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WILLIAM BLOUNT AND THE ESTABLISHMENT
OF THE SOUTHWEST TERRITORY,
1790 - 1791

By William H. Masterson

The opening months of the year 1790 were crowded ones for North
Carolina men of affairs. The successful if bitter fight for the adoption of
the new federal constitution at last successfully over, the new situation
abounded in political and economic opportunities. A host of new offices
dazzled the eyes of the politically ambitious, while vistas of safer trade and
more lucrative and widespread speculation in land or paper enticed the
interest of business men.

Among those most deeply interested in these new possibilities was
William Blount, of Greenville, North Carolina, for whom twenty-five years
of intense interest and activity in economics and politics were approaching a
climax. Trained in the complexities of business in the colonial and revolu-
tionary periods, he was by 1790 the owner of several farms, a number of
slaves, town lots, and saw and grist mills. Likewise, as a partner of his
brothers in the thriving mercantile firm of John Gray and Thomas Blount,
he was part owner of stores, ships, and wharves, and was thoroughly familiar
with the complexities of paper money exchange, and with the usages of
interstate and international commerce. Above all, like most other successful
business men of his day, he was a past master of speculation in paper and
land. He had practiced speculation in paper money throughout the tumultuous
days of Revolutionary finance, when, as a Continental Army paymaster
and a private speculator, he had bought, sold, and traded in the wildly
fluctuating and chaotic currencies of that inflationary period. Likewise in
the enthralling game of land speculation he was not lacking in experience.
Having traded in that commodity since the seventies, William Blount and his
brothers had acquired vast tracts both in their home state and in Georgia and
South Carolina, but since the middle 1780’s their interest had been increas-
ingly drawn to North Carolina’s western lands. Armed with cash and credit
from their mercantile business, the Blounts had plunged headlong into the
western land speculation which had so absorbed North Carolina leaders
since the earliest days of statehood. In this activity they were aided by
valuable western friends, such as James Robertson, John Sevier, Daniel
Smith, and a score of other leaders who were grateful for past political

1For the earlier career of William Blount, see Ailee B. Keith, Three North
Carolina Blount Brothers in Business and Politics (unpublished Ph. D. disserta-
tion, University of North Carolina, 1940), passim, and William H. Masterson, Business
Man in Politics: The Public Career of William Blount (unpublished Ph. D. disserta-
tion, University of Pennsylvania, 1980), 1-159.
favors. Thus, by 1780 the Blounts owned literally tens of thousands of acres in the west, and their interest in that area, active since their participation in Richard Henderson’s Transylvania purchase in 1775, had become paramount in their minds. 3

With the eventual adherence of North Carolina to the new Union, the Blounts were among the most interested in observing the new political scene. Since 1781 William Blount had served various terms in the state assembly. As a member of committees on soldiers’ claims, on paper money, on western lands, and on petitions from the western country he had made a name as a champion of that section. He had fought to save Sevier from the political effects of the Franklin movement, to obtain the cession of the western area to the central government, to establish roads, counties, and judicial districts in that area, to recognize western leaders by the gift of offices and responsibility, in short, to interest the politician, the homeseeker, and the investor in the trans-montane region. 4 Meanwhile on the national scene he had served in the old Confederation Congress; and in the Constitutional Convention of 1787 he had helped frame the new national government, for whose adoption he had worked incessantly in Carolina. By 1790, therefore, William Blount was known to all prominent Carolinians as a Federalist of western sympathies, and he had both powerful friends and bitter enemies. Thus, he had recently been defeated for his ultimate goal, the national Senate; but his successful rival for the seat, Benjamin Hawkins, was a long-time personal friend.

Prominent and active, therefore, in both political and economic affairs, William Blount wasted no time in regretting his defeat in the senatorial election, but continued in the busy stream of his business life. He was by 1790 shaken by both a “big Ague” and a “little one,” both contracted from years of lowland residence; also his travel and exposure in the unusually severe winter of 1789-90 brought on a racking cough. But nothing could slow ambition-driven activity. His father's estate had to be divided, a Blount cargo sent off to Ireland, plans made with John Gray Blount to build a warehouse and platform at Ocracoke Inlet, a defense planned for suits against the firm, and care taken to have the trial before a friendly judge. Blount covered counties on horseback or in carriage to collect debts, to buy corn (the crop selected by the firm for an attempted local monopoly), to attend surveys at Wilmington, to inquire for runaway slaves, or to explore market prices. He suggested to his brothers another voyage to smuggle turpentine into Jamaica, and speculated in futures in alum, salt, and coffee.

Also, with the west soon to be securely in federal hands, Blount's activity in the land market continued at its high rate. Through his western

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3Ben, Hawkins to John, Haywood, March 1, 1790, Hawkins Papers, Chastel Collection, P. C. 96. This collection is housed at the NC State Archives.

4Memorandum, John, Haywood to William, Blount, 1790, ibid., P. C. 96. William, Blount, ibid., P. C. 90, Craven County Deeds, Deed Book 13, 182, Beaufort County Court Minutes, 1805, 1809, Craven County, County Deed Book 13, Beaufort County Court Minutes, 1805, 1809. Although North Carolina Federal delegate Sam Houston was influential in obtaining the Mississippi Territory for the United States, he and his colleagues did not have the backing of influential Federalists in Tennessee. Although he was appointed as a federal judge, Houston’s influence in Tennessee was limited.

agent, Charles Gerrard, came a favorable report from James Robertson, "but one killed since I left there and the immigrants upwards of 800; the price of land rising." From New York Blount's close friend Hugh Williamson wrote that their long planned map and prospectus of the western country were nearly ready, and that the bill for the government of the ceded territory was halfway through Congress. These two events occurring together, he wrote, "must affect the public mind and turn the current of migrations toward Tennessee."

At this stage, Blount's land transactions took two forms. The first was regroupment and accounting. After some search, a buyer was found for all the Blount lands in Georgia, and William travelled to the land office at Hillsboro to settle accounts. Here he found 2,760 entries in the Blount name, for which he made arrangements to pay. He also obtained warrants of survey for 97,000 acres which the Blounts had already entered in partnership with John Donelson, and William now gave orders to Stockley Donelson for the surveying.3

At the same time, Blount continued his ceaseless activity in land acquisition and sale. Alone or in the firm, in his own name or in that of others, in North Carolina or the western country, buying, renting and selling, he lengthened the record of his involved and often tortuous dealings.4 As usual in a day when private and public business transactions were often linked, the "friendly services" of officials were most helpful. State Treasurer John Haywood loaned money and certificates from the treasury and delayed tax collection. Secretary of State James Glasgow, a close personal friend, issued warrants generously and, as later events were to show, carelessly. Even the friendship of the upright William Davie was of assistance, and reports from friends in Congress were of great value. In turn, Blount, observing that Entry-Taker John Armstrong was still under a public scrutiny which might discover the Blount accounts unpaid, and that "we had drawn money from the Treasury," protected himself and friends by paying up the Blount

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3 Ben. Hawkins to Wm. Blount, February 11, 1790; Chas. Gerrard to Wm. Blount, March 1, 1790; H. Williamson to J. G. Blount, April 16, 1790, John Gray Blount Collection, P. C. 841, 842, 843 (North Carolina Historical Commission, Raleigh). This collection is hereafter referred to as J. G. B.

4 Memorandum of William Blount, April 9, 1790; Wm. to J. G. Blount, April 17, 1790, ibid., P. C. 883, 843.

5 G. Blount to Jno. Struthers, p. 4; Certificate of George Dobson, April 9, 1790, ibid., P. C. 896, 883; Pitt County Deed Book, Book M, 341 (Greenville, N.C.); Craven County Deed Book, Book 27, pp. 338, 339 (New Bern, N.C.); Davidson County Deed Book, Book E, 125, Book 73, pp. 386, 429 (State Land Office, Raleigh); Beaufort County Deed Book, Book 6, p. 158, Book 14, p. 134 (Washington, N.C.). Although North Carolina had closed her Hillsboro office for western lands in 1784, legal provisions for transfers and generous grants by the legislature kept the land office officials busy. Also, surveyors had entered enormous tracts before 1784, and these were now for sale. For example, William wrote John Gray on April 17, 1790, that there remained in the land office warrants in five thousand acre tracts to the amount of 250,000 to 300,000 acres, of which Donelson had offered 15,000 to the Blounts, J. G. B., P. C. 843.
debts. He did so, however, in certificates and with the understanding that if the national assumption bill should be passed he might redeem them at their depreciated value in order to cash them in for his own profit.

In early 1790, however, another interest rivalled the land lure to the Blounts. This was speculation in money. The proposal of the national assumption of state debts had filled North Carolina with swarms of speculators, and upon meeting one of these, a buyer for a northeastern syndicate, William Blount was intrigued to discover the possibility of buying on credit for two shillings to the pound state certificates which might later be redeemed at eight shillings to the pound. At once he entered into a partnership with other business men by which the Blount firm obligated itself to buy 1,000,000 worth of military certificates. From Cumberland William Blount’s land agent, James Robertson, sent certificates collected on credit from the frontiersmen, and Absalom Tatum purchased paper from the uninformed westerners for the well-informed Blounts, while agent Gerrard “put his time against our horse” to collect paper in Carolina proper, and from New York associates Abishai Thomas and Hugh Williamson came a stream of advice on Congressional trends.

Yet, however absorbed William Blount became in his multitudinous business projects, his keen interest in political events never lessened. Immediately after the state’s adoption of the new frame of government, his attention was fixed on the elections to Congress. He observed with keen pleasure the success of his friends John Ashe, John Steele, Williamson, and Sevier, who were among the state’s first congressmen, and his own defeat for the Senate by Hawkins did not lessen, on the latter’s part at least, their friendship. Indeed, it would seem that the possibility of a coveted federal appointment in the west for his friend was early in the new Senator’s mind. Immediately after laying the cession before Congress, Hawkins asked Blount:

write me freely and confidentially on any of your prospects. I have had occasion to name you once or twice in a manner as you deserve. We shall be embarrassed with the Indian business and shall want some very confidential man in that quarter.

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1Wm. to J. G. Blount, March 22, 26, April 17, 1790; Jno. Haywood to J. G. Blount, March 15, 1790; Jas. Glasgow to J. G. Blount, February 22, April 15, 1790; Ben. Hawkins to J. G. Blount, February 6, 11, 1790, ibid., P. C. 832, 843, 842, 841, 842, 841; Comptroller’s Vouchers, XVIII, 224, 246 (North Carolina Historical Commission).


3Ben. Hawkins to Wm. Blount, February 6, 1790, J. G. B., P. C. 841. The naming
Williamson, too, kept his friend informed concerning the progress of legislation on the new cession, and on possibilities for personal advancement. As a result of this assistance, by the end of March, 1790, Blount announced himself “assured” that he would be appointed governor of the ceded territory.23

This post had been in the speculator’s mind at least since the state’s cession in November, and, with his defeat for the United States Senate, it became his principal ambition. The vast extent of the western land he held for sale, the power of treaty-making vested in federal officials, the need to keep western taxation low in his own interest, as well as a really unselfish interest in the west and its people all were powerful motives in fixing his attention on the new post. Also, having been in the old Congress when the Ordinance of 1787 passed, he was familiar with the power and prestige thereby conferred on a territorial governor, and William Blount loved power. For all these reasons, therefore, he had watched with keen interest as Congress accepted the cession on April 2, 1790, and on May 26 established a government for “The Territory of the United States South of the River Ohio.”24

The coveted prize was not, however, to be his without a struggle. Patrick Henry of Virginia, deep in land speculation, urged his own candidates. One of these was George Mason, the other Henry’s agent and friend, Joseph Martin. Mason, though, had no arresting military record and no connection with North Carolina. Martin had spent his adult life in the west and given his best services for the preservation of peace and good relations with the Indians, but this very activity hurt his cause. With the approval of Henry he had corresponded with the ominous Alexander McGillivray in order to placate that potent chieftain. These letters were now produced by his enemies and rivals, especially George Mathews of Georgia and Sevier, to support charges of treason. Furthermore, though a speculator himself, Martin’s efforts to bring peace to the west had shown a regard for the

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24 As you deserve” may well have been to Washington, by whom Hawkins was already held in high esteem. The embarrassing “Indian business” probably refers to the continual white encroachments, despite the treaties of Hopewell, and also to the Yazoo sales. Ben. Hawkins to Wm. Blount, February 11, 1790, ibid. In quoted material some clarifying changes in punctuation have been made.

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20, J. G. B., P. C. 841. The naming...
Indians intolerable to many settlers and speculators. Hence, in spite of efforts in his behalf by Edmund Randolph, B. H. Lee, William Grayson, Theodorick Bland, and even Jefferson, the ex-Indian agent was passed over. Two other formidable names appeared in opposition. Anthony Wayne hungrily eyed "this immense and valuable country" as a "vastly superior" field for national speculation, and sought Congressman Aedanus Burke's aid in securing the appointment. Meanwhile, in the Territory one name led all the rest in popular appeal. A convention called for the purpose besought the powerful influence of Samuel Johnston in securing the western governorship for "the Honorable John Sevier [Sevier]." This convention assured the Senator-elect "in the name of the People . . . that no other man upon the Continente the President of the United States (not excepted)—can give as general satisfaction to the People of this Country in that office . . ." Moreover, so likely did Sevier's success appear that North Carolina's Judge Samuel Spencer, seeking appointment to a territorial bench, applied to him for patronage.

Faced with this rivalry, Blount mustered every resource. He wrote to his friend, Congressman Steele, and frankly solicited aid. From the western country leading figures such as General Daniel Smith also wrote to congressmen in Blount's behalf. In Congress, Ashe, Timothy Bloodworth, Hawkins, and Williamson united in urging his appointment. To combat charges of land speculation, Williamson wrote disarrayingly to President Washington in his friend's behalf:

"It is true that Mr. Blount has a considerable Quantity of Land within the ceded Territory, but he has none to the Southward of it, and he must be the more deeply interested in the Peace and Prosperity of the new Government. Perhaps it is because I have many Relations and some Land there, given me by the State, that I am the more anxious to see it prosper."

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10Memorial of citizens of the ceded area, May 6, 1790, Hayes Library, Edenton, Johnston Collection (typed copy in North Carolina Historical Commission); S. Spencer to John Sevier, February 24, 1790, Draper MSS., 18DD28.

11Wm. Blount to John Steele, April 18, 1790; H. M. Wagstaff (ed.), The Papers of John Steele, 2 vols. (Raleigh, 1924), I, 117, 212; Wm. Blount to Daniel Smith, September 6, 1790, Miscellaneous MSS., B129 1/2 (Tennessee State Archives, Nashville); T. Bloodworth to the President, June 5, 1790; John B. Ashe to the President, June 5, 1790; Jefferson's Memorandum [1780], Carter (ed.), Papers, IV, 149-50.
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Unlike Wayne, Blount was a native of the state which had ceded the land. Unlike Sevier, he was untainted by Franklinism and by Indian massacre. He had a military and a Federalist record, and he knew President Washington from Convention days, if not earlier. He was thoroughly familiar with western affairs and leaders, and among the latter he was respected for his pro-western activities in the assembly. His influence, therefore, in calming a turbulent and somewhat Anti-Federal west would be enormous. Except for Senator Samuel Johnston, who was silent, and Sevier, who was absent, he had the unanimous recommendation of his state’s delegation in Congress. In short, his qualifications were very impressive to the Administration, and he was appointed on June 8, 1790, to the position of governor of the Southwest Territory and superintendent of Indian affairs for the southern department. With him were named the influential Daniel Smith as secretary and David Campbell and John McNairy as judges. With both Smith and McNairy, especially the latter, Blount’s relations had been close and cordial.

The eagerly anticipated news of his appointment reached Blount at home about June 20, and he and his friends rejoiced. Steele was happy, not that I suppose the Office a great acquisition, or that it will add any dignity to his character more than he is otherwise entitled to, but that it will put him out of the reach of and raise him above, his enemies. ... I conceive it a great point gained to our landholders, that the business of an Indian boundary will fall into the hands of a man, of all others the most proper.”

Williamson’s mind was

relieved from any anxiety respecting our Western Territory. ... I am now only to consider how the current of Migration shall best be turned towards the Tennessee Government so ... the value of our land may be improved or increased.”

Blount rejoiced “at it myself for I think it of great Importance to our Western Speculations.” Apart from “being delivered from my state Enemies,” he regarded the “appointment itself” as

truly important to me; more so in my opinion than any other in the Gift of the President could have been. The Salary is handsome and my Western Lands had become so great an object to me that it had become absolutely necessary that I should go to the Western

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9Hu. Williamson to the President, May 28, 1790, ibid., 19-20. The “none to the Southward” refers to the fact that Blount did not participate in the first Yazoo purchases.

“A. P. Whitaker, The Spanish-American Frontier, 1783-1786 (Boston, 1927), 120-31; Ramsey, Annals, 543, 545-46. The importance of congressional recommendations at that time is noted in Guillard Hunt, “Office Seeking During Washington’s Administration,” American Historical Review (New York), 1 (1894), 270-83.


Country to secure them and perhaps my Presence might have enhanced there value. I am sure that my present appointment will."

Even his senatorial defeat brightened in retrospect. "May it not be said that Jo McDowell and his Friends have rendered me essential Service?"

Exultantly, then, the speculator prepared to assume his new post and to develop its opportunities. His pride was justified—he had played his hand well to win the prize. At forty-one years of age he found at hand place, power, and profit, three guiding stars of his life. The future was unlimited.

But despite his fair prospects, the new appointee had problems to overcome before duties could be met. At home his wife, dark, vivacious Mary Grainger ("Molsey"), wept and spoke of Indian perils and of the desolation of his absence, for she refused to take the children to the new and dangerous frontier. A dozen business deals required closing transactions. For the trip and to support his new dignity money would be needed. Two good horses, saddles, bridles, portmanteau, clothing for himself and slave, and travelling money all had to be acquired, and he, like most business men of that specie-scarce era, was "without a copper." Of knowledge of the legal necessities and procedures he was equally destitute, for although his commission arrived July 6, there was not a copy of the territorial act or the Ordinance of 1787 to be had, nor advice on the procedure of qualifying or setting his government in motion.

Fears lest he be ordered west too soon, and still shaken by recurring chills and fever, Blount attacked his problems energetically. To John Gray Blount went orders, backed by the prospect of a hard money salary, for a portmanteau to be ordered from Philadelphia, broadcloth and nankeen for his wardrobe, and "Toc cloth" and "milled drab" for his slave's. The horses and their equipage were also ordered, and elaborate plans made to raise cash for the trip."

To close his varied accounts, Blount followed the judges on circuit to Hillsboro, Edenton, New Bern, and Wilmington, for although his legal business was small, the court sessions brought together the business men of the neighborhoods. He collected credits due and sold slaves to pay for his most pressing obligations, including those to state officials. He attempted by various means, including alterations in the map, to induce Wilson Blount to select his part of their joint western land holdings so as to leave William Blount's clear for future operations, and for the same purpose he balanced the Blount land and financial accounts with other partners. Meanwhile the persuasive powers of John Gray were invoked to reconcile "Molsey" to her husband's absence "so absolutely necessary to

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\( ^{1} \)Wm. Blount to Jno. Steele, July 10, 1796, Wagstaff (ed.), Steele Papers, I, 67-68.

her Interest as well as her Friends.”” Yet with all these hurried preparations the speculator found time for another plunge in the certificate market, selling to some associates a part of those certificates sent to him by Robertson from Mero District, and exchanging the rest for paper likely to be assumed by the national government, and therefore of greater potential value.15

During these busy weeks Blount through Williamson in Congress kept in contact with the Administration’s negotiations with McGillivray. By the same means in August he obtained copies of the congressional act on his territory and information on procedure for establishing his government. At Hillsboro he found time to engage the services of printer Robert Ferguson, who with George Roulstone, editor of the Fayetteville Gazette, agreed to cross the mountains as soon as possible with their press.16

At length, in early September, Blount began his trip westward, stopping at Governor Martin’s Guilford County home in order to secure final confirmation of all his land titles in the form of grants signed by the Governor. Here, however, he found that his oath of office would have to be taken before federal officials, and that instructions on territorial policy were needed from the executive branch. The President, he learned from the newspapers, was at Mount Vernon, so he turned northward. First, however, by his friend and aide Major George Farragut, he sent on to Secretary Smith in the Territory the latter’s commission, and likewise to Judge McNairy a long-sought copy of the Ordinance of 1787. Farragut’s mission had other features as well. Through him Blount sought to allay western impatience by assuring Smith that the new government could await his coming as no proclamation had issued from the Carolina governor officially announcing the cession and its acceptance. Also, Farragut carried a large sum of money to buy military certificates collected by Robertson before inauguration of the new government should raise their price.17

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16Jacob to J. G. Blount, September 17, 1790; Wm. Blount to James Hogg, August 31, 1790; Wm. to Thos. Blount, September 3, 1790; Thos. to J. G. Blount, September 19, 1790, ibid.


18Wm. Blount to D. Smith, September 8, 1790, Misc. MSS, J1294 (Tennessee State Archives); Wm. to J. G. Blount, November 10, 1790, J. G. B., P. C. 846, George Farragut, whom Blount knew from Revolutionary War days, and who as his aide accompanied him to the Territory, was the father of Admiral David G. Farragut. For an account of George Farragut’s career in the west, see Samuel C. Williams, “George Farragut,” East Tennessee Historical Society’s Publications (Knoxville), 1 (1929), 81-85.
Meanwhile, Blount hurried northward. Down the long valleys of the Dan and the Staunton record crops were moving, and the roads were crowded with cattle and wagonloads of corn, tobacco, and wheat on their way to eastern markets. The business man's eye noted all, and his pen duly reported crops and prices to John Gray at Washington.

At length on September 17 the impatient governor-designate arrived at Alexandria, and spent the following day and night at Mount Vernon. Here his aristocratic tastes were charmed with the famous household. It was, he reported, "the most agreeable Place I ever saw," though the General himself somewhat deputed the business man, who found him "too awful, for I verily believe he is awful as a God" although "great and amiable, indeed, admirable." The admiring visitor found Mrs. Washington "certainly one of the most agreeable Ladies of the whole world," Major (Bushrod) Washington "handsome, genteel, attentive," his wife "handsome and elegant," and even Martha's grandchildren "very promising." For the house, crops, and tree-shaded grounds he had warm praise, especially for "the Poplar of the Poe of which Ovid sings many hundred years past." The deeply impressed but still inquisitive taxpayer confessed that "The Style and Manner of his living surpasses what I have before seen particularly in Dignity and I suppose I saw him living on his own Funds, not those of the United States, in fact Major Jackson so informed me." Blount also reported on the probability of the President's trip to the south, and the most likely route, adding "I want that Molsey and my children should see him for certainly such another Man will not appear in their day." 

Referred by the President to Attorney General Edmund Randolph for induction into office, Blount returned from Mount Vernon to Alexandria, where he met James Iredell, now a member of the Supreme Court, and from him took the oath of office on September 20, 1790. Thus relieved of the necessity of seeking Randolph in Philadelphia, the Governor paid a second visit to the President, and on September 22 took up his journey to his government. As he travelled the long road following the Great Trading Path of colonial days through Winchester, Staunton, Botetourt Court House, and Chiswell's Mines (near Wytheville), the Governor reviewed the results of his northern detour. Besides incurring further expense, this northward swing had changed his plans, for he could no longer hope to carry out his earlier plan of returning from the Territory to attend the Carolina November assembly and to visit his family. On the other hand, he had learned that his powers were greater than he had anticipated, for he was to name all civil officers from constable up, and all military leaders except generals, whom he would nominate to the President. Over-all direction of civil, military, and

\[\text{\textsuperscript{Wm. to J. G. Blount, September 20, 1790, J. G. B., P. C. 844.}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{Wm. to J. G. Blount, September 22, 1790, 1614; Carter (ed.), Papers, IV, 24 n.}\]
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Indian affairs was his (as governor and superintendent); he licensed the politically potent lawyers, and he was answerable only to the President, whose instructions as to policy left the Governor wide latitude. Never in his palmiest days in the assembly had he wielded such power.  

The long journey, made five days longer by his slave’s illness, was at last ended on October 10, when the new Governor arrived at William Yancey’s house on the upper Holston. Then, after a brief pause to rest and forward word of his arrival, he moved south to the home of William Cobb, in the forks of the Holston and Watauga rivers, which was to constitute his temporary capital, and here his administration began. Cobb was a well-to-do North Carolina immigrant of the late 1760’s, of considerable influence and great hospitality. A leader since King’s Mountain days, he had formerly been a close associate of Richard Caswell’s, and, until the Franklin episode, a friend of Sevier’s. His white oak log home contained nine rooms, and the Governor, made comfortable in a chamber with glass windows and fireplace, conducted state business in the atmosphere of dignified affluence which he always sought to maintain.  

He learned much as he moved through the formalities of establishing his government, as he met the citizenry, studied the country, and heard from first hand of conditions formerly only reported by hearsay. Ever quick in appraising situations, he discovered in his new realm that variance of theory and fact, that contrast of the potential and the actual which pervaded the Territory. In theory his government ruled from the mountain crests to the Mississippi and from the 35th to the 36 1/2 degrees of latitude, comprising nearly 45,000 square miles of territory. As superintendent his authority presumably extended southward to the 31st parallel, but in practice the Crown of Spain had excellent claims up to the 32°28’, and others less solid but far more ambitious, extending to the Tennessee River. Meanwhile one of His Catholic Majesty’s servants was making extensive plans to enforce all of these claims. The Spaniard’s alarm was, however, in 1790 largely anticipatory, for the new Governor’s writ ran chiefly in a narrow strip of country from the Virginia line some one hundred and fifty miles southwest to the Little Tennessee. This settled area, extending in breadth from twenty-five to sixty miles, was bounded on the south by high and Indian-claimed mountains, on the west by the savages’ hunting grounds, on the north and northwest by the Clinch and Cumberland mountains. In the narrow valleys of the Holston, Nolichucky, French Broad, and Little rivers dwelt the majority of the Territory’s population, about 28,000 people. Over one hundred wilderness
miles to the west lay the other settlements, a population of between six and seven thousand more, strung out along the Cumberland for a distance of about thirty miles. Among the settlements, and indeed throughout the remainder of the Territory, stretched wilderness pervaded by the Indian and legally guaranteed to a savage enemy.

Moreover, even this restricted settlement overran its authorized boundary. The legally just but practically injudicious treaty line of Hopewell slashed deeply through the areas of habitation. By its terms, towns, farms, forts, whole counties lay in Indian territory, and even the cession extorted from the Indians by the Franklinites could not contain the ever-widening rivulets of settlement. To the westward, fairly compact habitation extended to the Clinch, and more than a few intrepid home-seekers had pushed beyond this stream to make their clearings between it and Cumberland Mountain. To the south, the rich lands below the French Broad had drawn land-seekers since the 1783 act had opened western North Carolina, although that legislation had specifically denied that area to white settlement. By 1790 these settlers had pushed all the way to the Little Tennessee, the now-repudiated Franklin-Cherokee line of 1786, and their cabins rose but five short miles from the Cherokees' "Beloved Town" of Chota. To the Cumberland settlements the Hopewell agreements had been more generous, but here too the lengthening string of cabins along the Duck and its tributary creeks invited savage wrath. For Blount, the heavily invested speculator, such expansion of settlement was the life of all his hopes. For Blount the governor, it was a challenge to his powers and a never-ending source of Indian warfare. That distant national authority which had drawn and guaranteed the restrictive if oft-ignored line now sent the speculator-governor to enforce it.

The same antithesis of fact and theory occurred in the Territory's economy. The fertile valleys, gentle hills, and enriching streams bespoke a thriving agrarian economy. But in the east the towering mountains from which the streams flowed defied most efforts at transport to eastern buyers, while the westward-flowing Tennessee slipped between miles of Indian-infested banks before it could lead to any market. Boxed in their valleys, the eastern farmers of the Territory looked to the Shenandoah Valley as the export route for their wheat, corn, hemp, pork, beef, or tobacco. Even so, the route was long, tedious, and costly. The same heavy expense of transport added

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[Footnotes]


[2] John Haywood, The Civil and Political History of Tennessee (reprinted, Nashville, 1861), 283-85; Ramsey, Amids, 548. In the east the Hopewell line ran a few miles east of Greenville, and in the west followed in general the watershed south of the Cumberland River.

perhaps a third to the cost of their imports of manufactured goods from Baltimore or Philadelphia. Likewise, in isolated Meröe the inviting Cumberland River led but to a Spanish Mississippi and a precarious market at Natchez or New Orleans. The dry goods, ironmongery, glassware, saddlery, and spices that stocked the shelves of Lardner Clark or other merchants of the Nashville settlement had traversed an even longer route. From Baltimore or Philadelphia they had been packed overland to Pittsburgh, thence down the barge-laden Ohio to the Cumberland, up which they were laboriously moved by oar or pole to the little settlement on the bluffs. Thus, blocked in the east by mountains which roadbuilders had not yet conquered, and in the west by distance and the jealous Spaniard, the territorial farmer lacked an easy means of export, a reasonable source of supplies, or a currency with which to traffic. His demands for all three were not the least of his plaints to the new Governor.\textsuperscript{23}

Likewise, divergence marked the Territory's political scene. According to their leaders' votes at Fayetteville, these westerners had sought cession to the United States; a national governor, then, should find abundant welcome. But to many whose voices were not heard at Fayetteville the United States meant a Hopewell; it meant surrender to the Indians; it meant subserviency to the Spanish on the Mississippi. It meant taxation without defense or self-determination, a preconceived rule in the interest of the Indian. Furthermore, inflamed by constant savage threat, the wounds of Franklin, covered but fresh, yet racked the Territory. In Washington District resentment kindled against Meröe; in the latter area, jealousy burned against the older, larger, dominant settlements to the east. On the Cumberland Robertson led unchallenged, at least on the surface, but on the Holston and French Broad the Sevier and John Tipton forces vied for control, and neither sought the leadership of Blount. For the Tiptonians, beaten in the fight for cession, well knew of the old Sevier-Blount entente, while Sevierites, whose hopes had risen after 1789, chafed under any leadership other than their Nolachecky Jack's.\textsuperscript{24}

Resentful, Indian-harrassed, factional, suspicious — the territorial citizenry heard of their new Governor's arrival, and they awaited with cold and pragmatic judgment his first decisions.

The object of this scrutiny found his first weeks both busy and unexpectedly harmonious. He had apprehended, and even more than once been warned of, the probable hostility of a jealous Sevier and his followers. But the ex-Governor of Franklin proved a good politician. Though he had


probably felt some resentment at Blount's neutral Franklin attitude, and had keenly desired the territorial governorship, yet he realized the necessities of the situation. On his part, Blount soon recognized the vast personal popularity of the Indian fighter, and also the fact that the majority of western leaders were ex-Franklinites. A political alliance thus developed to supplement the older economic connection, and Sevier, according to Blount, became "open and clear in his declarations in my favor." 8

As the Governor proceeded to organize his administration the effects of the alliance became evident. Though old officeholders under North Carolina, especially those of long service, were generally retained regardless of faction, the majority of appointees were Sevierites. For the strategic colonelcies, commanding in the militia, Blount named three Franklinites, Landon Carter, Gilbert Christian, and Stockley Donelson. He had suspected the influential Carter of enmity, but finding him reported as "much my friend and perfectly pleased with my appointment," Blount chose him for the Washington colonelcy over Tipton. This blow the fiery Tipton appeared to accept, but he declined appointment as senior justice of the peace, and bided his time. Meanwhile, the Governor and Judge Campbell travelled through the four counties (Washington, Sullivan, Greene, and Hawkins) which constituted the Washington District. Stopping at each county seat, Blount reconstituted the county under the new authority, read North Carolina's cession act and proclamation, his commission, and Congress' organic laws for the Territory. He then named officers, who took their oaths before Campbell. Amid addresses of welcome and polished replies the Governor was delighted with "the Honors, Respect, and Attention" shown him, accounts of which were duly relayed to Carolina. 9 True, there were disappointed office-seekers and some dissatisfaction, and a petition appeared protesting his appointments. But the Governor disdained the "whispers of Dissatisfaction from ... some contemptible Tiptonites and only the most contemptible Part of his Party remain attached to him, the more sensible having entirely abandoned the Party." The politically orthodox, on the other hand, continued to be rewarded. Sevier, Carter, Charles Robertson, John Chisholm, William Cobb, Joseph Hardin, Robert Hays, Thomas Amis, James White, Francis Ramsey, and George Farragut were among the many appointed whose fame had long rested upon, or would soon overspread, the land. 10 One young protege, Archibald Roane, was named county attorney in Greene County, and his fellow, Andrew Jackson, was soon to receive even more in Mevo District.

Blount dreaded a winter trip to this western district, but nevertheless planned an expedition thither, to consist of a numerous guard, several

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8Wm. to J. G. Blount, October 20, November 7, 10, 1790, J. G. B., P. C. 845.
9State Gazette of North Carolina (Edenton), December 17, 1790; Draper MSS., 11DD89a, 4XX20.
10Wm. to J. G. Blount, November 10, 1790, J. G. B., P. C. 845; Ramsey, Annals, 563; Carter (ed.), Papers, IV, 432-33.

William

friendly Indians there were interested in the prerogative of settling the country among large sparsely situated woodsmen, who felt they would not be rewarded in such complex situations as Daniel Smith, of Surry, thought fair, the selection of a site and the purchase of land claims chance. Their principal concern was for their principal concern was for their principal concern was for their principal concern was for the Governor's -

His decision was not made without considering the reaction of Federal troops expected from later. There was a wild inflation in the financial rewards. Sevier had been promised certificates. The Governor planned to issue them in the form of land certificates. These would be paid in fifty-year certificates, and their face value was not to exceed ten thousand. This would satisfy the varying demands of the speculator and the patriot. Gray could easily produce the money from the treasury if necessary.

The Governor's first step was to enter an act into the public records which had in it the instructions for the time to act for the establishment of his administration. He entered at fifty years of age as governor of the province of North Carolina, with a handsome profile, and was the embodiment of the governor's ancestor...
friendly Indians, and a number of prominent citizens. Meanwhile, however, there were interesting decisions to be made. The location of the capital, a prerogative of the governor, was arousing the liveliest interest, not only among large speculators in both east and west, but also among the humbler woodsmen, whom some of their descendants were to regard as unsophisticated in such complexities. Speculator James Mountiflorence and others through Daniel Smith, secretary of the territory, brought heavy pressure for the selection of a site in Meck District. On the other hand, the Indians whose land claims chiefly clashed with white settlement were the Cherokees, and their principal towns lay closer to Washington District. In addition to this, the Governor's own land on Emory River held a strong attraction for him. His decision was delayed, however, pending the arrival of his instructions from Philadelphia along with an Administration decision on the location of Federal troops in the Territory. Meanwhile, the advantages to be expected from landholding at the capital and Indian trading center caused a wild inflation of land prices at likely sites.20

Sevier, Robertson and their chief at this time began to plan for the financial rewards of cooperation. Landon Carter, Edmond Williams, and Sevier had been named in 1783 to a board to issue Revolutionary military certificates. These were not issued, and Sevier and the Governor now planned to issue them as of the date they were originally supposed to have been issued, and thus acquire seven years' interest. In addition, the certificates would be so worded as to assure assumption by the United States at their face value under the provisions of the Assumption Act of 1790. Sevier's son was to hold them until John Gray Blount sent paper from North Carolina to buy them at the depreciated price of four shillings on the dollar. This would satisfy the uninformed claimants and afford a handsome profit to the speculators. With North Carolina's querulous assembly over, John Gray could easily borrow the cash from his friends the collectors of taxes or from the treasurer.21

The General (Sevier) presented other alluring prospects to the Governor. Landon Carter, as entry-taker for Washington County under a 1779 act, had in his office unlocated entries by Sevier for some 30,000 acres of land, entered at fifty shillings per one hundred acres. If grants could be obtained for these from North Carolina, they could be located on the rich lands south of the French Broad and sold for ten pounds per one hundred acres, a handsome profit. The only difficulty was that of obtaining the Carolina governor's assent, insomuch as the entries were legally limited to Washington

21Ibid.
County." On the other hand, there were advantages to this scheme, as there was no money to advance, and Blount's name was not to appear.

At the same time, official duties were becoming pressing. Blount realized the necessity of formally commencing Indian relations, but could do nothing before the arrival of his instructions, and these, sent via Virginia, had miscarried. Meanwhile, the establishment of the Mero counties was imperative. Sevier had returned to Congress, and Judge Campbell had crossed the mountains for judicial conferences in the east, but despite these absences and bitter snowy weather the Governor on November 27 took up his journey to Cumberland. His retinue was impressive, with twenty-five mounted riflemen and as many prominent citizens.

The entourage was hampered by weather and the precautions necessary in crossing the Indian country, but mid-December found the Governor in Nashville. Here with the same ceremony as in the eastern district he reconstituted Mero District and its counties (Davidson, Sumner, and Tennessee), named civil and military officers, and swore Daniel Smith and John McNairy into office, after which the latter gave the necessary oaths to the other appointees. As in the eastern counties, these officers represented the past and future leaders of their region. Without the complication of a Tipton faction, the Governor was able to follow unhampered his own and Robertson's selections. John Donelson, Sampson Williams, the two Robertsons, the Winchesters, William Cage, and Robert Hays were only a few of the many associates rewarded. Andrew Jackson, David Allison, Howell Tatum, J. C. Monteilfoire, and James White received the coveted attorneys' licenses.

The Governor's visit was short. He did not travel in Sumner nor Tennessee County, but performed all the ceremonies at Nashville. Yet his eight-day stay allowed time for contacts and observation. He visited James Robertson's nearby estate of four thousand rich acres in the Cumberland Bend, and observed the General's grist and saw mills and bleached stock. In Nashville itself he inspected Lardner Clark's store, and with him discussed merchandizing problems; also his attention was drawn to Robertson's town lots and the other rich, black Cumberland lands with their limestone outcroppings.

The full list of Blount appointments is in the Governor's Journal, Carter (ed.), Papers, IV, 438-42.
William Blount and the Establishment of the S. W. Territory

The inhabitants of this fertile and undeveloped country likewise received a close inspection as Blount and the citizens regarded each other with great interest and considerable curiosity. The inhabitants beheld a courteous and dignified figure. The well-cut coat, the lace, the buckled shoes, the polished phrase and manner bespoke a foreigner; but the polite attention, optimism, and affability denoted a real interest in them and their country. The more discerning noted a reserve, a limit to conversational topics, assurances given but not promises, acquiescence made but not committant. The frank bonhomie of a Sevier was notably absent.

The Governor on his part saw a society in transition. The inhabitants, who but lately had borne an unfavorable reputation for drunkenness, brawling, and the cropping of official ears, were now evolving a society much like that of the envied eastern district. Fights and brawls occurred less often, buckskin clothes were disappearing in favor of eastern dress and clubbed hair once seen only at the inns. Religion and education were beginning to soften social mores. Although the good Bishop Francis Ashury bewailed "the poor preachers indifferently clad, with emaciated bodies, and subject to hard fare," yet the pastors were not neglected by their growing flocks. The Presbyterians' stern, learned, and precise Thomas Craighead, a graduate of Princeton, was well established by now in Spring Hill meeting house. The Methodists, after years of services in the county jail, had recently built their new church, and a scattering of Baptists, Quakers, and Moravians gave further depth to the ranks of religion.

As yet, of course, the classroom but indifferently complimented the pulpit. Pastor Craighead conducted classes in addition to his ministerial duties, and a few other individuals somewhat more learned than the average kept more or less desultory classes, but the average child's education was the familiar fireside learning. Of higher educational aims, intent still substituted for achievement despite North Carolina's establishment of Davidson Academy, presided over by Craighead; and those who dreamed of advanced learning envisaged the Reverend Samuel Doak's Martin Academy in Washington County, or, in wilder flights of fancy, sojourns in Philadelphia or Princeton.

Concurrently with social change ran economic diversity. The increasing number of saw and grist mills and iron works presaged a diversion from the all-pervading agriculture and hunting. The mounting population, the increasing number of stores and growing variety of merchandise in them, the plans and speculations concerning a livelihood gained through special services or artisanry, all these foretold a more varied and more complex...
economic future. In short, the observant Governor saw a frontier society on the eve of transformation.

Yet withal, it was in 1790 a rude society. "The most isolated community since Jamestown," despite its signs of development, still remained a far outpost of civilization. Each week brought accounts of violence and death, ravishment and pillage on the Kentucky Road or on the thin line of communication with the lower Holston country. Fire and the tomahawk were constant visitors to the scattered homesteads along the Cumberland and its tributaries. The "station" or half-fortified cabin was the rule, and Nashville itself boasted of but two formal "houses." The grim days of '81 and '82 were over, but the peril was still omnipresent, and no man knew how soon would come the blow. Many were discouraged and took the road for the east; more were hopeful for better days. A few, the leaders, planned for those days, and with these few the speculator-governor, the owner of tens of thousands of acres of Cumberland and western Tennessee lands, was often in conference. In eight short days he sampled thoroughly the western mind.

Circumstances, however, now called the Governor to the east. The long-awaited Indian instructions must have arrived, and the Indian problem was, as it remained, the keystone of all policy. With his party, therefore, Blount left Meriwether District and took the cold and dangerous road to the east, arriving at Cobb's on December 29, 1790.

Several disappointments met him on his return. The complete absence of letters from home was disheartening. A protégé sent to North Carolina to obtain the strategic surveyor's position had fallen ill and failed in his mission. A quarrel was brewing with Virginia over the Territory's northern border. Complaints were rising over the persistent practice of the North Carolina land office of issuing grants for land south of the French Broad. William Peery of Maryland, who had been named the third of the territorial judges, had not appeared, nor was his whereabouts known. Orders from Philadelphia instructed the Governor to hold a treaty with the Cherokees, but only within the framework of the Hopewell agreements, and for the principal purpose of checking the Tennessee Yazoo Company's project for settlement at Muscle Shoals.

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Some Indian agreement was, however, indispensable. Although trouble was brewing in their quarter, the Creeks were as yet quiescent under McGillivray's New York Treaty of 1790; likewise the usually friendly Chickasaws and Choctaws were no immediate problem. The Cherokees, however, posed an imminent threat. This tribe of some two or three thousand warriors had been divided since the Revolution, and the seceding band, the Chickamaugas, proved the most vigorous and incessant enemies of the advancing whites. Attacks from their five towns, located about one hundred miles below the mouth of the Holston River, had been fierce and incessant since 1782. By 1791 the enmity of both of these Cherokee factions was increased. The flood of immigration following the 1785 land act carried white cabins deep into Indian hunting lands. The Franklin treaties excited the savages further, especially when coupled with the appearance of speculators on the Bend of the Tennessee River. Reassured somewhat by the congressional commissioners at Hopewell, the Cherokees were dismayed by the more by the almost complete negation of that treaty by the rising white tide. In addition, the Georgia grants to the three Yazoo companies in 1789 and the activities of James O'Fallon, the South Carolina Company's agent, throughout 1790 had deeply disturbed the federal government, the Spanish, and the savages. Therefore, the Indian defeat of Gen. Josiah Harmar's expedition in the northwest in October seemed to present to the resentful Cherokees an inducement to chastise and restrain the invader in the southwest as well. Already, sporadic Indian harassment was increasing, and informed people both within and outside the Territory anticipated a general attack."

Blount, therefore, hastened to prepare for a treaty. He sent Major Robert King, United States agent to the Cherokees, to that nation requesting a meeting on May 31, 1791, at the mouth of the French Broad. To Secretary Henry Knox he wrote a detailed argument in favor of scrapping the Hopewell agreements altogether and obtaining further Indian cessions, to be paid for with the annuity of one thousand dollars which Knox had proposed merely as a gift to insure Indian favor. The lands he suggested for purchase were in the Muscle Shoals area, the object of both Zachariah Cox's Tennessee Yazoo company and his own earlier project. His careful estimates of the expenses of the proposed treaty meeting and the method of payment were at once accepted by the Administration. Meanwhile, Major King returned with a report that both the Upper Towns led by Hanging Maw and the Lower
Towns under Little Turkey were disposed to negotiate. As the weeks passed, however, problems increased. Andrew Pickens of South Carolina, angry with Blount over their clashes at Hopewell, warned the Cherokees against him as the worst governor possible—"that he loved land and would have all their lands." At the same time, hostile Indian traders worked against the Governor's aims so that rumors swept among the tribes that he was luring them to be massacred, and Blount found it necessary to send Robertson into the nation with assurances of benevolence.  

But while working for a treaty, Blount by no means abandoned his many business interests either in his old home or in his new. He followed the certificate market through John Gray and through Ashe and Steele in Congress. In land operations, Robertson was sent forth on a surveying party, and the Governor, deeply impressed with the richness of Cumberland soil, continued to purchase military warrants and otherwise to acquire acreage. He also returned to an earlier enthusiasm by buying an interest in the well-established and profitable iron-works of Colonel James King and John Sevier. He continued to give thought to the location of his capital, and about this time decided in favor of White's Fort (site of Knoxville) in the vicinity of the Holston and the French Broad, provided the treaty site on examination proved satisfactory. The advantages of this site were several, both in public utility and in the Governor's ownership of lands in the neighborhood.

V, Part Four (1891), 80; Whitaker, Spanish-American Frontier, 126-29. Sevier was associated with both the Tennessee and the South Carolina Y zeal companies, and Cox had accompanied Blount's speculative associates to the Bend in 1784. On the other hand, there is no evidence that Blount was at this time associated with either Y zeal company. The indications are that he still had his own Y zeal company plans in mind, and actually opposed Cox's 1789-1791 project. By 1795, however, when the second Y zeal grants were made, Blount's company was moribund, and he was ready to cooperate with Cox. Ibid., 144-45; Haskins, "Y zeal Land Companies," loc. cit., 83; W. Lowrie (ed.), American State Papers, Public Lands, 8 vols. (Washington, 1832-1861), I, 225; Masterson, Business Man in Politics, 240, 306, 307. The date in Lowrie's work is an obvious misprint.


"Draper MSS., 223-374; Tennessee County and Sumner County Deeds (State Land Office, Raleigh); Knox County Deed Book (Knoxville, Tennessee), Book A, 1, passim. Blount's land operations become more devious and difficult to trace after 1790 since he avoided criticisms of his growing acquisitions by the use of fictitious names, and by working through second and third parties. For these reasons it is very unlikely that the full story of his land operations will ever be known. Through scores of documents, however, both in the John Gray Blount Collection and in the State Land Office in Raleigh, the main outline is clear—never-ending acquisition.

Taylor, Historic Balloons, 122, 123; Williams (ed.), Early Travels, 332; American Historical Magazine, V (1900), 204; Whitaker, Mississippi Question, 18.

The precise date of this decision is variously estimated. 16 is clear that Blount had not decided before the Cumberland trip, on which he probably viewed the area.
The weeks passed, and some of the Cherokees began to look around for some land and would have all been there if they had not been prevented by the orders of the government. The settlers were afraid that he was luring them into a trap.

John Sevier had abandoned his many official duties and followed the certification of Steeple in Congress. He told the settlers that the land and soil, continued to prove very rich. He also followed the well-established line of the land, which he had discovered.

The settlers in the vicinity of the treaty site on the Tennessee lands were several, but the land in the neighborhood was never surveyed.

The evidence of his personal interest in the locality is circumstantial but convincing. The site was marked with either a flag or a stake. The survey was not completed until 1791, when the land was opened for settlement.

The settlement was on the banks of the French Broad River, on the site of present-day Jefferson County. The site was chosen for its strategic location and its apparent suitability for farming.

The settlers were told that the land was available for settlement, and they were encouraged to come and take possession of it. The government was concerned about the land being occupied by the Indians, and the settlers were instructed to take possession of it immediately.

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Caution was the more necessary since another battle with popular feeling was simultaneously in progress. The Administration having decided to mount another expedition against the Indians in the northwest, Blount was instructed to raise men under Sevier to join General Arthur St. Clair at Fort Washington in June or July. The Governor was much interested in the success of this expedition since if all went well a fort was to be established at the Muscle Shoals, and after the expected victory in the north he was sure of a sizeable diversion of troops to his Territory. Most southerners, however, felt that excessive attention was devoted to their favored brotheren to the northward while they themselves were ignored in their Indian-infested misery. The savage threat at home brought constant anxiety, increased by the distasteful militia service and the memory of the disaster of Harman, in which a number of Tennesseans had been involved. The Governor therefore found himself hard put to raise the men. His orders were, perforce, mingled with moral and economic appeals:

It is hoped that this Requisition of three hundred and thirty two men will not be thought oppressive when it is recollected that the people of this territory pay no public taxes, when it is recollected that they are exempt from the Opperation of the Act imposing a Duty of nine Cents per Gallon on Whiskey and other distilled spirits, and I have not the least doubt but the President believed when he gave the Order that the men in so remote a back country would readily turn out voluntarily for the bounty, Pay & Clothing which are offered, and well he might so believe since the Price offered is much more than can be obtained in money for hard Labour for that space of time. These Troops are to go to the relief and aid of our neighbors of Kentucky and to love your neighbors as yourself is one of the first of the Christian virtues. What is promised on the part of the United States will be faithfully performed. There will be no putting soldiers off with paper money or certificates for the United States are in Cash and want not Credit.

However, the response to these arguments, even when they had been reinforced by a draft of men, continued to be reluctant, and the Governor willingly turned over to Sevier the unpopular tasks of enlistment and equipment. His excuse for this, that preparations for the treaty absorbed his


"Wm. Blount to Col. Kennedy, May 21, 1791, Blount Manuscripts (Lawson McGhee Library).
own time, was by no means unjustified. Small parties of savages appeared at Cobb's to confer, and policy dictated that they be given attention and presents. The Chickamaugas were relatively quiet at the moment, although carrying on attacks against the pro-white Chickasaws; however, the Cherokees were alarmed and uneasy over the proposed treaty and still delayed coming. The Creeks, now torn by the rival leadership of William Augustus Bowles and McGillivray and instigated by the Spanish, repudiated the New York Treaty and recommenced attacks, especially on the exposed Cumberland settlers.

As the treaty time approached, therefore, Blount devoted more and more time to preparations for obtaining the best possible terms. Joseph Martin, despite the suspicions of the settlers, joined Robertson in "endeavors to put the Indians in the proper way of thinking" preliminary to the negotiations. From the east Hawkins warned the Governor that the principal aggressors since Hopewell had been the whites, and urged that he not seek too great a cession. Williamson, likewise, felt that the Administration would be satisfied with a moderate acquisition. McGillivray, in accordance with his promise at New York, advised the Cherokees to treat, provided the whites would promise to cease their speculative purchases. On the other hand, speculators and western officials argued that if possible the three hundred squatter families south of French Broad should have their holdings legalized, and that sufficient further land should be obtained, if at all possible, to include the routes between Cumberland and East Tennessee. Knox, in response to Blount's suggestions along this line, appears to have written new instructions allowing more latitude to the negotiator.

At length, charged with various advice and instructions, and balanced between ambition and anxiety, the Governor in June, 1791, departed for the treaty ground at White's Fort. Here again delay paralyzed affairs as John Watts and the Bloody Fellow, perhaps the most influential Cherokee chiefs, still held back, and Martin's utmost exertions were necessary to urge them on. Meanwhile, Colonels Isaac Shelby and Thomas Kennedy arrived from Kentucky with such harrowing tales of Cherokee atrocities and such demands for action that a volunteer retaliatory force rose and only with

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great difficulty was restrained, not by the Governor, who lacked the influence, but by the all-important militia officers.  

But at last the many difficulties were overcome and some twelve hundred Indians had arrived at the treaty ground. Disappointed by the absence of the Chickamaugas, Blount nevertheless realized that enough Cherokees were present to formulate a binding treaty. His love of ceremony and ritual was in keeping with Indian tastes, and it was given free reign. On a bank of the Tennessee (then called the Holston) and shaded by giant trees a marquee was erected. Under it sat the Governor in full dress with sword and military hat, flanked by his uncovered civil and military officers. Behind these stood the knots of curious citizenry whose homes lay about the neighborhood of the fort. Before the marquee were grouped the Indian braves, resplendent in eagle feathers and other finery. In the front rank the older chiefs and the medicine men, in more somber dress, eyed the splendor of the Governor-Superintendent. James Armstrong, who claimed familiarity with the etiquette of European courts, acted as master of ceremonies. One by one in order of age the chiefs were introduced by an interpreter to Armstrong, who, in turn, presented them by their Indian names to the seated Governor.  

After this ceremonial opening the negotiations began, carried on in the style of the Indian council. Blount opened his attack at once with the announcement that the purpose of the meeting was to secure a cession of land from the Indians. The latter, who professed to believe that the negotiations were to have dealt chiefly with procedural difficulties in the Hopewell treaties, appeared deeply chagrined, but the Governor pressed his point. He sought to begin the new boundary line in the Cumberland area, but the chiefs insisted on beginning it in the east where the major collisions were occurring. Blount therefore re-commenced with a proposal that the new line be from the Tennessee River to a ridge between the Little and the Little Tennessee (then called the Tennessee) rivers, thus to include the settlers south of the French Broad. The Indians rejected this, so the Governor proposed a yet larger cession, coupled with an offer to settle himself on the new line in order to enforce it. This suggestion being hastily rejected, Blount then turned to his first suggestion, to which the Indians replied with a counter-proposal that the line be run down the Holston from the Great Island. This would involve a smaller cession and in addition leave out land

50-51; Blount to Knox, July 2, 1791 (excerpt), *American State Papers, Indian Affairs*, I, 628.


Ramsey, *Annels*, 556-58. At that time the name "Holston" was applied to what is now the Tennessee to the mouth of the Little Tennessee, and the Little Tennessee was called the Tennessee.
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along the route of the Mero-Washington road which the Governor was intent on securing, and he therefore refused it."

Day after day thus passed with both sides becoming angrier and the debate more acrimonious. Indian complaints of white encroachments grew bitter. Watts denounced all North Carolinians as treaty-breakers with whom all negotiations were useless, and expressed surprise that the Governor, a Carolinian, should have been sent to treat; Blount's desire for a boundary on the winding ridge was declared to be evidence of his crooked heart. On his side, the Governor brutally told the chiefs that they could not appeal to the President for they had no money to make the trip. Also, in reply to the charge of white encroachment, he flatly ignored the policy of the United States by claiming all the disputed lands by right of conquest in the Revolution.

At length the Indians yielded to the main contention of the inexorable Governor, but they remained adamant that the line should be drawn straight from the point where the ridge between the Little and the Little Tennessee rivers hit the Tennessee eastward to the North Carolina line and westward to the mouth of the Clinch, instead of following the meanderings of the natural boundary as he desired. The Clinch River became the western boundary of the cession in East Tennessee. The argument then turned to compensation. The chiefs scornfully remarked that the one thousand dollars offered would not buy a breech cloth for each of their nation, and only with difficulty were they persuaded to settle temporarily on that annual sum, provided Congress on application should raise the figure.

After these main contentions were settled, other provisions were inserted in the treaty. One of these placed the Cherokees and their trade under the protection of the United States. Another provided for a mutual exchange of prisoners by the following April. The boundary, guaranteed by the United States, was to be marked by a joint commission of whites and Indians, and intruders on Indian lands would be left to the mercy of the savages. Passports were required to enter Indian territory, and horse thieves and other felonsious fugitives were to be given up by the Indians to the whites. Likewise, crimes committed by whites in Indian territory were to be punished by the criminal's home government, and acts of retaliation were renounced. Other stipulations concerned agricultural tools and interpreters for the Indians and unhindered use of the Washington-Mero road and the Tennessee River by the whites."

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"The only accounts of the treaty proceedings are later Indian versions, American State Papers, Indian Affairs, I, 204-05, 628-29. The first of these was occasioned by subsequent controversy and presents one side only. The second is derived from official, and therefore not very revealing, correspondence. Blount utterly denied the truth of either; nevertheless, they furnished his enemies with unfailing sources of accusation. See note 63.

"The text of the treaty is in Carter (ed.), Papers, IV, 60-67."
An express petition from the Indians was presented to them by a representative of the Senate of the State of North Carolina."

His speech was characterized by moderation and respect for the views of others. He pointed out the importance of a well-organized government to serve as a deterrent to further disagreements. He also emphasized the necessity for some time to be allowed for the Indians to adapt themselves to the new conditions. Fort was established on the site of the present town of Nashville, Tennessee. It was the only fort in that area, and its establishment led to a significant increase in the size of the settlement.

Meanwhile, plans for the Ohio Company were now well advanced. The venture had been agreed to earlier in the meeting, and it was announced that a treaty would be signed with the Indians to secure the necessary land. The treaty was signed in January 1785.

The treaty was signed at the Muscle Shoals, a site near the Tennessee River. It was a significant event in the history of the United States, as it marked the first time that the President of the United States had signed a treaty with the Indians.

In any event, Blount did not forget his personal interests. Early in the meeting, according to the Indian account, he approached the chiefs to obtain a sale of the Muscle Shoals lands, since he knew that the Indians had already purchased these lands from the State of Georgia, but was desirous of making a fuller purchase of our nation." Yet, despite his promises to erect storehouses and gunsmiths' shops for the use of the Indians, the chiefs refused to sell the lands, saying that they were the common hunting grounds of four nations."

Consequently, the Governor had made a treaty successful both from a public and a private point of view. He had, at least on paper, regularized Indian-white relations on critical legal settlements south of the French Broad, obtained a considerable cession of territory (including some of his own lands), and had included in the treaty certain indefinite terminologies, favorable construction of which might bring yet more land and squatters within white territory." Hence, convinced that no more land could have been obtained, he expressed himself as well satisfied.

**"Diary of Jacob Lindley," Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections, 21 vols. (Lansing, 1900-1913), XVII (1890), 611. These accounts must be accepted with considerable caution, since all parties concerned were strongly pro-Indian. It is also clear that the charges against Blount were not, apparently, made officially during the visit of the chiefs to the President in January, 1790. American State Papers, Indian Affairs, I, 203-06. On the other hand, despite the possibilities of simple misunderstandings, the evidence indicates the existence of trickery at the treaty meeting. "General Lincoln's Journal," loc. cit., 171; Geo. Weiswank to Col. Alexander McKee, January 10, 1790; Philip Hamer (ed.), "The British in Canada and the Southern Indians, 1790-1794." East Tennessee Historical Society's Publications, No. 2 (1930), 117; Pickering Papers, LXI, No. 15.

**American State Papers, Indian Affairs, I, 203-04. The Indians later recounted this passage with the Governor as part of the treaty proceedings, but it is inconceivable that the secretive Blount would thus air his projects before a public assembly. It undoubtedly occurred in private. For the Blount interest in Muscle Shoals, see Masterson, Business Man in Politics, 68-70, 75, 76-78 ff.

**Abernethy, Frontier to Plantation, 120; A. L. Bramlett, North Carolina's Western Lands (unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, University of North Carolina, 1928), 80-81; J. C. Peay, William Blount, the Land Speculator (unpublished Master's thesis, Vanderbilt, 1929), 69, 71; Hu. Williamson to J. G. Blount, August 16, 1790, J. G. R., P. C. 844; American State Papers, Indian Affairs, I, 629. Abernethy's charge that Blount sought to create further friction by leaving Indian land between Merco and Washington districts is untenable. All records indicate that to obtain these lands would have been impossible, and that he secured what he did only with the greatest difficulty.
An express was sent off to Philadelphia with the treaty, and diplomatically worded reports were directed to frontier leaders in Kentucky and South Carolina."

His sojourn on the lower Holston had confirmed the Governor's decision to locate his capital at White's Fort; he therefore arranged for the construction of a weatherboarded log cabin on a little hill near the Tennessee River to serve as a temporary home for his family until a more fitting mansion could be built. The selection of this site for the capital had been anticipated for some time now, and the heavily forested hills and plateaus about White's Fort were increasingly dotted with clearings. The two-storied fort itself was the only building of any size, but White now planned to lay off streets and lots, and owners of surrounding lands, including the Governor, anticipated sizable profits. In honor of his superior officer, Secretary of War Knox, Blount named the place "Knoxville."

Meanwhile, with his most immediate objective accomplished, Blount now planned his delayed trip to North Carolina. "Molsey" had at length agreed to come to the frontier, and in addition to bringing his family to the west, he had both old and new business demands. James Mountfleorse, lawyer and speculator of Nashville, had proposed to use his connections in France to sell Blount lands abroad, and this certificate transactions required conferences with John Gray Blount. In addition, Blount's foes in the December Carolina assembly had secured a resolution directing the attorney general to sue for the unpaid Hopewell accounts of the ex-agent, whose personal attention was now required for his defense. He therefore requested of Knox a leave of absence from September 15 to November 20."

Blount did not, however, idly await permission for his trip east. He sent Mountfleorse to Philadelphia and Titus Ogden to Carolina to settle accounts and speculate further in certificates, Mountfleorse being charged also with

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*William Blount and the Establishment of the S.W. Territory*

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*Ibid., 628-29; Wm. Blount to Henry Innes and others, July 2, 1791, Innes Papers, XIX (Library of Congress); Wm. Blount to Governor Charles Pinckney, July 5, 1791, Correspondence of William Blount, 1777-1797 (typed copies, Lawson McRae Library, Knoxville).*

*Note 61, above; Wm. Blount to John Steele, July 22, 1791, Wagstaff (ed.), Steele Papers, I, 80. For description of the site, see Ramsey, Annals, 374-76, 558-60.*


the reports on land occupation and geography that had been requested by the secretary of state. Also the Governor was again plagued by frontier enterprise. The expedition to the Muscle Shoals under Zachariah Cox had failed, due to the warnings of a party of Cherokees, but popular sympathy was so strongly in favor of the trespassers that a grand jury impanelled in Washington District, to Blount's chagrin, refused to indict them. The Spanish, however, had taken a more serious view of the effort and, by Miro's orders, had raised a fort at Walnut Hills (site of Memphis) to prevent the success of this or any other such enterprise. This Spanish stroke, observed by Secretary Daniel Smith on a surveying expedition, was reported by him to Blount, who, deeply alarmed, informed the secretary of war. Finally, the routine and tedious tasks of passing on commissary accounts, filling militia offices, and collecting information on Indian troubles absorbed much time. In July Joseph Anderson of Delaware, named by Washington as the third territorial judge after Peery had declined the post, arrived and was sworn in. The Governor had not formerly known him, but found him "a genteel man . . . a learned Judge and a very agreeable open Companion," and sent him to Robertson with warm recommendations.  

The census-taking of the Territory was delayed both by the difficulties of communication and by the reluctance of the citizens to be counted, since they feared, so the Governor alleged, their number would result in the establishment of a legislature. Whether or not this was a true cause of reluctance, it was entirely in accord with the Governor's own distaste for a division of his authority. Therefore, although even incomplete figures totalled 85,691 persons as of late July, the Governor made no plans for this next step in territorial administration.

His principal concern, however, in the late summer of 1791 was the mounting tempo of Indian attacks. The business man-governor naturally attached great importance to written agreement. He approached treaty-making and regarded treaties in much the same manner as he did the clever maneuvering for binding advantage with which he was familiar in the mercantile world. Several years of crushing disillusionment would yet be required to instruct him in the real weaknesses of the treaty process between

\[\text{Blount to Knox, July 28, 1791 (extract), Thomas Jefferson Papers, LXXXIX;}\]
\[\text{Blount to Robertson, September 3, 1791, "Robertson Correspondence," loc. cit., 192-93;}\]
\[\text{Ranson, Ante, 550-51;}\]
\[\text{Whittaker, Spanish-American Frontier, 148, 214;}\]
\[\text{Blount to Robertson, September 3, 21, 1791, "Robertson Correspondence," loc. cit., 192-93;}\]
\[\text{Carter (ed.), Papers, IV, 40, 49, 50, 446;}\]
\[\text{Blount to Jefferson, September 19, 1791, ibid., 80-81;}\]
\[\text{Blount to John Sevier, May 31, 1793, Draper MSS., 4XXX5;}\]
\[\text{A. V. Goodpasture, William Blount and the Old Southwest Territory, American Historical Magazine, VIII (1903), 9. This latter writer pictures Blount as the democratic instrument of his citizens' wishes. This is not an accurate picture of the personality or nature of William Blount. It does appear, however, that in this instance neither Blount, for personal reasons, nor his citizens, for fear of taxation, desired a legislature at this time. Note 53, above; Abernethy, Frontier to Plantation, 153.}\]
equally dissatisfied whites and savages. It was with deep concern, therefore, that in the face of his new treaty he heard of the increasing violence which beset his citizens. With the aid of the militia officers he had drawn up and forwarded by Mountfleury a plan of defense for the Cumberland area, calling for the stationing of regular troops in the Territory. This was seconded by a respectful but plain-spoken memorial to the President from the civil and military officers of the Mero District. But while the national administration gave languid attention to the “depradations” of “a few rascally Indians,” the settlers were growing increasingly restive under the mounting attacks of the Chiecmagens and the Creeks.” Knox, straining to equip St. Clair’s expedition and anxious for the assistance or at least the neutrality of the southern Indians in the coming campaign, could authorize nothing more than calling out the two companies of militia who, already tired of too constant calls, showed marked reluctance to leave their homes unguarded. The Governor, therefore, could do little but remind the militia officers that they were sworn to support the Constitution and the government, and to urge that the treaty be observed.” Blount, in fact, now faced the problem which beset his entire administration—that of making palatable to the harried and resentful frontiermen policies of the national government which, however intrinsically sound, appeared callous to the interests of his citizens.

For the present, however, escape from the problem was possible, since Secretary of State Jefferson informed him that his request for a leave of absence had been approved by the President. Hence with a sense of both accomplishment and relief, Blount turned eastward on September 15, 1791, to take the winding road for home, Molsey, and his family.

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3Robertson to Blount (1), August 25, 1791; Blount to Robertson, September 3, 1791, “Robertson Correspondence,” loc. cit., 191-93; Memorial of Mero Officers, August 1, 1791, Carter (ed.), Papers, IV, 72-73; J. Winchester to D. Smith, June 20, 1791, Draper MSS., 77282-33; Haywood, Tennesse, 209-70, 341.

4Knox to Blount, August 18, 1791 (extract), George Washington Papers, CCLI (Library of Congress); Blount to Robertson, September 3, 21, 1791, “Robertson Correspondence,” loc. cit., 162-93.