagg Bemis, A Diplomatic Histozy of the United States (New York, 1955), p. 60n takes a contrary view.
18. Milo M. Quaife, "When Detroit Invaded Kentucky" in The Histozy Quarterly, Vol. I, No. 2, January 1927, pp. 53-67.
19. Maj. Arent de Peyster letter of May 17, 1780 to General Sir Frederick Haldimand in Seineke, Selected Documents, p. 436.
20. Alexander McKee letter of July 8, 1780 to Maj. Arent de Peyster, *Ibid.*, p. 64.
21. Capt. Henry Bird letter of July 1, 1780 to Maj. Arent de Peyster, *Ibid.*, p. 62.
22. *Ibid.*
23. Benjamin A Cooper, Revolutionary War Pension Application S 16722. There is no other record of Benjamin Cooper's participation in the Ohio campaign of 1780.
24. George Rogers Clark letter of August 22, 1780 to Gov. Thomas Jefferson in Seineke, Selected Documents, p. 456.
25. Bakeless, Background to Glozy, pp. 259-266.
26. Hank Messick, King's Mountain (Boston, 1976), pp. 72-74.
27. *Ibid.*, pp. 75-78.
28. *Ibid.*, pp. 88-89.
29. Ward, The War of Revolution, pp. 742-744.
30. During the Revolutionary War, the British army used smooth-bore muskets with 21 inch bayonets. The muskets could fire two or three shots a minute and were accurate up to sixty yards. *Ibid.*, p. 28 and p. 107. The frontier rifle, often called the Kentucky rifle, was

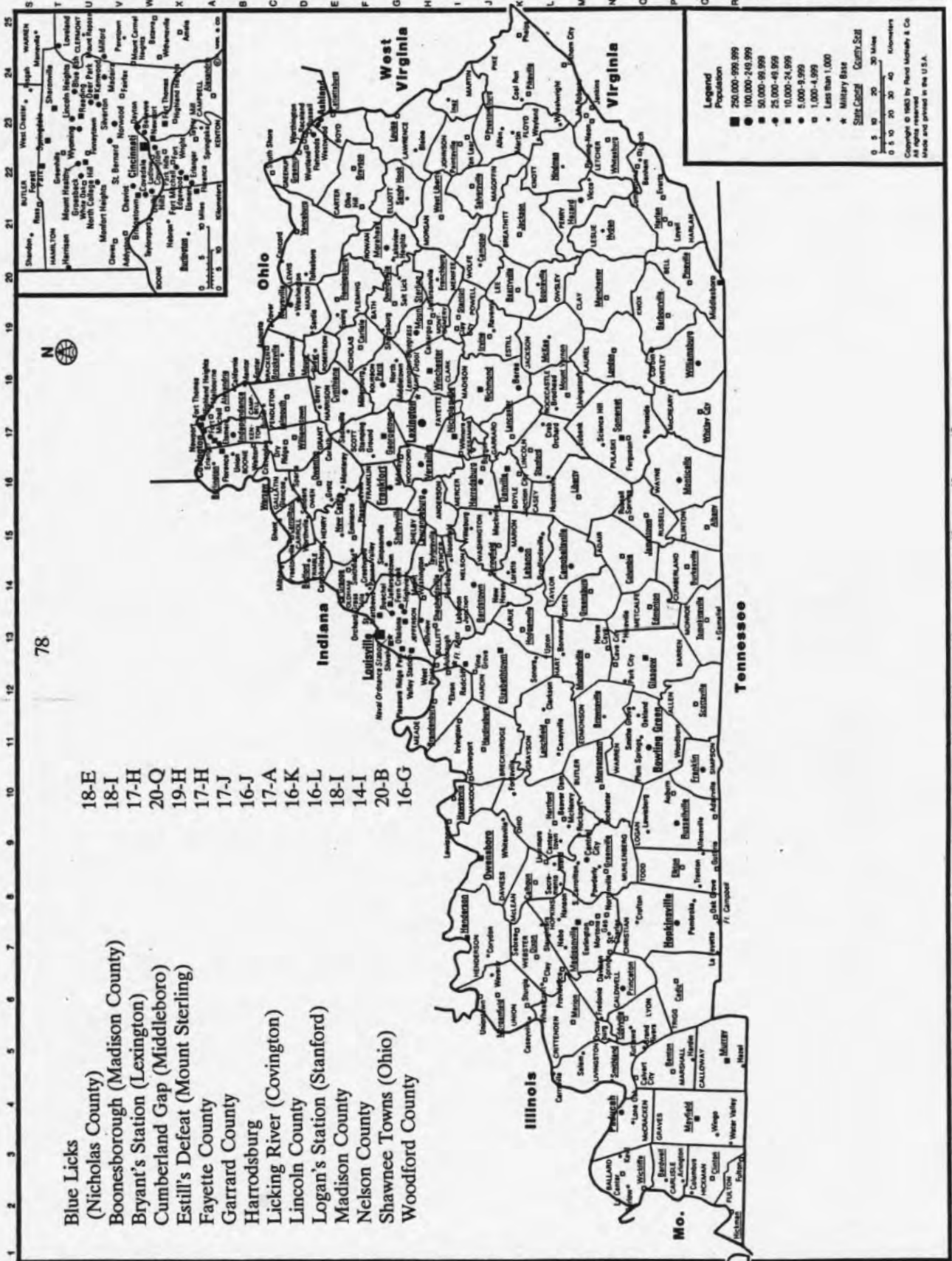
designed for accuracy, economy and dependability as a hunting weapon on the frontier. It had a long and grooved barrel to increase accuracy and a reduced bore to conserve precious lead and powder. Accurate at distances up to 125 yards, the frontier rifle was slow to reload, requiring thirty seconds to a minute, and virtually impossible to reload on horseback. RobertL Williamson, "The Muzzle-Loading Rifle," in Harold M. Hollingsworth and SandraL Myers Essays on the American West (Austin 1969), p. 68.

31. Messick, King's Mountain, pp. 91-159.
32. Louise Phelps Kellogg, "A Kentucky Pioneer Tells Her Story of Early Boonesborough and Harrodsburg", The History Quarterly of the Filson Club, Vol. III, October 1929, p. 230.
33. Kellogg, *Ibid.*, pp. 224-236. The Kellogg article is based on an 1844 interview of Ann Kennedy Wilson Page Lindsay McGinty reported in Draper MSS 4 CC 85.
34. J.F.D. Smyth's "A Tour in the United States of America," originally published London, 1784, quoted in Seineke, Selected Documents, p. 544.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 543.
36. Benjamin A Cooper, Revolutionary War Pension Application S 16722.
37. *Ibid.*
38. County of Kentucky petition of October 14, 1779 to the Assembly of Virginia, Robertson, Petitions of the Eady Inhabitants, pp. 45-46.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 47.
40. Stephen Cooper (1797-1890), a grandson of Francis Cooper, reported many years later that his grandfather had moved to Boonesborough with several children "perhaps before the big siege of 1778." While Stephen Cooper's mother's family was at Boonesborough in 1778, the Cooper family did not arrive until late in 1779 or early 1780.

Stephen Cooper interview of 1889 in Draper MSS 11C98. A son of Sarshel Cooper and Ruth Hancock Cooper, Stephen Cooper later played an active role in the defense of the family forts in Missouri and the opening of the Santa Fe Trail before moving to California in 1846.

In addition to the Cooper family of Culpeper, Virginia, several other, unrelated Cooper families were active in Kentucky during the pioneer period. Phillip Cooper was part of a Kentucky survey party in 1773 and William Cooper was a Kentucky settler of 1775. Neal O. Hammon, "Pioneers in Kentucky, 1773-1775", Filson Club Historical Quarterly, Vol. 55, July 1981, pp. 268-279. George Frederick Cooper (1759-1841) visited Kentucky in 1775-1776 and returned to settle permanently after Revolutionary War service. He may have been related to William Cooper, the pioneer of 1775, and to James and Robert Cooper who were killed by Indians. Guy C. Shearer, "William Armstrong Cooper, 1813-1909", Filson Club Historical Quarterly, Vol. XXV, April 1951, pp. 140-145.

41. Katherine Phelps Caperton, "A Partial List of Those at Fort Boonesborough" Register Kentucky State Historical Society, Vol. 23, p. 155.
42. William E. Ellis, H.B. Everman, Richard D. Sears, Madison County: 200 Years in Retrospect (Richmond, Kentucky, 1985), pp. 418-425. Direct descendants of the 640 pioneers who arrived at Fort Boonesborough before 1782 are eligible for membership in the Society of Boonesborough. The pioneer monument is at Fort Boonesborough State Park on a bluff above the Kentucky River in Madison County, near the actual site of the fort on State Route 627 five miles east of I-75 and 19 miles south of Lexington. In addition to Benjamin Cooper and 21 members of the Boone family, the monument also lists: George Rogers Clark; Stephen Hancock; Simon Kenton; James, Jesse and John Peake; Adam, Samuel and Capt. Archibald Woods. Of the 640 Boonesborough pioneers who have been identified, including several children, 68 were women and 56 were killed during the pioneer period.
43. Silas Emmett Lucas, Jr., editor, The Register of The Kentucky State Historical Society, Vol. 21, (Easley, South Carolina, 1981), p. 153, originally published Frankfort, Kentucky, 1923.
44. Benjamin A Cooper, Revolutionary War Pension Application S 16722.
45. Mrs. William Breckenridge Ardery, compiler, Kentucky Court and Other Records, Vol. II (Baltimore, 1972), p. 152. The records are from the Lincoln County Order Book, 1781-1783, p. 4. In his pension application, Benjamin Cooper reported that he had received a commission as lieutenant of militia from the Governor of Virginia but that the document had subsequently been lost. Revolutionary War Pension Application S 16722.
46. J.L Edwards letter of January 1834 denying Revolutionary War Pension Application S 16722.
47. Ibid. The pension was approved April 28, 1834 retroactive to March 1831. Benjamin Cooper was paid \$1120 in 1834 for the period between 1831 and 1834 and semiannual payments of \$160 until his death in 1841.
48. Louis A Burgess, Virginia Soldiers of 1776, Vol. 3 (Spartanburg, South Carolina, 1973), p. 1403. The surviving heirs who appeared in Saline County, Missouri in December 1851 were: Tobias, David, John, Sackett, Dudley, Rufus and Drucilla Cooper; Ephraim McLean; Nancy Sappington and Elisha Estes. Military Land Warrant 9532 was issued April 6, 1835. (Book III, p. 563). William B. Cooper (1796-1848), a son of Benjamin Cooper and the father of Nancy Cooper Simpson (1820-1883), had died by the time of the 1851 court appearance to claim the land warrant for Benjamin Cooper's Revolutionary War service.
49. Several members of the Cooper family were named Braxton. The Braxton Cooper who was an adult on the Kentucky frontier was a brother, probably a younger brother, of Benjamin and Sarshel Cooper. Two additional Braxton Coopers appear on the Missouri frontier in the next generation.



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- 18-E Blue Licks (Nicholas County)
- 18-I Boonesborough (Madison County)
- 17-H Bryant's Station (Lexington)
- 20-Q Cumberland Gap (Middleboro)
- 19-H Estill's Defeat (Mount Sterling)
- 17-H Fayette County
- 17-J Garrard County
- 16-J Harrodsburg
- 17-A Licking River (Covington)
- 16-K Lincoln County
- 16-L Logan's Station (Stanford)
- 18-I Madison County
- 14-I Nelson County
- 20-B Shawnee Towns (Ohio)
- 16-G Woodford County

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CHAPTER FIVE  
KENTUCKY IN 1782

Many widows were now  
made.

Daniel Boone<sup>1</sup>

The populous colonies of the Atlantic seaboard were lost to the British with the military surrender at Yorktown but control of the wilderness beyond the mountains remained in doubt. The British maintained strategic western outposts at Michilimackinac, Detroit, Niagara and Oswego and, with their Indian allies, kept pressure on the isolated frontier settlements while the diplomats in Paris negotiated boundaries for an ambiguous but critical frontier.<sup>2</sup>

As they had from the earliest settlement, the frontier families of Kentucky continued to live in fortified villages where they could protect themselves from Indian raids. Called "stations" in Kentucky and "family forts" thirty years later in Missouri, there were approximately sixty of these outposts in Kentucky by 1781. Although they varied in size, the forts shared a common design. Rows of log cabins were built against the inside walls of a rectangular log stockade. The rear walls of the cabins were the walls of the fort and the cabins faced into a large open space where livestock could be protected in time of attack. The log stockade, often twelve feet high, had heavy gates at each end and two-story blockhouses at each corner. The second story of the blockhouse was wider than the first and extended slightly beyond the walls of the fort to enable defenders to shoot at attackers attempting to scale the walls. The settlers lived within the stockade but tended livestock and crops in cleared areas outside the fort.<sup>3</sup>

The residents of the frontier were dependent on volunteers from nearby stations whenever they were attacked or whenever they needed assistance to punish a raiding party or recover



kidnapped settlers and stolen livestock. In joining his neighbor's party, the frontier settler was assuring that he would receive reciprocal assistance when necessary but he was also reducing the number of defenders left to protect his own fort and family. Col. John Floyd of Kentucky described the continual terror of frontier life in an April 1781 letter to Gov. Thomas Jefferson of Virginia:

We are obliged to live in forts in this country and notwithstanding all the caution that we use, forty-seven inhabitants have been killed or taken prisoners by the savages, besides a number wounded, since January last. .. Not a week passes, and some weeks scarcely a day, without some of our distressed inhabitants feeling the fatal effect of the infernal rage and fury of these execrable hell-hounds.<sup>4</sup>

George Rogers Clark, writing from his fort, explained the British frontier strategy in a March 1782 letter to the Governor of Virginia,

...we have received very allarming accounts from the enemy at Detroit. They last fall Collected Chiefs from the different Hostile tribes of Indians and Instructed them not to disturb the frontiers, and particularly Kentucky until towards Spring. Then to form small parties and take prisoners to hear what was going on. By which Conduct the Country would be off their guard. That the whole would Embolden in the Spring, Reduce this post and lay the whole Country waste, and make one Stroke do for all.<sup>5</sup>

As Clark had predicted, the Indians, sometimes in collaboration with the British and sometimes on their own, intensified the pressure on the Kentucky settlements during the spring of 1782. The Indians harassed the weakly-defended forts with quick raids stealing or killing livestock and withdrawing into the safety of the wilderness before the arrival of reinforcements from nearby stations. As Daniel Boone explained,

Our affairs became more and more alarming. Several stations which had lately been erected in the country were continually infested with savages, stealing their horses and killing their men at every opportunity.<sup>6</sup>

### Estill's Defeat

In March, an advance party of Indians from north of the Ohio River attacked Strode's Station where two settlers were killed and one wounded in a 36 hour siege. Benjamin Logan, the

commander of the Kentucky militia, sent fifteen men from Boonesborough to Estill's Station on Otter Creek where they joined volunteers from other forts. On March 19, Capt. James Estill led a party of forty mounted volunteers in pursuit of the Indians who had attacked Strode's Station. Approximately 25 Wyandot Indians circled behind Estill's party and attacked the station where only women, children and slaves were left to defend the fort. The Wyandot killed and scalped a thirteen year old girl who they surprised outside the fort at some sugar trees. They also killed cattle, stole horses and captured "Monk," Estill's slave. When the Wyandot withdrew, a boy in the fort rode to notify Captain Estill.

Estill and his party, reduced to twenty-five by men returning to protect their own forts, followed the Indian tracks in a light snowfall. On March 22, Estill and his party caught up to the Wyandot at a crossing of Hinkson Creek, sometimes called Little Mountain Creek, about 1-1/2 miles below the present town of Mt. Sterling in Montgomery County. The frontier sharpshooters quickly killed two Indian leaders. Using a common frontier tactic, Estill divided his force into three units and attacked. In the confusion, Monk escaped and rejoined Estill. The Wyandot responded by attacking Estill's left flank. The left flank collapsed, exposing the settlers. Seven of the settlers, including Captain Estill, were killed and four were wounded in the 45 minute battle that is remembered as Estill's Defeat.<sup>7</sup>

### The Siege at Bryant's Station

The Kentucky settlers were discouraged by the Indian raids during March. Col. John Todd of Fayette County wrote the Governor of Virginia on April 15 expressing his concern that the embattled pioneers might abandon Kentucky:

The inhabitants of Fayette County have been so harrassed this spring by Indians, that I was for some time apprehensive that the whole country w'd be evacuated, as Panicks of that kind have proved very catching...<sup>8</sup>

Colonel Todd reported that he had spent 11,000 pounds of his own money, for which he was seeking reimbursement, building a fort at Lexington to protect nearby stations and reassure settlers. The new fort had walls of rammed earth seven feet thick and nine feet high topped with wooden poles. The fort had been constructed in twenty days using hired labor.

The British meanwhile were organizing a major campaign in Ohio and Kentucky to secure their hold on the western frontier. British Capt. William Caldwell and the Pittsburgh Tory Alexander McKee mobilized 1400 midwestern Indians and Canadian Rangers to attack the frontier outposts in Kentucky. While many of the Indians deserted the British force before reaching Kentucky, Caldwell and McKee had between 300 and 600 fighting men under their command when they crossed the river into Kentucky in early August 1782. A detachment of seventy Indians broke off from the main British-Indian force and attacked Hoy's Station where they kidnapped two young boys before withdrawing toward the Ohio River.

Capt. John Holder organized a rescue party of volunteers from neighboring stations. With approximately seventy mounted men, Holder followed the Indian trail to the Upper Blue Licks on the Licking River where the settlers spotted Indians. Holder divided his force into two units and crossed the river. The Indians, using tactics that had proven effective at Estill's Defeat, lured the settlers into an ambush. In an exchange of gunfire, two settlers were killed and two received wounds from which they later died. The two captives were not recovered.<sup>9</sup>

Meanwhile the main British and Indian force under the command of Caldwell and McKee arrived at Bryant's Station five miles northeast of Lexington.<sup>10</sup> According to British sources, Caldwell, McKee and the notorious frontier renegade Simon Girty had an effective force of about 300 Wyandot (also called Huron) and Lake Indians as well as 60 Canadian Rangers and assorted Tories. Bryant's Station had a resident population of ninety including eleven men with families and twenty-nine single men. The residents of the fort became aware of the impending attack at daybreak

the morning of August 15. To gain time, the settlers pretended to carry on their daily routine all the while preparing for attack. The women of the fort, twelve adults and sixteen girls, walked boldly to the spring outside the walls of the fort, as they did every morning, to fetch water. As they walked to the spring on the morning of August 15, 1782, the women and girls knew that their every move was being observed by a raiding party of Indians waiting to attack. This and other diversions enabled the settlers to send riders from the fort to neighboring stations requesting reinforcements.

Although some local volunteers were still away assisting Captain Holder, the settlers responded promptly. They interrupted their farming, collected arms and horses and set out to relieve the garrison at Bryant's Station. Maj. Levi Todd, the ranking officer in the county in the absence of his brother Col. John Todd, took thirty volunteers to the besieged fort. Boone's Station sent an additional ten volunteers. The British and Indians approached the fort cautiously. By remaining hidden, they hoped to draw the defenders out of the fort. When this failed, Captain Caldwell ordered a frontal attack. The defenders responded with heavy gunfire forcing Caldwell to pull back. The British and Indians continued firing on the fort while destroying everything of value outside the walls including livestock, crops and outlying cabins.

The siege continued into the afternoon when reinforcements arrived from neighboring stations. Although the British and Indians had surrounded the fort, approximately half of the Kentucky volunteers were able to penetrate the Indian lines and join the defenders within the fort. The others, badly outnumbered, withdrew to await reinforcements. Levi Todd, the acting commander of the Fayette County militia, reported:

...finding the enemy lay round, we attempted forcing our way. 17 men on Horseback rushed in, the greater part of rest being on Foot were prevented & overpowered, obliged to seek safety by flight with the Loss of one killed & 3 wounded, one of which died the next morning The Enemy commanded by Simon Girty made an attempt to fire the Fort, but were prevented with much Loss. they however kept up a Smart fire till the morning...when they went off <sup>11</sup>

As Todd explained, the British and Indians continued the siege at Bryant's Station all day August 15 and all that night. The attackers attempted to set fire to the fort but the defenders, assisted by favorable winds, were able to stop the fires. By the next morning, when the attackers had given up and left, the fort was intact but it was surrounded by smoldering ruins. The raiders had failed to capture the fort but they had severely weakened its economic base.

Captain Caldwell reported to his British superiors that he and his force of 300 Indians and rangers had failed to capture the station but had:

Killed upwards of 300 hogs, 150 head of cattle and a number of sheep, took a number of horses, pulled up and destroyed their potatoes, cut down a great deal of their corn, burnt their hemp and did other considerable damage.<sup>12</sup>

Within the fort, four were killed and three were wounded. Among the attackers, five were killed and two were wounded.<sup>13</sup>

### To The Blue Licks

Although the British and Indians had departed, additional reinforcements continued to arrive at Bryant's Station. The defenders of the station and the volunteers who rode to their assistance agreed that the attack could not go unpunished and that a major retaliatory campaign should be mounted immediately against the Indian raiders and their British allies. By Sunday morning, August 18, 182 Kentucky volunteers had assembled at Bryant's Station. In the absence of Col. Benjamin Logan, the commander of the Kentucky militia, Col. John Todd of Fayette County was in command. He was joined by Col. Stephen Trigg of Lincoln County and Lt. Col. Daniel Boone as well as numerous other experienced frontier officers.<sup>14</sup>

Benjamin Cooper was then 26 years old and living on the Kentucky frontier. More than fifty years later, he remembered:

"I was Lieutenant in Capt. Scott's company in Kentucky,, and was in the battle of the Blue Licks, and was of Col. Trigg's regiment .  
.. I joined the Fayette troops at Bryant's Station the day the

Indians left there, and the troops then collected, and marched in pursuit of the Indians toward the Blue Licks."<sup>15</sup>

The Indians had made no effort to cover their trail as they moved away from Bryant's Station. The Kentucky volunteers, most of them on horseback but some on foot, followed the day-old trail for several hours before reaching a camp where the Indians had stopped the previous night. Benjamin Cooper recalled, "I was with Col. Boone when he, by counting the Indian fires, concluded there were at least 500 Indians."<sup>16</sup> Aware that they were badly outnumbered, the Kentuckians decided to proceed hoping to catch the retreating Indians by surprise. The Kentuckians followed the Indian trail along a buffalo trace leading toward the Licking River. The volunteers rested briefly at an abandoned station four miles from the Blue Licks before resuming their chase the following morning.

Maj. Levi Todd later reported, "On the morning of the 19th we came within sight of the Enemy about 3/4 of a mile, north of the lower Blue Licks - we dismounted."<sup>17</sup> Indians were visible on a hill across the Licking River at a place where the river made a large horseshoe bend.<sup>18</sup> The river was shallow at the foot of the horseshoe where there was a ford but was too deep to cross along the sides of the horseshoe. The Indians who could be seen were several hundred yards beyond the ford in hilly and wooded terrain. Benjamin Cooper reported that the Kentuckians paused while their officers assessed the situation,

When the troops came near the Indians, at the Blue Licks, there was a general council of officers held, at which I was present, and I knew the officers were of opinion and had decided not to fight the battle - that they were too weak and the enemy too strong.<sup>19</sup>

Fifty years after the battle, Benjamin Cooper remembered that Col. John Todd, Maj. Levi Todd and Daniel Boone had shared his opinion "of the desperate state of our troops contending against so much odds."<sup>20</sup>

### The Direful Catastrophe

That August morning on the Licking River, the Indians had the advantage of position. They were on a small ridge, across a river and protected by ravines, brush and timber. The Kentucky volunteers had lost any advantage that surprise might have given them but were strongly motivated by the desire for revenge against the Indians and British who had terrorized the frontier for several months. They remembered Estill's Defeat, the recent ambush of Holder at the Upper Blue Licks and siege at Bryant's Station as well as numerous other indignities. Like Estill and Holder, these experienced frontiersmen may also have underestimated the Indians' willingness to fight.

Historians have disputed the cause of the disastrous attack that followed. One explanation is that the Kentucky volunteers believed that they would soon be reinforced with additional troops organized by Col. Benjamin Logan. A second explanation is that Colonel Todd took the opportunity to attack the Indians at the Blue Licks because he knew he would not be in command after the arrival of Colonel Logan. Benjamin Cooper appears to have been aware of these explanations in 1836 when he attempted to reinforce the widely-held theory that the attack at Blue Licks was the result of the impetuous leadership of Maj. Hugh McGary.

The action was forced upon us by the act of Major Hugh Magary, who broke from the council, and called upon the troops who were not cowards to follow him, and thus collecting a band, went without order, and against orders, into the action, and in consequence of this act a general pursuit of officers and men took place, more to save the desparate men that followed Magary than from a hope of a successful fight with the Indians.<sup>21</sup>

Cooper specifically discounts the theories about Logan's impending arrival or Col. Todd's desire to exercise command because Logan was not present:

I never heard or knew myself of any expected reinforcement from Colonel Logan, until in the retreat we met Col. Logan with his force six miles in advance of Bryant's Station, to join us. In the pursuit of the Indians, and in the battle, I never saw or heard any

disposition in Col. John Todd to force an action, or hasten it contrary to the known and expressed wishes of the council; and throughout his conduct was prudent and regardful of the safety of his men. I believe that Col. Todd had no motive to anticipate losing the command by Col. Logan's arrival, for, as I stated, it was not expected that Col. Logan could or would join us in the pursuit.<sup>22</sup>

Contemporaneous accounts by Daniel Boone and Levi Todd, as well as an account written many years after the battle by Capt. Robert Patterson, suggest that the attack was orderly and planned. The Kentuckians crossed the river, dismounted and approached the Indians in three columns. According to all accounts, Col. John Todd, the commanding officer, was on the right with Colonel Trigg. Major McGary was in the center with an advance party under Major Harlin ahead. Daniel Boone and Captain Patterson were on the left. No troops were kept in reserve.

The Kentuckians advanced to within forty yards of the Indian position before heavy firing began on both sides. The left column of the Kentucky line surged forward but the right crumbled leaving the Kentuckians exposed along their right flank. Major Todd described the battle in a letter to his brother,

The left wing rushed on & gained near 100 yards of ground. But the Right gave way, and the Enemy soon flanked us on that side, upon which the Center gave way & shifted behind the left Wing. And immediately the whole broke in Confusion, after the Action had lasted about five minutes. Our men suffered much in the Retreat, many Indians having mounted our men's Horses haveing open woods to pass through to the River. and several were killed in the River. Several efforts were made to rally, but all in Vain.<sup>23</sup>

Daniel Boone reported, in an August 30 letter to Governor Harrison, that the settlers attacked in three columns but the right flank collapsed, "...at the first fire. So the Enemy was immediately on our Backs, so we were obliged to Retreat."<sup>24</sup>

From British accounts, the battle was brief and decisive. Alexander McKee reported to Major DePeyster, "at half past seven o'clock we engaged them and in a short time totally defeated them."<sup>25</sup> According to McKee, the British and Indians "were not much superior to them in numbers."



In his report to DePeyster, Captain Caldwell explained that his force at the Lower Blue Licks had dwindled to 200 because of Indian desertions after the siege at Bryant's Station. Caldwell's report of the battle, except for his estimate of Kentucky losses, was similar to the accounts of the settlers:

On the 18th...at half past seven they advanced in three Divisions in good order, they had spied some of us and it was the very place they expected to overtake us. We had but fired one Gun till they gave us a volley and stood to it very well for some time, till we rushed in upon them, when they broke immediately. We pursued for about two miles, and as the enemy was mostly on horseback, it was in vain to follow further. We killed and took one hundred and Forty six.<sup>26</sup>

According to **McKee**, ten Indians were killed in the battle as well as a British Indian agent named LeBute.

Overrun by the Indians and trapped by the river, the Kentucky lines were in chaos. Their officers killed or wounded, their horses scattered, the Kentuckians were slaughtered as they attempted to retreat across the river. During the fierce but brief battle, at least 60 Kentuckians were killed, seven taken prisoner and many more wounded. Several of the militia officers were among the dead including Col. John Todd, the commanding officer as well as Col. Stephen Trigg and twelve of the twenty-one other officers in the battle. Two additional officers were among the Kentuckians taken prisoner. Daniel Boone, whose son Israel was among those killed, reported "I cannot reflect upon this dreadful scene, but sorrow fills my heart."<sup>27</sup> A week after the battle, Andrew Steele, a private in the Kentucky militia, wrote

We followed them to the Lower Blue Licks where ended the Direful Catastrophy--in short, we were Defeated--with the loss of seventy five Men--among whom fell our two Commanders with many other Officers & soldiers of Distinguished Bravery. To Express the feelings of the Inhabitants of both Counties at this Ruefull Scene of hitherto unparalalled Barbarities Barrs all Words & Cuts Discription short.<sup>28</sup>

The surviving Kentucky volunteers retreated in disarray until they encountered Colonel Logan's volunteers on the road from Bryant's Station. Later that week, Logan and an army of 400 volunteers

returned to the Blue Licks to bury the bodies. Levi Todd reported that the burial detail was able to find about fifty bodies. "They were all stript naked, scalped & mangled in such a manner that it was hard to know one from another."<sup>29</sup>

At the battle of Blue Licks, the Kentucky settlers suffered a crushing defeat. They lost a substantial number of experienced militia officers and a large number of able-bodied pioneers. The last major engagement of the Revolutionary War was won decisively by the Indians and their British allies.

"This sanguinary and disastrous engagement was the last battle of the Revolution. The contest which began at Lexington, Massachusetts, ended at the Blue Licks, Kentucky..."<sup>30</sup>

On August 19, 1928, a group of prominent residents of Kentucky gathered at the Blue Licks battleground to dedicate a forty-foot granite monument to what Judge Samuel M. Wilson characterized as "...the high enterprise and daring deeds of the heroes of the Blue Licks."<sup>31</sup> The memorial lists the names of fifteen officers killed in the battle, two captured and seven who survived as well as the names of 49 privates who were killed. The inscription on the south side of the monument lists the names of 93 "privates who escaped" including Benjamin A Cooper. The inscription around the base of the monument lists six Indian tribes that participated in the battle.<sup>32</sup>

### The Miami River Expedition

After their victory at the Blue Licks, the main force of the Indians and their British and Canadian allies withdrew across the Ohio River and dispersed. A small party strayed into Jefferson County and attacked Kincheloe's Station where several settlers and their families were killed or taken prisoner. The Blue Licks defeat left the Kentucky militia disorganized and demoralized. While some Kentucky residents urged immediate retaliation, the surviving militia leaders proceeded cautiously. They bickered about responsibility for the disaster that Levi Todd described as "...our

defeat at the Blue Licks when the Enemy put us wholly to the Rout."<sup>33</sup> Todd explained in a letter to his brother,

The Conduct of the Officers is by some censured and charged with want of prudence in attacking at any Rate, but as we had no chance to know their number, we thought our was not much Inferior & supposed we should by a fierce attack throw them in confusion & break their Lines.<sup>34</sup>

Col. Arthur Campbell, who was not at the Blue Licks, was more direct in his criticism of the Kentucky militia leaders. He placed primary blame for the defeat on Hugh McGary but was strongly critical of other leaders as well:

Never was the lives of so many valuable men lost more shamefully...and that not a little thro' the vain and seditious expressions of a Major McGeary. How much more harm than good can one fool do. Todd & Trigg had capacity but wanted experience, Boone, Harlin and Lindsay had experience but were defective in capacity.<sup>35</sup>

In addition to his criticism of officers at the Blue Licks, several of whom died there, Campbell also disparaged the capabilities of officers who were not at the battle. He described Logan as dull and narrow and General Clark as a "Sot" or worse.

At the same time that they were seeking someone to blame, the Kentucky settlers were also pleading for assistance from Governor Harrison. Virginia was nearly bankrupt and reluctant to commit resources to protect its remote frontier counties. At the urging of George Rogers Clark, Virginia had sent money to build a fort and deploy gunboats on the Ohio River. As the Blue Lick survivors pointed out, these measures were ineffective against the Ohio Indians who entered Kentucky far to the east of Clark's fort at the Falls of Ohio. Without mentioning Clark by name, nine civil and military officers of Fayette County, included Daniel Boone and Levi Todd, wrote Governor Harrison that the fort and gunboat strategy,

...has a tendency to protect Jefferson County, or rather Louisville, a Town without Inhabitants, a Fort situated in such a manner that the Enemy coming with a design to Lay waste our Country, would

scarcely come within one Hundred miles of it, & our own Frontiers open & unguarded.<sup>36</sup>

In his August letter reporting the Blue Licks defeat, Benjamin Logan, the commanding officer of the Kentucky militia, reiterated conventional wisdom of frontier Indian strategy, reinforced by 150 years of bitter experience,

...a defensive war cannot be carried on with Indians, and the Inhabitants remain any kind of safety. For unless you can go to their Towns and scourge them, they will never make a peace; but on the contrary keep parties consistently in your country to kill.<sup>37</sup>

The lessons learned by the Virginia settlers in 1622 and 1644 as well as the attitudes of the frontier farmers during Bacon's Rebellion in 1675, would guide the Kentucky settlers more than a century later.

In the weeks after the defeat at the Blue Licks, Kentucky pioneers were more concerned about the survival of the settlements than about revenge against the Indians. As Daniel Boone explained in a letter to the governor, "The Inhabitants of these Counties are very much alarmed at the thoughts of the Indians bringing another Campaign into our country this fall, which if it should be the case, will Break these settlements."<sup>38</sup> The combination of Indian raids and uncertain land titles demoralized the existing settlers and discouraged the new settlers who were essential to bid up land prices and strengthen the militia. In their letters to Governor Harrison, the settlers described the critical situation in Kentucky while alternating requests for military assistance and the appointment of an official surveyor. Nine Fayette county officials wrote the governor in September warning "...if something is not speedily done, we ... will wholly be depopulated."<sup>39</sup>

Acknowledging that offensive military action into Indian country might be "impracticable," the Fayette County officials suggested the construction of forts on the Ohio River to protect existing stations and promote new settlement along the Limestone and Licking Rivers. The Fayette officials reminded the governor "tis now near two years since the division of the County & no Surveyor has

ever appeared among us...our principal expectations of strength are from him."<sup>40</sup> William Christian, who represented Kentucky in the Virginia General Assembly, reported that settlers were leaving Kentucky and predicted "If no succour is sent to Kentucky, and the war with the British continues another Year, it is more then Probable the whole of the Inhabitants will be killed, taken to Detroit or driven away."<sup>41</sup> In his letter to the governor, Andrew Steele suggested a more dangerous possibility when he warned that "the wealthy will forthwith Emigrate to the Interior parts of the Settlement & the Poor to the Spaniards."<sup>42</sup>

At the same time they were asking for assistance from the Virginia governor, the Kentucky settlers were replacing militia officers killed at the Blue Licks and planning a retaliatory expedition against the Shawnee towns across the river in what would later be the state of Ohio.<sup>43</sup> In spite of the resentment about the fort and gunboat near Louisville, the settlers agreed that General George Rogers Clark should command the invasion of Indian country. In addition to his dramatic and successful invasion of the Illinois country during the Revolutionary War, Clark had led the successful campaign against the Shawnee in 1780. John Floyd, the commander of the Jefferson County militia, sent troops out to patrol the Wilderness Road to intercept those faint-hearted settlers who might have considered leaving Kentucky.<sup>44</sup>

On November 1, the militia from the three Kentucky counties, some volunteers and some drafted, joined Clark at the mouth of the Licking River. Under the command of John Floyd of Jefferson County, Benjamin Logan of Lincoln County and Daniel Boone of Fayette County, more than 1,000 Kentuckians converged at the Ohio River. Along with several other survivors of the Battle at the Blue Licks, Benjamin Cooper was a member of Clark's 1782 expedition against the Shawnee. Cooper was a Lieutenant and second-in-command of Captain James Downing's company of 38 men from Lincoln County. Cooper and his company enlisted October 24, 1782 and were discharged November 24, 1782.<sup>45</sup>

General Clark and his army crossed the Ohio River November 2. He had his men build a blockhouse near the river and left a party of two officers and thirty privates to guard the boats and provisions that would be used to return to Kentucky. Clark organized his army into four battalions and marched up the Little Miami River. Slowed by the six pound cannon they were transporting, the troops followed the route Clark had taken two years earlier. The army passed the ruins of Indian towns at Chillicothe on the Little Miami and Piqua on the Mad River, abandoned since they were burned by Clark's army in 1780. General Clark later reported:

We left the Ohio the fourth, with one Thousand and fifty men, and surpris'd the principall Shawone Town on the Evening of the 10th Inst...in a few hours two thirds of their Towns was laid in ashes and every thing they ware possest of destroy'd except such articles as most usefull to the Troops, the Enemy not having time to secreet any part of their Riches that was in the Towns.<sup>46</sup>

Clark and his slow-moving army had been in Indian country for ten days before they reached the Shawnee village of New Piqua. As Clark explained, the attack caught the Indians by surprise. The Indian warriors were able to escape but left the town undefended. The Kentuckians captured New Piqua and the corn that the Indians were saving for the winter. After burning the town, Clark left a guard and divided his army into four units. The largest unit, 500 men under the command of Hugh McGary, now a Lieutenant Colonel in the Lincoln County militia, marched to attack McKee's Town.<sup>47</sup> The Indians, surprised again, fled as McGary's battalion approached. McGary and his troops rescued two Kentuckians who had been prisoners of the Indians since 1777 and burned the town. Meanwhile Daniel Boone led a detachment of 100 men to Willstown where the Indians also abandoned the town. Boone and his troops captured a valuable supply of furs before burning the town. At the same time, Benjamin Logan and 150 men attacked a French-Canadian trading post on Laramie's Creek. Logan's troops captured furs and trade goods before burning the trading post and its surrounding buildings.

The Kentucky militia destroyed three Indian towns, the trading post that supplied Indians attacking the settlements and an estimated 10,000 bushels of corn before withdrawing from Ohio.

General Clark later reported to Governor Harrison:

the Quantity of provisions burnt far surpass any Idea we had of their stores of that kind. The loss of the Enemy was ten scalps, seven prisoners and two whites retaken - ours one killed, one wounded. After laying part of four days in their Towns, finding all attempts to bring them to a genl. action fruitless, we retired as the season was far advanced and the weather threatening.<sup>48</sup>

On November 17, Clark and his army returned to the Ohio River. In the punitive expedition against the Shawnee, Clark and his army were unable to engage the Indians in battle or rescue the prisoners captured at the Blue Licks but the army destroyed the Indians winter food supply and weakened the capacity of the Shawnee to mount attacks against the Kentucky settlements. A year later, the British released eleven prisoners who had been captured at the Blue Licks August 19, 1782. The prisoners, including Jesse Peak, arrived at their homes in Kentucky August 27, 1783.<sup>49</sup>

### The Treaty of Paris

As early as August\_ 1779, the Continental Congress had appointed John Adams as plenipotentiary to negotiate peace with Great Britain. The Congress instructed Adams to require as a condition of negotiation that the British recognize the independence of the United States, that the British withdraw all troops and that the boundaries of the United States include all British territory east of the Mississippi River. In June 1781, the Congress acceded to French pressure and appointed additional commissioners including Benjamin Franklin and John Jay. During 1782, the negotiations continued amid rumor and intrigue. The commissioners for the United States remained firm in their demands while the British delayed and the French urged compromise. The French suggested a division of western lands among the British, Spanish, Indians and United States.<sup>50</sup>

The representatives of the United States avoided the pitfalls of European diplomacy and signed Preliminary Articles of Peace November 30, 1782 and the final Treaty of Peace September

3, 1783 at Paris. The Treaty of Paris acknowledged the independence of the thirteen colonies and the boundary "along the middle of said river Mississippi" from Lake of the Woods to the 31st parallel. The treaty also secured certain historic fishing rights in the Atlantic Ocean as well as the cessation of hostilities and withdrawal of troops "from every post, place and harbour."<sup>51</sup> The news of the preliminary peace treaty reached the Kentucky frontier in April 1783.<sup>52</sup> The British evacuated Savannah and Charleston in 1782 and New York November 25, 1783. In spite of the 1782 agreement, the British continued to maintain frontier garrisons in United States territory at Detroit, Niagara, Oswego and Michilimackinac until 1797. With the Treaty of Paris, Great Britain recognized the independence of the thirteen colonies and United States jurisdiction over the wilderness region lying between the Alleghany Mountains and the Mississippi River. The precarious frontier that the settlers of Kentucky and Tennessee had been fighting to protect was secured by the diplomats at Paris.



Kentucky in 1782 Notes

1. Attributed to Daniel Boone, "The Adventures of Col. Daniel Boon" in John Filson, The Discovery, Settlement and Present State of Kentucke (Wilmington, 1784), p. 77.
2. Bemis, Diplomatic History pp. 46-62. In June 1781, the Continental Congress appointed John Adams, Benjamin Franklin and John Jay to negotiate the treaty of independence and peace with Great Britain. In addition to defining the boundaries of the new republic, the negotiations included resolution of fishing rights off the New England coast, navigation rights on the Mississippi River and compensation for Loyalist and Patriot property confiscated or destroyed during the war.
3. Durrett, Bryant's Station, pp. 23-24. Kentucky forts of the late 18th century are also described in Cyrus Townsend Brady, Border Fights and Fighters (New York, 1902), p. 125 and p. 153.
4. Johnson, History of Kentucky. Vol. I, p. 68. Kentucky was part of Virginia until 1792.
5. George Rogers Clark letter of March 7, 1782 to the Governor of Virginia in William P. Palmer, editor, Calendar of Virginia State Papers and Other Manuscripts. 1782-1784, Vol. M (Richmond, 1883), p. 87.
6. Filson. Kentucke, p. 74.
7. Bessie Taul Conkright, "Estill's Defeat or the Battle of Little Mountain," Register Kentucky State Historical Society. Vol. 22, September 1924, pp. 312-320. Using accounts of the battle collected in Lyman Draper's interviews, Conkright was able to identify all twenty-five participants in the battle. Joseph Cooper had reported to Draper that his uncle, Benjamin Cooper, had been in Estill's Defeat (Draper MSS 23 S 138). Cooper may have been among the fifteen members of the Estill party who returned to their forts before the battle but he was not among the twenty-five who fought at Little Mountain.  
  
In recognition and appreciation of his bravery and loyalty, Estill's slave Monk was freed by his new owner. Monk was the first slave manumitted in Kentucky. Because of his skill making gunpowder, he was much in demand during the pioneer period. Johnson, History of Kentucky. Vol. I, p. 171.
8. John Todd letter of April 15, 1782 to Governor Jefferson in Palmer, Virginia State Papers Vol. III pp. 130-131. Colonel Todd appears to have been unaware that Benjamin Harrison had succeeded Thomas Jefferson as Governor of Virginia on November 30, 1781.
9. R.S. Cotterill, "Battle of the Upper Blue Licks," The History Quarterly. October 1927, pp. 29-33.
10. Historians have used both "Bryan's" and "Bryant's" for the station near the Elkhorn Creek crossing on the Lexington-Paris road. It appears that both names were commonly used in the eighteenth century. John Filson, the first Kentucky historian, used "Briant" in his

1784 book and "Bryan" on his 1784 map. Reuben T. Durrett, the leading expert on this battle, acknowledges that the family name was Bryan and that both names were commonly used at the time but he concludes that Bryant's was the most common name of the station. Durrett, Bryant's Station, pp. 20-21. Durrett also accepts the August 15th date of the battle reported by the British rather than the August 16th date reported by the Kentucky settlers.

11. Levi Todd letter of September 11, 1782 to Governor Harrison in Palmer, Virginia State Papers, Vol. III, p. 300.
12. William Caldwell letter of August 26, 1782 to Maj. Arent S. DePeyster in Bennett H. Young, "The Battle of the Blue Licks" in Durrett, Bryant's Station, pp. 208-209.
13. Durrett's 1897 Bryant's Station remains the most complete account of the battle. The August 1782 attacks are also described in: Richard H. Collins, History of Kentucky (Lexington, Kentucky, 1878), Vol. I, pp. 254-256; Johnson, A History of Kentucky, Vol. I, pp. 68-77; Samuel M. Wilson, Battle of the Blue Licks (Lexington, 1927), p. 24; Talbert, Logan, pp. 154-155.
14. The controversial Battle of the Blue Licks is described in every history of Kentucky since Filson's 1784 Kentucke. The most complete and balanced accounts are: Col. Bennett H. Young, "The Battle of the Blue Licks" in Durrett's 1897 Bryant's Station; Wilson's 1927 Battle of the Blue Licks; Talbert's Logan. Willard Rouse Jilison, A Bibliography of the Lower Blue Licks, 1744-1944 (Frankfort, Kentucky, 1945) is a comprehensive listing of everything published about the location and the battle over two hundred years.
15. Benjamin A Cooper affidavit of November 9, 1836 published posthumously in the St. Louis New Era in November 1845 and included in Draper MSS 26 CC 56, Wilson, Blue Licks, pp. 55-57 and below in Appendix One.

According to Louis Houck A History of Missouri (Chicago, 1908), Vol. III, p. 121, Benjamin Cooper fought at the Blue Licks where his brothers-in-law Peak and Woods were killed. Houck also suggests that Benjamin Cooper's younger brother Sarshel Cooper may have participated in the battle at the Blue Licks. According to Wilson, Pvt. Benjamin A Cooper was one of 45 officers and men who were known to have survived at the Blue Licks. There is no confirming evidence that Sarshel Cooper was in the battle. Houck appears to have been in error about his participation.

Joseph Cooper reported, in an 1868 interview with Lyman Draper, that he was uncertain whether his father Sarshel had fought in the Battle at the Blue Licks but that he knew that his uncle Benjamin had participated and that two of Benjamin's brothers-in-law, Peak and Woods, had been killed. Draper MSS 23 S 124-125. This 1868 interview, although it is not cited, is likely to have been the source for Houk in 1908. Although the evidence is not conclusive, it appears that neither Peak nor Woods was killed at the Blue Licks. Jesse (or John) Peak was captured during the battle and released in 1783. James Wood was killed by Indians in 1783. It appears likely that Betty Cooper, the sister of Benjamin and Sarshel Cooper married each of the men and was twice widowed;

16. Wilson, Blue Licks, pp. 55-56.
17. Levi Todd letter of September 11, 1782 in Palmer, Virginia State Papers, Vol. III, p. 300.
18. The State of Kentucky has established a park at the site of the 1782 battle. The 148 acre park is 40 miles northeast of Lexington along US 68. Blue Licks Battlefield State Park includes picnic and camping areas, a pioneer museum, a gift shop, a fifteen acre nature preserve along the old buffalo trace as well as a swimming pool and miniature golf course. The park is open April through October. A granite monument commemorating the battle is in the northeast corner of the park approximately 150 feet from the highway.
19. Wilson, Blue Licks, p. 56.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid. Many of the earlier Kentucky histories including Collins (1878) and Johnson (1912) blame Major McGary for the disastrous battle at the Blue Licks. Recent scholars like Wilson (1927) and Talbert (1962) have reexamined the accounts of survivors and concluded that McGary had been blamed unfairly.
22. Ibid.
23. Levi Todd letter of August 26, 1782 to Robert Todd in Palmer, Virginia State Papers, Vol. III, p. 333.
24. Daniel Boone letter of August 30, 1782 to Governor Harrison, Ibid., p. 275.
25. Alexander McKee letter of August 28, 1782 to Major De Peyster in Young, "The Battle of the Blue Licks," p. 213. The 2000 acres of Kentucky land granted to McKee for his service in the French and Indian War were confiscated after he joined the Tories in the Revolutionary War. The land was eventually transferred to Transylvania University as endowment.
26. William Caldwell letter of August 26, 1782 to Major De Peyster, Ibid., p. 200.
27. Filson, Kentucke, p. 77.
28. Andrew Steele letter of August 26, 1782 to Governor Harrison in Wilson, Blue Licks, p. 53.
29. Levi Todd letter of August 26, 1782 in Palmer, Virginia State Papers, Vol. III, p. 334.
30. Brady. Border Fights and Fighters, p. 146. Historians disagree about which battle was "the last" of the Revolution. One historian wrote that the Battle at the Blue Licks was "often and incorrectly called the last battle of the Revolution, this was a victory of the renegade white terror of the Old Northwest, Simon Girty, over a bunch of foolish frontiersmen...", Mark Mayo Boatman, III, Landmarks of the American Revolution (Harrisburg,

Pennsylvania, 1973), pp. 110. Boatman's scholarship fails to account for the role of British Capt. William Caldwell and the reports from Kentucky to Maj. Arent DePeyster.

Reuben Durrett, in a footnote, reviewed the claims of other "last battles" including Loughry's Defeat of August 24, 1781 and the fight at Combahee Ferry in South Carolina of August 27, 1782. He dismisses the former because it was not the last and the latter because it was not a battle. Durrett, Bryant's Station, p. 18n. Another historian claims that a November 14, 1782 skirmish on James Island, South Carolina was the "last battle." Howard H. Peckham, The War for Independence. A Military History (Chicago, 1958). While the South Carolina incident may have been the last military engagement, it was hardly a battle.

The Tennessee Historical Commission claims that a September 1782 battle near present-day Chattanooga was the "Last Battle of the Revolution." In that battle frontiersmen from eastern Tennessee destroyed the Chickamauga Indian town of Tuskagee on Moccasin Bend in an effort to destroy supplies that the British had provided the Indians. This campaign, much like Clark's punitive campaign against the Shawnee in November 1782, cannot really be considered part of the Revolutionary War because there is no claim that the British were directly involved. While several states have claimed "the last battle," the Battle of the Blue Licks in Kentucky was the last in which British officers and agents confronted Patriot militia.

31. Reiister Kentucky State Historical Society. Vol. 25, p. 323. According to local newspapers, 10,000 Kentuckians attended the dedication of the Blue Licks monument. Filson Club Historical Quarterly. Vol. III, October 1928, p. 13.
32. Reaister Kentucky State Historical Society. Vol. 26, pp. 294-2%. As additional participants have been identified, their names are added to the monument. As of November 1988, 116 of the 182 volunteers in the battle have been identified. The "privates who escaped" inscription includes, in addition to Benjamin Cooper, Henry Higgins, John Peake and Samuel Woods. The "privates who were killed" inscription includes Archibald Woods but does not list anyone named Peake who was killed. At least 65 of those killed remain among the "unknown heroes."
33. Levi Todd letter of September 11, 1782 in Palmer, Virginia State Papers, Vol. III, p. 300.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 301.
35. Arthur Campbell letter of October 3, 1782 to William Davies, *Ibid.*, p. 337.
36. Levi Todd letter 'of September 11, 1782, *Ibid.*, p. 300.
37. Benjamin Logan letter of August 31, 1782 to Governor Harrison, *Ibid.*, p. 282.
38. Daniel Boone letter of August 30, 1782, *Ibid.*, p. 275.
39. Daniel Boone et al letter of September 11, 1782 to Governor Harrison, *Ibid.*, p. 301.

40. Ibid., p. 302.
41. William Christian letter of September 28, 1782, Ibid., p. 331.
42. Andrew Steele letter of September 12, 1782, Ibid., p. 303.
43. The 1782 campaign into Ohio is described in Talbert, Logan, pp. 171-181, and Bakeless Background to Glory, pp. 291-303.
44. Talbert, Logan, p. 172.
45. Margery Heberling Harding, editor, George Rogers Clark and his Men: Military Records, 1778-1784 (Frankfort, Kentucky, 1981), p. 189. As a Lieutenant, Benjamin Cooper was paid six shillings a day and earned more than ten pounds for his service in Ohio. Benjamin Cooper included his service in the 1782 Ohio Campaign in his pension application fifty years later. Revolutionary War Pension Application S 16722.
46. George Rogers Clark letter of November 27, 1782 to Governor Harison in Palmer, Virginia State Papers, Vol. III, p. 381.
47. The Indian town was named for Alexander McKee, the British Indian agent. McKee and Simon Girty had been covert Tories until deserting to the British in March 1778. McKee commanded Indians in attacks against Kentucky settlements in 1780 and 1782. He was second in command to the British Capt. William Caldwell at the Battle of the Blue Licks.
48. Clark, letter of November 27, 1782, Ibid.
49. Harding, Clark and his Men, p. xvii. It is unclear whether Jesse Peak is the same person as John Peake and whether either was the Peak who married Betty Cooper Wood, the widow of James Wood and the sister of Benjamin and Sarshel Cooper.
50. Bemis. Diplomatic History, pp. 46-64. Dale Van Every points out that the Continental Congress voted nine states to two states to instruct the negotiators to accept the Proclamation Line of 1763 as the western boundary (Forth to the Wilderness, p. 19). Fortunately the commissioners ignored these instructions.
51. Commager, Documents of American History. Vol. I, pp. 117-119.
52. George W. Ranck, Boonesborough (Louisville, Kentucky, 1901), p. 132.

## APPENDIX ONE

BENJAMIN COOPER AND THE  
BATTLE OF THE BLUE LICKS

On November 9, 1836, Benjamin Cooper recounted, under oath, his role in the Battle of the Blue Licks fifty-four years earlier. Cooper's testimony was transcribed at the time and later discovered by Mann Butler, a Kentucky historian, who transmitted Cooper's statement to the St. Louis New Era for publication in November 1845. Cooper's statement, Dr. Butler's letter of transmittal and the certification of the affidavit were published in the St. Louis New Era, presumably in November 1845 and republished in other newspapers. The copy in the Draper collection, Draper MSS 26 CC 56, is a clipping from another, unspecified newspaper with the complete text of Butler's letter, Cooper's statement and the clerk's certification. The letter, statement and certification are also reprinted, in their entirety, in Wilson, Battle of the Blue Licks, pp. 55-57.

Mann Butler Letter of November 6, 1845

"Mr. Editor:--

"Aware of the devotion of the New Era to the history and antiquities of the Western portion of our noble Republic, I subjoin for publication a document, which has, from a variety of mischances, been eight years on its way to my hands.

It is a statement of the venerable and gallant Col. Benjamin A Cooper, of Saline county, in this State. It relates, you will perceive, to the battle of the Blue Licks, memorable for its disastrous results to the brave and hearty backwoodsmen of Kentucky.

"

Benjamin Cooper Statement of November 9, 1836

"State of Missouri,  
Saline County.

I, Benjamin A Cooper, of this State, formerly a resident of Madison county, Kentucky, state I was Lieutenant in Capt. Scott's company in Kentucky, and was in the battle of the Blue Licks, and was of Col. Trigg's regiment. I was married to a relation of Col. Daniel Boone, and was intimate with him. I knew Levi Todd, a Major in command

that day, having been in several battles with him. I knew Col. John Todd, who commanded in chief, and I knew generally all the officers in the engagement. I joined the Fayette troops at Bryant's Station the day the Indians left there, and the troops then collected, and marched in pursuit of the Indians toward the Blue Licks. I was with Col. Boone when he, by counting the Indians fires, concluded there were at least 500 Indians--when the troops came near the Indians, at the Blue Licks, there was a general council of officers held, at which I was present, and I knew the officers were of opinion and had decided not to fight the battle--that they were too weak and the enemy too strong. I knew the opinion of Col. John Todd and Major Levi Todd, to have concurred in that opinion, for I conversed with Levi Todd in the council, and had just before requested him to speak to his brother, Col. John Todd, and inform him, he commanded, of the desperate state of our troops contending against so much odds, and I heard distinctly Col. John Todd's opinion. Levi Todd's and Daniel Boone's to the same effect. The action was forced upon us by the act of Major Hugh Magarey, who broke from the council, and called upon the troops who were not cowards to follow him, and thus collecting a band, went without order, and against orders, into the action, and in consequence of this act a general pursuit of officers and men took place, more to save the desperate men that followed Magary than from a hope of a successful fight with the Indians. I never heard or knew myself of any expected reinforcement from Colonel Logan, until in the retreat we met Col. Logan with his force six miles in advance of Bryant's Station, to join us. In the pursuit of the Indians, and in the battle, I never saw or heard any disposition in Col. John Todd to force an action, or hasten it contrary to the known and expressed wishes of the council; and, throughout his conduct was prudent and regardful of the safety of his men. I believe that Col. Todd had no motive to anticipate losing the command by Col. Logan's arrival, for, as I stated, it was not expected that Col. Logan could or would join us in the pursuit.

Given under my hand, November 9th, 1836.

(Signed) Benjamin A Cooper"

This statement was certified as follows:

"I, the undersigned Peyton R. Hayden, of Booneville, Missouri, do certify that Col. Cooper, who has made, in my presence, the above statement, retains his mental faculties to a remarkable degree for a man of his age, and seems to have a perfect recollection of the circumstances attending the battle, of which he has spoken in his certificate above.

(Signed) P.R. Hayden"

## CHAPTER SIX

## LIFE ON THE KENTUCKY-TENNESSEE FRONTIER, 1782-1800

... thus we behold  
Kentucke, lately, a howling  
wilderness ...become the  
habitation of civilization

Daniel Boone, 1784<sup>1</sup>

With the end of the Revolutionary War, migration to the frontier in Kentucky and Tennessee accelerated. There was continuing danger from Indian attack, particularly on the Wilderness Road and in isolated settlements, but the growth of population and stability allowed families to begin building farms, towns, schools and churches. The area that had been struggling to survive but a few years before was quickly changing. Daniel Boone described the transition in his 1784 "autobiography,"

...thus we behold Kentucke, lately, a howling wilderness, the habitation of savages and wild beasts, become a fruitful field; this region, so favorably distinguished by nature, now become the habitation of civilization.<sup>2</sup>

As Boone suggests, the transition from wilderness to civilization was abrupt. By 1784, the population of Kentucky was approximately 12,000 with an additional 10,000 in the Holston settlements and 2,000 in the Cumberland district of Tennessee.<sup>3</sup> The change was so great that only one member of the Kentucky Convention of 1785 had fought in defense of Kentucky during the Revolutionary War.<sup>4</sup> By the end of 1785, the population in the Cumberland settlements had doubled to 4,000. By the summer of 1788, migration had swelled the population of Kentucky to *60,000*.<sup>5</sup>

While the rapid population growth may have appeared as "civilization" to Daniel Boone in 1784, it was a provocation and irritant to the Indians who saw their lands filling with adventurers and settlements. Kentucky and Tennessee remained remote and dependent on transportation lines over the mountains on the 200 mile Wilderness Road or down the Ohio River by flatboat from



Pittsburgh. Each route was difficult and dangerous and each could be choked off by small parties of Indians. By 1786, Indians north of the Ohio River and Indians south of the Cumberland River were becoming increasingly agitated and desperate. Small parties of Indians raided exposed settlements and travelers in what Dale Van Every characterized as "a war fought in the dooryard."<sup>6</sup>

During the early part of 1786, Indian raids increased. A large party of Indians, perhaps as many as 200, attacked flatboats on the Ohio River in May. Indians, in quick raids throughout Kentucky, stole an estimated 500 horses. In July, 500 Indian warriors collected near the old French village of Vincennes, in what would later become Indiana. The Indians surrounded and threatened the tiny settlement. When the weak federal government and army were slow to respond, Patrick Henry, again serving as governor of Virginia, authorized the Kentucky militia to send troops into Indian territory. County militia commanders asked George Rogers Clark to come out of retirement and lead the Kentucky campaign against the Indians on the Upper Wabash.

In September 1786, Clark assembled an army of 1200 Kentucky militia including Benjamin Cooper who reported "I was marched to Post Vincennes against the Indians to relieve the whites who had settled there."<sup>7</sup> The Wabash expedition was a military failure. The strong-willed but inexperienced Kentucky militia refused to follow orders, became demoralized when food supplies were lost and eventually deserted in large numbers. The desertions, primarily in the Lincoln County militia, were attributed to loyalty to Benjamin Logan or to continuing resentment about Clark's failure to protect the settlements in 1782.

A large army of Indian warriors waited at Pine Creek as Clark's army, with artillery and mounted troops, advanced toward battle. When mutiny reduced his force by half, Clark was forced to abandon the campaign without a battle. He bluffed the Indians into a truce and withdrew from Indian territory after leaving a token force of 150 to protect Vincennes. Weakened in the field by lack of discipline, Clark was also subverted by political rivals, including particularly the devious James

Wilkinson, who used the failure of the Wabash expedition to destroy Clark's reputation. After the Wabash campaign, Clark never again led men into battle. Undefeated in battle, he retired to a life of bankruptcy and disgrace.<sup>8</sup>

While Clark and the Kentucky militia were being frustrated on the Wabash, Benjamin Logan commanded 790 Kentucky militiamen in the familiar invasion of the Shawnee towns of Ohio. With many Shawnee warriors on the Wabash to fight the battle that never happened against Clark, Logan's army was able to bum 200 Indian houses and 15,000 bushels of com while capturing prisoners and livestock during October 1786 in Ohio. As Logan reported, "the Expedition was carried out in a Rapped manner."<sup>9</sup>

The militia campaigns of 1786, like similar campaigns in previous years, were ineffective in stopping Indian raids in Kentucky and Tennessee and along the routes from Virginia. By 1790, Henry Innes, a federal judge in Kentucky and Boonesborough pioneer, estimated that Indians had killed 1500 people and stolen 20,000 horses in Kentucky between 1783 and 1790.<sup>10</sup> Indian warfare continued intermittently with support and encouragement from British officers and agents at forts on the Great Lakes. In 1791, the United States army and frontier militia combined in two successful expeditions against Indians on the Upper Wabash and an unsuccessful campaign in Ohio. In August 1794, General Anthony Wayne with 1500 troops from the regular army and 1600 from the Kentucky militia defeated an Indian army at the Battle of Fallen Timbers, near present-day Toledo, Ohio. Abandoned by their British allies, the Indians of the Old Northwest surrendered most of Ohio and Indiana to settlement and began the move west.

### The People of the Frontier'

Many of the earliest settlers on the Kentucky and Tennessee frontiers had been people who had previously visited the area as hunters. They were joined by others who were ambitious to acquire land, in some cases enormous tracts of land, and by those who were merely restless because

of limited opportunity elsewhere or because they were fleeing debts or jail. While the frontier population, like any population, included a mix of backgrounds and types, observers of frontier character were often critical. Daniel Drake, who arrived in Kentucky as a child in 1788, remembered his neighbors as "all country people by birth and residence - all were illiterate, but in various degrees - and all were poor, or in moderate circumstances..."<sup>11</sup> An United States agent to the Creek Indians expressed his frustrations concluding "The United States, like most countries, is unfortunate in having the worst of people on her frontiers."<sup>12</sup> Francois Andre Michaux (1770-1855), a French botanist travelling on the frontier in 1802, observed,

The inhabitants of Kentucky...are nearly all natives of Virginia, and particularly the remotest parts of that state...they have preserved the manners of Virginians. With them the passion for gaming and spirituous liquors is carried to excess, which frequently terminates in quarrels degrading to human nature.<sup>13</sup>

Like other commentators on the frontier character, Timothy Dwight, a stern New Englander and Yale president, was critical while also acknowledging the social role of the frontier and its rough characters. As he pointed out, perhaps somewhat defensively,

All countries contain restless inhabitants, men impatient of labor, men who will contract debts without intending to pay them, who had rather talk than work.<sup>14</sup>

In the United States, these restless but impatient pioneers were joined on the frontier by people Dwight described as "the discontented, the enterprising, the ambitious, and the covetous."<sup>15</sup> In this view, the frontier was a social safety valve relieving polite society of several types of misfits including both the lazy and the ambitious. Dwight believed that these frontier types were suited by temperament for the work of clearing land, but that they were incapable of the sustained effort necessary to build the sort of community of the New England village. Writing about the frontiersmen he had observed in Vermont, Dwight concluded that the frontiersmen

cannot live in regular society. They are too idle, too talkative, too passionate, too prodigal, and too shiftless to acquire either property

or character. They are impatient of the restraints of law, religion, and morality...<sup>16</sup>

For Dwight, the rough frontiersmen played an important role in clearing land but another sort of person would have to follow to plant the crops, improve the land and build community.

While these observations are harsh, they contain an element of truth. Many of the pioneers on the Kentucky and Tennessee frontier, people like Daniel Boone and Simon Kenton, were not suited to civilization. They lost their Kentucky lands to legal processes they did not understand and moved on to new frontiers where they could again be pioneers. At the same time, there were pioneers of another sort on the frontier who brought their culture with them and who immediately set about the task of building the institutions of government, education, and religion that would enrich their lives and that of their families.

### Frontier Land

The lure of the frontier was primarily land. The pioneers had prevailed over the claims of the Indians and the British and the settlers followed to claim lands for themselves, often at the expense of the early pioneers. Moses Austin joined the migration in 1796 and described the attitude of his companions on the Wilderness Road from Virginia,

Ask these Pilgrims what they expect when they git to Kentucky, the Answer is land, have you any. No, but I expect I can git it. Have you any thing to pay for land, No. Did you ever see the country. No but everybody says its good land.<sup>17</sup>

The competition for land resulted in fraud, confusion, and endless litigation. Many of the pioneers, like Daniel Boone, were unable to protect their land claims against settlers who arrived after them but used the legal system to claim and hold land. The early land claims were often informal, poorly-surveyed if at all and, because of the distance, never filed officially in Virginia. By the time Michaux visited the area in 1802, he found,

...incredible confusion with respect to property...this incertitude in the right of property is an inexhaustible source of tedious and

expensive law-suits, which serve to enrich the professional gentlemen of the country.<sup>18</sup>

Benjamin Cooper, like other pioneers, lived in a fort when he first arrived in Kentucky. As soon as the Indian threat abated, he and his father filed land claims. In November 1781, Benjamin Cooper claimed 100 acres on White Oak Creek in Lincoln County and his father Francis Cooper claimed 400 acres.<sup>19</sup> In December 1782, soon after returning from the Ohio campaign against the Shawnee, Benjamin Cooper filed a claim for 400 acres on the South Fork of Casper's Run in Fayette County.<sup>20</sup> In January 1785, Benjamin Cooper claimed an additional 248 acres on White Oak Creek as well as 52 acres on the Kentucky River.<sup>21</sup> In addition to claiming land, Benjamin Cooper also joined with his neighbors in efforts to increase the value of lands. In November 1789, he was one of the "Inhabitants of Woodford County" who signed a petition asking to have the county divided in order to improve the accessibility of the county courts.<sup>22</sup>

As Kentucky became more settled, the pioneers struggled to protect their land from other claimants, many of them more sophisticated in the legal technicalities of land title. Some of the pioneers had neglected to file claims while others occupied lands that had been "shingled" with overlapping claims. The pioneers, when they could afford it, engaged surveyors to clarify land descriptions and titles. Benjamin Cooper had 42 acres on the East Fork of Simpson Creek in Nelson County surveyed in July 1793 and 216 acres on White Oak Creek in Garrard County surveyed in October 1797. (Garrard Country had been formed out of parts of Lincoln and Madison County, in 1796.) In August 1798, Benjamin Cooper had nearly 1000 acres in Madison County surveyed. These included 200 acres on the Kentucky River, 400 acres on Clear Creek, and 384 acres on Station Camp Creek.<sup>23</sup> Despite these precautions, Benjamin Cooper found himself in a dispute over land claims in 1796.<sup>24</sup>

As soon as pioneers arrived in Kentucky, they burned a piece of land and planted corn among the stumps. At a minimum, the crop would strengthen land claims. If the pioneer decided

to bring his family to the frontier, the crop would, along with hunting, sustain them during their first winter. The com, whether ground or pounded, mixed with water or milk and baked or fried was the com bread, hoe cake, spoon bread, mush, Johnny cake, com pone, hominy or grits that dominated the pioneer diet. These were prepared, using whatever ingredients and utensils were available.

The simplest form of bread was that made of meal, salt, and water and known variously as corn pone, hoe cake, or corn dodger...Bread could be cooked as corn was sometimes parched, simply by dropping in hot ashes, or the cook, not caring for the taste of ashes, could use a rock sloped toward the fire...best beloved and most common of all cornbreads was what we have come to know as cornbread, baked in a Dutch oven covered with coals, leavened, and mixed with eggs and buttermilk...the pioneer housewife had no soda or saleratus; instead she used a pinch of lye. Some by tradition made an especial baking lye from corn cob ashes, while others boiled down the same lye water they used for soap or hominy...<sup>25</sup>

Corn was an ideal crop. It was native to North America, could be planted on unplowed and uncleared land and could be eaten fresh or dried and stored. Pioneers could carry corn when they traveled and prepare it in a variety of forms when they settled. Corn could be pounded, ground or grated, depending on equipment available and eventual use. Nathaniel Hart, who was a child at Boonesborough, remembered that a single mortar, standing in the middle of the fort, was the source of all com meal for all the families in the fort. When the primitive pounding mechanism was replaced a few years later by a hand-operated grinding mill, the mill was in constant operation.<sup>26</sup> When corn was abundant, it could be used to fatten hogs or distilled into the whiskey for which Kentucky and Tennessee remain famous.

During this early period, settlers would plow their fields as early as practical and attempt to plant in early March for harvest in July and August. As the frontier became settled, the economy grew increasingly complex. Although most settlers produced crops primarily for their own consumption, others began to grow tobacco or to operate tanneries and grist mills. Since the Wilderness Road was only a trail until the 1790's, export goods were either transported by pack

horse over the mountains or shipped by flatboat down the rivers to New Orleans. By 1795, as travel to Kentucky and Tennessee became relatively safe, merchants from Baltimore and Philadelphia were shipping manufactured goods including nails, glass, linens and books as well as luxuries like coffee, tea, sugar and spices to the overmountain settlements. In exchange, the settlers traded skins; furs, flax, beeswax, butter and tallow.<sup>27</sup>

### Education on the Frontier

Education of young children on the Kentucky and Tennessee frontier was irregular and episodic. As early as 1647, Massachusetts had required frontier communities to provide public education. Each town of fifty or more families was required to hire a schoolmaster and each town of 100 or more families to establish a grammar school.<sup>28</sup> The tradition in Virginia, carried on in Kentucky and Tennessee, was that education was a family rather than community responsibility.<sup>29</sup> As a consequence, universal public education did not become accepted in either Kentucky or Tennessee until the late nineteenth century and severe problems of adult illiteracy continued into the twentieth century.

The earliest known school on the Kentucky frontier was at Fort Boonesborough where Joseph Doniphan operated a school for seventeen children during the summer of 1779 and a member of the McAfee family operated a school the following year.<sup>30</sup> In addition to instruction offered in the fort, several early settlers established schools in their homes. John Filson, who wrote the first history of Kentucky in 1784, supplemented his income by teaching in Lexington after the Revolutionary War. Filson was planning to establish a seminary in 1788 when he was killed by Indians.<sup>31</sup> John Croke, a Virginian who served as surveyor of Madison County from 1795 to 1847, established a school in his home sometime after 1789 where he taught mathematics and surveying from textbooks he prepared. Other schools, called "Old Field" schools because they were located on farm land that was no longer productive, were established during the 1790s in Madison County.

All of these were "subscription schools" in which parents agreed to pay tuition, in cash, tobacco, corn, whiskey, firewood or other goods, to the teachers.<sup>32</sup>

The first school in Tennessee was established at Watauga in 1780, near present-day Jonesboro, by Samuel Doak. Doak, whose sermon had inspired the frontiersmen who fought at Kings Mountain, had brought a small library of classics with him to the frontier. The school which Doak established became Martin Academy in 1783 and Washington College in 1795. Thomas Craighead, a Presbyterian minister and Princeton classmate of Doak, established an academy in Nashville in 1785. Samuel Carrick, another minister, established a seminary in the early 1790's which eventually became the University of Tennessee.<sup>33</sup> In middle Tennessee, where Thomas Simpson and his family settled about 1808, schools were established within five years of the first settlement. Quincy Academy was organized in Warren County in 1809 and the following year the Academy erected its own log building in McMinnville. Supported by parent fees, Quincy Academy, later operating as Carroll Academy, continued to 1854.<sup>34</sup>

Writing in 1802 about the Kentucky schools, Michaux reported,

...the children are kept punctually at school, where they learn reading, writing, and the elements of arithmetic. These schools are supported at the expense of the inhabitants, who send for masters as soon as the population and their circumstances permit...<sup>35</sup>

The Kentucky legislature encouraged the development of local schools by setting aside public lands which counties could sell to build schools. In 1798, the legislature allocated 6,000 acres to Madison County for education purposes. Local officials delayed establishing a school until about 1820.<sup>36</sup> The development of universal, public education also proceeded slowly in Tennessee. The Tennessee legislature began setting lands aside for public education in 1806 but a state-financed education system was not established until 1839 and not fully universal, at the grammar school level, until 1873.<sup>37</sup>



Although Kentucky was exceedingly slow to establish public elementary education, Kentucky leaders were concerned about higher education from an early date. In 1780, the Virginia Assembly set aside, for educational purposes in Kentucky, certain lands confiscated from British sympathizers, and established Transylvania Seminary,

to promote the diffusion of knowledge even amongst the most remote citizens, whose situation, a barbarous neighborhood and savage intercourse, might otherwise render unfriendly to science.<sup>38</sup>

The first students began receiving instruction in 1785 in the Lincoln County home of Reverend David Rice, another Princeton-trained Presbyterian. The school was subsequently relocated to Lexington.

By 1787, the Transylvania trustees, seeking financial support for the fledgling university, attempted to persuade the Virginia Assembly that surveying fees collected in Kentucky and used to support William and Mary College in Virginia should appropriately be devoted to the support education in Kentucky. The Virginia Assembly ignored the argument of the Kentuckians about the surveying fees "appropriated to the University of William & Mary, a Seminary which We greatly respect but from which the Inhabitants of Kentucky are too remote to derive any immediate advantage."<sup>39</sup> Transylvania continued to suffer financial problems. As the trustees explained in a 1790 petition,

"notwithstanding the Indulgence and encouragement they have hitherto experienced from the Legislature with the laudable design of propogating Science in this District they find the funds still so low as to be unable to erect any suitable Buildings."<sup>40</sup>

In response, the Virginia Assembly authorized Transylvania to use a lottery to raise up to five hundred pounds to build an academy. The seminary of the eighteenth century continues today as Transylvania University in Lexington, Kentucky.

At the same time Kentucky was struggling to establish schools, merchants were including books in their inventories. A bookstore opened in Lexington in 1792 and Lexington residents organized a subscription library in 1795. By 1801, the library had a collection of 750 books.<sup>41</sup>

Although universal public education was not developed in Kentucky and Tennessee until many years later, educated individuals, preachers, surveyors and others supplementing their incomes as well as individual families organized rudimentary schools during the early period of settlement. These schools were uneven in quality and usually of short duration but they were a part of the effort to transform the frontier into "the habitation of civilization."

### Religion in Early Kentucky and Tennessee

There was little time for religion during the Indian wars and early settlement of the frontier. Preachers were rare on the early frontier where every settler, whether man or woman, was engaged in a constant struggle for survival. As Methodist Bishop Francis Asbury (1745-1816) pointed out in 1797, "not one in a hundred came here to get religion but rather to get plenty of good land..."<sup>42</sup> Although the established Episcopal church had long dominated religious life in Virginia, the preachers who appeared on the early frontier were primarily representatives of the evangelical denominations then beginning to compete for adherents in North America. At Watauga, the most-populated district of the Virginia-North Carolina frontier, Presbyterian ministers began to arrive soon after the first settlers. The Reverend Charles Cummings and the Reverend Joseph Rhea were active by 1776, followed soon after by Doak, Craighead and Carrick. Baptists, including Matthew Talbot, Jonathan Mulkey and Tidence Lane, also began to organize frontier churches at Watauga during the Revolutionary War. With the end of the Revolutionary War, the Methodists sent circuit-riding preachers, like Jeremiah Lambert, to minister to families scattered throughout the frontier.<sup>43</sup>

Despite the religious activity at Watauga, preachers were seldom evident on most of the frontier during the period that travel was hazardous and the population confined to life in the forts. The Reverend John Lythe held a religious service at Boonesborough in May 1775 but ministers and religious services were scarce in Kentucky for a decade. The shortage of preachers was particularly

a problem because it meant that there was no one to conduct weddings. In 1783, the residents of Lincoln County, Kentucky, petitioned the Virginia legislature for,

...a law authorising some civil power to solemnize the rites of matrimony - as we have no clergy either of the church of England or Presbyterians who compose the greater part of our inhabitants.<sup>44</sup>

Recognizing the seriousness of the problem, the Virginia legislature promptly passed a law allowing "sober and discreet laymen" to perform marriages on the frontier where there was a shortage of preachers.

As the frontier became more settled, circuit-riding preachers began to visit the area and communities began to organize churches. In 1786, a Methodist, the Revered Jonas Haw, arrived in Madison County, Kentucky, and was authorized to perform marriages. A second Methodist and the first Baptist arrived in 1788. By 1792, when Kentucky became a state, there were five Baptists and three Methodists preaching in Madison County. Although the Presbyterians had been the largest denomination on the Kentucky and Tennessee frontier during the early years, the Baptists and Methodist denominations grew rapidly in the late 18th Century.<sup>45</sup> The scattered settlement of the 1780s and 1790s required circuit-riding preachers but, as the pace of settlement accelerated, frontier preachers could form permanent congregations and erect church buildings. In the Middle Tennessee area which became Warren County, where Thomas Simpson and his family settled about 1808, churches were organized within the first five years of settlement. The area was opened for settlement in 1805. By 1809, Elder Jesse Dodson, a Baptist, had formed Head of Collins River Church while Primitive Baptists and Methodists were combining efforts to build Shiloh Church.<sup>46</sup>

Daniel Drake, who lived in Mayslick, Kentucky, during the 1790s, described the preachers of the frontier and their training. According to Drake, most of the Baptist preachers,

were illiterate persons, but some were men of considerable natural talents. They all lacked dignity and solemnity, and some of them now and then uttered very droll expressions in the pulpit...Presbyterian ministers occasionally preached in the village;

but found little favor with the (predominant) Baptist people. The objections to them as I well recollect were their advocacy of sprinkling and of infant baptism, and their having been educated in early life to the Ministry as to a profession. The Methodists were, on the main, Marylanders and Virginians - the former predominating. Most of them were among the lamentably ignorant...<sup>47</sup>

As Drake suggests, many of the pioneers were suspicious of educated preachers and preferred the natural preachers, many of them "lamentably ignorant" and many of them with "considerable natural talents" who felt called to preach to their neighbors. Francis Asbury, the indefatigable Methodist Bishop who made sixty-two trips across the Appalachian Mountains to preach the gospel between 1786 and 1816, despaired of the prospects for religion on the frontier. Writing in his Journal in 1797, he observed,

I am of opinion it is hard, or harder, for the people of the west to gain religion as any other...! think it will be well if some or many do not eventually lose their souls...<sup>48</sup>

Bishop Asbury was realistic about the pioneers and their single-minded hunger for land but, despite his frequent visits and circuit-riding throughout the settlements, he underestimated the spiritual hunger on the frontier that, within a decade, would make Kentucky and Tennessee host to a great revival of religion and religious expression.

The late 18th century and the early 19th century was a period of active religious debate. Churches divided and denominations split over fundamental issues of religious doctrine. Theological issues identified in Europe or on the American seaboard were hotly debated in the churches and camp meetings of the frontier. Reflecting a schism between "particular" and "general" Baptists in Great Britain, Baptists in the United States divided into "Regular" and "Separate" factions. The Regular Baptists believed in an educated clergy and universal salvation. They discouraged the emotionalism of frontier religious expression and discontinued rituals like laying on of hands and footwashing. The Separate Baptists were decentralized, using untrained lay preachers. They relied

exclusively on the authority of the Bible and rejected universal salvation. The Regular Baptists tended to be located in the Upper Bluegrass while the Separate Baptists were most common South of the Kentucky River including Madison County.<sup>49</sup> There were recurring efforts to unite these Baptist divisions but there were also religious revivals which reinforced the separations.

Beginning perhaps at James McGready's Presbyterian Church at Muddy River, Kentucky in 1798 or Red River, Kentucky in 1799 or at the encampment at Cane Ridge, Kentucky in August 1801, the revival movement known in the East as the Second Great Awakening, swept through Kentucky and Tennessee during the early days of the 19th Century. so Michaux reported on the camp meetings he observed in Kentucky in 1802,

These meetings, which frequently consist of two or three thousand persons who come from all parts of the country within fifteen or twenty miles, take place in the woods, and continue for several days. Each brings his provisions, and spends the night round a fire. The clergymen are very vehement in their discourses. Often in the midst of the sermons the heads are lifted up, the imaginations exalted, and the inspired fall backwards, exclaiming, "Glory! glory!" This species of infatuation happens chiefly among the women, who are carried out of the crowd, and put under a tree, where they lie a long time extended, heaving the most lamentable sighs.<sup>51</sup>

A 19th century Kentucky historian described the revival meeting as "those extraordinary and disgraceful scenes produced by the jerkes, the rollini, and the barkini exercises, and etc."<sup>52</sup> While some denominations looked on the revivals and camp meetings with disdain, the evangelism spread throughout the region winning converts and invigorating the churches.

William Simpson (1793-1858), the youngest son of Thomas Simpson who signed the Watauga Petition, was part of the religious life of the nineteenth century frontier. A life-long farmer and lay preacher, he began his ministry and farming as a young man in Warren County, Tennessee about 1813. In the 1820's, he moved with his family to Missouri where he continued farming and preaching. After moving to Oregon in 1846, he continued preaching to the end of his life.<sup>53</sup> As an anti-missionary preacher, William Simpson was part of the "Separate" tradition among Baptists on

the frontier. He was a lay preacher whose rigid theology included opposition to revival meetings, missionary activity, and any other innovation not explicitly based on scriptural authority.<sup>54</sup> This Separate tradition within the Baptist Church, with its reliance on revealed truth and its distrust of formal education, was the source of the factions which became Primitive or Hard-Shell Baptists.<sup>55</sup>

### The Cooper Family of Kentucky

The settlers on the frontiers of Kentucky and Tennessee in the final decades of the eighteenth century were primarily subsistence farmers. In contrast to the pioneers who lived on the wild game they hunted, supplemented by corn and squash grown in small gardens, the farmers raised hogs and cattle as well as corn and tobacco for export. The hogs, sometimes fattened on corn, could be eaten fresh or preserved through smoking or salting as bacon, ham, sausage or salt pork,

...there was no time quite like hog-killing time; this meant plenty of fresh, juicy pork, cracklen bread, new lard, and sausage strong with red pepper and sage, as well as souse meat and a fresh supply of soap.<sup>56</sup>

The French traveller Michaux observed that hogs, allowed to run wild in the woods, were the most common source of meat and expressed surprise that few Kentucky families raised chickens. He also commented on the work of women in Kentucky in 1802,

The women seldom assist in the labours of the field; they are very attentive to their domestic concerns, and the spinning of hemp or cotton, which they convert into linen for the use of their family. This employment alone is truly laborious, as there are few houses which contain less than four or five children.<sup>57</sup>

Benjamin Cooper and his family, like other pioneer families in Kentucky, settled into the life of small farmers in the "Middle District" of Madison County immediately south of the Kentucky River.<sup>58</sup> This area, which included Fort Boonesborough, had been subjected to Indian attack during the late 1770's but was somewhat protected in later years as the population increased north of the river. The Coopers had acquired land and other property soon after their arrival in Kentucky. By 1792, Francis Cooper owned six horses and eleven cows. His sons Benjamin, Sarshel and Braxton

owned an additional fifteen horses and thirty-five cows. Francis Cooper also owned two slaves, one of them a child under the age of sixteen. None of the younger Coopers owned slaves in 1792.<sup>59</sup>

Benjamin Cooper and his family, in spite of their pioneering role, left little permanent record in Kentucky. At some time in the 1780s, Benjamin Cooper married Anne Fullerton (1760-1826).<sup>60</sup> As Benjamin Cooper recalled many years later, "I was married to a relation of Col. Daniel Boone."<sup>61</sup> The only surviving record of Anne Fullerton Cooper is a letter addressed to her "near Bryan's Station." The letter was left for her at the printing office of the Kentucky Gazette in Lexington in July 1791.<sup>62</sup> Benjamin Cooper and Anne Fullerton Cooper had a typically large frontier family including at least seven sons and three daughters.<sup>63</sup>

Although there is little direct record of the frontier life of Anne Fullerton Cooper, it was likely to have been a life of continual domestic responsibility punctuated by the terror of Indian raids. The pioneer woman of the late eighteenth century, with home-made equipment, made the soap, churned the butter, smoked the ham and bacon, spun and wove the cloth and supervised an active and large household while cooking, cleaning and sewing. During the early period of settlement, the frontier wife, often alone while her husband was away hunting or on a military campaign, would fetch water from the spring or tend her garden or animals knowing that Indians might be in the area. As Harriette Simpson Arnow explained,

It was in these years that women learned to fear the calm and beautiful weather that came after frost and most of the leaves had fallen, but before the deep snows of winter, the last weather suitable for long journeys; it was then the Shawnee came for scalps and horses, and so the frontier settler called the season Indian summer.<sup>64</sup>

Arnow describes a life of hard work and simple pleasures for frontier women but also a life of brightness and satisfaction in the crafts of the home and the rhythm of the seasons. Arnow contrasts the lifeless "reconstructed" frontier cabins in museums with the original,

The pioneer home was alive - cooking smells, wandering dogs, playing children, working men and women. There was even without people, a life and a brightness, impossible to re-create without the smell of new wood...<sup>65</sup>

and the contrasting colors and textures of furniture like the cherry chest, the poplar safe, the red cedar churn, pigger and pail, as well as the brightly-colored coverlids on the feather beds and the clothing hanging on the walls.

Beyond his frontier skills as pathfinder, hunter and Indian fighter, the frontier man also had to have some familiarity with the tools and skills necessary to clear land, grow crops, care for livestock, build a cabin and maintain the wooden, tin and iron equipment used in the house. Although traveling merchants were active in Kentucky and Tennessee by the 1790's, the frontier farmer had to rely on his own skills and tools for most construction and repair. In addition to the rifle, axe and hoe necessary for basic survival, the frontier settler would have been likely to have a variety of wood-working tools including a felling axe to cut trees, a maul and wedges to split logs, an adz, drawing knife and a froe to shape and smooth boards and gimlets and augers to drill holes for wooden pegs. Many frontiersmen also had simple blacksmith tools to make nails and horseshoes and to repair hoes, axes and other equipment.<sup>66</sup>

In addition to farming, Benjamin Cooper also engaged in salt manufacturing in Kentucky. In January 1785, he leased salt works in Lincoln County for one year from David Tanner. The lease required Tanner to provide Cooper "all the kettles or salt boilers...together with all the vessels of convenience...and the free and unmolested use and privilege of as much wood and water as may be necessary for the purpose of making salt for the term of twelve months."<sup>67</sup> Salt was a necessity on the frontier where it was used in curing hides and preserving foods. Its manufacture in Kentucky as it would be in Missouri thirty years later, was hard and dirty work involving cutting firewood and maintaining large cooking fires to boil the salt out of cauldrons of water. Surviving records do not indicate what Cooper paid for Tanner's 1785 salt franchise, although it is likely that payment was



made in salt. Sometime during the year Tanner's lease was assigned to James French to whom Cooper delivered the equipment, eleven kettles of sixteen gallons and two of twenty gallons, at the expiration of the lease.<sup>68</sup>

Benjamin Cooper's younger brother Sarshel was also living in Kentucky during this period. Sarshel had married Ruth Hancock, the daughter of Stephen Hancock. Ruth Hancock had arrived at Fort Boonesborough as a thirteen year old girl and was present during the six-day siege in 1778.<sup>69</sup> Her father was among the 27 Kentucky pioneers captured by the Indians while making salt at the Blue Licks in February 1778. In July 1796, the Madison County Court appointed Sarshel Cooper, spelled "Shershal" in the court records, guardian of William Wood.<sup>70</sup> Wood is likely to have been the teenage son of Betty Cooper Wood Peak, the sister of Benjamin and Sarshel who had been widowed in a frontier Indian raid in 1783.<sup>71</sup>

By 1800, the Coopers who had been part of the settlement of Kentucky, had become moderately prosperous landowners. The 1800 census lists Benjamin, Braxton, David, Francis and Shett Cooper living in Madison County.<sup>72</sup> Unlike Daniel Boone and others, who had been unable to obtain or hold title to any of their Kentucky land, Benjamin Cooper had successfully perfected land claims in Kentucky but, like Daniel Boone, Benjamin Cooper and his brothers decided, soon after 1800, to move west to a new frontier across the Mississippi River in Missouri.<sup>73</sup>

Francis Cooper, by this time nearly seventy years old, appears to have returned to Culpeper County, Virginia, rather than move to the new frontier in Missouri.<sup>74</sup> He probably died in Culpeper County between 1813 and 1817.<sup>75</sup> By the spring of 1806, Benjamin Cooper was settled in Hancock's Bottom along the Missouri River in St. Charles County. The following year, he was joined by his brothers Sarshel and Braxton Cooper.<sup>76</sup> The Coopers, like the thousands of other pioneers who followed, were bound for Boonslick.

## The Simpson Family in Tennessee

The first member of the Simpson family in America achieved appropriately mythic proportions in family legend by living to the age of 104 and recovering from blindness. He may even have grown a third set of teeth. His long life carried him from Scotland to colonial America before settling on the frontier in Tennessee and later Missouri. Like many myths and legends, the story of Thomas Simpson is difficult to document with any certainty.

Born in Scotland about 1731, Thomas Simpson came to America as a young man leaving, according to his grandson, "a valuable estate in Scotland which his heirs never received."<sup>77</sup> According to one, unconfirmed source,

He was unsuccessful in claiming a family estate in Scotland valued at several million dollars because family papers which would have proven his claim were destroyed by fire.<sup>78</sup>

Equally apocryphal, another source suggests that Thomas Simpson was the younger son of a Scottish baron who left Scotland and traveled through England and France on his way to Virginia.<sup>79</sup> He arrived in North America sometime before the Revolutionary War and lived in Virginia where he may have served as a "colonial soldier of Virginia."<sup>80</sup> He would have been in his mid-twenties during the French and Indian War and lived in Virginia where the colonial militia was activated repeatedly. Thomas Simpson is not listed in the rosters of the Virginia colonial militia.<sup>81</sup> He appears to have arrived on the Tennessee frontier at Watauga sometime in late 1775 or early 1776.<sup>82</sup>

According to one grandson, Thomas Simpson served seven years in the Revolutionary War without injury.<sup>83</sup> One family legend, completely without confirmation, places Thomas Simpson at Valley Forge during the winter of 1777-1778, where his son was killed.<sup>84</sup> According to another grandson, Thomas Simpson "knew General Washington well."<sup>85</sup> Despite these claims by adult grandchildren who might have heard the stories from an elderly grandfather more than sixty years earlier, there is no confirmation of Thomas Simpson's service in the war. He is not listed among any

of the Watauga militia units whose records have survived like those who fought at Kings Mountain in 1780. Since he would have been nearly fifty years old at the time, it is likely that his service would have been to defend the settlements while younger and more experienced frontiersmen were fighting in South Carolina. Few records were kept during that period and many records were lost. Although he lived fifty years after the end of the war, there is no record that Thomas Simpson applied for a pension for service in the Revolutionary War.<sup>86</sup> He is, however, listed as one of the soldiers of the Revolutionary War buried in Missouri.<sup>87</sup>

It is possible, but not likely, that Thomas Simpson, as his grandson claimed, was acquainted with General Washington. Since Washington never reached the frontier during the Revolutionary War, any acquaintance would have been the result of earlier experiences, perhaps during the French and Indian War when Washington was Commander-in-Chief of the Virginia Regiment and militia. Washington was a well-known figure in Virginia as a result of long public service in military and civil office. He traveled frequently to administer his plantations, to attend General Assembly sessions at the colonial capital at Williamsburg and to lead military campaigns. During the twenty years before the Revolutionary War, Washington traveled extensively along the Virginia frontier.<sup>88</sup>

During the period after the Revolutionary War, Thomas Simpson and his family moved several times. They apparently lived only briefly in the Watauga area before relocating.<sup>89</sup> According to a grandson, the family settled for a time near Charleston, South Carolina before returning to Tennessee and later moving to Missouri.<sup>90</sup> The Thomas Simpson family lived for a time on an old cotton plantation in Rockingham County, North Carolina in the 1790's before moving over the mountains to a farm in Warren Country, Tennessee sometime between 1803 and 1808 when Thomas Simpson would have been over seventy years old.<sup>91</sup> The Simpson family may have lived briefly in East Tennessee before settling in Middle Tennessee. A Thomas Simpson was a taxpayer in Blount County in 1801<sup>92</sup> and a Thomas Simpson was a taxpayer in Anderson County in 1802.<sup>93</sup> In each case,

Thomas Simpson owned no land nor slaves and lived in a household with a single adult male. In September 1806, Thomas Simpson was, along with John White and twenty-one others, one of the original settlers of White County.<sup>94</sup> The following year, White County was divided with the area southwest of the Caney Fork becoming Warren County. Thomas Simpson was not among the 313 residents southwest of the river who petitioned for the division of White County in 1806 nor among the incomplete list of early settlers of Warren County.<sup>95</sup> Sometime soon after the formation of the new county, Thomas Simpson and his family settled in Warren County where they lived into the 1820s.<sup>96</sup> Tennessee land, tax and census records for the period before 1820 are incomplete. The fragmentary records which survive do not show that Thomas Simpson nor his family owned property in Warren County.<sup>97</sup>

Warren County was established in 1807 on the highland rim of the Cumberland Mountains in central Tennessee. The area was opened to settlement after the Third Treaty of Tellico Blockhouse in 1805 extinguished Cherokee title to a large area in Central Tennessee and southern Kentucky north of the Cumberland River including most of the Cumberland Plateau. The 1805 Treaty superseded the 1798 Treaty of Tellico in which the United States obtained two parcels of Cherokee land in exchange for an agreement that the Cherokee would possess "the remainder of their country forever." In 1831, the United States ordered the removal of all Cherokee from Tennessee, the infamous "Trail of Tears."<sup>98</sup> The country was settled during the first decade of the nineteenth century. By 1808, a county government was organized and the following year a county seat had been selected at McMinnville. By 1810, a union church called Shiloh, an Academy and a log school had also been established in Warren County.<sup>99</sup> Warren County was settled rapidly. The population reached 5725 by the time of the census in 1810 and 10,348 by 1820. The population continued to grow into the 1830s when out-migration reduced the population by one-third.<sup>100</sup>

According to the family records, Thomas Simpson married twice and had a total of eleven or twelve children.<sup>101</sup> Nothing is known about his first wife other than she had three or four children.<sup>102</sup> His second wife, whose maiden name was Knight (1752-1837), bore him an additional eight children including six daughters and two sons, James and William.<sup>103</sup> William Simpson, the frontier preacher, was born in Rockingham County, North Carolina in 1793 and moved with his family to Tennessee in 1808 where he married Mary Kimsey (1797-1858) in 1813 and established his own Warren County farm.<sup>104</sup> Over the following twenty-three years, William and Mary Kimsey Simpson would have eleven children including six daughters and five sons, all born and raised on the frontier of Tennessee and Missouri.<sup>105</sup> The youngest of eight children of James and Mary Croly Kimsey, Mary Kimsey Simpson was born in Virginia.<sup>106</sup> Her mother and father, James and Mary Kimsey, had immigrated from Ireland and settled in Virginia about the time of the Revolutionary War.

The Kimsey family originated in Scotland where Benjamin McKimsey, an older brother of James born in 1725, fought at the Battle of Culloden and fled to safety, with his family to Ireland. According to family legend, McKimsey and his party crossed Ireland on foot before catching a ship to Maryland where both Benjamin and his brother James, with their name simplified to Kimsey, settled. Before 1750, the two brothers relocated to Virginia where Benjamin settled in Augusta County and James in Henry County. About 1768, James moved to Augusta County near his brother where both lived during the Revolutionary War. The brothers, after some delay, swore loyalty to Virginia in 1778. About 1785, the brothers moved again. James Kimsey and his family settled on the Duck River in what is now Tennessee where two Kimsey daughters married Simpson sons.<sup>107</sup> Called "Polly" by the members of her family, Mary Kimsey married William Simpson and her older sister Elizabeth Kimsey married William's older brother James Simpson.<sup>108</sup> James Kimsey was killed

in the War of 1812, presumably in Tennessee. Mary Kimsey, the daughter of James Croly, moved, with her daughter and her Simpson in-laws, to Missouri where she died in 1835.<sup>109</sup>

After several years of economic expansion and prosperity, the United States economy collapsed in 1819. Credit vanished, commodity prices fell, land values evaporated and banks failed. In Kentucky and Tennessee, where the economy depended on credit and land speculation, the Panic of 1819 was particularly severe and persistent. Farmers who had borrowed money to buy land during the boom years found themselves with crops they could not sell and loans they could not repay.

Although opinion was divided, both Kentucky and Tennessee enacted debtor's relief measures in 1819 to delay or prevent forced sales of property or equipment to repay loans.<sup>110</sup> For many families, the relief was too little or too late. They had lost their farms in foreclosure or were burdened with hopeless debt. For many such families, the economic collapse stimulated migration toward places where cheap land might be available and where a pioneer could start anew.

Sometime between 1820 and 1823, three generations of the Simpson family moved from Warren County in central Tennessee to Howard County in central Missouri.<sup>111</sup> The family included the elderly Thomas Simpson, now ninety years old, and his wife, as well as their son William with his wife Mary and their children Ellen, Thomas, and Benjamin. The extended family also included the widow, Mary Croly Kimsey, as well as James and Elizabeth Simpson and their children. Like many other families, the Simpsons were bound for the Boonslick region of Central Missouri.

Life on the Kentucky-Tennessee Frontier - Notes

1. Attributed to Daniel Boone, Filson, Kentucke, p. 49.
2. Ibid.
3. Dale Van Every, Ark of Empire (New York, 1963), p. 30.
4. Ibid., pp. 36-37.
5. Ibid., p. 81, p. 189.
6. Ibid., p. 158.
7. Benjamin A Cooper, Revolutionary War Pension Application S 16722.
8. Bakeless, Background to Glory. pp. 319-323. Clark hagiography tends to neglect the 1786 campaign.
9. Benjamin Logan letter of December 17, 1786 to Governor Edmund Randolph of Virginia in Palmer, Virginia State Papers, p. 204. The 1786 Ohio campaign is described in Talbert, pp. 208-214. During the invasion, Lt. Col. Hugh McGary, the hot-headed leader at the Blue Licks, murdered the defenseless old Shawnee Chief Moluntha who had surrendered wrapped in an American flag. McGary was court-martialed, found guilty and suspended from the militia for one year.
10. Ibid., p. 247.
11. Daniel Drake, Pioneer Life in Kentucky, 1785-1800, in Louis B. Wright, Culture on the Moving Frontier (Bloomington, Indiana, 1955). p. 51.
12. James Seagrove in Van Every, Ark of Empire, p. 25.
13. Francois Andre Michaux, "Travels to the West of the Allegheny Mountains", in Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., Early Western Travels, 1748-1846 (New York, 1966), p. 247.
14. Timothy Dwight, "The Restless Frontiersman" in The Annals of America, Vol. 4, 1797-1820 (Chicago, 1968), p. 280. The essay was originally published as part of Dwight's Travels in New England and New York, 1823. Dwight served as president of Yale College 1795 to 1817.
15. Ibid., p. 279.
16. Ibid.
17. Moses Austin memorandum of December 1706 in Ridge and Billington America's Frontier Story. p. 235. Austin and his son subsequently became pioneers in Texas.

18. Michaux, "Travels", pp. 227-228.
19. Willard Rouse Jillson, Old Kentucky Entries and Deeds (Louisville, Kentucky, 1926), p.24.
20. Ibid., p. 88.
21. Ibid., p. 24.
22. Lucas, The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society. Vol. 21, pp. 359-360.
23. Willard Rouse Jillson, The Kentucky Land Grants (Louisville, 1925), p. 164.
24. Karen Mauer Green, The Kentucky Gazette. 1787-1800 (Baltimore, 1983), October 12, 1796. Lawsuits over land claims fill five volumes of the records of the Circuit Court for Madison County. Jonathan Truman Dorris and Maude Weaver Dorris, Glimpses of Historic Madison County, Kentucky (Nashville, 1955), .p. 43. Some Kentucky land disputes were finally not resolved until the 1850's. For territories organized after Kentucky, the Land Ordinance of 1785 required surveyors to follow a system of townships, ranges and mile-square sections of 640 acres each. Commager, Documents of American History: pp. 123-124.
25. Arnow, Seedtime on the Cumberland, pp. 394-395, see also p. 153, pp. 322-324.
26. Nathaniel Hart, Jr., Draper MSS 17CC 191-209.
27. Mary U. Rothrock, ed., The French Broad-Holston County (Knoxville, 1946), pp. 73-74.
28. Blum, The People, p. 63.
29. Dorris and Dorris, Madison County. p. 78.
30. George W. Ranck, Boonesborough (Louisville, 1901), p. 109. Joseph Doniphan was the father of Colonel AW. Doniphan, the commanding officer of the Missouri volunteers who captured Chihuahua in 1847 as part of the Mexican War. The McAfee family established their own Kentucky station in 1779.
31. Wright, Culture on the Moving Frontier, p. 57.
32. Dorris and Dorris, Madison County. pp. 79-80.
33. Corlew, Tennessee. pp. 119-120.
34. Walter Womack, McMinnville at a Milestone. 1810-1960 (McMinnville, Tennessee, 1960), pp. 226-228.
35. Michaux, "Travels", p. 250.



36. William E. Ellis, H. E. Everman and Richard D. Sears, Madison County: 200 Years in Retrospect (Richmond, Kentucky, 1985), pp. 78-79.
37. Dykeman, Tennessee, pp. 164-167.
38. Wright, Culture on the Moving Frontier, p. 61. In 1792, David Rice published the first abolitionist book in Kentucky, Slaveiy Inconsistent with Justice and Good Policy.
39. Petition of the Trustees of the Transylvania Seminary of November 1787 in Robertson, Petitions of the Early Inhabitants, p.112.
40. Petition of the Trustees of the Transylvania Seminary of November 1790 in Robertson Petitions of the Early Inhabitants, pp.160-161.
41. Wright, Culture on the Moving Frontier, p. 72.
42. Dykeman, Tennessee, p. 4.
43. Corlew. Tennessee, pp. 121-122.
44. Lincoln County petition ca. May 1783 to the General Assembly of Virginia in Robertson, Petitions of the Early Inhabitants, p. 69.
45. Ellis, et. al., Madison County, pp. 68-69.
46. Womack, McMinnville, pp. 198-203.
47. Daniel Drake in Wright, Culture on the Moving Frontier, p. 52.
48. Bishop Francis Asbury Journal entry for March 1797 quoted in Dykeman, Tennessee, p. 4.; Corlew, Tennessee, p. 122.
49. H.E. Everman, "Religion in Early Madison County, 1786-1836," The Filson Club Histoiy Quarterly, October 1985, p. 428. Ellis, et. al.; Madison County, p. 70.
50. Martin E. Marty, Pilgrims in Their Own Land: 500 years of Religion in America (New York, 1986), pp. 175-176, p. 196. The first Great Awakening occurred in the 1730's and 1740's when a revival movement, initiated by Jonathan Edwards and spread by George Whitfield, swept the North American colonies. Ibid., pp. 108-121.
51. Michaux's "Travels", p. 249.
52. Lewis Collins, History of Kentucky, rev. Richard H. Collins, Vol. I. (Covington, Kentucky, 1878), p. 417.
53. Donation land claim #263, in Genealogical Material in Oregon Donation Land Claims. Vol.I (Portland, Oregon, 1957), p. 11

54. Clifford R. Miller, "The Old School Baptists in Early Oregon", Oregon Historical Society Quarterly, December 1957, pp. 307-327.
55. Dykeman, Tennessee, p. 125. In addition to the divisions among Baptist Churches regarding missionary activity, other factions split among the Baptists including those called Secret Order, Hard Side, Progressive and Two-Seeder Baptists.
56. Arnow, Seedtime on the Cumberland, pp. 400-405. Mrs. Arnow describes methods of killing hogs and preparing hams, bacon, sausage, lard and soap. Apart from the killing, butchering and fire-building, the preparation of pork and by-products was generally the work of women.
57. Michaux, "Travels", p. 248. Large families were common among frontier settlers. Arnow attributes part of the success of the Kentucky-Tennessee settlements to the large size of American frontier families and the consistently small families of the French and Indians in the same area at the same time.
58. Madison County was formed in 1785 from part of Lincoln County, one of three original Kentucky counties along with Fayette and Jefferson. In 1790, Madison County included all of what is now Madison, Owesley and Jackson Counties as well as parts of what is now Bell, Breathitt, Clay, Estill, Garrard, Harlan, Lee, Leslie, Perry and Rockcastle Counties. Charles B. Heinemann and Gavis M. Burmbaugh, First Census of Kentucky, 1790 (Washington, D.C., 1938), pp. 1-5. Kentucky was part of Virginia in 1790. The 1790 census found 73,677 people in the Kentucky District of Virginia. Most of the records of the 1790 census in Kentucky were destroyed when the British burned Washington during the War of 1812.
59. "Madison County Tax Lists, 1792", Register Kentucky State Historical Society, Vol. 23, May 1925, p. 126. The 1792 tax list spelled Francis "Francess", Braxton "Branton" and Sarshel "Sershal". The 1792 list also includes Lindsey Carson, whose son Christopher Houston Carson would be born in Madison County, Kentucky in 1809. The Carson family will follow the Coopers to the Boonslick region Missouri where Lindsey will be killed in an accident in 1818 and young Christopher will run away from an apprenticeship to become the frontier scout Kit Carson.
60. DAR number 47-226 and number 51-410. The dates of the birth and death of Anne Fullerton Cooper are from Shirly Simpson, The Oregon Pioneer: Benjamin Simpson and his Wife Nancy Cooper (Palatine, Illinois, 1982), p. 6.
61. Benjamin Cooper affidavit of November 9, 1836. The relationship of the Coopers and Boones was unclear. According to Joseph Cooper, Benjamin Cooper's mother was a Russell and Benjamin a cousin of the Grants of Kentucky including John and Squire Grant. Joseph Cooper, Draper MSS 23 S 137. The Grants were relatives of William Grant (1726-1804) who married Elizabeth Boone (1732-1825), one of Daniel Boone's older sisters. Grant was a Highlander who left Scotland after the rebellion of 1745-1746 and the defeat at the Battle of Culloden in April 1746. He settled on the Yadkin in North Carolina and later moved to Kentucky. Hazel Atterbury Spraker, The Boone Family (Rutland, Vermont, 1922), p. 277.

62. Green, Kentucky Gazette, July 9, 1791.
63. Houts, Revolutionary Soldiers, p. 59. The sons were Francis, Benjamin Jr., William, Tobias, Sarshel, John, and David. The daughters were Sallie (who married Ephraim McClain), Nancy (who married James Sappington) and Ruth (who married Elisha Estes).
64. Arnow, Seedtime on the Cumberland, pp. 138-139.
65. *Ibid.*, p. 383.
66. *Ibid.*, pp. 250-269. Arnow analyzed inventories of the estates of Kentucky and Tennessee pioneers to identify the equipment commonly owned by settlers of modest means.
67. Draper MSS 12 CC 208.
68. *Ibid.*
69. Stephen Cooper 1889 interview, Draper MSS 11C92.
70. Ardery, Kentucky Court Records, Vol. II, p. 69.
71. See chapter 4 above. It appears likely that Betty Cooper Wood Peak was widowed a second time before moving to Missouri. Two of her sons, Andrew Wood and John Peak, served in the militia under Sarshel Cooper defending the Booneslick forts in Missouri. See Chapter 4 of Part II, below.
72. Garrett Glenn Clift, "Second Census" of Kentucky 1800 (Baltimore, 1966) pp. 62-63. Like the 1790 records, many of the 1800 census records for Kentucky were destroyed. Surviving records show Benjamin, Braxton, Francis and "Sherswell" (Sarshel) Cooper living in Madison County in 1800. The surviving records are incomplete.
73. The extensive documentation of the Coopers in Missouri before 1810 is described below in Chapter Two of Part II, "Early Settlement of Boonslick Country."
74. Ronald V. Jackson, David Schaefermeyer and Gary R. Teeple, Virginia 1810 Census Index (Bountiful, Utah, 1976), p. 69. The surviving part of the 1810 census for Virginia shows Francis Cooper, a man over 45 (the oldest category), living in Culpeper County in a family with a woman over 45, a woman between 26 and 45, a man between 16 and 26, a girl between 10 and 16 and one slave. Francis Cooper does not appear in the 1820 census for Culpeper County, Virginia. Ronald V. Jackson, Gary R. Teeple and David Schaefermeyer, Virginia 1820 Census Index (Bountiful, Utah, 1976), p. 52.
75. Dorothy Ford Wilfeck, Culpeper County, Virginia. Will Books B and C (n.p., 1962), index to Will Book G (1813-1817), p. 81 and p. 310. Although the will book for 1813-1817 has been lost, an index for that period shows that the Francis Cooper will and inventory were entered in Will Book G.

76. Joseph Cooper in Draper MSS 238125. Sylvester Simpson (1844-1913), a great-grandson of Benjamin Cooper, reportedly asserted that Carter Braxton, a signer of the Declaration of Independence and Virginian, was an ancestor, Simpson, Oregon Pioneer, p. 58. There is no confirmation of this relationship beyond the fact that Benjamin Cooper's younger brother and two nephews were named Braxton Cooper. Carter Braxton (1736-1797) was an aristocratic planter and reluctant rebel whose Chericoke Plantation was in King William County far from Culpeper County.
77. Benjamin Simpson letter of April 12, 1897 to Sylvester C. Simpson, possession of the author.
78. John Clark Hunt, "Oregon's Fertile Lands" from Journal of Northwest Living Magazine, July 24, 1955 in Simpson. Oregon Pioneer, p. 44.
79. SamL. Simpson, Five Couples (Masset, Queen Charlotte Islands, British Columbia, 1981), p. 8.
80. Williams, Tennessee During the Revolutionazy War, p. 18n.
81. Crozier, Virginia Militia. Simpsons who served in the Virginia colonial militia include: William and Solomon who served in the 1st Virginia Regiment under Colonel George Washington (William was killed), p. 51; Daniel who served under Colonel William Byrd; James and Benjamin of Brunswick County, John of Botecourt County, and William, p. 58; Samuel of Fauquier County in 1761 and John of Middlesex County in 1676, p. 89. There is no record of Thomas Simpson serving in the Colonial militia of Virginia.
82. Ramsey, Annals of Tennessee, p. 119. There is no direct evidence that the Thomas Simpson who was at Watauga in 1776 was the same person who later settled in Warren County, Tennessee. Although the age and migration pattern would support the conclusion that there was one person, Shirlie Simpson concludes from her research that the Thomas Simpson of Watauga was not the same Thomas Simpson who later settled in Warren County.
83. David Simpson letter of March 26, 1897 to Sylvester C. Simpson, possession of the author.
84. Simpson, Five Couples, p. 8.
85. Benjamin Simpson, *Ibid.*
86. Max Ellsworth Hoyt, et.al., Index of Revolutionary War Pension Applications, 4 vol., (Washington, D.C., 1966), p.1035. Thomas Simpson is not listed among the Revolutionary War soldiers in Louis A Burgess, ed., Virginia Soldiers of 1776, 3 vol. (Richmond, Virginia, 1929, reprinted Spartanburg, South Carolina, 1973) or Eighth Annual Report of the Library Board, Revolutionary Soldiers of Virginia (Richmond, 1912). Pensions were approved for Revolutionary War service of three men named Thomas Simpson. These were paid in Maryland (540436), Massachusetts (W15336) and New Hampshire (511395). None of these was Thomas Simpson of Watauga. National Genealogical Society, Index

of Revolutionary War Pension Applications in the National Archives (Washington, D.C., 1976), p. 511.

87. Houts, Revolutionary Soldiers, p. 220.
88. Washington's early travels are described in detail in Freeman, George Washington, Vols. I-III. Someone named Gilbert Simpson was a tenant of George Washington at Hunting Creek Plantation beginning in 1761 when he paid Washington rent of 1888 pounds of tobacco. John C. Fitzpatrick, The Diaries of George Washington, Vol. I, (Boston, 1925), p. 167. In 1772, when Washington needed an experienced manager to develop land he had acquired on the Youghiogheny River in western Pennsylvania, he entered a partnership with Simpson, then a Loudoun County farmer. That fall, Simpson, accompanied by slaves owned by Washington, traveled to the western lands where they cleared, fenced and planted six acres and built an eighteen foot cabin. Simpson encountered several difficulties, including the strong objection of his wife to frontier living, and returned to Loudoun County in June 1773 without having built the mill Washington had planned. Washington was angered by Simpson's failure to carry out his part of the agreement. Freeman, George Washington, Vol. III, pp. 308-309 and pp. 324-325. There is no known relationship between Gilbert Simpson of Loudoun County and his Virginia contemporary Thomas Simpson.
89. Pat Alderman, The Over-Mountain Men: Early Tennessee History (Johnson City, Tennessee, 1970), pp. 58-59. Thomas Simpson is not listed among the Washington County Lists of Taxables, 1778-1801. This suggests he did not remain in the Watauga area long enough to acquire property but may have left as early as 1777 or 1778.
90. David Simpson, *Ibid.* The 1790 United States Census reported three Thomas Simpson families living in South Carolina but none in the Charleston area. These Simpson families, each with two sons, were living in Camden District, Chester County (p. 15), Camden District, Claremont County (p. 17) and % District, Laurens County (p. 75). These counties are all in the north-central and northwestern region of South Carolina.
91. David Simpson, *Ibid.* Donation land claim, #263. Rockingham County is on the North Carolina-Virginia border approximately 75 miles east of the Watauga area of eastern Tennessee. Rockingham County was organized in 1785. Simpson, Five Couples, p. 8, concludes that the move to Tennessee was "about 1803."
92. Pollyanna Creekmore, "Early East Tennessee Taxpayers, II, Blount County" The East Tennessee Historical Society's Publications, Vol. 24, 1952, p. 149.
93. E.G. Rogers, Memorable Historical Accounts of White County and Area, (Collegedale, Tennessee, 1972), p. 3.
94. Pollyanna Creekmore, "Early East Tennessee Taxpayers, I, Anderson County, 1802" The East Tennessee Historical Society's Publications, Vol. 23, 1951, p. 123.
95. Womack, McMinnville, pp. 15-18, 122-124.

96. Ronald V. Jackson and Gary R. Teeples, Tennessee 1820 Census (Provo, Utah, 1974), p. 482. In 1820, there were five Thomas Simpsons and eight William Simpsons in Tennessee. The Thomas Simpson in Warren County was over 45 years old and lived with a boy and girl under ten and a woman between the ages of 16 and 26. The 1820 census in Tennessee does not show any woman over the age of 26 in the Thomas Simpson household. Surviving records show that a David Simpson, whose relationship to Thomas Simpson is unknown, was commissioned Ensign in the Warren County 29th Regiment in December 1808. Mrs. John Trotwood Moore, ed., Record of Commissions of Officers in the Tennessee Militia, Vol. 3, p. 184.
97. Byron and Barbara Sistler Early Tennessee Tax Lists (Evanston, Illinois, 1977), p. 183. There are no complete census records for Tennessee before 1830. Tax lists for Warren County have survived for 1805, 1812 and 1817. None lists Thomas Simpson or William Simpson. Most Warren County marriage records for the period before 1852 have been lost or destroyed Marriage Records. Warren County, Tennessee (McMinville, Tennessee, 1965).
98. Corlew, Tennessee, p. 146; Rogers, White County, p. 36.
99. Will T. Hale, Early History of Warren County (McMinville, Tennessee, 1930), pp. 28-32. Incomplete country records show the marriage of Rebecca Simpson to a Mr. Lysenby in 1817, James Simpson to Polly Hammer in 1819 and Jeremiah Simpson in 1821.
100. Womack. McMinville, p. 124.
101. Benjamin Simpson, Ibid.
102. Benjamin Simpson, a grandson of Thomas Simpson, reported that he never saw any of the children of the first marriage of Thomas Simpson, Benjamin Simpson, Ibid. Thomas Simpson of Watauga would have been in the middle of his second marriage in August 1801 when another man of the same name announced his divorce from "Sarah" in the Tennessee Gazette. Harriette Simpson Arnow reports "The Simpsons, no different from many other families, showed a deplorable sameness in their choice of given names; thus we cannot be certain this was the same Thomas Simpson who signed the Watauga petition in 1776." Arnow speculates that the divorced Thomas "may have been a son of the other Thomas." Harriette Simpson Arnow, Flowering of the Cumberland (originally published New York, 1963; republished Lexington, Kentucky, 1984), p. 51. Herself a Simpson, the late Mrs. Arnow was a superb observer of frontier life in Kentucky and Tennessee.
103. According to the Benjamin Simpson letter, his grandmother Knight was English. According to the David Simpson letter, she was born and raised in Scotland. David Simpson does not appear to have been aware of the first marriage of Thomas Simpson. The dates of the birth and death of \_\_\_\_ Knight Simpson are from Simpson. Oregon Pioneer, p. 6.
104. Donation land claim, #263. The William Simpson-Mary Kimsey marriage was April 13, 1813.

105. Simpson, Five Couples, p. 6. The eleven children were Eleanor (1814-1878), Thomas (1815-1852), Benjamin (1818-1910), Harriet (1820-n.d.), Cassia (1822-1846), Mary Ann (1824-1849), Elizabeth (1826-n.d.), David (1828-n.d.), Martha (1830-n.d.), James (1833-1914) and Barnett (1836-1925).
106. Platte County Record, February 1866, p. 409-410. The Kimsey family name appears variously as Kimsey, Kimzey, Kimzy and Kinsey in Missouri and Oregon records. It is Kimsey in Hodges, Marriage Records of Platte County, Oregon Land Donation Claim #2136, Portrait and Biographical Record of the Willamette Valley, Oregon and the Benjamin Simpson letter. It is Kimzy in Oregon Land Donation Land Claims #552 and #553. It is Kinsey in the otherwise-reliable David Simpson letter. Kimsey appears to have been the most frequent spelling.
107. Simpson, Five Couples, pp. 8-9. Simpson obtained his information about the Kimsey family before 1800 from C. Mel Bliven who is descended from the union of James Simpson and Elizabeth Kimsey. The Kimsey move to Tennessee may have been as late as 1810.
108. Nadine Hodges and Mrs. Howard W. Woodruff, Abstracts of Wills and Administrations, Platte County, Missouri (1969), p. 46. See also Platte County Record, p. 410. James Simpson died in Platte County, Missouri in April 1852. He and his wife, Elizabeth Kimsey Simpson, had seven children: Mary Hicks, Nancy Liggett, Ezeriah McCracken, Mary Kimsey, Gillie Price, Phereba Buff, Preston Simpson.
109. David Simpson, *Ibid.* The Benjamin Simpson letter reports that his mother, Mary Kimsey, was born near Selma, Alabama, and that her family was Welsh and English. There is no confirmation of either fact. The Platte County Record confirms the Tennessee and Howard County origins of the "Kimseys of Platte" but confuses the chronology by reporting birthdates of 1802 and 1803 for older brothers of Mary Kimsey Simpson. Either the dates or the birth order is inaccurate. The 1797 birth of Mary Kimsey Simpson is confirmed by the 1850 census, her 1858 obituary and the 1897 David Simpson letter. Mary Croly Kimsey was buried in the same Johnson County, Missouri cemetery as Thomas Simpson and his wife.
110. Murray N. Rothbard, The Panic of 1819: Reactions and Policies (New York, 1962), pp. 43-56. Rothbard points out that there were two banks in Kentucky before 1817 and 46 new banks chartered in 1817-1818. By 1820, all of the new banks in Kentucky had failed. *Ibid.*, p. 98.
111. Benjamin Simpson, *Ibid.* The David Simpson letter reported that the move to Missouri occurred in 1823. Since Benjamin participated in the move and David was not born until 1828, Benjamin is somewhat more likely to be accurate about the date. The 1820 date is also used by John T. Simpson, the oldest son of Benjamin Simpson, in an interview with Oregon journalist Fred Lockley in Simpson, Oregon Pioneer, p. 21.

## AFTERWARD

Part II of this narrative, "Missouri, 1800-1846" should be completed in 1991. It will continue the Cooper-Simpson story and include chapters on the settlement of Boonslick, the fur trade, Missouri during the War of 1812, the Santa Fe Trail and the settlement of central and western Missouri. While much of the research has been completed, I welcome information, documents, leads or suggestions from anyone familiar with this period and place or with the Cooper, Simpson and related families.

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**VOLUME 3**

***A Very Improving State,*  
1755-1804**

A VERY IMPROVING STATE:  
THE SIMPSON FAMILY IN NORTH CAROLINA,  
1755-1804

**Kirke Wilson**  
**1995**

The country appears to be in a very improving state,  
and industry and frugality are becoming much more  
fashionable...Tranquility reigns among the People...

George Washington, 1791

## Introduction

This is the third in a series of narratives tracing the route and experiences of Simpson and related families as they moved across the nation in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Beginning in the seventeenth century Maryland settlement at the north end of Chesapeake Bay, these families, over several generations, uprooted and moved to new frontiers in North Carolina, Tennessee, Missouri and eventually Oregon. Over a period of less than one hundred years, members of these families migrated from near the Atlantic Ocean, across the continent to land near the Pacific.

Over that century, their pattern of settlement and migration accelerated. Their stops became shorter, one generation rather than two or three, and their moves became longer until, in 1846, they followed the Oregon Trail from Missouri to the Willamette Valley of Oregon. The Maryland period, 1688-1760, is described in [A Most Healthful and Pleasant Situation](#) (1991). It follows the first four generations over seventy years from Thomas and Elizabeth Gilbert, their daughter Anne and her husband Richard Simpson in Old Baltimore County through Thomas and Eleanor Simpson to the second Richard Simpson, his wife Elizabeth and their son, the second Thomas. Sometime in the 1750s, the second Richard Simpson and his family move to the frontier in North Carolina where they remain more than forty years on farms in what becomes Guilford and Rockingham Counties.

This chapter, in chronology the period after Maryland and before Tennessee, covers the period 1755 to 1804. In conjunction with [For We Cannot Tarry Here](#) (1990), it completes the story of the Simpson family from 1688 to 1820 when the Simpsons prepare to move from Tennessee to Missouri. The story of the Simpson family in Missouri, their marriage into the pioneer Cooper family and their emigration across the continent to Oregon will be published in the next few years.

The North Carolina period, like the Maryland period, is about three generations in length. It is marked, in public life, by the turmoil of the Revolutionary War but, in private life, it appears stable and secure. What little record survives, suggests a growing clan of hard-working farmers. They keep to themselves, conduct business with relatives and neighbors while remaining rooted for fifty years in a small area immediately north of what is now Greensboro, North Carolina. They buy and sell land and earn the respect of their neighbors. Like their experience in Maryland, the Simpson families of North Carolina live in an area where their more prosperous neighbors own slaves. The Simpsons, whether as a matter of economics or conviction, do not own any slaves as they had not owned slaves in Maryland.

The surviving documents, mostly land transactions and court records, suggest that this family was law-abiding and, in alter years, devoted to the Methodist Church and its circuit-riding preachers. The Simpsons somehow remained outside most of the political ferment of their time and place while living long and uneventful lives. Thomas Simpson was born and raised in Maryland but lived most of his adult life in North Carolina. He appears to have lived on or near his father's Guilford County farm until middle age when he moved with his adult sons to land in nearby Rockingham County. From the surviving evidence, the Simpson family remained close-knit over three generations in North Carolina and during their nineteenth century move over the mountains to Tennessee.

The documentary evidence from North Carolina explains the family legend about Thomas Simpson's alleged friendship with George Washington. Although circumstantial, the evidence also suggests that it is unlikely that the Thomas Simpson of Guilford County was not the same person who signed the Watauga petition of 1776 in what is now Tennessee. He may have served in the North Carolina militia in 1776 but the Watauga episode, while possible, seems entirely out of character for Thomas Simpson. The record is ambiguous but suggests, as family legend has it, that Thomas Simpson was blind for much of his adult life but regained his sight in old age.

The Simpson family devotion to the Methodist Church in North Carolina raises questions about why and how Thomas Simpson's son William became a lay preacher among the Anti-Missionary Baptists in Tennessee, Missouri and Oregon. The father was a devout Methodist during his adult and later life while the son, living in the same household, followed a different and more controversial spiritual path.

Like everyone engaged in historical research, I am exceedingly dependent on the work of others. I am the beneficiary of the meticulous scholarship of historians, archivists and genealogists as well as the patience and guidance of librarians in many states. I am grateful for the information and assistance I received at the Caldwell-Jones Room at the Greensboro Public Library, the Library of Congress, the Los Angeles Public Library, the Library of the Mechanics Institute in San Francisco, the Library of the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill, the Rockingham County Library at Reidsville, the Edith M. Clark history Room of the Rowan County Library at Salisbury, the Tennessee State Library and Archives in Nashville as well as the Sterling Memorial Library and its Franklin Collection at Yale University.

In addition to these institutions and their reference staff, I am dependent on the efforts of numerous local historians including, in North Carolina, William D. Bennett, Fred Hughes, Jo White Linn, Mamie G. McCubbins and Irene B. Webster. Finally I am particularly grateful to several remote Simpson cousins for their advice and encouragement. These include: Donald R. Simpson of Salt Lake City, the primary researcher of the Haw River Simpsons, whose articles, scholarship and guidance helped me to locate the Simpson properties in Guilford and Rockingham Counties; Wayne C. Simpson, the Rowan County Tax Collector, whose hospitality and understanding of the people and area made my 1992 trip to North Carolina pleasant and productive; Winona Williams of Ben Lomond, California, the editor of The Simpson Family Clan newsletter, who brought us all together and made my task possible.

For all the assistance and encouragement I have received from others, any errors of fact or interpretation are mine alone.

San Francisco, California  
February 1995

NORTH CAROLINA. 1750-1804

In truth it is the Best poor mans  
Cuntry I Ever heard of.

Alexander McAllister,  
c.1770<sup>1</sup>

The Carolina Colonies.

In 1663, Charles II granted an area called Carolina to eight court favorites including "beloved cousins and counsellors...our high chancellor...master of our horse...chancellor of our exchequer...vice chamberlain of our household" and other worthies. The grant included the land along the coast from Virginia to Florida and the land across the continent from the Atlantic Ocean "to the west as far as the south seas".<sup>2</sup> The crown divided Carolina into North and South in 1713 and established South Carolina as a separate royal colony in 1719. By 1729, the original proprietors had died and the crown was able to purchase most of Carolina for 22,500 pounds from descendants of seven of the eight original proprietors. John Carteret, Baron Carteret of Hawnes (1690-1763), a descendant of one of the proprietors of 1663, refused to sell his one-eighth share.<sup>3</sup> Because Carteret's share was an undivided part of the whole, land title in Carolina was clouded and settlement was delayed.

Lord Carteret agreed, in 1743, to exchange his one-eighth share in the larger territory for sole ownership of a tract of 26,000 square miles comprising the northern half of what is now North Carolina. The land was sixty miles from north to south and more than 350 miles wide from the Atlantic coast to a western boundary, like the one in the Carolina grant of 1663, that was undefined. From 1744, when Lord Carteret succeeded to the title Earl of Granville, this area of Carolina was known as the Granville District. The royal deed of grant of September 1744 specified that the northern boundary of the Granville land would be the line surveyed in 1728 between Virginia and Carolina. The southern boundary, the Granville line, was at 35 degrees 34 minutes north latitude. It had been surveyed from the coast to a point eleven miles west of Bath in 1743. In 1746, the boundary line was continued 103 miles west beyond the Haw River and, in 1747, an additional 87 miles to Coldwater Creek, just west of the traditional Catawba Trading Path and 14 miles southwest of what is now Salisbury in Rowan County.<sup>4</sup> The line was marked by four trees growing in a square and marked with blazes, including one with the initials of King George.<sup>5</sup> The same year, the proprietor opened a land sales office on the frontier.<sup>6</sup>

The royal grant provided that Granville would respect existing land ownership in the District but required the payment of an annual quitrent to the proprietor by all land owners. The quitrent for each 100 acres was three shillings sterling or four shillings proclamation money for land sold by Granville and somewhat less for land patented before 1744.<sup>7</sup> While the Proprietor had right to rents from all his lands in the district,



he did not have the broad governmental authority the Lords Proprietors had received in the grant of 1663. Granville could not, for example, establish courts, appoint government officials or levy taxes. The proprietor could appoint agents to sell his land and collect rents but he could not control the courts and local officials who enforced rent collection.<sup>8</sup> By 1763, when Lord Granville died and his land office was closed, land agents had issued nearly 5000 grants totaling more than three million acres in the Granville District.<sup>9</sup>

#### Settlement of the North Carolina Piedmont

Despite the availability of vast amounts of cheap land in North Carolina, the pace of settlement during the first half of the eighteenth century was slow. As one royal governor explained, "Land is not wanting for men in Carolina, but men for land."<sup>10</sup> The Granville District, at the time of the 1744 grant, had a population of about 30,000 living on one million acres of patented land leaving more than fifteen million acres of land for the proprietor to rent or sell. To encourage settlement, Granville offered to sell land in fee simple rather than leaseholds. He set the price of land at a reasonable level equivalent to approximately six pounds sterling for 640 acres reserving only certain mineral rights. The proprietor did not impose limitations on the uses or transfer of his lands or require that the landowners contribute labor to the maintenance of roads and bridges. At six pounds per section, land in the Granville District was far cheaper than

land in Pennsylvania where the price, since 1732, had been fifteen pounds per hundred acres and the quitrent was in excess of four shillings.<sup>11</sup>

Clouded land title was a continuing impediment to settlement in the Granville District. Bishop August Gottlieb Spangenberg, the head of the Moravian Church in the United States, visited the North Carolina backcountry in 1752 seeking a large tract of land for a church colony. In his diary, he observed:

Land matters in North Carolina are also in unbelievable confusion, and I do not see how endless law-suits are to be avoided. A man settles on a piece of land and does a good deal of work on it (from the Carolina standpoint), then another comes and drives him out--and who is to definitely settle the matter?...This much is sure,--My Lord's Agent cannot now give a patent without fearing that when the tract is settled another man will come and say "That is my land."<sup>12</sup>

Despite his well-founded misgivings, Bishop Spangenberg purchased nearly 100,000 acres of Granville land between the Yadkin River and the Dan River where he established the Moravian community of Wachovia at the site of what is now Winston-Salem. Other settlers also risked the consequences of uncertain land title on the North Carolina frontier. Between 1751 and 1762, the proprietor's agents sold nearly two million acres of land in the Granville District. The Granville land was sold in relatively large tracts. In Rowan County, the initial grants averaged about 500 acres each. Many of these large tracts were resold in smaller parcels as new settlers arrived.<sup>13</sup>

The western half of the Granville District, the land to the foothills of the Blue Ridge, was the area that would become Rowan and other counties. A rolling country of many streams but few trees, this area was 200 miles inland from the North Carolina coast

and had been crossed repeatedly by traders and hunters but was unsettled until the 1744 grant to Lord Granville. The availability of cheap land in the North Carolina piedmont attracted settlers from the colonies to the north where the high land costs of Pennsylvania, the soil depletion of Maryland and the growing population of both colonies had blunted opportunity. The pioneers followed a traditional route, sometimes called "The Great Indian Warpath", more than 400 miles from the densely-populated agricultural area of Pennsylvania through the recent settlements of the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia into the North Carolina backcountry. The route, later called "the Great Wagon Road" or the "the Carolina Road", began near Philadelphia, crossed the Susquehanna River near Harrisburg before turning south toward Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, Hagerstown, Maryland and the Valley of Virginia between the Blue Ridge on the east and the Allegheny Mountains on the west.

In Pennsylvania, the road connected to the population centers of Lancaster County and York County as well as the Upper Chesapeake Bay counties of Maryland and Delaware. In Virginia, the road followed the Shenandoah Valley to Roanoke where it divided. One road continued down the Valley toward the Cumberland Gap and the Wilderness Road into Kentucky and Tennessee. The Carolina Road turned south at Roanoke and climbed over the mountains, following the present route of U.S. Highway 220 to Martinsville, Virginia and into that part of the piedmont that would become Rowan County, North Carolina in 1753.<sup>14</sup> One 1758 emigrant from Maryland recalled traveling in the autumn, "...in a wagon drawn by four horses and a cart drawn by two

horses" with his parents and all the family belongings.<sup>15</sup> Women and children rode in the wagons while men and older boys walked or rode horseback. From 1730 to 1770, the Great Wagon Road was the primary route that the Scotch-Irish and German residents of the middle colonies traveled to the new lands opened for settlement in the Granville District of North Carolina.<sup>16</sup>

The first land grants in the area were made in 1749. By 1751, 812 families, most of them from Maryland and Virginia, had settled in three areas between the Yadkin and Catawba Rivers. In 1753, Anson County was divided and the northwest quarter of North Carolina became Rowan County. The Rowan County of 1753 included an area that would become part or all of 29 modern counties including the areas that would later become Guilford County and Rockingham County.<sup>17</sup> More than half the early Rowan County settlers were from Pennsylvania, primarily Lancaster and Chester Counties. Another 21% were from Maryland, including both the Western Shore and Eastern Shore of Chesapeake Bay. Delaware contributed 9% of the settlers and New Jersey 5% with small numbers from Virginia and other parts of North Carolina. From their origins, it is likely that virtually all the early Rowan County settlers arrived from the north on the Great Wagon Road.<sup>18</sup>

The piedmont plateau suffered scattered Indian raids during the 1750s. The original native inhabitants of the region, including the Tuscarora to the east and the Catawba to the south, had withdrawn as European settlement traditional territory. As

part of the global conflict between the empires of France and Great Britain, agents of the two European powers enlisted their Indian allies in the frontier battles of the French and Indian War. French agents encouraged Shawnee from Ohio to raid English settlements while British agents persuaded the Cherokee to send warriors to defend the Virginia frontier against the French and their allies. Several hundred Cherokee warriors joined British and colonial troops in battle against the French but scattered groups of Cherokee, while returning to their homes, clashed with settlers on the Virginia and Carolina frontier.<sup>19</sup>

In 1753, a party of French and Indians from the north attacked local Catawba Indians in a battle two miles from the recently-established Rowan County Courthouse. Although no settlers were killed or injured in the battle, the North Carolina Assembly was persuaded to appropriate money it did not have to send two militia units to the frontier. When Braddock and an army of British regulars and colonial militia were defeated by an army of French and Indians in Western Pennsylvania in 1755, the North Carolina Assembly appropriated an additional 10,000 pounds to build a fort and support three militia companies on the frontier.<sup>20</sup>

Fort Dobbs, named for the incumbent provincial governor, was constructed near the Yadkin River approximately twenty-seven miles west of Salisbury in what is now Iredell County. The fort was 53 feet long and 40 feet wide with walls of oak logs 24 feet high and 6 to 16 inches thick. Fort Dobbs had three levels so that as many as 100

muskets could be fired at once. Although it was the only government post on the North Carolina frontier, Fort Dobbs had a garrison of but 46 officers and men at its peak.

When the Indian threat appeared to subside in 1758, Captain Hugh Waddell, the commanding officer, departed leaving but two soldiers to defend the frontier. The Cherokee resumed attacks in North Carolina late in 1758 and in 1759 attacked the fort.

Captain Waddell reported,

... the Indians were soon repulsed with I am sure a considerable loss...they could not have had less than 10 or 12 killed or wounded...On my side I had 2 men wounded one of whom I am afraid will die as he is scalped, the other is in a way of recovery and one boy killed near the fort whom they durst not advance to scalp.<sup>21</sup>

The Shenandoah Valley of Virginia experienced extensive but episodic Indian attacks during the French and Indian War with 135 settlers killed or wounded and 161 captured between 1754 and 1758. The casualties were less numerous in the North Carolina backcountry where there were fewer settlers. The population of Rowan County had reached 1531 taxables by 1756 but declined to about 800 by 1759 during the Indian raids. During this period, a young Daniel Boone, whose family had been among the early settlers on the Yadkin, left North Carolina and found temporary work driving a tobacco wagon in Culpeper County, Virginia.<sup>22</sup>

Indian raids in the North Carolina backcountry continued into 1760. The Moravians at Wachovia reported that they provided emergency shelter for 220 of their

Rowan County neighbors who had lost homes between 1757 and 1760.<sup>23</sup> The Wachovia Church Book reports that 1760 "was a year of fierce Indian War".

On the 12th of March many Indians were in our neighborhood; eight miles away, on the Yadkin, houses were burned; two men were killed at the bridge over the Wach; two persons were killed on the Town Fork...Among our neighbors more than fifteen people were slain...<sup>24</sup>

With the defensive strategy proving ineffective in protecting the backcountry, the Carolina colonies shifted to a more aggressive approach in 1760. South Carolina mobilized 1650 militia under Col. Archibald Montgomery for an invasion of Cherokee territory in what is now northwestern South Carolina and northeastern Georgia. The South Carolina army destroyed five Cherokee Lower Towns but was defeated before reaching the Middle Towns. The following year, North Carolina sent an army of 2250 militia under Colonel James Grant into the Cherokee Middle Towns in the far western tip of North Carolina.<sup>25</sup> Grant's troops destroyed fifteen Indian villages and 1500 acres of crops in what is now Macon County, North Carolina. In 1763, officials of North Carolina and other southern colonies met with twenty-five Cherokee and Catawba chiefs and agreed to a treaty of "Perfect and Perpetual Peace and Friendship."<sup>1.6</sup> The military expeditions effectively rolled the Cherokee into the mountains and permanently eliminated the Indian threat to the Rowan County settlers. With the Indian danger removed, settlement resumed in Rowan County. By 1766, the royal governor of North Carolina could report to the Board of Trade in London,

I am of opinion this province is settling faster than any on the continent, last autumn and winter, upwards of one thousand wagons passed thro' Salisbury with families from the northward to settle in this province chiefly.<sup>27</sup>

### The RichanLSimpson Family in North Carolina

Sometime in the 1750s, the second Richard Simpson (1714-1795) moved with his family from Maryland to North Carolina. It is likely that he delayed the move until the fall of the year when he had completed harvesting his crops and had disposed of his property. He loaded his family and possessions in a wagon and followed the Great Wagon Road south bringing livestock, seed, farming equipment and the supplies necessary to survive the winter and begin farming in the spring. By then in his 40s with six children, Richard Simpson settled in the Haw River area of Rowan County approximately thirteen miles north of what is now Greensboro, North Carolina.<sup>28</sup> The Haw River is 130 miles long. It flows northeast through what is now Guilford County into Rockingham County before joining Deep River to form the Cape Fear River and flow into the Atlantic Ocean.

By May 1758, Richard Simpson had lived long enough in Rowan County to be summoned for service on the grand jury. The county seat at Salisbury was an 80 mile horseback ride, three days if the roads were dry, from his home. When he failed to appear, the county court ordered that he be fined along with six other county residents.<sup>29</sup> In 1759, Richard Simpson paid taxes in Rowan County.<sup>30</sup> In August 1764, he purchased 100 acres of land on the south side of Mears Fork in what was then Rowan County. Mears Fork is a tributary of the Haw River that flows northeast across Guilford County. Mears Fork follows a narrow valley that widens as it approaches the confluence



with the Haw River near the present line separating Guilford and Rockingham Counties.<sup>31</sup> Simpson paid twelve pounds North Carolina money to William Williams for land that Lord Granville had granted George Jurdan, Jr. in 1753.<sup>32</sup> William Williams was a Haw River farmer who engaged in land transactions with various members of the Simpson family over a thirty-year period. He was not the William Williams who was a hatter and real estate speculator in Salisbury during the same period.

The Simpson land was the western and upstream part of a 320 acre parcel that Williams had acquired in 1758. The land was bounded on the north by Mears Fork and on the east by Line Branch. Williams continued to live on adjacent property east of Line Branch running to the mouth of Mears Fork at the Haw River.<sup>33</sup> The land was located near the small Haw River bridge that today marks the boundary between Guilford County and Rockingham County. The property was immediately west of what was called Iron Works Road in the 18th century and is now Church Street Extension.<sup>34</sup> Church Street begins in downtown Greensboro and runs north into Rockingham County through gently rolling hills of suburban housing, small farms, open fields and woods. The Mears Fork land is two miles north of Gethsemane United Methodist Church and the crossroads store at State Route 150 and two miles south of the village of Midway at the intersection of US 158 in Rockingham County.<sup>35</sup> Mears Fork, Haw River and Troublesome Creek to the north are narrow streams, shaded by thick growth of vines and trees with little bottom land for cultivation. Since colonial times, these streams have offered little or no obstacle to traffic between the primary roads, like State Route 150

and US 158, that follow the flat ridges separating the many streams. Land is fertile red clay with crops planted on the gentle, upland slopes away from the streams.<sup>36</sup>

Richard Simpson and his family continued to live on the Mears Fork property for thirty years. At some point after arriving in North Carolina, Elizabeth Simpson died and Richard Simpson remarried. His second wife, Mary, was the mother of Richard Simpson's step-daughter Elizabeth, the wife of Cain Carroll who acquired 100 acres south of William Williams' property in 1779.<sup>37</sup> What little record survives suggests that Richard Simpson was a stable and respected figure. He and his sons acquired several parcels of land in the Mears Fork area over thirty years and Richard Simpson was asked, by prominent neighbors, to assume responsibility in settling their affairs. In October 1765, Richard Simpson appeared in Rowan County Court as a witness in the probate of the estate of a prosperous neighbor, John Hallum, Sr.<sup>38</sup> Hallum had obtained a Granville grant on a branch of Mears Fork in 1762 and owned 220 acres and one slave at the time of his death in 1764.<sup>39</sup>

The following year, another Haw River neighbor died naming Richard Simpson co-executor of his estate and guardian of his children. David Rothera left his 320 acre homeplace and mill seat on Troublesome Creek to his youngest son David. Young David and his sister Rachel were the "two small children left to the care of Richard Simpson & his wife Mary." In his 1765 will, the father also provided for the "schooling" of the two Rothera children for whom the Simpsons were guardians.<sup>40</sup>

For the next thirty years, Richard Simpson farmed with his family on the Mears Fork property. Like others on the frontier, he earned money in every possible way including, on one occasion, as a bounty hunter. In 1765, he was one of 110 Rowan County residents filing claims for "woolfs, panthers and cats" they had killed. In addition to bounty claims totalling 289 pounds, residents sought reimbursement for other services provided the county including "making a pillory...repairing the goal (sic) & Irons, etc."<sup>41</sup> The Rowan County Court set the tax rate at one shilling, six pence proclamation money on each of the estimated 2800 taxables in the county. Suffering from the uncollected taxes that, in subsequent years, would be part of the tax protest of the Regulators' Revolt, the Rowan County Court,

Order'd that, the Clark pay unto the persons mentioned to have claims on the County for the, Year-1764, four-Fifths of their claims Only as he has no more money in his hands, by reason of the delinquent Taxes for that year.<sup>42</sup>

For his claim of one wolf killed, Richard Simpson received a partial bounty payment of twelve shillings.<sup>43</sup>

Although they were young adults, Richard Simpson's three sons continued to live with or near their father on Mears Fork. In 1768, when the Rowan County Court ordered taxes collected, Thomas Donnell, the Justice for the Haw River area of the county, reported 254 titheables subject to taxation including eighteen slaves. Donnell reported that Richard Simpson, Senior and Samuel Marshall, presumably a hired man, were living at one location and that the three sons, Thomas, Richard, Jr. and Nathaniel were living nearby, perhaps on adjacent properties. None of the four Simpsons owned

slaves. In addition to the four Simpsons, Haw River residents in 1768 included the Reverend David Caldwell, a Princeton-trained Presbyterian minister, as well as William Williams, Thomas Knight and William Moorland.<sup>44</sup> The Simpson family engaged in several real estate transactions with Williams from 1759 to 1792 and members of the Simpson family married members of the Knight and Moorland families.

In addition to tax payments, colonial North Carolina also required adult males to perform voluntary service in the militia and the construction and maintenance of roads, bridges and other public works. Free males between the ages of 16 and 60, unless they **were** members of groups exempted by occupation, were obligated to participate in a regular schedule of musters. The frequency of North Carolina musters varied between 1760 and 1775. Captains were responsible for assembling local companies of approximately fifty men for "private" musters three to five times a year and colonels **were** responsible for the "public" muster of county regiments once or twice a year. Members of the militia were required to provide their own equipment including firearms, powder and shot. Musters included military drills as well as social events and attendance was enforced with fines of five and ten shillings.

Like the practice in 16th and 17th century England, men in colonial North Carolina were also required to provide labor in the construction and maintenance of public roads. Men were required to provide as much as one day a month in road service, if it were needed, and were subject to fines of a day's wage, two or three shillings, for

failure to participate.<sup>45</sup> In 1769, Richard Simpson was one of eleven Rowan County residents appointed to a "jury" with responsibility "to View and Lay off a Road from the Forks of Silver Creek Road to Sherrells Ford on the Catawba River."<sup>146</sup> Roads were a chronic problem in the North Carolina piedmont. They were poorly-designed, often little more than paths through the woods, and were inadequately maintained. They were often impassable due to boulders, fallen trees and flooding. The roads were rutted, often muddy and difficult to follow. An Act of 1764 required that roads be cleared of brush 20 feet wide with 12 foot wide bridges, mileposts and signposts at forks. The roads remained neglected and were an obstacle to the economic and social development of the piedmont well into the 19th century.<sup>47</sup>

The Mears Fork area of Rowan County became part of Guilford County in 1770.<sup>48</sup> At some point, Richard Simpson, denoted "Esquire" in the county records, purchased land from someone named Southwell who had acquired the land from Lord Granville. By the end of 1773, the Simpson portion of the Southwell land had been sold. William Nunn, Esquire, owned part of what had been the Simpson land and William Triplette sold another 100 acres for 100 pounds, one shilling to a buyer from York County, Pennsylvania.<sup>49</sup> In 1777, William Nunn, Junior sold 519 acres, including his father's home, to a buyer from Orange County for 400 pounds. This land is described as being on High Rock Creek. Richard Simpson, presumably the former owner of part of the Nunn property, was a witness to the 1777 transaction.<sup>50</sup> In 1779, Richard Simpson

owned 150 acres on "Mares" Fork of Haw River adjacent to the northwest corner of property owned by Cain Carroll.<sup>51</sup>

In later years, two of Richard Simpson's sons acquired adjacent properties on the south side of Mears Fork. Thomas Simpson bought land on the east side of his father in 1779 and south of his father in 1782. In 1783, the state of North Carolina granted 63 acres to Richard Simpson, Junior. The 63 acres was along the west side of the property his father had purchased in 1764.<sup>52</sup> By 1785, Richard Simpson qualified for exemption from the poll tax, presumably based on his age. His exemption was approved by the Guilford County Court at the August 1785 session.<sup>53</sup>

Richard Simpson died sometime early in 1795 on the Mears Fork property he had owned since 1764. He left "all the land on which I now live" as well as two other parcels of twenty acres each to his third son Richard (c. 1748-1804). To his son Thomas, he left "one breeding sow & a chair" and to his son Nathaniel "a white mare". To his three daughters and one step-daughter, Richard Simpson left household goods including a feather bed, trunk, chair, a stone quart mug, a spinning wheel and several basins including two of pewter. He specified that his supply of feathers "be equally divided" among his daughters. He also left property to his grandchildren including a three year old heifer to Elizabeth Rees Hicks, a chest to Elizabeth the daughter of his son Thomas and a "young cow named Rock" to Nathaniel, a son of Thomas. Four other grandsons, including Richard Simpson, a son of Thomas, shared the proceeds from the sale of the

remainder of their grandfather's personal property. His will, naming his sons Thomas and Richard as executors, was admitted for probate in Guilford County in May 1795.<sup>54</sup>

After nearly forty years on the North Carolina frontier, Richard Simpson had successfully acquired real estate and personal property and, with his wives, raised a large family. He had been a pioneer who had settled land and prospered as a farmer despite the political and social turbulence of the Carolina frontier during the colonial and revolutionary period. He appears to have gained the respect of his neighbors and was asked to administer their estates and assume responsibility for their children. Although a few of his neighbors owned slaves, there is no record that Richard Simpson owned slaves at any time during his forty years in North Carolina. The Regulator rebellion was active in Guilford County but there is no evidence that Richard Simpson participated. By the time of the Revolution, he would have been too old for militia duty but lived in an area that was crossed repeatedly by Continental troops fleeing the British and then returning to fight the Battle of Guilford Court House. The Haw River area was used by the Continental Army and state militia as a staging area before the battle and as a place of rest and recovery after the battle. Although there is no direct evidence, it is likely that the Simpson family and their neighbors were called upon to provide whatever grain and meat they could to supply the Continental army camped at Troublesome Creek.

### Life on the Carolina Frontier

The frontier area of North Carolina that became Rowan, Guilford and Rockingham Counties settled quickly in the third quarter of the eighteenth century. From wilderness in 1750, the area filled with small farmers from the crowded colonies of Pennsylvania, Maryland and Delaware. The settlers in the western part of the county experienced brief but intense Indian danger during the French and Indian War but, by the early 1760s the Indians had withdrawn from the area leaving the settlers in peace. The pioneers promptly planted crops and erected crude wooden houses. Charles Woodmason (c.1720-c.1780), an itinerant minister from the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, the evangelical arm of the Church of England, was merciless in his criticism of the settlers, their morals and their living conditions. In 1766, he observed,

The People all new Settlers, extremely poor. -Live in Logg Cabbins like Hogs- and their Living and Behavior as rude or more so than the Savages.<sup>55</sup>

In his travels, Woodmason slept in many Carolina backcountry homes. He complained that they were cold, poorly furnished, unfinished and lacking privacy. He found that most had dirt floors and that some were open to the sky. Others he found were dirty, smokey and crowded.<sup>56</sup>

While the frontier homes may have appeared crude and crowded to recently-arrived British observers like the Reverend Mr. Woodmason, they were typical of the frontier houses of the eighteenth century and they were improved or abandoned as



pioneers decided to remain or move on. The North Carolina houses were usually one or two room cabins constructed of logs and heated by a fireplace at one end. The fireplaces and chimneys were usually constructed of sticks caulked with dry mud. As families grew in size and prosperity, their houses became larger and somewhat more comfortable. Families added sleeping lofts or rooms constructed as a "lean-to" on the side or back of the cabin. The frontier houses were simply furnished with hand-made tables, benches and beds.

Most of the early settlement in the Carolina piedmont was on farms where families could produce the meat, vegetables and fruit to be nearly self-sufficient. The first few years were very difficult for the pioneer families of Rowan County. Their diets, augmented by the game they could hunt, were limited to the corn and hogs they could produce and preserve. Like other frontier settlers, they dried and ground the corn they prepared as cakes, bread, mush or corn pone. They preserved pork by dry salting and smoking and served the salt pork boiled or fried while using pork fat to fry the multiple and repetitive forms of corn. For Charles Woodmason, the Carolina diet was no better than any other aspect of frontier life. He reported,

All the Cookery of the People being exceedingly filthy and most execreble...fat rusty Bacon, fair water with Indian Corn Bread.<sup>57</sup>

As pioneers became more settled, they would plant gardens that would contribute turnips, potatoes, squash and other vegetables to their diet.<sup>58</sup> From 1755 to 1765, Rowan County farmers experienced the loss of crops and livestock to droughts, unusually

harsh winters and hot summers. The crop failures, for many Rowan County farmers, meant that there was little or no surplus production for sale or export. With nothing to sell, the subsistence farmers of Rowan County were unable to accumulate wealth or obtain cash to pay their taxes.<sup>59</sup>

In contrast to the Chesapeake Bay settlements where the export trade was accessible for anyone with goods to sell or the means to buy imports, the Carolina settlements were isolated 200 miles from the nearest port. The economic isolation entailed diversification of agricultural production and greater self-sufficiency. Where British and New England merchants were buying agricultural products and selling manufactured goods along the Atlantic coast, rural stores and taverns scattered throughout the southern backcountry were the primary site of economic transactions among the Carolina settlers. These merchants bought wheat, corn and other grains from local farmers when available as well as livestock, fruits and vegetables. The stores and taverns had a distribution function trading the surplus commodities of one farmer for different commodities from another. They also had a manufacturing function milling grains or distilling liquor for local consumption. The stores and taverns also acted as banks offering credit to customers, accepting deposits in the form of prepayments or surplus accounts and exchanging currency. Since there was a chronic shortage of money on the frontier, most transactions involved some form of barter.

Alexander Lowrance established a tavern and store on Beaverdam Creek ten miles west of Salisbury in 1755. After his death in 1762, his son John Lowrance operated the business until 1796. The Beaverdam Creek store and tavern bought and sold locally-grown wheat, corn, rye and barley as well as fruits, vegetables, cattle, sheep and pigs. The Lowrance's milled wheat flour and corn meal and produced beer, peach brandy, whiskey, butter, vinegar and linseed oil for local sale. The Lowrances bought deerskins from local hunters which they shipped, along with local agricultural products, more than 200 miles by wagon road to Charles Town on the South Carolina coast. In three or four weeks, the wagons would return with manufactured goods including cloth, glass, pewter and tinware. The Lowrances also purchased manufactured goods from itinerant peddlers or agents of port city merchants. These eighteenth century salesmen travelled the primitive roads and trails of the Carolina backcountry with pack animals or wagons exchanging manufactured goods for local products. They supplied the frontier merchants with sugar, salt, coffee, rum, buttons, paper, nails, flints, shot, gunpowder and other necessities the settlers could not provide for themselves.<sup>60</sup>

The Upper Haw River area of Rowan County was remote from the county seat at Salisbury. For families living near what is now the line between Guilford and Rockingham Counties, the first center of commerce may have been the mill erected in 1758 or 1759 at the confluence of Mill Creek and the Haw River. The mill, later called Patrick's Mill was located in what is now Rockingham County approximately two miles

from the Simpson family property on Mears Fork and is likely to have been the mill the Simpson family patronized for nearly forty years<sup>61</sup>

In some areas, frontier stores and taverns would locate near each other forming towns and trading centers. Salisbury, the county seat of Rowan County, had but seven or eight buildings in 1755 two years after the county was formed. By 1762, the town had grown to 35 buildings and an estimated population of 150. Salisbury could boast of sixteen licensed inns and a variety of professions, crafts and businesses including a:

candlemaker, a doctor, two lawyers, a potter, three hatters, an Indian trader, a weaver, a tailor, a tanner, a butcher, two merchants and a wagonmaker.<sup>62</sup>

Despite this growth and apparent prosperity, the town of Salisbury had no church, school, library or newspaper in 1762. The first church was built by Lutherans in 1767 and the first school at a later date. The first newspaper in Salisbury was not published until 1799.<sup>63</sup>

Educational opportunity was limited in colonial North Carolina and nearly non-existent in the backcountry. Charles Woodmason, writing in 1768, found that,

Very few can read--fewer write...They are very poor--owing to their extreme Indolence...Few or no Books are to be found in all this vast country...for these People despise Knowledge...<sup>64</sup>

There were few schools of any kind in North Carolina and little tradition of seeking higher education outside the province. The first schools in Rowan County were established sometime after 1760 when self-styled schoolmasters accepted students for a fee.<sup>65</sup> Some of these schoolmasters were only slightly better educated than their

students but others were well-educated Presbyterian ministers augmenting the modest salary of the frontier preacher. The Rev. David Caldwell (1725-1824), established the first school in that part of Rowan County that became Guilford County. He began preaching in North Carolina about 1764, after graduating from Princeton, and organized his academy in 1767 at his farm about three miles from present-day Greensboro. Caldwell's school enrolled as many as fifty students from throughout North Carolina and operated more than thirty years, interrupted only by the Revolutionary War. Five graduates of Caldwell's academy became state governors.<sup>66</sup>

Apart from the educated clergy sent out by the Presbyterian Church, the general level of education in North Carolina, even among the well-established families, was relatively limited. No student from North Carolina attended the College of William and Mary in Virginia until 1771. While the neighboring colonies of Maryland, South Carolina and Virginia sent a total of 58 students to Oxford or Cambridge between 1720 and 1776, North Carolina sent none. The other three colonies sent a total of 124 students for law training at the Inns of Court while North Carolina sent but eight.<sup>67</sup>

Religious life on the Carolina frontier was vigorous and contentious. In contrast to older colonies where an established church was dominant, North Carolina was settled by pioneers of various denominations. Although the Church of England was the established church in North Carolina until 1776, it was weak. There were only six Church of England clergy in North Carolina in 1765.<sup>68</sup> In the frontier areas, the settlers

brought with them the religions they had practiced in the tolerant colonies of Pennsylvania and Maryland. The backcountry settlers were primarily Protestant dissenters and included Baptists, Methodists, Quakers and Presbyterians as well as the Reformed Church of the Moravians. As missionaries were quick to point out, many of the settlers had no religious affiliation at all.

Charles Woodmason, dispatched to Carolina to gather souls to the Church of England, criticized the character, behavior and origins of the backcountry residents he encountered in 1765,

The Manners of the North Carolinians in General, are Vile and Corrupt-The whole Country is a Stage of Debauchery, Dissoluteness and Corruption...The People are compos'd of the Out Casts of all the other Colonies who take Refuge there.<sup>6</sup>

A year later, Woodmason observed little improvement in his prospective flock,

The People around, of abandon'd Morals, and profligate Principles-Rude-Ignorant-Void of Manners, Education or Good Breeding-No genteel or Polite Person among them...The people are of all Sects and Denominations-A mix'd Medley from all Countries and the Off Scouring of America.<sup>70</sup>

Woodmason was equally critical of his fellow preachers. The Baptist and Methodists he found "low and ignorant persons", the circuit-riders, "a Sett of Rambling Fellows...Bigots, Pedantic, illiterate, imprudent Hypocrites..." and Presbyterians possessed of a "persecuting Spirit".<sup>71</sup>

## The Revolt of the Regulators

The independent and self-sufficient frontier farmers of the North Carolina piedmont were people who had left other places where they had found opportunity and freedom constrained. By the 1760s, they began to experience problems with the remote governing authorities in eastern North Carolina. In 1766, the residents of Orange County, immediately east of Rowan County, began organizing protests against unfair taxation and corruption among local officials appointed by the Royal Governor. Two years later, the protesters announced,

...we are determined to have the officers of this country come under a better and honester regulation.<sup>72</sup>

The protesters, now called Regulators, formed an "association for regulating public grievances and abuses of power."<sup>73</sup> At the same time the Regulators in Orange County were formalizing their protest, residents of adjacent Rowan County, including particularly that area that would become Guilford County in 1770, were also refusing to pay taxes. The Rowan County sheriff reported that 2042 of 3000 taxables refused to pay their taxes for 1766. By 1770, there was no sheriff in Rowan County.<sup>74</sup>

In April 1768, the protest escalated when 70 Regulators rode into Hillsboro and reclaimed a horse and saddle that had been confiscated by the local tax collector. In June 1768, the Governor of North Carolina responded to the protest by ordering the Regulators to cease meetings, stop publishing their "advertisements" and respect local authorities. When several protesters were brought to trial the following September, 3700

Regulators appeared at the Court House in support. Herman Husband (1724-1795), one of the leaders of the protest and a gifted propagandist, displayed the heated rhetoric of the period describing government officials as

...these cursed hungry Caterpillars that will eat out the very Bowels of our Common-wealth if they are not pulled down from their Nests in a very short time.<sup>75</sup>

The Regulators, despite the inflated imagery, had relatively modest goals. Like many of the early revolutionary patriots, they were slow to recognize that the abuses they experienced were inherent in the colonial system. They believed, or at least said they believed, that their problems could be resolved if the governor understood how unfairly they had been treated and agreed to replace the corrupt local officials he had appointed. The Regulators did not want to depose the colonial government or remove the British. They merely wanted to be treated fairly and with respect.

As part of their growing protest, Regulators disrupted courts, threatened local officials and refused to pay taxes. In March 1771, Governor William Tryon responded with massive force. He mobilized the North Carolina militia and marched to Orange County to restore order. On May 16, the governor and 1452 militiamen encountered 2000 Regulators at Great Alamance River, 16 miles southeast of Greensboro. The Regulators, many of them unarmed and none organized into military units, hoped to discuss their grievances with the governor. When the Regulators ignored an order to disperse, the militia opened fire. Two hours of battle left nine dead on each side and many wounded before the Regulators abandoned the battleground.



Gov. Tryon, accompanied by the militia and displaying prisoners in chains, swept through Guilford and neighboring counties. He demanded that local residents provision his troops and offered clemency to those Regulators who agreed to disarm and swear an oath of allegiance to the king. Within six weeks, he and his troops had exacted the oath of loyalty and obedience from 6400 former Regulators and backcountry residents assumed to have been active in the Regulation. Although most of the leaders of the Regulation eluded the pursuing troops, the Governor arrested fourteen Regulators who were brought to trial in June. Two were acquitted and six were hanged.<sup>76</sup>

With the Regulators suppressed, the President of the Governor's Council reported optimistically to Lord Hillsborough in England that,

"those detestable Rebels...have submitted to government...at this time the province remains in perfect tranquility and I am under no manner of apprehension of any future attempts to disturb the quiet of the country."<sup>77</sup>

Within four years, the "quiet of the country" would be disturbed by events that would depose the colonial government and expel the British.

### The Revolution in North Carolina

The bloody defeat at the Battle of Alamance and subsequent repression destroyed the Regulator movement. Leaders of the movement fled and followers were bound by the oath of loyalty. Having once suffered the consequences of rebellion against British authority, residents of the North Carolina backcountry were cautious in their

response to the surge of liberty sweeping the colonies. Because they were remote from the coast and trade with Great Britain, the backcountry residents were relatively unconcerned about the series of taxes imposed by the British since the end of the French and Indian War in 1763 but they were aware of the growing movement for independence. In August 1774, a meeting of Rowan County residents adopted revolutionary resolutions. The Rowan County Resolves were taken from resolutions adopted in Prince George County, Virginia the previous June. The resolves opposed taxation without representation and urged a boycott of imports from Great Britain. Rowan County also sent delegates to a provincial convention that elected North Carolina representatives to the First Continental Congress.<sup>78</sup>

News of the April 1775 battle at Lexington, Massachusetts reached the North Carolina piedmont in letters and newspapers the following month. Twenty or more residents of Mecklenburg County convened at the Court House in Charlotte as a Committee of Safety. They discussed the fast-moving events and prepared a list of resolutions, later known as the Mecklenburg Resolves, declaring their independence from Great Britain, its laws and officials.<sup>79</sup> At the same time, the royal governor was organizing Loyalist support in eastern North Carolina before withdrawing to the safety of a British warship. A North Carolina Provincial Congress convened in August to form a government and to defend against counter-insurgencies from local Tories and from backcountry Indians allied with the British.

Although the backcountry residents were cautious about the revolt against the British, the majority ultimately aligned themselves with proponents of liberty and independence from Great Britain. For those who had sworn allegiance to the king after the Battle of Alamance, joining the Whigs required that they violate a sacred oath. David Caldwell, the Presbyterian minister and schoolmaster in Guilford County, reassured his neighbors, torn between conflicting obligations. Dr. Caldwell explained that the oath of 1771 was no longer binding because the crown had severed its reciprocal responsibility to protect its loyal subjects. Released from the oath of allegiance, many former Regulators joined the Revolution.<sup>80</sup> Contrary to the analysis of many historians, former Regulators did not become Tories in large numbers. While some Regulators may have remained neutral during the Revolution, far more became Whigs than remained Loyalists.<sup>81</sup>

North Carolina sent Whig militia to suppress Loyalists in South Carolina in December 1775. The following month, Guilford County Whigs under Captain William Dent ambushed and dispersed local Tories organized by four brothers named Field. North Carolina Loyalists attempted to recruit a militia offering 200 acres of land and rent relief to all who volunteered. The inducements attracted 1600 volunteers, many of them unarmed, but only 130 from the Regulator counties where loyalty to the Crown had been assumed to be strong. In response, minutemen and Whig militia from four North Carolina counties around New Bern mobilized to attack the Tories. In late February, approximately 800 Whigs under Colonel Richard Caswell trapped 1600 Tories at Moore's

Creek Bridge. The Patriots, with the advantage of surprise and discipline, killed or captured 850 Tories as well as large supplies of money, weapons and ammunition. The victory at Moore's Creek Bridge neutralized the Tory threat in eastern North Carolina for the first several years of the Revolutionary War.<sup>82</sup>

In July 1776, while the Continental Congress was debating independence in Philadelphia, the East Tennessee pioneers at Watauga were petitioning North Carolina "to share in the glorious cause of liberty." On July 5, 1776, 111 settlers signed the Watauga petition including one named Thomas Simpson.<sup>83</sup> Within days and with the urging of British agents, a Cherokee army of 700 warriors launched coordinated attacks on frontier settlements. Armed by British agents, Dragging Canoe attacked the Holston settlements, The Raven attacked Carter's Valley and Old Abram attacked on the Watauga and Nollichucky Rivers. The settlers withdrew into forts and survived the attack losing livestock, crops and outbuildings in the raids but gaining the justification for a punitive invasion of the Cherokee settlements in the western part of the Carolinas and Tennessee.<sup>84</sup>

In an unusual display of unity, Virginia, North Carolina, Georgia and South Carolina mobilized 5600 troops for a retaliatory expedition against the 40 towns in which the Cherokee lived. In a coordinated campaign, South Carolina troops were to attack the Lower Towns, North Carolina the Upper Towns in North Carolina and Valley Towns in eastern Tennessee and Virginia the Overhill settlements on the Little Tennessee River.

Brig. Gen. Griffith Rutherford, commander of the North Carolina militia for the Salisbury District, assembled the Guilford County militia at Martinsville July 23, 1776. Rutherford, whose strategic vision extended beyond mere retaliation, confidently predicted to his superiors the "Final Destruction of the Cherroce (sic) Nation."<sup>85</sup> The Guilford regiment was part of 2600 troops that North Carolina dispatched against the Cherokee towns. Rutherford sent 300 troops to reinforce the army from Virginia and assigned 400 troops to forts defending Rowan and adjacent frontier counties. On September 1, Rutherford marched west with 1700 troops. Encountering only token opposition, he sent 1000 troops to destroy the undefended Valley Towns that Grant and a North Carolina army had burned fifteen years earlier.

General Rutherford then took 900 troops over the mountains to attack the Valley settlements. Unfamiliar with the mountains, the North Carolina militia took a little-used route over the Blue Ridge at Swannanoa Gap and avoided an ambush by 500 Cherokee waiting on the customary route at Wayan Gap. The North Carolina troops penetrated the Indian territory of the Tennessee River Valley where they burned corn crops in the field, destroyed 36 undefended Cherokee towns, drove off cattle and confiscated supplies valued at more than 2500 pounds. Rutherford's troops killed or captured 21 Indians while suffering but three casualties. The North Carolina troops were joined in the Valley settlements by the battle-weary South Carolina militia under Col. Andrew Williamson. The South Carolina troops, following the war plan, had destroyed the Lower Towns but had suffered heavy losses crossing the Blue Ridge where Williamson's troops had to fight

their way out of the ambush that Rutherford's troops had avoided two days earlier. With the Cherokee towns devastated and the Indians in flight, Rutherford and Williamson concluded that their mission had been accomplished. On September 26, the two armies began the long march to their homes. In October, the Virginia troops reached the remote Overhill settlements on the Little Tennessee River where they destroyed five Cherokee towns and withdrew.<sup>86</sup>

The North Carolina troops returned to their homes and disbanded in October 1776. Several prominent frontier leaders including Evan Shelby and John Sevier were among the 272 troops who served under General Rutherford.

Thomas Simpson was also among the members of the North Carolina militia who served under General Rutherford in the Cherokee campaign of 1776.<sup>87</sup> Since several of General Rutherford's troops were signers of the Watauga petition, it is possible that the Thomas Simpson who participated in the 1776 expedition against the Cherokee was the same Thomas Simpson who signed the petition earlier that July.

The Cherokee campaign of 1776 pushed the Indians over the Blue Ridge but was only temporarily effective in discouraging Indian raids on frontier settlements. By the Spring of the following year, scattered Indian raids had resulted in the deaths of twelve frontier settlers and the remobilization of North Carolina militia. In May 1777, the North Carolina General Assembly adopted measures that South Carolina had found effective. The General Assembly offered the militia a bounty of ten pounds for every Indian scalp

and fifteen pounds for every Indian prisoner. For volunteers who were not members of the militia, the bounties were forty pounds for scalps and fifty pounds for prisoners. Recognizing their increasing vulnerability, the Cherokee agreed to peace terms with South Carolina in May 1777 and Virginia and North Carolina the following July. The treaties ended all hostilities and ceded all Cherokee land east of the Blue Ridge to the states. The peace treaties acknowledged the territorial rights of the Overhill Cherokee in Tennessee and resulted in several years of relative tranquility between North Carolina and the Cherokee population it had forcibly expelled from its boundaries. Although the Cherokee remained allied with the British, the treaties neutralized the Cherokee threat during the Revolutionary War.<sup>88</sup>

#### The Thomas Simpson Family in Guilford County

Thomas Simpson (1739-1833), the oldest child of Richard and Elizabeth Simpson, was a teenager when his family moved from Maryland to North Carolina. He appears to have lived with his father on Mears Fork for several years before moving to his own farm on adjacent property. He first appeared on the Rowan County tax list in 1768.<sup>89</sup> At about the same time, Thomas Simpson married a woman whose name is unknown. Together they had four sons and three daughters between about 1765 and 1780.<sup>90</sup>

In the 1770s, Thomas Simpson may have been at a point of transition in his life. His first wife, the mother of his seven children, had died. He had lived and farmed near

his father all his adult life but he may have considered moving out on his own. He may have left his family at Mears Fork, where his children would have been old enough to support themselves by working on their grandfather's farm, and explored opportunities on the new frontier opening on the North Carolina-Tennessee-Virginia border 150 miles to the West. While this is possible, it is somewhat out of character for Thomas Simpson. He made several moves during his long life but, in every other case, he appears to have moved with his family. He does not appear to have had other military service and it is uncertain whether he could sign his name. While he may have had an opportunity to explore frontier opportunities in 1776, it is most likely that the Thomas Simpson of Mears Fork was not the same man who signed the Watauga petition and served briefly as an elected member of the Washington District Court in what later became Tennessee. While Thomas Simpson of Haw River could have been at Watauga in July 1776, it would have been inconsistent with his life before or after the Revolution.

Whether or not Thomas Simpson, then in his late 30s, visited Watauga in 1776, he participated in the Cherokee campaign of 1776 and returned to Guilford County. His grandson reported, more than a century later, that Thomas Simpson "served seven years and never received a scratch" in the Revolutionary War.<sup>91</sup> Contrary to that legend, there is no evidence of subsequent service by Thomas Simpson in the Revolutionary War that swirled around his Guilford County home.<sup>92</sup> In February 1779, he purchased 50 acres from William Williams for 50 pounds. The land Thomas Simpson bought was on the east side of his father's Mears Fork property. Triangular in shape, the land was



bounded on the west by Line Branch and on the east by property William Williams had owned since 1758.<sup>93</sup> According to a contemporary description, the land was,

...on Mairs Fork waters of Haw R., begin at the mouth of Line Br. joining Richard Simpson's line, down the creek to a spanish oak, by a line of marked trees agreed upon between William Williams & Richard Simpson to the S line on William Williams cornering on a red oak...<sup>94</sup>

The Guilford County land Thomas Simpson purchased in 1779 was, like his father's property, part of the 640 acres Lord Granville granted George Jurdan, Jr. on Mears Fork and the Haw River. The Thomas Simpson land was bisected by Iron Works Road. In 1780, North Carolina granted 558 acres to William Dixon. The Dixon land was on the south boundary of the Richard Simpson and Thomas Simpson land. In August 1782, Thomas Simpson purchased 50 acres from William Dixon. The 50 acres was on the north edge of Dixon's land and extended across much of the southern boundary of the land Thomas Simpson and his father owned.<sup>95</sup>

### The Southern Campaign of 1781

North Carolina, like the other Southern colonies, was spared much of the military price of the early Revolutionary War. Apart from the unsuccessful invasion of Charleston, South Carolina in June 1776, British military and political strategy was to crush the revolution where it was strongest in New England and the Middle Colonies. After failing to hold Boston in March 1776, the British concentrated forces on an invasion of the Middle Colonies from New York City across New Jersey into Pennsylvania in 1776 and an invasion down the Hudson River Valley from Canada in

1777. The British captured the Continental capital of Philadelphia in September 1777 but the invasion from Canada was repelled at Saratoga the following month. When the military strategy to divide the colonies failed, the British withdrew from Philadelphia across New Jersey in 1778 but continued to occupy New York City.

Frustrated in New England and the Middle Colonies, British strategy turned south where Tory sentiment was assumed to be strongest. The British captured Savannah in December 1778 and, after a two-month siege, Charleston in May 1780. In June, Gen. Griffith Rutherford mobilized the North Carolina militia to prevent the British from moving north. In a confused and bloody battle pitting neighbor against neighbor and cousin against cousin, 400 disciplined Whig militia defeated 1300 untrained and poorly-armed Tory troops June 20, 1780 at Ramsour's Mill one-half mile north of Lincolnton.<sup>96</sup> Under the command of Major General Charles, Earl of Cornwallis (1738-1805), the British defeated a reinforced Continental Army at Camden, South Carolina in August 1780 and appeared poised for a triumphal march through the defenseless Carolinas into Virginia. Backcountry militia from the frontier settlements at Watauga destroyed a Tory army at Kings Mountain in October but the British continued to dominate Georgia and South Carolina.<sup>97</sup>

In December 1780, Washington appointed Gen. Nathanael Greene commanding officer of the remnants of the Continental Army in the South. Violating every military principle, Greene divided his meager forces enabling Daniel Morgan to defeat British

troops under the command of the impetuous Lieutenant Colonel Banastre Tarleton at the Cowpens, January 17, 1781. With Greene and Morgan racing north in an effort to reunite the Southern Army, Cornwallis destroyed his wagons and supplies in a desperate attempt to improve his mobility. Greene successfully joined forces with Morgan and moved north through the rain and mud of the North Carolina winter. By February 9, when Greene's little army arrived at the Guilford Court House, desertions and expiring enlistments made it risky for Greene to turn his weary and half-starved troops on his British pursuers. Greene and his depleted army crossed the Dan River into Virginia February 14 where they obtained supplies and reinforcements.

When Cornwallis tired of the chase and appeared to be moving into winter headquarters at Hillsboro in Orange County, North Carolina, Greene recrossed the Dan River and camped at the Speedwell Ironworks on Troublesome Creek in that part of Guilford County that would later become Rockingham County. Within a few days, Greene had crossed the Haw River and returned to Guilford Court House northwest of present-day Greensboro. Cornwallis, seeking an opportunity to engage the elusive Greene in the decisive battle that would destroy the Southern Army, advanced on the Court House from the South. Greene selecting the time and place of battle, deployed the undependable local militia in the front line of battle, the experienced Virginia militia in the second line and his few remaining Continentals, regiments from Maryland and Virginia, in a third line at the rear. He kept no troops in reserve.

Knowing he was outnumbered, Cornwallis moved forward with veteran cavalry and light infantry regiments into the face of Greene's troops. Greene's front line held briefly but the second and third lines vigorously resisted the disciplined bayonet charges and artillery fire of the British, inflicting heavy casualties before Greene ordered a retreat. At the end of the battle, the British held the ground but had suffered extensive casualties. Greene's troops withdrew to the Ironworks eighteen miles away on Troublesome Creek while Cornwallis retired to winter quarters at Wilmington to resupply his exhausted and depleted troops.<sup>98</sup> In a letter, Greene explained, "the enemy got the ground the other Day, but we got the victory."<sup>99</sup>

During that cold and wet winter of 1781, Greene and Cornwallis moved their armies back and forth across the muddy roads, swollen rivers and ravaged farms of Guilford and surrounding counties, requisitioning food, shelter and horses. In order to travel swiftly, each army carried very limited supplies. Cornwallis had destroyed his supply trains in January while Greene's troops, in their tattered clothing and worn shoes, depended on the food they could obtain from local farmers. Because it was winter, the food collected by foraging parties for either army was from the supply of grains and dried meats farm families had saved from the harvest of the previous fall.

An observer described the behavior of the British troops camped on the Guilford County property of Rev. David Caldwell during the days leading up to the battle at the court house,

...every panel of fence on the premises was burned; every particle of provisions consumed or carried away; every living thing was destroyed except one old goose; and nearly every square rod of ground was penetrated with their iron ramrods, in search of hidden treasure.<sup>100</sup>

In his dispatch from the battlefield at Guilford Court House, Cornwallis confidently but inaccurately claimed "a signal victory" but explained that "the total want of provisions in an exhausted country, made it ...impossible for me to follow the blow the next day." As Cornwallis reported,

This part of the country is so totally destitute of subsistence, that forage is not nearer than nine miles, and the soldiers have been two days without bread.<sup>101</sup>

For residents of the North Carolina piedmont, the Southern campaign of 1781 was exhausting. Whether or not they had any preference between the two armies, they were compelled to provide food, shelter and whatever livestock they had for the troops of each army. The Continental Army and the North Carolina militia, when requisitioning or confiscating supplies or livestock, were required to obtain an independent appraisal of the value of the property and to "pay" residents with interest-bearing certificates that residents considered worthless.<sup>102</sup> In the Haw River area of Guilford County, the foraging parties of both Greene and Cornwallis ranged widely in search of food during February and March 1781. Both armies were demoralized by hunger, frustrated by defeat and worn down by the winter march across the North Carolina piedmont. Each

army was maneuvering to achieve the decisive victory that would attract the public support and the militia volunteers necessary to bring an end to the war.

### Guilfor County After the Revolution

During the period he was acquiring land in Guilford County, Thomas Simpson married Mary Knight (c.1751-1836) and began a second family. Mary Knight was from a family that was closely associated with the Simpsons of Haw River. She was probably the daughter of David Knight of Rockingham and Grayson Counties, Virginia who lived in Orange County, North Carolina from 1755 until his death between 1775 and 1781. Her brother Thomas (c. 1740-1824) appears to have married Elizabeth Simpson, Thomas' younger sister, in 1768 and her sister Sarah Elizabeth married Thomas' younger brother Nathaniel in 1785.<sup>103</sup> Thomas Knight served in the Revolutionary War from Guilford County and later settled on Jacobs Creek in Rockingham County. He sold his Rockingham County land to his son Thomas Knight, Jr. in May 1805 and moved to Wilson County, Tennessee about 1808. He died in Wilson County in 1824.<sup>104</sup>

Thomas and Mary Knight Simpson had four children between 1783 and 1793. The oldest child, James, (n.d.-1852) married Elizabeth Kimsey (1790-1865).<sup>105</sup> Two daughters followed. Jane married Lazarus Matthews and Farraba married William Bragg (or Blagg). The youngest child, William (1793-1858), was born in Rockingham County June 27, 1793 and married Mary Kimsey (1797-1858), a younger sister of Elizabeth, in

1813 in Tennessee. William Simpson would later become a frontier preacher in Tennessee, Missouri and Oregon.<sup>106</sup> Although William Simpson would preach as a Baptist, his father was active as a Methodist in North Carolina and for the rest of his life. Two grandsons, writing a century later about the grandfather they had known as children, each remembered that he had been a devout Methodist.<sup>107</sup>

Raised in Maryland where the Church of England was the established church, Thomas Simpson became a Methodist sometime after the Revolution when the Methodist Episcopal Church began sending circuit-riding preachers to the mid South. By 1791, he was selling part of his Guilford County property to build a Methodist Church. He sold one and one-half acres on the south edge of the land he had acquired from William Dickson nine years earlier. The buyer was Francis Asbury (1745-1816), a tireless frontier evangelist and Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church. The most prominent Methodist clergyman of his time, Bishop Asbury traveled 270,000 miles preaching the gospel to frontier communities in Kentucky, Tennessee and the Carolinas between 1771, when he was selected by John Wesley to preach in North America, and 1816. At a time when roads were little better than trails in the wilderness, Asbury used horses, wagons and carriages to reach the homes, taverns, barns, court houses and open fields where pioneers gathered to hear the gospel. Over 45 years, he delivered 16,425 sermons while constantly on the move.

In his Journal, Bishop Asbury recorded 72 visits to North Carolina including several to Guilford County and Rockingham County. Like Charles Woodmason, the Anglican evangelist in the Carolinas a generation earlier, Asbury was critical of the roads, housing and people he encountered. In July 1780, he passed through the area complaining about bad roads and inattentive congregations,

...over rocks, hills, creeks and pathless woods and low land...for there was no proper road...the people's minds were in confusion; poor souls...they seem hardened and no preaching affects them, at least not mine; they are exceedingly ignorant withal.<sup>108</sup>

The following day, Asbury observed, "I can see little else but cabins in these parts built with poles." After a sermon to a congregation of sixty, he expressed his frustration and relief, "I was glad to get away, for some were drunk, and had their guns in meeting."<sup>1109</sup>

The next day, encountering another piedmont congregation, Bishop Asbury recorded in his Journal,

...the people are poor, and cruel one to another; some families are ready to starve for want of bread, while others have corn and rye distilled into poisonous whiskey.<sup>110</sup>

During a 1786 visit to Newman's Chapel in Rockingham County, Asbury found poverty and deprivation, "Provisions here are scarce: some of our friends...are suffering."<sup>111</sup> A few days later, vowing never again to return to nearby Orange County, he complained,

O, what a country this is! We can but just get food for our horses. I am grieved, indeed, for the sufferings, the sins, and the follies of the people.<sup>112</sup>

In 1787, after preaching at Newman's Chapel, Asbury observed tersely, "...the people were rather wild."<sup>113</sup> Newman's Chapel, where Asbury preached in March 1786 and



April 1787, was on Iron Works Road near the boundary between Rockingham and Orange County approximately ten miles from the Simpson farm on Mears Fork.

The Methodist Church began sending circuit-riding preachers into the North Carolina backcountry before the Revolutionary War. Residents of the Haw River area received regular visits after the Yadkin circuit was formed in 1780. Within three years, a separate circuit was created to serve Guilford County and what would soon become Rockingham County. Bishop Asbury first visited the Yadkin circuit in 1783 and visited the Haw River area annually from 1786 to 1788 and from 1793 to 1795 as well as visiting the area again in 1799.<sup>114</sup>

Bishop Asbury completed his twenty-first visit to North Carolina in January and February 1791.<sup>115</sup> He returned that March traveling with Bishop Thomas Coke and preached again at Newman's Chapel and at Arnett's in Rockingham County where he had conducted services in 1785 and 1786.<sup>116</sup> By 1791, Thomas Simpson and his family are likely to have had numerous opportunities to hear the gospel from circuit-riding Methodists. During one of these visits, Thomas Simpson and Bishop Asbury appear to have concluded that there was need for a Methodist chapel in the northern part of Guilford County. In March 1791, Bishop Asbury paid Thomas Simpson five shillings for the one and one half acres described as:

...near the dwelling house of said Thomas Simpson...for the purpose of erecting thereon a church chapel meeting house for the worship of Almighty God.<sup>117</sup>

The chapel, called Simpson's Methodist Church, was located on Iron Works Road in northern Guilford County within a mile of the Haw River and Rockingham County line.<sup>118</sup> In his Journal, Bishop Asbury does not mention his 1791 transaction with Thomas Simpson nor ever preaching at Simpson's Chapel.

Thomas Simpson and his family continued to live in Guilford County until 1792. At the time of the first national census in 1790, Thomas Simpson and his wife were part of a twelve-person household including two male children over the age of sixteen, two boys under sixteen and seven women. They lived in the same area as the elderly Richard Simpson, Senior, and his wife and Richard Simpson, Junior, and his household of eight.<sup>119</sup> In 1790, Thomas Simpson also served on a Guilford County jury.<sup>120</sup> Within two years, Thomas Simpson and his family decided to leave the Mears Fork area and move a few miles north into Rockingham County. His three oldest sons, Richard, Nathaniel and Peter Ryan, perhaps with financial assistance from their father, had each acquired land in Rockingham County. The young Simpsons all bought land in an area where Thomas Knight, a close family associate and relative by marriage, had lived since the Revolutionary War. In January and February 1792, Thomas Simpson sold his 98 1/2 acres in Guilford County to his neighbor William Williams and moved to Rockingham County.<sup>121</sup>

The Mears Fork land that Thomas Simpson sold his neighbor William Williams in 1792 was resold in 1795 to Stephen Gough and his teenage son Daniel Gough. In 1797,

Daniel Gough followed the Thomas Simpson family to Jacobs Creek in Rockingham County where he bought 50 acres from Thomas Simpson's son Richard and married Thomas Simpson's daughter Sarah.<sup>122</sup> When Thomas Simpson's brother Richard died in 1803, his will left "50 ac. near where my bro Thomas did live" to his son William.<sup>123</sup> Several descendants of Richard Simpson continued to live in Guilford County after Thomas Simpson moved across the county line into Rockingham County. Nathaniel Simpson, most-likely the son of Thomas Simpson, died in Guilford County in 1830 leaving his wife Sarah and sons named William and Thomas.<sup>124</sup>

### George Washington in North Carolina

Victory in the Revolutionary War eliminated British domination of the colonies but did not settle all the issues related to governance and taxation in the new United States. The initial confederation of states, adopted by the Continental Congress in 1777, proved inadequate. The Confederation recognized the independence of the states but failed to establish a central authority with power to tax and resolve disputes among the states. The Constitution adopted in 1789 created a strengthened central government with George Washington as chief executive. The new republic, as it would for 200 years, experienced tensions between the authority of the federal government and the sovereignty of the individual states. In the Spring of 1791, General Washington, half way through his first term as president, decided to visit the southern states to observe

conditions, ascertain attitudes and strengthen his bond with the remote and sometimes fractious citizens of the Carolinas and Georgia.

Traveling in a distinctive white coach drawn by four horses, Washington left his Mount Vernon home April 10 or 11 accompanied by a single military aide and five servants in red and white livery. In nine weeks, Washington and his elegant little party traveled 1887 miles across Virginia and along the Carolina lowlands to Charleston, South Carolina and Savannah, Georgia before returning through the Carolina piedmont.<sup>125</sup> On May 30 he visited the Rowan County seat at Salisbury where he had tea with the ladies of the town and attended a formal dinner and ball. The following day, he traveled 31 miles to the Moravian Community at Salem where he was entertained with sacred music.<sup>126</sup> On June 2, President Washington traveled from Salem to Guilford where he observed,

...there was a considerable gathering of people who had received notice of my intention to be there today and came to satisfy their curiosity.<sup>127</sup>

Washington and his entourage spent the nights of June 2 and 3 at the Guilford County home of Alexander Martin, a revolutionary war officer and North Carolina governor. Accompanied by Governor Martin, Washington visited the battlefield at Guilford Court House where ten years earlier the Continental Army lost a battle but severely weakened the British army under Lord Cornwallis.<sup>128</sup>

At dawn June 3, Washington and his party left the Governor's home and traveled north, through intermittent rain, across Guilford County and the Haw River into

Rockingham County. They followed Iron Works Road seventeen miles before stopping for breakfast with Benjamin Jones and his family at the iron works on Troublesome Creek. After eating, Washington continued north across Rockingham County stopping for the night about two miles from the Dan River. In his diary for June 3, he remarked ambiguously, "the Lands over which I passed this day were of various qualities..."<sup>129</sup> The following day, his formal tour completed, Washington crossed the river into Virginia. On June 12, he reached his home at Mount Vernon concluding his four-state southern tour. He expressed optimism about progress and development in the South but was unimpressed by conditions in rural areas. He wrote a former aide,

The country appears to be in improving state, and industry and frugality are becoming much more fashionable ...Tranquility reigns among the people...<sup>130</sup>

While Washington was impressed with the prospects for economic improvement in the South, he observed that housing, particularly outside of towns, remained relatively primitive. He commented in his diary that he did not see a single elegant country house, and that rural houses,

...are altogether of Wood & Chiefly of logs--some indeed have brick chimneys but generally the chimneys are of Split sticks filled with dirt between them.<sup>131</sup>

George Washington's route, early the morning of June 3, 1791 through Guilford County, from Martinsville to the smelter on Troublesome Creek, took him north on Ironworks Road along the east side of the Mears Fork area of the Haw River. He crossed property that Thomas Simpson acquired in 1779 and 1782 as well as the property of William Williams and the bridge across the Haw River erected in 1782 by John

Work.<sup>132</sup> This 1791 tour through Guilford County and across Simpson property is likely to have been the basis for the family legend that Thomas Simpson "knew General Washington well."<sup>133</sup>

### North Carolina After The Revolution

The North Carolina piedmont was wilderness in 1750 but was quickly transformed by the pioneers into a backcountry community of small farms and crossroads villages. The area was densely populated by the late eighteenth century but remained rural. Isolated by long distances and bad roads, the farmers of what had originally been Rowan County were independent and self-sufficient. They lived on property they owned and, in many cases, property they had cleared. Because they were remote from markets, these farmers produced for their own use and traded their surplus for local services and crafts products. These farmers rarely owned slaves or hired workers but relied on family labor to cultivate their crops and care for their livestock. Their wealth, however modest, was the product of their own effort and was relatively independent of market forces or credit.

To be self-sufficient, the farmers of the North Carolina piedmont during the last decades of the eighteenth century had to diversify their crops. They produced a variety of vegetables, grains, fruits and livestock for their families and for sale or barter. In addition to growing their own food, the middling farmers of North Carolina grew cotton

and flax for home-spun clothing and kept geese for feather beds. In 1800, a typical farm in Iredell County, an area west of Rowan County and similar to Guilford and Rockingham Counties, had approximately 300 acres of which 60 acres were cleared and cultivated with the remainder in pasture and woods. Of the 966 farms in the county, 98 percent were owned by the farmers who lived on the property including 39 farms owned by women. The typical farm had a small house, barns, outbuildings and rail fences.

Houses were generally constructed of logs. They were built by their occupants using wooden pegs and hand-made nails. Houses often began as one-room cabins with dirt floors and crude chimneys but were expanded and improved as conditions allowed or needs dictated. The houses were small but often had a sleeping loft or a second story. The more prosperous farmers were able to build fireplaces and chimneys of stone or brick rather than the sticks and mud observed by Washington during his 1791 tour. Of 1228 houses in Iredell County in 1800, one was built of brick and valued at \$1800 but 97 were cabins with a value of \$10 or less and 68 percent were valued at less than \$100. The value of land ranged from 25 cents an acre to \$2.50 an acre depending on quality. The average value of land in North Carolina in 1800 was \$1.38 an acre including improvements.

Barns of the time were typically 40 feet to 60 feet long and 20 feet wide. Most farms also had stables and one or more outbuildings used as smokehouses, spring houses, stills, com cribs or for storage of other grains. The farms were located near springs.

Grains and vegetables were planted in level areas near streams with orchards and fenced pasture nearby.<sup>134</sup>

The family farms of the North Carolina piedmont, because they were relatively small, relied on nearby merchants and crafts persons for specialized services. The 996 farms of Iredell County in 1800 were supported by 49 blacksmith shops, 34 grist mills, 13 sawmills, six stores, four tanneries and 25 assorted crafts persons including coopers, gunsmiths, hatters, potters, saddle-makers, and wagon makers. The farmers of the piedmont traded corn and other grains to owners of grist mills who used the abundant local water power to turn millstones and grind grain. In the same way, water-powered sawmills produced lumber for framing, flooring and furniture replacing the hand-hewn lumber of the frontier. Many farmers and merchants operated stills where surplus grains and fruits could be distilled into whiskey or brandy for local use or for shipment to distant markets.

The impulses that led to the North Carolina tax protests of the Regulation during the colonial period continued during the Revolution and the period following. In 1777, the North Carolina General Assembly adopted a property tax based on land value to raise money for government and military expenses. When severe wartime inflation reduced the value of Continental currency, the General Assembly increased tax rates in 1779 and 1781. Encountering persistent tax resistance, North Carolina was forced to borrow money to pay Revolutionary War expenses. In 1784, North Carolina abandoned



the tax based on property value for a flat tax. The 1784 tax was based on the amount of property owned and on a poll tax similar to that used in Colonial times. The land tax equated a town lot, whatever its value, with 300 acres of farm land. Each of these was also equivalent to the poll tax charged on each free male over the age of 21 and each slave, whether male or female, between the ages of 12 and 60. Each county prepared a list of taxables each spring, calculated taxes due and sent the local sheriff to collect. The county also collected taxes for business licenses.<sup>135</sup>

The flat tax of 1784 was easier to administer than the tax based on land value but it was less fair. Small farmers who owned unproductive land that had not been cleared or planted paid the same amount as large landowners with productive land. The flat tax also benefitted plantation owners by taxing slaves as polls rather than property. The year after the flat tax of 1784 was enacted, the elderly Richard Simpson applied for and received an exemption to the poll tax from Guilford County. In 1791, as part of Alexander Hamilton's plan to pay the national debt and promote commerce, the federal government imposed an excise tax on whisky production. Backcountry farmers in North Carolina, like their frontier counterparts in other states, used whisky as a barter item in lieu of cash. In North Carolina, farmers evaded the tax and defied the federal government until 1794 when President George Washington mobilized 15,000 militia from four states and crushed the Whisky Rebellion in western Pennsylvania.<sup>136</sup> In 1815, North Carolina replaced the flat tax with a more equitable system based on land value. As one historian observed about the residents of North Carolina, "There seemed to have

been a general expectation that freedom from England would mean freedom from taxes."<sup>137</sup>

The rejection of civil authority implicit in the Revolution also extended to moral authority. To listen to the religious leaders of the Carolinas, frontier settlers were as resistant to the gospel as they were to taxation. The preachers, between complaints about conditions of living and travel, railed against the wild behavior of frontier residents. In his sermons, the Anglican Charles Woodmason excoriated any and all, particularly the adherents of other denominations, for a long list of sins including, in one 1768 sermon,

...failing to observe the sabbath...the Vice of Drunkenness...Fighting, Brawling, Gouging, Quarreling...Riots, Frolics, Races, Games, Cards, Dice, Dances...the horrid Vice of Swearing...Lasciviousness or Wantonness, Adultery or Fornication...<sup>138</sup>

In July 1770 sermons, Woodmason admonished his congregations about proper behavior in church,

Bring no Dogs with you--they are very troublesome...do not practise that unseemly rude, indecent Custom of Chewing or of spitting.<sup>139</sup>

The behavior of frontier residents does not appear to have improved after the Revolution. According to one observer,

Parties for dancing were considered by many as harmless...the use of spirituous liquors had become more free...horse-racing was tolerated as an innocent amusement...many considered freedom from moral obligation as part of civil liberty.<sup>140</sup>

Bishop Asbury, in his 72 visits to North Carolina, repeatedly expressed concern about widespread drunkenness and violence on the frontier and inappropriate behavior in

church. Presbyterians in North Carolina responded to the deterioration of standards and behaviors by voting in 1789 to prohibit "dancing, reveling, horse-racing and card-playing" while also voting to require church attendance.<sup>141</sup>

With few exceptions, the preachers were better educated than the settlers and had higher standards of decorum but the persistence and similarity of the concerns expressed by preachers suggest that many settlers played as hard as they worked and brought their guns, dogs and frontier customs to church. For many of the settlers, the drinking, fighting and horse racing were the only interruptions in the hard work of subsistence farming.

#### The Thomas Simpson Family in Rockingham County

A few months after selling his Mears Fork property in Guilford County, Thomas Simpson purchased land approximately nine miles to the north on the upper reaches of Jacobs Creek in Rockingham County. Jacobs Creek flows north into Brush Creek and the Dan River draining a large area of Rockingham County north and west of State Route 65 and east of U.S. 220. The area is immediately north of the town of Bethany, North Carolina and approximately fifteen miles from the Virginia border.<sup>142</sup> In June 1792, Thomas Simpson paid "25 pounds actual gold and silver" to Charles Bruce of Guilford County for 150 acres on Bear Branch of Jacobs Creek. The land lay high on a ridge on the north and south sides of the branch. Two streams entered the property on

the east and joined to form Bear Branch in a steep valley in the southwest corner. The land was bounded on the south and west by the property of Samuel Short.<sup>143</sup>

In March 1796, Thomas Simpson's oldest son Richard purchased 121 acres on the waters of Jacobs Creek from John Conner for 36 pounds. The Richard Simpson land was bounded on the south by William Conner, on the west by Samuel Short and Andrew Conner, on the north by Charles Bruce and on the east by former governor Alexander Martin. Thomas Simpson was a witness to the 1796 transaction.<sup>144</sup> In August 1796, Peter Ryan Simpson, another son of Thomas Simpson, acquired 106 acres on Rocky Ford of Jacobs Creek. He paid 60 pounds currency to Adam and Allafa Trollinger for an oddly-shaped parcel north and east of Alexander Martin and south and west of Nathaniel Linder.<sup>145</sup> The following year, Richard Simpson sold a 50 acre parcel to his brother-in-law Daniel Gough for 15 pounds. The land was the southern part of land Richard Simpson had purchased eighteen months earlier.<sup>146</sup>

Rockingham County, the area immediately north of Guilford County to the southern boundary of Virginia, had been formed in 1785,

...by an east and west line, beginning at Haw River bridge, near James Martins...that other part of the said county of Guilford, which lies north of the said dividing line shall henceforth be erected into a new and distinct county by the name of Rockingham.<sup>147</sup>

The area was part of the Granville District and was first settled in the 1750s. The settlers established small farms along the Dan River and its tributaries and produced tobacco, grains and livestock.

Alexander Sneed, a Rockingham County official, wrote in 1810 that lands along Jacobs Creek were among those that were second in value only to the bottom lands of the Dan River and were,

well adapted to the Culture of Tobacco, Indian corn, wheat, Rye, Oats, the Irish and sweet pittato (sic), and most of the Vegetable productions, necessary for the use of man...<sup>148</sup>

According to Sneed, local farmers shipped tobacco, cotton, beef and bees wax to Petersburg and Richmond, Virginia as well as wheat and flax seed to Fayetteville. Local farmers also produced apples and peaches which were made into cider and brandy for local consumption and sale. He reported that springs, particularly at the headwaters of streams, provided water of excellent quality throughout the county and that the larger streams offered promising sites for mills. Sneed was particularly enthusiastic about the abundant local hardwoods including oak, black walnut, cherry, hickory, chestnut, ash, beech, elm, birch, sycamore and maple as well as poplar for shingles and locust for fence posts. Sneed listed the many natural advantages of Rockingham County in 1810 but also observed that land on the ridges between streams had been exhausted, "eaten out" as he described it, by overgrazing.

Like neighboring Guilford County, Rockingham County was settled by hard-working small farmers who cleared lands and planted crops for their own use and for sale. The Rockingham pioneers built log cabins with clapboard roofs, puncheon floors and shuttered windows. Like others on the frontier, they made much of their own furniture using axes, adzes and augers to fashion tables, stools and bed frames. With all

cultivation and harvesting by hand, the Rockingham pioneers had a variety of hand tools for farming including hoes, mattocks, sickles and scythes as well as wooden rakes, forks and simple plows.<sup>149</sup> As they became more prosperous, they expanded their houses adding cellars, second stories, outbuildings and fenced pasture. They expanded orchards and vegetable gardens. When they produced more than they used, they were able to trade surplus crops for salt, sugar, coffee and the manufactures of local craftspersons including the chairs, trunks, pewter goods and spinning wheel that the senior Richard Simpson had accumulated before his death in 1795.

As farmers expanded their production, grist mills were established to grind the grain and trade surplus products. In 1753, Aaron and Joseph Pinson built a mill at High Rock Ford on the Haw River. As the population increased, additional mills were established in Rockingham County in 1759, 1760 and 1764. In 1770, Joseph Buffington, a Pennsylvania Quaker, erected ironworks at Speedwell Furnace on Troublesome Creek. The ironworks closed in 1772 but were reopened and used as a camp before and after the Battle of Guilford Court House in 1781. At various times, Troublesome Creek was also the site of a grist mill, a saw mill and a store. The ironworks were in operation in 1791 when they were visited by George Washington. By 1800, more than twenty grist mills were operating in Rockingham County including one on lower Jacobs Creek owned by former governor Alexander Martin.<sup>150</sup>

Although Rockingham and surrounding counties remained predominantly agricultural throughout the eighteenth century, there was also a substantial expansion of skilled crafts throughout the ten county area that had been Rowan County. In 1759, the area had 124 artisans in 23 crafts or trades. Over the 1753-1790 period, this number expanded to 617 artisans in 47 crafts or trades. These included 90 weavers, 83 blacksmiths, 68 spinsters, 55 shoemakers and 42 carpenters as well as two locksmiths, seven silversmiths, four clockmakers/watchmakers and one gravestone cutter. Of the artisans, more than one-third were engaged in clothing trades with approximately one-seventh each in building trades, leather trades and metal trades. In 1759, Mary Boone, a spinner and sister-in-law of Daniel Boone, was the only woman artisan but over the 1753-1790 period, many women were self-employed as spinners of yarn and weavers.<sup>151</sup>

As farmers became more established, they expanded their production for export. Farmers began planting cotton for processing in local gins and mills and for shipment to Petersburg and Richmond in Virginia. Rockingham farmers also expanded orchards and the production of brandy and cider. They built more than 100 stills and, by 1810, were producing 31,000 gallons of whiskey and brandy each year.<sup>152</sup>

Francis Asbury, the circuit-riding Methodist evangelist, visited North Carolina for the 28th time in March and April 1794. After sermons and meetings in nearby counties, he visited Rockingham County. On April 11, he recorded in his Journal,

I went to Simpson's house. I was greatly chilled and unable to preach. The house was very open...my fingers were nearly frozen.<sup>153</sup>

With Asbury too cold to conduct services, one of his associates gave the sermon.

Asbury's Journal provides no other information about the Simpsons he visited in April 1794. The location of these Simpsons and the previous relationship between Thomas Simpson and Bishop Asbury suggest that Asbury's visit was to the Jacobs Creek home of Thomas Simpson and his family.

The importance of circuit-riding preachers declined in the North Carolina piedmont as growing population density supported the formation of small churches throughout the area. While these churches prospered, the religious life of the area was permanently altered in the early 1800s with the explosive success of the revival movement that came to be called the Second Great Awakening. Beginning with the first camp meeting in Kentucky in 1799 or 1800, word spread quickly to North Carolina. James McGready, a Presbyterian preacher and leader in the Kentucky revival movement, wrote friends in Guilford County where he had grown up and preached. By August 1801, ministers in Guilford and surrounding counties had organized the first camp meeting in North Carolina. Another revival was held later that fall at Hawfields and spread to other parts of North Carolina the following year. In March 1802, more than 8,000 people



attended a five-day meeting in Central North Carolina where 23 preachers representing six denominations participated.<sup>154</sup>

The Rev. William H. Foote, writing a half century afterward, described a typical camp meeting,

People came in crowds to the meetings...on horseback, in wagons, and on foot, and remained on the grounds for days; and continued engaged day and night in religious services, with little intermission, listening to sermons and exhortations, and uniting in prayer and praise.<sup>155</sup>

The revival movement quickly spread throughout the North Carolina piedmont. **While** there was healthy dispute about the extent to which revival conversions were authentic and lasting, the camp meetings reinvigorated religious life in the North Carolina and surrounding states and contributed in fundamental ways to the national religious experience as residents of the mid-South moved to settle other areas of the nation.

In addition to controversy regarding camp meeting revivals, there was theological dispute within denominations. Baptist congregations found themselves torn between factions later called "Regular", or "Missionary" and those called "Particular", "Anti-Missionary" or "Primitive". According to an early statement of faith, the Primitive Baptists rejected,

...all Missionary Societies, Bible Societies, and Theological Seminaries, and practices heretofore resorted to for their support in begging money from the public. We hereafter discountenance them in those practices; and we will not invite them into our pulpits, believing these societies and institutions to be the inventions of men, and not warranted by the word of God.<sup>156</sup>

The Primitive or Anti-Missionary churches rejected the term "Reverend" and referred to their preachers as "Elder". Anti-Missionary sentiment was particularly strong among the Baptist Churches of Rockingham County where each of the three Baptist congregations formed between 1776 and 1786 voted to affiliate with the anti-missionary association.<sup>157</sup>

William Simpson, who grew up in his father's Methodist household in Rockingham County, became a prominent Anti-Missionary Baptist preacher in Tennessee, Missouri and Oregon.

The neglect of education that characterized most of North Carolina during the colonial period continued for many years after independence. The constitution adopted by North Carolina in 1776 had authorized public schools but none was established. Rockingham County, which had been settled since the 1750s, had no permanent school until the 19th century. A small number of wealthy families in North Carolina engaged private tutors to instruct their children in "home schools" and others sent their children to subscription schools. The subscription schools were often organized by itinerant school masters and were sometimes called "old field" schools because they used abandoned farm property. The schools operated intermittently and were of uneven quality. One 1809 school master in North Carolina offered instruction for one year at "An English School" for ten dollars tuition and boarding expenses of fifty dollars. The master assured parents that the "strictest attention" would be paid to instruction and morals. He also offered to accept "board payment...in Corn, Bacon, or Brandy..."<sup>158</sup>

As late as 1792, only three academies in all of North Carolina offered the classical education then considered necessary preparation for college.<sup>159</sup> Children from educated families in Rockingham County attended the private academy operated in nearby Guilford County for fifty years by the Rev. David Caldwell. The first academies in Rockingham County were established in 1820 and the first public school in 1840.<sup>160</sup> While most North Carolina children received but rudimentary education in the late 18th and early 19th century, orphans and children from poor families often obtained no formal education at all but learned trades through apprenticeships.

In 1817, the North Carolina legislature considered a comprehensive public education program for all children. After extensive deliberation, the legislature declined to enact the program. The entrenched resistance to public education was described in 1830 by the first president of the University of North Carolina,

...our aversion to taxation, even to provide for the education of the poor children, is invincible...Through the influence of inveterate habit, large portions of our population have learned to look with indifference on education...<sup>161</sup>

It was not until 1839, when the state received a distribution of federal surplus, that North Carolina approved a plan for statewide public education.

It is unclear whether or not Thomas Simpson could read and write. He had grown up in Maryland in a farming family of modest means and had lived all his adult life in rural areas of North Carolina where education was limited and literacy was not essential. Rather than signing his name, Thomas Simpson made his mark in 1785 when

acting as a witness at his brother Nathaniel's marriage and in 1796 when his son Richard purchased land. He also made his mark in 1804 when selling land in Rockingham County.<sup>162</sup> In other land transactions, he may have signed his name.<sup>163</sup> It is possible that he was illiterate but it is also possible that there is another explanation for his inability to sign his name. According to a letter written by his grandson in 1897, Thomas Simpson

...was blind for many years--within a few years of his death, his eyesight came to him again. He could see to read common print without glasses.<sup>164</sup>

While the grandson may not have observed the recovery or have had direct knowledge of his grandfather's reading ability, the dramatic story suggests that Thomas Simpson may have been blind rather than illiterate during the years in Rockingham County.

With poor education, literacy in North Carolina was limited. Those who were interested in reading were dependent on private libraries and on itinerant booksellers. The Reverend Mason Locke Weems (1759-1825), was an Episcopal clergyman and author who supported himself for thirty years selling books in Virginia and the Carolinas. He was best known for the biography of George Washington he published in 1800. Parson Weems traveled throughout the piedmont playing the fiddle to attract prospective buyers for the collections of sermons he edited and the popular moral tales he wrote like God's Revenge Against Murder in 1807 and the 1810 sequel God's Revenge Against Gambling. He also sold almanacs, Bibles and books by other contemporary authors. Despite the low literacy level in the North Carolina piedmont, the energetic and entertaining Parson Weems was very successful as a bookseller in the villages of the

North Carolina backcountry from 1794 until his death in 1825.<sup>165</sup> The libraries of North Carolina, like the schools, were slow to develop. Apart from private subscription libraries and parish libraries, the first public library in North Carolina supported by local taxes was established in 1897 in Durham.<sup>166</sup> The first public library in Rockingham County was established in 1930.<sup>167</sup>

When Thomas Simpson moved to Rockingham County in the 1790s, the county population was 6219 including 1105 slaves. By 1810, the population had increased by 66 percent to 10,316 and the number of slaves had increased by 91 percent to 2114.<sup>168</sup> As transportation improved, larger land owners shifted from self-sufficiency farming to export commodities like tobacco and cotton. The shift to an export economy also resulted in increasing concentration of wealth and increased use of slave labor. Like the pattern that drove the Simpson family out of Maryland a half century earlier, the increasing concentration of wealth pushed out many of the middling farmers who could not accumulate the wealth to acquire new land and slaves. The new land was necessary to prevent declining crop yields as land became exhausted as a result of repeated planting of tobacco or cotton. Slave labor enabled planters to increase production of commercial crops like tobacco and cotton.<sup>169</sup>

The Simpson family, over more than a century in areas where slaves were common, had never owned a slave. It is possible that the Simpsons were opposed to slavery on principle, for many of their contemporaries found the practice objectionable.

It is more likely however that the eighteenth century Simpsons did not own slaves in Maryland or North Carolina because they were too poor. They were too poor to acquire large plantations and they were too poor to buy the slaves that were an essential component of the export economy. While they may have been too poor to acquire slaves, the Simpson family, relying on family labor, had prospered over three generations as middling farmers in Guilford and Rockingham Counties, North Carolina.

Thomas Simpson was 65 years old in 1804 when he began to prepare to move over the mountains to Middle Tennessee where it appears that his older sons Richard and Peter Ryan as well as his son-in-law Daniel Gough, all neighbors in Rockingham County, had preceded him. On May 31, 1804, Thomas Simpson sold an 101 acre parcel on Jacobs Creek to his brother-in-law and neighbor Thomas Knight for 100 pounds. The property is described as "waters of Jacobs Creek...beginning at black oak Thomas Knight's corner" with neighbors including Rowland Williams, Jacob Periman and Charles Bruce.<sup>170</sup> The land sold in 1804, although it was adjacent to property of Charles Bruce from whom he had purchased 150 acres in 1792, does not appear to have been the same property.<sup>171</sup>

At some other time, Thomas Simpson sold 50 acres on Brushy Fork of Jacobs Creek to Mary Patrick, whose family had owned Patrick's Mill near the Simpson family properties at Mears Fork. It is unclear where the Brushy Fork property was located or why or when it was sold. Like many land transactions of the time, the sale of the Brushy

Creek property remained unrecorded until 1807 when the estate of Mary Patrick sold the property.<sup>172</sup> There is no record that Thomas Simpson sold the 150 acre parcel he owned but he may have transferred ownership, without recording the deed, to his son Nathaniel who continued to live in Rockingham County until at least 1830.<sup>173</sup> Also preparing to move to Tennessee, Peter Ryan Simpson sold the 106 acres he had purchased from Adam and Allafa Trollinger in 1796 to Thomas Trollinger for \$150 in November 1804.<sup>174</sup>

Sometime after the 1804 sale of his North Carolina property, Thomas Simpson, as he had fifty years earlier, loaded the wagons to move to a new frontier. Accompanied by his wife Mary Knight Simpson and their four children, he traveled over the mountains into Middle Tennessee. Leaving only his adult son Nathaniel in Rockingham County, Thomas Simpson and his family were in the early part of a vast migration from North Carolina that would continue for nearly fifty years. Between 1815 and 1850, one-third of the residents of North Carolina, like Thomas Simpson and his family in 1804, migrated to other states.<sup>175</sup>

Although North Carolina residents had claimed more than five million acres in Tennessee, including 2.8 million acres granted to veterans of the Revolutionary War, Thomas Simpson was not among those who had acquired Tennessee land while living in North Carolina.<sup>176</sup> The Third Treaty of Tellico Blockhouse in 1805 had extinguished Cherokee land title in central Tennessee. The Thomas Simpson family settled on the

former Indian lands on the highland rim of the Cumberland Plateau. In 1807, the area was organized as Warren County. Within twenty years, the Thomas Simpson family, swollen with grandchildren and in-laws, would again be loading the wagons for a move to the new lands available in the Boonslick region of central Missouri.<sup>177</sup>



North Carolina Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Alexander McAllister, letter to his cousin, c.1770, in A. Roger Ekirch, Poor Carolina: Politics and Society in Colonial North Carolina, 1729-1776 (Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1981), p. 29.

<sup>2</sup> Charter of Carolina, March 24, 1662/3, in W. Keith Kavanagh, Foundations of Colonial America, Vol. III (New York, 1973), p. 1738-1739.

<sup>3</sup> Act for Establishing an Agreement with Seven of the Lords Proprietors of Carolina, for the Surrender of Their Title and Interest in That Province to His Majesty, 1729, *Ibid.*, pp. 1807-1815. The Act of Parliament was 2 Geo.II c. 34. John Fiske, Old Virginia and Her Neighbors, Vol. II (Boston, 1897), pp. 285-308.

<sup>4</sup> William S. Powell, The North Carolina Gazetteer (Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1968), p. 198. Thornton W. Mitchell, "The Granville District and Its Land Records", *North Carolina Historical Review*, April 1993, pp. 103-106.

<sup>5</sup> John H. Wheeler, Historical Sketches of North Carolina from 1584 to 1851, Vol. II (Philadelphia, 1851, republished New York, 1925), p.11.

<sup>6</sup> Margaret M. Hoffmann, The Granville District of North Carolina, 1748-1763. Vol. I, (Weldon, North Carolina, 1986). Robert W. Ramsey, Carolina Cradle: Settlement of the Northwest Carolina Frontier, 1747-1762 (Chapel Hill, 1964), p. 6.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 153. Proclamation money was the exchange rate established by colonial proclamation for provincial currency. William S. Powell, North Carolina Through Four Centuries (Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1989), p. 89.

<sup>8</sup> Ekirch, Poor Carolina, pp. 128-129.

<sup>9</sup> Mitchell, "The Granville District", pp. 116-127.

<sup>10</sup> Governor George Burrington, *Ibid.*, p. 7. Burrington was governor of North Carolina under the lords proprietors 1724-1725 and royal governor 1731-1734.

<sup>11</sup> Ramsey, Carolina Cradle, p. 18. The price of land in the Granville District was approximately one-seventeenth the price of land in Pennsylvania but the North Carolina land was remote from markets and seaports.

<sup>12</sup> August Gottlieb Spangenberg, Diary entry, September 12, 1752, new style, in Adelaide L. Fries, ed., Records of the Moravians in North Carolina, Vol. I (Raleigh, North Carolina, 1922), p. 32.

<sup>13</sup> Ekirch, Poor Carolina, pp. 128-131.

<sup>14</sup> Joshua Fry and Peter Jefferson, "A Map of the most Inhabited part of Virginia..." (London, 1751). The 1751 map shows the Great Wagon Road as 435 miles from Philadelphia to the Yadkin River in North Carolina. The map also shows Swans Point in Harford County, Maryland at the north end of Chesapeake Bay where the Simpson family lived before moving to North Carolina. A copy of the 1751 map is displayed at the DeWitt Wallace Decorative Arts Gallery, Williamsburg, Virginia.

<sup>15</sup> William Few in Charles Christopher Chittenden, "Overland Travel and Transportation in North Carolina 1763-1789", North Carolina Historical Review, July 1931, p. 253.

<sup>16</sup> Marcus W. Lewis, The Development of Early Emigrant Trails in the United States East of the Mississippi River (Washington, D.C., 1978), p. 3. George Raynor, Pioneers and Indians of Back Country, North Carolina (Salisbury, North Carolina, 1990), pp. 17-21. Ramsey, Carolina Cradle, p. 172.

<sup>17</sup> David Leroy Corbitt, The Formation of the North Carolina Counties (Raleigh, North Carolina, 1950, republished 1969), p. 185. Since 1836, modern Rowan County (pronounced Row-Ann) has comprised an area of 517 square miles. The county seat is at Salisbury. James S. Brawley, Rowan County: A Brief History (Raleigh, North Carolina, 1974), pp. 1-11.

<sup>18</sup> Ramsey, Carolina Cradle, p. 216. The data are drawn from a sample of 546, non-German early settlers of Rowan County, North Carolina.

<sup>19</sup> Duane H. King, ed., The Cherokee Indian Nation (Knoxville, Tennessee, 1979), p. xii.

<sup>20</sup> Ekirch, Poor Carolina, pp. 107-116. Ramsey, Carolina Cradle, pp. 193-196.

<sup>21</sup> Hugh Waddell letter of February 29, 1760 to governor Arthur Dobbs in Ramsey, Carolina Cradle, p. 197. Fort Dobbs was located near present-day Statesville.

<sup>22</sup> Kirke Wilson, For We Cannot Tarry Here (San Francisco, 1990), p. 27.

<sup>23</sup> Ekirch, Poor Carolina, p. 179.

<sup>24</sup> Fries, Records of the Moravians, Vol. I, p. 227.

<sup>25</sup> Betty Anderson Smith, "Distribution of Eighteenth Century Cherokee Settlements" in Cherokee Nation, pp. 48-55.

<sup>26</sup> Powell, North Carolina, pp. 100-101. Ramsey, Carolina Cradle, pp. 197-199. King, Cherokee Nation, p. xiii.

<sup>27</sup> William Tryon letter of August 2, 1766 to the Board of Trade in Hugh Talmage Lefler, North Carolina History Told by Contemporaries (Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1934), p. 69.

<sup>28</sup> The Upper Haw River area was in Rowan County, North Carolina in 1759. In 1771, Rowan County was divided and the Upper Haw River area was combined with part of Orange County to form Guilford County. In 1785, Guilford County was divided. The northern part of Guilford County, including part of the Upper Haw River area, became Rockingham County. The Mears Fork area where Richard Simpson lived remained part of Guilford County.

<sup>29</sup> Mamie G. McCubbins, ed., Rowan County, North Carolina. Abstracts of Court Minutes 1753 through 1795, Vol. 2, (Salisbury, North Carolina, n.d.), p. 595, May 22, 1758. The amount of the Richard Simpson fine is not recorded. At the November 1758 session of the court, a fine of three pounds was imposed on Anthony Hutchins for failure to appear for grand jury duty.

The records are in the McCubbins Collection, Rowan County Public Library, Salisbury, North Carolina.

<sup>30</sup> Clarence E. Ratcliff, North Carolina Taxpayers. 1701-1786 (Baltimore, 1984), p. 184.

<sup>31</sup> The Mears Fork area is in Lake Brandt (North Carolina) Quadrangle, United States Geological Survey map N 3607.5-W7945/7.5. Mears Fork is pronounced "Meyers" locally and was frequently spelled "Mairs Fork" or "Mares Fork" during the eighteenth century.

<sup>32</sup> Jo White Linn, ed., Rowan County, North Carolina Deed Abstracts. Vol. II 1762-1772 (Salisbury, North Carolina, 1972), p. 52. Rowan County Deed Book 6, p. 32, August 31, 1764. The transaction also appears in the records of the Rowan County Court, Minute Book, p. 549, October 1764. Jo White Linn, ed., Abstracts of the Minutes of the Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions. Rowan County, North Carolina. 1763-1774. Vol. II (Salisbury, North Carolina, 1979), p. 31. Also Rowan County Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions, Minute Book 2, p. 549, October 1764. Williams had purchased 320 acres of land granted to Jordan in 1753 from Robert Harris in 1758.

<sup>33</sup> Donald R. Simpson, "Lands of the Haw River Simpsons and their Neighbors," The Simpson Clan, Fall 1992, pp. 2-4.

<sup>34</sup> Fred Hughes, Guilford County, North Carolina. Historical Documentation No. IX (Jamestown, North Carolina, 1980, revised August 1988). I am grateful to Wayne C. Simpson of China Grove, North Carolina for bringing this map to my attention.

<sup>35</sup> Peter Simpson (1802-1857) and his wife Martha Deens Simpson (1806-1857) are among the members of the Simpson family buried in the Gethsemane Church cemetery.

<sup>36</sup> Part of the Simpson family Mears Fork land is in a 65 acre parcel subdivided into 29 residential lots along Church Street Extension in 1993. The land is part of a larger tract that had been donated to Guilford College in recent years. Apart from a small cornfield on bottom land, the Mears Fork property is overgrown with trees and vines

and does not appear to have been farmed in recent years. At the time of the 1993 subdivision, there were no structures on the property.

<sup>37</sup> Simpson, "Lands of the Haw River Simpsons", p. 2, p. 5. Cain Carroll sold the property in 1780. After his death, Elizabeth Carroll married John Winchester, Sr., another Haw River neighbor. Mary Simpson died between 1790 and 1793.

<sup>38</sup> Linn, Abstracts of the Minutes, p. 48. Will of John Hallum, Sr., from Book 2, p. 610, October 9, 1765.

<sup>39</sup> Jo White Linn, Abstracts of Wills and Estates Records of Rowan County. North Carolina. 1753-1805 and Tax Lists of 1759 and 1778 (Salisbury, North Carolina, 1980), p. 5, from Book A, p. 60.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 11, from Book A, p. 139. Jo White Linn, ed., Rowan County, North Carolina Will Abstracts, Vol. I, 1753-1805, Books A-F (Salisbury, North Carolina, 1970), p. 10. The will was filed September 17, 1765. Rothera, also spelled "Rederah," left 302 acres on "bigg trobilsome" to his son. Ibid., p. 97. Rowan County Will Book A, p. 139. Linn, Deed Abstracts, p. 74, Deed Book 6, pp. 303-304. Troublesome Creek begins in Guilford County and flows northeast into Rockingham County where it joins Haw River. It is unclear whether or how the "schooling" was accomplished since there were no schools in the area in 1765.

<sup>41</sup> McCubbins, Abstracts of Minutes, October 10, 1765, pp. 148-150.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 150.

<sup>43</sup> Linn, Abstracts of the Minutes, pp. 49-50. The bounty claim is Book 2, p. 615.

<sup>44</sup> Jo White Linn, "List of Taxables in Rowan County, 1768", North Carolina Genealogical Society Journal, November 1983, pp. 210-211. The 1768 list was lost for many years but is now in the North Carolina State Archives, Box CRX 244. See also, "A List of Taxables for the year 1768 taken by Thos. Donnell" in William D. Kizziah, ed., Rowan County, North Carolina Tax Lists, 1759-1787 (Salisbury, North Carolina, 1933), p. 20.

<sup>45</sup> E. Milton Wheeler, "Development and Organization of the North Carolina Militia", North Carolina Historical Review, July 1964, pp. 312-323. Marvin L. Michael Kay and William S. Price, Jr., "To Ride the Wood Mare: Road Building and Militia Service in Colonial North Carolina, 1740-1775", Ibid., October 1980, pp. 361-387.

<sup>46</sup> Linn, Abstracts of the Minutes, p. 97. See also, McCubbins, Abstracts, Vol. 1, p. 200. The jury was approved by the court August 9, 1769, Inferior Court, p. 23. Sherrell's Ford, in what is now Catawba County, was a long distance from the Simpson property on Mears Fork. The Simpson and Sherrell families were remotely related by marriage.

<sup>47</sup> Chittenden, "Overland Travel", pp. 239-252.

<sup>48</sup> Corbitt, North Carolina Counties, pp. 1i 3, 186. Modern Guilford County comprises an area of 651 square miles. The county seat has been at Greensboro since 1808.

<sup>49</sup> William D. Bennett, Guilford County Deed Book One (Raleigh, North Carolina, 1990), pp. 28-29. The December 7, 1773 sale is page 227 of the Guilford County Deed Book. The property description includes "a large white oak..a white oak saplin on side of a branch..."

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 57. The sale was October 10, 1777 and is page 408 of the Deed Book. In contrast to the 1773 property which is measured in paces, the 1777 property is measured in chains.

<sup>51</sup> A.B. Pruitt, Abstracts of Land Entries: Guilford County, North Carolina 1779-1796 and Rockingham County, North Carolina 1790-1795 (no location, 1987), p. 4. The entry is dated November 23, 1779 and is number 1900.

<sup>52</sup> Simpson, "Lands of the Haw River Simpsons," pp. 5-6. The Mears Fork lands of Richard Simpson and his son were sold in 1808 by heirs who were then living in Kentucky.

<sup>53</sup> August 1785 session, Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions of Guilford County in Nancy Hawlick Stein, Old Guilford, North Carolina Court Minutes, 1781-1788 (Hartford, Kentucky, 1978), p. HH.

<sup>54</sup> Irene B. Webster, ed., Guilford County, North Carolina Will Abstracts, 1771-1841 (Madison, North Carolina, 1979), pp. 56-57. The three daughters of Richard Simpson were Eleanor Hicks, Elizabeth Knight and Jane Marsilliot and the step-daughter was Elizabeth Carroll. The deceased Richard Simpson had two grandsons of the same name. One was the son of Richard Simpson, Junior and one was the son of Thomas Simpson. The will is in Guilford County Will Book A, file number 0344. The **will was** written December 24, 1793 and the probate was May 1795. The last Marsilliot in Rockingham County died in 1971.

<sup>55</sup> Charles Woodmason Journal, September 28, 1766 in Richard J. Hooker, ed., The Carolina Backcountry on the Eve of the Revolution (Chapel Hill, 1953), p. 7.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., pp. 16, 18, 33, 55. No aspect of frontier life in the Carolinas escaped Woodmason's acid criticisms.

<sup>57</sup> Woodmason Journal, January 25, 1767, Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>58</sup> Sam B. Hilliard, "Hog Meat and Cornpone: Foodways in the Antebellum South", in Robert Blair St. George, Material Life in America, 1600-1860 (Boston, 1988), pp.311-328.

<sup>59</sup> Ekirch, Poor Carolina, p. 180.

- <sup>60</sup> Daniel B. Thorp, "Doing Business in the Backcountry: Retail Trade in Colonial Rowan County, North Carolina", The William and Mary Quarterly, July 1991, pp. 387-408.
- <sup>61</sup> Robert W. Carter, "Mills in Simpsonville Township," The Journal of Rockingham History and Genealogy, Vol. 3, No. 1, p. x. The David Rothera and Richard Simpson families may have both used Patrick's Mill. Donald R. Simpson, "Research Notes", Simpson Clan, December 1986, p. 6.
- <sup>62</sup> Ramsey, Carolina Cradle, p. 169.
- <sup>63</sup> Ibid., pp. 168-169.
- <sup>64</sup> Woodmason Journal, August 5, 1768, in Hooker, Carolina Backcountry, pp. 52-53.
- <sup>65</sup> Ramsey, Carolina Cradle, p. 190.
- <sup>66</sup> William Henry Foote, Sketches of North Carolina (New York, 1846, reprinted Durham, North Carolina, 1912), pp. 231-242. James W. Albright, Greensboro, 1808-1904 (Greensboro, North Carolina, 1904), p. 19.
- <sup>67</sup> Ekirch, Poor Carolina, pp. 43-44.
- <sup>68</sup> Ramsey, Carolina Cradle, p. 131.
- <sup>69</sup> Charles Woodmason, "A Report on Religion in the South", in Hooker, Carolina Backcountry, pp. 80-81.
- <sup>70</sup> Woodmason Journal, September 21, 1766, Ibid., pp. 6-7.
- <sup>71</sup> Ibid., pp. 20, 42, and 43.
- <sup>72</sup> Regulator Advertisement of March 22, 1768 in Wheeler, Sketches, Vol. 11, p. 306.
- <sup>73</sup> Regulator Advertisement of April 1768, Ibid., Vol. I, p. 55.
- <sup>74</sup> Brawley, Rowan County, p. 17.
- <sup>75</sup> Herman Husband, "An Impartial Relation of the First Rise and Cause of the Present Differences in Public Affairs in the Province of North Carolina" in Hugh Talmage Lefler, North Carolina History Told by Contemporaries (Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1934), p. 89.
- <sup>76</sup> Hugh Lefler and Paul Wager, ed. Orange County, 1752-1952 (Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1953), pp. 30-39. Foote, Sketches, pp. 47-66. Wheeler, Historical Sketches, Vol. I, pp.54-63; Vol. 11, pp. 12-18, 170. Ekirch, Poor Carolina, pp. 186-205. Powell, North Carolina, pp. 148-159.

<sup>77</sup> James Hasell letter of July 4, 1771 to Earl Hillsborough in William L. Saunders, ed., *The Colonial Records of North Carolina*, Vol. IX (New York, 1968), p. 9.

<sup>78</sup> Brawley, Rowan County, pp. 19-20.

<sup>79</sup> The original Mecklenburg Resolves of May 20, 1775 declaring independence were lost in a fire and scholars are divided about the authenticity of the surviving texts. The Resolves of May 30, 1775 were more measured but declare the power of the king null and void in North Carolina. Foote, Sketches, pp. 34-41. Powell, North Carolina, pp. 176-181.

<sup>80</sup> E.W. Caruthers, A Sketch of the Life and Character of the Rev. David Caldwell (Greensborough, North Carolina, 1842), pp. 172-173. Foote, Sketches, p. 239.

<sup>81</sup> Of 883 persons identified as Regulators by historians, 289 were Whigs during the Revolution and 34 were Tories with the affiliations of the others, if any, unknown. Lefler and Wager, Orange County, p. 39.

<sup>82</sup> Hugh F. Rankin, "The Moore's Creek Bridge Campaign, 1776", *North Carolina Historical Review*, January 1953, pp. 35-60.

<sup>83</sup> Wilson, For We Cannot Tarry Here, pp. 46-47.

<sup>84</sup> John P. Brown, Old Frontiers (Kingsport, Tennessee, 1938, reprinted New York, 1971), pp. 148-154.

<sup>85</sup> Griffith Rutherford letter of July 5, 1776 to the North Carolina Council of Safety in Robert L. Ganyard, "North Carolina and the Cherokee Threat from the West", *North Carolina Historical Review*, January 1968, p. 56.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 59-64. Brown, Old Frontiers, pp. 156-161. Wheeler, Historical Sketches, Vol. II, pp. 383-384. Dale Van Every, A Company of Heres: The American Frontier, 1775-1783 (New York, 1962), pp. 66-73.

<sup>87</sup> North Carolina Archives, Accounts of the United States with North Carolina, War of the Revolution, Book E-G, pp. 73-80. Thomas Simpson is listed on page 80.

<sup>88</sup> Ganyard, "Threat from the West", pp. 61-64.

<sup>89</sup> Linn, "List of Taxables," pp. 210-211.

<sup>90</sup> The children, in approximate birth order, were Richard, Nathaniel, Peter Ryan, Elizabeth (who married Joseph Cunningham), David, Sarah (who married Daniel Gough, sometimes spelled Goff) and Sinah (who married Thomas Crumpton.)

<sup>91</sup> David Simpson letter of March 26, 1897 to Sylvester C. Simpson, possession of the author. Thomas Simpson is listed in Alice Kinyon Houts, editor, Revolutionary Soldiers Buried in Missouri (Kansas City, 1966), p. 220.

<sup>92</sup> National Archives, Index to Compiled Service Records of Volunteer Soldiers who Served During the Revolutionary War in Organizations from the State of North Carolina (Washington, D.C., 1958). The records show ten Simpsons, including a private named Richard, who served but show no service by Thomas Simpson.

<sup>93</sup> Simpson, "Lands of the Haw River Simpsons", pp. 2-3.

<sup>94</sup> Bennett, Guilford Deed Book, p. 70. The sale was February 18, 1779 and is page 483 of the Deed Book. Richard Simpson was a witness to the transaction.

<sup>95</sup> Simpson, "Lands of the Haw River Simpsons"<sup>11</sup>, pp. 2-5. The deed was recorded August 19, 1782. Stein, Guilford Court Minutes, p. 1.

<sup>96</sup> Wheeler, Historical Sketches, Vol. 11, pp. 189-190, 227-232. According to tradition, two Simpson brothers, cousins of the Haw River Simpsons, fought on opposing sides at Ramsour's Mill.

<sup>97</sup> Christopher Ward, The War of the Revolution (New York, 1952), Vol. 11, pp. 679-796. Hugh F. Rankin, The North Carolina Continentals (Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1971), pp. 284-298.

<sup>98</sup> Henry Lee, The Campaign of 1781 in the Carolinas (Philadelphia, 1824, reprinted Spartanburg, South Carolina, 1975), pp. 167-191. Banastre Tarlton, A History of the Campaigns of 1781 in the Southern Provinces of North America (London, 1787, reprinted New York, 1968), pp. 222-259. Wheeler, Historical Sketches, Vol. 11, pp. 170-180. Rankin, Continental, pp. 299-318. George W. Kyte, "Victory in the South: An Appraisal of General Greene's Strategy in the Carolinas", North Carolina Historical Review, July 1960, pp. 321-347.

<sup>99</sup> Greene letter of April 2, 1781 to Gen. Frederick Baron von Steuben in Rankin, Continental, p. 310.

<sup>100</sup> Foote, Sketches, p. 274.

<sup>101</sup> Cornwallis dispatch number 8 from Guilford Court House to Lord George Germaine, March 17, 1781 in Wheeler, Historical Sketches, Vol. 11, pp. 176-179.

<sup>102</sup> Wheeler, "North Carolina Militia"<sup>11</sup>, pp. 320-321.

<sup>103</sup> Ruth F. Thompson and Louise J. Hartgrove, Abstracts of the Marriage Bonds and Additional Data, Guilford, North Carolina, 1771-1840 (Greensboro, North Carolina, 1984), p. 167. Donald R. Simpson reports, in an 1993 letter, that the marriage of Elizabeth Simpson and Thomas Knight remains uncertain.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4. Mary Knight may have been a second cousin of Thomas Simpson. Kirke Wilson, A Most Healthful and Pleasant Situation: The Simpson Family in Maryland, 1688-1760 (San Francisco, 1991), p. 48.



<sup>105</sup> James Simpson married Elizabeth Kimsey in 1805, served in the War of 1812 from Warren County, Tennessee and died in Platte County, Missouri in 1852. Nona Williams, ed., The Simpson Clan, Winter 1992-1993, p. 11.

<sup>106</sup> Wilson, For We Cannot Tarry Here, pp. 116-117 and 124-125. It is unclear how many of the eleven or twelve children of Thomas Simpson were from the marriage to Mary Knight. Nona Williams, who attributes seven children to the first marriage, points out that David and Senah were common names in the Knight family and not previously used by the Simpsons. A grandson reported in 1897 that Thomas Simpson had three or four children with his first wife as well as six daughters and two sons with his second wife. Benjamin Simpson letter of April 12, 1897 to Sylvester C. Simpson, possession of the author.

<sup>107</sup> David Simpson letter.

<sup>108</sup> Francis Asbury Journal, July 22 and July 23, 1780 in Grady LE. Carroll, ed., Francis Asbury in North Carolina (Nashville, Tennessee, 1966), p. 45.

<sup>109</sup> Asbury Journal, July 24, 1780, *Ibid.*, p. 46.

<sup>110</sup> Asbury Journal, July 25, 1780, *Ibid.*, p. 46.

<sup>111</sup> Asbury Journal, March 1, 1786, *Ibid.*, p. 76.

<sup>112</sup> Asbury Journal, March 10, 1786, *Ibid.*, p. 77.

<sup>113</sup> Asbury Journal, April 15, 1787, *Ibid.*, p. 82.

<sup>114</sup> Elmer T. Clark, Methodism in Western North Carolina (Nashville, Tennessee, 1966), pp. 54-61. Michael Perdue, "The History of Wentworth United Methodist Church", The Journal of Rockingham County History and Genealogy, June 1986, p. 2.

<sup>115</sup> Carroll, Asbury in North Carolina, p. 105.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 111-112.

<sup>117</sup> March 1791 deed in Simpson Clan, Vol. 1, No. 9, p. 1. The deed from Thomas Simpson to Francis Asbury was proved in 1792. Virginia Redman, "Guilford County, North Carolina Court Minutes, 1781-1811," p. 188, Simpson Clan, Spring 1991, p. 8.

<sup>118</sup> Hughes, Guilford County Historical Documentation No. IX. Simpson, "Lands of the Haw River Simpsons", p. 3, p. 5. Don Simpson places the chapel on the east side of the present Church Street Extension at the north end of the pond 3/4 of a mile north of State Route 150.

<sup>119</sup> United States Bureau of the Census, Heads of Families at the First Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1790, North Carolina. (Washington, 1908, republished

Baltimore, 1966), p. 155. None of the three Simpson households in Guilford County included slaves in 1790.

At the end of the Revolutionary War, North Carolina and other states conducted a census. The statewide census of North Carolina failed to include the residents of Rowan County, Guilford County and the newly-formed Rockingham County. Alvaretta Kenan Register, ed., State Census of North Carolina. 1784-1787, second edition (Baltimore, 1973), p. 5.

<sup>120</sup> Redman, "Guilford County Minutes, U p. 99.

<sup>121</sup> The 50 acre parcel was sold to Williams January 16, 1792 and the 48 1/2 acres February 22, 1792. The transactions were recorded in 1792, Redman, "Guilford County Minutes," p. 164. The 1790 census shows Nathaniel Simpson, Thomas Simpson and three Knight families living in the Jacobs Creek area of Rockingham County. Nathaniel was the son of Thomas Simpson of Mears Fork. U.S. Census, Census of 1790, p. 167.

<sup>122</sup> Simpson, "Lands of the Haw River Simpsons", pp. 5-7. The northern part of the Thomas Simpson land on Mears Fork was purchased in 1798 by Thomas Kirkman whose brother George married Pharaby Simpson, a niece of Thomas Simpson. The southern part remained in the Gough family until 1811 when it was purchased by James Tomlinson.

<sup>123</sup> Webster, Guilford Will Abstracts, pp. 61-62. The will is in book A:0372. This third Richard left a widow Selah, three daughters and four sons including a fourth Richard. Richard Simpson also left a "young sorrel mare" to his nephew Thomas Knight.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., p. 108. Several generations of Richard Simpson's descendants owned Guilford County property to the east of Mears Fork on the upper branches of Reedy Fork into the 1850s. Donald Simpson, "More Lands of the Haw River Simpsons", Simpson Clan, Spring 1993, pp. 3-8.

<sup>125</sup> Archibald Henderson, Washington's Southern Tour. 1791 (Boston, 1923), pp. 17-18, 41, 46, 338. The coach used by George Washington in his 1791 tour of the South has not survived. There is a duplicate coach, manufactured at the same time and place, on permanent display at Mount Vernon.

<sup>126</sup> Archibald Henderson, North Carolina, the Old North State and the New, Vol. I (Chicago, 1941), pp. 429-431.

<sup>127</sup> Douglas Southall Freeman, George Washington, Vol. 6 (New York, 1954), p. 320.

<sup>128</sup> Alexander Martin (1738-1807) was a native of New Jersey and graduate of Nassau Hall (Princeton) who settled in the Rowan, Guilford and Rockingham County area about 1760. He was a colonel in the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War and commanded North Carolina troops at Bradywine and Germantown. He was elected governor of North Carolina six times, served in the United States House of

Representatives and Senate and was a member of the Constitutional Convention. In addition to his Martinsville home in Guilford County, he owned a home and plantation at Danbury on lower Jacobs Creek in Rockingham County. Henderson, Southern Tour, pp. 311-322.

<sup>129</sup> George Washington diary, June 3, 1791, *Ibid.*, p. 323.

<sup>130</sup> George Washington letter of June 20, 1791 to David Humphreys, *Ibid.*, p. 338. Humphreys was the United States minister to Portugal in 1791.

<sup>131</sup> George Washington diary, June 4, 1791, *Ibid.*, p. 326.

<sup>132</sup> Simpson, "Lands of the Haw River Simpsons", pp. 2-3. Robert W. Carter, Jr., "Mills in Simpsonville Township, Part 11<sup>11</sup>", Journal of Rockingham County History and Genealogy, October 1978, pp. 58-68. The Troublesome Ironworks was approximately 1.5 miles north of Monroetown on State Route 2423.

<sup>133</sup> Benjamin Simpson letter. At best, this letter by a grandson exaggerates the relationship more than a century earlier between Thomas Simpson and George Washington.

<sup>134</sup> Hugh Hill Wooten, "The Land Valuations of Iredell County in 1800", North Carolina Historical Review, October 1952, pp. 523-539.

<sup>135</sup> Paul W. Wager, "History of the County Government", in Lefler and Wager, Orange County, pp. 176-179.

<sup>136</sup> Jeffery J. Crow, "The Whiskey Rebellion in North Carolina", North Carolina Historical Review, January 1989, pp. 4-28. Herman Husband, who had been a leader of the Regulation in North Carolina, was among the leaders of the Whiskey Rebellion in Pennsylvania.

<sup>137</sup> Wager, Orange County, p. 176.

<sup>138</sup> Charles Woodmason, Sermon Book III, c. 1768, in Hooker, Carolina Backcountry, pp. 96-99.

<sup>139</sup> Woodmason, Sermon Book II, *Ibid.*, p. 88.

<sup>140</sup> Foote, Sketches, p. 371.

<sup>141</sup> Presbyterian Synod of the Carolinas, Session II, September 2, 1789, *Ibid.*, pp. 282-283.

<sup>142</sup> The Price-Strother map of 1808 shows a road from the Haw River bridge northwest across Big Troublesome Creek and lower Jacobs Creek to Danbury on the Dan River. Jean Anderson, "Carmel Church Records, Rockingham County, North Carolina", North Carolina Genealogical Society Journal, February 1983, p. 14. The Jacobs Creek area

is in the western part of Bethany (North Carolina) Quadrangle, United States Geological Survey map N3615-W7952.5/7.5. The Simpson property is likely to have been in the area between Bethany Road, State Route 65 and Huffine Mill Road. In 1993, Bethany was a crossroads with an elementary school, a firehouse, a Daughters of the Confederacy building and two churches.

<sup>143</sup> Irene B. Webster, ed., Rockingham County Deed Abstracts, 1785-1800 (Madison, North Carolina, 1973), p. 42. The transaction was recorded June 20, 1792 in Rockingham County Deed Book C, p. 208. The land was a rectangle 180 poles on the west and east and 134 poles on the north and south. A pole is 16 1/2 feet. According to Fred Hughes, Rockingham County Historical Documentation, the 1792 Thomas Simpson property in Rockingham County was on the headwaters of Mill Creek of Jacobs Creek. Mill Creek may have been the same as Bear Branch.

<sup>144</sup> Rockingham County Deed Book E, p. 130. The deed was recorded March 24, **1796.**

<sup>145</sup> Rockingham County Deed Book E, p. 165. The deed was recorded August 13, **1796.**

<sup>146</sup> Rockingham County Deed Book E, p. 242. The deed was recorded October 4, **1797.**

<sup>147</sup> Corbitt, North Carolina Counties, pp. 184-185. Modern Rockingham County comprises an area of 572 square miles. The county seat is at Wentworth. Simpsonville, one of twelve townships in Rockingham County, was formed in 1868 and comprises several communities in the southern part of the county.

<sup>148</sup> Alexander Sneed, "Rockingham County"<sup>1</sup>, North Carolina Historical Review, December 1982, p. 72. Huntington Hobbs, Jr., North Carolina: An Economic and Social Profile (Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1958), p. 104.

<sup>149</sup> Hugh Hill Wooten, "A Fourth Creek Farm from 1800 to 1830", North Carolina Historical Review, April 1953, pp. 167-173.

<sup>150</sup> Carter, "Mills in Simpsonville Township", pp. 58-65.

<sup>151</sup> Johanna Miller Lewis, "Women Artisans in Backcountry North Carolina, 1753-1790", North Carolina Historical Review, July 1991, pp. 221-233.

<sup>152</sup> Lindley S. Butler, Rockingham County: A Brief History (Raleigh, North Carolina, **1982**), p. 24.

<sup>153</sup> Asbury Journal, April 11, 1794, in Carroll, Asbury in North Carolina, p. 131. In January 1805, Asbury reported dining with another Simpson family in Bladen County, *Ibid.*, p.220.

<sup>154</sup> Foote, Sketches, pp. 376-386.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., p. 378.

<sup>156</sup> Minutes of the Kehukee Association, in Maloy A. Huggins, A History of North Carolina Baptists, 1727-1932 (Raleigh, North Carolina, 1967), p. 88. See also pp. 90-91, 207, 260 and 394.

<sup>157</sup> Robert W. Carter, Jr., "A History of the Wolf Island Primitive Baptist Church". The Journal of Rockingham County History and Genealogy, June 1984, pp. 1-14.

<sup>158</sup> Archibald Wills advertisement, January 26, 1809, Raleigh Star in Lefler, North Carolina History, p. 170.

<sup>159</sup> Powell, North Carolina, pp. 245-247. As late as 1840, one-third of the adults in North Carolina were illiterate.

<sup>160</sup> Butler, Rockingham County, pp. 44-45.

<sup>161</sup> Joseph Caldwell, in Lefler, North Carolina History. p. 186.

<sup>162</sup> Thompson and Hartgrove, Abstracts of Guilford, p. 107 and p. 167 (1785 wedding). Rockingham County Deed Book E, p. 130 (1796) and Deed Book M, p. 55 (1804).

<sup>163</sup> Redman, "Guilford County Minutes," 1792, p. 164 and p. 188.

<sup>164</sup> David Simpson letter. David Simpson would have been about five years old when his grandfather died.

<sup>165</sup> James S. Purcell, "A Book Peddler's Progress in North Carolina", North Carolina Historical Review, January 1952, pp. 8-23.

<sup>166</sup> Hobbs, North Carolina, p. 254.

<sup>167</sup> Butler, Rockingham County, pp. 11-23. U.S. Census, Census of 1790, pp. 10-11. Charles Dyson Rodenbaugh, ed., The Heritage of Rockingham County, North Carolina (Winston-Salem, North Carolina, 1983), pp. 2-23.

<sup>168</sup> Hugh Hill Wooten, "Westward Migration from Iredell County, 1800-1850". North Carolina Historical Review, January 1953, pp. 62-71.

<sup>169</sup> Rodenbaugh, Rockingham County, p. 80.

<sup>170</sup> Rockingham County Deed Book M, p. 55. The deed was recorded May 31, 1804. In addition to the land Thomas Knight purchased from Thomas Simpson in 1804, Knight had also acquired 100 acres in Rockingham County in 1794 that "includes Thomas Simpson's improvement". Pruitt, Abstracts of Land Entries, p. 134. The January 1, 1794 entry is number R209.

<sup>171</sup> The 1792 property was 180 poles by 134 poles. The 1804 property was 80 poles on the east and 210 poles on the south with a 6 pole by 105 pole section missing in the northwest corner.

<sup>172</sup> Rockingham County Deed Book N, pp. 45-46. The estate sale was recorded November 2, 1807.

<sup>173</sup> Donald Simpson, "Research Note #7", Simpson Clan, Vol. 2, No. 2, pp. 1-2.

<sup>174</sup> Rockingham County Deed Book N, p. 64.

<sup>175</sup> Powell, North Carolina, p. 249. At the time of the 1850 census, 31 percent of all persons born in North Carolina were living in other states.

<sup>176</sup> National Archives, List of North Carolina Grants in Tennessee, 1778-1791 (Washington, D.C., 1944).

<sup>177</sup> Wilson, For We Cannot Tarry Here, pp. 123-125. There is no evidence whether or not the Thomas Simpson family moved directly from Rockingham County to Warren County. Apart from family records, there is little documentation of the Simpson family in Tennessee, 1804-1823. The 1820 census shows an elderly Thomas Simpson in Warren County, Tennessee.

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**VOLUME 4**

# **The Platte Purchase, 1836-1846**

# THE PLATTE PURCHASE

THE SIMPSON AND COOPER FAMILIES, 1836-1846

Kirke Wilson  
San Francisco

August 1999

## INTRODUCTION

*The Platte Purchase* is the eighth and final chapter of an incomplete manuscript recounting the experiences of the Cooper and Simpson families in Missouri from 1800 to 1846. The earlier sections followed the Benjamin Cooper family of Kentucky in the settlement of the Boonslick region of Missouri and the opening of the Santa Fe Trail. The earlier parts of the narrative also traced the Thomas Simpson family of North Carolina and Tennessee through Howard County and Johnson County, Missouri before moving west. The eighth chapter covers the decade between 1836 when the Congress approved the annexation of the Platte region to Missouri and 1846 when several members of the Cooper and Simpson families abandoned their Platte County homes and farms to begin the transcontinental emigration to Oregon and California.

In the context of western expansion, the Platte Purchase was a small but familiar example of eager settlers acquiring valuable lands despite treaty commitments to Indians occupying the lands. From the perspective of the participating families, many of whom were moving but a few day's wagon ride from their Missouri homes, the Platte Purchase was an opportunity to obtain unspoiled land and begin anew. These families were accustomed to the process. They had grown up with it. They were the children and grandchildren of the pioneers of Kentucky, Tennessee and other parts of Missouri.

The settlement of the Platte Purchase was rapid and peaceful. The Indians living in the area did not resist but cooperated in an orderly relocation as they had promised. Missouri families rushed into the Little Platte to claim land and begin the hard work of clearing, planting and building. The area was promptly surveyed and residents were soon able to obtain title to the land they had improved. The Platte settlement occurred during a period of national economic depression and also coincided with a nearby religious war in which Missouri brutally expelled 12,000 Mormons. Within a decade, many Platte settlers were ready to leave Missouri and risk the 2000 mile trek across the continent to the Pacific Coast. For the pioneers, whose experience had been the incremental progress from county to county in Missouri, the transcontinental move marked a profound shift in thinking and a calculation that the possible benefits exceeded the expected hardships. The Platte residents knew about the duration and dangers of the trail. They had learned from the experiences of earlier travelers, including several of their Little Platte neighbors, and prepared for the risks of several months on poorly-defined trails with little opportunity for resupply.



My focus, as it has been in earlier parts of this narrative, is on the lives of the people involved. I remain interested in their experiences and the choices they made. I am particularly interested in how they raised families and built communities while repeatedly moving. I am searching for explanations for their restlessness and their willingness to embrace the unknown. As they move west, these families emerge somewhat from the background but we continue to depend on what we can know about the time and the place to understand their experience and motivation.

Beyond the obvious desire for new land, the pioneers left little direct evidence of their motivation for moving to the Little Platte or the reasons why so many became so dissatisfied so quickly. The best explanation for their behavior seems to be that the process of uprooting and resettling had become part of their nature. Many of the Platte pioneers had moved twice or more during the previous twenty years and would continue to move, with increasing frequency, until they reached the edge of the continent. What becomes evident in the Little Platte is the clan nature of the migration and settlement process. Extended families, like the Simpsons and Kimseys or the Brown and Coopers, had intermarried over several generations and moved together from one frontier to the next. In the Little Platte, the members of these clans settled near each other and assisted each other to clear land and establish farms. Rather than the self-reliant frontier individualist who traveled alone through the wilderness, many of the pioneers of the Little Platte were members of clans who worked and traveled together to reduce the risks of the frontier and to share the hard work of resettlement. Within a decade, some of the settlers in the Little Platte would rely on their experience and clan relationships to cross the plains.

I am grateful for the assistance I have received from the collections and staff at the Library of Congress, the Library of the State Historical Society in Columbia, Missouri, the Los Angeles Public Library, the Mid-Continent Public Library in Platte City, Missouri, the Missouri Historical Society Library in St. Louis, the National Archives of the United States, the Platte County Historical Society and the Sterling Memorial Library at Yale University. I am particularly grateful for the genealogical and other research of Shirley Kimsey and Betty Runner Murray of Platte City as well as the extraordinary family record compiled and published by Faye Lightbum of Jacksonville Beach, Florida.

Kirke Wilson  
San Francisco, California

August 1999

It is desirable that the ...boundary of  
the state be extended.

Governor John Miller, 1832<sup>1</sup>

## CHAPTER EIGHT: THE PLATTE PURCHASE

The western boundary of Missouri was an inconsequential part of the stormy and protracted Congressional debate about slavery which accompanied Missouri statehood. The 1820 compromise which resulted in the admission of Maine and Missouri as states included an understanding that there would be no subsequent expansion of slavery north of 36 degrees, 30 minutes latitude, the line between Missouri and Arkansas Territory. Missouri would be admitted as a slave state but the remainder of the Louisiana Purchase would forever remain free of slavery. With the focus on slavery and the southern border of Missouri, legislators had overlooked the western boundary. Instead of using an easily identified natural barrier like the Missouri River, the Missouri Enabling Act of March 6, 1820 assured future disputes by drawing a simple north-south line on the map at the confluence of the Missouri and Kansas Rivers. The line was artificial, difficult to locate with any certainty and an inevitable source of conflict between Indians who had treaty rights to the land and settlers who wanted the land.

### THE CAMPAIGN FOR ANNEXATION

Although the 1820 boundary may have appeared tidy to mapmakers in Washington unfamiliar with the area, it excluded nearly two million acres of fertile and well-watered land between the western Missouri line and the Missouri River. Known as the Little Platte, this region rapidly became a focus of conflict and the subject of political agitation. Within a decade, the boundary accepted in 1820 would be challenged by the land-hungry Missouri settlers and their elected representatives. As the Missouri Legislature explained in an 1831 petition to the United States Congress, the 1820 boundary had been adopted when the area "was one continued wilderness...the geography was unwritten".<sup>2</sup>

Now the six counties of northwestern Missouri, the area that came to be the Platte Purchase was an inverted triangle 60 miles wide on the north, 104 miles

on the east along the old border and 150 miles on the west along the Missouri River. The Platte Purchase comprises the 1,981,540 acres in the six present-day Missouri counties of Andrew, Atchison, Buchanan, Holt, Nodaway and Platte. Through treaties and use, the Platte region was Indian territory. The Great and Little Osage had relinquished their lands north of the Missouri River in 1808 but other tribes continued to have claims in the Platte region. The Kansas Indians had signed a treaty June 3, 1825 which included a specific claim to land outside Missouri in the Platte area.<sup>3</sup> By 1830, the United States was attempting to move all Indians to areas west of the Mississippi River. In the Treaty of Prairie du Chien of July 15, 1830, Sac and Fox, Iowa, bands of Sioux, Omaha, Oto and Missouri Indians agreed to cede land in Minnesota, Iowa and the Little Platte area to the United States with the understanding that the lands would be allocated "to the tribes now living thereon..."<sup>4</sup> Four years later, a Committee of the United States Senate concluded that the 1830 treaty precluded use of the Platte region by anyone other than the Indians to whom it had been dedicated but optimistically observed that "moderate additional compensation will induce them [the Indians] to yield any remaining interest they may seem to have in this small tract."<sup>5</sup>

The Indian tribes which had been large and powerful in the areas east of the Mississippi were often fragmented and scattered by relocation. They were unable to sustain themselves through hunting or farming and became dependent on the food, supplies and cash distributed by government Indian agents. Along with bands of Potawatomi, Chippewa, Ottawa, and Iowa, the Sac and Fox had found themselves pushed into the Platte region and pushed out again by encroaching settlers. With Indians blocking white settlement in the Platte region, Missourians began agitation to persuade the government to extinguish Indian title to the land and rectify the mapmakers' omission of 1820.

By the 1830s, it was becoming increasingly evident that Indians and non-Indians could not, whatever the treaty agreements, live in proximity without conflict. Whites could not or would not enforce treaty obligations on their own people and Indians failed to become the self-sufficient small farmers that well-intentioned reformers had envisioned. As early as 1824, the Missouri General Assembly complained to the United States Congress about the interaction of Indians and settlers. The legislators found the remnants of Indian tribes in the state and concluded that the situation was "...pregnant with evil both to the Indians themselves, and to the people of the state of Missouri."<sup>6</sup> While the evil of the pregnancy may have been reciprocal, the consequences were most severe for the Indians who, according to the General Assembly, would suffer the "...degradation

of their character...[and] diminution of their numbers" as a result of "collisions" with settlers.

While Missouri legislators were unselfconscious about the idea that the Indians had to be moved for their own good, others recognized the inherent injustice of the prevailing Indian policy. Secretary of War John C. Calhoun observed in 1825:

...one of the greatest evils to which [the Indians] are subject is that incessant pressure of our population which forces them from seat to seat...there ought to be the strongest and most solemn assurance that the country given them should be theirs, as a permanent home for themselves and their posterity, without being disturbed by the encroachment of our citizens.<sup>7</sup>

Calhoun was entirely correct about the evils of white encroachment but underestimated the inability of the United States to enforce the "solemn assurance" in the face of land-greedy settlers.

Since federal and local authorities were unreliable in protecting Indian land interests, the only practical solution was racial separation. To make Calhoun's solemn assurances real, national Indian policy would require that Indians be relocated to reserves far beyond populated areas where there would be no collisions with settlers. The initial plan had been to move **all** Indians to federal lands west of the Mississippi River. Before the initial relocation could be completed, Missouri had been settled and the Indians had to be moved farther west.

The Platte region was a logical part of Missouri and should never have been left outside the state boundary. Within the first decade of statehood, it had become a matter of state policy to annex the area. The proposed annexation was logical and obvious but it also raised sensitive political issues. It would entail the elimination of Indian land claims in the Little Platte, many of them products of recent treaties, and it would eventually require the physical relocation of Indians from the area. Because it would violate the 1820 prohibition on the expansion of slavery, the proposed annexation could potentially reopen the slavery debate that continued to divide the nation.

Annexation of the Little Platte had been discussed in the Congress in 1829

as part of deliberations related to a Missouri boundary survey. The residents of Missouri who advocated annexation ignored the potential political problems and based their arguments on the need to separate the Indians and the settlers as well as the desirability of the region and the logic of its incorporation into the state. In February 1831, the Missouri legislature sent a memorial to the Congress asking that the Little Platte be added to the state. The 1831 memorial understated the size of the Platte region and mistakenly asserted that it was free of Indian claims. The memorial emphasized "the necessity of interposing, wherever it is possible, some visible boundary and natural barrier between the Indians and the whites" and explained that the annexation would make the Missouri River that barrier.<sup>8</sup> The Missouri Congressional delegation introduced the Platte legislation in late February 1832. The annexation was approved by the Senate but was not considered in the House of Representatives where anti-slavery interests were in the majority.

Missouri Governor John Miller had opposed the 1831 memorial for technical reasons. The following year, he was a leading proponent of annexation. As he explained in an 1832 message to the Missouri General Assembly:

It is desirable that the ...boundary of the state be extended...so as to include the territory lying between our western limit and the Missouri above the mouth of the Kansas river...By annexing it to the state, the Missouri river would become our boundary which would greatly protect the frontier from the invasion of hostile Indians and prevent those questions of right to jurisdiction, which so often disturb the quiet of the country, and afford not only an excuse for, but a temptation to the commission of crime.<sup>9</sup>

Governor Miller also pointed out that the annexation would improve farmers' access to the river and, as a consequence, increase the value of their products and their land.

The arguments for annexation were based on an unstated but broadly accepted assumption that the settlers were entitled to the land. For it was the settlers, not the Indians, who were disturbing the quiet of the country. And it was the Indians, not the settlers, who had title to the land and who were quietly in possession. It was the settlers who coveted the land who were creating the disturbance and were tempted to crime.

Despite the strong support in Missouri, the Platte annexation remained inactive in Congress until May 1834 when the Senate declined to ratify an Indian

treaty because of provisions related to the Platte region. The Treaty of Chicago had been negotiated with the Potawatomi, Chippewa and Ottawa tribes September 26, 1833. The treaty would have relocated the three tribes from the Great Lakes region to an area in the West that included the Little Platte. Without consulting the Indians, the Senate amended the 1833 treaty by excluding the Platte region from the areas where the Great Lakes tribes would be resettled.

#### AGITATION FOR ANNEXATION

By 1835, Missouri residents were growing impatient with the unresponsiveness of the Congress to their desire for the Little Platte. United States Senator Lewis F. Linn of Missouri (1796-1843) summarized the opinion prevalent among his constituents in a January 1835 letter:

...It has long been desired by the people of Missouri to have annexed to the State that portion of territory lying between her western boundary and the great river, Missouri, for the purpose of preventing the location of an annoying Indian population, and for the purpose of having points on the river to receive their supplies and ship their productions, within a moderate distance from the homes of those inhabitants residing along that line of the frontier. The location of the Potawatomi, by the treaty of Chicago, on this territory, interposes a barrier to the attainment of these objects so important to the welfare and tranquility of the inhabitants of the northeastern and western counties.<sup>10</sup>

Demand for annexation heated up during the summer of 1835. A Clay County militia muster at the Weakly Dale farm three miles north of Liberty provided the occasion for a mass meeting with impassioned oratory and belligerent threats about local residents taking the land themselves. A committee of local leaders was formed to assure that the Platte region was promptly acquired for Missouri. Judge William T. Wood was directed to prepare a resolution to the Congress conveying the sentiment of the Clay County residents.<sup>11</sup>

Eager to claim the Indian land of the Little Platte, residents of Clay County had been sneaking into the area for many years. Senator Linn, an apologist for expansion, estimated that there may have been as many as 300 premature settlers in the Little Platte in 1835. Federal troops were dispatched from Fort Leavenworth across the river to evict the squatters. Writing sixty years later, a local historian described the gentle removal of the trespassing settlers: "An officer

and posse were sent from the fort and with kindness [the settlers] were asked to leave."<sup>12</sup> Among the intruders of 1835, Sarshel Brown and Thomas Johnson of Clay County, planted a corn crop in the Platte which they sold to the army at Fort Leavenworth before being evicted.<sup>13</sup> The army burned squatters' cabins but allowed a small number of families to remain to provide necessary services to the Indians and travelers. Two families stayed at the Issue House built that summer to supply beef, flour and bacon to the two Potawatomi bands which had been moved to the Little Platte. Another family remained to operate a ferry boat on the Missouri River. One of the settlers expelled from the Platte area was able to save his cabin from destruction by installing Indian tenants.<sup>14</sup>

In 1836, the bill to annex the Little Platte was reintroduced in the Congress and moved quickly. Although the 1836 bill was a technical violation of the Missouri compromise and expanded "slave soil" by two million acres, it did not change the balance of power between the anti-slavery and pro-slavery interests in the Congress and it did not compromise the principle that no new slave states would be created north of Arkansas. The Senate approved the Platte legislation May 14 and the House of Representatives followed June 3. Four days later, President Andrew Jackson signed the bill. Commonly called the Platte Purchase, the 1836 legislation authorized no land purchase but defined the sequence of events necessary for Missouri to extend its western border to the Missouri River. These included requirements that the Little Platte be cleared of all Indian claims, that the State of Missouri accept the boundary change and that the President of the United States declare, by proclamation, that all Indian land claims in the area had been extinguished.<sup>15</sup>

#### ACQUIRING INDIAN LAND CLAIMS IN THE LITTLE PLATTE

Delayed for five years by Congress, the annexation of the Little Platte proceeded quickly once it was approved in June 1836. The Senate sent a resolution to President Jackson urging him to order Indian agents to contact the bands and tribes involved in the 1830 Treaty of Prairie du Chien and obtain their land rights in the Little Platte.<sup>16</sup> Within a three month period during the fall of 1836, Indian agents at five locations successfully negotiated treaties in which Indians exchanged their land rights in the Little Platte for cash, goods and land across the Missouri River.

On September 10, Zachary Taylor negotiated a treaty in which Wa-ha-shaw's band of Sioux relinquished all claims in the Little Platte for \$400 in

presents.<sup>17</sup> Meanwhile Superintendent of Indian Affairs William Clark, making his first visit up the Missouri River since his 1804-1806 expedition with Meriwether Lewis, met at Fort Leavenworth with the Iowas, and the Missouri band of Sac and Fox. In a treaty signed September 17, the tribes agreed to give up all claims to the land on which many of them had lived in the Platte Region. In exchange, the tribes received \$7500 and a 256,000 acre reservation (400 sections of land) in what is now Kansas to be divided between the two tribes. The United States also agreed to build eight comfortable houses, fence and cultivate 400 acres and erect two mills as well as provide two ferry boats, 200 cows, ten bulls, 200 hogs, agricultural implements, rations for one year and \$900 in relocation expenses. The United States also agreed to provide each tribe a farmer, a blacksmith, a teacher and an interpreter for five years. Twelve members of the Iowa and fifteen members of the Sac and Fox signed the treaty along with William Clark who immediately returned by steamboat to his home in St. Louis.<sup>18</sup>

In late September 1836, Henry Dodge, Governor of Wisconsin Territory and Superintendent of Indian Affairs for the area, negotiated with another band of Sac and Fox opposite Rock Island on the Mississippi River in Wisconsin. The Treaty of September 27 acknowledged that the 1830 Treaty of Prairie du Chien had assigned Platte lands to the Sac and Fox but concluded that the lands would be impractical for Indian use:

...they can never be made available for Indian purposes...an attempt to place an Indian population on them must inevitably lead to collisions with the citizens of the United States...<sup>19</sup>

As a demonstration of Indian "friendship", the treaty of September 27 expressed support for the incorporation of the Platte region into the state of Missouri. In the treaty, the Sac and Fox agreed to:

...forever cede, relinquish, and quit claim to the United States, all our right, title and interest of whatsoever nature in, and to, the lands lying between the State of Missouri and the Missouri River.<sup>20</sup>

The September 27 treaty was signed by Governor Dodge and 23 Indians.

Indian agents John Dougherty and Joshua Pilcher convened members of the Otoe, Missouri and Omaha tribes and the Yankton and Santee bands of the Sioux at Bellevue in what is now Nebraska. On October 15, 1836, the assembled Indians



agreed to give up the land rights in the Little Platte they had received as part of the 1830 Treaty of Prairie du Chien. In exchange for what Pilcher described as a "beautiful...valuable" piece of land, the tribes received merchandise valued at \$4520 and five hundred bushels of corn the following year as well as agricultural assistance for the Omaha tribe.<sup>21</sup> On November 30, the Medawah-Kanton, Wahapakoota and Sisitong Tribes gave up **all** their claims in the Little Platte for \$550.<sup>22</sup>

On December 16, the Missouri General Assembly accepted the provisions of the federal law. The following March 28, newly-inaugurated President Martin Van Buren issued a proclamation that:

...Indian title to all the said lands lying between the State of Missouri and the Missouri River, has been extinguished, and that the said Act of Congress of the 7th of June 1836, take effect...<sup>23</sup>

With the presidential proclamation, Missouri had successfully obtained the land it had been denied in 1820. The Little Platte was now part of Missouri and could be settled as soon as Indians living in the area could be relocated.

Several bands of Indians continued to live in the Little Platte through the winter of 1836-1837. The Iowas and Sac and Fox were located in the northern part of the Platte Purchase and two bands of Potawatomi from Illinois had been temporarily living in the southern part approximately 15 miles north of the present location of Platte City. During the spring and summer of 1837, the Iowa and the Sac and Fox began moving their families to reserves in what is now Doniphan County, Kansas as they had agreed in the treaty of the previous September. A group of Iowa relocated in early May with the assistance of Subagent Andrew S. Hughes, one of the members of the Clay County committee that had agitated for annexation two years earlier.

By the end of July 1837, most of the Indians had moved except those who remained briefly in the Platte to harvest corn they had planted. Subagent Hughes reported in late August that 992 Iowa and 510 Sac and Fox had been resettled in Kansas. At their new reservation, the Indians planted corn, pumpkins, beans and other vegetables while also building 41 bark houses.<sup>24</sup> By November 1837, the Presbyterian mission for the Iowa Indians had also relocated from the Platte area to the reserve near Council Bluffs in Iowa where missionaries established a training school for Indians.<sup>25</sup>

The Potawatomi, Chippewa and Ottawa who had been relocated to the Little Platte in 1835 were moved to land in Southwestern Iowa during the summer of 1837. Two groups of women, children and invalids, totaling 175 people, were transported to the new reservation by steamboat during July and August while a larger group traveled overland. By the end of the year, 2500 Potawatomi had reached the Council Bluffs Subagency in Iowa.<sup>26</sup>

#### SETTLEMENT OF THE PLATTE PURCHASE

During the spring and summer of 1837, as the Indians were being moved out and land became available, settlers rushed into the Little Platte. Many of the pioneers were claiming lands they had selected in previous years. In some cases, these were lands they had farmed illegally when the land was Indian territory. Writing many years later, William Paxton remembered the clearing of timbered land with small trees felled and cut into ten foot lengths for fence rails while larger trees were girdled and allowed to die. Paxton described the settlement process but expressed surprise at the settlers preference for wooded and hilly land rather than the fertile prairie meadows.

Choice claims were selected, cabins erected, clearings opened, fences built, and com planted. The roads were crowded with emigrants. They dashed north until stopped by the Iowa line. They sought the lands densely covered with timber of the most superior quality, and at once commenced to destroy it. The lovely prairies, ready for the plow, were neglected.<sup>27</sup>

Using available materials along with the designs and techniques their parents and grandparents had developed on earlier frontiers, the new residents of the Platte Purchase immediately erected temporary shelters. Paxton, who had been a boy at the time, recalled the simple cabins of 1837:

...rude huts constructed of round logs, daubed with mud, floored with puncheons, and covered with clapboards held down by weight poles. The chimney was of logs to the arch, and then of laths filled in with mud. The door was of clapboards, and the latch-string, night and day, hung outward; for the pioneer is both fearless and hospitable. But as soon as lumber could be procured, these cabins were succeeded by warm hewed-log houses, with plank floors and stone chimneys.<sup>28</sup>

According to Paxton, fish were plentiful in the streams of Platte County during the early years of settlement but game, except for prairie fowl, was scarce. The buffalo, antelope, bear and deer, once abundant in the area, had been exhausted.

On December 31, 1838, the General Assembly of Missouri voted to create Platte County in the southern part of the Platte Purchase immediately north of present-day Kansas City. Platte County had fewer than a dozen white residents in December 1836 and more than 4500 two years later. By the time of the federal census in June 1840, the county population had grown to 8913 including 858 slaves. The County Court held its first session March 11, 1839 in a tavern at the Falls of the Platte, an area which later became Platte City. The court granted licenses to a ferry operator, a merchant and a dram-shop. Two weeks later, a circuit court judge convened a Grand Jury in the same log tavern to indict several fun-loving local residents for gambling.<sup>29</sup> The Court convened in rented buildings or outdoors until the fall of 1840 when the county was sufficiently prosperous to build a proper court house at an estimated cost of \$15,000. The court house served the county until it was destroyed by fire in December 1861 during the civil war.

Zadock Martin was among the premature settlers who found reason to be in the Little Platte while it was still Indian country. Martin had visited the area as early as 1829 and in later years operated a ferry across the Missouri River. When the Platte was opened for settlement in 1837, Martin quickly laid out a town he named Martinsville. Within months, the new town had 35 houses and a population of 200. Two years later, Martinsville residents included several merchants, lawyers, saddlers, a carpenter, a physician, a hotel-keeper, a saloon-keeper and a deputy sheriff. With his sons, Martin built a grain mill in 1837 near the Falls of the Platte. The following year, he built a sawmill and imported French millstones to expand and improve his grain mill.<sup>31</sup>

By May 1839, Platte County was incurring expenses. The county had approved payment of \$102 for a preliminary land survey and had committed \$100 toward the \$280 construction cost of a bridge over Bee Creek. County officials were counting on the federal government to provide the remaining \$180 for the bridge project.<sup>32</sup> That spring, the county engaged Martin to prepare a list of Platte County property owners which could be used to assess taxes. The original record of the 1839 tax assessments has been lost but the names of property owners living in Platte County was published by local historians and has survived.<sup>33</sup> The 1839 tax rolls list 873 families including several members of the Simpson-Kimsey family

of North Carolina, Tennessee and Johnson County, Missouri as well as several members of the extended Cooper clan of Kentucky and the Boonslick area of Missouri.<sup>34</sup>

## THE SIMPSON FAMILY IN THE PLATTE PURCHASE

William Simpson (1793-1858) was listed on the 1839 tax roll for Platte County and in the 1840 census where his family of nine included his wife, an adult daughter and six children.<sup>35</sup> He had been born in Rockingham County, North Carolina and moved with his parents to Middle Tennessee about 1804 where in 1813 he married Mary "Polly" Kimsey (1797-1858) of Virginia.<sup>36</sup> William and Mary Simpson established a farm in Warren County, Tennessee where he became active as an anti-missionary Baptist preacher. In 1820, William and Mary Simpson relocated to Howard County, Missouri accompanied by his parents, her mother, three small children and several other relatives. In Howard County, William Simpson and his Kimsey brothers-in-law Benjamin and Thomas claimed land a few miles east of land Benjamin Cooper owned near the Missouri River. In 1831, the Simpson and Kimsey clan moved to Johnson County, Missouri where they acquired land in Post Oak Township and lived until 1838 or 1839 when land became available in the Platte Purchase. William Simpson claimed 160 acres in Pettis Township in the southern part of Platte County. His land was the northwest quarter of Section 6 of Township 51 North, Range 34 West and was near land claimed by several Simpson and Kimsey relatives. The William Simpson land is seven miles due south of Platte City on Road N (4th Street in Platte City) and approximately three and a half miles east of the Little Platte River. The quarter section consists of rolling hills along the east side of Road N and is approximately one mile southwest of what is now Kansas City International Airport.<sup>37</sup>

Several other Simpson and Kimsey relatives were among the early Platte County settlers. William Simpson's older brother James (1780/1784-1852), his sister Jane Simpson Mathews and his Kimsey in-laws also participated in the migration from Johnson County. The William Simpson land in Platte County shared a corner with a quarter section owned by his brother-in-law James Kimsey and was immediately north of land owned by his sons-in-law James Anderson and Alvis Kimsey. The land was a half mile east of a quarter section owned by his brother James and one mile west of land owned by his brother-in-law Benjamin Kimsey (1802-1865). Two miles to the north, another brother-in-law, Thomas Kimsey (1803-1866) owned a quarter section on the Platte River near a quarter section owned by William's son Thomas K. Simpson and an additional 240 acres

owned by William's brother James Simpson. In all, the extended Simpson-Kimsey clan acquired 1720 acres of land in southern Platte County on the east side of the Platte River.<sup>38</sup>

In addition to the family members who obtained land during the early years of settlement, the 1840 census listed several other Simpson relatives living in Platte County. These include William Simpson's brother-in-law Lazarus Mathews as well as the young families of his nephews Thomas Mathews, James Mathews and Johnson Kimsey.<sup>39</sup> Lazarus and Jane Simpson Mathews had nine children between 1811 and 1830. Their older sons, James and Thomas, married in Johnson County in 1836 and 1838. Soon after, the Mathews family moved to Platte County where their daughter Sarah Ann was married in 1839 and their daughter Susan was married in 1845.<sup>40</sup> In contrast to the William Simpson family, most of which moved on to Oregon in 1846, the James Simpson family remained in western Missouri. James Simpson lived in Pettis Township, Platte County to his death in 1852.<sup>41</sup>

The Kimsey family, older brothers of Elizabeth Kimsey Simpson and Mary Kimsey Simpson, were also part of the extended clan which resettled in the Platte. By 1841, Samuel Kimsey (n.d.-1844) and Thomas Kimsey had moved to Platte County where they remained for the rest of their lives.<sup>42</sup> James Kimsey, another Simpson brother-in-law, went to Oregon.<sup>43</sup> The multiple linkages between the Kimsey and Simpson families were continued into a younger generation when William Simpson was the minister at the May 1839 wedding of his daughter Cassia (Casey) Simpson (1822-1846) and Alvis Kimsey (1816-1856).<sup>44</sup> William Simpson also presided at the November 1840 wedding of John F. Kimsey and Mary Price.<sup>45</sup> Harriet Simpson, a daughter of William and Mary Simpson, married Larkin Price. Alvis Kimsey and his family, Larkin Price and his family and Duff Kimsey were among the extended Simpson family who moved to Oregon in 1846.

William Simpson's son Benjamin was 21 years old in 1839 and was not a property owner when the 1839 tax list was prepared. On May 28, 1839, with his father serving as the minister, Benjamin Simpson (1818-1910) married Eliza Jane Wisdom, the daughter of Joseph and Mary Scott Wisdom.<sup>46</sup> Benjamin appeared on the 1840 census for Platte County and on June 20, 1841, John T. Simpson (1841-1920), the son of Benjamin and Eliza Wisdom Simpson was born in Platte County. Ten days later, Eliza Wisdom Simpson died.<sup>47</sup> Benjamin Simpson and his infant son John lived in Platte County where Benjamin Simpson served briefly as a Justice of the Peace.<sup>48</sup> In 1846, they moved to Oregon with the Simpson family.

## THE COOPER FAMILY IN THE PLATTE PURCHASE

The Cooper family of Culpeper County, Virginia and Madison County, Kentucky had settled in the Boonslick area of central Missouri by 1810. This family was large and related through marriage to several other families who had followed a similar path to Missouri. In addition to the direct descendants of Benjamin A. Cooper and his ten children, a large number of Cooper cousins continued to live in Missouri. These included the children of the two brothers and the three sisters of Benjamin Cooper who had moved to Missouri. Elizabeth Cooper Woods Peake (1758-1815), widowed twice before leaving Kentucky, had at least five children who moved with her to Boonslick. Her sisters Malinda Cooper Fugate (ca. 1760-ca. 1843) and Frances Cooper Brown (ca. 1766-n.d.) each had twelve children. Benjamin Cooper's two brothers were killed by Indians during the War of 1812 near Cooper's Fort but each left a widow and a large family. Sarshel Cooper (1762-1815) had eleven children and Braxton Cooper (ca. 1768-1812) had six children. By 1840, many of the descendants of these families had settled in the Platte Purchase and within a decade several had moved to the Sacramento Valley of California.<sup>49</sup>

The Coopers and the Brown family of Middlesex County, Virginia were large clans which intermarried over three generations in Kentucky and Missouri. Frances Cooper married Samuel Brown (1758-1844) in Kentucky where Brown had served under her brother Benjamin Cooper in the Revolutionary War. With his wife and twelve children, Brown followed his Cooper in-laws to Missouri about 1810 where he participated with his sons in the defense of Cooper's Fort during the War of 1812. Four of the children of Samuel and Frances Cooper Brown married their Cooper cousins. Robert Brown married Mildred "Millie" Cooper, the daughter of Braxton Cooper and heroine of Cooper's Fort.<sup>50</sup> Robert Brown's younger brother Benjamin married Millie's younger sister Mary "Polly" Cooper. Her brother Robert Cooper married Elizabeth Carson in 1813. Benjamin Brown served as legal guardian of his nephew, the young Christopher "Kit" Carson, after the accidental death of Carson's father at Boonslick in 1818.<sup>51</sup> In addition, a brother and sister of Robert and Benjamin Brown also married cousins, children of Townsend and Malinda Cooper Fugate. Townsend Brown married Rachel French (Fugate) Still and Nancy Brown (1801-1850) married Rachel's brother Hiram Fugate.

Another of the sons of Samuel and Frances Cooper Brown, William Brown (1785-1843) moved from Howard County to Clay County in 1832 and into the

Platte Purchase in 1837. William Brown married Mary "Polly" Woods and they had ten children including two sons who married daughters of Braxton and Fannie Hancock Cooper.<sup>52</sup> Another son of William and Mary Woods Brown was the Sarshel Brown who had raised an illegal corn crop in the Platte area in 1835. By the time the Platte Purchase opened for settlement, Frances Cooper Brown had died and Samuel Brown was elderly but seventeen Brown children, nephews and in-laws claimed 2800 acres in Pettis Township, Platte County. The area came to be called "Browntown" and was near the William Cooper and William Simpson property.<sup>53</sup>

Born in Madison County, Kentucky, William Benjamin Cooper (1797/8-1848) was the sixth often children of Benjamin and Anna Fullerton Cooper and cousin of the Browns.<sup>54</sup> As a young man, William Cooper had been active with his brothers and cousins in the defense of the Boonslick forts during the War of 1812. He also participated briefly in the fur trade when he and his cousin Joseph Cooper assisted mountain man Ezekiel Williams to recover furs hidden on the Arkansas River during the winter of 1814-1815.<sup>55</sup> In 1818, William B. Cooper married Susan Higgins at Cooper's Fort in Howard County, Missouri. Susan Higgins Cooper (1801-1877) was the daughter of Josiah Higgins (1782-1841) of Tennessee and Barbara Smelser Higgins (1779-1840). The Higgins family had lived at Coopers Fort at the end of the War of 1812.<sup>56</sup> After his marriage, William Cooper is likely to have accompanied his father and cousins on the second successful trading expedition on the Santa Fe Trail in 1822.<sup>57</sup> He later served with the Illinois Mounted Volunteers in the Black Hawk War of 1832.

William and Susan Higgins Cooper owned land in Howard County near the William Simpson family and lived for several years in Saline County, Missouri. When they moved to the Little Platte, they claimed the southwest quarter of Section 7, Township 51 North, Range 34 West four miles north of the Platte River in Pettis Township. The Cooper land is on the west side of road N eight miles due south of Platte City on both sides of a tributary of Brush Creek. The land is near the present day intersection of I-435 and SR 152 approximately three miles southwest of Kansas City International Airport.<sup>58</sup> The Cooper land was adjacent to a parcel owned by Alvis Kimsey and a mile south of the Platte County property owned by William Simpson. William and Susan Higgins Cooper lived three miles west of 320 acres owned by her brother Jacob Higgins and 160 acres owned by her brother Philemon Higgins.<sup>59</sup> The land was also about four miles northwest of 240 acres in Pettis Township owned by Susan Cooper's cousin Jacob Smelser (1805-1888), a Platte County Justice of the Peace.<sup>60</sup> Her father, Josiah Higgins was a

prominent Platte County pioneer. Josiah Higgins was elected a Justice of the Peace for Pettis Township in the first Platte County election in 1839. At the time of the 1840 census, he owned four slaves including an adult woman and three children.<sup>61</sup> Josiah Higgins died in Platte County in 1841. William Cooper served as Secretary in the probate of the 1841 estate of his father-in-law Josiah Higgins.<sup>62</sup>

On June 8, 1843, the paths of the Cooper and Simpson families converged when Nancy Cooper (1820-1883), the daughter of William and Susan Higgins Cooper married Benjamin Simpson the son of William and Mary Kimsey Simpson. Over three generations the Coopers had moved from Virginia to frontier Kentucky and Missouri. The Simpsons began their journey from Maryland a generation before the Coopers left Virginia but avoided the frontiers and moved more frequently. They settled at two locations in North Carolina, one in Tennessee and two in Missouri before moving to the Little Platte. The William Cooper and William Simpson families had been neighbors in the 1820s in Howard County and were neighbors twenty years later in Platte County when Nancy Cooper married the young widower Benjamin Simpson.<sup>63</sup>

Benjamin and Nancy Cooper Simpson remained in Platte County less than three years after their June 1843 wedding. In addition to Benjamin Simpson's son John, they had two sons born at Elm Grove, Platte County, Missouri. Their first son Sylvester (1844-1913) was born March 21, 1844 and their second son Samuel (1845-1899) was born November 10, 1845. In April 1846, with three children under the age of five, Benjamin and Nancy Simpson left Missouri on the Oregon Trail.

Several other Boonslick pioneers and their descendents were among the early Platte County settlers. Joseph Todd (1777-1851) was one of the Boonslick defenders during the War of 1812 where his older brother Jonathan was killed by Indians. Todd moved to Clay County in 1823 and Platte County in 1839 where he and his sons claimed 640 acres in Lee Township between Bee Creek and the Platte River.<sup>64</sup> Joseph Still, whose father Joseph W. Still was also killed by Indians in 1814, settled in Platte County in 1839 where he acquired 160 acres in Carroll Township.<sup>65</sup> Three grandsons of Archibald and Elizabeth Cooper Woods also claimed land in the Platte. William C. Woods and Adam C. Woods settled on adjacent quarter sections in Pettis Township near several members of the Brown family and their brother Archibald Woods claimed two parcels in northeastern Platte County near a bend in the Platte River.<sup>66</sup>



During the early period of settlement in the Platte Purchase, Stephen Cooper (1797-1890), a son of Sarshel Cooper, was serving at Council Bluffs in what would become Iowa where he had been appointed Indian Agent for the Potawatomi by President Martin Van Buren. When John Tyler became president in 1841, Stephen Cooper was replaced as Indian Agent and moved to the northern part of the Platte Purchase where in 1844 he was elected to the Missouri legislature from Holt County. Many years later, with self-deprecating humor, he recalled his experience as an unlettered frontiersman encountering parliamentary procedure:

...there was much sport at my expense. Some of them proposed to bet that I would not say ten words again throughout the session. I remarked that if I couldn't talk sense, I would talk nonsense.<sup>67</sup>

He modestly claimed revenge over his legislative colleagues by pointing out that they had considered **him** crazy for predicting the transcontinental railroad. As he explained, "I have lived to see the day, and have ridden on the iron horse four times and heard him snort."<sup>68</sup>

The following year, Stephen Cooper served with John C. Fremont's 1845 military reconnaissance expedition to the southern Rocky Mountains. Known to history as the "Great Pathfinder", Fremont, as he had on previous expeditions, surrounded himself with experienced mountain men, exceeded his formal orders and improvised his way into controversy. Fremont wrote from Washington in April 1845 offering Cooper a salary of \$2.50 a day. As Fremont explained to Cooper,

Colonel Benton tells me that you have accepted an appointment in my party and I am glad to have with me a man for whom he has so high an opinion, as I have no doubt that on this trip we shall need men of the best quality...<sup>69</sup>

Cooper joined Fremont on three days notice on May 28, 1845 and accompanied him from Missouri to Bent's Fort in the Rocky Mountains where Fremont divided his company. Fremont with Kit Carson, Joseph Walker and others turned north through the Rocky Mountains to Salt Lake and west to California. Cooper was a member of a second party of about 30 men commanded by J. W. Abert and guided by mountain man Thomas "Broken Hand" Fitzpatrick. Abert's party turned south exploring the Canadian River in what is now New Mexico, Texas and Oklahoma

before returning to Missouri in October.<sup>70</sup> The following year, Stephen Cooper organized a wagon train to California where he became active in public affairs.<sup>71</sup>

## LIFE IN THE PLATTE PURCHASE

With the opening of the Platte Purchase, the western edge of settlement had reached the Missouri River. In contrast to the frontiers of previous generations, the Little Platte had little or no frontier period. Once it had been cleared of Indians, it was quickly and fully populated. The pioneers could immediately plant crops and build houses without fear of the Indian raids that had delayed settlement for several years in Kentucky and Boonslick.

One of the early settlers arrived in the Platte November 4, 1837 with his wife and children and acquired land approximately twenty miles northwest of William Simpson. He built a house and purchased corn and pork for the winter. Within six weeks, he was writing his brothers in Lincoln County, Missouri expressing his satisfaction with the land he had acquired and his confidence that he would be able to protect his ownership.

We are sometimes threatened with Spanish claims being laid over our improvements, but I for one am not alarmed...There are occasional controversies about Claims, but nothing serious resulting of these disputes.<sup>72</sup>

He cheerfully invited his brothers to visit his new home, "We could give you some hog and hominy and chat the time off quite pleasantly."

In contrast to the experience in Kentucky and Boonslick where land ownership was confused and uncertain for a decade or more, settlers in the Little Platte could have some degree of confidence that they would soon be able to purchase title to the public lands on which they lived and worked. In 1838, the federal government enacted a general preemption law allowing persons then living on public lands to buy up to 160 acres of land they had settled at a fixed price. The following year, the state of Missouri began a survey of the Platte County boundaries and in 1840, a surveyor began to lay out section lines.<sup>73</sup> In September 1841, the Congress enacted a new law extending preemption rights to men who had settled before June 1840 and making the proceeds of some public land sales available to the states for roads, bridges and other internal improvements. To obtain land under the preemption laws, settlers were required to occupy the

property and make improvements like clearing land and building a house as well as obtain a survey of the property and purchase the land at a public land office.<sup>74</sup> In 1842, the Congress authorized the establishment of a public land office in the Platte Purchase. The office opened in Plattsburg February 1, 1843 where it operated continuously until 1859.<sup>75</sup>

The rapid settlement of the Platte region demanded equally rapid development of community institutions to serve the pioneer families. The federal Land Ordinance of 1785, commonly known as the Northwest Ordinance, had specified that public lands be laid out in one mile square sections and six mile square townships. The federal ordinance also required that section 16 in each township be reserved "for the maintenance of public schools within the said township."<sup>76</sup> Missouri law used the federal townships as the basic unit of local government and required that each township organize and finance its schools using the proceeds from the sale of the sixteenth section. By 1842, many of the townships in Platte County had organized schools including the Brown district in Township 51 North, Range 34 West near the Simpson, Kimzey and Cooper property.<sup>77</sup>

The intention of the state and federal laws had been that the sixteenth section in each township would be sold at auction and the proceeds would be used to build or operate schools. In Platte County, settlement occurred prior to any land survey and, as a consequence, many of the sixteenth sections were occupied by so-called squatters. Instead of the competitive bidding of an auction, the sixteenth sections in Platte County were sold at the minimum price of \$1.25 an acre to the squatters. According to a local historian, the 1840 sale of school lands in Platte County raised only \$21,000 rather than the \$200,000 which he estimated would have resulted from competitive bidding.<sup>78</sup> The first schools in Platte County and throughout the region were simple, one room buildings constructed of round or hewed logs with a door on one side and a window on the other. A slanting board below the window served as a desk at which students stood or sat on stools. Families paid a tuition of \$2.50 for each three-month term. The tuition, sometimes paid in farm products, was used to pay a salary to the teacher who often boarded with a nearby family. By the end of 1846, 27 school districts had been formed in Platte County.<sup>79</sup>

## RELIGION IN WESTERN MISSOURI

Religion had played an active role in the frontier life of North Carolina,

Kentucky and Tennessee where circuit-riding evangelists and camp meeting revivals carried the gospel to scattered residents. In Western Missouri, religious competition intensified and erupted into violence. By the time of the Platte Purchase, several Protestant denominations were actively competing for believers. William Paxton remembered that Baptists, Presbyterians, Methodists and Disciples of Christ were active in Platte County and that they preached in school houses and camp grounds because no churches were built during the first decade after settlement. According to Paxton, "Hardshell Baptists were the leading denomination...they were an excellent people but their ministers were not educated and were seldom paid."<sup>80</sup> As an Anti-Missionary Baptist, William Simpson was a preacher in a denomination which relied on the common-sense interpretation of the Bible by untrained and unpaid clergy. As he had in Howard County and Johnson County, William Simpson farmed during the week in and preached when he could. Between his arrival in Platte County and 1846, when he left for Oregon, William Simpson performed 36 weddings for relatives and neighbors.<sup>81</sup>

At the same time that settlers were rushing into the Little Platte in 1837 and 1838, the simmering hostility between Mormons and their non-Mormon neighbors was exploding into civil war in nearby Caldwell County. The Mormon Church, the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints, had been formed in western New York state in 1830 soon after the publication of the Book of Mormon and its revelations. The following year, the fast-growing church moved its headquarters to Ohio and established a colony, called Zion, near Independence in Jackson County, Missouri. From its earliest days, the new church was the target of attack by its neighbors. One local newspaper reported the Mormon migration to Missouri and observed, "...we should not rejoice much in the acquisition of so many deluded, insane enthusiasts."<sup>82</sup>

By July 1833, 1200 Mormons had settled in Jackson County and non-Mormons were organizing opposition to the newcomers. While some of the opposition to the Mormons was religious in nature, much of it was political and economic. A statement of grievances prepared by local residents in 1833 explained, "...it requires no gift of prophecy to tell that the day is not far distant, when the government of the county will be in their hands."<sup>83</sup> The Missourians took particular exception to what they regarded as a Mormon invitation to "free brethren of color in Illinois" to settle in the Jackson County Zion. The Missourians foresaw,

...the corrupting influence of these on our own slaves and the stench both

physical and moral, that their introduction would set off in our social atmosphere, and the vexation that would attend the civil rule of these fanatics...<sup>84</sup>

Joseph Smith, the Mormon founder, prophet and eventual martyr described the hostility and violence which forced his followers out of Jackson County in 1833,

...they commenced at first to ridicule, then to persecute, and :finally an organized mob assembled and burned our houses, tarred and feathered, and whipped many of our brethern and :finally drove them from their habitations.<sup>85</sup>

The Mormons left Jackson County during the winter of 1833-1834 and moved north across the Missouri River into Clay County where they found temporary safety. Alexander Doniphan, David Atchison and William Wood, the Clay County attorneys who would promote the annexation of the Little Platte the following year, agreed to represent the Mormons in their Jackson County claims. By June 1836, the mood of the Clay County residents had changed and the Mormons were denounced at a public meeting where they were urged to leave Clay County peacefully. At the same time that Clay County residents were moving west into the Little Platte, Mormons were moving north into an unpopulated area which became Caldwell County. The Mormons established 2000 farms, built 150 houses and began construction of a temple at the place they called Far West.

The Mormon population grew quickly in Caldwell County and spilled over into nearby Daviess and Carroll Counties. By June 1838, conflict between the Mormons and their neighbors had resumed. Mormons had formed covert, paramilitary units for self-protection and Sidney Rigdon, a Mormon leader, was calling for violence to confront violence,

...it shall be between us and them a war of extermination...for we **will** carry the seat of war to their own houses and their own families, and one party or the other shall be utterly destroyed.<sup>86</sup>

On election day in August 1838, a brawl broke out in Daviess County when non-Mormons attempted to prevent Mormons from voting. The election day riot resulted in an arrest warrant for Joseph Smith and the activation of six companies of militia by Missouri Governor Lilburn Boggs. Mormon groups armed themselves and looted nearby towns. Non Mormons retaliated and by late October

the Mormon militia and the Missouri militia were engaged in skirmishes.

On October 27, Governor Boggs issued an order mobilizing the Missouri militia. As he explained, "The Mormons must be treated as enemies, and must be exterminated, or driven from the state if necessary for the public peace."<sup>87</sup> Three days later, a Missouri mob of 200 or more attacked Mormon families gathered for safety at Hauns Mill where 17 Mormon men and boys were killed and 15 wounded.<sup>88</sup> The following day, an overwhelming force of Missouri militia surrounded the Mormon capital of Far West. After brief negotiation, the Mormons surrendered their arms, gave up Joseph Smith and other leaders to arrest and agreed to leave the state of Missouri.<sup>89</sup>

Responding to the Governor's order, Major John Boulware mobilized three companies of the Platte County militia which had been organized the previous fall. The Platte County battalion traveled to Caldwell County but arrived after the Mormon surrender.<sup>90</sup> By April 1839, 12,000 or more Mormons had left Missouri for Illinois and Joseph Smith had escaped from custody to rejoin his followers. The Mormons built a new capital, Nauvoo the Beautiful, in Illinois on the Mississippi River where, in June 1844, Joseph Smith and his brother were arrested and lynched by Illinois militia. Soon after, Brigham Young began planning the 1847 migration to a Mormon Zion in Utah.

James Goff(1809-1887) was one of the Mormons who moved from Missouri to Illinois and later to Utah. He was a teenager living in Howard County in 1832 when he encountered Mormon missionaries and joined the Mormon Church. He was the third child of Daniel and Sarah Simpson Goff and a nephew of William Simpson, the frontier preacher. James Goff had grown up in Warren County, Tennessee and moved with the Simpson-Kimsey clan to Howard County, Missouri and later to Johnson County, Missouri. In the 1840s, after most of his Simpson relatives had moved to the Platte Purchase, James Goff and his family moved to Hancock County, Illinois where he arranged the proxy Mormon baptism of his grandfather Thomas Simpson, a devout and life-long Methodist. Goff later moved to Utah where he died in 1887.<sup>91</sup>

## THE PANIC OF 1837

At the same time that land-hungry settlers were rushing into the Little Platte, the United States was entering a period of economic depression. The early 1830s had been a period of economic expansion with public optimism and growing

prosperity. In the frontier areas, easy credit supported widespread land speculation. Public land sales in the United States increased from \$3 million in 1832 to \$25 million in 1836. In June 1836, the federal government attempted to restrain the credit supply and stabilize the economy by requiring buyers of public lands to pay in gold or silver rather than the notes issued by under-capitalized local banks and corporations. As the government explained, the specie circular of 1836 was designed to prevent "the monopoly of the public lands in the hands of speculators and capitalists, to the injury of the actual settlers in the new states...as well as to discourage the ruinous extension of bank issues and bank credits."<sup>92</sup>

The circular effectively reduced land speculation. In 1837, public land sales declined to \$7 million.<sup>93</sup> The Treasury policy also resulted in demand for gold and silver on the frontier and a reduced supply of specie to pay debts in other parts of the country just as international lenders were increasing interest rates and seeking greater security. The prosperity and inflationary spiral of the early 1830s collapsed in the spring of 1837. During May, 800 banks closed as prices fell and anxious depositors and lenders attempted to recover their money.<sup>94</sup> One of the casualties was the Mormon-owned bank in Ohio which had been used to buy church property in Missouri. In addition to its economic consequences, the failure of the Mormon bank in Ohio contributed to religious tensions in Missouri. During this period, economic panic swept throughout the United States resulting in unemployment and riots in eastern cities and business failures in every area of the country. Hard times continued for several years with depressed land prices, falling commodity prices and limited credit.

In Missouri, the impact of the 1837 depression was delayed until the middle of 1841. The mining industry, the fur trade and the Santa Fe Trade had remained profitable while the migration into Western Missouri stimulated commerce on the Missouri River. In contrast to banks in other states, the Bank of the State of Missouri opened when other banks were failing and resisted intense pressure from the public and St. Louis business community to accept the devalued notes of other banks. Through prudent management, the Bank of the State of Missouri was the only bank in the western United States which did not close during the panic.<sup>95</sup> On the Missouri frontier, the impact of the national financial crisis was mitigated somewhat by the growth in economic activity and the federal policy offering public lands for sale at a fixed price. The preemption laws of 1838 and 1841 protected settlers by fixing land prices and discouraging speculation. Land prices in the Platte remained stable but money was limited and there were few opportunities for profit. For the settler in the Platte Purchase, the

extended depression meant that hard work did not result in discernible improvement in living standards or prosperity. The expectations that the new lands of the Little Platte would quickly enrich the early settlers were frustrated and within a decade some Platte settlers were planning another move westward.<sup>96</sup>

## THE NEXT FRONTIER

Disappointed by their experience in Missouri, many of the farmers and shopkeepers who had settled the Platte Purchase were soon considering their alternatives. They knew or had heard that the prospects for settlement in the area immediately to the west, in what is now Kansas and Nebraska, were not good. The area was hot in the summer and cold in the winter. It was dry, treeless and, by all accounts, populated by particularly fierce Indians. The area was a place to hurry across not a place to settle. The place to settle was 2000 miles away near the Pacific Ocean in an area called Oregon which was the subject of a long-standing territorial dispute between the United States and Great Britain or a territory of Mexico called California.

The Platte residents were familiar with the continental drama unfolding in front of them. Some, like William Cooper and his cousin Stephen Cooper, had first-hand experience on the Santa Fe Trail and in the Rocky Mountains. Others had neighbors or knew of prominent Platte County residents who had crossed the plains and established themselves in Oregon or California. As early as 1840, residents of Western Missouri had convened in the Platte County town of Weston and formed the Western Emigration Society. In 1841, John Bidwell, a Platte County school teacher, was one of the leaders of the 34 person Bidwell-Bartleson party that reached California by overland trail. The following year, nine members of the 1841 party returned to Missouri following a Southern route along the Santa Fe Trail. Joseph Chiles of nearby Jackson County, Missouri, traveled overland to California in 1841, returned to his Missouri home in 1842 and took his family to California in 1843. During the winter of 1842-1843, Oregon missionary Marcus Whitman returned from the northwest and spent a week in western Missouri promoting Oregon settlement before continuing to Washington, New York and Boston. Peter Burnett, a prominent Platte City lawyer was one of the leaders of the 1843 emigration to Oregon and Cornelius Gilliam of Platte County was one of the organizers in 1844.<sup>97</sup>

Local residents were aware of the excitement each spring at the nearby communities of Independence and Westport where emigrants outfitted themselves



and organized to cross the plains. By the mid-1840s, emigrants were reporting their observations and experiences in letters to friends and family in Missouri. Some of these letters were published in local newspapers and provided a source of information, not **all** of it accurate, about the overland journey and the paradise awaiting on the Pacific shore. In some cases, early travelers returned to Missouri to promote migration.

Emigration during the 1840-1844 period relied on experienced guides to locate the route and avoid the dangers of the trail. By 1846, several of the participants from earlier years had returned and were preparing guidebooks for the overland traveler. Lansford Hastings of the 1842 party returned in 1845 and published a guidebook in 1846. Overton Johnson and William H. Winter of the 1843 party and John M. Shively all returned from the West that year and began writing trail guides. In November 1845, Elijah White and others arrived in Missouri carrying 541 letters written that summer in Oregon. There was no shortage of information about the trip. Although California and Oregon remained outside the United States, they were permanently connected to the Platte by trail, family and expectation.<sup>98</sup>

In March 1846, Stephen Cooper published an open letter in the *St. Joseph Gazette* announcing **his** intention to go California and inviting others to join him.<sup>99</sup> At the same time that Stephen Cooper was organizing **his** wagon train at Council Bluffs to travel to California, **his** cousin Nancy Cooper Simpson and her Simpson in-laws were assembling a family group for the trip to Oregon.

William Simpson was 53 years old and the patriarch of a family of more than twenty sons, daughters, in-laws and grandchildren who started for Oregon in April 1846. He was a veteran of previous migrations with his family to Tennessee, to Missouri and twice within Missouri. These moves had **all** been westward but they had been incremental. They involved selling land, loading wagons with possessions and traveling through settled country to areas where government land had recently become available. In their earlier moves, William and Mary Simpson had been accompanied by their Simpson and Kimsey siblings and their families. The trip to Oregon would be different. It would be far longer and far more dangerous than the previous moves and it would be made without many of the relatives who had accompanied them from Tennessee to Missouri.

Barnet Simpson (1836-1925), the youngest child of William and Mary Simpson, many years later remembered that his mother had been apprehensive

about the many risks of the overland trail and had prepared for the worst. According to Barnet Simpson,

When we started across the plains, all our neighbors told mother what a dangerous trip it was and how we were sure to be killed by Indians or drowned or die of cholera or be run over by buffaloes.<sup>100</sup>

Aware of the hazards, Mary Simpson was concerned about the perfunctory style of trailside burials. Rather than allowing her loved ones to be wrapped in the nearest blanket, she spent the winter of 1845-1846 carding, spinning, weaving and dying cloth from which she fashioned shrouds for each family member should they be killed or die on the trail.

From the perspective of ten year old Barnet Simpson, the expedition to Oregon was a festive family event,

Our whole family came to Oregon in 1846, except my brother Thomas...all the rest of my brothers and sisters were along so there was quite a clan of us.

According to Barnet, his oldest brother Thomas K. Simpson (1815-1852) and his wife were cautious about abandoning their Platte County farm before they knew more about life in Oregon.

Tom...decided to let us come out and see if we liked it and if we did, he would sell out and come.<sup>101</sup>

In 1852, Thomas Simpson rejoined his parents and siblings in Oregon.

The Simpson family that traveled west in 1846 left a far larger clan in Missouri including members of the extended family that had been part of their life in Tennessee and in three Missouri counties. In addition to his oldest son Thomas, William Simpson was leaving his older brother James and sister Jane S. Mathews in Platte County. Mary Simpson was leaving her sister Elizabeth K. Simpson as well as her brothers Benjamin, James and Thomas Kimsey. For Nancy Cooper Simpson, it was her parents William and Susan Higgins Cooper who were remaining in Platte County. The elder Coopers left for Oregon in 1848. William Cooper died on the trail. His widow Susan H. Cooper continued to Oregon where she remarried in 1856 and settled near her daughter.<sup>102</sup>

On April 18, 1846, three generations of the Simpson family left Missouri with two wagons and four yoke of oxen.<sup>103</sup> William Simpson the frontier preacher, and his wife Mary were the leaders of the family group moving to Oregon but the trip across the continent was made possible because they were accompanied by 17 vigorous young adult relatives. The traveling party also included six or more children under the age of ten. In a century and a half, their Simpson ancestors had moved from the shores of Chesapeake Bay to the Missouri River. In one long, hard spring and summer, the William Simpson family would travel twice as far to the Pacific. They were beginning the journey that Samuel Simpson, then an infant in the wagon, would later describe in his poem "The Campfires of the Pioneers" as "A hundred nights, a hundred days," toward the "sweet horizons of dreams."<sup>104</sup> The hundred days and nights would stretch into 150 before they could rest in Oregon.

1. Governor John Miller, message of November 20, 1832 to the Missouri General Assembly in Howard I. McKee, "The Platte Purchase", *Missouri Historical Review*, Vol. XXXII (January 1938), p. 135.
2. Walter Williams, ed., *A History of Northwest Missouri*, Vol. I, (Chicago and New York, 1915), p. 43.
3. Floyd Calvin Shoemaker, *Missouri and Missourians*, Vol. I (Chicago, 1943) p. 62.
4. Charles J. Kappler, ed., *Indian Treaties, 1778-1883*, (New York, 1972), Vol. II, p. 473.
5. United States Senate, 24th Congress, 1st Session, Document 251 quoted in McKee, "Platte Purchase", p. 139.
6. American State Papers, 18th Congress, 1st Session, Senate, May 14, 1824, p. 79.
7. Report of John C. Calhoun, Secretary of War, to President James Monroe, January 24, 1825, in Martin Ridge and Ray Allen Billington, *America's Frontier Story: a Documentary History of Westward Expansion* (New York, 1969), p. 282.
8. Williams, *Northwest Missouri*, p. 44.
9. McKee, "Platte Purchase", pp. 135-136.
10. Lewis F. Linn letter of January 23, 1835 to Henry Ellsworth in *History of Clay and Platte Counties, Missouri* (St. Louis, 1885), p. 545. This centennial history is attributed to "Gatewood".
11. The members of the Clay County Committee included: David R. Atchison (1807-1886) a lawyer who subsequently represented Missouri in the United States Senate from 1843 to 1857; Peter H. Burnett (1807-1895) a lawyer and 1843 emigrant to Oregon who subsequently served as the first Governor of California from 1849 to 1851; Alexander W. Doniphan (1808-1887) a lawyer who subsequently served as Colonel of the Missouri Mounted Volunteers in the Mexican War; Andrew S. Hughes (1789-1843) a lawyer, Indian Agent and Clay

County farmer. McKee, "Platte Purchase", pp. 134-138.

12. William M. Paxton, *Annals of Platte County, Missouri*, (Kansas City, Missouri, 1897), pp. 14-15.

13. Ibid., p. 13.

14. No author, *The Platte Purchase*, (St. Joseph, Missouri, 1918), p. 11.

15. Shoemaker, *Missouri and Missourians*, p. 441

16. McKee, "Platte Purchase", p. 140.

17. Shoemaker, *Missouri and Missourians* p. 64; McKee, "Platte Purchase", p. 142.

18. Louise Barry, *The Beginning of the West: Annals of the Kansas Gateway to the American West, 1540-1854* (Topeka, Kansas, 1972), p. 314; McKee, "Platte Purchase", p. 142.

19. Kappler, *Indian Treaties*, Vol. II, p. 473.

20. Ibid.

21. John E. Sunder, *Joshua Pilcher: Fur Trader and Indian Agent* (Norman, Oklahoma, 1968), p. 120; Shoemaker, *Missouri and Missourians*, p. 64; Barry, *Beginning of the West*, p. 315.

22. Shoemaker, *Missouri and Missourians*, p. 64.

23. Presidential Proclamation of March 28, 1837 in McKee, "Platte Purchase", pp. 146-147.

24. Barry, *Beginning of the West*, pp. 325-326.

25. Ibid., p. 337.

26. Ibid., p. 329.

27. Paxton, *Annals of Platte County*, p. 18.

28. Ibid., p. 21.

29. Ibid., pp. 26-27; Barry, *Beginning of the West*, p. 361; Gatewood, *History of Clay and Platte Counties*, pp. 553-555; Population Schedules, Sixth Census of the United States, Roll 228, Missouri, Vol. 5.
30. Jesse Morin, "History of Platte County, Missouri" in Edwards Brothers, *An Illustrated Historical Atlas of Platte County, Missouri*, (Philadelphia, 1877), p. 9.
31. Paxton, *Annals of Platte County*, p. 15, 19.
32. Ibid., p. 27.
33. The names of the residents on the 1839 tax rolls was published in Morin, "Platte County" in 1877 and was republished in the county history attributed to Gatewood in 1885.
34. Betty Runner Murray, ed., *Platte County, Missouri Records, 1839-1849* (Platte City, Missouri, 1993), pp. 3-9. The 1839 list includes five Cooper families, five Higgins, six Kimseys and four Simpsons.
35. Ibid., p. 46.
36. The Kimsey family name is spelled variously in Missouri and Oregon records as Kimsey, Kimzey, Kirnzy and Kinsey. The most frequent spelling appears to be Kimsey. Faye M. Lightburn, *Revolutionary Soldier Samuel Brown* (Baltimore, 1993), pp. 310-311.
37. Murray, *Platte County Records*, p. 120.
38. Ibid., pp. 120-124.
39. Ibid., p. 46, 50, 68.
40. Shirlie Rice Simpson, "Thomas Simpson and Mary Knight", *Simpsons a Gathering of the Clan*, Vol. I, Number 12, p. 1.
41. Ibid., Spring 1993, pp 12-13, Fall 1993, pp. 2-4.
42. Lightburn, *Revolutionary Soldier Samuel Brown*, pp. 310-311.
43. Paxton, *Annals of Platte County*, pp. 409-410.
44. Nadine Hodges, ed., *Marriage Records of Platte County, Missouri, 1839-1855*, (Independence, Missouri, 1966; reprinted 1974), p. 1.

45. Ibid., p. 5.
46. Ibid., p. 1. Napoleon Bonaparte Wisdom, the brother of Eliza Wisdom Simpson, married Elizabeth Simpson, a sister of Benjamin Simpson. Napoleon and Elizabeth Simpson Wisdom were 1846 emigrants to Oregon and eventually settled on a Donation Land Claim near the Simpson-Kimsey families. Lottie L. Gurley, *Genealogical Material in Oregon Donation Land Claims*, Supplement to Vol. I (Portland, Oregon, 1975), p. 22.
47. Benjamin Simpson letter of April 12, 1897 to Sylvester Simpson, possession of the author. John T. Simpson crossed the plains to Oregon in 1846 with his family.
48. Hodges, *Marriage Records of Platte County*, p. J.
49. Lightburn, *Revolutionary Soldier Samuel Brown*, pp. 61-63, 263-279, 285-289.
50. According to legend, seventeen year old Mildred Cooper volunteered to ride for help when Coopers Fort was attacked during the War of 1812. *Boon's Lick Sketches*, March 27, 1939.
51. Lightburn, *Revolutionary Soldier Samuel Brown*, p. 77, 89, 265.
52. Mary "Polly" Woods was the daughter of Adam and Anna Kavanaugh Woods and the younger sister of Patrick Woods (1774-1810) who married Rachel Cooper, a younger sister of Benjamin Cooper. Although Adam Woods lived in Madison County, Kentucky and Howard County, Missouri, he does not appear to have been related to the Archibald Woods who married Elizabeth Cooper, a sister of Benjamin Cooper. Archibald Woods was killed in the Battle of Blue Licks in 1782. Ibid., pp. 61-67, 109-110, 400-401, 406-408.
53. Ibid., pp. 51, 61-62, 77, 81; Murray, *Platte County Records*, pp. 199-120.
54. Lightburn, *Revolutionary Soldier Samuel Brown*, pp. 267-272.
55. Kirke Wilson, "Boonslick and the Fur Trade in Fact and Fiction", *Boonslick Heritage*, March 1994, pp. 3-7.
56. Platte County Historical Society, *Cemetary Records of Platte County*, Vol. I, (Platte City, 1980), p.66.

57. Josiah Gregg, *The Commerce of the Prairies* (New York, 1844, reprinted Lincoln, Nebraska, 1967), p. 7. Gregg, who had grown up with the younger Coopers at Cooper's Fort, mentions that "Colonel Cooper and sons" went to Santa Fe in 1822. There is no other evidence that William Cooper went to Santa Fe.
58. Murray, *Platte County Records*, p. 120.
59. Ibid., p. 5. 50,217. The name is variously spelled Philomon (1839 tax list), Phileman (1840 census) and Philemon (1849 tax list). To add to the confusion, the seventh child of William and Susan Higgins Cooper was Philomen Cooper (1834-1865).
60. Ibid., p. 120.
61. Ibid., p. 50.
62. Nadine Hodges and Mrs. Howard W. Woodruff, ed., *Platte County, Missouri Abstracts of Wills and Administrations*, (Kansas City, 1969), p. 22.
63. Paxton, *Annals of Platte County*, p. 59.
64. Lightburn, *Revolutionary Soldier Samuel Brown*, pp. 343-348; Murray, *Platte County Records*, p. 8, 84, 128.
65. Lightburn, *Revolutionary Soldier Samuel Brown*, p. 289; Murray, *Platte County Records*, p. 8, 84, 123.
66. Lightburn, *Revolutionary Soldier Samuel Brown*, p. 409; Murray, *Platte County Records*, p. 119, 130.
67. Stephen Cooper, *Sketches from the Life of Maj. Stephen Cooper*, (Oakland, California, 1888), p. 14.
68. Ibid.
69. Captain John C. Fremont letter of April 22, 1845 to Stephen Cooper, Ibid., p. 15.
70. Stephen Cooper, "Autobiography of Major Stephen Cooper" in *Colusa County* (Orland, California, 1891), p. 358. By 1888, when his autobiography was written, Cooper had become confused about which President had appointed him.



71. Cooper, *Sketches*, pp. 14-15, 17. In California, Stephen Cooper served as Alcalde of Benicia, Judge of the Sonoma District and Justice of the Peace in Colusa County.
72. John Downing letter of December 17, 1837 to Ezekiel and Andrew Downing, *Platte County Historical and Genealogical Society Bulletin*, Winter 1989, Vol. 42, No. 1, p. 13.
73. Paxton, *Annals of Platte County*, pp 24-27.
74. "Preemption Act of 1841", Henry Steele Commager, *Documents of American History*, Vol. I (New York, 1968), pp. 291-292.
75. Murray, *Platte County Records*, pp. 114-115.
76. "Land Ordinance of 1785", Commager, *Documents of American History*, Vol. I, pp. 123-124.
77. Laverne Taulbee, "Schools of Platte County", *Platte County Historical and Genealogical Society Bulletin*, Vol. 49, No. 3, August-November 1996, pp. 22-24.
78. Paxton, *Annals of Platte County*, p. 46.
79. Ibid. Taulbee, "Schools of Platte County", p. 22.
80. Paxton, *Annals of Platte County*, p. 22.
81. Hodges, *Marriage Records of Platte County*, pp. 1-8.
82. *Missouri Intelligencer and Boon's Lick Advertiser* September 17, 1831 quoted in Stephen C. Le Sueur, *The 1838 Mormon War in Missouri* (Columbia, Missouri, 1987), pp. 71-72.
83. Ibid., p. 79.
84. *Missouri Intelligencer and Boon's Lick Advertiser*, August 10, 1833, Ibid.
85. Joseph Smith letter of March 1, 1842 to John Wentworth in William Mulder and A. Russell Mortensen, ed., *Among the Mormons: Historic Accounts by Contemporary Observers* (New York, 1967), p. 14.
86. Sidney Rigdon oration, July 4, 1838, Caldwell County, Missouri, Ibid., p. 95.

87. Lilburn W. Boggs, Governor of Missouri, orders of October 27, 1838 to General John B. Clark of the Missouri State Militia, *Ibid.*, pp. 102-103.
88. Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My Name: The Life of Joseph Smith* (New York, 1945; republished 1963), pp. 236-237.
89. Mulder and Mortensen, *Among the Mormons*, pp. 106-110.
90. Paxton, *Annals of Platte County*, p. 22, 25.
91. Don Simpson, "A Simpson-Goff Record", *The Simpson Clan*, Fall 1995, p. 2.
92. United States Department of the Treasury, Circular of July 11, 1836 in Commager, *Documents of American History*, Vol. I, p. 283.
93. Brodie, *Joseph Smith*, p. 190.
94. *Ibid.*, p. 198.
95. Shoemaker, *Missouri and Missourians*, p. 442, 478.
96. Ray Allen Billington, *Westward Expansion: A History of the American Frontier*, third edition (New York, 1967), pp. 364-368, 372-380.
97. Barry, *Beginning of the West*, pp. 428-575.
98. *Ibid.*
99. Stephen Cooper, "To California Emigrants", published March 13, 1846 in *The Gazette*, St. Joseph, Missouri and republished in Dale Morgan, ed., *Overland in 1846*, Vol. II (Georgetown, California, 1963), p. 489.
100. Barnet Simpson interviewed by Fred Lockley, *Oregon Journal*, March 18, 1925. William Barnett Simpson was recounting experiences which had occurred 79 years earlier
101. *Ibid.*
102. Gurley, *Oregon Donation Land Claims*, Supplement to Vol. I, p. 129.
103. David Simpson letter of March 26, 1897 to Sylvester Simpson, possession of the author. David Simpson recalled that the departure from Missouri occurred on his eighteenth birthday.

104. Samuel L. Simpson, "The Camp Fires of the Pioneers", *Quarterly of the Oregon Historical Society*, Vol. I, No. 4, December 1900, pp. 385-394.

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## OTHER PUBLICATIONS

The *Platte Purchase* is the 1836-1846 segment of an incomplete narrative tracing the path of the Simpson and Cooper families across the continent in the 18th and 19th centuries. Earlier parts of the narrative have been completed and are available from the author for the cost of printing and postage. These include:

*For We Cannot Tarry Here: The Cooper and Simpson Families on the Frontier, 1750-1800* (1990), 150 pages.

*A Most Healthful and Pleasant Situation: The Simpson Family in Maryland, 1688-1760* (1991), 50 pages.

*A Very Improving State: The Simpson Family in North Carolina, 1755-1804* (1994), 62 pages.

"Boonslick and the Fur Trade in Fact and Fiction", *Boonslick Heritage*, March 1994, 9 pages.

"The Death of Sarshel Cooper", *Boonslick Heritage*, March 1995, 6 pages.

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**VOLUME 5**

# **Where One Road Ends**

BY KIRKE WILSON

# Where One Road Ends, Another Begins

THE WILLIAM SIMPSON FAMILY

*Oregon Pioneers, 1846–1880*



THE OVERLAND MIGRATION OF THE MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY HAS CAPTURED THE IMAGINATION OF THE PUBLIC AND GENERATIONS OF HISTORIANS. OVER TWO DECADES, THE ICONIC COVERED WAGONS CARRIED A QUARTER MILLION MEN, WOMEN,

and children two thousand miles across land most of them found inhospitable, and created a nation reaching across the continent. The human drama of the westward migration has deservedly attracted the bulk of the scholarly and public attention. But it has left a second story to be told. The second story, one example of which follows, was the experience of the emigrants once they reached Oregon. For some families, the move to Oregon resulted in little change in their lives, while other families experienced profound and lasting change.

During the years before the 1849 gold rush to California, 80 percent of the overland emigrants went to Oregon. Some were motivated by a patriotic desire to add to the number of Americans in Oregon. They hoped to increase the likelihood that the United States would prevail in the long-standing dispute in which the United States and Great Britain each claimed and occupied Oregon. Other emigrants were attracted by the expectation that free land would be available in Oregon. British and American diplomats resolved the joint occupancy issue in 1846, but the distribution of Oregon land to settlers would be delayed for several years. The provisional government, organized

in 1843, accepted land claims from settlers, yet the final distribution of land under the Oregon Donation Land Law of 1850 was delayed until the United States could acquire title to the land from the Indians and complete the necessary land surveys.

#### WESTWARD MIGRATION

The Simpson family of Platte County, Missouri, was among the emigrants traveling overland to Oregon in 1846. They were typical frontier farmers, dissatisfied with what they then had and willing to risk five months on the overland trail to improve their prospects. William Simpson was a farmer and preacher and the patriarch of a large clan which had moved into the six-county Platte Purchase region of western Missouri soon after it was opened to settlement in 1839. By the winter of 1845–1846, he and his family were thoroughly dissatisfied by economic conditions in the region. The Panic of 1837 had resulted in bank failures, depressed commodity prices, and economic stagnation throughout the nation. On the Missouri frontier, the results were devastating. Money was in short supply and farmers could not sell their crops or make payment on their land. For William Simpson, it was time to move west and start over.

Moving west and starting over was something of a habit for Simpson and his family. He had been born in Rockingham County, North Carolina, in 1793, and moved to Warren County, Tennessee, about 1804. With three generations of his family, he moved to Howard County, Missouri, in 1820, Johnson County, Missouri, in 1831, and Platte County in 1839. In each place, he was a farmer and Old School Baptist preacher proclaiming a strict interpretation of the scriptures and opposing a trained clergy, Sunday Schools, theological

(on p. 107) Henry Warre, *Village at the American Settlement—Wallamatta River. Called Oregon City—Jan 1846*. In 1845, with a population of about six-hundred, Oregon City, on the Willamette River, was the largest settlement north of San Francisco. When the Barlow Road was opened in 1846, Oregon City became the western end of the Oregon Trail. Warre, a British army officer, visited Oregon in 1845 covertly assessing Great Britain's capacity to defend its claims to the Oregon Country. His sketches of the region were published with his report. *Oregon Historical Society, neg. OrHi 49029*.



BENJAMIN SIMPSON (1818–1910)

Oregon politician and businessman, Simpson served seven terms in the Oregon Territorial and State Legislatures, operated saw mills, stores, and shipping businesses while also serving as an Indian agent, Surveyor General, and Postal Inspector in Oregon. *Oregon Historical Society, neg. OrHi 54771.*

seminaries, Bible tracts, missionary societies, and other modern innovations.

#### OVERLAND TO OREGON

William Simpson was the leader of a multi-generational clan of forty-seven people who traveled together from Missouri to Oregon in 1846. The group included eight of William and Mary Kimzey Simpson's nine adult children with their children as well as their in-laws and extended families. William and Mary Simpson's twenty-eight-year-old son Benjamin was elected captain of the wagon train. He was traveling with his wife, Nancy Cooper Simpson, and their two young sons, Sylvester, who was two years old, and his younger brother Sam, an infant of six months.

Several other Missouri families were part of the overland wagon train. The largest of these

were the families of James McBride, a Buchanan County physician and preacher traveling with seven daughters, two sons, and several grandchildren; and that of Ben Munkers of Liberty, Missouri. With him were his invalid wife, their nine children, including four who were married, and five grandchildren. The Simpson-McBride wagon train stayed near the front of the 1846 migration, avoided unnecessary delays, ignored advice about shortcuts, and crossed the Cascade Mountains on the newly-opened Barlow Road. About September 20, 1846, the wagon train arrived in Oregon City. There, their paths diverged. The McBride family went to Yamhill County and the Munkers family went to what would become Marion County. The large Simpson clan scattered in several directions.

#### EARLY DAYS IN OREGON, 1846–1855

William and Mary Simpson, with four of their children, a daughter-in-law and grandson, found land near Carlton in Yamhill County where they either rented or squatted for a year. The young adults immediately found jobs splitting rails in exchange for food, while William Simpson built a cabin, planted crops, and, with another preacher, erected a building to be used as a school house during the week and as the Hillsborough Baptist Church, the first Old School Baptist Church in Oregon, on Sundays. William and Mary Simpson lived in Yamhill County for a year. After they harvested their first wheat crop, they moved to the Waldo Hills of Marion County, where several of their adult children had settled. They claimed 640 acres under the Oregon Donation Land Law, built another Baptist church, and lived the rest of their lives there, surrounded by their children and grandchildren.

William Simpson's oldest son, Benjamin, took a different path. With his wife, Nancy Cooper Simpson, and their two young children, Ben Simpson settled in Oregon City. He was able to redeem

credits at the Hudson's Bay Company store for surplus food he had left at Fort Hall, on the Snake River.<sup>1</sup> Ben Simpson began by building a sawmill on the Clackamas River in 1847. The mill was the first of four he would build at various sites in Oregon over the next twenty-five years.

In 1848, Ben Simpson joined the Oregon Mounted Volunteers in the Cayuse War to pursue and punish the Indians responsible for the killings the previous fall at the Whitman Mission, which stood just west of modern-day Walla Walla. He returned from the Cayuse campaign to his Clackamas sawmill where he manufactured prefabricated houses ("knock-down" houses) which he transported by ship to California and sold at inflated gold rush prices.<sup>2</sup> In 1849, Ben Simpson and a partner opened a store in Oregon City to sell merchandise he had purchased in San Francisco.

While he was starting in business, Simpson was also becoming involved in Oregon politics. In 1849, he was instrumental in persuading Samuel Thurston to run for territorial delegate to the U.S. Congress. Thurston acknowledged, "to Simpson I owe my election. I do not mean that he elected me, but . . . had it not been for him, I should never have been a candidate."<sup>3</sup> In 1850, Simpson also ran a successful campaign and was elected to the territorial legislature representing Clackamas County.

Ben Simpson was restless and ambitious. The following year, he sold his Clackamas mill and store and moved to Marion County, where he built a 120-foot steamboat to transport passengers and farm products above the falls of the Willamette. He

also purchased a store in Parkersburg, a warehouse at Fairfield Landing, and a sawmill on the Santiam River. He was next elected to the territorial legislature from Marion County and eventually served seven terms in the territorial and state legislatures representing four different counties.

#### LAND IN OREGON

In 1848, Oregon became a territory of the United States. Samuel Thurston, the non-voting territorial delegate, lobbied vigorously for the Oregon Donation Land Law, which Congress enacted in 1850. The 1850 law provided grants of up to 640 acres (one square mile) to married couples who had arrived in Oregon prior to December 1850 and occupied and improved the land for four years. The law also provided grants of 320 acres to white male adults who had arrived in Oregon prior to December 1, 1850, if they occupied and cultivated the land for four years. Emigrants arriving between 1850 and 1853 were eligible for half-grants of 160 acres for an individual and 320 acres for a couple. The law was later extended to include emigrants arriving by 1855.

The Donation Land Law of 1850 was generous—but somewhat premature—since the United States government did not own any land in Oregon. The land, particularly in the fertile and desirable Willamette Valley, remained Indian land although most of the tribes that had lived and hunted in this region for centuries had been recently devastated by disease through contact with European arrivals. Wanting this land for settlers, Congress appropriated funds to acquire land title and authorized the appointment of treaty commissioners to negotiate with the remnants of the Willamette Valley tribes. During an eight-month period in 1851, the Indian commissioners reached agreements with nineteen tribes and bands in which the native peoples relinquished six million acres of land in exchange for cash and goods but retained fragments of their

1 William Barnet Simpson interview in Fred Lockley, "Impressions and Observations of the Journal Man," *Oregon Journal*, March 20, 1925. The *Journal* was Portland's daily afternoon newspaper, 1902–1982.

2 See *Oregon Spectator*, December 13 and 27, 1849; *Portland Oregonian*, May 18, 1910.

3 Samuel R. Thurston to Elizabeth McL. Thurston, June 15, 1850, James R. Perry, Richard H. Chused, and Mary DeLano, eds., "The Spousal Letters of Samuel R. Thurston, Oregon's First Territorial Delegate to Congress, 1849–1851," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 96: 1 (Spring 1995): 40 (hereafter OHQ).

traditional lands. None of the 1851 treaties was ratified by the United States Senate.

In 1853 and 1854, Indian agents undertook a second round of negotiations. This time they reached agreements with fifteen tribes, and acquired land, for a second time, in the Willamette Valley and nearby areas. Five years after the enactment of the Oregon land law, the treaties were ratified and the federal government could begin processing land claims. In all, the federal government approved 7,437 claims under the Donation Land Law for 2.6 million acres of land, most of it in the Willamette Valley.

Many of the emigrants had been tenants or burdened by mortgages in Missouri and other midwestern states. In Oregon they were land owners. In Missouri, William and Mary Simpson had purchased the 160 acres maximum allowed under the federal preemption law and they had been part of a family clan that owned 2,600 acres scattered around Platte County.<sup>4</sup> In Oregon, William and Mary together obtained 640 acres of donation land and were surrounded by 4,048 acres of donation land owned by seven related families.

Land ownership was somewhat less important to William Simpson's son Benjamin, the businessman and politician. Ben Simpson obtained donation land in Marion County, farmed it briefly and disposed of it in one or another of his business transactions. For him, the future of Oregon lay in the development of business and industry. He used his political relationships to obtain government contracts and government jobs.

For Benjamin's sons, Sylvester and Sam Simpson, education replaced land ownership as a source of "social capital," that is, the means by which their community status was established.<sup>5</sup> William Simpson and his son Ben had received limited

education themselves but recognized its importance for the younger generation. William Simpson was a preacher in a denomination that rejected the notion of a trained clergy, but one of his first projects in Oregon was to build a schoolhouse. Ben Simpson had received a typical frontier education in Missouri, and like his father, he sometimes preached. He was a quick-witted stump speaker. In 1851, when he was campaigning for a seat in the territorial legislature, a rival candidate sought to disqualify Simpson because he was a preacher. Simpson responded, "Our professions ought not be an objection to either of us . . . While I think I am not minister enough to be dangerous, I know that Judge W— is not lawyer enough to hurt."<sup>6</sup>

However clever Ben Simpson may have been as a campaigner, his frontier education limited his political prospects. In 1866, when he ran for the United States Senate, the *Portland Morning Oregonian* was particularly harsh in its judgment that Simpson was not qualified to be a U.S. Senator because of "the deficiencies of his early education."<sup>7</sup> He might be successful in politics or business, but he remained too much the rough man of the frontier to be fully acceptable.

Ben Simpson understood that his children would need the education he lacked if they were to sustain the social status he had achieved in Oregon. At a time when most schooling stopped after eighth grade and education of women was not considered important, Ben Simpson sent six of his eleven children, including three of his daughters, to Willamette University, which had begun as an Indian training school in 1842.

4 The general preemption law of 1838 limited purchases of public lands, like those in the six county Platte region, to 160 acres. This limitation was continued in the 1841 extension of the federal preemption law.

5 For a discussion of social capital, see, for example, Alejandro Portes, "Social Capital: Its Origins and Applications in Modern Sociology," *Annual Review of Sociology* 24 (August 1998): 1–24. An interesting online resource is <http://www.socialcapitalresearch.com/literature/definition.html>.

6 Benjamin Simpson, undated clipping, 1851, Oregon Historical Society, Scrapbook 112, 21 (hereafter, OHS).

7 "New Candidate and His Qualifications," *Portland Morning Oregonian*, September 27, 1866.



Ben Simpson's son Sylvester was an outstanding student at Willamette, where he earned a master's degree in 1864. A schoolmate described Sylvester Simpson as "a man of brilliant intellect . . . and a man of great learning."<sup>8</sup> Eighty years later, Charles Moores, a former speaker of the Oregon House and fifty-three-year Willamette University trustee, said of Sylvester, "No man of stronger intellect ever passed the portals of Willamette."<sup>9</sup> Sylvester Simpson read law in the office of a private attorney and returned to Willamette in 1866 when he was appointed professor of ancient languages (Latin, Greek and Hebrew). During this period, he was also earning a reputation in Oregon as a public intellectual. He wrote essays, published articles, and lectured and debated about patriotic topics, current events, history, and biography. No topic seemed to elude his interest, but the value of supporting and improving public education was a recurring theme in his presentations.

When he was twenty-one-years-old, Sylvester Simpson wrote an essay in which he surveyed public education in other states and identified reforms appropriate for Oregon, including increasing school budgets, extending the school year from three months to six, and modifying the curriculum to serve vocational students who were completing their formal education at eighth grade as well as those students who were planning to go on to high school.<sup>10</sup> In another essay, Simpson chided those Oregon residents who opposed all tax-supported public education and again boldly advocated the extension of the school year and an increase in school taxes.<sup>11</sup>



SYLVESTER CONFUCIUS SIMPSON (1844–1913)  
Simpson, a lawyer and educator, taught language at Willamette University, served as state librarian and State Superintendent of Public Instruction. *Oregon Historical Society, neg. OrHi 89584.*

Sam Simpson was two years younger than his brother Sylvester, but no less gifted. He enrolled at Willamette at the age of sixteen. He was both popular among the students and an excellent student. He graduated from Willamette in 1866 at the age of nineteen and immediately became editor of the *Salem Statesman*, the newspaper his father had purchased to bolster his unsuccessful campaign for the United States Senate. After the Senate race, Sam used his father's connections to study law in the office of a respected judge. In 1868, Sam joined the law firm of J. Quinn Thornton, himself an 1846 Oregon emigrant.

Sam soon resigned from Thornton's firm and wrote *Beautiful Willamette*, a 52-line poem that would change his life. The poem concludes with the refrain:

8 Joseph D. Lee, *Transactions of the Oregon Pioneer Association*, 41st Annual Reunion, 1913, p. 66 (hereafter OPA).

9 Charles Moores, quoted in Robert Moulton Gatke, *Chronicles of Willamette* (Portland, Oregon: Binfords & Mort, 1943), 266.

10 Sylvester Simpson, "The Course of Study for the District Schools of Oregon," December 26, 1865, manuscript, Author's Collection.

11 Sylvester Simpson, "A Plea for Free Education," n.d., manuscript, Author's Collection.



SAMUEL LEONIDAS SIMPSON (1845–1899)

Samuel L. Simpson supported himself as a journalist and lawyer while writing poetry. His poems were frequently read at public events like the launching of the battleship Oregon and the reunions of the Oregon Pioneer Association. *Oregon Historical Society, neg. OrHi 50914.*

Onward ever,  
Lovely River,  
Softly calling to the sea,  
Time that scars us,  
Maims and mars us,  
Leaves no track or trench on thee.<sup>12</sup>

With its publication, he suddenly found himself an Oregon celebrity. Over the next thirty years, he would publish hundreds of poems celebrating Oregon and its natural beauty, civic events, and people. He spent the rest of his life trying to live up to his own reputation. As he described it years later, the poem he wrote at twenty-two “exercised a sort of tyranny over me.”<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Samuel Simpson, “Beautiful Willamette,” W. T. Burney, ed., *The Gold-Gated West: Songs and Poems by Samuel L. Simpson* (Philadelphia: J. Lippincott Company, 1910), 19–20.

<sup>13</sup> Samuel Simpson, in W. W. Fidler, “Personal Recollections of Samuel L. Simpson,” *OHQ* XV (December 1914): 268.

Sylvester and Sam Simpson were unusually talented young men, but they were also children of privilege. They were well-educated and socially adept; but their early careers were the result of their father’s network of political associates who taught them law, gave them jobs, and served as mentors. Sylvester and Sam were publicly successful, but privately they both questioned their own capabilities, including particularly what they identified as timidity and lack of ambition. Despite their very real accomplishments, Sylvester and Sam lacked self-confidence. They remained uneasy about the future, and each, in his own way, sought to escape the long shadow of his father.

#### THE SETTLERS AND THE INDIANS

Ben Simpson was recovering from a disabling injury at his Santiam sawmill in 1856 when he was hired to build a dam and sawmill on the Indian reservation at Grand Ronde, in Yamhill County. He later operated the sutler’s store at nearby Fort Yamhill where he was appointed U.S. postmaster. In 1863, President Lincoln appointed Ben Simpson to be Indian agent at the Siletz Agency of the Coastal Reservation.<sup>14</sup> The following year, he found himself caught between the demands of settlers and the rights of the Indians when he observed a boat from San Francisco harvesting oysters in tribal waters on Yaquina Bay. When the captain of the boat refused to comply with an order to cease poaching in Indian waters, Simpson had him arrested. The captain was soon released and sued Simpson. The Benton County court ordered Simpson to stop interfering with the illegal oyster harvest and to pay substantial damages to the captain. The court decision was later

<sup>14</sup> For more information about the Grand Ronde, Coastal, and Siletz Reservations, see David G. Lewis and Robert Kentta, “Western Oregon Reservations: Two Perspectives on Place,” *OHQ* III No. 4 (Winter 2010): 476–85; and Charles Wilkinson, “Writing a Siletz Tribal History,” *ibid.*, 462–64.

overturned, but the clear message was that state courts would not protect Indian property against settlers' encroachment.

Ben Simpson was a practical man. He recognized that the settlers were restive and that they usually prevailed when they claimed that Indian lands were not being used. He proposed a modest adjustment to the reservation boundary that would place Yaquina Bay outside the reservation. In 1866, President Andrew Johnson went far beyond Simpson's proposal and removed 200,000 acres, including the bay and surrounding lands, from the reservation. There was no negotiation and no compensation paid to the Indians for the land taken from them.

More than twenty years later, Ben Simpson encountered a similar situation when he was appointed to lead the 1889 federal commission negotiating an Indian treaty in Idaho. The

590,000-acre Coeur d'Alene reservation was under pressure from railroad, mining, and timber interests, and settlers who demanded access to "unused" tribal lands in the resource-rich northern part of the reservation. After protracted negotiations, the Coeur d'Alene agreed to give up 183,000 acres of reservation land, nearly 300 square miles, in exchange for \$500,000 and the ratification of a previous treaty. This pattern was distressingly familiar. The government set aside lands for the tribe and then reclaimed the lands when settlers or corporations claimed they were "unused."

Ben Simpson's sons, Sylvester and Sam, had grown up among Indians at Fort Yamhill and held very different views than their father. In one of his essays, Sylvester attributed the condition of the Indians to misguided national policy: "By conquering the Indians and circumscribing their territory,

A VIEW OF BUILDINGS ON THE SILETZ (COAST) RESERVATION, PHOTOGRAPHED CA. 1910

The reservation was created in 1855 along the Oregon Coast. Ben Simpson became an Indian agent there in 1863. The reservation, originally 1.1 million acres, was reduced in size in 1865 and 1875, allocated to individual tribal members, and eventually closed. The tribe was terminated in 1954 and restored in 1977 as the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians. *Oregon Historical Society, neg. OrHi 38714.*



we have stopped their natural progress; we have destroyed their vitality as a people.”<sup>15</sup> He recommended alternative approaches based on respect for Indians and an understanding of their culture.

Sam Simpson wrote hundreds of poems about nature, patriotism, and other topics, but he rarely wrote about current events or anything controversial. One exception was a poem about an Indian boy who had been lynched many years earlier in southern Oregon and the mother who grieved for him:

He was only an Indian, the son of Old Mary,  
Swarthy and wild, with midnight of hair . . .  
But we left him at last, with his forest-born  
mother,  
As she camped by the tree that had strangled  
her child.<sup>16</sup>

#### A SOUL SET TO MUSIC

In 1870, Sam Simpson left his law practice to take up writing and publishing. He used a loan from his father to purchase the weekly *Corvallis Gazette*, where he began what proved to be a recurring pattern of high initial expectations followed by missed deadlines and erratic behavior. He was gifted and charming, but a life-long drinking habit had made him unreliable. He cascaded through a series of short-term writing jobs, editing textbooks and H. H. Bancroft’s *Histories*, ghost writing a novel, editing a newspaper in Eugene, and writing for smaller papers in Astoria, Portland, and Iwalco, Washington. He continued to write poetry, but what he called “the dragon of drink” made it impossible for him to hold a job for very long.

In *A Romance of Life*, Sam Simpson wrote of someone very much like himself:

<sup>15</sup> Sylvester Simpson, “The True Nature of Charity,” n.d., manuscript, Author’s Collection.

<sup>16</sup> Samuel Simpson, “The Mother’s Vigil,” Burney, ed., *Gold-Gated West*, 132–36.



The Sam Simpson Memorial, erected in 1927 by the Sons and Daughters of Oregon Pioneers. The monument, at his grave in Portland’s Lone Fir Cemetery, is inscribed with Simpson’s 1868 poem, “Beautiful Willamette.” *Oregon Historical Society, neg. OrHi 56109.*

He wandered aimlessly through life  
Tho’ his talents were rare;  
He sometimes tried to baffle fate  
But always met despair.<sup>17</sup>

In 1899, Sam Simpson fell on the sidewalk in front of a Portland hotel. He died two days later in a city hospital. In 1910, eighty-one of his poems were collected and published posthumously as *Gold-Gated West*. In 1950, the *Portland Oregonian* named Sam Simpson among the “100 men of the *Oregonian Century*.” John Burnett, who had studied law with Sam Simpson and later served on

<sup>17</sup> Samuel Simpson, “A Romance of Life,” OHS Scrapbook 266, 14.

the Oregon Supreme Court, said of Simpson, “his soul was set to music.”<sup>18</sup>

#### EDUCATION REFORM IN OREGON

From its earliest days, Oregon residents were divided about public education and slow to do much about it. The compact creating the 1843 provisional government had pledged that education would be “forever encouraged” in Oregon. Education may have been encouraged, but there was little willingness to pay for it. Portland closed its schools for two years in the 1850s after running out of money. At the 1857 constitutional convention, delegates debated whether Oregon should have public education at all, and voted narrowly, 21 to 20, to include “a uniform and general system of common schools” among the functions of the state.<sup>19</sup> The legislature delayed fifteen years before establishing a state board of education and assigning administrative responsibilities to a state superintendent of public instruction.

By the 1870s, the common schools of Oregon were suffering from years of neglect. They had poorly-trained teachers with inadequate supervision, dilapidated buildings, and a chaotic curriculum. Most public schools operated for only three months a year and received less than four dollars a year per student in revenue from the state school fund. Twenty-two locally elected county superintendents, most of them holding other full-time jobs, supervised schools in 578 local districts.

The goal of the 1872 School Law was to create a uniform system of common schools in Oregon with statewide textbooks, teacher certification standards, and increased school visitation by county superintendents. In 1873, Governor Lafayette Grover appointed Sylvester Simpson as Oregon’s first superintendent of public instruction. Although he was only twenty-nine years old, Simpson had been

lecturing and writing about education in Oregon for several years. In his first report to the Oregon Legislative Assembly in 1874, Simpson recognized that statewide adoption of a single set of textbooks was the essential reform. He wrote that “Diversity of textbooks has been the bane of the public schools of Oregon . . . [Teachers contend] that it was impossible to organize their schools or classify their pupils properly while this diversity existed.”<sup>20</sup>

Simpson and the board of education reviewed the multiplicity of textbooks used in Oregon and recommended that eighteen books currently in use be retained. They also recommended that a new set of five readers and a spelling book be adopted. Called the Pacific Coast series, the readers were in the process of being prepared by a San Francisco publisher. Sixteen of the twenty-two county superintendents approved the Pacific Coast series after reviewing incomplete drafts. By the beginning of the 1874 school year, 453 of the 578 school districts in Oregon were using the new textbooks.

Sylvester Simpson achieved most of the school reform objectives set out in the 1872 law, but at a high personal price. The adoption of new textbooks proved to be exceedingly contentious in the press, and the criticism intensely personal. Simpson was attacked unmercifully by his political opponents. Newspapers accused him of “swindle and fraud” and “sectional pride,” while a Republican legislator attacked him for prostituting his office. Opponents of changing the books in use claimed that Simpson had coerced the county superintendents and that he was profiting from the new textbook selection. Still other opponents charged that the new readers neglected the classics to accommodate “western” writers like H. H. Bancroft, Bret Harte, Mark Twain, and Sam Simpson.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup> John Burnett, in John B. Horner, *Oregon Literature*, 2nd. ed. (Portland: J.K. Gill Co., 1902), 62.

<sup>19</sup> R. Gregory Nokes, *Breaking Chains: Slavery on Trial in Oregon Territory* (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2013), 134.

<sup>20</sup> Sylvester Simpson, *First Biennial Report to the Legislative Assembly, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction*, September 14, 1874.

<sup>21</sup> Lee Lau, “Oregon’s First Mandated School Reader,” *OHQ* 105, no. 4 (Winter 2004): 610–19.

Sylvester Simpson completed his term as superintendent of public instruction in 1874. By then the legislature had made the position elective and Simpson did not stand for election. He returned to his position as chief clerk of the Senate, and L. L. Rowland, a teacher, physician, preacher, and stock breeder was elected state superintendent. Dr. Rowland was a Republican, the first of an unbroken series of Republicans who held the state superintendent position until 1926.

The battering he received as state superintendent discouraged Sylvester Simpson and damaged his self-confidence. He was thirty years old when he stepped down, and at a turning point in his life. The public criticism he received contributed to private doubts he had about his own capabilities and his future prospects in Oregon. He was a Democrat in a state that was becoming increasingly Republican. He wrote to his mentor, Federal Judge Matthew Deady, seeking advice. Simpson listed careers that appealed to him, such as the judiciary and journalism, and the reasons he felt his personality would hamper him in those careers. In a melancholy formulation, he explained his dilemma to the judge: "I haven't enough piety for a preacher and I have too much for an 'average' editor. I seem to be tolerably good for so many things that I can't be very good for anything."<sup>22</sup>

Simpson resumed the practice of law in 1875 when he joined a Portland law firm. In February 1877, Governor Grover resigned to accept a seat in the U.S. Senate and was succeeded by another Democrat, Stephen F. Chadwick, Oregon's secretary of state. Simpson returned to Salem to serve as Personal Secretary (the equivalent of today's chief of staff) to the new governor for the twenty months remaining in the governor's term. When Governor Chadwick's term expired in September 1878, Simpson returned to the state senate for a sixth and final term as chief clerk. The following



After 1883, Benjamin Simpson, above, moved from Oregon to Alabama where he became a U.S. Postal Inspector and owner of a large cotton plantation. *Oregon Historical Society, neg. OrHi 95798.*

year he left Oregon and public life for a new career as a legal researcher and editor with the Bancroft Whitney publishing firm in San Francisco.

#### THE ENTREPRENEUR

Timidity and lack of ambition were never problems for Ben Simpson. He was optimistic about nearly everything he tried. While he was Indian agent at the Siletz reservation, he became convinced that Yaquina Bay could become a major Pacific Coast port. His vision was that agricultural products from the Willamette Valley could be transported to San Francisco more quickly and at less expense if they were shipped through Yaquina Bay. This vision required the development of the bay and the construction of a railroad from the Willamette Valley over the coastal mountains. In 1871, Simpson's plan was underway. He received a federal contract to construct a lighthouse on a hill overlooking the entrance to Yaquina Bay. He built a steam-powered

<sup>22</sup> Sylvester Simpson to Matthew Deady, April 4, 1874, Matthew P. Deady Papers, Mss. 48, OHS Research Library.

saw mill, two ocean-going schooners, and eventually the town of Oneatta (now abandoned), which stood on the north side of the Yaquina River near present-day Newport. He was an investor and director of the Willamette and Coast Railroad Company in 1867 and a successor railroad in 1871. But the two railroads failed and Simpson sold his Yaquina Bay town, mill, and ships by 1878.

By the early 1870s, Ben Simpson had completed a long political evolution and had become a Republican. He had been a southern Democrat and part of the "Salem Clique," which had dominated Oregon politics during the territorial period. At the time of the Civil War, when Oregon Democrats split between pro-Southern and pro-Union factions, Simpson became a Unionist Democrat opposed to secession. After the Civil War, Republicans were in the ascendancy in Oregon government and controlled the federal patronage jobs Simpson sought.<sup>23</sup> By 1872, he was back in politics, elected to the state legislature as a Republican representing Benton County. Later that year, President Ulysses S. Grant appointed Simpson to a four-year term as U.S. surveyor general for Oregon. Simpson was responsible for the administration of federal land laws in Oregon, including the Swamplands Act of 1850 and the Homestead Act of 1862.

After completing his term as surveyor general, Ben Simpson obtained an appointment as U.S. postal inspector for Oregon. His sinecure at the post office suddenly turned controversial in 1882 when a postmaster in Independence, Oregon, delivered a bundle of feminist newspapers to the husband of the woman to whom the bundle had been addressed. Abigail Scott Duniway, the publisher of the newspaper and then the foremost women's rights advocate in Oregon, complained bitterly that the post office was involved in a conspiracy to

suppress her newspaper. Simpson investigated the charges and concluded the postmaster's behavior was "inexcusable."<sup>24</sup> But although he had ruled in favor of the women, Ben Simpson found himself criticized for "secretly" favoring the men and failing to recommend that the postmaster be fired. The next year, 1883, following the death of his wife, Nancy Cooper Simpson, the postal service transferred him to a postal inspector position in Alabama. He bought a 1,200-acre cotton plantation near Selma and lived in the state for twenty years before returning to Oregon, where he died in 1910.

#### MODERNIZATION COMES TO OREGON

The early settlers in Oregon saw themselves as independent and self-sufficient. They did not, they thought, need much government. As a consequence, the governments they formed had limited powers. The Organic Laws of the provisional government of 1843 included a strong statement of liberties, including no taxes and no militia for defense. Rather than make laws as the need arose, the provisional government simply adopted the 1839 laws of Iowa Territory. But in 1847, when the Cayuse Indian attack at the Whitman Mission at Waiilatpu raised fears that the Indians were organizing to attack the pioneer settlements, the provisional government had less than fifty dollars in the treasury and no militia. Remote from any American assistance, the provisional government had to rely on its rival, the British-owned Hudson's Bay Company, to ransom the captives. The volunteers who served in the Cayuse War, like Ben Simpson, were required to provide their own horses, rifles, and other supplies.

Many Oregon settlers had mixed feelings about their status as a territory. They welcomed the financial support provided by the federal government, but resented federal control of territorial

<sup>23</sup> Between 1870 and 1900, six of seven presidents of the United States were Republican. Republicans controlled both houses of the Oregon Legislature in ten of the fifteen sessions between 1870 and 1900.

<sup>24</sup> *The New Northwest*, March 31, 1881; *Portland Oregonian*, January 31, 1882.

YAQUINA BAY LIGHTHOUSE,  
NEWPORT, OREGON

Located at the mouth of Yaquina Bay, the lighthouse was constructed in 1871 by Ben Simpson. Photograph by J. G. Crawford. *Oregon Historical Society, neg. OrHi 38714.*



affairs, including the appointment of administrative and judicial officials and the right to override the decisions of the territorial legislature. Despite their displeasure about their colonial status, however, territorial residents rejected statehood proposals on three occasions before 1857 when the Dred Scott decision exposed the territory to the possibility that it might become a slave state.

The Donation Land Law had created an economy of small farmers producing primarily for local markets. This satisfied the immediate needs of Oregon residents but also limited the capacity of the state to diversify its economy and prepare for the future. Oregon remained predominantly agricultural for many years. During the twenty years between 1860 and 1880, the number of farms in Oregon doubled. During the same period, California diversified its economy and soon controlled

commerce in the West. In 1880, San Francisco accounted for 99 percent of the imports and 83 percent of the exports of the Pacific Coast states. One who resented California's economic domination was Ben Simpson. He had owned ships transporting goods to San Francisco and complained that Oregon had "served a bitter and harassing vassalage to California—drawing its supplies from San Francisco and shipped thither all its products."<sup>25</sup>

Long before he became a state official, Sylvester Simpson observed the irony that the emigrants who had contributed to change in Oregon were often obstacles to change. Simpson acknowledged the "great strength of character and tenacity of purpose" of his fellow pioneers, but observed that "many of

<sup>25</sup> Benjamin Simpson, Report of the U.S. Surveyor General for Oregon, 1877, Mss. 2346, OHS Research Library.





Sylvester C. Simpson and Mary Frances McFarland Simpson, photographed at Burnbrae, the rustic summer home they built in Mill Valley, California, in 1899. *Oregon Historical Society, neg. OrHi 95803.*

them will obstinately oppose any change in the system . . . to which they have been accustomed."<sup>26</sup> He was writing about education, but he could also have been thinking about the statehood debates or the endless delays in railroad construction.

Oregonians recognized that railroads could end the state's isolation and transform the Oregon economy but they badly underestimated the obstacles that would hinder their efforts. Oregon businessmen formed several corporations to develop railroads, like the two in which Ben Simpson had been involved, but found themselves unable to assemble the capital and managerial talent to construct a railroad. In 1868, Ben Holladay, an unscrupulous wagon and stagecoach tycoon from California, arrived in Salem with pockets full of cash and a plan to create a transportation monopoly in Oregon. He bribed politicians, bought elections, published a newspaper, built a political machine within the Republican Party, and gained control of the Oregon and California Railroad. He used a combination of incentives and threats to persuade the legislature to revoke

existing railroad land grants and reassign them to his railroad.

In 1871, Ben Simpson himself became ensnarled in one of Holladay's schemes to influence Simpson's old friend federal judge Matthew Deady. Simpson had offered Deady free railroad tickets to Washington, D.C., to enable the judge to plead his case for a salary increase. Deady, however, wisely declined Simpson's offer and so avoided becoming obligated to Holladay. The following year, Holladay sent Simpson to persuade the judge to stop criticizing one of Holladay's political cronies. Judge Deady was not intimidated by Holladay's implied threats. By 1873, the free-spending Holladay began to run out of money. He lost control of his transportation empire to German bond holders who eventually fired him. Holladay's successors completed the railroad from Oregon to California in 1887, eighteen years after the completion of the transcontinental railroad between San Francisco and New York.

Sylvester Simpson's 1865 assessment of the citizenry as barriers to progress had been accurate. The Oregon pioneers were often slow to accept new ideas. They delayed statehood for several

<sup>26</sup> Sylvester Simpson, "Course of Study for the District Schools," n.d., Author's Collection.



“ULTIMATUM ON THE OREGON QUESTION,” A POLITICAL CARTOON BY E. W. CLAY, NEW YORK, 1846. In the cartoon, President James Polk and various European monarchs dispute the proposed Oregon boundary settlement at the 49th parallel. *Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USZ62-7722.*

years. They resisted school reform, and they were slow to develop the railroad system that would enable them to diversify their economy and connect to a wider world.

#### THE EVOLVING MYTH OF THE OREGON TRAIL

Oregon changed dramatically during the lifetime of many of the overland emigrants. Pioneers who had walked two thousand miles beside their oxen in the 1840s could travel the same route in comfort by railroad fifty years later. In the annual procession of the Oregon Pioneer Association, the old and frail pioneers rode, incongruously, in automobiles through the streets of Portland. The world was changing and the meaning of the overland trail was changing. More importantly, the control of the narrative, the source of authority about

the meaning of the trail, was shifting from the emigrants who had lived it to people who had to imagine it because they had not been there.

The overland emigrants knew at the time they crossed the continent that what they were doing was special and that their migration had wider implications for the United States. Many kept meticulous daily records of miles traveled and accounts of unusual occurrences or natural features of the land. The story of covered wagons and stalwart pioneers became a central part of the Oregon heritage and the national story about how we became a continental nation.

In 1873, veterans of the Oregon Trail began to convene annual reunions to share memories and see old friends. At several of the reunions, someone, but never the “pioneer poet” himself, read part or all of one of Sam Simpson’s poems. His 518-line epic, “The Campfires of the Pioneers,”

evoked the beauty and drudgery of the overland experience as well as the lurking presence of death:

. . . And so the dust and grit and stain  
Of travel wears into the grain;  
And so the hearts and souls of men  
Were darkly tried and tested then.  
So that in happy after years,  
When rainbows gild remembered tears,  
Should any friend enquire of you  
If such or such an one you knew—  
I hear the answer, terse and grim,  
“Ah, yes, I crossed the plains with him!”<sup>27</sup>

At the 1897 pioneers’ reunion, the featured poem was Simpson’s tribute to the patient and enduring “Pioneer Ox.”


One of the purposes of the Oregon Pioneer Association was to “collect from living witnesses . . . facts relating to the Pioneers and history of the territory of Oregon.” The speakers at early reunions included prominent pioneers such as former governor George L. Curry, an 1846 emigrant, at the first reunion, and former Senator James W. Nesmith, an 1843 emigrant, and Judge Matthew Deady, an 1849 emigrant, at the third reunion. The speakers told their own stories and recited the names of other pioneers. Nesmith called out the names of all the able-bodied men and boys who had accompanied him in 1843, as well as the eighty-seven American settlers and twenty-one missionaries who were already living in Oregon when he arrived. The speakers conveyed the message that each of the assembled pioneers had a story and that story deserved to be remembered.<sup>28</sup>

As the years went by, the annual reunions became increasingly elaborate with parades through the streets of downtown Portland, bands playing, ornate floral displays, and lavish banquets. The reunions were popular but, as time

passed, they began to diverge from the experience the old pioneers were celebrating. Speakers were invited who were not themselves emigrants. Rather than listening to the re-telling of their own stories now, the living witnesses were being told by others the meaning of their experience. They were told they were a breed apart, fearless and heroic, and, in 1894, that they had rescued the West “from the dominion of wild beasts and wilder men.”<sup>29</sup> The narrative was shifting from the remembered contributions of individuals who had crossed the western lands to a generic myth of heroism and conquest. In this new rendition, the heroic myth diminished the role of the individual emigrant by folding it into a larger narrative of valiant pioneers and national inevitability.

The “living witnesses” had become the audience. The individuals who had triumphed over adversity on the overland trail had become bit players in a larger drama. The sense of individual accomplishment that was inherent in the stories of the living witnesses was replaced by the grand myth of manifest destiny.

The pioneers had changed and Oregon had changed, but the meaning of the Oregon Trail remained the stories of common people doing uncommon things during one long, dreary summer. The story is powerfully and fully recorded in the trail journals and reminiscent accounts passed down among generations of their descendants and preserved by historians and other writers. It is a great national drama. It does not require the embellishment of a heroic myth to give it significance.

KIRKE WILSON was president of the Rosenberg Foundation in San Francisco until his retirement in 2005. He has published numerous articles on philanthropy, frontier history and social change. This article was presented in an abbreviated form at the 2013 OCTA annual convention in Clackamas, Oregon. 

27 Samuel Simpson, “The Campfires of the Pioneers,” in Burney, ed., *Gold-Gated West*, 98.

28 OPA, *First Annual Reunion, 1873*, 66; *Third Annual Reunion, 1875*, 51.

29 OPA, *22nd Annual Reunion, 1894*, 17–19; *31st Annual Reunion, 1903*, 31.

**VOLUME 6**

# **The Death of Sarshel Cooper**

# THE DEATH OF SARSHEL COOPER

By Kirke P. Wilson

*Boonslick Heritage, March 1995*

*Reprinted with permission*

*(BHS member, Kirke P. Wilson, lives in San Francisco. This article is from a Work-in-progress following the Cooper and other pioneer families from Chesapeake Bay to the Pacific Ocean. Mr. Wilson welcomes comments and inquiries from others interested in the Missouri frontier. Letters can be addressed to him at 172 Hancock Street, San Francisco, CA 94114)*

For all the violence and terror on the Missouri frontier during the War of 1812, nothing was more shocking to the residents of Boonslick than the murder of Sarshel Cooper. (1) Cooper had been among the first settlers in Boonslick in 1710 was a leader in the defense of the settlements during the three years of Indian raids and battles between 1812 and 1815. By April 1815, the war had been over for four months, but Sarshel Cooper was killed, surrounded by his family, in the safety of his log cabin at Cooper's Fort. (2)

Sarshel Cooper was born in Culpeper County, Virginia, in 1763 and moved to Kentucky as a teenager. He married Ruth Hancock, the daughter of Kentucky pioneer Stephen Hancock, and farmed in Madison County, Kentucky, before moving to Missouri after 1800.

With his brother Benjamin, Sarshel Cooper was a leader among 42 men who established the settlement at Boonslick in March 1810. Although they were 100 miles beyond the previous frontier at the Gasconade River, the Boonslick settlers were protected by the fort the United States had established at Fort Osage in 1808.

In 1813, William Clark, the territorial governor, moved a band of 100 Sac and Fox Indians to an area between the settlements downstream and the little community at Boonslick. A decade later, Clark explained that the Sac and Fox had been threatening to side with the British in the war but had assured him that they would remain neutral if they could be relocated. Clark moved the tribe to an area on the south side of the Missouri River. The following year, the tribe split with one faction scattering in an extended rampage through the frontier settlements. (3) The same year the Indians were moved, the United States withdrew the tiny garrison and closed Fort Osage leaving Boonslick exposed as the westernmost community in the United States.

After two men from Boonslick were killed by Indians in March 1812, Sarshel Cooper formed a volunteer militia company of 126 men and boys from a total population of about 300. The residents of Boonslick built family forts, enclosing their log houses in stockades to protect families and livestock during periods of danger. For three years, the pioneers lived in the forts and carried guns when they ventured outside to milk cows, tend crops or catch horses. The most innocent activities were carried out with constant awareness of possible danger. One young scholar at Boonslick remembered dropping his book and grabbing his gun when the Indian alarm sounded during the school day. (4) Other residents were ambushed and killed while going about their daily chores.

With the advantage of 180 years and somewhat greater sensitivity to issues of race in our society, it is likely that the frontier conflicts between the Indians and settlers during the War of 1812 was far more complex than reported. Historians, to the extent that they have examined this period have relied on the memories of survivors of the 1812-1815 period at Boonslick, none of them Indian, interviewed 40 or 50 years later. (5) The survivors, many of whom were adolescents during the war, report the pattern of unprovoked Indian attack, aggressive settler response and brutality on both sides. As one might expect, the perspective of the survivors is that the Indians were sneaky, thieving and cowardly and that the only effective response was one of overwhelming military action. The survivors display no ambivalence about their moral legitimacy or sympathy toward the Indians and their situation.

The Indians in the Boonslick area, like the pioneers, were veterans of previous frontiers. They had agreed to treaties in which they exchanged part of their land for security and perpetual use of the

remaining land. In the case of the Sac and Fox band, the Indians recently had been uprooted from traditional lands to the east and relocated, if only temporarily, between settled areas in Central Missouri. Their lands and economy had been disrupted leaving them destitute and dependent on government handouts. When the Indians could not survive on the tract of land Governor Clark had designated on the south side of the Missouri River, the tribe splintered into small bands and ranged through the frontier settlements stealing livestock and destroying property.

Conflict was inevitable. The pattern of treaty, relocation, treaty violation, Indian response and massive retaliation were familiar to both the Indians and the pioneers. The familiarity of the pattern did not protect either side from misunderstanding, terror and bloodshed. The frontier war may have delayed additional settlement at Boonslick for three years, but the outcome was never in doubt. There was no possibility of any resolution that would respect the needs of both Indians and settlers. The settlers believed that the land they settled on had been acquired through treaty and that their ownership had been confirmed through the investment of labor, time and eventually blood. (6)

The War of 1812 ended December 24, 1814, when the Treaty of Ghent was signed in Belgium. The treaty was ratified by the United States Senate February 17, 1815, and the news reached Missouri about three weeks later. On March 11, the Missouri Gazette and Illinois Advertiser in St. Louis announced the peace in a headline. In the March 18 issue, the Gazette published a presidential proclamation summarizing the treaty and the following week, March 25, 1815, printed the complete text of the treaty. News of the treaty is likely to have reached the frontier at Boonslick within a week of its publication in St. Louis. The War of 1812, like the Revolutionary War, continued on the frontier long after the peace had been achieved elsewhere. While the diplomats in Belgium were celebrating the conclusion of negotiations on Christmas Eve 1814, Indians were attacking the forts at Boonslick. The decisive Battle of New Orleans, in which militia under General Andrew Jackson routed British regulars, occurred January 8, 1815, two weeks after the official conclusion of hostilities.

While the war with the British was over, the Indian war on the frontier continued into the spring. The night of April 14, 1815, the leaders at Cooper's Fort held a meeting to plan their next steps. After the meeting, Sarshel Cooper relaxed in front of his fireplace with his wife, Ruth. Several of their eleven children were playing on the floor of the cabin and their youngest child was sitting on his father's lap. It was a dark and stormy night but Cooper and his family were warm and secure in their fortified cabin. This scene of domestic tranquility was shattered by a single rifle shot through the wall of the house. Sarshel Cooper fell dead. In the storm, the killer had been able to get inside the stockade without being noticed by the sentry on duty and to sneak up to the cabin wall. While the family assembled in the warm glow of the fireplace, the killer used a knife to dig out daubing between the logs in the wall of the cabin. Without alarming the occupants, he widened the hole so that it would accommodate a rifle barrel and allow space to aim. (7)

Then a teenager, Stephen Cooper (1797-1890), a son of Sarshel Cooper remembered many years later: *My father was shot and instantly killed, sitting by his own fireside, by an Indian, who picked a hole in the wall one dark, stormy night. This was after we had heard that peace had been declared in 1815.* (8)

In another account of the same incident, Stephen Cooper remembered that his father had recently returned from a trip to St. Louis seeking assistance:

*He had been at home only a few days when, on a stormy night, while thundering and lightning, the Indians picked a hole through the wall of the house and shot my father sitting by the fireplace. He was shot and never spoke. I had just gone to bed and dropped to sleep. I jumped up with gun in hand, sprang to the upper story of the house, and as it lightened I saw an Indian, but in an instant it was dark. I fired at random, but think to no effect; at this time the country was alive with hostile Indians. (9)*

At dawn the following day, the Cooper's Fort residents sent out a party to track the killer. Although the storm had obliterated much of the trail, the Boonslickers followed the track thirty miles until it became imperceptible. The disappointed posse returned to Cooper's Fort where reinforcements soon arrived, but the killer had disappeared and was never found. Benjamín Cooper, seeking revenge, was able to use his frontier experience and Indian contacts to find out who had killed his brother. Cooper reported that the killer was an Indian and announced that he would shoot the killer on sight if they should ever meet. The hot-headed Cooper vowed that he would kill the Indian even if he were walking down the street in St. Louis with Governor Clark. (10) Perhaps aware of the threats and reputation of Colonel Cooper, the killer was never again seen in the settlements.

Many years later, Joseph Cooper (1792-1875) another son of Sarshel Cooper, suggested the killer might not have been an Indian at all but one of the employees of Captain Coursault whose boat and cargo had been confiscated by the Coopers and the Boonslick militia in 1813. Joseph Cooper explained in an 1874 letter:

*We had taken a keel boat from some Frenchmen who were attempting to take it up the river loaded with whiskey, powder and lead for the Indians... I think one of this party killed my father. (11)*

There is no confirmation for this unlikely speculation. The years of frontier warfare and the circumstances of the killing, along with the testimony of Stephen Cooper, suggest that Sarshel Cooper was killed by one or more Indians. It seems particularly unlikely that he would have been murdered by one of Captain Coursault's men since Sarshel Cooper had been responsible for saving the life of the French Captain at the time of the 1813 encounter. (12)

Sarshel Cooper was buried 100 yards southeast of Cooper's Fort. By 1844, his descendants had prospered. They decided to honor the old pioneer with a fine tombstone, with a suitable and poetic inscription. Before the tombstone was completed, the Missouri River flood of 1844 covered the site of the old fort and the Cooper cemetery. The unused tombstone was stored in a Cooper family shed until 1889 when Nestor B. Cooper presented it to the museum at Central College in Fayette. A Missouri River flood in 1903 uncovered the graves at Cooper's Fort and Sarshel Cooper's remains were reburied in the Cooper family graveyard on the farm where the tombstone had been stored for forty years. (13) Finally, in 1991, the South Howard County Historical Society and various Cooper descendants petitioned Central Methodist College to permit placing of the tombstone in the repaired and restored family graveyard. [Editor's Note: *For a more complete description of Sarshel Cooper's tombstone and its curious history, see the following article on page nine.*]

After three years of warfare, the Boonslick pioneers were accustomed to Indian raids and violent death but the murder of Sarshel Cooper was particularly unsettling. One of their leaders had been killed in the security of his family and fortified home. Although they knew the War of 1812 was over, the Boonslick settlers must have wondered if it would ever end on the frontier. Some of the settlers, veterans of three years of warfare, considered giving up and returning to the settlements where they would be safe and where they could resume normal lives.



The death of Sarshel Cooper was the final major incident of the frontier war at Boonslick. As Jesse Morrison, one of the founders of the salt factory at Boonslick, observed, Sarshel Cooper was a “most daring, indefatigable man... a great loss to the settlements” (14) At a great cost in lives and wealth, the Boonslick community had survived. Joseph Cooper estimated that his family had lost one hundred head of cattle and over eighty horses. He reported that the Cooper family had only six horses left after three years of warfare. (15) His brother, Stephen Cooper, assessed the cost of the three years:

*My father and three cousins were killed and two others wounded... [and] the country was stripped of horses and cattle; my father had eighty head of fine beef cattle driven off in one band. We also lost some thirty head of horses. (16)*

The Boonslick settlement was devastated by the war. At least twelve men were killed as well as two who were kidnapped and never seen again. Of the 126 men and boys who had volunteered to defend the settlements three years earlier, seven had been killed by Indians. In addition to the loss of life, there was also widespread loss of property and disruption of the local economy. The Morrisons had to close the salt factory at Boone’s Lick in 1814 because the production equipment had been destroyed. (17) Most of the settlers lost their horses, cattle and pigs. As one resident explained,

*Indians stole so many horses from the Boone’s Lick settlements, that for two or three of the years at the close and after the war, they had to plow the ground and plow out corn with oxen and in some cases with their milk cows. (18)*

Thinking back to the death of his father many years earlier, Stephen Cooper recalled, “We had very little trouble after this. Peace was made with the Indians.”(19)

With the end of international hostilities, President James Madison appointed Governor Clark and two others to negotiate peace treaties with Indian tribes involved in frontier warfare during the War of 1812. The three delegates successfully completed treaties of peace and friendship with twenty-one tribes including the Fox, Kickapoo, Great and Little Osage, and Sac during the summer of 1815 at Portage des Sioux, Missouri Territory. Each treaty included agreement that “every injury or act of hostility... shall be mutually forgiven and forgot.” (20) The Sac of Fox River, the faction that had scattered from the Missouri River in 1814, continued to resist government authority until May 1816 when they too agreed to a treaty of peace and friendship. (21)

While the Indians and settlers welcomed peace, it is unlikely that survivors of the frontier war either forgave or forgot. In 1818, the General Assembly of the Territory of Missouri convened at the fast growing new city of Franklin in Howard County. The elected representatives established a new county on the south side of the Missouri River and named the county in memory of the last and most shocking casualty of the War of 1812 on the Missouri frontier. As the local newspaper reported in 1823, Cooper County was named,

*...in testimony of the tragical end of Col. Sarshel Cooper, who in his lifetime loved the frontier and at last fell victim to savage barbarity. (22)*

The Boonslickers had successfully defended their community with little external assistance. For three years, the settlers relied on their relatives and neighbors to hold the western frontier of the United States against repeated attack. With the end of the war, the Boonslick frontier was secure and the rush of settlement could resume.

## NOTES

*Information about Sarshel Cooper and his family as well as information about the War of 1812 at Boonslick are from unpublished manuscripts by the author.*

1. Historians have spelled Sarshel Cooper's name variously as "Sarshal" or "Sharshall". Cooper signed an affidavit on behalf of Frederick Hiatt on July 5, 1813, and a muster roll of the 1814 Mounted Missouri Volunteers. In each case, he spelled his name "Sarshel".
2. There is confusion about the date Sarshel Cooper was killed. It is variously reported as April 14, 1814, April 14, 1815; or April 6, 1815. Since he is known to have commanded troops in the Miami campaign of August-October 1814, the April 14, 1814, date cannot be correct. The April 14, 1815, date is confirmed in an 1869 letter to Lyman Draper from Mary E. Cavanaugh, a granddaughter of Sarshel Cooper (Draper MSS 23 S 251). But his tombstone bears a death date of April 6, 1815.
3. William Clark report of January 12, 1826, to the United States Superintendent of Indian Affairs in American State Papers: Documents, Legislative and Executive of the Congress of the United States Indian Affairs Vol II, 19<sup>th</sup> Congress 1<sup>st</sup> Session, Senate, March 6, 1826, p. 55.
4. Stephen C. Cooper in History of Howard and Cooper Counties, Missouri (St. Louis, 1883), p. 153.
5. The primary sources of information about the frontier war in Missouri are the interviews Lyman C. Draper conducted between 1851 and 1889 with survivors. The Draper interviews appear to have been the basis for Walter Bickford Davis and Daniel S. Durrie, An Illustrated History of Missouri (1876) and Louis Houck, A History of Missouri, 3 volumes (1908). They may have also been used to some extent for the History of Howard and Cooper Counties (1883). The Draper collection of 1200 frontier interviews and other documents is at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin.
6. Treaty with the Osage, 1808 in Charles J. Kappler ed. Indian Treaties, 1778-1883 (Washington, 1904, reprinted New York, 1972), pp. 95-97. The treaty ceded most of Missouri, including all lands north of the Missouri River to the United States in exchange for protection, \$1200 in cash, \$1500 in merchandise, a government blacksmith and a trading post. The Sac and Fox were not party to the 1808 treaty.
7. The killing of Sarshel Cooper was one of the central events of the frontier war and is recounted by several of the old pioneers interviewed by Lyman Draper including Samuel Cole (Draper MSS 23 S 75, 85), Joseph Cooper (Draper MSS 23 S 124), Stephen Cooper (Draper MSS 11 C 104) and Jesse Morrison (Draper MSS 30 C 92-93). The accounts are nearly identical with regard to weather, setting and method.
8. History of Howard and Cooper Counties, p. 153.
9. Stephen Cooper, Sketches from the Life of Maj. Stephen Cooper (Oakland, California, 1888), p. 6. The same material was also published as "Autobiography of Major Stephen Cooper" in Justus H. Rogers, Colusa County (Orland, California, 1891), pp. 351-361.
10. Col. Samuel Mosby Grant in Draper MSS 30 C 238. Benjamin Cooper remained angry at Governor Clark for refusing to send assistance to Boonslick during the early years of the frontier war.
11. Joseph Cooper letter to Col. Newton G. Elliott, January 1874, in History of Howard and Cooper Counties, p. 105.
12. Joseph Cooper in Draper MSS 23 S 121. Stephen Cooper in Draper MSS 11 C 103-104 and Sketches, p. 5.

13. Lilburn A. Kingsbury, "Tales of Old Howard County Cemeteries", Bulletin of the Missouri Historical Society, January 1947, pp. 51-52.
14. Jesse Morrison in Draper MSS 30 C 92-93.
15. Joseph Cooper in Draper MSS 23 S 140.
16. Stephen Cooper in Sketches, p. 5.
17. Jesse Morrison in Draper MSS 30 C 94-95.
18. Samuel Cole in Draper MSS 23 S 81.
19. Stephen Cooper in Sketches, p. 6.
20. American State Papers, Indian Affairs, Vol. II. Pp. 1-5.
21. Ibid., p. 94.
22. Missouri Intelligencer, April 29, 1823. Sarshel Cooper was a captain of militia during his lifetime.

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# CAPTAIN SARSHEL COOPER'S TOMBSTONE

*(Part of the information for this article was gleaned from "Boon's Lick Sketches" Numbers 59 and 60, originally written for the Boonslick Historical Society on March 13 and March 20, 1939 and submitted to area newspapers for publication. The remainder was taken from various contemporary sources, including Howard Hendrix of the South Howard County Historical Society, New Franklin Mo.)*

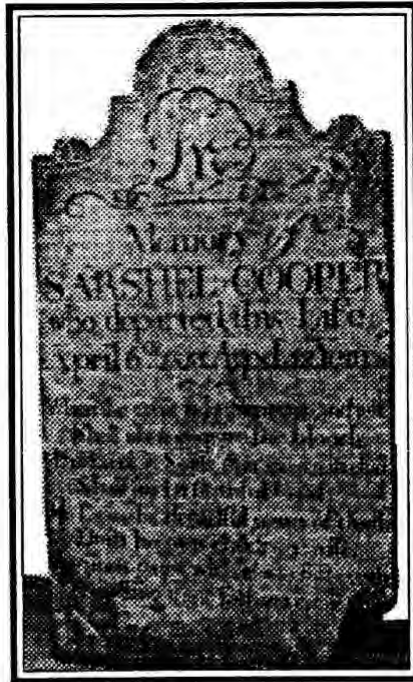
In 1844, twenty-nine years after Sarshel Cooper's death, members of the Cooper family decided to honor his memory by erecting a suitable monument at his grave near the site of Cooper's Fort. A tombstone, thirty-six inches high and twenty-four inches wide (shown below), was ordered to be inscribed, but before it could be completed, the great flood of 1844 engulfed the valley. When the water receded, a deposit of sand and silt covered the land around the site of the old fort until not a trace of the cemetery could be found.

Disappointed relatives took the monument home and set it in the upstairs room of a cabin in the yard to await the time, if ever, when the site of the grave might be determined. But the years rolled on and the earth kept its secret.

In 1875, when Merritt Masters Clarke bought the farm which had long been the home of one of the Cooper families, the tombstone still stood against the wall in the cabin. Mrs. Henry Black, one of the Clarke children, was a little girl at that time, but she clearly remembered the childish curiosity and misgivings she felt about it at first when she played in the cabin. Her inquisitiveness brought out the story of its origin and the reason for its preence there.

Robert L. Clarke of Fayette, a brother of Mrs. Black, recalls that the monument stood undisturbed in the cabin until some time in the 1880's when Nestor B. Cooper came to the farm one day to put some cattle on pasture. The Clarkes told him of the monument. When he expressed his desire to possess it, the Clarkes gladly allowed him to take it.

According to Morrison Cooper of Fayette, Nestor B. Cooper took the tombstone to his country home about five miles southwest of Fayette and set it against the trunk of a walnut tree in his yard where it stood several years. He died in 1898, but about ten years before his death he presented the stone to Central College in Fayette and it was put in the Museum of that institution.



**In Memory of  
Sarshel Cooper  
who departed this Life  
April 6th 1815 Aged 52 Years  
When the great Judge Supreme and Just  
Shall once enquire for blood  
The Humble souls that mourn in dust  
Shall find a faithful God.  
He, from the dreadful gates of death,  
Doth his own children raise  
In Zion's gates with cheerful breath  
They sing their Father's praise**

In 1903 the Missouri River went on another rampage, and again the entire river bottom was flooded. After the water subsided a strange thing was noted. Whereas the flood of 1844 had left a deep deposit of sand and silt over the site of old Fort Cooper, the 1903 flood seemingly had tried to sweep the earth away. Whirlpools had cut broad deep holes and at the edge of one of these was revealed after 59 years, the site of the old cemetery at the fort. An eddy had cut across several graves washed out most of the dirt which had filled them and exposed the remains of those who had lain there nearly ninety years. The remaining walls of the graves stood in perfect outline and Robert L. Clarke of Fayette and Dr. W. R. Hawkins of Glasgow, both of whom visited the scene, relate that they saw what appeared to be spade marks made at the time the graves were originally dug still visible in the soil.

Mrs. Sue Craig Chancellor, New Franklin, a great granddaughter of Capt. Sarshel Cooper, tells of her visit to the old cemetery immediately after the flood laid open its graves.

“I was living with my uncle, Col. Stephen Cooper (1832-1911) at that time,” relates Mrs. Chancellor. “Uncle Steve felt that these bones which the flood waters had exposed were those of his grandfather Sarshel Cooper. He got ready to go to the cemetery and as he was not at all well that day, I went with him.

“I shall never forget how those old graves appeared with most of the earth washed out of them, their sides standing as clear cut as if they had been dug recently. We found a number of bones exposed to view and some still partially buried by wet earth which had not been washed out.

“It had always been a common saying down through the generations of our family that Grandfather Sarshel Cooper had a perfect set of teeth when he was killed although he was 52 years old. So when Uncle Steve and I found a skull which contained all of the teeth, apparently perfect, we felt little doubt about its being that of our forefather, Sarshel.

“The bones of Captain Sarshel Cooper were taken to the Joseph Cooper family graveyard and buried, on the farm where his monument had stood in the cabin for more than forty years. But strange as it may seem, at the time of this incident, I had never heard of this stone. However, I am of the fourth generation of the Coopers.”

“It is probable that other descendants of Sarshel Cooper who might have known of the existence of the tombstone, did not know at the time that the flood had uncovered his remains which Uncle Steve moved to the family cemetery. So far as I am aware, no interest has been shown in having the monument set up to mark the grave.”

Thus it was that Sarshel Cooper’s tombstone remained in the Stephens Museum at Central College until 1990-91 when members of the South Howard County Historical Society, under the direction of Howard Hendrix, did restoration work on both the Benjamin Cooper and Joseph Cooper cemeteries.

A petition was signed by 23 descendants of the Cooper family asking Central Methodist College to allow Sarshel Cooper’s tombstone to be placed on his unmarked grave in the Joseph Cooper cemetery. The request was honored by the college, and on August 20, 1991, in the presence of descendants of the Cooper family (Marion Lee Cooper of Jefferson City; Mildred Amick of New Franklin; Glenda and Becky Wolfe of Boonville; Devin and Joyce Cooper Campbell of Cairo, Mo.; and Oree Cooper of Glasgow), the stone was dedicated, and after 147 years the tombstone intended for Sarshel Cooper’s grave finally caught up with his remains. It now stands framed between the graves of his son, Joseph (and his wife Francis), and his grandson, Col. Stephen Cooper, on a high hill over-looking the Howard County river bottoms only a few miles from the site of Cooper’s Fort where Sarshel Cooper was killed 180 years ago.



**Joseph Cooper Cemetery**

In the Joseph Cooper Cemetery on Route Z (left) are buried, from right to left, Joseph Cooper (son of Sarshell), born 1792, died 1875, age 83, and his wife, Francis, died 1878, age 81; Sarshell Cooper, born 1762, died 1815, age 52; and Col. Stephen Cooper (son of Joseph), born 1835, died 1911, age 75.

In the Benjamin Cooper Cemetery on Route Z (right) are buried Col. Benjamin Cooper (far right), died 1840, age 87; his wife, Anna (to the left of his stone) died 1826, age 66; and, behind them, their son, Benjamin, Jr., died 1849, age 59, and his wife, Phebe (death date obscured) age 77. There are also a number of unmarked graves presumed to be slaves, in this cemetery.



**Benjamin Cooper Cemetery**





**Boonslick And  
The Fur Trade In  
Fact And Fiction**

# "BOONSLICK AND THE FUR TRADE IN FACT AND FICTION"

By Kirke P. Wilson

*Boonslick Heritage, March 1994*

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*(BHS member, Kirke P. Wilson, lives in San Francisco. This article is from a Work-in-progress following the Cooper and other pioneer families on the rolling frontier from Chesapeake Bay to the Pacific Ocean. Mr. Wilson welcomes comments and inquiries from others interested in the Missouri frontier and the Santa Fe Trail. Letters can be addressed to him at 172 Hancock Street, San Francisco, CA 94114)*

Much of the fur trade of the early nineteenth century moved along the Missouri River and through the Boonslick region of central Missouri. The pioneers of Boonslick, many of them veterans of earlier frontiers, were fully occupied building and defending their little community and with few exceptions, remained at Boonslick. While the fur trade held few attractions for the older settlers, some of the young men of the Missouri frontier participated briefly in the fur trade before starting families on Boonslick farms or becoming pioneers on new frontiers in the West.

Boonslick was beyond the frontier in 1808 when Benjamin Cooper (1756-1841) and his wife Anne Fullerton Cooper (1760-1826) erected a log house on the northern bank of the Missouri River about one mile downstream from Arrow Rock. Cooper was a native of Culpeper County, Virginia, who had settled in Kentucky in 1779. He was one of the pioneers at Fort Boonesborough and served with Daniel Boone in the Battle of the Blue Licks and the 1782 invasion of Ohio under George Rogers Clark. He settled in Madison County, Kentucky, and by 1806 he had moved with his family to Hancock's Bottom in St. Charles County, Missouri. Within months of building his Boonslick cabin, the Coopers were ordered by Governor Meriwether Lewis to return to the safety of St. Charles County one hundred miles to the east.

In early 1810, Cooper organized a company of 42 men, including several Cooper relatives, and returned to Boonslick where he reclaimed the cabin he had abandoned two years earlier. The little company cleared land planted crops and built homes for the women and children who joined them that summer. The Boonslick pioneers prospered for two years until the spring of 1812 when the community suffered the first of a series of Indian raids that continued intermittently for three years. The settlers built family forts along the Missouri River and successfully defended their families and property, at great cost, during the War of 1812.

During the same period that Boonslick pioneers were establishing their community on the Missouri frontier, another group of pioneers were exploring the remote corners of the West looking for beaver. For nearly forty years, this "reckless breed of men," as historian Robert Cleland called them, followed the major river systems of the West setting their deadly steel traps in the shallow waters and icy mountain streams that feed the Colorado, the Columbia, the Arkansas and the Missouri. Trapping alone or in small groups, these intrepid mountain men trapped, skinned, dried and packed beaver pelts for shipment downstream to traders and eventually to the cities of the United States and Europe. The skins were scraped, stretched on willow hoops, dried in the sun, folded fur side in and compressed into hundred-pound bundles for shipping. The packs of beaver skins were wrapped in deer skins and transported in rude rafts or bull boats to trading posts where the furs were repacked for shipment. (1)

From the time of the Lewis and Clark expedition in 1804-1806 to the time of the first pioneer caravans across the plains in the early 1840s, the mountain men were the advance guard for the families that followed. They built no communities apart from a few key trading posts, but, as long as beaver hats remained fashionable the trappers worked the vast wilderness finding routes and learning the ways of the Indians. The independent trappers and the fur trading companies were the visible presence of the United States in most of the newly-acquired Louisiana territory for forty years. Cleland summarized the contribution of the fur trapper and mountain man, "the feet of a nation walked his half-obliterated trails; the course of empire followed his solitary pathways to the western sea." (2)

For historian Bernard DeVoto, the fur trappers and mountain men “went about the blank spaces of the map like men going to the barn.”(3)

St. Louis, with its strategic location on the Mississippi River near the mouth of the Missouri River, had been the commercial center of the western fur trade since before the Louisiana Purchase. At St. Louis, trading companies maintained offices, organized parties and shipped furs. Trappers from St. Louis followed the Missouri River through the Boonslick Country to the Rocky Mountains where they trapped, explored and sometimes remained. These early trappers suffered extremes of isolation and risk for relatively little return. The settlers at Boonslick, in contrast, were farmers and family men. They were prepared to accept the hard work and risks of the frontier, but they were also committed to building a community. One older settler who was active in the fur trade was Ezekiel Williams (c. 1775-1744), a native of Kentucky, Boonslick pioneer and early mountain man. He was an independent trapper in Montana in 1807 and a member of the Missouri Fur company that constructed Fort Mandan in North Dakota in 1809. Apart from emergency visits to Boonslick to recruit assistance in 1813 and 1814, Williams remained in the mountains until 1815.

While Williams was an exception among the older generation of Boonslick pioneers several of the children who had grown up at Boonslick participated, as young adults, in the fur trade, the Santa Fe traffic and the opening of the West. Three of the younger generation of Coopers, teenage defenders of Boonslick during the Indian raids of 1812-1815, accompanied Ezekiel Williams in some of his adventures in the fur trade. William Wolfskill (1798-1866) was the son of a Boonslick pioneer and a member of the 1822 Becknell party on the Santa Fe Trail. He was a trapper in the Rocky Mountains, founder of the Old Spanish Trail to California and eventually a prosperous rancher in California. Matthew Kincaid (1795-1860) moved from Kentucky to Missouri as a child in 1809 where his father David Kincaid built one of the family forts at Boonslick. As a teenager, the younger Kincaid was a member of Sarshel Cooper’s company during the Indian wars. He was on the Santa Fe Trail in 1825 and was an early resident of New Mexico, Colorado and California. The best known of the next generation was Christopher Carson (1809-1868), the son of Lindsay Carson. The elder Carson had been among the defenders of Boonslick and was killed there in an accident in 1818. Kit Carson ran away from Boonslick as a teenager and went west where he was variously a trapper, guide and soldier as well as a frontier legend. (4)

The first two years on the Missouri frontier were relatively peaceful until 1812 when William Clark, the territorial governor, relocated a band of approximately 100 Sauk and Fox Indians to an area between Boonslick and the settlements downstream. The following year, the military closed Fort Osage leaving Boonslick exposed as the westernmost outpost of the United States. From 1812 to 1815, the 300 residents of Boonslick lived in family forts and, with little outside assistance, vigorously defended their families and farms against intermittent Indian raids. Although Benjamin and his brother Sarshel Cooper (1763-1815) were leaders in the Boonslick defense, three younger members of the large Cooper clan took time away from the Indian battles to assist their neighbor Ezekiel Williams in an elaborate and controversial effort to rescue lost companions and recover hidden furs.

In 1810, Williams traveled with a party of twenty into the Arapaho country of Wyoming and Colorado. The party continued trapping until it was scattered by Indian raids. Williams and five others moved first to the North Platte and Sweetwater to avoid the Indians and then back to the head of the Arkansas where three of the remaining six were killed by Indians. The depleted party hid their

furs and, with some trepidation, took refuge among the Arapaho where they spent the winter of 1811-1812. Suspecting that their hosts may have been responsible for the deaths of their three companions, the trappers slipped away from the Indians in the spring of 1812. Uncertain about where he was, Williams decided to try escaping down the Arkansas River. He left his companions in March 1812 and followed the river, trapping as he went. He trapped for a year in the New Mexico-Colorado area and, by June 1813, had reached the lower Arkansas where he was captured by Kansas Indians. The Indians confiscated some of his furs but escorted him to Fort Osage in western Missouri.

By the fall of 1813, Williams had successfully recovered most of the furs he had lost to the Kansas Indians and returned to Boonslick where he spent the winter of 1813-1814 at Cooper's Fort. He joined the settlers fighting the Indians and also successfully courted a widow with six children. The following spring, the newly married Williams organized a party to return to the mountain to rescue his companions and recover the furs he had hidden. As he later recounted:

*... I started from Boons-lick, to go and bring in my fur from the Arrapahows, in company with Morris May, Braxton Cooper, and 18 Frenchmen called Pillebers Company [Editor's Note: This is a reference to a company of St. Louis fur traders led by Joseph Philibert]. When we arrived at the Arrapahows, I called a council of the chiefs....(5)*

The chiefs told Williams that his companions of 1812 were all dead. With Cooper, May and Michael Le Clair, a member of Philibert's Company, Williams retrieved some of the furs he had hidden three years earlier and rafted them down the Arkansas River. After traveling an estimated 500 miles, Williams and his companions found the river too low to continue. Williams hid the bundles of fur planning to return for them the following spring when the water levels would be higher.

In a sworn statement, Braxton Cooper confirmed Williams' story:

*... on the 16<sup>th</sup> of May, 1814, I started and went with Ezekiel Williams from this place to go to the Arapahows on the head of the Arkansas, to assist said Williams to bring in some furs he had left in that country.... Sometime in July, we left that town and headed down the Arkansas four or five hundred miles where we were compelled to leave the canoes and loading, the water being too shallow to descend further; from which place we returned home by land. (6)*

After hiding the furs on the lower Arkansas River, Williams and Braxton Cooper returned to their Boonslick homes during the early fall of 1814 with nothing to show for six months of danger and hard work.

Braxton Cooper retired from the fur trade after the 1814 adventure and Williams recruited two other young Coopers to join him in recovering the furs hidden on the Arkansas River. Joseph Cooper (1792-1875) was the son of Captain Sarshel Cooper, and his cousin William Cooper (1796-1848) was the son of Colonel Benjamin Cooper. During the winter of 1814-1815, according to Braxton Cooper,

*.... Williams received information that a party was forming at St. Louis to go and steal his fur, to be piloted by Le Clair, a Frenchman in Williams employ, who was present when the fur was hid; consequence of which Williams set out with William Cooper and Joseph Cooper to get it. They returned the summer following and informed me that they had got off the fur before said party got there. (7)*

In **The Lost Trappers**, a popularized history published in 1847, David Coyner dramatized Williams' 1814-1815 trip from Boonslick to the Arkansas to protect the hidden furs:

*On the 26<sup>th</sup> of December the old veteran trapper, with his two youthful companions, Joseph and William Cooper left Cooper's fort, again to brave the perils of the wilderness. They set out on horses, with ten day's provisions, and traveled up the Missouri to fort Osage, where they left the river and went a southwest course until they struck the Osage River. Here they found fine grass for their horses. In the prairies there was a deep snow, and the wind blew very cold. Leaving the Osage, they journeyed a west course until they came to the Neasho (Neosho) river, which is an affluent to the Great Arkansas and interlocks with the tributaries of the Kansas. Two days before they reached the above river, their provisions failed, and not a living thing was to be seen on the face of the earth...*  
(8)

To maintain the dramatic interest, Coyner invented a series of fictional scenes in which the little party is successively saved from certain starvation by finding fresh walnuts under the snow, killing squirrel and finally through the charity of Indians. On the very day that "William Cooper fainted on the prairie, from hunger and fatigue," the party conveniently finds a herd of buffalo. As Coyner tells the story, Williams and the Coopers continued up the Arkansas river suffering from cold and hunger and eating whatever was available including a wolf and a horse while eluding Indians.

Coyner's inventions and inaccuracies have befuddled generations of historians trying to separate fiction from fact. Hiram Chittenden, the dean of fur trade scholars, described the Coyner book as the "completest fabrication that was ever published under the guise of history." Chittenden acknowledged that the framework of the Williams saga was based on fact but complained that Coyner had added numerous fictional embellishments. (9) In **The Lost Trappers**, Coyner collapses the chronology. He places Williams with the Arapaho in 1812-1813 rather than 1811-1812 and omits the May 1814 expedition with Morris May and Braxton Cooper in its entirety. By combining the May 1814 and Christmas 1814 expeditions, Coyner has Joseph Cooper and William Cooper traveling to the mountains. The dramatic adventures in Coyner's story may have occurred but not as recounted.  
(10)

According to Coyner, he prepared **The Lost Trappers** manuscript during 1845-1847 and his sources included "papers furnished by ... Col. Cooper of Howard County." (11) Since Benjamin Cooper died in 1841, Coyner is either wrong about his chronology, wrong about his sources or he had unusual powers of communication.

In addition to the egregious liberties of Coyner, historians have found the multiple Coopers confusing. According to Chittenden, Braxton, Joseph and William were brothers. (12) The confusion is understandable. Joseph and William Cooper were cousins and the Braxton Cooper who accompanied Williams in May 1814 was their uncle, the younger brother of Benjamin and Sarshel Cooper, and one of three Coopers named Braxton who lived at Boonslick between 1810 and 1815. The others included a young cousin from Kentucky who was killed by Indians at Boonslick in September 1814 as well as a son of Sarshel Cooper who would have been a child in 1814. (13)

The true story of the 1814-1815 expedition is somewhat less melodramatic than Coyner's 1847 version but equally exciting. Williams and the two young Coopers raced across the winter prairie to the hiding place on the Arkansas River. The treacherous Le Clair, possibly working as an agent for the mysterious "certain men in St. Louis," recruited Osage Indians to assist him. When the

Indians found that Williams and the Coopers were guarding the furs, the Indians deserted and the opportunistic Le Clair abandoned his plan to steal the furs.

As Williams later explained, he and the two young Coopers reached the hiding place before his larcenous former employee Le Clair. The three Boonslickers,

*... waited the coming of the plunderers, but they did not appear. When the water raised in the spring, we set off with my fur down the Arkansas, and when I arrived at the settlement I met Messrs John and James Lemon's (sic), who told me they were at Cheniers village, when the party returned, which went to steal the fur, and were told by said party that they (said party) were employed by certain men in St. Louis, and that their orders were to kill us if we had got there first, and take the fur and bring it in. That they were to have as many Indians to assist them as necessary, that they had hired a large party, but had not told them the particulars of their business until they had got within a few miles of the fur. When the Indians were informed of it, they abruptly left them and went back home. (14)*

When the spring rains raised the level of the river, Williams and the Coopers floated the furs down the river to Arkansas Post where the furs were sold. Williams and the two young Coopers returned to Boonslick during the summer of 1815 where Joseph Cooper learned that his father Sarshel Cooper had been killed the previous spring in an Indian raid at Cooper's Fort.

Williams discovered that his adventures were not over. He was accused of selling furs that rightly belonged to the fur company and of murdering his companions of 1811-1812 to steal their furs. The charges, although widely publicized, were found to be groundless. Williams settled down on his wife's farm where he was a neighbor of Col. Benjamin Cooper. In 1821, the Williams farm was the rendezvous for William Becknell and the first successful party to cross the Santa Fe Trail. In 1827, Williams returned to the wilderness for a year as captain of a large trading party on the trail to Santa Fe. He died in Missouri in 1844.

During the early settlement of Boonslick, most of the pioneers were too busy clearing land, planting crops and defending their community to become part of the fur trade. Apart from old mountain men like Ezekiel Williams, the adventuresome sons of Boonslick were the members of the next generation like the younger Coopers, Matthew Kincaid, William Wolkskill and Kit Carson. Members of this generation participated briefly in the fur trade and the Santa Fe traffic before moving on to become the pioneers of the next generation in the far west.

## NOTES

*Biographical information about Benjamin Cooper, Sarshel Cooper and their families is from unpublished manuscripts prepared by the author.*

1. Carl P. Russell, **Firearms, Traps & Tools of the Mountain Men** (Albuquerque, New Mexico, 1977, reprinted 1986), pp. 151-159.
2. Robert Glass Cleland, **This Reckless Breed of Men** (New York, 1950), p. 5.
3. Bernard De Voto, **Across the Wide Missouri** (Boston, 1947), p. 5.
4. Biographies of the children of Boonslick can be found in Leroy R Hafen, **The Mountain Men and the Fur Trade of the Far West**, 10 vols. (Glendale, California, 1968) and Dan L. Thrapp, **Encyclopedia of Frontier Biography**, 3 vols. (Glendale, California, 1988).

5. Ezekiel Williams letter of August 7, 1816, to Joseph Charless published in the St. Louis **Missouri Gazette** September 14, 1816, and reprinted in David Coyner, **The Lost Trappers**, ed. David J. Weber (Albuquerque, New Mexico, 1970), pp. 180-181.
6. Braxton Cooper affidavit of August 8, 1918, published in the **Missouri Gazette**, September 14, 1816, and in Coyner, p. 182.
7. Coyner, p 182.
8. Coyner, pp 88-89
9. Hiram M. Chittenden, **History of the American Fur Trade in the Far West**, 3 vols. (New York, 1902), pp 645-648.
10. The most reliable account of the adventure is Frederic E Voelker, "Ezekiel Williams" in Hafen, **The Mountain Men**, Vol. IX, pp. 393-408.
11. Coyner, p. 2.
12. Chittenden, p 647.
13. David J. Weber, Coyner's recent editor, identified the correct Braxton Cooper. The confusion reappears on the Santa Fe Trail in 1822 and 1823 when a Braxton Cooper, this time the son of Sarshel Cooper, is a member of parties organized by his uncle Benjamin Cooper.
14. Coyner, p. 181.

**Editor's Note:** Howard County Deed Records (Book A, pp. 32-34 and pp. 257-260; and Book C, p. 126 and 309) reveal that Ezekiel Williams bought 320 arpents (about 270 acres) of bottom land in what was then known as "Nash's Prairie" from "Yeasant Dehetre" for \$960 on February 17, 1817, and in that same year acquired Lot No. 7 in the town of Franklin with a frontage of 132 feet on Second Main Cross Street. He then did some trading with Thomas Gray, who owned Lot No. 16 and managed to obtain frontage on First Main Street facing the town square. Williams also served as a juror in David Barton's Howard County Circuit Court in 1817 and 1818 (Record Book 1, numerous citations). In 1819 he was involved with laying out a number of roads in both Cooper and Howard Counties; and during 1820 and part of 1821 he was involved in various legal complications connected with the settling of his wife's former husband's estate (see both Howard County Circuit Court Record Book 2 and Cooper County Circuit Court Record Book 1).

In the fall of 1821, the expedition organized by William Becknell that turned out to be the first successful trading expedition to Santa Fe, thus inaugurating the Santa Fe Trail, probably left from Williams' home. There is not absolute certainty that Williams was part of this expedition, but it seems safe to assume that he was.

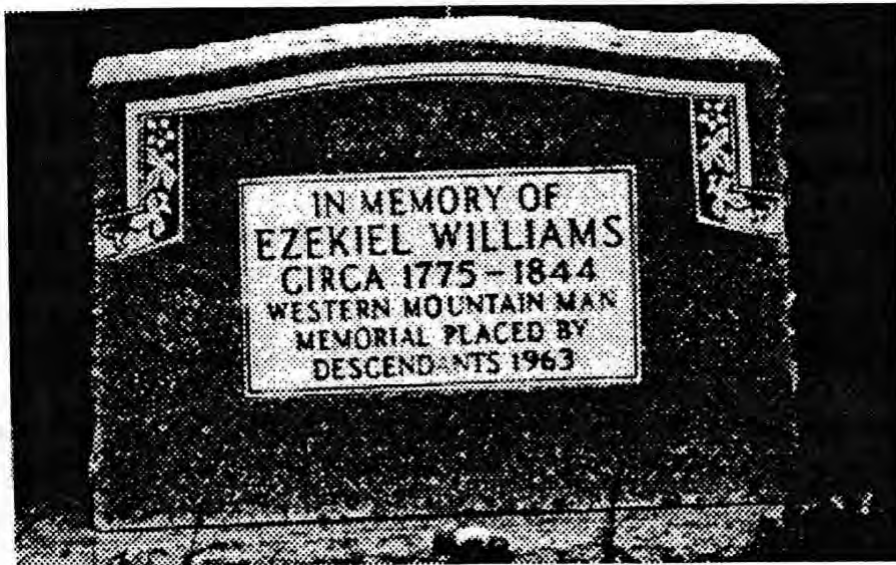
In November of 1822 Williams bought two town lots in Boonville – No 132, with 90 feet facing High Street between Eighth and Ninth; and No. 22, a corner lot, with 90 feet on Morgan Street and 150 feet on Second Street (Cooper County Deed Record Book B, p. 268). He also acquired some land in Lamine Township, just west of Boonville and moved to Cooper County in early 1823. During the July term of the Cooper County Circuit Court, Williams was accused of bigamy (Case No. 7), but after several continuances the case was dismissed.

In 1827 Williams led what turned out to be a very successful caravan of some 53 wagons to Santa Fe (**Missouri Intelligencer**, Fayette, May 24, 1827), and he may have continued in the Santa fe Trade through 1829. Shortly after this, probably with money he had made in the Santa Fe trade, he decided to move his family to a remote section of what is now the northeast part of the Benton County, not far from the Osage River. As James H. Lay points out in his 1876 **Sketch of the History of Benton County, Missouri**, Williams built a house in the bottom along Williams Creek on the old



trail that later became the Boonville-Springfield Road. He is, in fact, considered to have been one of the earliest settlers in what is now Benton County. When that county was finally officially organized in 1835, the township Williams was residing in was named in his honor. A post office was also established at Williams' house and was called "Cole Camp," though the present-day town of Cole Camp was actually established several miles northeast of his house.

Ezekiel Williams died on December 24, 1844, and was buried in the old "Williams grave yard" on land he sold to the Methodist Episcopal Church prior to his death. This cemetery is now known as Union Cemetery. Descendants of Williams still live in the Cole Camp area, and in 1963 they placed a stone marker (below) in the cemetery as a memorial to him.



## About the Author



Kirke Wilson

Kirke Wilson grew up hearing the stories his Simpson grandmother and her sisters had heard from their grandfather of restless ancestors crossing the plains in covered wagons and raising families on the frontier of settlement. The stories exaggerated some events, Grandfather Simpson, for example, was unlikely to have known General Washington, and neglected others, like the assumption that vacant Indian lands were available for settlement. There were accounts of ordinary people, dissatisfied with their prospects, moving westward over several generations to unclaimed lands and better opportunities. The adventures were exciting for young ears but they were incomplete. They were vague about why these folks kept moving and what, if any, guidance their stories offered their descendants.

The exploration of family history consumed more than half a century of intermittent travel and research following the Simpson family from the shores of Maryland's Chesapeake Bay, to North Carolina, Tennessee and Missouri where they converged in Platte County, Missouri with the Cooper family who had followed a similar path from Virginia to Kentucky and Missouri. The exploration included visits to places where the two families had lived and the libraries, historical societies, cemeteries and battlefields where their lives and those of people like them are remembered. The research was backwards, from west to east, from well-documented to more speculative. It was guided by the precision of local genealogists, contextualized by historians and enriched by contributions from remote relatives, some of whom were descendants of the family members who chose to remain in North Carolina, Tennessee or Missouri rather than complete the transcontinental journey to the Pacific Ocean.

Kirke Wilson retired in 2005 after 31 years as director and president of the Rosenberg Foundation in San Francisco. He had previously been the West Coast Vice President of a public policy consulting company, a Staff Assistant in the office of the Governor of California and an organizer of migrant and seasonal farm workers in the San Joaquin Valley. He graduated from Yale where he majored in philosophy.

In addition to several iterations of family history, Kirke Wilson has published articles, reviews and opinion pieces covering a wide range of subjects. His articles have appeared in *Boonslick Heritage*, *Foundation News*, *The Nation*, *Overland Journal* and other publications.

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