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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,¹ 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.² 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.³ Russell must have been

¹ Samuel Cole Williams, *Dawn of Tennessee Valley and Tennessee History* (Johnson City, 1937), 319-32.

² J. G. M. Ramsey, *Annals of Tennessee* (Charleston, S. C., 1853), 94.

³ Williams, *Dawn*, 337-38, 337n. "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., Jesse, Robert, George, Sara, Jane, and possibly others.⁴

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.⁵ 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.⁶

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.⁷ A year later, full county status was

⁴ Zella Armstrong, *Notable Southern Families*, 2 vols. (Chattanooga, 1918-22), II, 8.

⁵ Nellie Zada Molyneaux, "A Genealogical Record of the Bean Family" (typescript, n. p., n. d., in the writer's possession).

⁶ Williams, *Dawn*, 337n.

⁷ Walter Clark (ed.), *The State Records of North Carolina*, Vol. XXIII, *Laws, 1715-1776* (Goldsboro, 1904), 995.

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granted the district by the legislature, and at the organizational meet-
ing of the court of pleas and quarter sessions in February, 1778, Bean
was holding the same office.⁸

In those troubled days of the Revolution, shadowed by the con-
stant 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 cam-
paigns 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.⁹

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.¹⁰

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 hur-
riedly abandoned their homes and fled for safety to the nearest stock-
ade. 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 Noli-
chucky. There she was first threatened with death, but spared, and on

⁸ Minutes of the Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions, Washington County, February
Term, 1778, Records of Washington County (Courthouse, Jonesboro, Tennessee).

⁹ Ramsey, *Annals*, 179.

¹⁰ Minutes of the Washington County Court, May 23, 1780.

the retreat, taken to the Cherokee capital, Echota (or Chota), to teach the Indian women to make cheese and butter. Again she was condemned and once even bound to a stake for burning, before being rescued 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 penmanship than was usual among his contemporaries.¹⁶

¹¹ Ramsey, *Annals*, 157; James Mooney, "Myths of the Cherokee," *19th Annual Report*, Bureau of American Ethnology (Washington, 1900), part 1, p. 490.

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.

¹⁵ Armstrong, *Notable Southern Families*, II, 13.

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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. Isabel 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."¹⁷

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

¹⁷ 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.

¹⁸ Clarence Edwin Carter (ed.), *The Territorial Papers of the United States*, Vol. IV, *The Territory South of the River Ohio, 1790-1796* (Washington, 1936), 444.

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

¹⁹ Worth S. Ray, *Tennessee Cousins: A History of Tennessee People* (Austin, Tex., 1950), 25.

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.

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to far-away Connecticut, to study advanced processes in use there, to benefit by them in his own shop.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."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."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."²⁵ At the time Colonel Henley was agent for the War Department in Tennessee and a part of his duties related to the superintendency 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,

²² Col. Isaac T. Avery to James Parton (n.d.) as quoted in James Parton, *Life of Andrew Jackson*, 3 vols. (New York, 1860), I, 166. Hereafter cited Letter of Col. Avery.

²³ Documents in possession of the writer.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ As quoted in Mary Hardin McCown and Inez E. Burns, *Soldiers of the War of 1812 buried in Tennessee* (Johnson City, 1959), 157.

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 Waightstill 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.

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Jonesboro. Colonel Avery stated that he personally saw parts of the events, and heard of many of the other incidents from Bean's own lips.²⁸

On his return from New Orleans, Russell found his wife with a tiny infant, a situation which he deemed rather questionable, considering his long absence. Saying little at the time, he went to town and, though normally not a drinking man, became roaring drunk. Returning, he picked up the child from its cradle, pulled his hunting knife from its sheath and cut off both its ears, saying that he "had marked it so that it would not get mixed up with his children."²⁹ At the time, it was the custom to denote ownership of livestock by cropping or slitting ears in a distinctive manner.

For this offense he was arrested, but escaped custody, whereupon a second fugitive warrant was issued:

State of Tennessee) To all Sheriffs, Constables
County of Washington) and other officers.

Whereas my warrant hath hitherto issued for apprehending a certain Russell Bean for having feloniously and on purpose maimed and disfigured an infant child by having cut off both its ears and John Whitton was specially appointed and sworn to execute the same warrant, who thereupon oath made return that he, the said Russell, had been taken but by force of arms had escaped from his custody. These are therefore to command you, forthwith, to raise a sufficient force and power, within your several precincts and make diligent search for the said Russell Bean, and to make further pursuit and hue and cry after him from town to town and from county to county, as well by horsemen as by foot, until the said Russell shall have been apprehended, and bring him before some Justice of the Peace for the county wherein he shall be taken, to be examined by the said Justice, and death [*sic*] with according to law. Hereof fail not at your peril, respectively. Given under my hand and seal at Jonesborough, in the County aforesaid, the 12th day of February, One Thousand Eight Hundred and Two.

John Adams, J. P.³⁰

While Russell was a fugitive, he put in at least part of his time on another merchandizing venture, again headed for Natchez. For this we have his own account:

Russell Bean, who being sworn, etc., Depose 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

²⁸ Letter of Col. Avery, 160-61.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 166-67; also John Allison, *Dropped Stitches in Tennessee History* (Nashville, 1897), 119.

³⁰ 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.

Russell Bean.

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

³¹ Quoted in Samuel Evans Massengill, *The Massengills, Massengales and variants, 1472-1931* (Bristol, Tenn., 1931), 266. Mark Bean was probably a nephew of Russell. 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 Cherokee," 75-85.

³² Documents in possession of the writer.

³³ Letter of Col. Avery, 167.

³⁴ Documents in possession of the writer.

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Finally brought to trial for maiming the child, Russell was convicted, 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. ³⁵

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. ³⁶ 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. ³⁷

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

³⁵ Allison, *Dropped Stitches*, 120.

³⁶ Marquis James, *Andrew Jackson, the Border Captain* (New York, 1933), 89-90.

³⁷ Letter of Col. Avery, 167.

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 others: John Allison, *Dropped Stitches*, 120; Letter of Col. Avery, 167; and a letter of Jas. A. McLoughlin, quoted in John Spencer Bassett, *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson*, 7 vols. (Washington, 1926-35), I, 65n.

³⁹ Letter of Col. Avery, 167.

⁴⁰ Marriage Book C, p. 149, Records of Washington County.

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Unicoi County, where he was still working at the trade until the early part of this century.⁴¹

Baxter Bean never married. His gun shops were in Jonesboro and on Cherokee Creek in Washington County.⁴² 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.⁴³

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.⁴⁴ 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.⁴⁵

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.⁴⁶ Also, he had become reconciled with his former wife, Rosamond.

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

⁴¹ 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.

⁴² Documents in possession of the writer, and various entries in the Deed Records of Washington County.

⁴³ Told to the writer about 1920 by James Bean, son of Charles H. and great-nephew of Baxter.

⁴⁴ Documents in possession of the writer.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ 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 McLin'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.

⁴⁸ Mrs. John Trotwood Moore, "Record of Commissions of Officers in the Tennessee Militia, 1811," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, VI (March, 1947), 65.

⁴⁹ Various records in the Tennessee Archives, Nashville.

⁵⁰ *Nashville Banner*, September 18, 1927.

⁵¹ Muster rolls in the Tennessee Archives, Nashville.

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period of time, such as ninety days, or one might enlist in some volun-
teer 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."⁵²

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 Wash-
ington 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 \$20.00.⁵³

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 Jessee was acting as lieutenant of such a
company under Gen. John Coffee at the Battle of Horseshoe Bend in
1814.⁵⁴

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 tennessee. when he found Rusele Beene the[y] knew
onenother."⁵⁵ 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,

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Documents in possession of the writer.

⁵⁴ Report of Andrew Jackson to Gen. Pinckney, March 28, 1814, as quoted in S. G. Heiskell, *Andrew Jackson and Early Tennessee History*, 2nd ed., 3 vols. (Nashville, 1920), I, 501.

⁵⁵ Mary Hardin McCown, ed., "The J. Hartsell Memora: The Journal of a Tennessee Captain in the War of 1812," *East Tennessee Historical Society's Publications*, No. 12 (1940), 130.

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."⁵⁶

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 Jesse 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

⁵⁶ 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.

⁵⁷ 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.

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one of those appointed to serve on the first jury "to inquire into the body of the County."⁶¹ 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 Isah Bean.⁶²

Another entry in these early Shelby County records is mystifying. We know that Russell and Rosamond were divorced in 1802, but later were reconciled and remarried. Nothing has come to light indicating any further separation, and Rosamond was still alive in 1850, aged 75 years, and living in the household of Jacob Hartsell, on Cherokee Creek in Washington County.⁶³

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.⁶⁴ 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.⁶⁵ 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

⁶¹ Goodspeed Publishing Co., *History of Tennessee* (Nashville, 1887), 816.

⁶² Minutes of Shelby County Court, October 21, 1828, in Probate Court Minute Book, No. 2, 1824-1829 (Shelby County Courthouse, Memphis), 337.

⁶³ Original returns, U. S. Census of 1850 (microfilm).

⁶⁴ Marriage Book No. 1, 1820-1853, Records of Shelby County (Courthouse, Memphis, Tennessee).

⁶⁵ 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.