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What's in a Name?

by Thelma E. Heflin

"I never had any thing Worth Notice to quaint you with since I left you till now," wrote Lt. Isaac Shelby to his uncle on October 18, 1774. Shelby's name was to be scattered across the hills and plains of a United States yet unborn; today nine states, including Iowa, have counties named for him, and there are 17 towns across the land that bear his name. The something "Worth Notice" that Shelby wanted to share with his uncle was the Battle at Point Pleasant, West Virginia, which has gone down in history as the first decisive victory won by an army made up exclusively of Americans.

An army of Shawnee Indians led by Chief Cornstalk met the Americans in a battle during "Lord Dunmore's War" and discovered that the farmers could be a disciplined and hard-to-defeat military unit. More than a decade earlier, during the French and Indian War in the 1760s, Indian tribes had joined French soldiers to protect their land from the steady westward push of American colonial settlers and British troops, and Americans then had often fought under British command.

At Point Pleasant, however, there were no professional British soldiers to give orders and fill in the ranks. In fact, at that very moment, the First Continental Congress was meeting in Philadelphia's Carpenter Hall, and the die was being cast that would lead to active rebellion against King George III.

Following an impressive military career, Shelby served his country in the political field. He was elected Governor of Kentucky in 1792 and also in 1812. In 1813, he again donned the military uniform and led 4000 Kentucky volunteers to join General Harrison in Canada for a British defeat at the Battle of the Thames, for which he was awarded a gold medal by Congress in 1818.

Historians describe Shelby as a "wise and prudent man." His reputation as a war hero and statesman made his name a natural choice for counties and towns springing up across the nation. Fourteen states have either counties or towns named for him, some states having both.

Shelby County, Iowa was named in 1851 by the General Assembly of Iowa in honor of Isaac Shelby. Two years later, the Legislature provided for the location of a county seat in Shelby County, to be named Shelbyville. The plat for Shelbyville was approved on February 5, 1855. Four years later, on April 4, Shelby County residents voted to move the county seat to Harlan. With the removal of its chief reason for existence, Shelbyville soon dwindled away. Today there is no trace of Shelby County's first county seat.

On September 6, 1870, a new township was established in Shelby County, Iowa and was named Shelby Township. The organizing officer posted notices of an election to be held "at depot building at SHELBY

STATION on Tuesday, Oct. 11, 1870." Thus a small settlement, with the first railroad station in the county, received its name, presumably from the Rock Island Railroad.

During this Bicentennial period, Shelby County, Iowa, Shelby Township, and the town of Shelby are involved in activities to commemorate the Revolutionary War, with special emphasis on a gallant soldier and statesman who loaned them his honorable name.



Isaac Shelby

State	County	Town
Alabama	Shelby	Shelby
Illinois	Shelby	Shelbyville
Indiana	Shelby	Shelby, Shelbyville
Iowa	Shelby	Shelby
Kentucky	Shelby	Shelbiana, Shelby Gap, Shelbyville
Michigan		Shelby
Mississippi		Shelby
Missouri	Shelby	Shelbina, Shelbyville
Nebraska		Shelby
New York		Shelby
North Carolina		Shelby
Ohio	Shelby	Shelby
Tennessee	Shelby	Shelbyville
Texas	Shelby	

The following text of Isaac Shelby's letter about the Battle of Point Pleasant is from Reuben Gold Thwaites and Louise Phelps Kellogg (eds.), Documentary History of Dunmore's War, 1774 (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1905). The original letter is in the Draper Manuscript Collection of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin.

Letter from Isaac Shelby to John Shelby

Camp Opposite to the Mouth of Great
Canaway October 16th, 1774

DR. UNCLE — I Gladly embrace this opportunity to Acquaint You that we are all three yet alive th[r]o Gods Mercies & I Sincerely wish that this may find you & your Family in the Station of Health that we left you. I never had any thing Worth Notice to quaint you with since I left you till now, the Express seems be be Hurrying that I Cant write you with the same Coolness & Deliberation as I would; we arrived at the mouth [of] Canaway Thursday 6th Octr. and incamped on a fine piece of Ground with an intent to wait for the Governor & his party but hearing that he was going another way we Contented our selves to stay there a few days to rest the troops &c when we looked upon our selves to be in safety till Monday morning the 10th Instant when two of our Compys. went out before day to hunt. To wit Val. Sevier & Jas Robison & Discovered a party of indians; as I expect you will hear something of our Battle before you get this I have here stated this affair nearly to you.

For the Satisfaction of the people in your parts in this they have a true state of the Memorable Battle faught at the mouth of the great Canaway on the 10th. Instant; Monday morning about half an Hour before sunrise two of Capt Russels Compy. Discovered a large party of indians about a mile from Camp one of which men was killed the Other made his Escape & brought in his intelligence; in two or three minutes after two of Capt Shelbys. Compy. Came in and Confirmed the Account. Colo. Andrew Lewis being Informed thereof Immediately ordered Colo. Charles Lewis to take the Command of 150 men

from Augusta and with him went Capt. Dickison. Capt. Harrison. Capt. Willson. Capt. Jno. Lewis from Augusta and Capt. Lockridge which made the first division. Colo. Fleming was also ordered to take the Command of one hundred & fifty more Consisting of Botetourt Fincastle and Bedford Troops Viz. Capt. Buford of Bedford, Capt. Love of Botetourt, Capt. Shelby & Capt. Russell of Fincastle which made the second Division. Colo. Lewis marched with his Division to the Right some Distance up from the Ohio. Colo. Fleming with his Division up the banck of the Ohio to the left: Colo. Lewiss Division had not marchd. little more than a quarter of a mile from Camp; when about sunrise, an Attact was made on the front of his Division in a most Vigorous manner by the United tribes of Indians — Shawnees; Delewares, Mingoës, Taways, and of several Other Nations in Number not less than Eight Hundred and by many thought to be a thousand; in this Heavy Attact Colonel Charles Lewis received a wound which soon after Caused his Death and several of his men fell in the spott in fact the Augusta Division was forced to give way to the heavy fire of the Enemy In about a second of a minute after the Attact on Colo. Lewiss Division the Enemy Engaged the Front of Colo. Flemings Division on the Ohio; and in a short time Colo. Fleming recd. two balls thro his left Arm and one thro his breast; and after animating the Captains and soldiers in a Calm manner to the pursuit of Victory returned to Camp, the loss of the Brave Colonels was Sensibly felt by the Officers in peticular, But the Augusta troops being shortly Reinforced from Camp by Colonel Field with his Company together with Capt. M'Dowel, Capt. Mathews & Capt. Stuart from Augusta, Capt. John Lewis, Capt. Paulin Capt. Arbuckle & Capt. M'Clanahan from Botetourt, the Enemy no longer able to Maintain their Ground was forced to

give way till they were in a Line with the troops left in action on Bancks of Ohio, by Colo. Fleming in this precipitate retreat Colo. Field was killed, after which Capt. Shelby was ordered to take the Commd. During this time which was till after twelve of the Clock, the Action continued Extreemly Hott, the Close underwood many steep bancks & Loggs greatly favoured their retreat, and the Bravest of their men made the use of themselves, whilst others were throwing their dead into the Ohio, and Carrying of[f] their wounded, after twelve the Action in a small degree abated but Continued sharp Enough till after one oClock

Their Long retreat gave them a most advantages spot of ground; from whence it Appeared to the Officers so difficult to disloge them; that it was thought most adviseable to stand as the line then was formed which was about a mile and a quarter in length, and had till then sustained a Constant and Equal weight of fire from wing to wing. it was till half an Hour of Sun sett they Continued firing on us which we returned to their Disadvantage at length Night Coming on they found a safe retreat They had not the satisfaction of scalping any of our men save One or Two straglers whom they Killed before the ingagement many of their dead they scalped rather than we should have them but our troops scalped upwards of Twenty of those who were first killed; Its Beyond a Doubt their Loss in Number farr Exceeds ours, which is Considerable.

Field Officers killed Colo. Charles Lewis, and Colo. Jno. Fields, Field Officers wounded Colo. Willm Fleming; Capts. killed John Murray Capt. Saml. Willson Capt. Robt. McClanahan, Capt. Jas. Ward, Captains wounded Thos Buford, John Dickison & John Scidmore, Subbalterns Killed Lieutenant Hugh Allen, Ensign Mathew Brakin Ensign Cundiff, Subbalterns wounded, Lieut. Lard: Lieut. Vance Lieut.

Goldman Lieut. Jas. Robison about 46 killed & about 80 wounded from this Sir you may Judge that we had a Very hard day its realy Impossible for me to Express or you to Concieve Acclamations that we were under, sometimes, the Hidious Cries of the Enemy and the groans of our wound[ed] men lying around was Enough to shuder the stoutest hart its the general Opinion of the Officers that we shall soon have another Ingagement as we have now got Over into the Enemys Country; we Expect to meet the Governor about forty or fifty miles from here nothing will save us from another Battle Unless they Attact the Governors Party, five men that Came in Dadys [daddy's] Company were killed, I dont know that you were Acquainted with any of them Except Marck Williams who lived with Roger Top. Acquaint Mr Carmack that his son was slightly wounded thro the shoulder and arm & that he is in a likely way of Recovery we leave him at mouth of Canaway & one Very Carefull hand to take Care of him; there is a garrison & three Hundred men left at that place with a surgeon to Heal the wounded we Expect to Return to the Garrison in about 16 days from the Shawny Towns.

I have nothing more Peticular to Acquaint you with Concerning the Battle. as to the Country I cant now say much in praise of any that I have yet seen. Dady intended writing to you but did not know of the Express till the time was too short I have wrote to Ma[m]my tho not so fully as to you as I then Expected the Express was Just going. we seem to be all in a Moving Posture Just going from this place so that I must Conclude wishing you health and prosperity till I see you & Your Family in the meantime I am yr. truly Effectionate Friend & Humble Servt

Isaac Shelby

To Mr. John Shelby Holstons River Fincastle County favr. by Mr. Benja. Gray