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# "The American Canaan": Eighteenth century Trans-Appalachian migration

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“The American Canaan”: Eighteenth Century Trans-Appalachian Migration

Lauren C. James

A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY

In

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the degree of

Master of Arts

History

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*For my Grandfather, Jim T. Smith, whose wisdom, love, and support have shown the value and importance of family and heritage and whose stories have illuminated what it truly means to be an historian and a proud Tennessean.*

*“The mountains are fountains not only of rivers and fertile soil, but of men. Therefore, we are all born mountaineers....and going to the mountains is going home.”*  
*-- John Muir*

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## **Abstract**

This thesis examines the events that produced a uniquely Tennessean identity before the 1796 statehood through a careful examination of the late colonial, Revolutionary, and Early Republic periods in the Appalachian backcountry. It argues that land, as a tangible embodiment of the republican notion of liberty, was the chief motivation for the actions of these backcountry settlers in the latter half of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It first addresses specific circumstances concerning the motivation for the migration of hundreds, even thousands, of individuals across the Appalachian Mountains into Cherokee lands from four distinct originating colonies: Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina. It then examines the way in which the American Revolution and subsequent War for Independence played into the cultural, social, economic, and familial connectedness of the settlers in the Tennessee country. The final portion of the thesis addresses the post-Revolution and Early Republic periods in which the Tennessee country went through several governmental organizations before attaining statehood. Here, still, the notion that liberty is found in land ownership is prevalent as Tennesseans sought legitimacy in the new United States.

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## Introduction

*“Should this country once come into the hands of the Europeans, they may with propriety call it the American Canaan...this country seems longing for the hands of industry to receive its hidden treasures...”<sup>1</sup>*

When commissioned by the British to engineer a military fort in the isolated foothills of the Appalachian Mountains for use during the French and Indian War, German immigrant J.W. Gerard De Brahm noted his admiration, to the point of reverence, for the land upon which he would be building. De Brahm was a renowned cartographer and engineer who began work on Fort Loudoun on the Little Tennessee River in 1756. He was captivated by the “vallies [sic] of the richest soil” in the Tennessee country that would continue to beckon settlers throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. As land was the most valuable and coveted commodity in the eighteenth century, those longing to establish themselves in the British North American colonies sought it with the greatest priority. The ability to own land and cultivate it into a sustainable crop to provide a livelihood was a standard that separated free men from those who were dependent on another. Thus, land was the greatest tangible expression of the ideological notion of liberty.

Land, as it was tied to this republican idea of liberty, dominated the drive for westward movement of the eighteenth century. The desire for it, the settlement of it, the defense of it, and the legalization of it, shaped the manner in which Americans viewed the west. This study seeks to explore the precise circumstances that motivated thousands of Mid-Atlantic and Chesapeake settlers to journey over the Appalachian Mountains into the unimproved and dangerous backcountry in the 1760s and 1770s, those settlers’

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<sup>1</sup> J.W. Gerard DeBrahm, 1756, quoted in Andro Linklater, *Measuring America: How an Untamed Wilderness Shaped the United States and Fulfilled the Promise of Democracy* (New York: Walker & Co., 2002), 45.

involvement in the American Revolution, and the subsequent struggle for admission into the United States as an autonomous state. These settlers, who were often recent European immigrants or part of the growing middling class, sought available land upon which to establish themselves. Much of the desirable land on the eastern seaboard had been settled for several generations by the wealthy planting class, so new settlement was generally only available in the backcountry.

The present study is broken into three chronologically driven chapters spanning some forty years, because a distinct and dramatic change over time has been identified in this region. Chapter One, “‘To a Far and Distant Land’: Early Tennessee Settlement in the Eighteenth Century,” provides a context to the greater continental circumstances that ignited the desire for westward migration in the 1760s and early 1770s. Looking specifically at the colonies of Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina, the chapter argues that these colonists identified various forms of oppression that inhibited their acquisition of land and thus, their perceived rights as British subjects. These unfavorable situations encouraged several hundred eastern colonists to relocate themselves and their families in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. The chapter also argues that while settlers in the Watauga and Holston River Valleys in the Tennessee country were of diverse origins, they were able to quickly form strong connections with one another due to similar ideological beliefs in the importance of land.

Chapter Two, “‘This Unhappy Civil War’: The Overmountain Men in the War for Independence,” examines the involvement of the Tennessee settlers in the American Revolution and the defense of the land they had worked to improve and inhabit. The chapter challenges misconceptions of the Tennessee settlers, arguing that they desired to

remain connected and involved in the affairs of the established colonies, especially during the imperial crisis that resulted in irrevocable independence from the mother country. The chapter also argues that the settlers' support for the Patriot cause was due to their wish to maintain their settlement west of the Proclamation Line of 1763, which would be threatened should the British emerge victorious from the conflict. A militia force from the Tennessee country that became known as the Overmountain Men participated in several skirmishes and battles; chief among them was the Battle of King's Mountain in 1780. This very physical participation in the Patriot movement speaks to their desire to see the eradication of British influence in the colonies. The war served to unify the community socially, economically, and emotionally and encouraged their desire to be able to govern themselves within the new country they helped create.

The third chapter, "'The Right of Separation': Tennessee's Struggle for Statehood," continues this chronological look at the region and the challenges it faced in the post-Revolution years of the 1780s and 1790s. This chapter examines the efforts of the inhabitants of the region to form their own state within the Union, and thus separate from the parent state of North Carolina. This movement for the creation of an independent state raised more problems than it solved, however. The status of the Tennessee country was in constant flux during the 1780s and early 1790s, which resulted in strained relations with neighboring Indian tribes and with the federal government. The chapter argues that the Tennessee settlers did not consider the American Revolution to be ended until they could claim full, autonomous admission into the United States. For the Tennesseans, the fruition of the struggles and victories of the American Revolution did not reach the rolling hills of their beloved land until they attained statehood in 1796.

This study is a new addition to the various historiographies to which it belongs. Studies in early Appalachia, the colonial backcountry, and the American Revolution do not necessarily address the vital importance of the republican concept that, for the early Tennesseans, liberty meant land ownership and that this mentality drove the settlement and statehood of the region. This locality has been grossly overlooked in the existing scholarship, and many secondary sources on the topic of the early Tennessee country offer little more than a sweeping, basic narrative of its eighteenth century Anglo-American origins. The body of historiography is sporadic in both dates of publication and scope. This study fills a niche in which the settlement motivations and patterns, Revolutionary involvement, and statehood aims are all detailed and driven by primary source evidence.

Frederick Jackson Turner's essay, "The Significance of the American Frontier in American History," published in 1893, sets the groundwork for scholars of the backcountry and frontier. Turner defined the frontier as the origin of the distinctive American identity. Turner's thesis rested on the idea that the continuous movement of the frontier line and the impact it had on those settlers defined the American experience. This experience, he argued, cultivated a uniquely exceptional and adventurous American character. Originally discussing the trans-Mississippi expansion, Turner's thesis has also been applied to the much earlier western expansion in the Early American backcountry. Since this "Turner Thesis" was presented, the academy has supported, tested, or refuted his findings, presenting innovative ways to consider the westward expansion of America. These "Turnerian" or "anti-Turnerian" scholars have created an entirely new installment

to the historiography of Colonial America, the American Revolution, and the Early Republic.

An early source discussing the backcountry during the Revolution is Thomas P. Abernethy's *Western Lands in the American Revolution*, published in 1937. It discusses Virginia's claims to western territories and the effect those claims had in the colony's Revolutionary experience. Abernethy argues that the item that Virginia most desired from the Revolution was, "the non-interference of Parliament in the local government and the continuance of all their ancient privileges."<sup>2</sup> While this source does not discuss the Tennessee country, Abernethy's argument can be applied to the settlers of the region in question. These "ancient privileges," however, are not defined in Abernethy's work and left a hole in the historiography.

Writing with James Blaine Hedges in 1949, Ray Allen Billington published *Westward Expansion: A History of the American Frontier* and reinforced Turnerian ideals about the implications of the American Frontier on the collective American character.<sup>3</sup> Providing a detailed, sweeping narrative of the expansion of Americans across the Appalachian Mountains, the trans-Mississippi region, and still further westward, the book places the highest emphasis on American exceptionalism. Altogether disregarding the plight of Native Americans who stood in the way of this westward movement, the authors argue that the movement of Anglo-Americans was an overwhelmingly positive aspect of the history of the continent.

Yet another historian ascribing to the Turnerian school is Robert W. Ramsey,

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas Perkins Abernethy, *Western Lands and the American Revolution* (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, Incorporated, for the Institute for Research in the Social Sciences, University of Virginia, 1937), 161.

<sup>3</sup> Ray Allen Billington and James Blaine Hedges, *Westward Expansion: A History of the American Frontier* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1949).

whose argument is found in *Carolina Cradle: Settlement of the Northwest Carolina Frontier, 1747-1762*.<sup>4</sup> First published in 1964, Ramsey traces the movement of the original Carolina settlers from the coastal communities to the western backcountry of the colony. He considers the economic, religious, and social influences that led the settlers to the backcountry. He also examines the geographic motivations in leading the settlers westward, a typical Turnerian line of thought. He also describes how these frontier communities were organized and supervised, using such primary documents as land grants, journals, and tax records. The trend of placing the study of the backcountry in an academic vacuum was persistent through the 1960s and 1970s, leaving the scholarly installments to the field devoid of any cultural or social study.

The late 1980s and early 1990s saw a shift away from Turnerian arguments in the study of the Early American backcountry. The historiography that followed this divergence was more apt to disagree with Turner as interdisciplinary studies infiltrated traditional historical research. In this portion of the historiography, the examination of the backcountry and westward movement aimed to dispel notions of an inherently courageous attitude in the settlers that led to their movement into the unimproved backcountry. These later installments into the historiography instead suggest economic, ecological, gender, racial, cultural, and social motivations for westward movement.

Editors Ronald Hoffman, Thad W. Tate, and Peter J. Albert compiled *An Uncivil War: The Southern Backcountry During the American Revolution*, which was published in 1985.<sup>5</sup> These essays collectively argue that the violence of the Revolution directly

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<sup>4</sup> Robert Wayne Ramsey, *Carolina Cradle: Settlement of the Northwest Carolina Frontier, 1747-1762* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1964).

<sup>5</sup> Ronald Hoffman, Thad W. Tate, and Peter J. Albert, *An Uncivil War: The Southern Backcountry During the American Revolution* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1985).

influenced the way backcountry communities were settled. This forceful method of settlement, they argue, also dictated the way outside perceptions of their society were shaped. This violence also gives insight into the manner in which the settlers interacted with Indians, who they fought for territory and hunting rights. These essays refute the Turner thesis as they suggest that the backcountry and frontier experiences were born out of violence and strife, instead of valor and strong character as Turner argues.

Albert Tillson, with *Gentry and Common Folk: Political Culture on a Virginia Frontier, 1740-1789* published in 1991, also examines the backcountry experience during the American Revolution. Tillson offers a study concerning the political relevance of the backcountry of Virginia during the Revolutionary Era. Tillson argues that the circumstances driving settlers west are significant and largely forgotten in the historiography of the Revolution due to the adherence to Turnerian notions of westward migration. Tillson offers his interpretation that the Virginia backcountry played a driving role in the Virginia Revolutionary efforts. Scholars of the Revolution, he argues, have forgotten the backcountry's principal role in the conflict. He asserts that, "the ideology and material circumstance of the revolutionary era combined to create a strikingly more republican ethos by 1789."<sup>6</sup> The academy has since acclaimed Tillson's work as perhaps the most significant installment in the historiography of the Revolutionary backcountry. This work provides a framework upon which scholars have since argued for the social, economic, and cultural significance of the backcountry. His argument that a "republican ethos" was not solidified until 1789 is refuted in several primary sources used in the current study.

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<sup>6</sup> Albert H. Tillson, *Gentry and Common Folk: Political Culture on a Virginia Frontier, 1740-1789* (Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1991), 159.

Other installments about the backcountry and Tennessee in the Revolution include Lyman Draper's *The Heroes of King's Mountain*, published in 1881<sup>7</sup>, and Hank Messick's *King's Mountain: The Epic of the Blue Ridge "Mountain Men" in the American Revolution*, published in 1976.<sup>8</sup> Both of these give great detail about the battle that would win Tennesseans recognition in 1780, but provide virtually no analysis or sources. John Pancake's *This Destructive War: The British Campaign in the Carolinas, 1780-1782* utilizes more scholarly sources, but his discussion of King's Mountain and the victorious Tennesseans is barely a chapter long.<sup>9</sup> None of these secondary sources provides context to the prevailing motivations for the Overmountain Men to become involved in the hostilities of the War for Independence on the side of the Patriots, or even why they participated in the war at all.

In 1996, Wilma A. Dunaway published *The First American Frontier: Transition to Capitalism in Southern Appalachia, 1700-1860*, applying world-systems theory to the development of Southern Appalachia and the American frontier as a whole.<sup>10</sup> Her examination of the world-systems theory, or the international division of labor, while applying it in the eighteenth and nineteenth century backcountry, was an entirely new addition to the historiography of the subject. This interdisciplinary approach to the subject was received with acclaim. Dunaway challenges many assumptions about the development of preindustrial Southern Appalachia's society and economy. She argues that capitalist exchange and production came to Appalachia much earlier than has been

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<sup>7</sup> Lyman Copeland Draper, *King's Mountain and its Heroes: History of the Battle of King's Mountain, October 7th, 1780, and the Events Which Led to It* (Cincinnati: P.G. Thomson, 1881).

<sup>8</sup> Hank Messick, *King's Mountain: The Epic of the Blue Ridge "Mountain Men" in the American Revolution* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1976).

<sup>9</sup> John S. Pancake, *This Destructive War: The British Campaign in the Carolinas, 1780-1782* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1985).

<sup>10</sup> Wilma A. Dunaway, *The First American Frontier: Transition to Capitalism in Southern Appalachia, 1700-1860* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).



recorded in the existing scholarship. Through this argument, Dunaway provides a new perspective on those living in the backcountry in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. She argues that they were economically viable and continued to trade with those in settled colonies and, later, states.

Adding greatly, both in quality and in volume, to the historiography of the Virginia backcountry is Warren Hofstra. Serving as an editor for many compilations concerning the Shenandoah Valley and the Virginia backcountry, Hofstra also published his original work titled *The Planting of New Virginia: Settlement and Landscape in the Shenandoah Valley*, in which he argues how the land shaped cultural and social mentalities of the settlers in the Valley. These installments to the Early American backcountry historiography utilize economic, architectural, environmental, and social information to provide a much deeper understanding of the significance of the backcountry. While Hofstra and his colleagues generally focus on the Virginia backcountry, their arguments and conclusions have been applied to other regions in the backcountry.

John R. Finger's *Tennessee Frontiers: Three Regions in Transition* was published in 2001 and presents two key themes that have sparked conversation among historians of Tennessee history.<sup>11</sup> First, he asserts that the backcountry settlers believed that the region offered unique opportunities that they could not get in the eastern colonies. He then examines the tension between local autonomy and central authority, citing distinctions of class and gender. Finger's examination of the region marked a new wave in looking at Tennessee's origins through a critical, rather than narrative, lens.

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<sup>11</sup> John R. Finger, *Tennessee Frontiers Three Regions in Transition* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001).

The study of the Southern Colonial and Revolutionary backcountry is a growing field in early American history. The examination of the Tennessee country is lacking in both breadth and depth, but the trend toward looking at the state's eighteenth century origins is emerging. This particular study can be situated in the existing historiography as an in-depth examination of the manner in which republican ideologies were expressed in the early Tennessee country. The driving importance of land, in every respect, has yet to be fully explored in the current body of scholarship. Utilizing an array of primary sources, this study adds a significant contribution to the field. Sources such as the Draper Manuscripts, Records of the House of Burgesses, Colonial and State Records of North Carolina, *The Virginia Gazette*, the William Blount Papers, the John Sevier Papers, records of the first fourteen congressional sessions, and sundry other documents provide the evidence necessary to argue for the continued importance of land in the backcountry.

The fascination German engineer De Brahm had with the fertile and untouched land of the Tennessee country spread rapidly to colonists who were desirous of fulfilling their dream and right of land ownership. The eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries saw a revolution of ideals that were expressed through documents and events like the Declaration of Independence, the War for Independence, and the United States Constitution. These ideals were tangibly and practically applied in the backcountry region, specifically in the Tennessee country, through the land. The origins of this kind of thought in America would dictate the manner in which the country would progress and process the events of the nineteenth century.

## Chapter One

### “To a Far and Distant Land”: Tennessee Settlement in the Eighteenth Century<sup>1</sup>

The British colonies in the New World had long been a source of lucrative crops and natural resources for the empire. The Caribbean holdings dominated the economic return, but the population on the islands was overwhelmingly built of African slave labor with very few British subjects. The thirteen North American colonies, however, saw the most settlement of British communities and a more distinct transplant of English culture, religion, and ideology. The relationship between these colonies and the mother country became strained in the eighteenth century, as many colonists realized a divergence in the way each side defined notions of liberty and equality. This, of course, culminated in the American Revolution and the War for Independence, but many colonists anticipated these movements by several years and decided to remove themselves from undesirable governments. Many Pennsylvanians, Marylanders, Virginians, and North Carolinians identified various forms of oppression in their home colonies that inhibited their right to own land. In order to secure this right for themselves and their families, settlers poured over the Appalachian Mountains in the 1760s and 1770s in pursuit of a new homestead that would be out of the realm of corrupt colonial governments.

A series of events, circumstances, and movements during the 1760s encouraged an evolving political, social, and economic climate in and among the British North American colonies. During and after the French and Indian War, the colonies began to see just how they fit into the hierarchical structure of the British Empire. At the close of

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<sup>1</sup> A folk song settlers sang upon their trek over the Appalachian Mountains began: “Come to me, my dear, and give me your hand and let us take a social ramble to some far and distant land...”. Found in Hank Messick, *King's Mountain: The Epic of the Blue Ridge "Mountain Men" in the American Revolution* (Boston: Little Brown, 1976), 16.

the French and Indian War, Britain had more than doubled its North American land holdings, but had nearly bankrupted the treasury in the process, incurring a national debt of £129.6 million.<sup>2</sup> In order recuperate the financial losses acquired during the war with France, as well as fund a standing army of British Regulars who were to patrol the borders and extremities of the new land holdings, Parliament had to dramatically raise taxes in Britain and its colonial holdings.

As a result, those royally appointed colonial governors in America became the embodiment of the very unpopular Parliamentarians who instituted the taxes and stringent trade restrictions. The end of this lengthy and costly war thus marked the end of an extended period of salutary neglect. This reflects the relationship between the British monarch and Parliament and their colonial dependents in America. Beginning in the mid-seventeenth century the official attitude of Britain toward the North American colonial holdings was one of avoidance in terms of the implementation or enforcement of laws or acts in the colonies. This leniency of trade restrictions, taxation, and inter-colonial relations necessitated that the thirteen North American colonies become highly self-governed and self-reliant by the mid-eighteenth century. Parliament imposed various measures to raise money for the treasury, including the Sugar Act and the Stamp Act in 1764 and 1765, respectively.

Discontent spread from Massachusetts to Georgia, but the Mid-Atlantic and Chesapeake colonies of Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina saw ardent and sometimes even violent objections to this sudden and unwelcome attention

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<sup>2</sup> Colin G. Calloway, *The Scratch of a Pen: 1763 and the Transformation of North America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 12.



Marylanders from the westernmost county of Frederick were placed in a vulnerable geographic position during the French and Indian War and Pontiac's Rebellion due to their isolation from the colonial center on the Eastern Shore and their proximity to many Indian tribes.<sup>5</sup> Since the fur trade was disrupted on the Potomac River due to violent conflicts with nearby Indian tribes, many western Marylanders lost a means of income. They were thus forced to find other employment or move elsewhere. The former option was very difficult, as much of Maryland's economy was situated in the eastern part of the province and was based on tobacco production through the use of expensive African slave labor. Western Maryland was less amenable to such large tobacco plantations. Relocation was the most viable option for most Marylanders who had faced financial difficulties due to the recent struggles with Indians. Western lands recently opened through the cession of lands at the end of the French and Indian War were an attractive option for many Marylanders seeking to relocate.

Even though the existence of the Indian conflicts affected many Marylanders, these colonists exercised their frustrations in generally peaceful ways. The same could not be said for their neighbors in Pennsylvania. In the winter of 1763, less than six months before the end of the French and Indian War, several predominantly Scots-Irish settlers from the central counties of the colony rioted in Philadelphia. This group called the Paxton Boys not only rioted, but attacked a small Indian settlement and brutally murdered twenty natives. These hostilities, which later became known as the Conestoga

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<sup>5</sup> The Frederick County of the mid-eighteenth century is now divided into Garrett, Allegheny, Washington, and Frederick counties.

Massacre, were allegedly due to the fear and hatred of the Indians that was exacerbated by the French and Indian War and Pontiac's Rebellion.<sup>6</sup>

The Paxton Boys and other Pennsylvanians also had a growing discontent with Governor John Penn because they believed the land inhabited by native groups in central Pennsylvania should be opened to European settlement. They argued that Penn was misusing their tax money to support and preserve the Indian settlements occupying this desirable land. The financial support and tradition of friendly relations toward the native groups in Pennsylvania were the result of an agreement made between tribal ancestors and the colony's founder, William Penn, in the early seventeenth century. The current Governor Penn released a statement about the 1763 massacre saying that those involved should be, "apprehend[ed] and secure[d] in some of the publick Gaols [sic] of this Province, that they may be brought to their Trials, and be proceeded against according to Law."<sup>7</sup> For the Paxton Boys, Penn's dismissal of their grievances only inflamed their discontent even more. With feelings of rejection by the leaders who they expected to protect them, many central and western Pennsylvanians realized the need to relocate to a settlement in which they could begin anew.

Violent frustrations with royally appointed governors were not isolated to Pennsylvania. From 1768-1771, a movement swept through North Carolina that reflected the outcries of thousands of disgruntled settlers in the central counties of the province. A dramatic population increase through Scots-Irish immigration in North Carolina in the

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<sup>6</sup> Jeremy Engels, "Equipped for Murder: The Paxton Boys and The Spirit of Killing All Indians in Pennsylvania, 1763-1764," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* (2005): 639.

<sup>7</sup> Benjamin Franklin, "A Narrative of the Late Massacres, in Lancaster County, of a Number of Indians, Friends of this Province, By Persons Unknown. With some Observations on the same, 1764," The Franklin Papers Yale University Library, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp?vol=11&page=42a> (accessed September 10, 2011).

1760s put a strain on the colony's already struggling economy. This drew hundreds of colonists out of the eastern cities and colonial centers toward the backcountry, which then rested in central North Carolina and at the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains.<sup>8</sup> The agriculture-based economy was suffering from a deep economic depression, due to several droughts in the planting seasons of the 1750s. Crop shortfalls prompted many to turn to purchasing goods and necessities from merchants. This, in addition to rising taxes in the colony, resulted in their mounting debt. Debts were not uncommon at the time, but from 1755 to 1765 the number of cases brought to court increased fifteen fold, from 7 annually to 111 in centrally located Orange County alone.<sup>9</sup> In order to amend these problems in the colony, it was evident even to King George III the colonial leadership had to change. Unfortunately for the inhabitants of North Carolina, the new governor was unpopular from the beginning. From his installment as royally appointed governor of North Carolina in 1765, William Tryon gained the reputation as a corrupt man who surrounded himself with similarly corrupt agents.<sup>10</sup>

Many North Carolinians cited the source of such corruption in the fact that county sheriffs would demand extra, unlawful fines and fees in addition to the already inflated taxes. Those most frustrated with the depravity of the colonial leaders became vocal and physical protestors known as Regulators, striving for a regulation of laws and policies in their province. According to the Deputy Sheriff of Anson County in December 1770, the Regulators refused to pay fees and extra taxes because they thought, "they were illused

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<sup>8</sup> Wayne E. Lee, *Crowds and Soldiers in Revolutionary North Carolina: The Culture of Violence in Riot and War* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2001), 15.

<sup>9</sup> James Whittenburg, "Planters, Merchants, and Lawyers: Social Change and the Origins of the North Carolina Regulation" *The William and Mary Quarterly*: 1977), 215-238.

<sup>10</sup> Testimony of John Butler. 7 December 1770. William Saunders, ed., *The Colonial Records of North Carolina*, vol. 15 (Raleigh, N.C.: P. M. Hale, Printer to the State, 1886), 762. *Documenting the American South*, University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2007.



[sic] by officers and did not know what they paid their money for.”<sup>11</sup> Governor Tryon, who preferred to keep the support of his ring of colonial officials rather than the favor of the people, endorsed this system of extortion. These infractions encouraged thousands of North Carolinians to mobilize as members of the Regulation. In order to obtain their goals, they engaged in violent protests and demonstrations.

Governor Tryon was adamant to quell any full-scale rebellion before it could escalate. A circular letter from Tryon to the colonels in the North Carolina militia signifies his acknowledgement of the Regulators as well as a plan of action. He states:

Whereas the Peace and good order of this Government has been lately violated and much injury done to the Persons and Properties of many Inhabitants of this Province by a Body of People who stile themselves Regulators, I...order and direct you forthwith to call a General Muster of so many of the Companies of the Regiment of Militia as you judge free from any engagements with those Insurgents, to be held at such place or places as you think most proper and make report to me as soon as possible of the number of Volunteers that are willing to turn out in the service of their King and Country.<sup>12</sup>

This call for arms against the Regulators ultimately resulted in the Battle of Alamance on May 16, 1771, “where about 6,000 appeared in arms and fought each other. 4,000 Regulators killing three Tryonians and 2,000 [Tryonians] killing twelve Regulators.”<sup>13</sup> With nothing resolved from the violence at Alamance, the Regulators remained disgruntled and considered alternatives to living under the economically and socially

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<sup>11</sup> Testimony of James Terry. 7 December 1770. William Saunders, ed., *The Colonial Records of North Carolina*, vol. 15 (Raleigh, N.C.: P. M. Hale, 1886), 762-763. *Documenting the American South*, University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2007.

<sup>12</sup> Circular letter from William Tryon. 19 October 1770. William Saunders, ed., *The Colonial Records of North Carolina*, vol. 8 (Raleigh, N.C.: P. M. Hale, Printer to the State, 1886), 679-680. *Documenting the American South*, University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2007.

<sup>13</sup> Description by Morgan Edwards of the Battle of Alamance. 1771. William Saunders, ed., *The Colonial Records of North Carolina*, vol. 8 (Raleigh, N.C.: P. M. Hale, Printer to the State, 1886), 655. *Documenting the American South*, University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2007.

oppressive rule of the royal governor. Many moved further west, across the Appalachian Mountains, into virtually untouched territory.

The Regulation dissipated with this western migration and with Tryon's removal from the province. Tryon was appointed as Governor of New York to replace Lord Dunmore, who would be taking the post of Governor of Virginia, the largest and wealthiest of King George's North American colonies. Dunmore's arrival in Virginia in 1771 was as unwelcome as Tryon's had been in North Carolina in 1765. At Dunmore's arrival in the colonial capital of Williamsburg, many Virginians made it evident that Regulation was not isolated to the central counties of North Carolina, but was echoed in Virginia as well. However, the Virginians were initially not as violent or boisterous as their North Carolinian neighbors. This is due in part to the more favorable economic situation in Virginia due to the booming tobacco culture.

The spirit and goals of the Regulation were resounding throughout Virginia due to frequent mention of the movement in the *Virginia Gazette*, the colony's newspaper. Dozens of editions of the *Virginia Gazette* mention or feature information about the Regulation between 1768-1776. A September 1771 article regarding the Battle of Alamance notes that Tryon's men attacked, "a set of Harmless and Industrious men who were striving hard against the Iron Hand of Oppression."<sup>14</sup> This exemplifies a clear sentiment of support for the Regulators and the identification of Tryon and other officials as oppressive and unjust. Later, in November of the same year, the *Virginia Gazette* published a letter to "His Excellency William Tryon" from someone under the assumed

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<sup>14</sup> "Newbern, August 23" *Virginia Gazette*, 26 September 1771. Rockefeller Library Archives. (accessed July 15, 2011).

name of Atticus.<sup>15</sup> Addressing Tryon, Atticus asserts, “The beginning of your Administration in the Province was marked with Oppression, and Distress to its Inhabitants....your Excellency had exemplified the Power of Government in the Death of a Hundred Regulators, the Survivors, to a Man, became Proselytes to Government.”<sup>16</sup> The fact that the publishers of the *Gazette* even printed this scathing letter to Tryon is enough to signify the leanings of the general populace of Virginia. Their disapproval of the corruption in North Carolina even foreshadows the feelings many Virginians would develop toward Dunmore and his advisors in the early 1770s.

The palpable sentiments of political restlessness in these colonies encouraged many to migrate to lands outside of the immediate attention of the unpopular governors and agents. Another motivating factor for western relocation stemmed immediately from the French and Indian War. With over 1.1 million white Europeans living in British North America at the beginning of the hostilities, tens of thousands of colonists served the Crown as militiamen.<sup>17</sup> Throughout their travels, many troops were taken to Fort Loudon in the western foothills of the Smokey Mountain chain of the Appalachian Mountains.<sup>18</sup> Travel to this British outpost ignited the desire of many colonial soldiers to relocate their families to this virtually untouched, fertile location at the conclusion of the War.

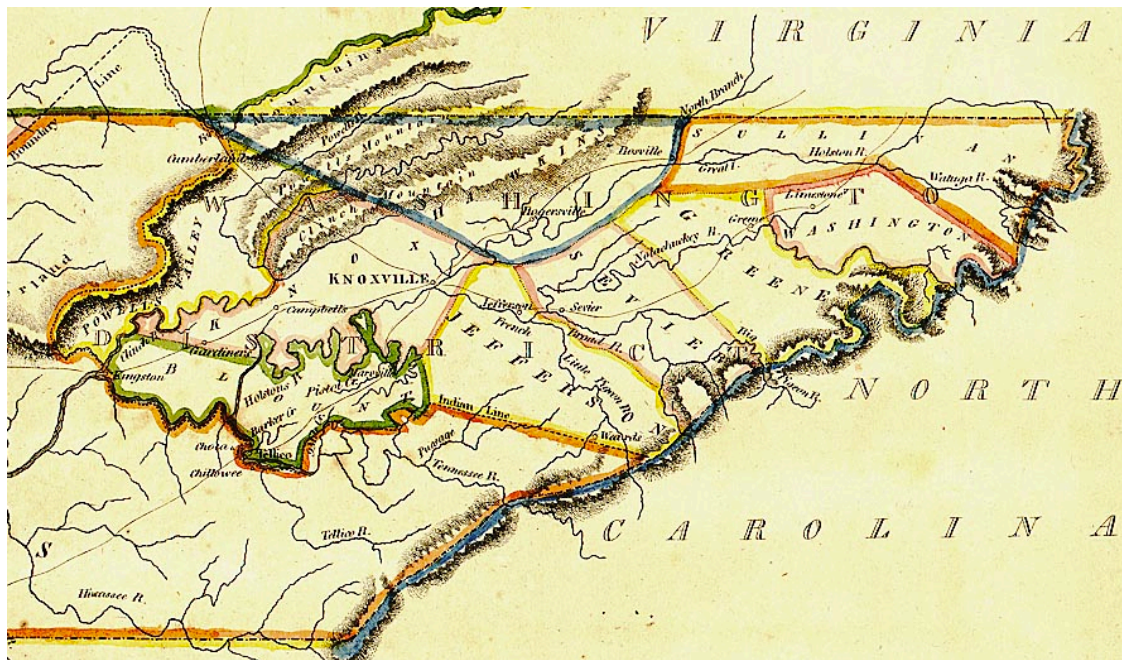
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<sup>15</sup> It was common in the eighteenth century for letters, both published and unpublished, to be signed with an assumed name linked to classical history, such as Roman or Greek. These names were often chosen to signify a certain characteristic, virtue, or event with which the ancient person was associated.

<sup>16</sup> *Virginia Gazette*, 7 November 1771. Rockefeller Library Archives. (accessed July 17, 2011).

<sup>17</sup> Richard Hofstadter, *America at 1750: A Social Portrait* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 3.

<sup>18</sup> See Figure 2. “East Tennessee Detail,” <http://www.tngenweb.org>. (Accessed March 5, 2012).



(Figure 2)

One such soldier who found his way into this country was Daniel Boone, the later-famous frontiersman. Born in 1734 in Pennsylvania to a Quaker family, Boone served the Crown as a militiaman in the French and Indian War and was brought to the Tennessee country to fight Cherokee who had allied with the French. While stationed in the Holston River valley in 1760, he inscribed on a beech tree, “D. Boone cilled a Bar [killed a bear] on [this] tree in the year 1760”.<sup>19</sup> Boone returned to the Holston River valley to settle in 1769 after traveling through Virginia and North Carolina. Upon his arrival, he noted that, “I had gained the summit of a commanding ridge, and, looking round with astonishing delight, beheld the ample plains, the beauteous tracts below.”<sup>20</sup> Boone, however, was not the first man of European descent to be so taken with the landscape in the Watauga and Holston River valleys. In the 1750s, German Moravian

<sup>19</sup> John Anthony Caruso, *The Appalachian Frontier: America's First Surge Westward* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2003), 74. Daniel Boone's inscription remains on the beech tree in present-day Washington County, Tennessee.

<sup>20</sup> Daniel Boone, “The Adventures of Colonel Daniel Boone, formerly a hunter,” *The American Magazine*, 1787.

bishop August Spangenberg was seeking to spread his faith throughout the American colonies. He traveled through western North Carolina and said of his voyage through the mountains in 1752 that, “[It is] a region that has perhaps been seldom visited since the creation of the world... We saw many hundreds of mountains, rising like great waves in a storm.”<sup>21</sup>

However, even with such positive reports of this land of mountains and valleys, the Royal Proclamation 1763, or the Proclamation Line of 1763, impeded settlement.<sup>22</sup> With the addition of the French claims in North America, Britain had to devise a way to govern and maintain this vast area that was almost entirely populated by Indian tribes. Some of these tribes had been forced to these western lands due to English colonization on the east coast. In order to avoid military conflict with native tribes and to contain settlement patterns, the Proclamation was created that effectively established the first standing British army in the American colonies. These British Regulars were stationed along the entire Appalachian Mountain range, from Georgia to Canada, to enforce restriction to the original colonial boundaries.

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<sup>21</sup> August Spangenberg. 14 Nov 1752. “August Spangenburg Diary” in Adelaide L. Fries et al., eds., *Records of the Moravians in North Carolina*, Vol 1, 59-60. (Raleigh, N.C., 1922-1969).

<sup>22</sup> See Figure 3. “Proclamation Line, 1763,” <http://www.ourstory.com/thread.html?t=541629> (Accessed March 5, 2012).



(Figure 3)

Those colonists living in Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina seeking to leave their home colony for either political or practical reasons were outraged. As royally appointed colonial governors and bureaucrats began to realize this Proclamation would not only be difficult to enforce, they saw that colonists had no qualms in defying it. Orders to obey this Proclamation were placed in several colonial newspapers, including the *Virginia Gazette*. Virginia's Lieutenant Governor Francis Fauquier made a proclamation in the August 1, 1766 edition of the publication recognizing that, "several people of Virginia have seated themselves on lands belonging to the Indians...in disobedience to his Majesty's commands." He thereby required, "...all persons who have made such settlements immediately to evacuate the same; which if they shall fail to do they must expect no protection or mercy from Government, and be exposed to the revenge of the exasperated Indians."<sup>23</sup> Governor John Penn of Pennsylvania also addressed the problem of those in western Pennsylvania violating the

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<sup>23</sup>*Virginia Gazette*, 01 August 1766. Rockefeller Library Archives. (accessed July, 15 2011).

Proclamation Line. As he said in his January 1768 proclamation, “As nothing can be of more importance to this province than preventing the calamitous effects of an Indian war...the necessary exertion of the powers of government [will be applied] in the removal of those rash and lawless intruders.”<sup>24</sup>

Royal Superintendent of Indian Affairs in the Southern Colonies John Stewart issued a statement concerning the colonists’ trade with Indian tribes across the Proclamation Line that, “no licenses for carrying on the said trade will be considered valid or sufficient.”<sup>25</sup> This effectively disrupted the trading practices of many colonists living in the backcountry who maintained correspondence with neighboring Indian tribes. These trade relationships had existed with these Southern tribes including the Cherokee and Creek since the early sixteenth century with Spanish exploration. No permanent settlements resulted from these early forays into the western foothills of the Appalachians, but it exposed the native peoples occupying the area to Europeans and their goods. Thereafter, both the natives and European settlers benefitted from trading with one another, but the legality of these transactions ceased with the Proclamation Line and its subsequent attempts at its reinforcement.

Several treaties made between colonists and Indian tribes attempted to make provisions for gradual settlement west of the Proclamation Line. One such agreement was the Treaty of Fort Stanwix, signed in 1768. The stipulations of this treaty required that the Iroquois Confederation relinquish claims to the land south of the Ohio River as far west as the mouth of the Tennessee River in exchange for £10,460 sterling, the

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<sup>24</sup> “Pennsylvania, January 5” *Virginia Gazette*, 03 March 1768. Rockefeller Library Archives. (accessed 17 July 2011).

<sup>25</sup> *Virginia Gazette*, 5 May 1768. Rockefeller Library Archives. (accessed July, 15 2011).

highest monetary sum ever paid by British colonists to an Indian tribe.<sup>26</sup> The Iroquois claim to this land was slight, at best. The land was actually inhabited by the Cherokee and Chickasaw tribes. Since the Cherokee in the western parts of Virginia and North Carolina still believed they had rightful claim to the land, the practical legitimacy of treaties like the one made at Fort Stanwix was almost nonexistent.

With the belief that treaties with individual tribes superseded the Proclamation Line and the additional edicts made by various bureaucratic actors, waves of settlers washed over the mountains in pursuit of the abundant land described by the early hunters and explorers of the area. Commander of British forces Thomas Gage wrote a letter to the Earl of Hillsborough in 1770 concerning the Proclamation saying that:

There is room enough for the colonists to spread within our present limits for a century to come. . . . When all connections upheld by commerce within the mother country shall cease, it may be suspected that an independency on her government shall follow. [The people] . . . go into the back countries where the lands are better and got upon easier terms. They are already almost out of reach of law and government. Neither the endeavors of government or fear of Indians has kept them properly within bounds.<sup>27</sup>

By 1770, the Watauga and Holston River valleys in the Tennessee country were populated with permanent settlements. Settlers from Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina deliberately violated the Proclamation Line and the continued warnings of their officials and made the trek across the unimproved roads through the Blue Ridge, Alleghany, and Smokey Mountains.

Travel into the backcountry was dangerous not only because it violated legal

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<sup>26</sup> Alan Taylor, *The Divided Ground: Indians, Settlers, and the Northern Borderland of the American Revolution* (New York: Knopf, 2006), 44.

<sup>27</sup> Thomas Gage, letter to the Earl of Hillsborough, 10 November 1770. *Letters to the Right Honourable the Earl of Hillsborough from General Bernard, General Gage, and the Honourable His Majesty's Council for the Province of Massachusetts-Bay [microform]*. (Boston: Edes and Gill, 1769).



decrees, but also because the journey itself was difficult and perilous. New innovations in land travel accommodated this rapid movement west. Vehicles called the Conestoga Wagon and later the Virginia Road Wagon enabled families and even communities to make the trek across the mountains safely with their belongings. This wagon had a wide frame, thick wheels, and had a covered and arched top. The curved bed of the wagon prohibited the shifting of goods along the unimproved and rocky backcountry roads. They were generally able to sustain 4,000-5,000 pounds, the largest successfully carrying 6,000 pounds. This enabled settlers to transport all of their possessions in one trip. These wagons not only assisted settlement in the west, but also encouraged continued trade relations with towns and markets in the east.<sup>28</sup>



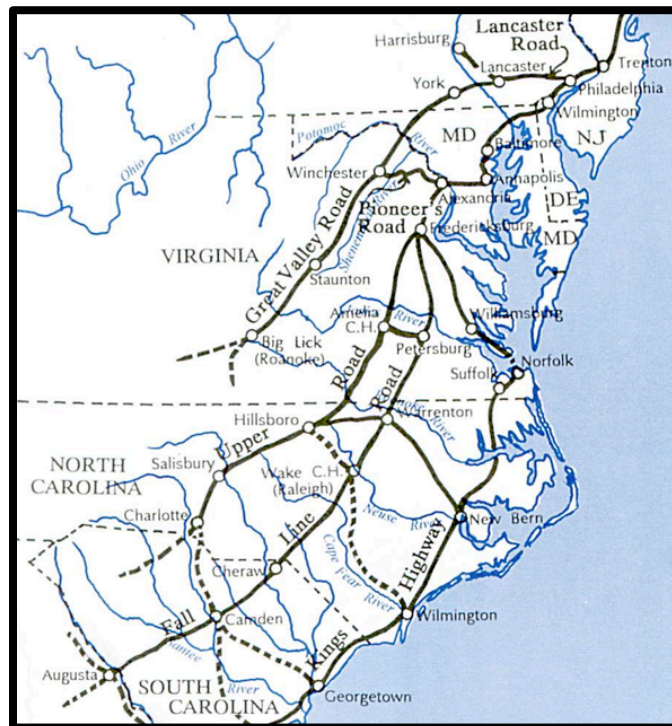
(Figure 4)

The advent of the wagon, of course, went hand-in-hand with the forging of roads and paths that would become heavily traversed during these westward migrations. The Great Wagon Road, with portions known as the Great Valley Road, the Great Philadelphia Road, the Lancaster Road, and the Wilderness Road, developed along the eastern foothills of the Appalachian Mountains in the mid-eighteenth century. Beginning

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<sup>28</sup> See Figure 4. "Virginia Road Wagon," East Tennessee History Center, Knoxville, Tennessee.

in southern New Jersey and eastern Pennsylvania, the road continued in a southwesterly direction eventually emptying in the Carolinas, Georgia, and the Tennessee country.<sup>29</sup> With the establishment of these backcountry roads and “as goods and commodities began to move more rapidly through the system, so did people seeking backcountry lands farther and farther south, into the Carolinas and Georgia. More migrants meant more trade.”<sup>30</sup>



(Figure 5)

Not only did the advent of this wagon provide a method for travelers to establish their own western communities, it also embodied a component of a transportation and consumer revolution that occurred in the eighteenth century. Perhaps for the first time, the common man was able to transport several thousand pounds of goods very long

<sup>29</sup> See Figure 5. “Map of the Great Wagon Road,” <http://philnorf.tripod.com/mapofthe.htm>. (Accessed February 6, 2012).

<sup>30</sup> Warren R. Hofstra, *The Planting of New Virginia: Settlement and Landscape in the Shenandoah Valley*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 9.

distances over land. Up until this point travel and transportation was only possible through waterways. This also constituted the manner in which towns and communities were clustered and established, as they were often contingent on the proximity of an aqueous transportation system. These properties and plantations set up along the eastern rivers had been occupied since the earliest days of North American settlement in the seventeenth century. Those seeking land after these prime locations had been claimed were often forced to settle far away from waterways. This meant that it would be much more expensive to ship their crops and goods to markets. The Virginia Road Wagon traversed roads often without a river in range, thereby providing an option for those who had previously not been able to travel to sell goods.

This also fostered a consumer revolution, as it provided a way for merchants or private buyers to haul vast amounts of goods to stores and markets. People could then purchase as many goods as they wanted, rather than as much as they or their horse could carry. With this, consumerism burgeoned in the colonies, allowing people to purchase an item several times, rather than making one last a lifetime. The region “unleashed a flurry of new economic activity in backcountry areas as merchants in coastal ports sought to capitalize on opportunities opened up by expanded sources of credit, new supplies of money, more concentrated settlements, and transportation improvements.”<sup>31</sup> As eastern plantations in Maryland and Virginia became overused for tobacco crops, the uncultivated western lands along the Great Valley Road became a wildly popular commodity. Cultivation of grains, livestock, and other goods turned the once remote backcountry into a highly profitable corridor of economic ingenuity.

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<sup>31</sup> Warren R. Hofstra, *The Planting of New Virginia: Settlement and Landscape in the Shenandoah Valley*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 8.

In pursuit of acquiring and cultivating this fertile land, immigrants purchased tracts upon which they could set up their farms and homes. The process of purchasing land in the Tennessee country was extremely simplified as opposed to the process in the established colonies. This, of course is another motivating factor for colonists to move away from their crowded home colonies. In Virginia, for instance, land purchase for English subjects was difficult from the colony's founding. In 1624, the headright system was implemented to distribute land. This awarded each new settler in Virginia fifty acres. Upon receiving this land, the new owner had to pay for the transportation of another emigrant from England. Those brought to Virginia from England through the indenture system received no land until the terms of their indenture were completed.<sup>32</sup> Those who survived their contract of indenture were given land, but it was often far away from water transportation, making the sale of crops and goods extremely difficult and expensive.

By the first quarter of the eighteenth century, the demand for land led to the establishment of the treasury right, essentially replacing the headright system. Distribution of land through the treasury provided citizens with the opportunity to pay five shillings to the main office in Williamsburg and would receive the title to five acres of land in the colony. This system of purchasing land became so popular, that Governor Alexander Spotswood issued a proclamation in 1713 that prohibited patents exceeding four thousand acres.<sup>33</sup> This policy of land distribution continued throughout the remainder of the colonial period in Virginia.

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<sup>32</sup> "The Virginia Land Office: 1607-1775". Library of Virginia. Archives Research Services. [www.lva.virginia.gov](http://www.lva.virginia.gov) (Accessed September 15, 2011).

<sup>33</sup> Alexander Spotswood. *The Official Letters of Alexander Spotswood, Lieutenant-Governor of the Colony of Virginia, 1710-1722*, now first printed from the manuscript in the collections of the Virginia Historical Society. (New York: AMS Press, 1973). 36.

For aliens, or those not born in Britain or in one of her subsequent colonies, strict naturalization laws made land ownership rights difficult to attain. In Virginia, the naturalization status of an individual affected almost every aspect of their life in the colony. In the March 1657 session of the Virginia General Assembly, the delegates passed an act dictating the conditions by which a foreign-born individual could become a denizen, or subject of the colony of Virginia under the authority of the English crown. To receive the privileges afforded to English subjects living in the Virginia colony, the foreigner must have lived in the colony for four years, exhibited upstanding character, and taken an oath of fidelity in the county courthouse.<sup>34</sup> By completing this lengthy process, denizens were able to purchase and sell land in the colony. Attaining land-holding rights was absolutely essential in order to perform subsistence and commercial farming practices.

With the backcountry regions of Virginia and North Carolina so far removed from governmental intercession, the purchase of land was more accessible to those to which it had once been denied and it was considerably less expensive. Even those natural-born subjects of Britain and her colonies could attain land far easier in the backcountry than closer to the more populated areas of the colony. Speculators seeking to make a quick profit claimed questionable legality to the land and sought to sell it to those settlers willing to make the move west. Thus, the population in the Tennessee country became a heterogeneous assortment of disenfranchised foreigners and British colonial natives, both searching for land that was fertile, cheap, and accessible. The fact that settlers were purchasing land alludes to the fact that they desired for their settlement to be as legal as

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<sup>34</sup> H.R. McIlwaine. *Journals of the House of Burgesses of Virginia, 1619-1658/59*. Ed. by H. R. McIlwaine. Richmond, VA. (The Colonial Press, E. Waddey Co., 1915).

possible, even though it violated the Proclamation Line. The status as a “squatter” on the land was undesirable. This challenges the accusation of many of their contemporaries that these backcountry settlers desired to be lawless men removed from organized government and without legal accountability.

Leaders of the settlements in the Tennessee country arose upon their arrival in the early 1770s. These individuals eventually provided the Tennessee settlements with structure and helped to maintain a connectedness with the people and events on the eastern side of the mountains. From Pennsylvania, General Isaac Roberts moved to the region after participating in several skirmishes with the local Cherokee tribes during the French and Indian War. He relocated his immediate and extended family to the Watauga River valley as he sought fertile tracts of land upon which to cultivate a crop.<sup>35</sup> Frederick County, Maryland natives Evan Shelby and his son Isaac left their home colony due to the disruption of their fur trade that was caused by Pontiac’s Rebellion in 1763.<sup>36</sup> Reestablishing favorable trade with Indians proved to be a cumbersome task, especially in the trapping region of western Maryland. In order to provide for themselves, the Shelbys moved to the area north of the Holston River in 1771 where they established a farm, a general store, and resumed their fur trade at Sapling Grove.<sup>37</sup> A land grant dated February 26, 1778 recorded a purchase by Isaac Shelby of 640 acres on the south side of the French Broad River, 300 acres on Long Island on the Holston River, and 200 acres of

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<sup>35</sup> W.T. Roberts letter to Lyman Draper concerning his father, Isaac Roberts, 24 March 1845. *The Draper Manuscripts: Tennessee Papers [microfilm]*. XX: 5. (Chicago: University of Chicago, Joseph Regenstein Library, 1979).

<sup>36</sup> Gregory Evans Dowd. *War Under Heaven: Pontiac, the Indian Nations, & the British Empire* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002).

<sup>37</sup> Sapling Grove was one of the first established towns in the Tennessee country. It is present-day Bristol, Tennessee.

land at the mouth of the Holston River.<sup>38</sup>

Virginia and North Carolina were also amply represented in the volume of settlers who relocated in the area. Valentine Sevier and his son John of Rockingham County, Virginia in the Shenandoah Valley also settled in Sapling Grove and accumulated vast tracts of land upon their arrival in the area.<sup>39</sup> James Robertson, a member of the Regulation movement from Orange County, North Carolina, also relocated in the western foothills of the Appalachians. Yeoman farmers, traders, and soldiers, they were men of no particular status or wealth. The ascension of leaders with origins in each of the four contributing colonies promoted political, cultural, religious, and economic diversity in the settlement that served to create a unique frontier identity among the settlers. These communities experienced almost immediate harmonization through a thriving backcountry culture. Settlers from various home colonies seemed to coalesce easily, sharing their skills for agriculture, trapping, and other trades with one another. Despite the success of the settlement and their newfound autonomy, they did not wish to remain isolated from the greater colonial community.

By 1772, the initial settlements on the Watauga and Holston Rivers had grown to include those on the Doe and Nolichucky Rivers, as well as the intervening valleys. Many settlers, including Roberts, Shelby, Sevier, and Robertson, convened at Sycamore Shoals to establish a regional government known as the Watauga Association. Here, they discussed the necessity of a set of written laws to govern the settlement, as well as the need to legally procure land from the Cherokee who also continued to inhabit the land.

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<sup>38</sup> Isaac Shelby Land Grants, 26 February 1778. *The Draper Manuscripts: Tennessee Papers [microfilm]*. XX: 5. (Chicago : University of Chicago, Joseph Regenstein Library, 1979).

<sup>39</sup> Isaac Shelby and John Sevier began a life-long professional and personal friendship in Sapling Grove. They would both go on to lead men in the Battle of King's Mountain in 1780. Shelby and Sevier would also become founders and first governors of the states of Kentucky and Tennessee, respectively.

Present to negotiate with the settlers was Cherokee Chief Dragging Canoe. This meeting produced an arrangement whereby the Cherokee leased the settled regions for a period of ten years. A witness of the signing of the lease, Sam Wilson, recorded that, “Dragging Canoe told them it was the bloody Ground, and would be dark, and difficult to settle.”<sup>40</sup> The Cherokee had been none too welcoming to the white interlopers, but recognized that their presence in the area, especially under a lease of land, could be lucrative for the tribe.

The settlers were relentless, though, and pushed the lease forward in spite of the foreboding statement from Cherokee chief. The Watauga Association explained that they were:

Finding ourselves on the Frontiers, and being apprehensive that, for the want of a proper legislature, we might become shelter for such as endeavored to defraud their creditors; considering also the necessity of recording Deeds, Wills, and doing other public business, we, by consent of the people, formed a court for the purposes above mentioned, taking—by desire of our constituents—the Virginia laws for our guide...we have endeavored so strictly to do justice, that we have admitted common proof against ourselves, on accounts, &c., from the colonies.<sup>41</sup>

The Watauga Association intended to provide an organized government to those living outside the bounds of the established colonies. Whether the Tennessee country was within the bounds of Virginia or North Carolina was even unsure, because westernmost boundary lines were not drawn until 1799. Also, the establishment of the Watauga Association provided a standing treaty with the Cherokee tribes who had been aggressive and hostile to European settlement in their tribal lands.

As the first legal governmental body west of the Appalachian Mountains, the

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<sup>40</sup> William P. Palmer et al., eds., *Calendar of Virginia State Papers and Other Manuscripts Preserved in the Capitol at Richmond, 1652-1869*, 1:283. (Richmond: R.F.Walker, superintendent of printing, 1875-1893).

<sup>41</sup> “Petition of the Inhabitants of the Washington District”, 1776. William L. Saunders, ed., *The Colonial Records of North Carolina*. (Raleigh, North Carolina: Josephus Daniels, 1886-1890), 10: 708-711.



Watauga Association did not go unnoticed in the colonial centers. In Williamsburg, Lord Dunmore noted his astonishment in a report to London that the Wataugans had, “appointed Magistrates and framed Laws for their present occasions and to all intents and purposes erected themselves into, though inconsiderable, yet a separate state.”<sup>42</sup> In the midst of mounting conflicts between the American colonists and the British, other royal governors and officials in North Carolina and Pennsylvania took notice of the Watauga Association, discouraging their actions because they had formed distinct governments apart from the Mother Country.

News of the swelling problem between the colonists and the Imperial Center reached the frontier settlement and incited conversation among the Wataugans by 1774. Although they were geographically isolated from the established colonies, they were inclined to identify with the Patriots for several reasons, both ideological and practical. The desires of the Watauga settlers mirrored those of many Patriots in the established colonies, in that they wished to see the removal of corrupt Royal authority in their day-to-day affairs. This, of course, is evidenced in the very reasons for the settlers’ removal to the Tennessee country in the first place. Although they had already moved past the original Proclamation Line of 1763, the settlers wanted to be rid of the British restrictions to western settlement so they could expand their territories and establish a more expansive governmental entity, completely independent of an existing colony, with vast expanses of land to attract planters to the area. This, coupled with the fear that their newly improved lands could be taken away, encouraged anti-loyal sentiments among the Wataugans. This desire to be rid of British authority also extended to the strict regulation

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<sup>42</sup> Dunmore to Dartmouth, May 16, 1774, (Public Record Office, *Colonial Office Papers*, 5/1352:141).

of trade relationships between the settlers and neighboring Indian tribes. Royal officials had been placed in the backcountry settlements to regulate and restrict extensive trade with Indians in order to promote the settler's acquisition of goods exclusively from the British towns. This regulation of trade forced dangerous travel of hundreds of miles to Williamsburg or Raleigh to buy or sell goods.<sup>43</sup>

Dunmore provided another reason for concern among those in the Watauga Association and in Virginia. Hostile Shawnee and Cherokee tribes in western Virginia and in the mountains prompted Lord Dunmore's War in 1774. The conflict resulted from escalating violence between Virginians and these tribes who occupied fertile lands in the Ohio Valley. Many prominent Virginians, including George Washington, had land interests in the Valley and wished to see the removal of inconvenient, hostile tribes.<sup>44</sup>

Dunmore, "directed the Militia...to compose a Body of Men sufficient to go against the Indian Towns, and drive off, or extirpate, the Blood-thirsty and savage inhabitants."<sup>45</sup> With little accomplished from the ensuing hostilities, Dunmore's War ultimately served as a way to distract Virginians, and subsequently the Wataugans, from the larger colonial crisis. It also served as an attempt for Dunmore to remind the colonists that they would not be able to protect themselves from the "savage" natives should British rule be removed from the colonies.

Henry Stuart, the British superintendent of Indian affairs in the Southern district, reinforced this sentiment of the necessity of protection from native tribes in 1776. Stuart composed a letter to the Wataugans stating the Crown's intentions for the settlement and

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<sup>43</sup> Charles J. Farmer *In the Absence of Towns: Settlement and Country Trade in Southside Virginia, 1730-1800*. (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1993) 91.

<sup>44</sup> Gregory Evans Dowd. *A Spirited Resistance: The North American Indian Struggle for Unity, 1745-1815* (Baltimore, MD.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 42-43.

<sup>45</sup> *Virginia Gazette*, 14 July 1774. Rockefeller Library Archives. (Accessed July, 15 2011).

their relationship with neighboring tribes. Stuart's letter to those living in "Wataugah" is both cautionary and benevolent in tone. He stated:

It is not the design of His Majesty to set his friends and allies, the Indians, on his liege subjects. Therefore, whoever of you are willing to join his majesty's forces, as soon as they arrive at the Cherokee nation, by repairing to the King's standard, shall find protection, and their families and estates be secure from all danger.... Every one that is desirous of preventing inevitable ruin to himself and family, immediately to subscribe a written paper, acknowledging their allegiance to his majesty King George, and that they are ready and willing, whenever called upon, to appear in arms in defence of the British rights in America.<sup>46</sup>

Stuart's letter demonstrates several very important implications made by the Crown concerning the Wataugans. First, that they as a settlement were significant enough for the King and his superintendents to take notice of their existence. They were, of course, the first settlement west of the Appalachian Mountains to create a written set of laws and government. Also, they were an extension of one of the King's most lucrative North American colonies. Secondly, Stuart's letter implies that the fact that the settlement was made west of the Proclamation Line, thereby disobeying it, was irrelevant. Nowhere in the letter does Stuart, as an extension of the King, make note that they are in violation of the Proclamation of 1763 or that they should disband their settlement. Third, and perhaps most important, Stuart makes it abundantly clear that the Watauga settlers would be an important addition to the British cause in America. Due to their continued communication with their home colonies as well as their apparent ingenuity in creating their frontier settlement, the Wataugans were henceforth seen as a viable player in the colonial crisis.

Another source for Wataugan support for the Patriot cause derived from British threats to the social structure of the colonies, specifically in regards to the slave

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<sup>46</sup> *Virginia Gazette*, 7 June 1776. Rockefeller Library Archives. (Accessed July, 20 2011).

population in Virginia. Anticipating hostilities between the American colonists and British troops, Parliament and other officials decided to raise a loyal support system from within the colonies. This, known as the Dunmore Proclamation, declared martial law in the colony of Virginia and promised freedom to any “indent’ed servants, negroes [who were] willing to serve His Majesty’s forces to end the present rebellion.”<sup>47</sup> This caused concern among the Wataugans, as several hundred slaves were documented to live in the settlement.

Dunmore’s aim in offering freedom to slaves who served the King as soldiers was twofold. First, he saw the necessity to bolster forces in the British army in Virginia and the other Southern colonies in preparation for an uprising of Patriot forces. The vast majority of British forces in America were concentrated in Boston and the greater New England area in 1775, leaving the remaining colonies without the physical might of the British Empire. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, he hoped that offering the emancipation of slaves in exchange for their military service would threaten the white slaveholders into supporting the Crown in an effort to maintain their workforce. As the central component for Virginia’s colonial economy, tobacco production was imperative to the livelihood of most of the citizens, regardless of social status. Since many settlers in the Watauga Association had moved from Virginia and maintained familial ties in Virginia, Dunmore’s Proclamation both concerned and angered them.<sup>48</sup> Upon an examination of their options in the coming conflict, the Wataugans did not accept the appealing offer of British protection. They instead wanted to, “Contribute [their] Mite to

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<sup>47</sup> John Murray, Earl of Dunmore. “Dunmore’s Proclamation”, November 7, 1775. (Library of Congress, Printed Ephemera Collection; Portfolio 178, Folder 18b). <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.rbc/rbpe.1780180b>.

<sup>48</sup> Edward Michael McCormack. *Slavery on the Tennessee Frontier* (Nashville: Tennessee American Revolution Bicentennial Commission, 1977). 4.

support the glorious cause...being deeply impressed with the Sense of the tyrannical & oppressive Measures agitated by the British Ministry against his Majesty's loyal Subjects in America".<sup>49</sup> Acting upon this pledged support, the Wataugans contributed their arms to Patriot militias in Fincastle County, Virginia in 1776.

After their participation in minor skirmishes, the Watauga Association recognized that their efforts would be best used if they belonged to an existing colony. Abandoning the title of the Watauga Association, they reorganized themselves into an entity called the Washington District in honor of the newly named General of the Continental Army, George Washington. John Sevier had a personal and professional relationship with his fellow native Virginian, which encouraged the renaming of the settlement as well as the clearly patriotic sentiments that accompanied it. The Washington District sent a formal petition to North Carolina on July 5, 1776 to be formally annexed into the newly independent state. The petition promised the legislature of North Carolina that those in the Washington District, "shall adhere strictly to your determinations, and that 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."<sup>50</sup>

The legal status of the Washington District of North Carolina was made official at the Provincial Congress in November 1776 where delegates from across North Carolina composed a new state constitution. Four delegates from the Washington District took part in writing and ratifying the Constitution and Bill of Rights of the new State of North Carolina.

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<sup>49</sup> Petition of the Committee of Pendleton District, West Fincastle County, Virginia, Feb. 1, 1776. William J. Van Schreeven et al., *Revolutionary Virginia: The Road to Independence*, Vol. IV, 42.

<sup>50</sup> William L. Saunders, ed., *The Colonial Records of North Carolina*. "Petition of the Inhabitants of the Washington District", 1776 (Raleigh, North Carolina: Josephus Daniels, 1886-1890), 10: 708-711.

This Constitution asserted the state's authority to the Tennessee country and beyond to the Pacific Ocean, citing the original charter given to the Lords Proprietors of Carolina by King Charles II in 1638. This final act in making the Tennessee settlers into a lawful entity encouraged even more migration across the Appalachian Mountains.

Although the Tennessee settlers had an unprecedented founding, they remained consistent in their desires to evade the corruption and oppression of the royal government, to set up large and sustainable farms and trades, and to remain connected to the greater colonial community. The diversity of reasons why settlers migrated from their various colonies of origin provided a unique governmental, social, and cultural structure to the settlement. The combination of all of these elements had yet to be seen in any of the European settlements in North America, providing an exceptional group of settlers who were adamantly in support of American independence from Britain and her oppressive presence.

## Chapter Two

### “This Unhappy Civil War”: The Overmountain Men in the War for Independence<sup>1</sup>

As the discord between Great Britain and her North American colonies grew, the idea of an irrevocable independence from the Mother Country began to take root in the colonies. “Long live the King” no longer hung on many American subjects’ lips, but rather, cries of “live free, or die” rang through towns and the backcountry alike. Settlers living west of the Proclamation Line of 1763 in the Tennessee country in the Holston and Watauga River Valleys recognized that their involvement in the coming War of Independence would be significant.<sup>2</sup> As the War moved toward the Southern theater in 1779-1780, those settlers known as Wataugans made the decision to support the Patriots not only in word, but also in deed. Their collective distinctiveness as a group grew throughout the war years, but they maintained a desire to remain connected to the greater American community east of the mountains. Outsiders, or those not residing in the Tennessee country, acknowledged that the participation of these men on the side of the Patriots would be a crucial component to a potential Rebel victory in the Southern campaign of the War.<sup>3</sup> The perceptions the Tennessee settlers had about themselves and

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<sup>1</sup> Quote from a letter from Alexander Machir to John Sevier. Cited later.

<sup>2</sup> As it is known among scholars of the American Revolution, the “American Revolution” and “War of Independence” are not used interchangeably because the American Revolution refers to the larger movement toward irrevocable independence from Great Britain encompassing ideological movements and cultural changes. The War of Independence refers to the actual military conflict between the Continental Army and the British Army.

<sup>3</sup> The historiography of the involvement of the Overmountain Men in the War of Independence is divided among sources discussing the Southern theater, Virginia’s involvement, North Carolina’s involvement, and South Carolina’s involvement. The first source concerning them is Lyman C. Draper’s *King’s Mountain and its Heroes* (1881. Reprint, Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1967). More recently, Hank Messick. *King’s Mountain: The Epic of the Blue Ridge "Mountain Men" in the American Revolution*. (Boston : Little Brown, 1976). Also, Jeffrey J. Crow, and Larry E. Tise. *The Southern Experience in the American Revolution*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1978). Also, Walter Edgar. *Partisans and Redcoats: The Southern Conflict That Turned the Tide of the American Revolution* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001). In examining ideological struggles, David C. Hsiung, *Two*

those held by outsiders evolved throughout the conflict between the American colonies and Great Britain. The stirring conflict in the colonial centers reached the Tennessee settlers and ignited their desire to, “enter the service of [their] country until her independence was secured for [they] could not remain a cool spectator of a contest in which [their] dearest interests were at stake.”<sup>4</sup> The backcountry settlers participated in the War of Independence to protect the land they had settled and defend their inherent liberty of land ownership.

The geographic isolation of the Tennessee settlers during the War for Independence was a factor that could have encouraged them to be disinterested in the events just across the mountains. These settlers, however, maintained ties to their home colonies of Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina. John Sevier, a notable leader of the Tennessee settlers following his arrival in the area in 1770 due to his leadership and marksmanship, maintained correspondences with his friends and family who remained in his region of origin, the Shenandoah Valley in Virginia. One letter from his friend Alexander Machir of Staunton, Virginia is particularly telling of the palpable climate of change in the colonies. Machir said in his July 27, 1775 letter to Sevier:

As to politics, I can say but very little as it is above my comprehension. We have heard no news from Boston since the action of the 19<sup>th</sup>. Ultimately, the Colony Convention [House of Burgesses] is now sitting at Richmond. It's imagined that there will be an army of two or three

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*Worlds in the Tennessee Mountains: Exploring the Origins of Appalachian Stereotypes.* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1997). Incorporating the men in a discussion of South Carolina, John S. Pancake *This Destructive War: the British Campaign in the Carolinas, 1780-1782.* (University, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1985). In Virginia, Neal O. Hammon and Richard Taylor. *Virginia's Western War: 1775-1786.* (Mechanicsburg, Pa: Stackpole Books, 2002). This study will fill a gap in the historiography by directly addressing the perceptions the Tennessee settlers had of themselves and the perceptions others had of these men before and after the Revolution.

<sup>4</sup> Isaac Shelby, *Autobiography.* (Unpublished manuscript, Reuben T. Durrett Collection, The Joseph Regenstein Library, University of Chicago). Isaac Shelby was one of the most influential leaders of the Tennessee settlers. His close friend and fellow frontiersman, John Sevier, was equally as important to the settlement.



thousand men raised immediately....The Continental Congress shall continue to sit but what is done is not made published, only that they have again petitioned his Majesty to repeal our grievances and sent a very spirited address to the inhabitants of Great Britain. God only knows what this unhappy civil war will end in. There are no accounts from England since the first battle at Boston.<sup>5</sup>

This letter signifies that Sevier had previously inquired as to the political state of Virginia and the greater colonial community. Sevier's interest in affairs beyond the backcountry reflects a desire to remain informed and connected to the established colonies. Machir's letter to Sevier also denotes concern for the future of Virginia through the coming conflict as well as an acknowledgement of British grievances, revealing his Patriot sympathies.

This correspondence as well as other letters between settlers and their acquaintances in their home colonies sparked conversation among the Wataugans about their future in the imminent war.<sup>6</sup> Whichever way they decided to throw their support, the Tennessee settlers believed they could hold great influence in the War for Independence. This sentiment is evident through their petition to be annexed into the state of North Carolina as Washington County in 1776. By pledging that, "nothing will be lacking or any thing neglected that may add weight in the civil or military establishments to the glorious cause in which we are now struggling", the Washington County inhabitants not only offered their services, but recognized that they have

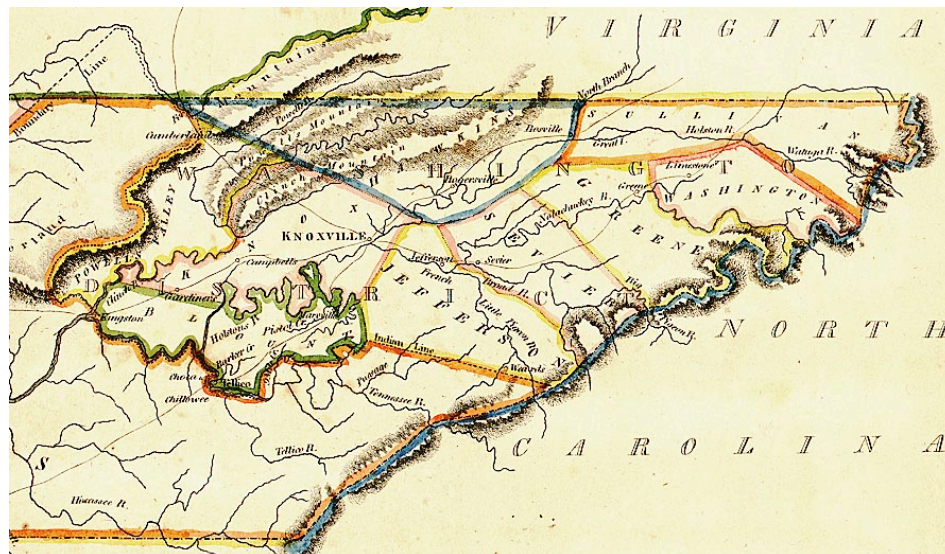
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<sup>5</sup> Letter from Alexander Machir to John Sevier, July 27, 1775. The Draper Manuscripts: King's Mountain Papers [microfilm]. 11DD. (Chicago: University of Chicago, Joseph Regenstein Library, Photo duplication Dept., 1979). Alexander Machir's references to "the action of the 19<sup>th</sup>" is referring to the Battles of Lexington and Concord on April 19, 1775. The towns of Lexington and Concord are located approximately fifteen and twenty miles, respectively, from Boston. His later reference to the "first battle at Boston" is referring to the same Battles of Lexington and Concord. Virginia Governor Lord Dunmore had dissolved the House of Burgesses in 1774, but many of the men continued to meet in various locations outside the Capitol building to discuss Virginia's stance on independence, military forces, and non-importation agreements.

<sup>6</sup> Settlers in the Tennessee country were originally organized in the Watauga Association, and were referred to as 'Wataugans'.

something worth offering to the cause.<sup>7</sup> They recognized their duty to serve the state to which they belonged.

Four delegates from the Washington District were invited to the Congress at the state capitol in Raleigh and took part in writing and ratifying the Constitution and Bill of Rights of the newly independent state of North Carolina. This Constitution asserted the state's authority to the Tennessee country and beyond to the Pacific Ocean, citing the original charter given to the Lords Proprietors of Carolina by King Charles II in 1638. This act in making the Tennessee settlers into a lawful entity, connected with an established state, encouraged even more migration across the Appalachian Mountains. So many settlers made the journey across the mountains that other counties were established bordering Washington County. Sullivan, Greene, and Hawkins Counties were all established in the years directly following the founding of Washington County to accommodate the droves of settlers arriving in the Tennessee country.<sup>8</sup>



(Figure 6)

<sup>7</sup> William L. Saunders, ed., *The Colonial Records of North Carolina*. "Petition of the Inhabitants of the Washington District", 1776. (Raleigh, North Carolina: Josephus Daniels, 1886-1890), 10: 708-711.

<sup>8</sup> See Figure 6. "East Tennessee Detail"  
<http://www.appalachianamericangenealogy.com/maps.htm> (Accessed October 10, 2011).

In the midst of the Tennessee counties' annexation into the state of North Carolina, the War of Independence was underway in New England and the Mid-Atlantic states. The Continental Army grew in size and skill after intensive training and the acquisition of more equipment. After narrow Patriot victories at the Battle of Bunker Hill and Fort Ticonderoga in 1775 and 1776, General Washington's army moved to fortify New York City, already under siege by the British. A key Patriot victory at Saratoga in 1777 caused the British commanders to reconsider their strategy in the War. Swiftly quelling the rebellion no longer seemed in reach for the British after the winter of 1778 due to dwindling supplies and troops. The British commanders did not anticipate the irregular warfare in which they would participate in the colonies, leaving many of their troops dead, injured, or captured. Battle tactics of the Americans and the British were starkly different. The British practiced tried-and-true formal warfare, always facing their opponents in advancing lines in a gentlemanly fashion. Washington and his generals, on the other hand, often employed guerrilla tactics to confuse the enemy.<sup>9</sup> The Continental Army took advantage of the natural lay of the land and the soldiers' knowledge of winding rivers, thick forests, and the elusive Appalachian Mountains.<sup>10</sup>

By 1777, after a series of Patriot victories, newly appointed Commander of British forces in North America, Sir Henry Clinton, turned his focus to the Southern colonies. British commanders and strategists hoped to regain control of the War by

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<sup>9</sup> While the term "guerrilla warfare" would not have been used during the War for Independence, this term accurately describes the kind of tactical maneuvers that were often employed in the Southern theater. It is a form of irregular warfare and refers to conflicts in which a small group of combatants use unorthodox methods in battle.

<sup>10</sup> Further information concerning the Northern theater of the War of Independence can be found in Gordon S. Wood, *The American Revolution: A History*. (New York : Modern Library, 2002). Also see, John E. Ferling, *Almost a Miracle: The American Victory in the War of Independence*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

recruiting those loyal to the British Crown living in the Southern colonies to raise arms against their rebel neighbors. After an unsuccessful attempt to capture Charleston, South Carolina, commanding General of the Southern army, Lord Charles Cornwallis, divided his forces in an attempt to take control of the Carolinas by crippling the small rebel forces in the area, thereby ending the American rebellion and the lengthy war.<sup>11</sup>

As British forces moved South from their Northern encampments in 1777, many Southerners were forced to solidify their stance for or against the Revolution. The Wataugans, with their roots in Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina, moved to the land west of the mountains because of their discontent with the royal governance of their home colonies. This long-standing dissatisfaction with British policy, coupled with the prospect of independence, encouraged their Patriot sympathies during the War. Due to their adherence to the tenets of the Revolution, the Tennessee settlers were experiencing threats and intimidation from two groups, one to the east and one to the west.

Loyalists living in western Virginia presented an immediate threat to the Tennessee settlers. Henry Massengill, a Washington County resident, wrote about the danger the Loyalists posed to his community. "...Tories came, abused my family, destroyed my property, [and] burnt the Massengill House of Worship to the ground."<sup>12</sup> Due to the violent and unpredictable nature of attacks, loyalism was considered an extremely high offense in Washington and other counties in the Tennessee country. The state of North Carolina even administered a test oath, or an oath of fidelity to the state.

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<sup>11</sup> Henry Lumpkin, *From Savannah to Yorktown: The American Revolution in the South*. (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1981). 34-35.

<sup>12</sup> Letter from Henry Massengill, Senior. 1 June 1779. Henry Massengill Papers. Sevier County Courthouse.

Those citizens who refused were “required to give bond and security to depart the State in sixty days,” resulting in the exile of several hundred loyalists from North Carolina.<sup>13</sup>

Loyalists were not the only threat to the Tennessee settlers, as Indians to the west also emerged as a dangerous enemy. Since the settlement of whites in the Watauga and Holston River Valleys in the 1760s, skirmishes over land claims existed. There was a mutual fear of attack between the two groups, which culminated in the Cherokee Wars.<sup>14</sup> Later, when the Wataugans sought to gain legal authority over the land, the Cherokee reluctantly complied. Cherokee leader Corn Tassel said in the negotiation meeting in 1777, “We are a separate people! [The Creator] has given [whites and Indians] each their lands, under distinct considerations and circumstances....He has, indeed, given you an advantage in this....[land and animals] ought not to be taken away without our consent, for something equivalent.”<sup>15</sup>

A resentment for the loss of their lands lingered with the Cherokee until the British gave them a proposition during the War for Independence. On March 15, 1776, Colonel John Stuart wrote to Clinton saying that he wished the Cherokee to participate in the, “operations of His Majesty’s forces by drawing the attention of the Rebels [sic].”<sup>16</sup> Here, it is evident that the British believed the Tennessee settlers needed to be distracted to ensure British success. To avoid a potentially costly encounter with the Tennesseans, the British sought a third party ally to engage the settlers in a separate conflict. The

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<sup>13</sup> Walter Clark, “Preface,” in *The Colonial Records of North Carolina*, vol. 11 (Raleigh, N.C.: P. M. Hale, Printer to the State, 1886), pp. xviii. *Documenting the American South*. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2007.

<sup>14</sup> John Alexander Williams, *Appalachia, A History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002). 64.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in Thomas M. Hatley, *The Dividing Paths: Cherokees and South Carolinians Through the Era of Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993). 213-214.

<sup>16</sup> Stuart to Clinton, 15 March 1776. Public Record Office, Library of Congress 5:77, in David C. Hsiung, *Two Worlds in the Tennessee Mountains: Exploring the Origins of Appalachian Stereotypes*. (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 28.

British had used the Cherokee as an ally during the French and Indian War some fifteen years prior, and had maintained a cordial relationship with the tribe since. Cherokee Chief Dragging Canoe was propositioned by the British to distract the Tennessee settlers from the conflicts across the mountains in exchange for the promise of land after the anticipated British victory. Dragging Canoe accepted the offer hoping that an alliance with the British would drive the intruding frontiersmen away from their ancestral lands.<sup>17</sup> The Cherokee moved their villages to more defensible areas where they could easily attain supplies from the British.<sup>18</sup> A letter from Colonel Arthur Campbell of Washington County, Virginia to Isaac Shelby denotes the violence inflicted on the settlers by the Indians saying, “you are no doubt well informed of the hostilities commenced by the Creek & Cherokee...[They] will not lay down their arms until our new nation is thoroughly humbled.”<sup>19</sup>

The threats posed by the Cherokee placed the frontier settlers in an extremely compromised position. Growing concerns about two-front hostilities from the Cherokee to the west and Loyalists to the east served to solidify the settlers’ decision to support the Revolution. The Tennessee settlers had tangible fears of tyranny through the threats and attacks made by the two interceding groups. As the Tennesseans sought liberty by engaging in a conflict with the British, they met the worst possible kind of tyranny in their Indian foes. For many colonists living on the eastern seaboard, their greatest threat was a standing British army, but the British alliance with Indians was, in the eyes of most

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<sup>17</sup> Chief Dragging Canoe stated in 1775 that, “Whole Indian Nations have melted away like snowballs in the sun before the white man’s advance.” Quoted in Hank Messick, *King’s Mountain*, 49.

<sup>18</sup> Williams, *Appalachia*, 65.

<sup>19</sup> Letter from Colonel Arthur Campbell of Washington County, Virginia to Isaac Shelby of Washington County, North Carolina, 10 October 1779. The Draper Manuscripts: King’s Mountain Papers [microfilm]. 11DD. (Chicago: University of Chicago, Joseph Regenstein Library, Photo duplication Dept., 1979).

Americans, ungentlemanly warfare in its extreme. The intimidation tactics used by the British, Loyalists, and Indians throughout the war physically and emotionally connected the Tennessee settlers to one another in ways that fostered the development of a common identity, and, in turn, a deep desire to be rid of all who infringed on their ability to hold land in their beloved backcountry. This ability to hold land freely was the definition of ‘liberty’ to the Tennesseans, and thus, a reflection of the ideological statutes those men in Philadelphia were professing. Possession of a tract of land guaranteed social and economic independence and, to the Tennesseans, was something worth warring over.

By the late 1770s, skirmishes with Indians and Loyalists plagued the patriot-leaning settlers in the Washington District. This put stress on the economic situation of the settlers, whose most immediate trade partner was the Cherokee. However, as British forces under Cornwallis made an aggressive move South into the Carolinas, the attention of the Southern Patriots turned toward the threat of British Regulars in their territory. When Charleston fell to British hands in May 1780, the tide of the War changed. *The Annual Register*, a London newspaper, recorded that,

The loss of Charlestown produced a directly contrary effect to that which might have been naturally expected. For instead of depressing and sinking the minds of the people to seek for security by any means, and to sue for peace upon any terms, the loss being now come home to every man’s feelings and the danger to his door, they were at once awakened to a vigour [sic] of exertion scarcely to be expected in their circumstances....The very loss of Charlestown became a ground of hope, and an incitement of vigour [sic].<sup>20</sup>

With the might of the British regulars occupied in Charleston, many southerners who had previously taken an apathetic stance to the conflict became either devoted Loyalists or ardent Patriots. British commanders anticipated collecting a large number of Loyalist

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<sup>20</sup> Quoted in Alexander R. Stoesen, “The British Occupation of Charleston, 1780-1782,” *The South Carolina Historical Magazine* (1962): 71.

men and runaway slaves to serve in the final thrust of the war against the rebels.

However, as a result of the harsh treatment many southerners received from British officers in occupied cities, one South Carolinian noted that, “Great Britain [created] a hundred enemies, where it had one before.”<sup>21</sup>

As British forces began to mobilize to trek through the wilderness of the western Carolinas to confront Rebel forces, they formed distinct perceptions about the backcountry. Uzal Johnson, a Loyalist surgeon from New Jersey traveling with the American Volunteers<sup>22</sup>, said of their movement into the backcountry that it, “greatly mortified us, for now we began to see our destiny was fixed to do duty in the back Woods separate from the Main Army, with the Militia.”<sup>23</sup> Not only was there a prejudice about the backcountry on the part of the Loyalists, but there was also a similar bias toward the British held by backcountry residents. Johnson noted that the people they encountered, “have always been kept in ignorance, & told of the Cruelty of the English, one Poor Woman expressed great surprize [sic] at seeing our Men so mild, she asked if there was not Heathens in our Army that eat Children, she had been told there was.”<sup>24</sup> The circulation of such outlandish rumors and misconceptions was typical and served to embitter each side all the more.

With the swift movement of British forces into the backcountry, the Tennessee settlers recognized the immediacy of the situation and raised arms at the Battle of

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<sup>21</sup> Francis Kinloch to Thomas Boone, 1 October 1782, in Francis Kinloch, “Letters of Francis Kinloch to Thomas Boone, 1782-1788,” ed. Felix Gilbert, *Journal of Southern History* 8 (February 1942): 92.

<sup>22</sup> The American Volunteers were a group of Loyalists from many colonies who served as regulars in the British army. Uzal Johnson was a surgeon from Newark, New Jersey.

<sup>23</sup> Uzal Johnson, Journal Entry 29 August 1780, in *Captured at King’s Mountain: The Journal of Uzal Johnson, A Loyalist Surgeon*, ed. Wade S. Kolb III and Robert M. Weir (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2011), 27.

<sup>24</sup> Uzal Johnson, Journal Entry 14 Sept 1780, in *Captured at King’s Mountain: The Journal of Uzal Johnson, A Loyalist Surgeon*, 28.



Musgrove Mill in South Carolina in August of 1780. This battle, although it was a smaller engagement than other key encounters, held considerable repercussions for British forces. While they were receiving “Constant information that the Rebels were collecting in force...under Colls [sic] Shelby, McDoul, & Cleveland,” the British suffered a considerable blow at the engagement.<sup>25</sup> During the course of the battle, 200 Patriot militiamen from the Tennessee country defeated 500 Loyalist regulars.<sup>26</sup> Vastly outnumbered, leading commander Colonel Isaac Shelby employed guerrilla tactics and engaged the enemy. The Overmountain Men, as the Tennessee soldiers became known in this battle, charged the Loyalists, shrieking Indian war cries, intimidating and defeating the enemy.<sup>27</sup> With only four casualties, the Overmountain Men proved themselves a legitimate military force.<sup>28</sup> The Battle of Musgrove Mill served as an important prelude to the larger battle that was soon to take place at King’s Mountain.

In the wake of the abysmal defeat of American General Horatio Gates at Camden earlier in the month, the victory at Musgrove Mill bolstered the Patriots’ spirits and served as further evidence that the British could not hold the backcountry. Musgrove Mill was also instrumental in preparation for the Battle of King’s Mountain as it introduced an important foe to the Overmountain Men: Major Patrick Ferguson. Serving under Cornwallis in the Southern theater, Ferguson was given command of the left flank and had orders to collect Loyalist soldiers in the backcountry of the Carolinas. While

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<sup>25</sup> Uzal Johnson, Journal Entry 29 August 1780, in *Captured at King’s Mountain: The Journal of Uzal Johnson, A Loyalist Surgeon*, 30.

<sup>26</sup> Walter Edgar, *Partisans and Redcoats: The Southern Conflict That Turned the Tide of the American Revolution* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), xi.

<sup>27</sup> John Buchanan, *The Road to Guilford Courthouse: The American Revolution in the Carolinas* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1997), 178.

<sup>28</sup> The Overmountain Men were, of course, named thusly due to their trek over the Appalachian Mountains to assist their neighbors in Virginia and the Carolinas. Other interchangeable names for these men are “Backwater Men,” “Backwoods Men,” and “Men of the Western Waters”.

Ferguson ventured into the backcountry, Cornwallis held Charleston under siege in the summer of 1780. This “disagreeable service in the back Woods” disappointed the ambitious young officer, as he desired a more prestigious assignment.<sup>29</sup> Ferguson’s ardent disdain for the backcountry was evidenced in the vocabulary he used to refer to the inhabitants of the western lands. Referring to them as “mongrels” and “barbarians” in his letters to other officers, Ferguson grossly underestimated the frontiersmen before their unlikely victory at Musgrove Mill.<sup>30</sup> In spite of his reluctance to forage the mountainous region for Loyalist militiamen, Ferguson had success in adding to the numbers of Cornwallis’s left flank. The recruits Ferguson collected were, “unaccustomed to military restraints & become so soon homesick.”<sup>31</sup> However, with training in the British fashion, Ferguson soon found that these “country people” were “very fit for rough & irregular war, being all excellent woodsmen.”<sup>32</sup> These men, Ferguson hoped, would later be able to successfully face the other “excellent woodsmen” who had been the victors at Musgrove Mill.

After Musgrove Mill, the Overmountain Men returned to their homes in the Holston and Watauga Valleys. A sixteen-year-old participant in the battle, James Collins, noted that the time at home in Washington County was, “like a calm after a heavy storm...and for a short time every man could visit home, or his neighbor without being afraid.”<sup>33</sup> After the short respite of about a month, the Tennesseans could no longer ignore the necessity of their presence across the mountains again. As Ferguson

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<sup>29</sup> Uzal Johnson, Journal Entry 28 August 1780, in *Captured at King’s Mountain: The Journal of Uzal Johnson, A Loyalist Surgeon*, 26.

<sup>30</sup> Hank Messick, *King’s Mountain*, 56.

<sup>31</sup> Robert Stansbury Lambert, *South Carolina Loyalists in the American Revolution*. (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1987). 133.

<sup>32</sup> Lambert, *South Carolina Loyalists*, 134.

<sup>33</sup> James Collins, *Autobiography of a Revolutionary Soldier* (Clinton, LA: Feliciana Democrat, 1859), 53.

continued to add to the American Volunteers in the backcountry and Cornwallis's occupation of Charleston persisted, many Patriots recognized the need to overrun British forces in the Carolinas so they would not suffer the fate of their neighbors to the South. Georgia had fallen into British hands in 1778 and many local Patriots were struggling to free the Southern-most state from occupation. Colonel Elijah Clarke, a Patriot from Georgia, was acquainted with Overmountain leaders Shelby and Sevier from the Indian Wars of the previous decades.<sup>34</sup> Recognizing the impact the Tennessee settlers had after their victory at Musgrove Mill, Clarke appealed to the Overmountain Men to again engage Loyalist militia in hopes that it would begin a chain of events that would liberate Georgia from British hands.

As pressure built in the Southern theater, the Overmountain Men volunteered to make the long, 150-mile march across the mountains to intercept Ferguson and preserve the Carolinas and keep British soldiers out of their settlement west of the mountains. By September 25, 1780, nearly 1000 Overmountain Men had gathered again, this time at Sycamore Shoals, which served as a departure point for their journey.<sup>35</sup> Also present at the camp were the families of the volunteer soldiers. Women readied animals, sewed clothes and blankets, cleaned weapons, and prepared food for the men to take across the mountains. Men who stayed behind to protect the community from Indian raids donated their firearms, horses, and other equipment. To further supply the Overmountain Men, Sevier asked John Adair, Sullivan County public treasurer, for funds. Adair replied that he, "had no right to make any such disposition of this money; it belongs to North

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<sup>34</sup> John S. Pancake, *This Destructive War: The British Campaign in the Carolinas, 1780-1782*. (University, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1985), 45.

<sup>35</sup> Sycamore Shoals is near present-day Elizabethton, Tennessee. This was a convenient meeting place for the men of the various counties in the Tennessee country and provided the easiest starting point for passage through the Appalachians.

Carolina. But if the country is overrun by the British, liberty is gone—so let the money go too.”<sup>36</sup> Sevier and Shelby took the money to buy goods and pledged to repay it with their own personal funds if necessary.

Reverend Samuel Doak was also at Sycamore Shoals to equip the men for battle in his own way. Doak reminded the men why it was necessary for them to participate in the coming engagement. Doak declared,

The Mother Country has her hands upon you, these American Colonies, and takes that for which our fathers planted their homes in the wilderness—our Liberty. The Crown of England would take from its American Subjects this last vestige of Freedom. Your brethren across the mountains are crying...God forbid that you shall refuse to hear and answer their call...Brave men, you are not unacquainted with battle. Your hands have already been taught to war.<sup>37</sup>

Doak thus reinforced the notion that to the Tennessee settlers, the ability to hold land was the most tangible and absolute form of liberty. He also reminded the men that this liberty’s existence had been threatened in their settlement and in America. This republican ideal of defending liberty was the driving motivation for the mobilization of the Overmountain Men to engage Ferguson and his troops. Responding to their crying brethren, the Overmountain Men were thus engrained with the notion that their participation in the coming battle was not only a necessity, but also their responsibility to assist their fellow Americans, which alludes to the notion of emerging national unification. Doak’s commission into battle provided the men with a sense of self-entitled legitimacy. Through his rousing words, the Tennessee settlers believed that they

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<sup>36</sup> Letter from John Adair, Jr. concerning his father to Lyman C. Draper, 1832. *The Draper Manuscripts: King’s Mountain Papers [microfilm]*. 11DD. (Chicago: University of Chicago, Joseph Regenstein Library, Photo duplication Dept., 1979).

<sup>37</sup> Reverend Samuel Doak, Muster at Sycamore Shoals, 26 September 1780. Found in Messick, *King’s Mountain*, 96.

themselves were significant contributors to the coming battle with Ferguson, and more importantly, to the larger War for Independence.

While the Overmountain Men gathered at Sycamore Shoals, Ferguson simultaneously mobilized his Loyalist militiamen for rapid movement South. As retribution for the British defeat at Musgrove Mill, Ferguson was determined to provoke and humiliate the Tennesseans. In a Proclamation dated October 1, 1780, Ferguson addressed the inhabitants of North Carolina, threatening:

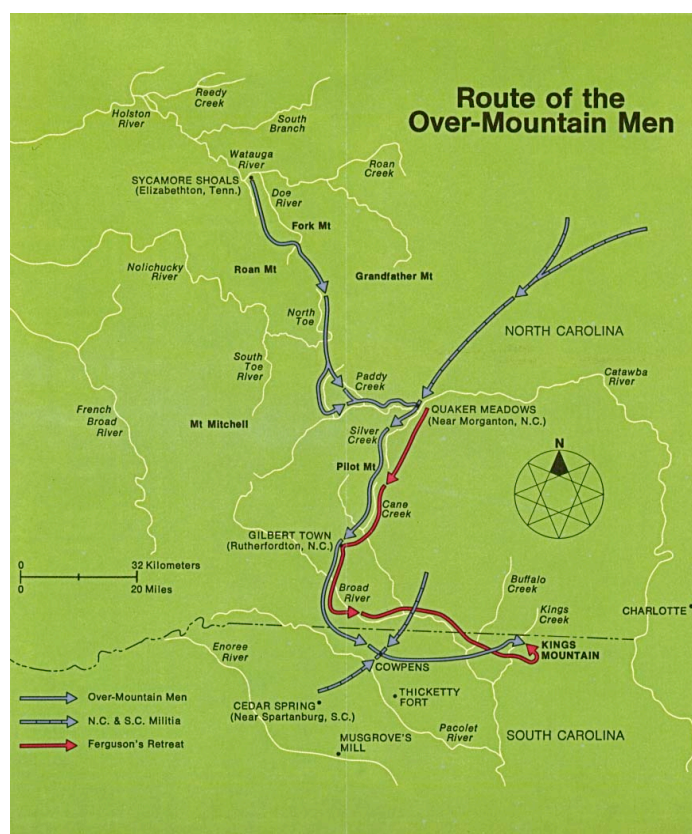
...if you wish to be pinioned, robbed, and murdered, and see your wives and daughters...abused by the dregs of mankind—if you wish or deserve to live and bear the name of men, grasp your arms in a moment and run to [the Loyalist] camp. The Backwater men have crossed the mountains...If you choose to be pissed upon forever and ever by a set of mongrels, say so at once and let your women turn their backs upon you, and look out for real men to protect them.<sup>38</sup>

Ferguson's incendiary Proclamation had a dual purpose. Its primary goal was to gather more Loyalists to the American Volunteers, as Ferguson knew a battle was imminent. Unfortunately for Ferguson, few responded to this last-minute call. The other purpose, of course, was to paint a gruesome picture of the "Backwater men", frightening those who might come in contact with them on their march to Ferguson. This affront to the Overmountain Men was the more potent of the two, but not for the purpose Ferguson intended it. Considering the 18<sup>th</sup> century concepts of manhood, words abusing a man's honor and ability to protect his family were incredibly disrespectful. Ferguson's snide attack on their masculinity enhanced their sense of duty with a personal desire to defeat Ferguson and his Tory militia to defend their honor as well as their land and families at home in the backcountry.

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<sup>38</sup> *Virginia Gazette*, 11 November 1780. Rockefeller Library Archives (accessed 20 July 2011).

Ferguson's correspondences with Cornwallis and his other superiors directly preceding the battle depict a very different sentiment toward the Overmountain Men than his threatening Proclamation. Instead of a haughty disdain, Ferguson's letters allude to a fear of the men because of the destruction they had laid on the Loyalists at Musgrove Mill. A rather foreboding correspondence from Ferguson to Cornwallis stated that, "...if necessary, I should hope for success against them myself, but, numbers compared, that must be doubtful....Something must be done soon."<sup>39</sup> Clearly, Ferguson considered the Overmountain Men to be a legitimate threat to the British advance in the Southern theater and to his own success in the coming battle that he had provoked.



(Figure 7)

<sup>39</sup> Ferguson to Cornwallis, 1 October 1780. Cornwallis Papers, Public Records Office, London. Collection 30/11, file 64, 121-122. Here when Ferguson refers to the "numbers compared", he is referring to the number of skilled shooters. Ferguson's men outnumbered the Overmountain Men by about 200, but not all were skilled with a rifle like the marksmen from the Tennessee country.

After reading Ferguson's provocative Proclamation, the men set off from Sycamore Shoals. Their journey took an arduous seven days of marching through rough terrain to reach Ferguson's encampment at King's Mountain.<sup>40</sup> The mountain straddles the border between North and South Carolina, making the ensuing battle all the more important for the preservation of the Revolution in both states. Sevier and Shelby led the men from the Tennessee country, and comprised the largest faction of the overall Patriot force at the battle. Campbell and McDowell, leading the group from Virginia, joined the Overmountain Men a few days prior to the battle. Colonels Williams, Chronicle, and Cleveland were the last to join the group, bringing the Carolinians. As they drew nearer to the Loyalist camp, Cleveland of South Carolina spoke to the blended militia saying that the time was at hand for each man to, "do his country a priceless service—such as shall lead your children to exult in the fact that their fathers were the conquerors of Ferguson."<sup>41</sup> Understanding that their actions would become legendary, the men faced Ferguson's regiment of American Volunteers.

As Johnson, the Loyalist surgeon, noted in his journal on October 7, 1780, it was, "almost White frost on the Ground, the first this fall."<sup>42</sup> With chilling autumn weather bearing down on both forces, they assumed positions and prepared for battle. Cloaked by thick brush and large boulders, the Overmountain Men took cover at the foot of the mountain, while Ferguson and his forces took a defensible position on top of King's

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<sup>40</sup> See Figure 7. "Route of the Over-Mountain Men." Figure provided by jrshelby.com. (Accessed October 6, 2011).

<sup>41</sup> Messick, *King's Mountain*, 111.

<sup>42</sup> Uzal Johnson, Journal Entry 28 Sept 1780, in *Captured at King's Mountain: The Journal of Uzal Johnson, A Loyalist Surgeon*, ed. Wade S. Kolb III and Robert M. Weir (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2011), 29.

Mountain.<sup>43</sup> The Overmountain militia prepared to advance up the mountain in seven columns. Ferguson's men fired the first shots as they caught sight of the Overmountain Men. Eager to commence their own response, Campbell shouted to his men, "shout like hell, and fight like devils!"<sup>44</sup> Finally reaching the top of the mountain at the east end of the camp, Sevier's men aimed at Ferguson and met their mark with accuracy, and "shot [him] from his Horse".<sup>45</sup> With little chance of continuing with success after their commander's death, "it was thought most expedient to send out a Flagg to save a few brave men that had survived the heat of action."<sup>46</sup> The white flag of surrender was raised and the Overmountain Men shouted loud "huzzahs" of victory wherever they stood.<sup>47</sup> The entire battle reportedly took only forty-seven minutes.<sup>48</sup> At the cost of only twenty-eight Patriot casualties, the Battle of King's Mountain yielded 200 Loyalist casualties, 100 wounded, and 800 prisoners, effectively extinguishing Cornwallis' left flank of the British army in the South.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> See Figure 8. "The Battle of King's Mountain." Image from Lyman Copeland Draper, *King's Mountain and its Heroes: History of the Battle of King's Mountain and the Events which led to it*. (1881. Reprint, Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1967), 237.

<sup>44</sup> James Collins, *Autobiography of a Revolutionary Soldier* (Clinton, LA: Feliciana Democrat, 1859), 64.

<sup>45</sup> Uzal Johnson, Journal Entry 7 October 1780, in *Captured at King's Mountain: The Journal of Uzal Johnson, A Loyalist Surgeon*, 31.

<sup>46</sup> Uzal Johnson, Journal Entry 7 October 1780, in *Captured at King's Mountain: The Journal of Uzal Johnson, A Loyalist Surgeon*, 31.

<sup>47</sup> Wilma Dykeman, *With Fire and Sword: the Battle of Kings Mountain, 1780*. (Washington: Office of Publications, National Park Service, U.S. Dept. of the Interior ; 1978), 67.

<sup>48</sup> *Virginia Gazette*, 21 October 1780. Rockefeller Library Archives (accessed 20 July 2011).

<sup>49</sup> *Virginia Gazette*, 21 October 1780. Rockefeller Library Archives (accessed 20 July 2011).





military, regulars and militia alike. Clinton would later remark that the Battle of King's Mountain, "unhappily proved the first link of a chain of evils that followed each other in regular succession until they at last ended in the total loss of America."<sup>51</sup> Scholars of the War of Independence and the Revolution have agreed with Clinton that the Battle of King's Mountain was the turning point in the Southern theater and changed the tide of the entire War of Independence. The victory at King's Mountain won the backcountry Patriots recognition for their marksmanship, courage, and sacrifice.

The involvement of the Overmountain Men in the War of Independence reflects their enduring connectedness to the rest of the American community. Their geographic isolation from the conflict across the mountains could certainly have allowed them to remain disinterested and self-contained. However, the donation of their funds, arms, and lives to the War denotes a strong desire to continue to be involved in the larger American picture. Additionally, the severing of amicable relations with the Cherokee points to the priority they placed on supporting the Revolution. The valuable trade relationship they once held with Cherokee was cut upon their annexation into the newly formed State of North Carolina and an adherence to her Patriot sympathies. Due to the Cherokee alliance with the British, trade and amenable relations between the two peoples occupying the Tennessee country was no longer an option. This subsequently left the backcountry settlers without an immediate source for the purchase and sale of goods.

In addition, their continued involvement in circumstances outside the backcountry served to deny the stereotypes of their contemporaries that they wished to be lawless, isolated men. Many individuals who remained in the settled areas of the colonies held

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<sup>51</sup> Sir Henry Clinton, *The American Rebellion; Sir Henry Clinton's Narrative of His Campaigns, 1775-1782, with an Appendix of Original Documents*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954).

these misconceptions and underestimated the intentions of westward movement for thousands of frontiersmen. For the Tennessee settlers, and many other newly independent Americans, the high ideological rights outlined in the Declaration of Independence were practically reflected in their ability to hold land, cultivate it into a sustainable crop, and set up a home. The Overmountain Men were participating in the War of Independence to protect the land they had settled, and in so doing, were upholding principles voiced by the Continental Congress some 500 miles away that men should not have to fear for their inherent liberties.

The involvement of the Tennessee men in the various battles in the War of Independence united them in a way no other event could. Forcing them to examine their own significance, the Battle of King's Mountain acted as an agent to solidify the Tennessee settlers as a unique entity, while ensuring their involvement in national struggles and events. Outsiders, too, began to recognize the Tennessee settlers as an autonomous group. Their allies in the various battles such as the Virginians in Washington County, Clarke and his Georgians, and the Carolinians respected them for their participation in the War. However, the British, Loyalists, and Indians quickly identified the ferocity with which their foes would fight and learned not to underestimate the frontiersmen.

The Overmountain Men returned to their backcountry settlement with a renewed pride in their land, having fought and sacrificed to keep it. They had engaged in an event that had tried them physically, economically, and emotionally. The Tennessee settlers formed bonds during the war that yielded a unique identity and legitimacy extending beyond that of their home colonies. These bonds were so strong, in fact, that it was

recorded that the men were, “so often called together that they were like a band of brothers raised in the same family.”<sup>52</sup> This period of unification would be a key component in the pursuit an autonomous governmental body in the post-Revolution years. The settlers’ quest for statehood would be a continuation of their pursuit of liberty and, for them, the goals of the Revolution would not be realized until an independent statehood could be obtained.

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<sup>52</sup> James Sevier to Lyman C. Draper, 19 August 1839. The Draper Manuscripts: King’s Mountain Papers [microfilm]. 11DD. (Chicago: University of Chicago, Joseph Regenstein Library, Photo duplication Dept.,1979). James Sevier was the son of Col. John Sevier.

## Chapter Three

### “The Right of Separation”: Tennessee’s Struggle for Statehood<sup>1</sup>

After the decisive American victory at Yorktown in 1781, the tumult of the American Revolution wound down in 1782-1783 with little excitement. The long and expensive war tested the resolve and ambition of the fledgling nation through economic, social, political, and militaristic strife. With the signing of the Treaty of Paris in 1783, the combatants were pledging to “forget all past misunderstandings and differences that have unhappily interrupted the good Correspondence and Friendship which they mutually wish to restore.”<sup>2</sup> With the War for Independence officially at a close, the new United States of America found herself in an internal crisis that rivaled the turmoil of the 1770s. Thirteen seemingly disjointed new states carried both economic and emotional scars from the cumbersome years of the war. Those soldiers and communities who had devoted themselves to the cause of the Revolution were faced with the task of learning how to apply their newly earned liberties to their everyday lives.

Settlers living in the westernmost provinces of North Carolina in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains belonged to this group who questioned their place in the new United States. For these settlers in the Washington District, the revolutionary ideologies of liberty were most practically exercised in their ability to own land and cultivate a sustainable crop for subsistence or commercial goals. Seeking to utilize the vigor and patriotism of the Revolution to their advantage, these Washington settlers desired to

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<sup>1</sup> Quote taken from “Manifesto Concerning the State of Franklin from Governor Alexander Martin”. 25 April 1785. William Saunders, ed., *The Colonial Records of North Carolina*, vol. 22 (Raleigh, N.C.: P. M. Hale, 1886), 646. *Documenting the American South*. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> *Treaty of Paris of 1783*. Washington, DC: U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, 1972.

differentiate themselves from their parent state and pursue their own statehood and admission to the Union. In 1784, just a year after the Treaty of Paris, the people in the Washington District began a chain of events that would forever separate themselves from North Carolina and the east coast. In pursuit of their own autonomy as a distinct and sovereign American state, the settlers cited the Revolutionary notions for which they had fought and sacrificed. Embedded in this desire for statehood rested their continuing pursuit of the republican ideological concept that the possession of land is the greatest form of liberty.

As the Overmountain Men filtered back into the Washington District from their military commitments in the east in 1783, they returned with the acclaim and appreciation of their neighbors across the mountains. According to North Carolina Governor Alexander Martin, the Overmountain Men had, “Gloriously won at King’s Mountain, and elsewhere in supporting the freedom and Independence of the United States.”<sup>3</sup> Finally, after years of being caught between the two hostile forces of Cherokee and Loyalists, the Washington settlers could enjoy the freedoms they had attained through the Revolution. Regular trade, farming, and other social aspects of their lives resumed.

This newfound freedom was restricted, however, because North Carolina ceded its lands west of the Appalachian Mountains to the federal government in 1784. This cession was made at the prodding of the federal government who had the intent to sell the land speculatively in sections to help pay the steep debts from the War for Independence. This cession was not given without reluctance, however. Governor Martin responded to

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<sup>3</sup> Manifesto Concerning the State of Franklin from Governor Alexander Martin, 25 April 1785. William Saunders, ed., *The Colonial Records of North Carolina*, vol. 22 (Raleigh, N.C.: P. M. Hale, 1886), 646. *Documenting the American South*. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2007.

the Congress' first request for the cession in January 1783 saying, "It will not be our interest or policy to make a cession of our western lands... that the State should cede her vacant lands which are daily settling up with numerous inhabitants and from which she expects to derive considerable advantage."<sup>4</sup> In a later statement made in December 1783, Martin reiterated, "I can venture to say there will be no cession of any land worthy of acceptance, as the principal lands will be entered [settled] before this reaches you."<sup>5</sup> Martin recognized that the westernmost districts of the state had the potential to prove lucrative in the post-war years, especially due to the intricate and extensive waterways within the territory. The North Carolina state congress brought to light the pressure to provide cessions to the federal government saying, "The eyes of every State to the northward are now turned towards the Carolinas and Georgia and expecting from them liberal cessions... You may readily imagine that we are not a little embarrassed."<sup>6</sup>

Mounting pressure from Virginia, who had already ceded its western lands of Kentucky in order to help reduce the national debt, took a toll on the seemingly staunch reluctance of North Carolina delegates. Dozens of members of the North Carolina legislature petitioned the Cession Act, but to no avail. In order to comply with the request of the struggling federal government, North Carolina yielded on April 19, 1784.

When news of the ratification of the cession reached the people in the western counties,

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<sup>4</sup> Letter from Alexander Martin to the Honorable Delegates in Congress. 28 January 1783. William Saunders, ed., *The Colonial Records of North Carolina*, vol. 16 (Raleigh, N.C.: P. M. Hale, Printer to the State, 1886), 733. *Documenting the American South*. (University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2007).

<sup>5</sup> Letter from Alexander Martin to the Honorable Delegates in Congress. 8 December 1783. William Saunders, ed., *The Colonial Records of North Carolina*, vol. 16 (Raleigh, N.C.: P. M. Hale, Printer to the State, 1886), pp. 919. *Documenting the American South*. (University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2007).

<sup>6</sup> Letter from Benjamin Hawkins and Hugh Williamson to Alexander Martin. 26 September 1783. William Saunders, ed., *The Colonial Records of North Carolina*, vol. 16 (Raleigh, N.C.: P. M. Hale, Printer to the State, 1886), pp. 888. *Documenting the American South*. (University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2007).

they expressed sentiments of surprise and disappointment. John Sevier, a leader of the Washington District and colonel of the Overmountain forces during the War for Independence, became a voice of opposition for the settlers during the cession crisis. In a letter to former Virginia governor Richard Casswell, Sevier notes the western settlers,

...do not pretend to discriminate the Motives that induced that body to enter into those measures, but beg leave to say that in Our Opinions, that had the deed or Deeds been Executed agreeable to the Cession Act, that then Our Lands in the West would have been secure under the Conditions of that Act.<sup>7</sup>

Sevier, and many other western settlers, believed their honor had been offended that they were so easily detached from North Carolina. Their participation in the Battle of King's Mountain and various other engagements during the War for Independence seemed to be forgotten with this cession. They, "who so often have fought and bled in behalf of the parent State," had been offended and decided to ardently pursue the liberties they were promised at the end of the war through other means.<sup>8</sup> The fact that the settlers' land and by extension their liberty were being treated so flippantly was unacceptable. The settlers felt as though they were second-rate citizens of this new country, because their desires did not seem to be of consequence to Martin or the federal government.

Only a few months after the cession of their lands had been ratified by the already-weak Articles of Confederation Congress, the North Carolina state government rescinded its offer of cession. They were unsure of how the land would be utilized and,

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<sup>7</sup> Letter from John Sevier to Richard Casswell. 28 October 1786. William Saunders, ed., *The Colonial Records of North Carolina*, vol. 22 (Raleigh, N.C.: P. M. Hale, 1886), 659-661. *Documenting the American South*. (University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2007).

<sup>8</sup> Letter from John Sevier to Richard Casswell. 28 October 1786. William Saunders, ed., *The Colonial Records of North Carolina*, vol. 22 (Raleigh, N.C.: P. M. Hale, 1886), 659-661. *Documenting the American South*. (University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2007).



more importantly, lamented the loss of the lucrative lands and trade routes.<sup>9</sup> Hugh Williamson, a North Carolina politician, wrote in September 1784 that, “some very strange and unexpected incidents have presented themselves since the last Spring which...must affect our finances greatly and may render it proper for the State to embrace measures or to use cautions which in the last Spring were not indicated.”<sup>10</sup> These cautions not considered in the previous spring refer to the decision to cede the western lands to the federal government.

This abrupt reclamation of the western lands only added fuel to the growing fire that was spreading throughout the frontier. Not only had their trade with the neighboring Indians been disrupted, but also the recipient of their taxes had yet again been changed. Their lands were in jeopardy of being divided and repurchased by interloping settlers, which was the highest breach of liberty the western settlers could imagine. Dissatisfaction with their North Carolina leaders was the topic of conversation in many homes and communities in the Washington District. The manner in which they should proceed, however, was up for debate. Isaac Shelby, another colonel of King’s Mountain and friend of Sevier, kept in touch with the happenings in the Washington District after he relocated in Kentucky after the war. His father, Evan Shelby, wrote that, “Many people are firmly attached to North Carolina, Others are as Obstinate against it; however, it is to be hoped that time and reflection will restore them friendly to North Carolina.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Samuel Cole Williams, *History of the Lost State of Franklin* (Johnson City, Tennessee: The Watauga Press, 1924), 35.

<sup>10</sup> Letter from Hugh Williamson to Alex Martin. 30 September 1784. William Saunders, ed., *The Colonial Records of North Carolina*, vol. 17 (Raleigh, N.C.: P. M. Hale, 1886), 98. *Documenting the American South*. (University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2007).

<sup>11</sup> Letter from Evan Shelby to Richard Casswell. 21 March 1787. William Saunders, ed., *The Colonial Records of North Carolina*, vol. 20 (Raleigh, N.C.: P. M. Hale, 1886), 646. *Documenting the American South*. (University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2007).

In order to proceed in a manner that complied with the majority of the western settlers, delegates representing the various western counties met on August 24, 1784. Convening at Jonesborough, the delegates discussed the radical notion of legally separating from the state of North Carolina and forming their own distinct body. This talk of secession from the parent state took root and spread throughout the counties and communities, finally coming to fruition in December of the same year. The delegates reconvened and voted, 28 to 14, in favor of total separation from North Carolina and for the establishment of a new and entirely separate state.<sup>12</sup> It was decided that it would be called Franklin, in honor of the highly popular and influential figure of the Revolution, Benjamin Franklin. The choice to name their new state after this American pillar further elucidates their adherence to the ideologies of the period and their desire for its fruition in their settlements.

The decision to separate from the state of North Carolina was, for the delegates and settlers, a fulfillment of their Revolutionary aims. The promise of liberty, freedom, and independence from an unsatisfactory government were the rights the new Franklinites sought in their secession from the parent state. They were, after all, not unfamiliar with establishing governing entities of their own. Many of the men who pushed for the State of Franklin also participated in the creation of the Watauga Association in 1772, which was the first organized government entity west of the Appalachians. The pursuit of favorable government situations had been the largest motivating factor that led many of the first settlers into the Tennessee country in the first

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<sup>12</sup>, Stanley J. Folmsbee, Robert Ewing Corlew, and Enoch L. Mitchell *Tennessee: A Short History*. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1969). 80.

place. This desire was rooted in the ideological notions of liberty, but it was expressed in economic and social circumstances.

The elected governor of this newly proposed state, John Sevier, assured the former Governor of North Carolina, Richard Caswell, that,

...under the present Circumstances the greatest part of our Western Country Lies in a very doubtfull [sic] and precarious Situation. I hope your assembly Will take Under there Serious Consideration our present Condition... Our local and remote Situation are the only motives that induce us to wish for a separation. Your Constitution and Laws we Revere, [sic] and Consider ourselves Happy that we have had it in our power to get the same Established in the State of Franklin, altho' it has Occasioned Some Confusion among our Selves... We cannot be of the opinion that any Real advantages Can be obtained by a Longer Connection.<sup>13</sup>

It was vitally important that Sevier and other Franklinites strive for an amicable relationship with the leaders of North Carolina for several reasons. Relations with the Cherokee and Creek Indians remained very unstable and Franklin had relied upon the resources the North Carolina legislature provided for their protection and defense. At the point of separation, they suddenly found themselves unable to adequately support themselves. They also maintained many trade relationships in North Carolina that would be severed should interactions between the two states turn hostile. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, it was imperative to tread lightly as they emerged as a new state in order to gain the favor of existing states and the federal government, who would be responsible for ratifying their request for statehood.

For these reasons, and because some Franklinites had a hand in writing the North Carolina constitution, the new state fashioned its constitution after that of its parent state.

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<sup>13</sup> Letter from John Sevier to Richard Casswell. 28 October 1786. William Saunders, ed., *The Colonial Records of North Carolina*, vol. 22 (Raleigh, N.C.: P. M. Hale, 1886), 659-661. *Documenting the American South*. (University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2007).

They did, however, include a preface that provided a list of causes for their separation. One of the chief reasons they cited was that the state constitution of North Carolina provided a consolation to “erect New States Westward” should the occasion arise. This was supported, they continued, by the federal Congress who was, “incouraging [sic] the erection of New States [and] have appeared to us ample incouragment [sic].” Further supporting their desire for separation, they note that,

...almost every sensible disinterested traveller has declared it incompatible with our Interest to belong in union with the Eastern part of the State, for we are not only far removed from the Eastern parts of North Carolina, But separated from them by high & almost impassable mountains, which Naturally divide us from them which have proved to us that our interest is also in many respects distinct from the inhabitants on the other side & much injured by an union with them.<sup>14</sup>

The geographic impediment of the Appalachian Mountains separated the Franklinites from the parent state not only physically, but also politically and judicially. Franklinites cited difficulties in receiving state monies for public works projects such as the construction and improvement of roads because of the distance from the state capitol in Raleigh. The Franklinites felt as though they were out of sight and thus out of the immediate consideration of state officials. They felt a lack of consideration in the North Carolina government and echoed the tenets of the Revolution that one should not be taxed without adequate representation.

The preface to the Constitution of the State of Franklin ended by asserting the key reason for separation, which was saturated with Revolutionary ideology. The constitution concluded that, “We Unanimously agree that our lives, liberties and Property can be more secure & our happiness much better propagated by our separation, &

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<sup>14</sup> The Constitution of the State of Franklin. William Saunders, ed., *The Colonial Records of North Carolina*, vol. 22 (Raleigh, N.C.: P. M. Hale, 1886), 661-670. *Documenting the American South*. (University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2007).

consequently that it is our duty and unalienable right to form ourselves into a new Independent State.”<sup>15</sup> It was no accident that much of the same language found in the Declaration of Independence is found in the Franklin Constitution. These leaders were intimately familiar with the literature that launched the Revolution and made the conscious decision to apply the same notions and pleas in their own document of independence. The Franklinites desired to find the fulfillment of their Revolutionary efforts in the creation of a governmental entity separate from the parent state.

As a response to the bold constitution, North Carolina governor Alexander Martin issued a manifesto to the inhabitants of the extralegal state, beseeching them to return to their true and rightful government. His firm letter accuses those with a “restless ambition and a lawless thirst of power,” to have brought about the call for separation. To the inhabitants who had apparently been “seduced from their Allegiance,” he says that, “the honor of this State [North Carolina] has been particularly wounded” due to the violent and immediate secession of Franklin. He warns that, “congress, by the Confederation, cannot countenance such a separation wherein the State of North Carolina hath not given her full consent,” in an attempt to shake the ambition of the Franklinites in their pursuit of legal statehood. He then presents an ultimatum to the residents of the new state warning that they were threatening to, “open afresh the wounds of this late bleeding Country, and plunge it again into all the miseries of a Civil Warr [sic].”<sup>16</sup> The rhetoric Martin utilizes in the Manifesto is reminiscent of the same warnings the British

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<sup>15</sup> The Constitution of the State of Franklin. William Saunders, ed., *The Colonial Records of North Carolina*, vol. 22 (Raleigh, N.C.: P. M. Hale, 1886), 661-670. *Documenting the American South*. (University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2007).

<sup>16</sup> All from the Manifesto by Alexander Martin. 25 April 1785. William Saunders, ed., *The Colonial Records of North Carolina*, vol. 22 (Raleigh, N.C.: P. M. Hale, 1886), 642-647. *Documenting the American South*. (University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2007).

government issued to the Americans during the Imperial Crisis of the 1760s and 1770s. This very rhetoric shaped the manner in which the Franklinites understood republican forms of liberty. The fact that they were being shamed and treated as a willful and obstinate child only served to further encourage their separation from the parent state, just as it had during the Revolution for the Patriots. Martin's motives for quelling this separation were pragmatically based in economics. The western territory provided lucrative crops and furs, trade with Indians, and access to waterways into the Ohio Valley. This is much the same reason why the British initially sought to stifle the rebellion in the colonies.

The Franklinites did not heed this firm and unforgiving manifesto, however. Franklin state leaders even went so far as to send invitations to portions of southwest Virginia to be included in the new state. This effort quickly died, however, when Governor Patrick Henry labeled the actions of the Franklinites as "high treason."<sup>17</sup> A Henry County, Virginia resident noted that "if they [Franklin] proceed, [they] will undoubtedly induce the State in a war with the Indians."<sup>18</sup> Neighboring communities in the Kentucky country wanted no part of the proposed state for similar reasons. In their proposal to the federal Congress for admission into the Union, the Franklinites specifically mapped out the proposed territory to be included in the new state, which would include lands west to Nashville and south into Chickasaw territory.<sup>19</sup> They submitted their petition for admission in May 1785 with the name as "Frankland,"

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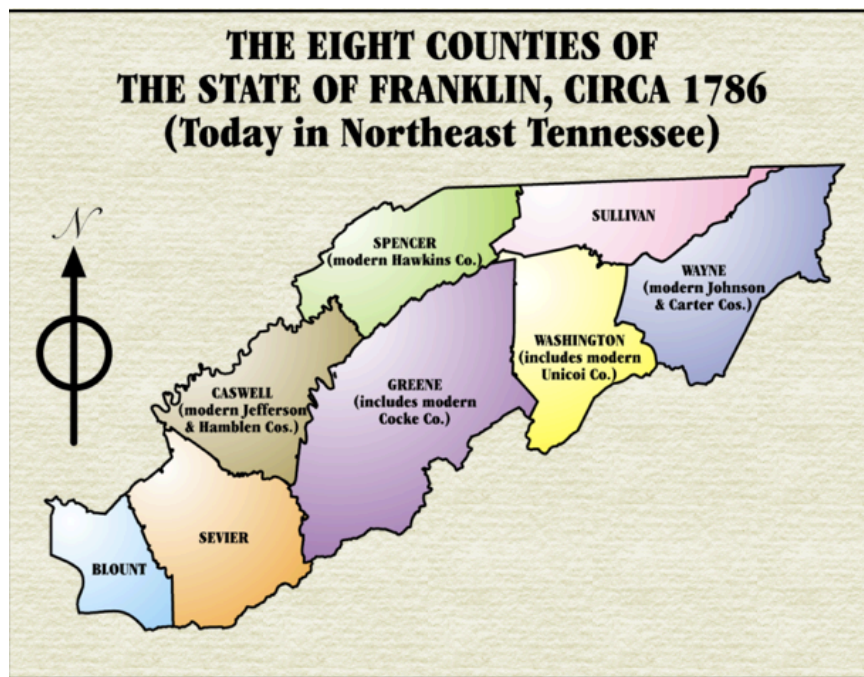
<sup>17</sup> Samuel Cole Williams, *History of the Lost State of Franklin* (Johnson City, Tennessee: The Watauga Press, 1924), 83.

<sup>18</sup> Letter from Joseph Martin, 26 March 1785. The Draper Manuscripts: Draper's Notes [microfilm]. 12S. (Chicago: University of Chicago, Joseph Regenstein Library, Photo duplication Dept., 1979).

<sup>19</sup> See Figure 9. "The Eight Counties of The State of Franklin, Circa 1786," <http://www.loststates.com>. (Accessed January, 29 2012).

however only seven states voted in favor of the movement thereby stifling the petition that required at least nine approving states for admission.

The Franklin legislature reconvened after the petition was rejected to explore their options and decided to seek the advice of the man for whom the state was named, Benjamin Franklin. In response to the pleading letter, Franklin suggested that they should, “accommodate [their] misunderstanding with the government of North Carolina by amicable means, and avoid an Indian war by preventing encroachments on their land.”<sup>20</sup>



(Figure 9)

These wise suggestions were difficult to heed, however, because the struggling state legislature was experiencing factions and dissension that threatened the survival of the Franklin project. In addition, North Carolina was offering pardons to those who wished to individually rejoin the parent state. Even some of the founding leaders of the

<sup>20</sup> Benjamin Franklin to John Sevier. 30 June 1787. Franklin Papers, VIII, folio, 1803, MSS. Division Library of Congress.

Franklin movement secretly pledged their allegiance to North Carolina, namely John Tipton. This faction, called the Tiptonites, held public elections in Washington and Sullivan counties for the North Carolina legislature in 1786 on the same days as Franklin elections in the same counties. These political quarrels eventually erupted in a physical brawl between the leaders of the two groups, Sevier and Tipton. Citizens of Franklin became deeply entrenched in their beliefs of how the extralegal state should proceed. The North Carolina legislature and governor offered to waive any back taxes and to withhold the force of the militia should the Franklin government concede to rejoin the parent state. Many citizens concurred with Sevier when he wrote to Governor Caswell in 1787 that, “We shall Continue to Act as independent, And Would rather suffer death in all its various and frightful Shapes than Conform to anything that is disgraceful.”<sup>21</sup>

Due to the political friction between the two entities, an agreement was drawn up between North Carolina and Franklin on March 20, 1787. Some key items were settled upon in this meeting, including, “That the Inhabitants residing within the said disputed territory [Franklin], are at full liberty and discretion to pay their public Taxes, to either the State of North Carolina or the State of Franklin.”<sup>22</sup> The two also agreed that if any person was convicted of a felony in Franklin that a North Carolina court could try him, if he wished. This fluidity of legal relations concerning taxes and justice provided a means to lubricate the tensions between the extralegal state and the parent state, however it only served to exacerbate the confusion and frustrations of the residents in the disputed

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<sup>21</sup> Letter from John Sevier to Richard Caswell. 6 April 1787. William Saunders, ed., *The Colonial Records of North Carolina*, vol. 22 (Raleigh, N.C.: P. M. Hale, 1886), 679-680. *Documenting the American South*. (University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2007).

<sup>22</sup> Articles of Agreement between North Carolina and Franklin. 20 March 1787. William Saunders, ed., *The Colonial Records of North Carolina*, vol. 22 (Raleigh, N.C.: P. M. Hale, 1886), 674-675. *Documenting the American South*. (University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2007).



land.

The political troubles of Franklin were not the only ones complicating the survival of the de facto state. Indian tribes that surrounded the territory had supported the British during the Revolution and were quite wary of the encroaching white settlers. When Franklin was established, Sevier and other leaders signed more treaties with neighboring tribes. However, Franklinites breeched these treaties to accommodate the settlers who poured into the frontier lands. Chief Old Tassel, leader of a pacifist band of Cherokee in the Over Hill region, noted in 1785 that, “We have held several treaties with the Americans when bounds were fixed, and fair promises made that the white people would not come over, but we always find that after a treaty they settle much faster than before.”<sup>23</sup> One specific agreement was the Treaty of Dumplin Creek, in which the State of Franklin negotiated the admittance of hundreds of settlers to move into traditional Cherokee hunting grounds. In spite of the treaty, violence ensued. The frontier became a raging battleground, in what John Sevier, Jr., described as “the hottest Indian war I ever witnessed.”<sup>24</sup>

All of these difficulties, coupled with their dissatisfaction with the weak Articles of Confederation government, pushed Sevier and other Franklin leaders to seek assistance elsewhere. With the lack of funds or support from the United States government, the State of Franklin considered an alliance with Spain, whose Governor Esteban Rodríguez Miró sent gold to Sevier in hopes of adding the Appalachian region to Spanish holdings

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<sup>23</sup>Pat Alderman and Timothy N. Tate. *Nancy Ward, Cherokee Chieftainess, Dragging Canoe, Cherokee-Chickamauga War Chief*. 2nd ed. (Johnson City, Tenn.: Overmountain Press, 1990).

<sup>24</sup>Letter from John Sevier, Jr., 20 June 1835. The Draper Manuscripts: Draper’s Notes [microfilm]. 12S. (Chicago: University of Chicago, Joseph Regenstein Library, Photo duplication Dept.,1979).

in Florida and Louisiana. Other trans-Appalachian settlements were propositioned with Spanish protection and gold, including Kentucky and Cumberland.<sup>25</sup> For the Franklinites, local interests were placed above allegiances to surrounding states or to the national government. The Franklin project had consumed its leaders and they were determined to make their foray as an independent state a lasting success. The offer of an alliance with Spain would allow the Franklinites to subdue the hostile Indian tribes and maintain control of the land. This, of course, was the goal of the proposed state in the first place. Reinforcing these republican ideals of land ownership remained at the center of their ambition.

However, as rumors of a Spanish alliance spread throughout Franklin and neighboring states, many residents ardently spoke out against such a proposal. As one anonymous inhabitant so eloquently and vehemently argued in a circular letter, “To sell us & make us vassals to the merciless Spaniards, is a grievance not to be borne. The parliamentary acts which occasioned our revolt from Great Britain were not so barefaced and intolerable.”<sup>26</sup> Even though no agreement of alliance between Franklin and Spain ever came to fruition, North Carolina officials charged Sevier with treason and arrested him in 1788. Sevier was quickly released, but it was evident that the Franklin movement had died while he sat in a North Carolina jail. He and other loyal holdouts of the state swore oaths of allegiance to North Carolina in 1789. In the face of mounting adversities, the Franklin leaders were forced to accept the quashing of their beloved project. The

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<sup>25</sup>Malcolm J. Rohrbough, *The Trans-Appalachian Frontier: People, Societies, and Institutions, 1775-1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 118. The Cumberland settlements refer to those communities near present-day Nashville.

<sup>26</sup>A Letter from a Gentlemen to his Friend in New England, 4 December 1786, quoted in Stanley J., Robert Ewing Corlew, and Enoch L. Mitchell *Tennessee; A Short History*, 91.

settlers' quest to acquire their own autonomy had lived a brief and turbulent life.

With the territory formerly known as Franklin once again firmly under the control of North Carolina, citizens learned to readjust to the jurisdiction of the parent state. Sevier was elected to the North Carolina legislature in 1789 as representative of the western counties. He was one of a majority of delegates from the state to vote for the ratification of the newly completed United States Constitution, making North Carolina the twelfth state to enter the Union. Joining the Union did not come without stipulation, however. A new cession act was put into place, which required North Carolina to relinquish all trans-Appalachian land claims to the federal government. This act differed from the similar controversial act of 1784 because it assured those settlers who already lived in the western territory that their land claims would remain valid and intact. Another appealing component of this act stated that one or more states would be created out of the ceded lands at a later date.<sup>27</sup>



(Figure 10)

<sup>27</sup> See Figure 10. "Southwest Territory," <http://www.tengenweb.org>. (Accessed February 15, 2012).

A cession of western territories was required of Virginia and North Carolina, but the Kentucky country applied for statehood at the permission of its parent state of Virginia in 1790, excluding Kentucky from inclusion in the new territory. While this process was underway for Kentucky, the Tennessee country to the Mississippi River was organized into the Southwest Territory under the governorship of William Blount. Applying the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 to the territory in question, all the same laws and privileges were employed except for the restriction of slavery in the new territory. The “Territory South of the River Ohio” was given three distinct criteria it must meet before acquiring statehood in the Union. Its inhabitants must first employ appointed officials, then set up a representative system, and finally, when the free population reached 60,000 individuals the territory could apply for statehood.<sup>28</sup> After the embarrassing end to the Franklin movement, this structure provided the citizens of the Southwest Territory a clear means to the statehood they so desperately desired. It also cut out the necessity for the initial approval from any existing state before they officially applied, allowing their eligibility for statehood to rest in their own hands.

In order to establish a thriving commercial environment in the Southwest Territory, the inhabitants had to be participants in trade with other US states and territories, Indian tribes, and even international entities. This required a certain sensitivity of the Territory to international and regional conflicts so the inhabitants could best capitalize on trade. Sevier, who had been appointed a Brigadier General of the territory, wrote in 1791 that,

An excise bill is also on the carpet [House of Representatives], for imposing duties on distilled spirits, stills, &c. Though this, I hope, will not

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<sup>28</sup> John R. Finger, *Tennessee Frontiers: Three Regions in Transition* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 149.

reach us. The news from Europe is, that Britain and Spain continue indefatigably their preparations for war...I am of opinion, should the excise bill be passed, we shall derive great benefits from it; [provided] we can keep clear ourselves, as it would have a direct tendency to encourage emigration into our country, and enable us to sell the production of our own distilleries, lower than our neighbours [sic].<sup>29</sup>

These considerations for international affairs reveal the global connectedness of the Southwest Territory. The concerns of a European war were felt not only in the nation's capital, but also in the trans-Appalachian region. As President Washington worked to sustain the country under the Constitution and avoid foreign entanglements, residents of the Southwest Territory were vying to prove themselves a legitimate actor in the nation's progress.

While foreign conflicts remained apparent to the residents of the territory, the more immediate threat continued to be that of Indian attacks. Despite a litany of treaties, relations between the Territory and neighboring tribes remained fragile, at best. Governor Blount continually submitted concerns of hostile Indian raids to Congress, President Washington, and Secretary of War Henry Knox. Blount expressed the danger that adjacent Cherokee and Chickasaw tribes posed to the settlers of the Southwest Territory, hoping for reinforcements.<sup>30</sup> In the December 1792 session of Congress, "Blount assert[ed] that most of the depredations can not be charged to the Spaniards; attributes troubles largely to bloodthirstiness of Indians; gives list of 119 persons killed, wounded, or taken prisoners by Indians since January 1, 1791."<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Letter from John Sevier to General Daniel Smith, 10 January 1791. The Tennessee Governor's Papers: Governor John Sevier Papers, First Administration Papers [microfilm]. 1:1. (Nashville: Tennessee State Library and Archives, 1988).

<sup>30</sup> See Figure 11 for a context of the proximity of white settlers to Indian tribes. "Tennessee, 1790-1796," <http://www.tengenweb.org>. (Accessed February 20, 2012).

<sup>31</sup> 7 December 1792, 2C:2S, A. W. Greely *Public Documents of the First Fourteen Congresses, 1789-1817*. (Washington, D.C.: G.P.O., 1904), 101.



(Figure 11)

Indian raids and hostilities continued to be the most challenging issue facing the Southwest Territory. Still trying to add to their foothold in the trans-Appalachia region, Spain offered support to the Indian groups in hopes of breaking the Southwest Territory into pieces, thereby making them easier to acquire. The Spanish governor of New Orleans, Baron de Carondelet, pledged to, “Supply the Cherokees and Creeks with sufficient arms and munitions to maintain themselves.”<sup>32</sup> To these raids and threats, Secretary Knox insisted on, “the necessity of additional appropriations for frontier defense.”<sup>33</sup> With a steadily growing population in the Southwest Territory, these defenses were necessary not only to defend the settlers, but also to protect commercial interests.

To best voice these and other issues to the Congress, the Territory needed to have their own delegates in the US Congress. In order to accomplish this appointment legally, Territorial leaders cited Section 12 of the Northwest Ordinance that stated that once a

<sup>32</sup> Quoted in Stanley J. Folmsbee, Robert Ewing Corlew, and Enoch L. Mitchell *Tennessee; A Short History*, 103. For more on Spanish relations with the Cherokee, see Robert J. Conley, “A Pipe and a Little Tobacco,” in *The Cherokee Nation: A History* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005), 73-80.

<sup>33</sup> 7 December 1792, 2C:2S, A. W. Greely *Public Documents of the First Fourteen Congresses, 1789-1817*. (Washington, D.C.: G.P.O., 1904), 101.

territorial legislature was formed, it could elect a non-voting delegate to the United States Congress.<sup>34</sup> Governor Blount made a proclamation to the US Congress in 1793 saying,

Proof having been made to me, that there are five thousand and upwards, of free male inhabitants, of full age in the said Territory: I do give authority for the election of representatives to represent the people in General Assembly; and do ordain, that an election shall be held by ballot [sic], for thirteen representatives to represent the people for two years in general assembly...qualified as provided and required by the Ordinance of Congress, of July 13, 1787, for the government of the Territory North of the Ohio, and by free male inhabitants, of full age, qualified as electors.<sup>35</sup>

This not only accomplished better representation for the Territory in the nation's capitol, but it also made delegates from other states more aware of its pressing issues, earning a better reputation for the settlers after the Franklin debacle.

As the population of the Southwest Territory continued to burgeon upwards of 50,000 inhabitants, the necessity arose for the establishment of governmental and social mechanisms to support the trans-Appalachian settlers. In September of 1794, the territorial legislature met to appropriate the funds necessary to erect a "Public Gaol [sic] and Stocks in the town of Nashville."<sup>36</sup> In order to raise the funds a lottery was established and, "The number of one thousand tickets shall be issued and sold out to adventurers, at three dollars each."<sup>37</sup> A similar lottery strategy was employed in the same month when the legislature voted on "An Act to Cut and clear a Waggon [sic] Road to

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<sup>34</sup> John R. Finger, *Tennessee Frontiers*, 127.

<sup>35</sup> Proclamation by William Blount, 19 October 1793. The Tennessee Governor's Papers: Governor William Blount Papers, 1790-1796 [microfilm]. Box B2: No. 140B. (Nashville: Tennessee State Library and Archives, 1988).

<sup>36</sup> "Act for the Purpose of Raising a Fund for Erecting a District Jail and Stocks in the Town of Nashville in the Mero District," in Tennessee Virtual Archives at the Tennessee State Library and Archives, <http://teva.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/compoundobject/collection/tfd/id/95/rec/1> (Accessed February 4, 2012). In the eighteenth century, the common spelling of "jail" was "gaol".

<sup>37</sup> "Act for the Purpose of Raising a Fund for Erecting a District Jail and Stocks in the Town of Nashville in the Mero District," in Tennessee Virtual Archives at the Tennessee State Library and Archives, <http://teva.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/compoundobject/collection/tfd/id/95/rec/1> (Accessed February 4, 2012).

the Settlements on the Cumberland River in the Mero District.”<sup>38</sup> As this project of building a road would be more costly than the construction of a jail, this lottery sold three thousand tickets and was advertised in “Kentucky, North Carolina, Virginia, and Territorial Gazettes.”<sup>39</sup> This road would, of course, encourage the settlement of the western parts of the Territory as well as trade on the Mississippi River. The addition of judicial buildings and improved roads in the Territory provided a much-needed structure to those hopeful of attaining statehood in the near future.

Another addition to the developing Territory was in promotion of higher education. In 1794, Blount College, named after the Territory’s governor, was established in Knoxville and was the first representation of higher education west of the Appalachian divide.<sup>40</sup> With Pennsylvania-born Samuel Carrick as the college’s first president, Blount College was also a continuing example of the diversity of eastern settlers in the Territory. The college’s charter very distinctly dictated that it would be a nonsectarian establishment, which was unique to colleges in the eighteenth century.<sup>41</sup> Late eighteenth century culture and education was often woven with religious tones, making Blount College atypical of this trend.<sup>42</sup> It is also a challenge to the old religious order of the colonial era that often stifled education, particularly in the Anglican province

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<sup>38</sup> “An Act to Cut and clear a Waggon Road to the Settlements on the Cumberland River in the Mero District,” in Tennessee Virtual Archives at the Tennessee State Library and Archives, <http://teva.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/compoundobject/collection/tfd/id/194/rec/3> (Accessed January 25, 2012).

<sup>39</sup> “An Act to Cut and clear a Waggon Road to the Settlements on the Cumberland River in the Mero District,” in Tennessee Virtual Archives at the Tennessee State Library and Archives, <http://teva.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/compoundobject/collection/tfd/id/194/rec/3> (Accessed January 25, 2012).

<sup>40</sup> John R. Finger, *Tennessee Frontiers: Three Regions in Transition*, 172.

<sup>41</sup> Blount College was renamed East Tennessee College in 1807 and was finally renamed The University of Tennessee in 1879 after the Civil War.

<sup>42</sup> Gordon Wood, “Republican Reforms,” in *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789-1815* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).



of Virginia. Many residents of the Territory were one-time inhabitants of the colony of Virginia and remembered well the oppressive nature of the Anglican Church, as it required substantial taxes from residents. The availability of higher education to the young men of the Territory would eventually yield representatives who possessed a traditional, classical education. The establishment of the college also reflected a piece of Revolutionary ideology that a self evident right is the ability to pursue one's own kind of happiness. This could refer to the want of land, education, family, industry, or any number of other human desires. The prevailing search for an American identity in the 1790s is echoed in the establishment of Blount College as it speaks to the democratic ideologies of the period.

By 1795, relations with Indians in the Southwest Territory finally reached a point of stability. The crushing defeat of the Western Confederacy of Indian tribes at the Battle of Fallen Timbers in the Ohio country in 1794 had a quieting effect on the southern tribes threatening settlers in the Tennessee country. Relations with the Spanish in Florida and Louisiana were eased when US Representative Charles Pinckney negotiated a treaty that clearly defined the boundaries between Spanish colonies and U.S. states. It also allowed for uninterrupted US navigation rights on the Mississippi River. The signing of Pinckney's Treaty in 1795 provided the settlers in the Southwest Territory the ability to expand and trade freely without threat of Indian or Spanish interference. With this mounting stability in the Territory, statehood seemed imminent.

Governor Blount called the territorial assembly to meet to discuss the means by which they could achieve statehood in the summer of 1795. He called for a census, or, "An Act for the Enumeration of the Inhabitants of the Territory of the United States

South of the River Ohio” on July 11.<sup>43</sup> Still operating under the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, it was necessary for the territory in question to possess at least 60,000 free inhabitants to be considered for statehood. The completed census revealed a sprawling total population of 77,262, of which 10,613 were slaves. This left 66,649 free residents of the Territory, including 973 free blacks.<sup>44</sup> With this information, the territorial legislature voted to pursue the process to apply for admission into the Union. They elected delegates to convene in January 1796 for a state Constitutional Convention. In addition to electing delegates to write and approve the state constitution, they also elected the person who would become the first governor of the new state. The choice was clear, and almost unanimous, resulting in John Sevier’s second governorship after Franklin. When he was elected to this position, the outgoing territorial Governor Blount presented a silver watch to Sevier with the inscription, “To my esteemed and trusted friend, John Sevier,” showing his approval and support of the proposed first governor of Tennessee.<sup>45</sup>

The new state’s federal representatives were also preemptively elected with Blount and William Cocke as Senators and a young Andrew Jackson as Representative in the House.<sup>46</sup> Blount’s interests had long rested in federal politics, and he was all too happy to relinquish his position as territorial governor for that of Senator. Cocke had previously served on the Virginia House of Burgesses and in the colonial militia during the War for Independence. Upon his travels during the War, Cocke decided to relocate to the growing Tennessee backcountry region in 1776 and was involved in the establishment

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<sup>43</sup> “An Act for the Enumeration of the Inhabitants of the Territory of the United States South of the River Ohio,” in Tennessee Virtual Archives at the Tennessee State Library and Archives, <http://teva.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/compoundobject/collection/tfd/id/111> (Accessed January 25, 2012).

<sup>44</sup> John R. Finger, *Tennessee Frontiers: Three Regions in Transition*, 149.

<sup>45</sup> Silver Pocket Watch, object. Tennessee State Museum: Nashville (Object viewed 27 December 2011).

<sup>46</sup> Stanley J. Folmsbee, Robert Ewing Corlew, and Enoch L. Mitchell *Tennessee; A Short History*, 107.

of the State of Franklin. Jackson served as a lawyer in the town of Jonesboro before his election to the House of Representatives. All three gentlemen elected to the Congress to represent Tennessee were staunch adherents to Thomas Jefferson's Democratic-Republican Party, supporting the party's opposition to a strong central government, individual freedoms, and state's rights. Their partisan preferences were rather unwelcome in the Federalist-dominated Congress, as they were seeking to maintain their influence in the upcoming Presidential election.

On February 6, 1796, the delegates approved a constitution for the State of Tennessee. The document was replete with Revolutionary ideology, such as the statement that a citizen of the state could not be, "deprived of his life, liberty or property."<sup>47</sup> It also stated that, "all power is inherent in the People...[who] have at all times an unalienable and indefeasible right to alter, reform, or abolish the Government in such manner as they may think proper," further revealing the residents' enduring notions of Revolutionary rhetoric.<sup>48</sup> For these Tennesseans, applying for admission into the Union was the fruition of goals, desires, frustrations, and victories from the colonial and Revolutionary periods.

In response to this activity, conversations swelled in Washington about the emerging prominence of the once-forgettable backcountry settlers. The U.S. Congress reviewed their request for statehood on May 5, 1796.<sup>49</sup> Deliberation on how to proceed

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<sup>47</sup> "1796 Tennessee Constitution," in Tennessee Virtual Archives at the Tennessee State Library and Archives, <http://teva.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/compoundobject/collection/tfd/id/90> (Accessed January 25, 2012).

<sup>48</sup> "1796 Tennessee Constitution," in Tennessee Virtual Archives at the Tennessee State Library and Archives, <http://teva.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/compoundobject/collection/tfd/id/90> (Accessed January 25, 2012).

<sup>49</sup> 5 May 1796, 4C:1S, A. W. Greely *Public Documents of the First Fourteen Congresses, 1789-1817*. (Washington, D.C.: G.P.O., 1904), 182.

with the request lasted for the duration of the congressional session. Since Tennessee was the first state to be created from a territory, there was no precedent to follow. Congressmen were divided due to the emergence of political factions within the federal government. New England-based Federalists led by John Adams were generally against admitting Tennessee while the predominantly southern Jeffersonian Republicans supported it. At the end of the congressional session, a slim majority approved Tennessee's statehood. President Washington signed a bill ratifying Congress's approval of Tennessee's application for admission on June 1, 1796. Senators Blount and Cocke wrote to Sevier on June 2 that,

It is generally believed that the State of Tennessee would have experienced no difficulty in the admission of her Senators if it had not been understood that George Washington would not again accept the Presidency and that that State would throw its weight into the Southern Scale against Mr. Adams whom it seems the northern People mean to run at the approaching Election.<sup>50</sup>

The admission of Tennessee into the Union had come at the end of the Presidential career of Washington, and the capitol was in the throes of a looming election season. This, as Blount and Cocke noted, halted the expediency of the divided Congress on the Tennessee decision. The established states, and the factions therein, believed that Tennessee might have the ability to tip the scales of the 1796 Presidential election. This consideration would set the stage for Tennessee to be a legitimate actor in national politics.

These complications did not sully the excitement that surrounded the new state's approval for admission into the Union, however. When Sevier addressed the first general

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<sup>50</sup> Letter to Governor Sevier from William Blount and William Cocke, 2 June 1796. The Tennessee Governor's Papers: Governor William Blount Papers, 1790-1796 [microfilm]. Box B2: No. 140B. (Nashville: Tennessee State Library and Archives, 1988).

assembly of the state in July 1796, he proudly proclaimed that he had,

... the pleasure of announcing... the admission of the State of Tennessee into the general union, a circumstance, pregnant with every flattering prospect, of peace, happiness and opulence to our infant State: The period is at length arrived, when the people of the Southwestern Territory may enjoy all the blessings and liberties of a free and independent republic.<sup>51</sup>

Sevier articulated the gratifying sentiment that was felt throughout the legislature and by the average backcountry settler who could now call himself a Tennessean. The burgeoning population of the newly admitted sixteenth state could now exercise the activities, laws, and privileges of full-fledged statehood in the government they helped create through the trials of the Revolution.

While the proud sentiment endured among Tennesseans, troublesome issues facing the new state curtailed the celebrations. Amid the switch from territory to state, the Cherokee and Chickasaw tribes neighboring the white settlements commenced hostilities yet again due to the spread of Tennesseans into their hunting grounds.<sup>52</sup> Before Blount stepped down as governor of the Southwest territory, he unlawfully seized Cherokee lands in February 1796.<sup>53</sup> In April, governor-elect Sevier wrote to Cherokee leaders reminding them of treaties and aims for friendship, while making the white man's dominance abundantly clear. He wrote,

I shall always endeavor to keep the path of peace wide and straight between us, and if ever war is again known to your land, it will not be our fault. Your good and great friend, Governor Blount, is going to Philadelphia to sit in the great and beloved council of America. Your

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<sup>51</sup> To the Gentlemen of the Senate and House of Representatives of Tennessee, 30 July 1796. The Tennessee Governor's Papers: Governor John Sevier Papers, First Administration Papers, 1796-1801[microfilm]. 1:1. (Nashville: Tennessee State Library and Archives, 1988).

<sup>52</sup> Robert J. Conley *The Cherokee Nation: A History*, 78.

<sup>53</sup> 2 February 1796, 4C:1S, A. W. Greely *Public Documents of the First Fourteen Congresses, 1789-1817*. (Washington, D.C.: G.P.O., 1904), 179.

beloved father, Washington, is President there, and so long as your nation keeps bright the chain of peace, they will both be your friends.<sup>54</sup>

Protection for citizens from raiding Indian tribes consumed Sevier's duties as governor in his efforts to raise and equip a defensive militia. He sought support from the Congress for funding and arms, beseeching them to consider, "the deplorable condition our frontier citizens would be plunged into should this country unhappily again be plunged into war with a savage nation."<sup>55</sup> Many eastern settlers immigrated to the expansive, and generally unimproved, lands of the west during this period of transition from territory to state. They sought cheap land and a better means of supporting themselves and their families. However, as the population grew, the problem of protecting them did as well. Sevier noted that, "The rapid emigration into our state is truly flattering, but a single hostility might [cause] the prospect...to cease. Many thousands have removed to our government, not many are wealthy, their resources are small, and their wants great."<sup>56</sup>

A fragile relationship with neighboring Indian tribes was not the only troublesome circumstance that plagued the fledgling state. In 1797, a serious scandal tied to a popular Tennessee senator struck the nation's capitol. After Blount ascended to his long-desired position as a U.S. Senator, his finances took a sharp downturn. His investments in western land speculation failed and he sought a way to recover his fortune. He and a few accomplices concocted a conspiracy to aid the British in the acquisition of Spanish Florida and Louisiana. This, they believed, would help keep the territories out of the

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<sup>54</sup> To the Chiefs and Warriors of the Cherokee Nation, 2 April 1796. The Tennessee Governor's Papers: Governor John Sevier Papers, First Administration Papers, 1796-1801 [microfilm]. 1:1. (Nashville: Tennessee State Library and Archives, 1988).

<sup>55</sup> Letter to the Gentlemen of the General Assembly, 22 April 1796. The Tennessee Governor's Papers: Governor John Sevier Papers, First Administration Papers, 1796-1801 [microfilm]. 1:1. (Nashville: Tennessee State Library and Archives, 1988).

<sup>56</sup> Letter to the Gentlemen of the General Assembly, 22 April 1796. The Tennessee Governor's Papers: Governor John Sevier Papers, First Administration Papers, 1796-1801 [microfilm]. 1:1. (Nashville: Tennessee State Library and Archives, 1988).

hands of the rising French General Napoleon, who was daily gaining power. They were to encourage Cherokee and Creek Indians and western Americans to threaten the Spanish colonies for the benefit of the British Empire. For these services, the conspirators aimed to demand compensation in vast tracts of land. This, of course, was assuming the British would welcome such a plan. They were tied up with a European continental war with the Spanish and French, and hardly had the means to send troops back into North America.

Blount's conspiracy was discovered when President Adams intercepted an incriminating letter in July 1797. He promptly gave it to Congress for consideration, which voted to impeach the Senator on July 7 for violation of his Constitutional oath. Blount tried to defend his honor and reputation in his home state, writing to the Tennessee legislature that, "I hope...the people upon the Western Waters will see nothing but good in it [the conspiracy], for so I intended it—especially for Tennessee."<sup>57</sup> Sevier was asked to supply the federal government with any documents that might be used as further evidence of Blount's treason. A cover letter to an agent of the Department of War revealed that some letters enclosed were, "in the handwriting of Mr. Blount to Colonel John McKee and that probably the contents of the same may be inconsistent with the peace and interest of the United States."<sup>58</sup> McKee served as the U.S. federal agent to the Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Cherokee tribes, alluding to his involvement in the conspiracy as well.

Impeachment proceedings began in 1798 against Blount for "conspiring to excite the Creek and Cherokee nations to hostilities," and he was removed from his position and

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<sup>57</sup> Found in, William H. Masterson *William Blount* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1954). 320-321.

<sup>58</sup> Letter to Colonel David Henley from John Sevier, 16 August 1797. The Tennessee Governor's Papers: Governor John Sevier Papers, First Administration Papers, 1796-1801 [microfilm]. 1:3. (Nashville: Tennessee State Library and Archives, 1988).

alienated from Washington society.<sup>59</sup> While Blount awaited the trial decision, he returned to a very loyal Tennessee. Because the Adams administration was exceedingly unpopular in the state, many Tennessee leaders, including Andrew Jackson, defended Blount vehemently. Painted as a victim of partisan prejudice, Blount received no public scorn in his home state for the conspiracy to aid Britain.<sup>60</sup> After much deliberation, the impeachment charges were dismissed on January 11, 1799.<sup>61</sup> This was not due to the Congress' doubt of Blount's guilt, but rather as a way to reestablish positive relations with the Spanish and those in the western states of Kentucky and Tennessee.

With these, and still other, issues facing the young state, Tennessee's earliest years were nothing short of chaotic. Fears of Indian raids, political factions, and the threat of a national war with foreign powers concerned Tennesseans of all social ranks. Those involved in the establishment of the state were not unaccustomed to trials, however. The manner in which the Tennessee country was settled, the various extralegal governments that were set up, and the toilsome War for Independence alluded to the adversity Tennesseans would face in the early years of statehood.

Despite the difficulties the new state faced, many looked forward with anticipation of the dawning nineteenth century on the horizon. Tennesseans felt they were finally enjoying the liberties the first generation of trans-Appalachian settlers sought in the 1760s. To them, the ideology of the Revolution was reflected in the ability to own land, to earn a living, to worship according to personal beliefs, to actively participate in government, and to defend themselves against those who would threaten these rights.

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<sup>59</sup> 7 February 1798, 5C:2S, A. W. Greely *Public Documents of the First Fourteen Congresses, 1789-1817*. (Washington, D.C.: G.P.O., 1904), 229.

<sup>60</sup> Stanley J. Folmsbee, Robert Ewing Corlew, and Enoch L. Mitchell *Tennessee; A Short History*, 130.

<sup>61</sup> William Blount remains the only United States Senator to be impeached.



For Tennesseans, the Revolution was not won in 1783 as it was for their eastern brethren. Many of the grievances outlined in the Declaration of Independence persisted, in some way, for those living on the frontier in the Tennessee country. Their liberties were not realized until they were accepted as equal partners in the nation they helped build. Admission into the Union affirmed the legitimacy and viability of the settlers of the Western Waters. With this recognition, many federal leaders began to have a more westward-focused mindset at the beginning of the nineteenth century, specifically with the Louisiana Purchase in 1803. Tennessee's statehood ushered in an era of fascination with the frontier that would permanently change the goals and priorities of the young nation.

## **Conclusion**

### **The Volunteer State Prospers**

Settlers in the Tennessee country went through several distinct stages from the 1760s until their admission into the United States as an autonomous state in 1796. Their status as a member of a larger governmental body was very fluid, taking them from a squatter community, to the Watauga Association, to admission to North Carolina, to the State of Franklin, to the Southwest Territory, and finally to Tennessee statehood. Not only did the title of their settlement change, but so too did the faces of their enemies. From the oppressive British colonial officials, to Loyalist militias and hostile Cherokee and Creek tribes, to those in the United States government who impeded their desire for statehood, the Tennesseans faced adversity from the moment they collected into a community. Their goals and ideologies, however, did not change. The original settlers migrated over the mountains in pursuit of land away from the unfavorable and corrupt governments in their home colonies of Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina. In the years of the Revolution, this land became all the more precious, as the settlers fought to protect it from British soldiers and their allies. The post-Revolution years brought about the challenge to take ownership of this land in a legal way, through the pursuit of statehood in the country they helped create. Throughout these stages, the driving force for the actions of the settlers was the pursuit of the republican ideology that land was the most tangible manifestation of liberty.

With this liberty finally expressed and obtained in the 1796 statehood, the Tennesseans found themselves on the cusp of a new century and a new era in American politics, culture, and economy. As the nation was pushed into the throes of another war

with Britain in the War of 1812, Tennessee emerged on the national scene due to its participation and leadership in the ensuing conflict. When Congress raised the call for men to fight in 1812, some 2,500 Tennesseans volunteered to defend the land they held most dear once again. This substantial contribution of men to the war effort earned the new state the nickname of the “Volunteer State.”<sup>1</sup> The Tennesseans’ previous supply of over 1,000 Overmountain Men for the Battle of King’s Mountain in 1780 certainly set a solid precedent upon which to give the state the title.

Included in this force were two young Tennesseans, Sam Houston and David Crockett, who would both go on to rise to national fame in the mid-nineteenth century.

As the theater of war turned south in 1814, Andrew Jackson led a force of Tennessee militia, Choctaw, Cherokee, and U.S. regulars southward to attack the Creek tribes, who were allied the British. It was in this conflict where Jackson earned the nickname of “Old Hickory,” solidifying his reputation as a tough and resilient soldier.<sup>2</sup> These victories would catapult Jackson’s career in national politics as thousands of Americans would adhere to his brand of democracy that was marked by the advancement and interests of the common man. Leaders from western states, such as Jackson and Kentucky’s Henry Clay, would take the stage in national politics and diplomacy in the 1820s and 1830s. This is indicative that the national government, and Americans as a whole, adopted a more westward focus as it considered the lucrative commodities and ventures that were available in the frontier lands.

With this attention to the west, Tennessee’s status as a key contributor to the success of the United States was solidified by the early nineteenth century because it

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<sup>1</sup> Donald R. Hickey *The War of 1812: A Forgotten Conflict, Bicentennial Edition* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012), 149.

<sup>2</sup> Robert V. Remini *Andrew Jackson* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 36.

served as a bridge between the established eastern seaboard states and the wild frontier. One significant Tennessee contribution was the city of Memphis, a vital port on the Mississippi River. Thousands of people came in and out of Memphis to trade or sell their goods down-river to New Orleans. The lowland regions in West Tennessee also proved to be good for planting the commercial crop that overtook the South in the nineteenth century: King Cotton. This, in turn, contributed to the use of slave labor in the pockets of the state where cotton and tobacco plantations thrived. This set the state up for the looming conflict that would plague the nation in the mid-nineteenth century. However, until the Civil War exploded, Tennesseans prospered in agriculture, livestock, trades, and commerce.

Thus, Tennesseans continued to shape and be shaped by the land, continuing the efforts of the first trans-Appalachian settlers of the colonial era. The notion that land was the greatest tangible expression of liberty endured in the nineteenth century and continued to influence the way Tennesseans acted and reacted to surrounding circumstances. The Tennesseans' desire, defense, and ownership of these elusive mountains, rolling hills, fertile pastures, and raging rivers dictated the measure of devotion they showed in three distinct wars in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The weight of the importance of the land to the Tennesseans cannot be overstated, as they tied their very identity as Americans and free men to the possibilities and promise it held.

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