

The Watauga Compact and Watauga Purchase

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Essential Question: What events contributed to the development of the Watauga settlement?

The first permanent white settler in what is now Tennessee was William Bean, who settled in 1769 on Boone's Creek, near where it flowed into the Watauga River. Within a year there were several more families in three neighboring communities: Nolichucky, Carter's Valley, and North Holston. Most had arrived by way of the Great Valley, coming down through Virginia, while some had moved west from North Carolina.

The settlers claimed they had settled within the boundary of Virginia and the Proclamation of 1763. A survey revealed, however, that all the communities except North Holston were outside of the boundaries of both North Carolina and Virginia. The settlements were on land that had been guaranteed to the **Cherokee** Nation. The government told the settlers that they had to move off of Cherokee land. Instead, the settlers came together in the Watauga settlement and asked the Cherokee if they could lease land along the Watauga River for ten years. The Cherokee agreed.

However, the Wataugans were still beyond the boundary of any organized government. To solve this problem they created the **Watauga Association** in 1772. This group of white, male settlers worked together to create a system of laws for their settlement based on the laws of Virginia. The laws were written in a document called the **Watauga Compact**. The settlement had five elected officials called commissioners who were in charge of recording legal documents like land titles and dealing with law breakers. The Watauga Association made no claims of independence from Great Britain. Even so, the Wataugans were under the authority of no other government and thus represent the first independent white government in the British colonies.

In 1774, Lord Dunmore, the royal governor of Virginia wrote to the British official in charge of the Americas about the Wataugans. He described the Wataugans refusal to leave their lands, their agreement with the Cherokee and their extra-legal government. Further, Dunmore stated that Wataugans' state formation "sets a dangerous example to the people of America, of forming governments distinct from and independent of his majesty's authority."

In 1775, the Watauga settlement was the site of a most remarkable real estate transaction: the **Transylvania Purchase**. For several days in mid-March, Richard Henderson of North Carolina negotiated with leaders of the Cherokee Nation. He eventually secured an agreement by which the Cherokee exchanged their claim to all of the Cumberland River Valley and most of Kentucky in exchange for 10,000 pounds of trade goods.

Virginia and North Carolina eventually voided the Transylvania Purchase, but it still had significant consequences for the Wataugans. In the aftermath of the transaction, Wataugan leaders approached the Cherokee to ask that their lease be converted into a purchase.

Attakullakulla, or Little Carpenter was an important Cherokee chief and diplomat. He favored both the agreement with Henderson and the sale of Watauga to the settlers. Not all Cherokee liked the idea of selling their land. Attakullakulla's own son, **Dragging Canoe**, opposed both land sales. He believed that the Cherokee had to stop the growth of white settlements or the Cherokee would eventually lose all their land. However, enough Cherokee agreed with Attakullakulla for the sale to be completed. The sale of the Watauga settlement is known as the **Watauga Purchase**.

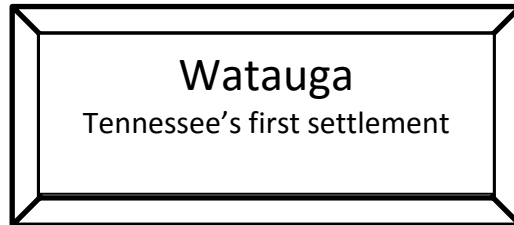
Sources:

Biggers, Jeff. *The United States of Appalachia: How Southern Mountaineers Brought Independence, Culture, and Enlightenment to America*. Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2006. Print.

Michael Toomey, East Tennessee Historical Society. North Carolina History Project: Encyclopedia. <http://www.northcarolinahistory.org>

The Watauga Compact and Purchase

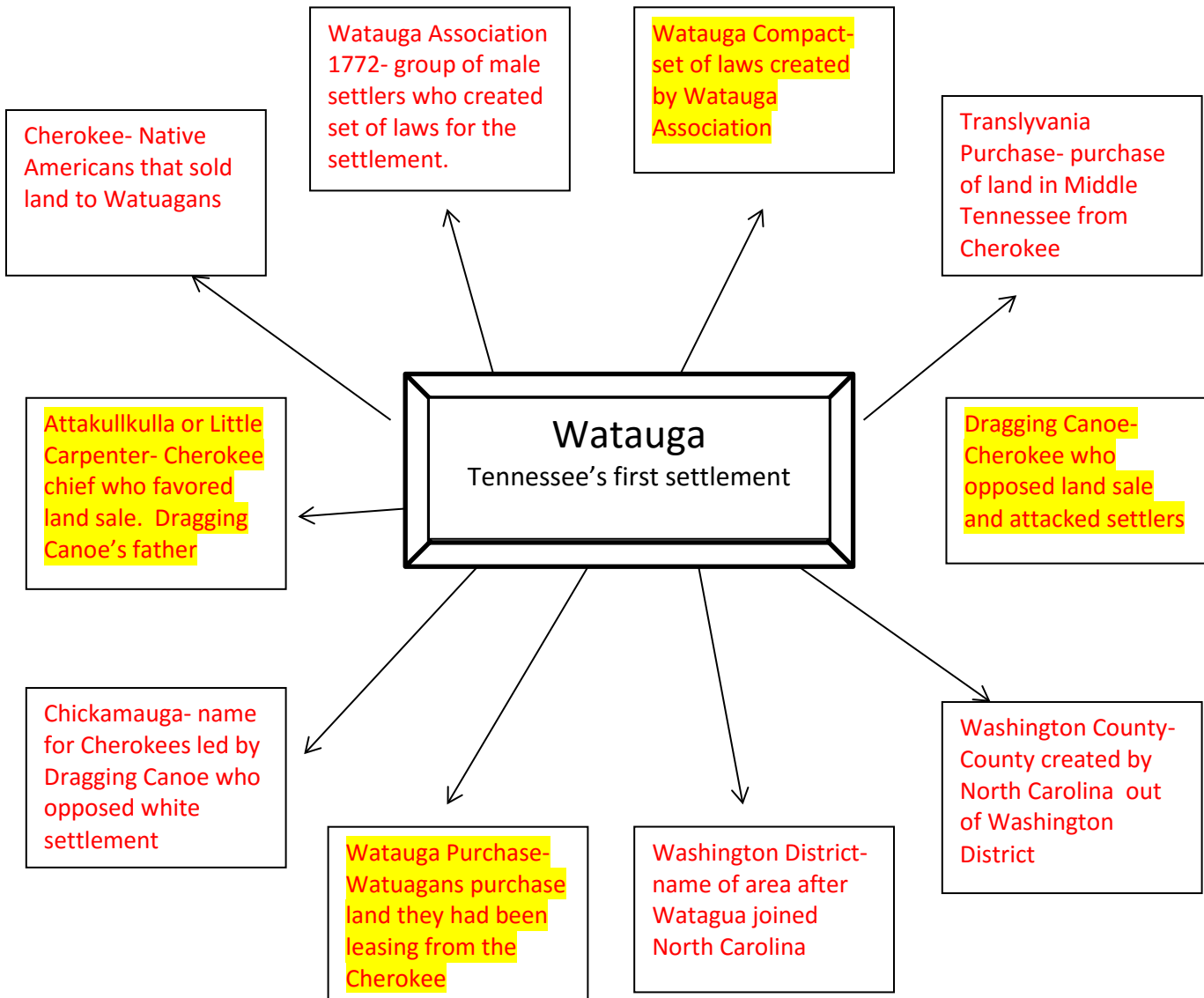
Create a mind map on Watauga, Tennessee's first settlement. Use each of the bold terms from the essay in your mind map. Then on the back of this page write a short summary of the important events and people highlighted in your mind map.



The Watauga Compact and Purchase Key

Create a mind map on Watauga, Tennessee's first settlement. Use each of the bold terms from the essay in your mind map. Then on the back of this page write a short summary of the important events and people highlighted in your mind map.

Answers will vary. Concepts highlighted in yellow are specifically listed in standard.



John Adams on Richard Henderson and the Transylvania Purchase

During much of his life, John Adams (1735-1826), kept a series of small manuscript volumes in which he described both daily activities and notable events in which he participated. Much of John Adams's life was spent in service to his country. He was a delegate to the Continental Congress, an officially appointed diplomat (who served as a commissioner in France, Great Britain, and the Netherlands, and as minister to the Court of St. James's), vice president and president of the United States.

In this diary entry, Adams describes meeting an associate of Richard Henderson's roughly five months after the Transylvania Purchase.

October 25, 1775

“Last Evening Mr. Hewes of N. Carolina, introduced to my Namesake and me, a Mr. Hog from that Colony, one of the Proprietors of Transylvania, a late Purchase from the Cherokees upon the Ohio. He is an associate with Henderson who was lately one of the Associate Judges of N. Carolina, who is President of the Convention in Transylvania. These Proprietors have no Grant from the Crown nor from any Colony, are within the Limits of Virginia and North Carolina, by their Charters which bound those Colonies on the South Sea. They are charged with Republican Notions -- and Utopian Schemes.”

Source: Adams, John. *Diary 15 September 1775- 3 January 1776*. John Adams Family Papers. Massachusetts Historical Society, 2014. Web. 25 June 2014.

<<http://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/archive/doc?id=D24&hi=1&query=Henderson&tag=text&archive=all&rec=2&start=0&numRecs=2>>

The Watauga Purchase March 19, 1775

The Wataugans purchased the land they occupied from the Cherokee Indians in the spring of 1775 on the occasion of the Henderson purchase of Transylvania. Their purchase, as the contract below indicates, included the whole of the Watauga River valley, plus the North Carolina headwaters of the New River, plus the area below the Holston's South Fork and below the Virginia line. This was the boundary of "Watauga County" until 1777, when North Carolina modified its eastern boundary—cutting off the New River and edging Washington County along the Unicoi- Unakas rather than the Blue Ridge divide.

“This Indenture, made the 19th day of March, 1775, O-con-os-to-ta, Chief Warrior and First Representative of the Cherokee Nation or Tribe of Indians, and Attaculleully and Savanucah, otherwise Coronah, for themselves and the rest of the whole Nation, being the Aborigines and sole owners by occupancy from the beginning of time of the lands of the waters of Holston and Wataugah Rivers, and other lands thereunto belonging, of the one part, and Charles Robertson of the settlement of Wataugah, of the other part, Witnesseth, &c.” The consideration was “the sum of two thousand pounds, lawful money of Great Britain, in hand paid.” The deed embraced “all that tract, territory, or parcel of land, on the waters of the Wataugah, Holston and Great Canaway or New River; beginning on the south or south-west side of Holston River, Six English miles above Long Island, in said river; thence a direct line near a south course to the ridge which divides the waters of Wataugah from the waters of Nonachcukeh; thence along the various courses of said ridge nearly a southeast course to the Blue Ridge or line dividing North Carolina along the Virginia line to Holston River; thence down the meanders of the Holston River to the first station, including all the waters of Wataugah, part of the Waters of Holston and the head-branches of New River or Great Canaway, agreeable to the bounds aforesaid, to said Charles Robertson, his heirs, and assigns,” etc.

“And also the said Charles Robertson, his heirs and assigns, shall and may, peaceably and quietly, have, hold, possess and enjoy said premises, without let, trouble, hindrance or molestation, interruption and denial, of them, the said Oconostota and the rest, or any of the said Nation.”

“Signed in the Presence of

John Sevier	Oconostota, his X mark. (Seal)
Wm. Bailey Smith	Attaculleully, his X mark.
(Seal) Jesse Benton	Tennesy Warrior, his X mark.
(Seal) Tillman Dixon	Willinawaugh, his X mark.
(Seal) William Blevins	
Thomas Price	
Jas. Vann, Linguister.”	

Source: Max Dixon, *The Wataugans. Tennessee in the Eighteenth Century: A Bicentennial Series*. James C. Kelly, Dan E. Pomeroy eds. Tennessee American Revolution Bicentennial Commission. (1976), 32.