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LIFE IN EAST TENNESSEE NEAR END OF EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

WILLIAM FLINN ROGERS

Early Tennessee was separated into two naturally distinct divisions by the Cumberland mountains, which were some thirty miles wide.¹ Immense areas of uninhabited forests stretched between the two quite different communities of the State, the Cumberland Settlements in the western part and the Holston Settlements in the eastern section.² The two districts were also commercially unlike, since the latter traded for the most part overland with the seaports of the Atlantic States and had very little to do with New Orleans by the river routes, and had not a great deal of connection with the Cumberland Settlements in a business way. The western region of the State, on the other hand, carried on an extensive trade both with New Orleans by means of its natural waterways,³ and overland with Kentucky.⁴ This situation and the difference in natural character of the two regions caused the inhabitants to employ themselves differently, because the products profitable to one locality were not so to the other.⁵

The Holston Settlements thrived lustily, for wagon roads had been built that led into both Virginia and North Carolina. Many people came into this country by what was called the Good Spur route, passing through Western Virginia and down the Holston valley into East Tennessee. Others came across Stone and Yellow mountains of the Allegheny range; and yet others by way of Flour Gap and the lower counties of Virginia. A wagon road had been opened from Burke County, North Carolina, to Jonesboro in the Holston community.⁶ There were now no great obstacles to overcome in moving into the valleys of upper East Tennessee, because the people in this section were in close touch with the older

¹ Imlay, *A Topographical Description of the Western Territory of North America*, p. 512.

² Michaux, F. A., *Travels to the West of the Allegheny Mountains, in Early Western Travels*, III., p. 260, edited by R. G. Thwaites.

³ Ibid., p. 282.

⁴ Ibid., p. 203.

⁵ Imlay, p. 512.

⁶ Phelan, *History of Tennessee*, p. 170.

States—the many farms and stations forming almost unbroken links from the borders of North Carolina and Virginia down the Watauga and the Holston valleys.⁷

The valley lands filled up rapidly; and the population consisted of a better class farmers, since there were no longer in the older States great prizes in the way of large tracts of rich unclaimed land for the pioneer and the speculator. The soil of the West was generally fertile, though the surface was often much broken into hills and mountains. The farms never suffered from drouth as the valley district was situated between two ranges of mountains which were covered with a dense growth of virgin timber.⁸

Many towns began to grow in East Tennessee, and were usually safe without stockades. Jonesboro, Greeneville, Kingston, Kingsport, Rogersville and Knoxville were outstanding in the section. Knoxville was the largest of these towns, and consisted of more than two hundred houses, chiefly built of wood. Though the place was about ten years old there were no manufacturing plants with the exception of a few tan-yards. But the stores and shops did a lively business and were much better stocked than those at Nashville.⁹ The public officers lived here, as the town was the capital of the State and the seat of the government. Three law courts held their sessions at this place, the Superior Court, the Court of Equity for Hamilton District, and the Court of Pleas and Quarterly Session for Knox County. There was also a printing office, which published a weekly newspaper, *The Knoxville Gazette*.¹⁰

Kingston was the newest and smallest of the other towns mentioned above, and was made up of some thirty to forty houses. It was located about one mile from Fort Southwest Point, a point on the road from the Holston Settlements through the wilderness to the Cumberland regions.¹¹ Greeneville was a small place between Knoxville and Jonesboro in a very fertile district, where more corn was grown than wheat. The town consisted of more than forty houses, which still continued to be constructed with square beams like the old loghouses.¹² Jonesboro was the last town of importance in Tennessee as one went along the main high-

⁷ Roosevelt, *The Winning of the West*, III, p. 92.

⁸ F. A. Michaux, p. 280.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 265.

¹⁰ Imlay, p. 514.

¹¹ F. A. Michaux, p. 270f.

¹² *Ibid.*

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way east and north. It consisted of more than one hundred and
fifty houses of wood, placed along both sides of the road or main
street. There were four or five respectable shops in the town,
where one could find a good stock of merchandise.¹³ The courts
of Washington District were regularly held at this place.¹⁴

Two of the main routes for settlers, who wished to move into
the Cumberland section, passed through East Tennessee. They
made their way by land from the Holston Country over the newly
opened wagon-road of one hundred and eighty-three miles, which
ran from near Fort Southwest Point across the Cumberland moun-
tains to Nashville.¹⁵ Little boards painted black were nailed upon
the trees every three miles to show the traveler the distance yet
to go. In spite of peace with the Indians, it was still deemed pru-
dent to travel with five or six in the party when passing through
the wilderness in the Cherokee lands between the last settlement
of the Holston and the first of the Cumberland.¹⁶ Other people
embarked at Knoxville and floated down the Tennessee and poled
or paddled up the Cumberland in fleets of flat-boats and canoes.
These routes, however, were not used so often at this time because
of Indian river pirates.¹⁷

The cabins of the poor, who usually lived near the wilderness
where land was cheapest because of the greater hardships and
dangers, were built of logs from the forest trees. Houses of this
type as a rule held but a single room, above which was a loft where
the boys slept.¹⁸ In these frontier homes the master of the house
provided its furnishings with his own hands. Household utensils
were scarce. The Dutch oven, skillet, and pot were used in cook-
ing. Wooden trays, trenchers, and dressed boards were often
used in the place of dishes.¹⁹ Most of the houses were equipped
with either the hominy block or the handmill that were so neces-
sary in the preparation of corn for the meals.²⁰

The houses of the well-to-do were neater, larger, and much more
comfortable. Around the settlements and in the towns there were
many frame dwellings, and even those built of forest trees had

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Imlay, p. 514.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 515.

¹⁶ F. A. Michaux, p. 261.

¹⁷ Imlay, p. 515.

¹⁸ Strickland, (Ed.) *Autobiography of Rev. James B. Finley*, p. 35.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 70.

²⁰ Hartley, *Life and Times of Colonel Daniel Boone*, p. 252.

the logs neatly hewn.²¹ Many of the houses in the larger towns were built of brick²² or stone.²³ Shingles were now used on the roofs, and piazzas began to divide the cabins. Windows, covered with heavy wooden shutters, were found in the older settled communities, and occasionally glass windows were to be seen. Puncheon and clapboard floors had been replaced by plank floors, which were clean and dry.²⁴ As the country developed and prospered the poorer families grew to be well-to-do, and the latter class became richer. Better and larger houses were built as the years passed.

The Ramsey house, which was located near Knoxville, was an example of the finer homes that were built near the end of the eighteenth century. It was a large stone structure with a deep basement, two tall stories, and an attic. Its corners, arches, top of chimneys, and the first row of buildricks—midway between the ground and the top of its chimneys—were built of blue limestone; while the walls were of red granite. Its style was Gothic, with long narrow windows, cornices richly carved in wood, but painted to resemble stone; and it was elaborately finished and ornamented. At the time of the census of 1800, it was the most costly and most admired building in Tennessee.²⁵

The home of the more prosperous settler was well furnished. The rude home-made furniture gave way to manufactured pieces brought into the settlements by the wagon trains from the older States. In some places there were skilled cabinet makers in Tennessee at this time. The architect, who planned and built the Ramsey house, was also a skilled cabinet-maker and upholsterer. He made the "tall and elegant Secretary and Book-case in which the fancy volumes of Col. Ramsey's library were placed, and a massive Beaufot."²⁶

It was possible to buy from Nelson and Company, of Rogersville, Tenn., as early as 1792, such articles as bedclothing, pewter dishes, tinware of all kinds, knives and forks, scissors, needles, pins, thimbles, and queensware of all kinds.²⁷ James Miller in the Rogersville community informed his friends through the

²¹ Roosevelt, *The Winning of the West*, I, p. 112.

²² F. A. Michaux, p. 199.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 255.

²⁴ Phelan, p. 175.

²⁵ Ramsey, *Autobiography* (Ms.), p. 10.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 10f.

²⁷ *The Knoxville Gazette*, January 14, 1792.

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columns of the *Knoxville Gazette*, February 11, 1792, that he had for sale the following articles of household furnishings: pewter dishes and plates, candlesticks, shears, scissors, razors, tea-kettles, scythes, cutting knives, steel and iron.²⁸ On January 9, 1797, Lewis Tiner announced to the people around Knoxville, that he had just opened a hardware store where he had for sale Dutch ovens, pans, andirons, and all sizes of pots and kettles.²⁹

The character of dress of the women reflected their economic and social standing. Deer skins and linsey-woolsey were the materials most often used in making the clothing by the poorer classes and the people in the more remote regions. Linen made from home-grown flax furnished the chain, and wool supplied the filling or woof in the case of linsey-woolsey.³⁰ The attire of those who moved in higher circles varied from the above. The ladies of that day were believers in shoes with high heels. These heels were made of wood, beautifully tapered, neatly covered with leather, and varied in height from one to two inches. The outer clothing was made of the richest of brocades, or of other silks and satins. Neckerchief, gloves, rings, and ruffles in profusion were important parts of the dress of many women of the towns.³¹ The more fortunate could buy from Nelson and Company, "scarlet cloaks, black and colored silk, silk and cotton stockings, women's fine hats, velvet in all colors, lastings, poplins, calicoes, chintzes, plain and striped coatings, green plush, striped and plain muslin, cambrics and lawns, silk and cotton handkerchiefs, Irish linen, and shoe buckles."³²

The apparel of the men in the outer or frontier communities consisted chiefly of well-dressed deer skin, which was made into hunting-shirts, pantaloons, coats and waistcoats, leggings and moccasins. The poorer class dressed in stout jeans made of butter-nut linsey-woolsey. Half the year the family wore no shoes. Moccasins were worn in the colder weather, and deer's hair or oak leaves were used in the place of stockings.³³ But these things could not be said of the well-to-do men of the towns. John Sevier mentions in his diary buying articles of clothing at least twenty

²⁸ Ibid., February 11, 1792.

²⁹ Ibid., January 9, 1797.

³⁰ Williams, *History of the Lost State of Franklin*, p. 249.

³¹ Strickland, p. 97f.

³² *The Knoxville Gazette*, January 14, 1792.

³³ Strickland, p. 97f.

times. He made notes of purchasing such things as silk stockings, silk breeches, pumps, jackets, and knee-buckles.³⁴ The shops in the towns sold hats, shoes, fine and coarse broadcloth.³⁵ Most of the men were clean-shaven. It is interesting to note that the shop-keepers often advertised "razors, razors in boxes, and shaving boxes complete."³⁶

The people in the towns had about the same kind of food that was found among the small farmers in the rural districts. Agriculture was still the main occupation of the people, and every man had his farm or garden. From the advertising done by the various stores of the time, it seems that they had for sale little in the way of food stuff other than salt, sugar, coffee, teas, spices, and once in a while fresh meat.³⁷ Among the vegetables not yet known in East Tennessee were cauliflower, sweet corn, lettuce, cantaloupes, and tomatoes while the tropical fruits such as bananas and oranges were never more than heard of in the new country. Even the rich could not have ice in the summer.

The typical settler everywhere was the small farmer, who lived with his wife and swarming children on a big tract of wooded land. Of the large number of acres he rarely cleared more than thirty to forty; and most of these were cleared imperfectly. Though often not in the possession of a dollar in specie, yet he lacked no real necessity of life.³⁸ The extraordinary fertility of the soil caused this farmer's wealth to increase rapidly, even though he started with small capital. His live stock needed no provender during the greater part of the year, except corn and wild clover. After the second year he could well afford to feed them, for even the poorly cleared and quickly cultivated land yielded fifty to sixty bushels of corn in the first year, and seventy to one hundred in the second year. His garden with little attention produced all the vegetables necessary for the table. In the second year there was plenty of animal food from the increase in domestic animals; and by the third and fourth, there was a surplus for the market. By the fourth year he could build a better house, and it would cost him little more than the labor of his family and his servants. He could barter or sell a part of the farm products for

³⁴ *Diary of John Sevier* in Heiskell, *Andrew Jackson and Early Tennessee*, II.

³⁵ *The Knoxville Gazette*, January 14, 1792.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, February 11, 1792.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, May 22, 1795.

³⁸ F. A. Michaux, pp. 214, 269.

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whatever extras that were necessary for the new building.³⁹ The value of his estate increased nearly thirty per cent after the second year of improvement; and, if he wished to move on westward to cheaper land, he could easily sell his farm at a handsome profit to some new immigrant, who wanted to be sure of gathering corn enough to supply his family and domestic animals as soon as possible.⁴⁰

Land was often cleared for cultivation by burning. In March the dead grass was burned from the meadows to reveal the new green grass to the cattle and other stock. Generally the trees were belted or girdled by chopping a ring around them with an axe. After they died, they were felled, cut into logs, rolled into piles and burned. The stumps were also burned to the ground and sometimes dug out. At times the fire would get beyond control and a large area of forest lands would be destroyed, thereafter to be called a barren.⁴¹ The canebrakes were prepared for cultivation by means of the axe and mattock, which chopped down the cane and dug out the roots.⁴²

The farms were cultivated by the plow, the hoe, and the harrow. The farmer broke up the ground with a rude mold-board plow; and, as the soil was rich and new, deep plowing was not necessary. As breaking up virgin soil was so difficult that the plow required all the attention of the tiller, a small boy usually rode the horse. This was no sinecure for the boy, as the horse was not infrequently lean and lazy, the sun hot, and the hours long. Time after time the plow would hang under a root, and the hames would give the boy-rider a severe punch in the stomach, at the very moment he least expected such a thing to happen.⁴³ A narrow wooden harrow or brushy limb of a tree was dragged over the field to break up the clods of earth, and the hoe was often used after this. All grain was planted by hand.⁴⁴

Corn was the chief crop produced on the farms, and often grew to a height of ten to twelve feet on the richer estates, where an acre would yield from seventy to one hundred bushels which were worth about twenty-five to thirty cents each. A single individual

³⁹ Imlay, p. 166.

⁴⁰ F. A. Michaux, p. 179.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 221.

⁴² Drake, (Ed.) *Pioneer Life in Kentucky*, p. 45.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 45f.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 63.

could cultivate from eight to ten acres at that time, and thus have all the grain necessary for his own use and a sufficient supply for use to barter at the stores, or for export to the markets.⁴⁶ Even the hill lands produced from thirty to fifty bushels of corn to the acre. The average production in the State was more than sixty bushels to the acre.⁴⁶

In addition to corn, East Tennessee produced all varieties of grain, tobacco, cotton, fruits, and vegetables. Cucumbers, turnips, and peas grew very fine.⁴⁷ Wheat and barley grew better in this section than in Kentucky, and this was true, in a measure, of tobacco and cotton.⁴⁸ The tobacco production had grown so large in Tennessee, that the General Assembly passed laws in 1799 forbidding the export of the crop, unless it had been packed in hogsheads or casks of regulation size and carefully inspected "to restrain the practice of mixing trash with the stemmed tobacco." The location of the following places of inspection shows where the Tennessee crop of tobacco was being grown at the times.⁴⁹

In Davidson County, at Nashville, Waynesboro, Haysboro.
In Sumner County, at Cairo, James Sander's.
In Smith County, at Bledsboro.
In Montgomery Co., at Clarksville, Port Royal.
In Greene County, at Greeneville.

Imlay gave the following prices as current in Tennessee in the summer of 1795:⁵⁰

At Knoxville

Corn per bushel, 25-33 $\frac{1}{2}$ cents.
Wheat per bushel, 66 $\frac{2}{3}$ cents.
Rye per bushel, 41 $\frac{1}{3}$ cents.
Oats per bushel, 33 cents.
Barley per bushel, 50 $\frac{1}{3}$ cents.
Potatoes per bushel, 33 $\frac{1}{4}$ cents.
Whiskey per gallon, 50 cents.

⁴⁶ F. A. Michaux, pp. 239ff.

⁴⁶ Imlay, "A Letter from an Inhabitant," p. 526.

⁴⁷ Imlay, p. 62.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 65.

⁵⁰ Scott, (Comp.) *Laws of the State of Tennessee*, I, pt. 2, p. 657. *Acts of Tennessee*, Oct. 26, 1799.

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At Nashville

Corn per bushel, 16 $\frac{2}{3}$ cents.

Wheat, Rye, Oats, Potatoes, Same as at Knoxville.

Whiskey per gallon 75c to \$1.

Hogs were the most numerous of the farm animals of the day. All farmers kept them, some of the settlers having from one hundred and fifty to two hundred at a time. In the spring the swine helped destroy the canebrakes by eating out the young roots; during the summer, they were turned into the orchards to get the advantage of the fruit until the apples and peaches got ripe enough to fall too rapidly. During the fall and winter they never left the woods, where there was plenty of mast food for them. Sometimes they grew extremely wild, and the farmers, each adopting a distinct "brand," had to cut and mark their ears, so that each might know his own stock, and register it as notice to the world, in case of loss in the woods. When food was scarce in the forest, the hogs would come up to the plantations to get corn.⁵¹ Thus the people found their hogs a source of real profit, since they could be raised at such a small cost. Not only did they furnish fresh meat during the winter and salt meat for the rest of the year; but they provided a medium of exchange or barter, for nearly all the stores in the towns were willing to sell their wares for pork, bacon, and lard.⁵² Imlay quoted pork in Knoxville at \$3.33 for the hundred pounds, and bacon at eight and one-third cents per pound. The price for the former in Nashville was only three dollars for the hundred pounds.⁵³

There was a considerable number of cattle in early Tennessee. The family cow was almost a necessity in the earliest days, since milk, butter, and cheese were always among the chief foods. The price of a good milk cow in Kentucky and presumably in Tennessee at this time was about ten to fifteen dollars,⁵⁴ and the cost of feeding cattle was small since they grazed at large most of the time on the meadows or in the woods.⁵⁵ There was a ready market for the surplus of butter and cheese, and Imlay quoted the price

⁵¹ Imlay, p. 545.

⁵² F. A. Michaux, pp. 241, 246, 257.

⁵³ *The Knoxville Gazette*, December 19, 1796.

⁵⁴ Imlay, p. 545.

⁵⁵ F. A. Michaux, p. 245.

of both of these articles at eight and one-third cents per pound in Knoxville and Nashville during the summer of 1795.⁵⁶ The best markets for beef cattle were in Virginia. They were collected as lean herds and driven through the mountains to the Potomac river region, where graziers fattened them for the meat markets of Baltimore and Philadelphia. The drovers often set out from Tennessee with herds, which numbered from two to three hundred head; but few of them were lost during the journey, though they had to cross rivers, forests, and mountains with these animals, some of them extremely wild.⁵⁷ There was also a fairly good local market for cattle, and Imlay gave the price of beef as two dollars for the hundred pounds in Nashville and two dollars and a half for the same weight at Knoxville.⁵⁸

The harvest was a kind of social labor, a frolic, a scene of excitement; and was, therefore, a much more enjoyable period of the year than that of planting or cultivating. The neighbors, who dropped in to help in the rush season, were fed at the farmhouse. Pigs and calves were sacrificed for the occasion, and there was whiskey for all hands.⁵⁹ The grain was cut with a reap hook or a cradle, and beat out of the straw with a flail or by the feet of the horses, ridden over the straw laid out in a circle for this purpose.⁶⁰ The potatoes and turnips were buried deep in the ground so that they might not freeze. As there were few barns or mows, the wheat straw and hay were stacked out in the open. It was quite an art to make a stack that would keep out the rain and not blow over.⁶¹

The merchants of East Tennessee procured their goods overland from Richmond, Baltimore and Philadelphia. The distance to Baltimore was about seven hundred miles, and the cost of transportation was about six or seven dollars for the hundredweight.⁶² There was a fairly good wagon road to Richmond, which was about three hundred and fifty miles from Knoxville,⁶³ and carriers were constantly on the move, aiding in the exchange of imported

⁵⁶ Drake, p. 72.

⁵⁷ Imlay, p. 545.

⁵⁸ F. A. Michaux, pp. 245, 280.

⁵⁹ Imlay, p. 545.

⁶⁰ Drake, p. 64.

⁶¹ Durrett, (Ed.) *The Centenary of Kentucky*, in Filson Club Publication. Cincinnati, 1892., pp. 75ff.

⁶² Drake, pp. 107, 64f.

⁶³ F. A. Michaux, p. 265.

goods for Tennessee than in Nashville.

Stores were found and the building home. Very few purposes, and the together. Nails, bonnets, lumber, were sold over the could be produced tenths of the market were imported for cutlery, iron more fine earthenware, directly from Indiana they got their of French goods imported stones.⁶⁷

Among the articles Tennessee (other comb, valentia shoe and buckle copperas, brimstone, spelling books, bridles, knives and irons, padlocks, files, assortments augurs, all kinds smith's vices, st ribbons, writing metic, Primers, books on Divinity Glauber salts, B and a few young combs, money s Physician, Turli

⁶⁴ Imlay, p. 512f.

⁶⁵ Crockett, *Autobiography*.

⁶⁶ F. A. Michaux,

⁶⁷ Durrett, pp. 75f.

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exchange of imported

goods for Tennessee products.⁵⁴ Trade was brisker in Knoxville than in Nashville, and the stores were much better stocked.⁵⁵

Stores were found in nearly all the principal towns and stations, and the buildings were frequently a combination of shop and home. Very few of the houses had been built for purely mercantile purposes, and the stocks of commodities were usually found jumbled together. Nails, calicoes, axes, broadcloths, books, silks, furniture, bonnets, lumber, hats, sugar, iron, medicine, whiskey, and salt were sold over the same counter. The stores sold few things that could be produced at home by the husband or the wife.⁵⁶ Seventenths of the manufactured articles consumed in the new country were imported from England, such as coarse and fine jewelry, cutlery, iron mongery, and tinware. Drapery, mercury, drugs, fine earthenware, muslins, nankeens, tea, and the like were brought directly from India to the United States in American ships; and they got their coffee and raw sugar from the Carribees. The French goods imported were taffetas, stockings, brandies and millstones.⁵⁷

Among the articles that could be secured from the stores of East Tennessee (other than those mentioned already) were: honeycomb, valentia and jeans, blankets, bedticks, weaver's brushes, shoe and buckle, brushes, wool and cotton cards, playing cards, copperas, brimstone and allspice, pepper, chocolate, Bibles, Testaments, spelling books, men and women's saddles, curb and snaffle bridles, knives and forks, pen, pocket, and cutteau knives, stirrup irons, padlocks, saddlebags, hinges, assortments of blacksmith files, assortments of small files, assortments of plain bit and screw augurs, all kinds of chisels, shoemakers tools, hammers, gimlets, smith's vices, steel traps, brass cocks, ink stands, assortments of ribbons, writing paper, History, Law books, Dilworth's Arithmetic, Primers, Watt's Psalms and Hymns, Sermons and several books on Divinity, assortments of stills, camphor, assafoetida, aloes, Glauber salts, Bateman drops, best rum, wine, brandy, whiskey, and a few young and likely Virginia-born negroes, iron and horn combs, money scales, steel spectacle cases, Buchannan's Family Physician, Turlington's Balsam, Peruvian bark, spirits of turpen-

⁵⁴ Imlay, p. 512f.

⁵⁵ Crockett, *Autobiography*, pp. 33ff; *Knoxville Gazette*, July 14, 1792.

⁵⁶ F. A. Michaux, p. 265.

⁵⁷ Durrett, pp. 75ff.

tine, spirits of hartshorne, borax, alum, raisins, nutmegs, and shoes.⁶⁸

The Knox County Court passed a law in 1795 requiring the use of standard weights in business dealings, and this ruling was announced to the people through the columns of the *Knoxville Gazette* as follows: "Notice is hereby given to the inhabitants of Knox County who sell by weight or measure to call on the subscriber, the standard keeper for the county of Knox, at his house in Knoxville, where due attendance will be given in order to have their weights and measures sealed. The weights are from fifty-six pounds to the half ounce, steelyards included. The measures are from a bushel to half a peck, dry measure; from a gallon to a gill, liquid measure; and from an ell to one-eighth of a yard, cloth measure. Those who neglect to comply with this notice before the first of July next, may depend most assuredly on being prosecuted according to law." The notice was signed by Drury Breazeale, who had been made inspector for the county.⁶⁹

East Tennessee exported much of its produce to the Atlantic States by land, because over two thousand miles by the rivers lay between them and New Orleans;⁷⁰ and in the Tennessee river were two serious obstacles, which the people of neither Western Tennessee nor Kentucky had to encounter. One of these hindrances to navigation was the whirlpool (Boiling Pot) below and near the present site of Chattanooga, and the other was the Muscle Shoals. Some of the heavier produce, however, was taken down the rivers to the markets of the lower country during the seasons when the river was high enough to take boats over the Shoals. The *Knoxville Gazette* on June 19, 1795, stated that on Sunday before that issue of the paper, Captain Rawleigh Hogan left in a boat of twenty tons for New Orleans with a cargo of whiskey, bar iron, bacon, and lime. On the same day four other boats left for the Cumberland district with a load of stuff too heavy and bulky to be carried overland through the mountain wilderness. The boats were of about fifteen tons in size, and carried a supply of bar iron, cast iron, and other heavy articles. John M'Farlan ran an advertisement in the *Gazette* of January 23, 1795, giving notice

⁶⁸ F. A. Michaux, p. 203.

⁶⁹ *The Knoxville Gazette*, January 14, 1792. *The Knoxville Gazette*, February 11, 1792, July 14, 1792.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, May 22, 1792.

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The Knoxville Gazette, February

to the public that all persons who wished to sail with him to New Orleans in either of his boats, the Mary (25 tons) or Little Polly (15) had to be ready by March. Those who had contracted for freightage had to be ready sooner. Flour, cotton, and lime were sent out of East Tennessee by way of the water route.⁷¹

All through the West there was much difficulty in getting money. Credits were long and collections were hard to make, and payments were usually made in barter. The current coins in Tennessee were the same as in the Atlantic States, the dollar and the penny. Other coins were so scarce that the people cut the dollar into pieces, as quarters, eighths.⁷² This habit gave rise to the expressions, four bits, six bits, and the like so often heard to-day.⁷³ Newspaper advertising showed the slowness of collection. The *Gazette* itself ran in its columns a notice, calling on subscribers who owed the printer to settle their accounts. It informed the public that the following articles would be received in the discharge of debts, if delivered on or before the first of January, 1797: beef, pork, corn, flour, linsey, country linen, and fire wood. The threat was added that all accounts after the time limit would be placed in the hands of proper officials for collection.⁷⁴ James Miller, a merchant mentioned above, called on all persons indebted to him either by note or store account to make immediate settlement as he was about to start to Philadelphia within a few days.⁷⁵

Most of the collection notices showed that the creditors realized the people would pay their obligations if they could possibly do so. Another type of collector as well as debtor is presented in the following advertisement:

"TAKE NOTICE ALL YE WHISKEY DRINKERS—

"That I will positively sue every person indebted to me in 21 days from this date, if they do not make payment.

Benjamin White."⁷⁶

A few contractors, or "undertakers" as they were called at the time, were busy in East Tennessee. In 1792 the Knox County Court appointed Thomas M'Culloch, George M'Nutt, James

⁷¹ Ramsey, *Autobiography*, p. 17.

⁷² *The Knoxville Gazette*, June 19, 1796.

⁷³ Drake, p. 31. F. A. Michaux, p. 204.

⁷⁴ Durrett, pp. 75ff.

⁷⁵ *The Knoxville Gazette*, December 19, 1796.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, January 16, 1793.

Cozby, Joseph Greer, and John Adair as a commission to let a contract for the building of a court-house, prison, and stocks for the county. They were authorized to give the contract to the lowest bidder, and to require the "undertaker" to make bond or give approved security before they accepted his bid.⁷⁷ The project was advertised to the public in the following way:

"To be let to the bidder who plays lowest fox,
And by him to be raised from the stump,
A house that will hold all the justices of Knox,
And the cash will be paid by the lump.
Not too high, nor too low, but a neat little box,
To hold quarter-sessions and pleas,
And to punish the rogues, both a prison and stocks
For then we may sleep at our ease.
The plan may be seen in the ville of Knox,
On Monday, the first day of Court,
Where those who love fun may meet,
And thus attend business and sport.
M'Culloch presides, & the sign is three knocks,
When the building is taken in care
But the bond must secure both the keys & the locks
To M'Nutt, Cozby, Greer, and Adair."⁷⁸

Captain John Miller, of Hawkins County, made the first attempt to raise silk worms in Tennessee. From a small stock he raised nearly five million worms; and, during the first year of his project, they produced over twenty pounds of excellent raw silk. He expected that they would produce over thirty pounds during the second season. The work of taking care of the worms had been done chiefly by the children, and there was thus little expense in handling the business.⁷⁹

A large number of tanneries could be found throughout the frontier region, and several were located in and near Knoxville. Black oak was used as one of the media in the tanning process.⁸⁰ In the earlier days much leather had been tanned in the homes. The work was done in a large vat, a trough sunk to the upper edge of the ground. Barks and ashes and lime were used to take the hair off the skins. They were softened with bear's oil, hog's

⁷⁷ Ibid., July 17, 1794.

⁷⁸ Ibid., March 9, 1792.

⁷⁹ Ibid., April 6, 1793.

⁸⁰ Ibid., June 16, 1792.

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lard, and tallow. Black oak was used for tanning.⁸¹ But the work of tanning soon became a commercial specialty, and expert tanners constantly advertised their establishments. They finished skins for their customers on shares, and offered to buy green hides at three pence per pound, and dry ones for six pence per pound. Cash was usually offered as an added inducement in order to get people to sell their pelts and skins to the tanneries instead of taking them to the stores to be used as barter in exchange for provisions.⁸²

One of the most important of the really necessary provisions of the inhabitants of the new State was salt. In nearly all the advertising of the merchants, special attention is always called to their supply of salt, which they were willing to sell cheap in order to draw customers to their places of business. Though Tennessee abounded in saline springs in certain sections, very few of them were ever worked, because the scarcity of hands would make the salt dearer than ever, if their time were taken from the more important tasks.⁸³ East Tennessee therefore secured much of their salt from the wells and mines of Virginia.⁸⁴

The children of East Tennessee were receiving their education in three types of schools by the end of the eighteenth century, and not one school was supported by the government. The neighborhood or village subscription school, the private academy, and the home-tutoring system were the three kinds of schools of the period. In the latter case, well-to-do people often employed educated young men as clerks and helpers in their businesses, so that they might teach the children of the family in their spare time. Ramsey stated in his autobiography that his father usually employed such young men as clerks, because common-school teachers were not always at hand on the frontier, and the ones to be found were often incompetent.⁸⁵

Private academies were founded by some individual as a business proposition; and were attended by the sons of the gentlemen in the community, who were able to pay the tuition charges. Samuel Carrick advertised in the *Knoxville Gazette*, Dec. 1, 1792, that he was going to open such an academy near Knoxville. Its two

⁸¹ F. A. Michaux, pp. 199ff.

⁸² Hartley, *Life and Times of Daniel Boone*, p. 254f.

⁸³ *The Knoxville Gazette*, April 20, 1792, June 15, 1793.

⁸⁴ F. A. Michaux, p. 280.

⁸⁵ *The Knoxville Gazette*, January 2, 1797.

sessions each year were to commence on the first of January and the first of July, each lasting five months. A tuition charge of seven dollars per session was due at the time of entrance. Complete instruction in Latin and Greek with much attention to grammatical construction, pronunciation and the like; English language with attention to the rules of reading, parsing, correcting, and composing; the Liberal Arts, such as Geography, Logic, Natural and Moral Philosophy, Astronomy, and Rhetoric, were advertised as courses of study to be offered in Carrick's academy.⁸⁶

The history of Tennessee shows an extensive social evolution within the brief period of thirty years from 1769 to 1800. By the end of this short period of years, Tennessee had become a State with a population of more than sixty thousand people. As Imlay expresses it, "From a few straggling settlements scattered over this vast territory, whose inhabitants were obliged to shut themselves up in blockhouses and establish their rights by the point of the sword, there has arisen fertile fields, blushing orchards, neat and commodious houses and trading towns, whose inhabitants have imposed upon themselves the just restraint of mild laws, and who—increasing in numbers—can lie down secure and free from all apprehensions of tomahawk or scalping knife. Such has been the wonderful progress of this country. . . ."

⁸⁶ Ramsey, *Autobiography*, p. 14.

⁸⁷ *The Knoxville Gazette*, December 1, 1792.

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JOHN CHISHOLM, A SOLDIER OF FORTUNE

KATE WHITE

John Chisholm appeared among the people of the Watauga-Nolachucky region about the same time as Jacob Brown and John Irvine (or Irvin), all three coming from the Province of South Carolina. In the genealogy of the Irvine and Chisholm families of South Carolina and Georgia it is said that those families migrated from Drum, Scotland, directly to South Carolina, and were closely connected with Robert Bruce, Earl of Carrick, and of the royal house of Scotland. Ann Cutbirth, who came from Scotland to South Carolina in 1738 and who married, first, Patrick Graham, and, second, James Bulloch (son of a governor of Georgia), in her will of 1762 remembered her two nephews, John and Thomas Chisholm.

It was in the year 1772 that the settlements on the Watauga, Holston and Nolachucky began to receive a steady flow of immigrants, designated by the British authorities "squatters," and as such ordered to evacuate the land. In the same year the Watauga Association was formed for law and order.

In Lord Dunmore's War of 1774, resulting in the battle of Pt. Pleasant, the name of John Chisholm appears as a private on the roster of Captain Wm. Nalle's company. It is likely that Chisholm remained for a time in Virginia, since his name does not appear appended to the Petition of the Inhabitants (for incorporation into the government of North Carolina) of 1776. However, on grant of this petition and the establishment of Washington District in the same year, we find that John Chisholm was one of the justices of the Washington District Court of 1777, prior to the organization of Washington County. When the county was organized, February 23, 1778, Chisholm was still one of the justices. That office he continued to hold until after the battle of King's Mountain. The record of the last court held before that battle shows that Chisholm was fined one hundred pounds for beating one, Abraham Denton, who stood charged in court with being an active Tory. After that battle, at the first session held November 7, 1780, Chisholm was elected deputy-surveyor of the county, under James Stuart.

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In 1784, when the first convention was held by the men of the West to consider what they should do for their protection and government in view of the act of cession passed by North Carolina's legislature, the delegation selected to represent Washington County included John Chisholm along with John Sevier, Rev. Samuel Doak and others. Chisholm remained throughout the Franklin State struggle a strong supporter of its governor, Sevier. His name is affixed to the petition to North Carolina of 1787 asking for grant of separation.

After the second cession act and the appearance of Wm. Blount upon the scene as territorial governor, Chisholm received at his hands appointment as one of the justices of Washington County. Blount's seat of government for some years was at the home of William Cobb, near the present Johnson City, and when it was removed to Knoxville, Chisholm went along, and built the first tavern in Knoxville in the rear of the gubernatorial mansion of Governor Blount, the latter being on Arch (now Hill) Street and the tavern on River Street.

At this period (1792) there were no governmental post routes in the Southwest Territory. Private individuals entered the field; and Chisholm added that business to tavern-keeping. In the issue of October 6, 1792 the *Knoxville Gazette* printed his announcement:

"The subscriber will establish a post from Knoxville to Jefferson Court House, thence to Greenville Court House, thence to Jonesboro, thence to Abingdon, and return by Sullivan Court House and Hawkins Court House to Knoxville, once every twenty-one days for one year, to commence the first Monday of November, next, or as soon as \$250.00 shall be subscribed for defraying the expenses, to be paid at the expiration of every three months. No subscription under \$2.00 received unless money is paid down. Newspapers and letters carried and left at the nearest court house for subscribers without any other charge. The subscription paper is lodged in the hands of Mr. Richardson, the Printer."

Three weeks later, the *Gazette* announced that the post-route was established, and urged the increased facility as reason for the public to subscribe for that newspaper.

At Knoxville, June 11, 1792, the County of Knox was created by ordinance, and on the 16th Chisholm was named a justice of the peace by Governor Blount. He was called "Captain Chis-

holm," a title received in militia service. He wrote often to John Sevier of happenings around White's Station, later Knoxville.

At the time of the treaty of Holston, concluded on the site of Knoxville, July 2, 1791, all the merchants' store-buildings were on the river bank, and all business done within half a block of the river. Shortly after that treaty Chisholm seems to have been employed by Governor Blount on missions to the Indian tribes at the South. In the spring of 1792, Blount used him as messenger to Alexander McGillivray, the great chief of the Creek Indians, who after wavering between alliance with the Spaniards and the Americans was now won over to the former. Chisholm was also the useful agent of the governor among the Cherokees. In a letter to General James Robertson, of date May 20, 1792, Blount painted a picture of the reception of the Cherokee Chief, The Glass, as he and other chiefs yielded and came in from the lower towns to Coyate: "At the house built there for my reception is erected the standard of the United States (a very elegant stand) on a high pole. To this they (the lower chiefs) were conducted by the Bloody Fellow and John Watts, Kittagesta and other chiefs and Captain Chisholm and [Leonard] Shaw walking side by side with the Bloody Fellow and Watts to the great joy of both parties, where volleys were fired by those from the lower towns in honor of it and returned by the upper. . . . Chisholm declares he never saw more joy expressed by any people."

In August of the same year Governor Blount sent Chisholm on a mission to the Cherokees of the Estanaula region. In the campaign of 1793, Captain Chisholm accompanied General Sevier, the commander, and was useful in giving information of the country to be invaded—around the present Rome, Ga. He continued to run his tavern in Knoxville, after this campaign. In July, 1795, he conducted a delegation of Chickasaw and Choctaw Indians to Philadelphia; they remained in Knoxville for more than a week to rest their horses and the great Piomingo had "committed them to the care of Capt. Chisholm." In November of 1795, Blount sent the Captain to the Chickasaws to "use his influence and address to restore peace between them and the Creeks." Following the admission of Tennessee into the Union, Governor Sevier used Chisholm among the Cherokees, Creeks; and he seems to have gone also to the Chickasaws. Sevier's Diary shows that he was at times a guest at Chisholm Inn.

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Wm. Blount was elected one of the first Senators in Congress from Tennessee, in 1796, so popular was he among the people he had served as governor. He was a fine looking man, cultured, cordial and a good mixer. He was a thoroughgoing politician and unable to say "no" to a friend. The Indians, too, liked him, and he tried to be just to them. He spent no little money in their entertainment. When he went to Congress he was, practically speaking, a bankrupt, from having lent money to friends and signing notes as surety. He, like most prominent men of the time, dreamed of and lusted for vast possessions of land. This led to his expulsion from the Senate, since it led him on to the formation of plans which were capable of being given the color of conspiracy that would have involved his government. Chisholm's name played a not inconspicuous part in the impeachment trial which followed.

The charge was that Blount had engaged in an effort to wrest Louisiana and the Floridas from Spain, in behalf of England, on condition that he was to become governor of the territory if won and to receive large grants of land. It was also charged that his confederates in this wild scheme were John Chisholm, of Knoxville, John Rogers, a Cherokee, James Carey, an interpreter among the Cherokees, Major James Grant, of Knoxville, and Dr. Nicholas Romaine, of New York, the latter an Englishman who was well known to the British minister, Liston, resident in this country.

As early as 1796 Blount and Romaine were in conference in the East about some sort of speculation in western lands. During the session of Congress in Philadelphia Chisholm and Carey with a number of Cherokee chiefs and warriors from Tellico turned up there, on affairs of the Indians. Chisholm laid before Liston, the British minister, plans for an invasion of Spain's possessions, and he so far impressed the minister that the latter wrote to the London government for advice. This was in January, 1797. An answer "not arriving as soon as the eagerness of the projector expected, he became impatient and was extremely pressing to go to England to obtain, in person, an answer from the British government."

Liston arranged with a wealthy Philadelphia merchant, Wm. Davy, for Chisholm's passage on a chartered brig, and paid Chisholm's fare. The vessel was cleared for Hamburg, but her true destination was London. Davy had been told by Liston's secre-

tary that Chisholm was to carry dispatches for the minister. Davy feared that if the brig were searched by the French and the dispatches found on Chisholm the vessel would be condemned. He was assured that the documents were loaded, and that Chisholm was instructed to throw the package into the ocean, should the brig be captured; and that it would sink to the bottom. The brig was prevented from sailing on the day first intended, and Sunday, the 19th of March, was fixed for her departure. The brig dropped down the river, and Davy was disturbed on learning that Chisholm was yet in the city. Both Davy and the minister were much excited, and the two rushed around to places where it was likely that Chisholm might be found. At eleven o'clock at night the minister gave out and returned to his home; but Davy kept up the search and about one o'clock found Chisholm in a bar-room, in a brawl with a party of Frenchmen; he had three of them thrown on the floor when Davy found him. Davy took him out and asked him why in the blazes he had not sailed in the vessel. Chisholm replied that the brig had not sailed and would not until five o'clock in the morning; that the captain knew where he was and would call for him in time to sail. It so turned out. Chisholm was gone next morning, and sent back by the pilot enthusiastic letters, one to Davy and one to Blount.

Chisholm reached London May 1, 1797, and immediately made arrangements to meet Mr. Pitt and Lord Grenville. The latter had on April 8th written Liston to drop the matter; that it was not then expedient to attempt to wrest territory from Spain. When he received Chisholm, he gave the same assurance. Chisholm was given a large sum of money, treated courteously and advised to return to America. This is the last we know of Chisholm; no trace of him thereafter has been found.

In his deposition in the impeachment proceedings, Davy described Chisholm as he appeared in Philadelphia: "He was a hardy, lusty, brawny, weather-beaten man. . . . While drinking some porter, he appeared sociable; said that he was a back-country man; that he had long lived among the Indians, and was with them during the last war; that he was well known to the Spaniards; that his name was Captain Chisholm; that he had been an interpreter to the Indians last winter in this city; that the Spaniards had frequently imprisoned him and treated him cruelly in Pensa-

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cola; that they dreaded him, and he hated them, and was now determined to take his full revenge on them. He added, that his influence with the Indians was such that he could do with them as he pleased; that he knew every part of the Mississippi; that there was no man in America who knew the forts and their exact situa- tion so well as himself, and that he was now going to London to accompany and conduct a squadron to the attack of Pensacola; . . . that the Spaniards had no posts of any consequence on the whole of the Mississippi; that one hundred, or one hundred and fifty, a mere handful of men, might destroy them all."

John Chisholm was a large man, with very red hair, and was between fifty-five and sixty years of age when he sailed for England. He was pugnacious and cared little who was ruling so long as he was in exciting action, preferably a fight. Often he came to blows with friend or enemy alike, as court records show. It was this reference to Chisholm in the celebrated Blount to Carey letter, written from Col. King's Iron Works, April 21, 1797, that involved Blount in serious trouble: "Among other things I wished to have seen you about, was the business of Captain Chisholm mentioned to the British minister, last winter, in Philadelphia. I believe, but am not quite sure, that the plan then talked of will be attempted this fall, and if it is attempted, it will be in a much larger way than then talked of, and if the Indians act their part, I have no doubt but it will succeed. A man of consequence has gone to England about the business; and, if he makes arrangements as he expects, I shall myself have a hand in the business, and probably shall be at the head of the business on the part of the British. . . . Where Captain Chisholm is I do not know. I left him in Philadelphia in March, and he frequently visited the minister and spoke upon the subject; but I believe he will go into the Creek nation, by way of South Carolina or Georgia—He gave out he was going to Eng- land, but I did not believe him."

It was Colonel James King to whom Blount gave the letter for safe delivery to James Carey, at Tellico Blockhouse. King entrusted the letter to Major James Grant who delivered it in person to Carey. The letter was shown by Carey to Byers, an employee of the government at Tellico Blockhouse. Byers carried it to Philadelphia express, and it was in the hands of President Adams about June 14th.

Chisholm left a wife and family in Knoxville. His daughter, Elizabeth, married John Somerville, in Knoxville, May 20, 1794. Sons were Ignatius and John D. Chisholm.¹

¹ John D. Chisholm married a half-breed woman, and removed to the West with the Cherokees at an early day. While yet in the Alabama Country he was one of a syndicate which proposed to the national government the removal by the syndicate of obstructions to navigation at Muscle Shoals of the Tennessee for the privilege of charging toll per ton on traffic (1805). Along with James Rogers he acted as deputy of the Cherokees then living on the Arkansas River in executing the Cherokee treaty of July 8, 1817. He and Rogers also represented the Western Cherokees in council with U. S. officials in 1834. As late as 1843, he, adopted into the Cherokee tribe, was living on the Canadian River. It is believed that his name was given to Chisholm's Trail, noted in western history. If his father survived the journey to England, it is probable that on return to this country he found a home with the Cherokees, and, with his son John D., was among the first of that nation to remove voluntarily west of the Mississippi.

On removal to the West John D. Chisholm established himself on the Arkansas and Sprada Rivers. His son, Thomas, is said to have been the last head-chief of the Cherokees to have come to that office by heredity. This son was awarded a silver medal by President Jefferson in 1808. He was the father of Mrs. Narcissa Chisholm Owen, mother of the Hon. Robert L. Owen, one time U. S. Senator from Oklahoma, by her marriage to Robert Latham Owen I, who at the time was chief civil engineer of the East Tennessee & Virginia Railroad, then under construction, and later its president. The marriage took place at Jonesborough, the ceremony performed by the noted educator and divine, David Sullins. Miss Chisholm was a teacher in the female seminary at Jonesborough presided over by Sullins. Thus, fate brought to that historic old town where John Chisholm had first appeared west of the Alleghenies his descendant. John D. Chisholm died at Hot Springs, Ark., on a date unknown, to which place he had gone for the benefit of the waters.—EDITOR'S NOTE.

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