Suggested Citation:

RUSSELL BEAN, TENNESSEE’S FIRST NATIVE SON

By PAUL M. FINK

Until only a very few years preceding the American Revolution, the land now known as upper East Tennessee was without any inhabitants whatsoever. The Indians who had previously lived there and had left in the earth so many imperishable evidences of their presence, had moved away. Generations later, only a few hardy explorers had pushed their way through the forests from Virginia or North Carolina, down the valleys of the Holston, Watauga, Nolichucky, and Clinch rivers.

Following these, the Long Hunters, led by such intrepid souls as Daniel Boone, Elisha Walden, Nathaniel Gist, Gilbert Christian, and others equally as daring, made extended trips into the wilderness, hunting and trapping, away from their homes for months at a time. Not long behind them, traders, driving their strings of laden pack horses, began following the Great War Path westward to the towns of the Cherokee Indians on the Little Tennessee and Hiwassee rivers.

At the same time, the population east of the mountains was increasing rapidly, and cheap, available land was becoming hard to find. The stories of the returning Long Hunters, telling of beautiful rivers and fertile lands in the valleys west of the high wall of the Blue Ridge, lands to be had for the taking, were sweet music in the ears of the land hungry.

Among the very first to answer the siren call of this music was William Bean, of Pittsylvania County, Virginia. Bean had hunted with Daniel Boone and, it is said, chose for his frontier home a former camping place of theirs, at the mouth of Boone’s Creek, on Watauga River. Here in 1768 or 1769 he built his rude log cabin, the first permanent white habitation in Tennessee, and here, the following year, his son Russell became the “first white child born to permanent settlers” within the boundaries of present Tennessee. Russell must have been

1 Samuel Cole Williams, *Dawn of Tennessee Valley and Tennessee History* (Johnson City, 1937), 319-32.
3 Williams, *Dawn*, 337-38, 357n. "Undoubtedly," says Williams, "white children were born in the Fort Loudoun community, 1757-1760." Thus, Russell was the first identifiable native son.
the youngest child of William Bean and his wife Lydia Russell, for when they came to the Watauga they were accompanied by other sons and daughters, William, Jr., Jessee, Robert, George, Sara, Jane, and possibly others.¹

According to one account, William Bean was of royal descent, his line being traced back to Malcolm II, King of Scotland, 1004-1033 A.D., through his grandson Duncan I and his great-grandson, Donald Bain, both of whom appear as characters in Shakespeare's "Macbeth." Over the years the name had been changed from Bain to Baines, Beans, and finally Bean.² William himself seems to have been born in Pennsylvania, moved first to Augusta County, Virginia, then about 1753 to Pittsylvania County. Here he prospered, he and his son William becoming owners of over a thousand acres of land.³

After moving to Watauga in 1768-69, he was soon followed by his wife's brothers, George and John Russell, also from Pittsylvania. Other seekers for elbow room and good land followed closely behind, until in a very few years there was a respectable population on the Western Waters. Among them Bean took his place as a natural leader. At first holding his lands by right of possession, he was one of the very first to receive a deed for his acreage from "Charles Robertson of Watauga," who as trustee of the Watauga Association had acquired by one of the treaties of Sycamore Shoals of 1775 title to a considerable portion of Upper East Tennessee.

In 1775 or 1776 the settlers in the Watauga and Nolichucky valleys, feeling the need of a proper government to facilitate their participation in the War of the Revolution, formed themselves into Washington District, with the usual organization of a county. Threatened with an Indian invasion, the settlers petitioned the North Carolina assembly for recognition. The request was granted by the North Carolina Convention of 1776, which drafted the state's first constitution and appended to it a list of justices of the peace for Washington District, one of whom was William Bean.⁴ A year later, full county status was

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³ Williams, *Down*, 337n.
Lydia Russell, for whom he was named, survived by other sons named John, George, Sara, Jane, and William Russell.

William, of royal descent, his grandmother was a MacDonald of Scotland, 1004-1033 and his grandfather was the playwright, Sir William Baines. In Shakespeare's "Macbeth," William Baines was adapted to Baines, Beans, Beams, and William was born in Pennsylvania about 1753 to William and Jane. In 1760, William became a naturalized citizen.

The same year after his marriage, Baines moved from Pittsylvania, Virginia, and settled closely behind, or in, the cemetery of the Presbyterian population on the newly acquired, granted, or sold lands in the natural leader. The town was named for his brother-in-law, William Robertson of Dunlop, who was one of the very few Englishmen who had acquired property in Pennsylvania. Baines eventually moved to a considerable distance from the Presbyterian population.

In 1767, the Cherokee and Nolichucky Indians together to facilitate their migration westward into what is now a county. Threatened by the North Carolina governor and the North Carolina legislature, the North Carolina constitution and the North Carolina governor, established the Washington District, which was given a county status as early as 1766. Baines, harrassed by the Nolichucky Indians, was captured by the Indians, and taken to their base camp on the Nolichucky. There she was first threatened with death, but spared, and on

granted the district by the legislature, and at the organizational meeting of the court of pleas and quarter sessions in February, 1778, Bean was holding the same office.  

In those troubled days of the Revolution, shadowed by the constant dread of Indian invasion from the west and the threat of British forces overrunning the Carolinas to the east, every man able to bear arms was an active member of the militia, subject to call for instant duty. William Bean held office as captain in a company of Washington County troops. As such, with his older sons, he took part in the campaigns against the Cherokee Indians. Closer home, he led the party that routed some Tories greatly troubling the Wataugans. On one occasion, they tracked down a certain miscreant, Grimes by name, wounded him, and drove him out of the country. Found among Ferguson's troops after the Battle of Kings Mountain, Grimes was hung as a traitor.

Yet with all these public duties, civil and military, William Bean did not neglect the successful management of his own affairs. He cut timber from some of his acres and farmed the clearings. He worked at his trade of blacksmith and gunsmith, both in high demand on the frontier, and in 1780, he was granted permission to build a grist mill near his home on Boone's Creek.

Young Russell spent his childhood amid the frontier activities of war and danger. Sights and sounds of violence were a matter of daily occurrence, and stories of bloodshed and death were as familiar to him as were nursery stories to children in more protected localities. He himself was actively exposed to these perils at the tender age of seven, when the Cherokees made their greatest mass effort to drive out the whites. In the face of the savage invasion, all the outlying settlers hurriedly abandoned their homes and fled for safety to the nearest stockade. En route to Fort Caswell, at Sycamore Shoals on the Watauga, Mrs. William Bean, either the mother of Russell or the wife of his elder brother, became separated from the remainder of the family, was captured by the Indians, and taken to their base camp on the Nolichucky. There she was first threatened with death, but spared, and on
the retreat, taken to the Cherokee capital, Echota (or Chota), to teach
the Indian women to make cheese and butter. Again she was con-
demned and once even bound to a stake for burning, before being res-
cued by Nancy Ward, the famous Beloved Woman of the Cherokee,
possessor of the power of pardoning captives. After some months of
bondage, Mrs. Bean was returned to her home unharmed.¹¹

Russell was yet a stripling when his father died in 1782. By the
wording of his will, Russell must have been a favored son, or else the
father felt that the other sons were well able to care for themselves,
while Russell, a minor for some years yet, needed special provision:

... to my beloved wife Liddy [I leave] one negro girl name Grace and
all my horses and cattle and hoggs and shepp and my household
goods, together with the land and mill where on I now live during her
natural life and after her decease the land and mill to be given to my
beloved son Russel and all the remainder that is given to my beloved
wife at her decease to be divided among my children and all the
remainder and residue of my estate, real and personal, after my just
debts being paid to be equally divided among my surviving
children. ...¹²

Just what happened to this grist mill left to Russell is a mystery.
His talents were turned otherwise, toward gunsmithing and metal
working, not grinding wheat and corn. In the "Return of Taxable
Property in Capt. Stone's company for the years of 1790 and 1791,"
Russell is shown as owning 400 acres of land,¹³ but nothing can be
found in the Deed Books as to whether this was the mill property, or
how or when he disposed of it. Also, in 1801, he is shown as owning
one Negro slave.¹⁴ No other record has been found where he ever
owned real estate.

Russell grew into a handsome youth, with curly black hair and a
fine physique.¹⁵ Schools as we know them did not exist on the frontier;
yet some time in those growing years he received a fair education.
Many existing specimens of his handwriting show much better pen-
manship than was usual among his contemporaries.¹⁶

¹¹ Ramsey, Annals, 157; James Mooney, "Myths of the Cherokee," 19th Annual
¹² Will probated at May session, Washington County court, and recorded in Will
Book 1, p. 4, Records of Washington County, Tenn.
¹³ Mary Hardin McCown, Nancy E. Jones Stickley, and Inez E. Burns, Washington
County List of Taxables, 1778-1801, 2 vols. (Johnson City, Tenn., 1964), I, 70.
¹⁴ Ibid., 228.
¹⁶ Documents in possession of the writer.
Russell Bean, Tennessee's First Native Son

It may have been that he lacked a father's restraining influence during the formative years. Be that as it may, Russell's violent temper, which was to embroil him with the law on more than one occasion, manifested itself before he reached his majority. In the summer of 1788 he engaged in an altercation with Mrs. Isabel Cobb, wife of William Cobb, whose home, Rocky Mount, was north of the Watauga River, a short distance from the Bean home. Cobb was a large landowner, and it was at Rocky Mount that William Blount, newly named governor of the Territory of the United States South of the River Ohio, established his first seat of government in 1790, before moving to his permanent capital in Knoxville.

Just what brought about the trouble between Russell and Mrs. Cobb we may never know, but action soon passed from words to blows. He evidently forgot that a gentleman never strikes a lady; yet from the evidence in the case he didn't lay a hand on her. Quite the contrary.

Hailed before the court at its February, 1789, term, to answer a complaint that "with Force and Arms he an assault made on her the said Isbell and her beat, etc., against the Peace and Damage for Five Hundred Pounds," Russell pled not guilty. But the evidence was against him, for Dred Cobb, a prosecution witness, testified that

he saw Russell Bean taking his foot as if from Mrs. Isbel Cobb and that he concluded from the falling of his foot and Mrs. Cobb's crying out that Russell Bean had kicked her, that he [meaning the said Russell] had kicked her, and that this witness did not see Mrs. Isbell Cobb kick or strike Russell Bean, for at the time of the transaction his head was turned another way, therefore he cannot give information whether she struck or kicked him.

So in the face of that testimony even a plea of self-defense did not help, and Russell was adjudged guilty, fined £25, and "Ordered held in Close gaol until the fine be paid." 13

One of the duties devolving on William Blount when he assumed the governorship of the Southwest Territory was the appointing of all county officers to serve under him. For the year beginning May, 1791, he named Charles Robertson sheriff of Washington County, with Russell Bean and Robert Irwin as his deputies. 18

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11 Or rather her, since the Cherokee, like the French, had no personal names. "Cherokee," 19th Annual Report of Indian Commissioners (1862), p. 490. See also E. W. Grimes, Reminiscences of the Cherokees (1881); and recorded in Will Burnet, History of Tennessee (1864), I, 70.

12 Original warrants, bond, and deposition in the case, in possession of the writer. Verdict and penalty to be found in the Minutes of the Superior Court of Law and Equity, Feb. 26, 1789, Book No. 2, pp. 297, 299, Records of Washington County, Tenn.

Robertson was one of the earliest of the Wataugans, and had been a leader in all the activities, both civil and military, of Washington County under the jurisdiction of both North Carolina and the state of Franklin. Bean probably won his appointment as deputy by the fact that he had married Robertson’s daughter Rosamond.\(^{19}\)

Russell set about his new duties with enthusiasm. Existing records show that he served many warrants, executions, and other legal papers.\(^{20}\) If he had not already done so, in this work as deputy sheriff he made the acquaintance of Andrew Jackson, then public prosecutor, an acquaintanceship that was to last for many years, and to bring them together under many peculiar circumstances. In it, each young man learned to know and respect the mettle of the other.

Representing Daniel Shelby, Jackson had brought suit against Andrew Greer, a prominent and wealthy citizen. A *capias* placed in the hands of the sheriff was returned unserved, with the reason endorsed: “Not to be taken by being kept off by a knife and stick and threatens.” Jackson believed he knew another officer whose courage would not be daunted by knives and sticks and “threatens,” and turned the writ over to Russell for service. Unfortunately, we have no details as to what difficulties he had, only the record of his success in the terse entry on the back of the document, “Executed by me, July 13, 1791. Russell Bean, D. S.”\(^{21}\)

The many legal papers served by Russell attest his activity in his position as law officer, but this was not his major occupation. His childhood had been spent in and about the shop of his father. On the frontier, where a man’s rifle not only supplied the meat to feed his family, but also stood as a shield against hostile Indian forays, the gunsmith was a most valuable and respected member of the community. Russell’s older brothers, William, Jr., Robert, John, Jesse, and George, devoted at least a part of their time to the craft. So it was only natural that Russell should follow the family tradition. Unlike them, he was not content with what instruction he could obtain locally, but impelled by a desire for better knowledge of the art, he journeyed

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\(^{20}\) Documents in possession of the writer.

\(^{21}\) Samuel C. Williams, “The First Bar West of the Mountains,” a paper read before the meeting of the Tennessee Bar Association, Nashville, July, 1897, and printed in the *Memphis Commercial-Appeal*, August 1, 1897.
to far-away Connecticut, to study advanced processes in use there, to benefit by them in his own shop.\textsuperscript{22}

The itch of the roaming foot, so much in evidence all his life, was beginning to develop. By 1792 he was either living or working in Knoxville. His wife Rosamond had had some difficulty with the law in Washington County, for which she had been fined £40 and costs, a total of £52-16-3. When an officer reported she could not be found there, a capias to collect her fine and costs from Russell was sent to Knox County. A stud horse was seized and sold for £13-17s and the writ returned, marked "No more property found."\textsuperscript{23}

Rosamond, like Russell, was a true child of the frontier, for she, too, was born on the Watauga in the savage early days, her father an experienced Indian fighter. She herself must have been a turbulent character, a fit mate for Russell. In 1798 she, Russell's sister Jane (later to be ambushed and killed by Indians at Bean's Station on the Holston River), and one Jemima Scroggins were involved in some sort of trouble, and an indictment returned against them. The warrant for their arrest was returned unserved, with the short but character-revealing comment, "Will not be taken, kept off by force and arms."\textsuperscript{24}

Russell next appears further afield in 1797, when an entry in Col. David Henley's Waste Book reads, "Russell Bean's expenses to the Natchez, $20.00."\textsuperscript{25} At the time Colonel Henley was agent for the War Department in Tennessee and a part of his duties related to the superintendence of Indian Affairs. While the simple entry in his Waste Book gives no hint of the reason for sending Russell on this trip, we can imagine that he was a messenger or emissary to the Choctaw Indians, or at least an observer as to their attitude toward the whites.

Ever since John Donelson's flotilla had made its epic voyage from Long Island to found the settlements on the Cumberland, flatboats in increasing numbers had been floating down the Holston and on to the Tennessee, carrying not only emigrants to the western settlements, but also surplus agricultural and other products. James King, owner and operator of an iron works on Beaver Creek, near the present Bristol,
saw an opportunity to enlarge his market, and in June, 1798, entered into an agreement with Russell Bean, whereby King would furnish the iron from his Beaver Creek establishment and Bean would take it by boat down the river to Natchez for sale, with the net profits to be equally divided.26 Before the expedition could get under way, some doubt arose as to Russell’s merchandizing ability, and it was thought best that a third partner be added. So a new contract, dated September 5, 1798, was drawn. By this, John Hillsman, a merchant of Knoxville, was named as the third party, to represent the interest of Col. King, and to have sole charge of sales. The bar iron and castings comprising the cargo would total from fifteen to twenty tons, and were to be transported to Knoxville, the point of embarkation, by wagon. Costs of merchandise, wagon freight, and handling were all prescribed. After deducting all costs and expenses, the net profits were to be divided equally among Bean, King, and Hillsman.27

Tradition has it that Russell deviated from the strict terms of the contract in two respects. First, instead of taking all the bar (wrought) iron just as it came from the forge or bloomery, he worked up a portion of it into guns, knives, and other articles that were in great demand and consequently would bring higher prices and larger profits. Second, that all the cargo was not sold at Natchez, but the voyage continued on down the river to New Orleans. There he spent a number of months enjoying the divertissements of the city, cock-fighting, horse and foot racing, and other sports popular on the frontier, before starting back on the long journey overland.

The stories of the dramatic incidents in the life of Russell over the period of two or three years immediately following this trip down the Mississippi have been written and rewritten so many times, with various details added and transposed, that it has been very difficult if not virtually impossible to get the true picture, accurate in every detail and sequence. In this account, reliance has been placed, in so far as possible, on existing public records, as well as the letters and accounts of those who had either first hand or contemporary acquaintance with the facts. One such person was Col. Isaac T. Avery, son of Wrightstill Avery, with whom Andrew Jackson once fought a bloodless duel in

26 "Some Old Papers," *American Historical Magazine*, V (July, 1900), 204-05.
27 Archives of the Tennessee Historical Society (State Library and Archives, Nashville, Tenn.), Box 31, no. 893.
June, 1798, entered into a contract to furnish the plantation with rice. This contract would take 40 bales of rice to the agent in New Orleans and he was to obtain the net profits to be left to the owners. The conditions of the contract were such that, if not under way, some 200 bales were to be furnished the plantation, and it was thought that the contract could not be obtained. A bill of exchange, dated September 10, 1798, from Col. King, merchant of Knoxville, Tennessee, paid by the interest of Col. King, merchant of Baltimore, and consisting of castings comprising three tons of iron, and two tons of nails, were to be delivered by wagon. Costs of transportation were not prescribed. After delivery of the castings were to be divided among the parties on the contract.

The contract was made in strict terms of the law, and the revenue from the bar (wrought) iron was a popular article in great demand in those days, and yielded larger profits. Second, the necessary expenses of the voyage continued on the return, including a large number of months spent on the highway, horse and foot, before returning to New Orleans.

The life of Russell Bean over a period of years during this trip down the Mississippi many times, with this contract, has been very difficult if not impossible to relate in every detail because it has been placed, in so far as read, in private letters and accounts of the companies of acquaintance with the descendants of Waightstill of Natchez, the bloodless duel in which he was involved, and the letters and accounts that have been written about the events. Russell Bean, who being sworn, etc., Deposeeth that some time in the month of February, 1802, he engaged with King & McAlister, merchants of Jonesborough, to navigate a boatload of flour to Natchez, in the Mississippi Territory — Started in Feb., 1802. About the 1st of March, near South West Point the military at that place pursued him and for safety he was obliged to abandon the boat. He left in her...

39 Ibid., 66-67; also John Allison, Dropped Stitches in Tennessee History (Nashville, 1897), 119.
40 Original warrant in possession of the writer.
2 or 3 hired hands, amongst whom was Mark Bean who undertook to
navigate the boat to Natchez. Some time in March the boat reached
Muscle Shoals in the River Tennessee—here Mark Bean disposed of
the Boat and Cargo, Consisting of about 100 barrels of flour—to Chief
Double head, a Cherokee Indian then residing at the Shoals—for
$200. When Russell heard of the situation, being much alarmed for
the consequences and extricated from his difficulties early in April
with Samuel McAllister he hastened to the Shoals and found the boat
and cargo in the possession of Doublehead—McAllister offered to
compensate the Indian for any trouble or expense if he would give up
the boat and allow it to proceed but this was refused saying he had
bargained with the person in possession and that he had paid $20 of
the purchase money to Mark Bean.

Russell Bean & McAllister went on to Natchez and returning in
June with Henry Massengill and William Massengill called at the
house of Double head and demanded payment. Double Head replied
that Russell Bean was not the person with whom he had bargained—but
that if Mark Bean or King & McAllister called on him, he would
pay at any time.

Sworn 1 October, 1804.
James Stuart,
Justice of Peace of County of Washington.\(^{31}\)

Not waiting for Russell’s capture and return, his wife Rosamond
on the first Monday in March, 1802, filed suit for divorce, with the
hearing set for the September term of superior court. The subpoena
in this case was finally served on Russell on August 20.\(^{32}\) No court record
has been found as to the outcome of the suit, but all sources agree that
a divorce was granted. Rosamond then moved to Knoxville.\(^{33}\)

Russell was having more troubles about that time. Separated from
his wife and boarding, he was unable to pay for his keep promptly,
and was sued by Frank Allison for a debt of $61.80, “for Eleven Weeks
Boarding at One Dollar and sixty six cents and two thirds of a cent
and for feeding one Horse at thirty three and one third cents per day
for Seventy Seven days and a quantity of whiskey and cider furnished
the said Russell,” plus several small cash advances made for his benefit.
Levy was made on three horses, ordered sold to pay the debt.\(^{34}\)

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\(^{31}\) Quoted in Samuel Evans Massengill, *The Massengills, Massengales and variants, 1472-1931* (Bristol, Tenn., 1931), 26. Mark Bean was probably a nephew of Russell.

\(^{32}\) Doublehead, a war chief of the Chickamauga branch of the Cherokees, was long hostile to the whites and a leader in the great raid on Knoxville in 1793. After a treaty between the Indians and whites in 1794 he became peaceful. In another treaty in 1805 certain tracts of land were set aside for him, in exchange for his services, but shortly afterward he was killed by order of the tribal council for misuse of his official position for personal ends. Mooney, *Myths of the Cherokees,* 73-85.

\(^{33}\) Letter of Col. Avery, 167.

\(^{34}\) Documents in possession of the writer.
who undertook to
the boat reached
Bean disposed of
of flour—to Chief
Chief—of the Shoals—for
much alarmed for
an early in April
found the boat
Lister offered to
one would give up
saying he had
had paid $20 of
and returning in
still called at the
Riddle Head replied
had bargained—
up him, he would
Bean.

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mistrust and variants,
hey a nephew of Russell.
brothers, was long hostile
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tracts shortly afterward he was
mission for personal ends.

Finally brought to trial for maiming the child, Russell was con-
victed, sentenced to a term in prison, and also to be branded in the
brawn of the hand. As was the usual custom, this latter punishment was
inflicted at once, in the presence of the court. Whereupon he
immediately bit out the spot of scorched flesh, and spat it out on the
floor.85

All this trial and punishment was evidently at the March, 1803,
term of the superior court, for we are told that jail did not hold him
long, and that he escaped the night of a fire in Jonesboro, March 15,
about which Judge Andrew Jackson wrote to his wife Rachel.86 Colonel
Avery also described this event in detail. The fire broke out in the
stable of the Rawlings' Tavern. Jackson, staying with friends, rushed
to the scene, and as was his wont, took charge, organizing a bucket
brigade and generally directing the work. Russell Bean, appearing from
nowhere, rushed to the blazing stable, tore down the doors to release
the horses inside, climbed roofs and spread wet blankets to extinguish
flying sparks, and in general did more than any two men, save Judge
Jackson, to save the town. In reward, Governor Sevier, who chanced
to be in town, pardoned him from the jail sentence.87

Russell's resentment still rankled against the seducer of his wife,
one Allen, a merchant of the town, who very prudently had absented
himself. As a result of picking a fight with Allen's brother, Russell
was once more bound over for trial. Judge Jackson was again on the
bench. When the case was called, the sheriff reported Bean sitting in the
doorway of his home, a block up the street, a loaded rifle across
his knees, defying arrest. Well acquainted with his desperate nature,
the sheriff hesitated to press matters, for fear of bloodshed. Jackson,
himself a fiery, resolute soul, would brook no such flagrant defiance of
the law. As court was recessed for noon, he spoke pointedly to the
sheriff, "Summon every man in the court house, and bring Bean in here
dead or alive." Nettled, the sheriff retorted, "Then I summon your
honor first!"

"By the Eternal, I'll bring him!," Jackson replied. His ever-present
pistol hanging loosely in his hand, Jackson marched down the street

85 Allison, Dropped Stitches, 120.
86 Marquis James, Andrew Jackson, the Border Captain (New York, 1933), 89-90.
toward Bean's home, followed, at a discreet distance, by a curious crowd. Realizing that he was facing a man as determined as himself and that Jackson was backed by the majesty of the law, Bean laid his gun down with a sigh, saying, "I'll surrender to you, Mr. Devil." His implication was that none but Jackson could have taken him. Placing the prisoner in the hands of the astonished sheriff, Jackson called the court back into session, found Bean guilty, and levied a heavy fine.38

Col. Isaac Avery, well acquainted with Bean, tells more stories of his extra-curricular activities in the next few years. Some time after his divorce from Rosamond, he had seduced a respectable girl living near town. In order to protect himself, he induced one of the employees in his shop to visit her, and make her his mistress. The stratagem succeeded so well that the young man, fascinated by her charms, made his plans to marry the girl after her accouchement, and then go west. Awakened late one night, Bean opened the door to a woman, who, without a word, placed a blanket-wrapped, new-born infant in his arms, turned and vanished. Sending for a nursing bottle, he set about raising the child himself, without aid of a nurse, claiming afterward that he found it a pleasant task, and little more trouble than raising a little pig.39

All these troubles, and possibly the fact that he was growing older, appear to have had a settling effect on Russell, for nothing more has been found showing him on the wrong side of the law. He devoted most of his time to his craft of gunsmithing. At this he gained wide renown, the excellence of his products making them in great demand among connoisseurs of fine rifles. The art was taught to at least two sons, Charles and Baxter, with whom he was in partnership at various times.

The eldest son, Charles, married Margaret Cloyd, June 19, 1815.40 Most, if not all their lives were spent in Washington County. Their son, Charles H., was blacksmith and gunsmith in Jonesboro until after the Civil War, when he moved to South Indian Creek, in the present

38 This account is a composite of three ones: John Allison, *Dropped Stitches*, 120; Letter of Col. Avey, 167; and a letter of Jas. A. McLoughlin, quoted in John Spencer Bassett, *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson*, 7 vols. (Washington, 1826-35), I, 65n.
40 Marriage Book C, p. 149, Records of Washington County.
Unicoi County, where he was still working at the trade until the early part of this century.  

Baxter Bean never married. His gun shops were in Jonesboro and on Cherokee Creek in Washington County. Some time after 1825 he moved to Nashville, where he met a tragic end. Large and very strong, he was a quiet man, not inclined to be quarrelsome or to impose on anyone, but well able to take care of himself should trouble arise. Sitting on the upper gallery of a tavern one evening, he was annoyed by an intoxicated person. Picking the bully up bodily, he held him over the edge of the porch, shook him, then set him down unharmed. On his way home that night, Baxter was knifed in the back and killed. His assailant was never identified, but it was always supposed to have been done by or at the instance of his enemy of the evening.

About the time of his entanglements with the law, or shortly thereafter, Russell was living on part of Lot No. 20, of the original plan of Jonesboro, on the southwest corner of West Main Street and First Avenue, though he did not own the property; it belonged to Dr. William P. Chester, a prominent physician and innkeeper of the town. It was while living here that he was operating a gunshop across Main Street, in partnership with his son Baxter. The shop building had been rented from John Smith for a year, at an agreed rental of “two rifle guns at $25.00 each and also $50.00 to be paid in good trade, equal to corn at 2 shillings per Bushel.” Smith later sued on the contract, alleging that, although the tenants had overstayed the term of the lease by about a year, no rental had ever been paid.

If all his troubles had lost for him any of the regard of the people, he soon began to regain it. In 1809 he was named a member of the grand jury at the February term of the court of pleas and quarter sessions. Also, he had become reconciled with his former wife, Rosamond.

After their divorce, she had gone to Knoxville to live, where the

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43 Some years ago the writer owned guns made by Russell, Charles, and Charles H. Bean. Rifles made by the Beans are today in great demand among gun collectors, and command considerably higher prices than those of less competent makers.

44 Documents in possession of the writer, and various entries in the Deed Records of Washington County.

45 Told to the writer about 1920 by James Bean, son of Charles H. and great-nephew of Baxter.

46 Ibid.

47 Minutes of the Washington County Court.
crop-eared child had died. Russell chanced to be there, just at a time when Andrew Jackson was visiting the town. Jackson knew them both well, as he did their families, and interested himself in bringing about a reconciliation. His efforts succeeded, and the couple were reunited.\(^47\)

While every able-bodied man was supposed to be a member of the militia and to take part in at least a small amount of training, nothing has been found concerning any military activity on Russell's part until after the bickering with England, that resulted in the War of 1812, was inflaming the minds of the people. True, the militia had been largely inactive since the last threat from the Indians, but now it began to stir itself. In 1811 Russell was named as captain of one of the companies of the 1st Regiment of Tennessee militia.\(^48\) There is no record telling of any active service performed while holding this office.

During the Revolution William Bean and most, if not all, of his sons of age to bear arms had taken an active part against both the Indians and the British. Now, when fighting with the English began in 1812, the family once again flocked to the colors. "Flocked" is the correct term, for not less than fifteen of the name served in the Tennessee troops.\(^49\) How many more in other states is unknown, but as the clan had spread widely throughout the Southwest, undoubtedly there were many others. One, Peter Ellis Bean, who seems to have been Russell's nephew, returned to the United States from Mexico, where he had won distinction as a cavalry leader, and was with Andrew Jackson at New Orleans.\(^50\)

In no list seen of Russell's children has there been found a son bearing his Christian name, but on the roll of Captain McClin's Company, Colonel Lillard's Regiment, are the names of Russell Bean as 1st lieutenant and Russell, Jr., as private, both enlisting the same day, October 12, 1813.\(^51\) It is possible, even likely, that they may have been uncle and nephew rather than father and son, the term "Jr." being often so used at that time.

During this war, as in the Revolution, it was customary for the militia to be called out for a specific campaign and for a certain short

\(^{47}\) Letter of Col. Avery, 167-68. Other accounts are substantially the same.


\(^{49}\) Various records in the Tennessee Archives, Nashville.

\(^{50}\) *Nashville Banner*, September 18, 1927.

\(^{51}\) Muster rolls in the Tennessee Archives, Nashville.
period of time, such as ninety days, or one might enlist in some volunteer unit for like duty and time. Hence, Russell is found to have served in several commands and in various ranks. Once, at least, his talents as gunsmith were recognized when he was "detached to armory." 59

Equipping these hurriedly raised troops was sometimes difficult. Every militiaman was supposed to furnish his own accouterments, but with the volunteers it was different. Usually the arms were supplied by the state, though in extreme cases guns in private hands were "pressed" into service, to be returned to the original owner after the campaign. When in 1813 Capt. Jacob Hartsell was recruiting a company in Washington County for the Creek War, he "pressed" a rifle belonging to Ephraim Murray to arm Henry Ruble. Russell Bean, because of his knowledge of weapons, was called upon to appraise the worth of the gun; he gave a valuation of $20.00. 60

Bean's name does not appear in the muster roll of Captain Hartsell's company, but he did accompany the unit. It may have been as civilian armorer or possibly spy, as members of scouting detachments were often called. His brother Jesse was acting as lieutenant of such a company under Gen. John Coffee at the Battle of Horseshoe Bend in 1814. 61

Captain Hartsell's "Journal" tells of Russell's meeting some old acquaintances while the troops were in camp in Alabama: "... the same man that Came new [knew] Russel Bean, and Rusele Bean's Brother in the Chocktoy nation, and he inquired for the name of been [Bean] from East tennesee, when he found Rusele Beene the[y] knew one another." 62 Probably it was a friend he had made on his mission to the Choctaws for Colonel Henley or an acquaintance of some trading trip down to Natchez, passing en route through the Choctaw country.

The war over, Russell returned to Jonesboro and resumed the art of gunsmithing, sometimes in partnership with his sons. By 1818 or 1820 Baxter was operating a manufacturing establishment on Cherokee Creek, some five miles south of town, equipped with "two Bellows,"

59 Ibid.
60 Documents in possession of the writer.
two anvils, one stake, four vices, with hammers, tongs, files, punches, boring tools and all other appurtenances belonging to a black smith and gun smith Shop."

The pioneer urge still infected the Bean clan, and many had moved westward. Peter Ellis Bean, we have seen, had gone as far as Mexico about the turn of the century. By 1818 Mark Bean, who had sold the boatload of flour to the Cherokee chief Doublehead, was boiling down salt at the saline springs in Crawford County, Arkansas, then deep in the lands of the Osage Indians.⁵⁷

Russell's old acquaintance, Andrew Jackson, alternately adversary and friend, was in 1819 associated with John Overton and James Winchester in promoting a new city to be called Memphis, on the bank of the Mississippi at the fourth Chickasaw Bluff.⁵⁸ Joab Bean was already established there, as gunsmith, blacksmith, and trader with the Indians. The son of Jessee Bean, Joab was thus nephew of Russell, who soon joined him, for upon the organization of Shelby County in 1820, among the members of the patrol were both Joab and Russell.⁵⁹

Remembering that the Mississippi River at the time was infested with river pirates, the sometimes scarcely less ruffianly keelboatmen, and the general run of hard-case individuals to be found on the frontier, one is tempted to believe that Russell's appointment was prompted by a knowledge of his own intrepid character. In addition, Russell had an early variety of juvenile delinquent to combat. By one account he had the unruly boys under firm but benevolent control:

The boys in the little village, as Memphis might be called at that early day, were a pretty wild set; their fun and mischief had to be attended to. They meant no real harm, but their nocturnal depredations were of frequent annoyance to older ones, who would sometimes threaten extermination to the whole posse. It availed but little to them, they would approach the one offended and say... "We will bring Russell Bean round, and get him to sing you a few songs." Russell Bean was an excellent singer, always carried his songbook in his pocket, and would sing it through if requested. "Well," the reply might be, "You better go to church and learn to do better."⁶⁰

In addition to being a member of the patrol, Russell had a part in other civic duties. He, with Jacob Bean (relationship unknown), was

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⁵⁷ Mortgage to John McAllister, Washington County Deed Book 17, p. 76. See also The Historical Records Survey, Works Projects Administration, Records of Washington County: General Index to Deeds & Mortgages, 1779-1866 (Nashville, 1940), 21.⁵⁸ Grant Foreman, Indians and Pioneers (New Haven, 1936), 59-62.
⁵⁸ James, Jackson: Border Captain, 331.
⁵⁹ Samuel Cole Williams, Beginnings of West Tennessee (Johnson City, 1930), 115.
⁶⁰ James D. Davis, History of Memphis (Memphis, 1873), 292.
songs, files, punches, and later going to a blacksmith.

Joab Bean, and many had
had gone as far as
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Lyman County, Arkansas, then

Alternately adversary
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nephew of Russell,
Shelby County in
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.. "We will
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"Well," the reply
"No, I'll do

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ship unknown), was
Book 17, p. 76. See also
Records of Washington
ville, 1940), 21.

, 59-62.

Hudon City, 1930), 115.

one of those appointed to serve on the first jury "to inquire into the body of the County." At the same term of court the first bill of sale offered for recording was that of Jacob Bean to William Jones for a Negro boy. And in 1824 a "Road was Ordered marked from Memphis in the direction of Love's Settlement," and among the hands named for the work were Russell and Isab Bean.

Another entry in these early Shelby County records is mystifying. We know that Russell and Rosamund were divorced in 1802, but later were reconciled and remarried. Nothing has come to light indicating any further separation, and Rosamund was still alive in 1830, aged 75 years, and living in the household of Jacob Hartsell, on Cherokee Creek in Washington County.

Yet we find that in Shelby County a marriage license was issued to Russell Bean and Mary C. Harkleroad, May 20, 1820, with John C. Harkleroad as surety. The most plausible theory is that this was the same elusive Russell, Jr., who enlisted in the East Tennessee Volunteers in 1813, and was later transferred to the West Tennessee troops. If this be he, it is strange that the designation "Jr." was not used, inasmuch as the original bearer of the name was active in the county at the time. Other than these, no mention of a possible Junior has been found.

The wandering foot brought Russell back to Washington County again before long. On January 11, 1825, he gave a deposition in a law suit. At that time, and until 1829, Baxter Bean was still operating his gun shop on Cherokee Creek, and his father may well have been working for him.

Following this date, no positive trace of Russell has been found. So far as the record goes, old frontiersmen, like old soldiers, never die, just simply march away. Some of the older members of the community say that years ago a badly weathered stone, bearing simply the crudely lettered name "R. Bean," stood in the cemetery at old Uriel Church, only a mile or two from where the Bean gunshop was located. If this

63 Goodspeed Publishing Co., History of Tennessee (Nashville, 1887), 516.
64 Minutes of Shelby County Court, October 21, 1828, in Probate Court Minute Book, No. 2, 1824-1839 (Shelby County Courthouse, Memphis), 337.
65 Original returns, U. S. Census of 1850 (microfilm).
66 Marriage Book No. 1, 1820-1853, Records of Shelby County (Courthouse, Memphis, Tennessee).
67 Document in possession of the writer.
be true, the stone has long since disappeared. Nor is there any way to tell if the "R" stood for Russell, Rosamond, or some other member of the family.

In attempting an appraisal of Russell Bean, one must hold in mind many things. One, he was no common border ruffian. He came of an excellent family, that associated intimately with the best that the frontier possessed, and that both in Washington and Shelby counties, at opposite ends of the state, he held positions of civic importance. Yet he was a true son of the frontier, a product of the time and place. We today can hardly visualize the conditions under which he was reared. Scenes of cruelty and violence were his daily fare, and the stories most frequently told by the fireside at night dealt with conflict with savage beasts and even more savage men, red and white. While his own youth and early manhood were turbulent and unruly, after the few violent days were over, he settled down into a reputable, well-regarded citizen. In all that, one might say that his career was in a way parallel to the story of his Mother State, which after its tumultuous early days, found itself and took its proper place, an equal in the community of states.