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COL. JOHN WILLIAMS

COLONEL JOHN WILLIAMS

By LEOTA DRIVER MAIDEN

In the burial grounds of the First Presbyterian Church at Knoxville, Tennessee, stands a simple marker, now weathered and gray, bearing the inscription:

In Memory of
Col. John Williams
Born Jan. 29, 1778
Died Aug. 10, 1837

A hundred years earlier this modest epitaph probably would have been expanded to record that he was a loving father, a devoted husband, a courageous soldier, an able jurist, a public-spirited citizen, and an unselfish servant of his state and country, both in war and in peace.

Although the records of Colonel Williams' activities belong in the annals of Tennessee, like many another prominent citizen of his time, he was not a native son. Born in Surry County, North Carolina, he was the third of the twelve children—ten sons and two daughters—of Colonel Joseph and Rebecca Lanier Williams.¹ About 1766 Nathaniel, his paternal grandfather, had moved from Hanover County, Virginia, to Granville County, North Carolina.² Joseph, then a lad in his teens—his birth date is given as March 27, 1748—was, therefore, a native Virginian. He was of Welsh descent.

Soon after their arrival, he married Rebecca Lanier, the descendant of a French Huguenot family who had left France after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes.³ That they were people of some means is evident from her will proven in August, 1832, in which she mentioned property including a Negro woman obtained from the estate of her father, Thomas Lanier.⁴

¹ John H. Wheeler, *Historical Sketches of North Carolina from 1584 to 1851*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia, 1851), II, 409-10. Corrected in pen by a member of the family. Copy supplied by the late W. M. Roberts, of Taylors, South Carolina. See also Mrs. Hayne Davis, "Panther Creek," *The North Carolina Booklet* (Raleigh), III, No. 6 (Oct., 1903), 18-23. The children named are Robert, Joseph, John, Nathaniel, Lewis, Thomas, Alexander, William, James, Nicholas, Rebecca, and Fannie.

² Seldon Nelson, "The Williams Name in History," *Knoxville Sentinel*, Jan. 4, 1908.

³ Davis, "Panther Creek," *loc. cit.*

⁴ Will of Rebecca Williams, signed March 29, 1831, Records of Surry County, North Carolina. Copy supplied by the late W. M. Roberts.

Joseph and Rebecca Williams moved from Granville County to Surry and settled about three miles from the Shallow Ford of the Yadkin, at what came to be known as Panther Creek. Here they prospered, acquiring much land and many Negroes. His will, dated January 28, 1812, says that the tracts of adjoining land "whereon I do now live near two thousand five hundred acres, . . . it is impossible to know how much land I do own and may have a right to as a large quantity depends on the decisions of suits that are now and may hereafter be commenced."⁶

In addition to increasing his possessions, he was active in political and military affairs. In 1775 he served as a delegate to the Hillsborough Convention.⁶ Although holding the rank of colonel in the colonial army, he resigned this commission and became an officer in the continentals, being appointed a lieutenant-colonel from Surry in 1776.⁷

Accounts differ concerning some of his activities during the Revolution; but they agree on his campaign with General Griffith Rutherford against the Overhill Cherokee Indians from September to November, 1776. He was in command of the troops from Surry, who joined those from Virginia under Colonel William Christian. Together they marched against those Indians living along the Little Tennessee River believed to be under British influence. Within approximately two months their towns had been burned, their supplies ravaged, and treaties concluded with all inclined to be friendly. Colonel Christian estimated that 50,000 bushels of corn and from 10,000 to 15,000 bushels of potatoes together with great numbers of fat cattle, hogs, and poultry of every kind were appropriated without restraint by the soldiers, or otherwise destroyed. The effect of this campaign in discouraging active participation by these Indians on the side of the British during the Revolution cannot be estimated.⁸

While in the Cherokee country, Colonel Williams passed the site of the junction of the Holston and the Tennessee rivers, or in present day nomenclature, of the Tennessee and the Little Tennessee at Lenoir City. Upon returning home, he urged the erection of a fort there to be

⁶ Will of Col. Joseph Williams, Sr., *ibid.*

⁶ Wheeler, *Historical Sketches*, 409. This convention set up a provisional government for North Carolina.

⁷ *Ibid.*; Nelson, "Williams Family Name," *loc. cit.*

⁸ Samuel C. Williams, "Col. Joseph Williams' Battalion in Christian's Campaign," *Tennessee Historical Magazine* (Nashville, 1915-1937), IX (1926), 104-111.

garrisoned by North Carolina troops. "I never saw any better formed by nature," he reported.⁹ His interest in the western country survived the campaign. When in 1779 the state line was about to be surveyed, he obtained command of the battalion which guarded the commissioners and the surveyors to Cumberland Gap and beyond.¹⁰ One may conjecture the influence of this interest upon the four sons who later became identified with the history of Tennessee.

Whether Colonel Joseph Williams took part in the battle at King's Mountain is uncertain. Lyman Draper says that he was prevented from such participation by wounds received in the fight against the Tories at Colson's. However, a tradition has persisted among his descendants that he was present and active at this defeat of the British.¹¹

Be that as it may, events during those years revealed the stern stuff of which Rebecca Williams was made. Before leaving home, Colonel Joseph had stored up supplies for the family—a wife and three sons. During the latter part of the war, news reached Mrs. Williams of the approach of Lord Cornwallis' army. Taking an old Negro woman and the children, an infant son two weeks old having been added to the group, she hid in the woods until the enemy had crossed the river at Shallow Ford. Returning home, she found almost everything destroyed, only the house and the Negro quarters not burned. Deprived of necessities, especially for the smaller children, she determined to return to Granville County, where her father's family still lived. After arranging as best she could for the servants and the two older boys, she made the journey on horseback, alone except for the sick baby in her lap and a boy of two and one-half, the future Colonel John Williams, behind her.¹²

With the coming of peace, the Williamses resumed life at Panther Creek. That they prospered is evidenced by Colonel Joseph's will probated in 1827. Nicholas, the youngest son, inherited the home, where he lived in ease and affluence until the Civil War. The house was colonial in style, and the garden became widely known for its hedges,

⁹ *Ibid.*, 103.

¹⁰ Walter Clark (ed.), *State Records of North Carolina* (Raleigh, 1895-1905), XIV, 109, 117, 139, 144, 145.

¹¹ Lyman C. Draper, *King's Mountain and Its Heroes* (Cincinnati, 1881), 116. Cf. Nelson, "Williams Family Name," *loc. cit.*

¹² Davis, "Panther Creek," *loc. cit.*, 18.

flowers, and shrubbery.¹³ A photograph shows a two-story white clap-board structure with wide porches enclosed by banisters.

Developing their sons into useful citizens also formed an integral part of the activities of Joseph and Rebecca Williams. Although eight of the ten became well known, the career of only one is of immediate concern to us, John, whose achievements are a notable chapter in the history of Tennessee.

Before leaving his native North Carolina, he had studied law in Salisbury.¹⁴ His father's will noted that "Robert & John are at the Bar, I do conceive that each of them cost me at least five hundred dollars over & above their schooling expenses, etc. to obtain their legal knowledge & furnish them with such books as I have done."¹⁵ About 1800 or soon thereafter he came to Knoxville.¹⁶ On January 11, 1803,

John Williams appeared and produced a License authorizing him to practice as an Attorney at Law in the severall Courts of Law and Equity in this State, who took an Oath to support the Constitution of the United States, an Oath to support the Constitution of the State of Tennessee, and also the Oath prescribed by Law for Attornies, who is admitted as an Attorney of this Court.¹⁷

During the following five years, his appearances in the courts were numerous, both as prosecutor and as defense counsel. He also served occasionally as a temporary judge of the superior court of law and equity, acting under a special commission in the place of one of the regular judges, usually David Campbell, whenever he was absent or disqualified himself because of personal interest in a case before the court.¹⁸ Such appointments were expressions of considerable confidence in a young lawyer but recently admitted to the bar within the state.

Not all his energy was directed toward advancement in the legal profession, however. In 1799, before leaving his native state, he had been initiated into the Masonic Order in Johnston-Caswell Lodge, No. 10, at Warrenton, North Carolina. After coming to Tennessee, he became a member of Overton Lodge, No. 5, at Rogersville, Hawkins

¹³ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁴ *Biographical Directory of the American Congress, 1774-1949* (Washington, D. C., 1950), 2019.

¹⁵ Will, Col. Joseph Williams, *loc. cit.*

¹⁶ Nelson, "Williams Family Name," *loc. cit.*

¹⁷ Records of Knox County, Record Book No. 4, 1802-1805 (Knox County Courthouse, Knoxville), 101.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 316, 325, 327-28, 331, 332, 339; Records of Knox County, Hamilton District Superior Court of Law and Equity, Minute Book No. 1 (Knox County Courthouse, Knoxville), 199, 202, 203, 206, 239-41.

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County, the second oldest lodge in the state, chartered by the Grand Lodge of North Carolina. When in 1813 a convention met at Knoxville to form a Grand Lodge in Tennessee, he served as a representative from Overton. Evidently he had been an officer from its institution, for in 1807 he paid for its charter.¹⁹

As evidence of his early interest in military affairs, he served as a captain of the Sixth Infantry from April 23, 1799, to June 15, 1800.²⁰ Handsome and not averse to romance, about 1805 he married Malinda White, daughter of General James White, the founder of Knoxville. She could have been only about sixteen, for her birth date is recorded as February 15, 1789. Their eldest son, Joseph L., was born on October 23, 1807. In 1807 John Williams, with such other Tennessee notables as George W. Campbell, John Sevier, Archibald Roane, and Francis Ramsey, was appointed a trustee of East Tennessee College.²¹

That he did not neglect his chosen profession during this time is shown by a publication of A. S. Outlaw, relative to judgments against his land by John Campbell and Samuel Newell, for whom John Williams was attorney.²² Neither were military matters overlooked, for in December, 1809, he informed Pleasant M. Miller, then in Congress, that he had advanced \$1,620 to Colonel Return J. Meigs, from whom he had procured a bill on the Secretary of War. It evidently had been lost in the mails, and he was requesting Miller to investigate the matter.²³

The first record of a transaction between Williams and Andrew Jackson, who was to become his superior officer and admirer but later his bitter enemy, is dated 1810. On December 15 of that year he signed a bill of sale for three Negroes "for the sum of eight hundred and fifty dollars to me in hand paid by Andrew Jackson of county of Davidson."²⁴ This sale, as well as the loan to Colonel Meigs, would suggest

¹⁹ Charles A. Snodgrass, *The History of Free Masonry in Tennessee, 1789-1843* (Nashville, 1944), 44, 282, 424.

²⁰ Francis B. Heitman, *Historical Register and Dictionary of the U. S. Army*, 2 vols. (Washington, 1903), I, 1041.

²¹ Mary U. Rothrock (ed.), *The French Broad-Holston Country* (Knoxville, 1941), 506; Nelson, "Williams Family Name," *loc. cit.*; *Wilson's Knoxville Gazette*, Aug. 17, 1807.

²² *Ibid.*, July 22, 1809.

²³ John Williams to P. M. Miller (Enclosure, John Williams to P. M. Miller), Rogersville, Dec. 3, 1809, Records of the Office of the Adjutant General, The National Archives (Washington, D. C.), Record Group 94. Hereafter records in the National Archives are indicated by the symbol NA, followed by the record group (RG) number.

²⁴ Jackson Papers (Manuscript Division, Library of Congress), Second Series, I.

that material prosperity came to him within the first ten years of his residence in Tennessee.

Also he was becoming influential politically. In December, 1811, a mass meeting of Knox County citizens passed resolutions condemning Archibald Roane for resigning his seat in the legislature to accept a judgeship. Roane addressed a reply, directing it to "John Williams, Pleasant M. Miller and Co.," who, he intimated, were the moving spirits of this gathering.²⁵

In the *Gazette* of January 27 Williams published his reply, couched in terms which reveal him as a master of fearless statements, with no personal feelings spared. The Judge, he said, was attempting to represent himself as a victim of persecution. To succeed, he would be obliged to show that the meeting was attended only by his enemies,—an impossibility, because it was held after ten days' public notice. At that assemblage, Roane was arraigned and charged with faithlessness and misdemeanors. Thereupon the citizenry had passed a sentence of condemnation, which he now was pretending to regard as the verdict of individuals only. Evidence, said Williams, convicted him on two counts: 1. To promote his own interests, he had voted to recede from an amendment proposed in the senate to the enumeration bill, which amendment after mature consideration he previously had advocated; 2. To provide himself with an office, he had deserted his post as a member of the senate while measures the most deeply significant to his constituents of any which occupied the attention of the legislature during the session still were undetermined. The reply concluded with the scathing observation, "I too often have seen you staggering through the streets of Knoxville with intoxication to believe you qualified to preside over our lives, liberties, and fortunes."²⁶

Then followed years filled primarily with military and political services. When, in June, 1812, war was declared against Great Britain, the people of Tennessee experienced a peculiar elation. Spain was a close ally of England and probably would join in the hostilities. Such a situation would present to the frontiersmen a chance for reprisals on that country as well as Great Britain.²⁷

²⁵ *Wilson's Knoxville Gazette*, Dec. 9, 1811-Jan. 6, 1812, *passim*.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, Jan. 27, 1812.

²⁷ Samuel C. Williams, "A Forgotten Campaign," *Tennessee Historical Magazine*, VIII (1924), 266.

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Early in November Governor Willie Blount received President James Madison's request for 1,500 militia from Middle Tennessee for service in New Orleans or in West Florida, then held by the Spaniards. The East Tennessee troops of Major General John Cocke were disappointed at not being offered participation. Colonel Williams, then adjutant general, conceived a plan for an independent volunteer campaign.²⁸ In fact, some such procedure had been fomenting in his mind for several months. On September 1 he informed Colonel Edmund P. Gaines that he had commenced raising a company of mounted infantrymen, believing a corps of that type would be useful not only against the Indians but in other operations as well. This opinion, he added, had been strengthened by Colonel Gaines' concurrence. He would use his best exertions, he promised, to organize 1,000 such troops and asked authority to use Gaines' name in commending the project to his fellow citizens. Both his pride and his ambition would be gratified, he added, by being selected to command such men as would voluntarily enroll in the company; to efface the stigma his country's honor had sustained and to overwhelm with destruction "our British and Indian foes" would afford the highest temporal satisfaction.²⁹

Both the *Knoxville Gazette* and the *Nashville Clarion* carried an "Address to the People of East Tennessee," signed by Colonel Williams, which urged a voluntary command to aid Georgia in checking the hostile Indians. Major General John Cocke, the "Address" said, had enrolled as a common soldier. The requirements stipulated that "Each soldier must be mounted on a strong horse, armed with a musket or rifle (at his election), with a brace of pistols, if to be procured, a tomahawk and a butcher's knife—dressed in black hat, black hunting shirt or roundabout and pantaloons."³⁰

On December 3 Colonel Williams reported results to President Madison:

Upon short notice one hundred and sixty five mounted men convened at this place on Tuesday the first of this month and will march on tomorrow under my command for St. Johns where it will afford us pleasure to execute the orders of the President. In executing your orders not a man in the corps will entertain constitutional scruples on the subject of *boundaries*.³¹

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 267.

²⁹ Printed in *Knoxville Gazette*, Oct. 12, 1812.

³⁰ Williams, "A Forgotten Campaign," *loc. cit.*, 267.

³¹ John Williams to James Madison, Knoxville, Dec. 3, 1812, NA, RG 94.

An extract from the letter of an unidentified gentleman in Knoxville, dated December 4, to his friend in Nashville probably summarized the general interest and approbation of the expedition:

Col. Williams with about 150 mounted Infantry Volunteers (amongst whom were many of your particular friends) marched this morning for the southern frontiers of Georgia. They are well equipped and well mounted, and are unquestionably not only the most respectable citizens of East Tennessee, but are by far the finest looking men for the number I have seen together — They go firmly resolved to *act* — They will, I am persuaded, do their duty.³²

In support of the statement concerning the personnel of this company, one needs merely to scan the roster of the Volunteer Infantry Regiment of East Tennessee Mounted Infantry to recognize such names as Captain Samuel Bunch, Thomas L. Williams, Hugh Lawson White, B. I. White, Judge William Cocke and his son, General John Cocke, Pleasant Miller, Enoch Parsons, and Alexander Outlaw.³³

Even before immediate hostilities threatened in 1812, the United States had recognized the importance of acquiring the Floridas. In fact, it seems probable that General George Matthews had been sent as a secret agent to help in fomenting a revolution there which might serve as a pretext for the federal forces to occupy that region. Such efforts resulted in the Patriot's War and temporary occupation, which was prolonged.³⁴ The Seminole Indians were dominated by the Spanish and, in consequence, were the scourge of the Georgian settlements along the St. Mary's River. Never were Tennesseans tardy in responding when an opportunity came to strike a blow at the savage menace. When, in addition, other traditional enemies might be discomfited, all personal considerations were disregarded. Under such conditions the mounted infantry was organized.

On December 11 the force camped near Asheville, from which place Colonel Williams wrote to Governor D. B. Mitchell of Georgia, reiterating his belief that the United States government shortly would occupy the Floridas, that aid would be needed by the Georgia troops, and that for this reason "I determined to collect a volunteer force from East Tennessee and march to the scene of action." He reported his

³² *Nashville Clarion and Tennessee Gazette*, Dec. 15, 1812.

³³ Nelson, "Williams Family Name," *loc. cit.*; Williams, "A Forgotten Campaign," *loc. cit.*, 272-73.

³⁴ Paul Kruse, "A Secret Agent in East Florida: General George Matthews and the Patriot War," *The Journal of Southern History* (Lexington, Ky.), XVIII (1952), 193-95.

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command as about 200 well mounted and well equipped men and requested directions as to where to go.⁸⁵

In reply Governor Mitchell, on December 24, 1812, suggested Point Petre or Coleman, on the St. Mary's River, as a place of rendezvous. On January 6, 1813, General Thomas Flournoy at St. Mary's informed General Thomas Pinckney that a deputation of the Tennessee Volunteers had waited upon him with a letter. Evidently this was the communication from Colonel Williams, entrusted to Thomas L. Williams and Peter Parsons for safe delivery. "I have directed Col. Williams," General Flournoy reported, "to arrive at Camp Pinckney (the place of the new Encampment above Colerain) tomorrow when I shall meet them, and with the least possible delay, send them against the Indians."⁸⁶

General Pinckney forwarded both General Flournoy's and Colonel Williams' letters to the Secretary of War and asked for instructions concerning the East Tennessee Volunteers. Ten days later he reported that they had arrived but directions were still lacking. He was especially anxious because he had read in the *National Intelligencer* that their services would not be required "in consequence of the act authorizing an augmentation of the regular forces"; but he added, "I have gladly availed myself of the services of these Volunteers for the purpose of protecting the country and of subduing the savages who have committed hostilities, particularly the Seminoles." The expedition, he thought, would be of short duration, for the Indians were much dispersed and the distance to their towns not considerable. He must be directed, therefore, he concluded, whether to retain the Volunteers for further service or to dismiss them upon their return and allow them pay and emoluments authorized by the Volunteers' Act.⁸⁷

That General Flournoy did hasten to avail himself of their services is proved by another communication from General Pinckney to the Secretary of War on February 10. A letter from that officer, he said, stated that the Volunteers to the number of about 250, including a few Georgians, had marched from their camp last Wednesday against the Indian towns of the Seminoles. Colonel T. A. Smith with not less than

⁸⁵ Printed in *Nashville Clarion and Tennessee Gazette*, Feb. 9, 1813.

⁸⁶ Extract of a letter from General Flournoy to General Pinckney, St. Mary's, Jan. 6, 1813, NA, RG 94.

⁸⁷ Pinckney to Secretary of War, Jan. 19, 29, 1813, *ibid.*

200 Regulars had been directed to leave his camp on the St. John's in time to meet them near the first Indian town: "should the plan be carried into effect, they will this night [February 6, 1813] fall upon several of their villages."³⁸

As for the success of the Volunteers, Colonel Williams' lengthy report to General Flournoy is most conclusive. After outlining complete details concerning the movements of the troops from February 7 to the conclusion of their invasion of Seminole territory, he concluded:

On every day during our stay in the Nation detachments were actively engaged in collecting provisions and burning houses . . . We found a tolerable supply of corn for our Horses and a plenty of beef for ourselves. We burnt 336 houses in the different Villages together with a great quantity of property: We took from the enemy about 250 horses and between three and four hundred Cattle. We were unable to visit the black Hammock Town for the want of a Pilot. The balance of the Seminole Nation is completely in waste. On all occasions the Tennessee Volunteers supported the toils and dangers of the campaign with the same spirit which animated them in making a tender of their services.³⁹

The report of Colonel Smith varies but little, except as to the amount of destruction inflicted:

We burnt three hundred & eighty houses, consumed and destroyed from fifteen hundred to two thousand bushels of corn; three hundred horses & about four hundred cattle were collected, many of which were lost in attempting to drive them in, two thousand deer skins were found in Bowlegged's magazine, part of which were used by the troops, the others destroyed.

He added, also, that "the weather was extremely bad during the whole of this incursion, the men were much fatigued by their constant employment in scouring hammocks."⁴⁰

General Flournoy expressed satisfaction with the results of the campaign: "I am unwilling to magnify the success of the enterprise, but there is no doubt but that the enemy have received severe chastisement for their inconsideration and hasty determination to take up the tomahawk against us."⁴¹ On March 8 General Pinckney forwarded these reports together with a commendation of his own to the Secretary of War.⁴²

³⁸ *Id.* to *id.*, Feb. 10, 1813, *ibid.*

³⁹ Report of Col. John Williams on the Expedition in East Florida, Camp in East Florida, Feb. 23, 1813, *ibid.*

⁴⁰ Copy of Report of Col. T. A. Smith to Gen. Flournoy, Camp New Hope, St. John's, Feb. 24, 1813, *ibid.*

⁴¹ Flournoy to Pinckney, St. Mary's, Feb. 27, 1813, *ibid.*

⁴² Pinckney to Secretary of War, Mar. 8, 1813, *ibid.*

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Military officials were not alone in expressing appreciation for the services of the Volunteers. The mayor and aldermen of Savannah, Georgia, tendered "their thanks, gratitude, and applause."⁴³ Governor Willie Blount added his congratulations for the movement and conduct of these troops, who marched upwards of 600 miles, supplying themselves until their services had been accepted by the national government.⁴⁴

General Pinckney's question of whether the Volunteers were to be retained or dismissed once their announced objective had been accomplished still remained on his doorstep while he waited for information concerning the intentions of the government in relation to East Florida. Their consumption of forage was considerable in a country not abounding in that article, and immediate disposition was important. By February 26 the issue had been decided, "The Tennessee Volunteers shall be dismissed."⁴⁵

In mapping their return, Colonel Williams found it necessary for them to follow several routes, because of the difficulty of obtaining forage for the horses and food for the men. General Flournoy estimated the cost to ration them and gave Williams \$2,000 in money instead of supplies:

If the payment of this money should be considered irregular, I have to reply I did it because I thought it best. Knowing that the public could not lose by it, & also knowing that the Volunteers were entitled to pay (having merited it) & that in due time they would receive full compensation for their services & remuneration for private losses sustained.⁴⁶

General Pinckney commented in his communication to the Secretary of War that the amount would not exceed one month's pay for a detachment of infantry of the same force, and, therefore, the United States could not lose by this payment.⁴⁷

In his report to Governor Blount, Colonel Williams said that the Volunteers were discharged by General Flournoy on February 25, 1813, after which they returned to Knoxville, where they were mustered out.⁴⁸ Thus was successfully concluded a venture unique in mili-

⁴³ Resolutions, Savannah, Ga., Mar. 8, 1813, *Wilson's Knoxville Gazette*, Apr. 5, 1813.

⁴⁴ Blount to Williams, Nashville, June 13, 1813, *ibid.*, July 5, 1813.

⁴⁵ Pinckney to Secretary of War, Feb. 23, 26, 1813, NA, RG 94.

⁴⁶ Flournoy to Pinckney, St. Mary's, Mar. 4, 1813, *ibid.*

⁴⁷ Pinckney to Secretary of War, Charleston, Mar. 16, 1813, *ibid.*

⁴⁸ Report, Col. Williams to Gov. Blount, Knoxville, Mar. 25, 1813, *Nashville Clavion and Tennessee Gazette*, July 13, 1813.

tary activities: a group which armed and equipped themselves travelled hundreds of miles to vanquish an enemy who did not threaten them. They devastated the villages of the Seminoles and drove the survivors into Spanish territory, carrying hostilities to foreign soil without embroiling the government of the United States with the Spanish authorities.

In the meantime, war with the lower Creeks seemingly had become inevitable. Both British and Spanish influences were at work, inciting the Indians against the American settlers in that region. In recognition of his success with the East Tennessee Volunteers, on June 18, 1813, John Williams was commissioned as colonel of the 39th United States Infantry and authorized to recruit and organize this group, a regiment destined to win fame for its officer and itself by further helping to end the Indian menace in the Old Southwest.

Recruiting 600 men apparently was an easier matter than providing them with the necessary equipment. Many of the Volunteers re-enlisted for service, drawn by loyalty to their former commanding officer or the possibility of striking additional blows at the hated savage enemy. In July Colonel Williams complained of the difficulty encountered in obtaining funds for the 39th, "Since banks refuse to honor more drafts upon the U. S. It appears that specie will have to be waggoned from Baltimore to meet expenses." In October he again reported that no funds had been received for the contingent services of the regiment.⁴⁹

Some uncertainty as to the immediate use of this group seems to have developed, for Governor Willie Blount observed that it could be recruited in a very short time if it were directed to march against the Creeks in Georgia. It should be allowed to conduct a winter campaign in the South, he believed, and then sent north the next spring, if necessary.⁵⁰ Apparently, Blount's aim was to insure the services of these regulars for Jackson and the militia in his proposed campaign against the Creeks. Certainly Jackson was counting on their aid and was using whatever approaches were open to guarantee it: "Please signify to

⁴⁹ Williams to John Sevier, Knoxville, July 12, 1813; Williams to Secretary of War, Nashville, Oct. 11, 1813, NA, RG 94.

⁵⁰ Blount to Secretary of War, Aug. 28, 1813, *ibid.*

Colo. Williams," he wrote, "my wishes to be Joined by him before I make the movement (against the Creeks)."⁵¹

For several months much confusion in military authority seems to have existed in the area, and the 39th Regiment was the victim of conflicting orders. General Flournoy still commanded the Seventh Military District; General Pinckney, formerly of the Sixth, now was placed over the Seventh likewise, or "to so much of District no. 7 as may come within the operations necessary to the prosecution of the Creek war."⁵² Apparently, the original intent of the War Department had been to make him responsible for directing the expedition against the Creeks.⁵³ By the time the atmosphere had cleared, however, General Flournoy had retired, and the 39th had been under orders to join Jackson's forces and to defend New Orleans at the same time. Seemingly, only Jackson's insistence plus his access to the ears of influential persons, notably Governor Blount, and perhaps the preferences of the Colonel and his men kept them in position for the battle of the Horse Shoe.

On December 23, 1813, General Pinckney ordered Colonel Williams to join Jackson, unless he had positive orders from the War Department "to employ your Regiment when raised, on any other expedition you will obey that order notwithstanding the enclosed."⁵⁴ On January 4, 1814, Jackson wrote to Governor Blount:

I hope the order of Genl. Pinckney is so explicit the delays & difficulties with which I have been surrounded will be speedily removed by the promptness of the execution of your orders, and the speedy arrival of my friend Col Williams with his Regt.⁵⁵

Two days later he was "exceedingly pleased with the promptness with which he [Colonel Williams] is disposed to aid in the present campaign, and with his happy anticipation of Genl. Pinckneys order, which before this he will have recd."⁵⁶ Years later, when discussing Jackson's bitter enmity toward him, Williams recalled that he had "risked my commd. & my fortune" by marching to his aid in violation of the orders

⁵¹ Jackson to Blount, Fort Deposit, Nov. 29, 1813, J. S. Bassett (ed.), *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson*, 6 vols. and index (Washington, 1926-1935), I, 362.

⁵² To Gen. Flournoy, Mar. 2, 1814, Military Book, 1813-1814, NA, RG 94.

⁵³ Pinckney to Williams, Milledgeville, Dec. 23, 1813, NA, RG 94.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Jackson to Blount, Ft. Strother, Jan. 4, 1814, Jackson Letters and Orders, D, Jackson Papers.

⁵⁶ Jackson to Hugh L. White, Jan. 6, 1814, Bassett (ed.), *Correspondence*, I, 435.

of the War Department.⁵⁷ But the human mind often is fickle in remembering obligations. As will be seen later, he did not receive the conflicting orders he had in mind until after he had joined Jackson, and the orders were then modified at the General's request.

A letter of January 7 detailed to Colonel Williams the dire need for his troops: "Never were your services more needed than at the present moment. I am almost destitute of an army."⁵⁸ Proof had just been handed to Jackson that Colonel William Lillard's 2nd Regiment, East Tennessee Volunteers, would not remain after their term of enlistment expired on January 14: "I entreated, in the most pressing manner I knew how, the continuation of their services for only 20 days beyond the period of their engagement. This was putting both their sincerity and patriotism to the teste. . . ."⁵⁹ In spite of his pleading, only Captain William Hamilton and two of his men, his father and his nephew, agreed to stay.

According to one account, Colonel Lillard was asked to ascertain the opinions of his men. They insisted upon marching home by the fourteenth or sooner. One captain who prided himself on his straightforward manner of expression said, "I Stated that If we head not bin Decived by hour General Someney times that we wold bin willing to Stay and to Serve good officers." The fact that only three men enrolled for longer service "made the old Vilion Sware outrageous. he said we head acted with great imposition to make amock of him and the rest of the officers; he was greaved to the heart to think we thought nomore of him."⁶⁰ At best, Jackson's position was not enviable.

Meanwhile, General Flournoy was pleading with Governor Blount and General Pinckney to send at least five hundred men for the defense of Mobile; at the same time he directed Colonel Williams to send his recruits with the least possible delay to New Orleans.⁶¹ General Pinckney, however, fully cognizant of Jackson's need, remained firm in his orders to Williams and ordered the recruiting of additional militia.⁶²

⁵⁷ Williams to Martin Van Buren, Mar. 22, 1831, Van Buren Papers (Manuscript Division, Library of Congress), XIII.

⁵⁸ Jackson to Williams, Ft. Strother, Jan. 7, 1814, Jackson Letter Book, D (Jackson Papers), 258.

⁵⁹ Jackson to Blount, Jan. 7, 1814, Bassett (ed.), *Correspondence*, I, 437.

⁶⁰ Mary Hardin McCown (ed.), "The J. Hartsell Memora," *East Tennessee Historical Society's Publications* (Knoxville), No. 12 (1940), 140-41.

⁶¹ Flournoy to Secretary of War, New Orleans, Jan. 1, 1814, NA, RG 94.

⁶² Pinckney to Jackson, Jan. 9, 1814; *ibid.*

On January 12, before these orders arrived, the 39th Regiment marched from Knoxville to meet forces from West (now Middle) Tennessee at Fort Deposit. No provisions had arrived, but military stores had been supplied by Lieutenant Colonel George Washington Sevier. Williams wrote: "My force of about six hundred effective men will add much to the Security of Gen. Jackson's present position."⁶³ Apparently, some artillery was included among the equipment, for on January 18 the quartermaster-general was ordered to provide "four strong horses to hawl a few pieces of artillery belonging to Colo. Williams's Regt."⁶⁴ From Huntsville Williams informed Jackson that of the six hundred men, 180 were armed. The remainder would have to be provided for upon their arrival. Colonel Lillard's conduct was to be deplored: "I am mortified to hear of Col. Lillard's conduct. It is disgraceful in the extreme. A petty coat ought to be presented to him."⁶⁵

By February 4 Colonel Williams received the conflicting orders already mentioned. Much perplexed, he immediately requested General Jackson's advice: "I am at a loss to know what to do. Whether to remain with you where my services are so much needed or proceed to New Orleans."⁶⁶ Naturally, the General's opinion was easily determined: "Your services with your Regt. added to my regular force is all important. . . . I have to request that you remain with me until I hear from Maj Genl. Pinckney."⁶⁷

Posthaste, two communications were forwarded to General Pinckney, the first accompanied by a copy of Jackson's letter to Colonel Williams. In the first the General expressed the belief that with the retention of the 39th Regiment, the Creek War could be concluded quickly enough for the troops to reach Mobile as soon as they could arrive in New Orleans by water. In the second, he added:

I shall be able with Colo. Williams's Regt. the 39th to sweep the Coosa [Coosa] and Cahaba, cross the Coosa at its Eastern Bank and scour the Hickory Ground, form a junction with the Georgians and with your promised aid of supplies in fifteen days thereafter destroy every warrior on the Tallipoose With Colo. Williams's Regt. this can be effected in a short time.⁶⁸

⁶³ Williams to Secretary of War, Knoxville, Jan. 13, 1814, *ibid.*

⁶⁴ Bassett (ed.), *Correspondence*, I, 442n. See also Jackson to Williams, Ft. Strother, Jan. 15, 1814, Jackson Letter Book, E, 15.

⁶⁵ Jan. 22, 1814, Jackson Papers, XVI.

⁶⁶ Williams to Jackson, Feb. 4, 1814, Jackson Letter Book, E, 43.

⁶⁷ Jackson to Williams, Feb. 4, 1814, Jackson Letters and Orders, E, 43.

⁶⁸ Jackson to Pinckney, Feb. 4, 1814, *ibid.*, 45-48; *id.* to *id.*, Fort Strother, Feb. 5, 1814, Bassett (ed.), *Correspondence*, I, 457-58.

To another officer he added: "If he (Colonel Williams) is taken from me my whole prop is gone and I will have to risque my character and the Public Service upon raw & inexperienced troops again—commanded by perhaps raw and inexperienced officers."⁶⁹

While waiting a reply from General Pinckney, Jackson appointed Colonel Williams to serve on a general court martial on February 15 of Captain James Harris, who with three of his fellow captains was to be tried for sedition, mutiny, desertion, and disobedience to orders. The General wrote: "The trial will be important both as it relates to the government & prisoners—and it is necessary that this appointment be filled with talent and experience, that complete justice be done to all."⁷⁰

The circumstances from which these charges resulted seem to have been an outgrowth of the confused military situation of the time, especially as it concerned the militia. These officers and their men had offered themselves for a tour of three months' duty. With such understanding, they had marched under the command of Brigadier-General Isaac Roberts to a point within three miles of Fort Strother. There they remained while Roberts secured Jackson's agreement to the terms of enlistment. When a report was read that the General would receive no one for less than six months, they understood that the choice of enlisting for that length of time or of returning home was left to them. They chose to leave; they were not ordered to march to Fort Strother or to return after they had started; the next news to reach them was "we were reported as deserters."⁷¹ On February 18, 1814, the captains were convicted on charges of mutiny and were sentenced to suspension from military command for twelve months together with the loss of pay due them. The penalties would have been heavier had it not appeared that their superior officer, Brigadier-General Roberts, was largely responsible.⁷²

Before the completion of the trial, on February 17, General Pinckney had complied with Jackson's request that the 39th Regiment remain with him. "Believe me, General," Jackson replied, "that this is

⁶⁹ Jackson to Maj. John Reid, Feb. 8, 1814, Jackson Papers, Second Series, II.

⁷⁰ Jackson to Williams, Feb. 9, 1814, Jackson Letters and Orders, E, 55. See also p. 67.

⁷¹ Bassett (ed.), *Correspondence*, I, 454-56.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 456n.

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By March 14 all was in readiness for the advance. Williams and the 39th were in charge of provisions and quartermaster's stores on board the boats, with instructions to be ready at a moment's notice to take them down the river.⁷⁴ Finally, on the morning of March 18, the fleet started. Three days later, on the evening of March 21, it arrived within two miles of Fort Williams, named for the Colonel. Navigating the Coosa had been extremely difficult, he reported.⁷⁵

Then, on March 27, came the battle of Horse Shoe Bend, or Tohopeka, which destroyed the Creek warriors as an effective resisting force. In his report to Governor Blount, Jackson said:

The regular troops, led on by their intrepid and skillful commander Col. Williams, and by the gallant Major Montgomery were presently in possession of the nearer side of the breast-work; and the militia accompanied them in the charge with a vivacity and firmness which could not have been exceeded and has seldom been equalled by troops of any description.

To these words of commendation he added, "The loss of Col. Williams' reg't of Regulars is seventeen killed and fifty five wounded; three of whom have since died."⁷⁶

In this engagement the 39th Regiment carried a flag made for it by Miss Mary McClung. It is described as being about 24x36 inches in dimensions, of silk, elaborately embroidered. In the upper right hand corner were the stars; in the center was an eagle, erect, wings extended, across his breast a shield of red, white, and blue, and in his talons, six arrows. At the bottom of the banner were a kettle drum with sticks, a cannon mounted on a two-wheeled carriage, a powder keg, and a horn. The figures showed, also, a swab, a rifle, an ax, and a tomahawk, all of the most exquisite workmanship, the colors being especially remarkable for their truth to nature. Sam Houston, who was so severely wounded that recovery seemed impossible, was the bearer.⁷⁷

Evidently the injuries suffered by the regiment were more extensive

⁷³ Pinckney to Secretary of War, Feb. 17, 1814, NA, RG 94; Jackson to Pinckney, Feb. 17, 1814, Bassett (ed.), *Correspondence*, I, 464-65.

⁷⁴ Jackson to Williams, Mar. 14, 1814, Jackson Papers, XVIII.

⁷⁵ Williams to Jackson, Fort Williams, Mar. 22, 1814, *ibid.*

⁷⁶ Jackson to Gov. Blount, Mar. 31, 1814, Bassett (ed.), *Correspondence*, I, 492. See also Jackson to Pinckney, Mar. 28, 1814, *ibid.*, 488-89.

⁷⁷ Nelson, "Williams Family Name," *loc. cit.*

than at first reported. On April 4 Colonel Williams wrote to John Armstrong, secretary of war:

One half of the officers and about one sixth of the troops of the 39th engaged in the battle of Tohopeka on the 27th Ult. are among the killed and wounded. The officers remaining with the regiment fit for duty, are insufficient for ordinary camp duties. I endeavored before the opening of the present campaign to have the vacancies in my regiment filled, but without effect. The appointment of persons qualified for command has been prevented as it is understood by some electing members of Congress from Tennessee. The necessity for officers is so great that the publick service would be promoted even by the appointment of that description of persons who would best answer the purposes of *Gentlemen* at the next polls.⁷⁸

The depletion of the 39th Regiment caused such grave concern that on April 21 Jackson suggested that recruiting for it should be superintended by some field officer and mentioned Colonel Williams for this assignment:

The great popularity of Col Williams in our state would render him, I am sure the most fit person for this business. . . . I know the anxiety he feels to have his Regiment, and as the present reduction of it was principally occasioned by his faithfull services at Tohopeka.⁷⁹

Previously, General Flournoy had sensed the value of Colonel Williams in enlisting men when, asking for his transfer or release, he had recommended the Tennessean as his logical successor to the command of the Seventh District: "Should it become necessary to draw men from Tennessee, Colo. Williams' personal influence would enable him to effect that object with facility."⁸⁰

So, the Creek War ended, General Pinckney ordered the 39th, now under the command of Colonel Thomas H. Benton, to descend the Alabama and to report to General Flournoy at New Orleans, while Colonel Williams returned to Tennessee in the recruiting service. The Colonel feared that unless exertions were used in its behalf, this fighting group might lose its existence under the consolidation act. Still solicitous for the welfare of those men who had served him well, he asked that they be marched from the southwestern frontier before the "sickly" or the "fatal" season came to endanger their health.⁸¹

⁷⁸ NA, RG 94.

⁷⁹ Jackson to Pinckney, On the March, Apr. 21, 1814, Bassett (ed.), *Correspondence*, I, 505.

⁸⁰ Flournoy to Secretary of War, Mar. 21, 1814, NA, RG 94.

⁸¹ Williams to Flournoy, May 2, 1814, Jackson Papers, XX. For Jackson's treatment of Benton, who succeeded Williams in command of the 39th, see William N. Chambers, "Thwarted Warrior: The Last Years of Thomas Hart Benton in Tennessee, 1812-1815," *East Tennessee Historical Society's Publications*, No. 22 (1950), 19-44.

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Not content with handling important matters from a distance, Colonel Williams went to Washington to solicit funds for recruiting and also clothing and arms for equipping his regiment. These latter he asked to have sent by wagon from Harper's Ferry instead of by boat down the Ohio. A notation on the back of his letter of request states he was furnished with \$20,000.⁸²

During the following two months, results were far short of those anticipated. In July he said that unless more success attended the efforts of his recruiting officers, the 39th would not have a hundred men in it, and it might become a regiment of officers without men to command. By August conditions had not changed. He had been furnished by the General Government with about \$50,000 for bounties & premiums and \$5,000 for contingencies. I have also recd, 1,000 stands of arms; and 500 suits of Infantry clothing is now on the road from Baltimore to this place. Nothing is wanting but soldiers to make my command in your division of the army a respectable one.

He expressed the hope that the soldiers who re-enlisted might be allowed a furlough, for they would be helpful in interesting others. He planned a tour of certain counties of East Tennessee in the interests of recruiting and then a trip across the mountains for a few days to see his father who was seriously ill.⁸³

That very equipment which he now held in custody for his regiment was destined to cause much bitterness. On September 26 General Nathaniel Taylor of the militia advised Colonel Williams that small arms and accoutrements were not available for the men under his command; General Jackson had ordered him to march without delay and to be equipped for service. To wait until weapons could be collected might prove fatal to the interests of the United States; to march without arms might prove equally injurious to its cause. To guard against either contingency he asked "the favor of you to deliver me five hundred stands of the arms which I am informed you have in your possession."⁸⁴

But those weapons were the property of the War Department, issued to Williams in trust for the use of the regulars. The Colonel's decision was prompt and decisive: "It is not in my power to furnish the militia under your command with arms."⁸⁵

⁸² Williams to Secretary of War, Washington, June 2, 1814, NA, RG 94.

⁸³ Williams to Jackson, Knoxville, July 15, Aug. 21, 1814, Jackson Papers, XXI, XXII.

⁸⁴ Copy, Jackson Papers, XXIV.

⁸⁵ Williams to Taylor, Sept. 26, 1814, copy, *ibid.*

Undaunted, General Taylor sent a second message on the same day, this one a demand:

I regret, Sir, that you do not view the Subject in the same point of light with myself. As I cannot perform the duty assigned to me without possession of the arms in question, it subjects me to the necessity of making a peremptory demand of them for the Services of the United States.

General Taylor, however, had met a determined will:

You have been already informed that it is not in my power to part from the arms in my possession. I am under the necessity of refusing positively a Compliance with your order. I deem it unnecessary at this time to investigate your authority to give me an order.⁸⁶

All this was reported to General Jackson. John S. Bassett, the Jacksonian biographer, says this incident marked the beginning of the enmity between Williams and the man who had pled for his assistance at the battle of the Horse Shoe.⁸⁷ Certain it is that on October 17 Jackson addressed a severely critical letter to Colonel Williams:

By express from Genl. Taylor, I have recd. a copy of a correspondence between him and yourself, relative to the arms required of you. For what purpose this communication is forwarded I cannot say; no charges or specifications have accompanied it. It may be intended by the Genl. as a foundation of your arrest.

I regret that you did not furnish him all the arms that could be spared from the Deposit in your hands. The moment he was ordered into the service of the United States, he had a right to command any officer of lower grade. And the want of arms and the urgency of the occasion, would no doubt justify the order; there being no possibility of arming his men, after leaving Knoxville until they passed through the country of the enemy. The Slow progress making in recruiting in Tennessee from late reports is an evidence that at most one half of these arms would have been fully adequate for the recruits of your regiment, until a supply could have been ordered on, and reached you

I have deemed it necessary to make this communication to you as well to prepare you for an event which must happen, if insisted on by Genl. Taylor, as to guard you against the repetition of an act which might prove so injurious to the safety of the country. This is not a time to investigate nice military questions of rank. It is the duty of all officers even to recede a little from their own rights where a public benefit would ensue.⁸⁸

In the meantime, before the receipt of this communication, Colonel Williams had ordered Colonel Benton to reorganize the companies of the 39th Infantry, to select officers to command them, and to send the

⁸⁶ Taylor to Williams, Sept. 26, 1814; Williams to Taylor, Sept. 26, 1814, copies, *ibid.*

⁸⁷ Bassett (ed.), *Correspondence*, II, 88n.

⁸⁸ Jackson to Williams, Mobile, Oct. 17, 1814, Jackson Letter Book, H, 96-97.

supernumerary officers to Tennessee on recruiting service. This plan was to be continued until all the soldiers enlisted for one year were discharged. A report of this order was forwarded to Jackson, together with the information that on the following Tuesday one company of the regiment would march from Knoxville to join his forces. Recruiting still was slow, but as soon as 400 or 500 men had been secured, Colonel Williams planned to leave that work to other officers and rejoin the army himself.⁸⁹

Then arrived the General's letter of censure and rebuke. Secure in the conviction that he had acted according to military regulations, Williams immediately wrote a long and complete defense of his refusal to surrender the supplies. He expressed regret and astonishment at the reprimand. General Taylor had no authority to demand the arms, he maintained. The old question of rank had arisen again, and he assumed that Taylor had no more right as a militia general to take the arms than the clothing of the regulars:

In either case, I should have been accountable to the Government, and bound to have paid the amount, out of my private funds I am assured that Genl. Taylors correspondence with me, was not commenced, with an expectation of promoting the public service. . . . And it would afford me infinite satisfaction to deliver over all the public stores in my possession to promote the service, if I had a legal order to that effect. But I never will involve myself in ruin by squandering the public stores confided to my care. And I will resist every attempt to make me responsible for others faults. I am always ready and willing to have every act, both of my civil, and military life, investigated. In the exercise of your discretion you seem to think these are sufficient grounds for my arrest. I shall therefore hold myself in readiness to receive your order of arrest, And to repair without delay to such place as may be appointed for my trial.⁹⁰

No arrest took place. On the same day Colonel Williams addressed an inquiry to the Secretary of War, asking whether a brigadier-general of militia could command him when they were not acting together in the same service. He explained that an officer of that rank had demanded his arms and that he would not comply unless instructed to do so.⁹¹

Easy it is to understand that never again could these two be other than enemies. Williams' honesty and loyalty had been questioned; on

⁸⁹ Williams to Benton, Knoxville, Oct. 22, 1814; Williams to Jackson, Oct. 23, 1814, Jackson Papers, XXIV.

⁹⁰ Williams to Jackson, Knoxville, Nov. 1, 1814, Bassett (ed.), *Correspondence*, II, 88-89.

⁹¹ NA, RG 94.

the other hand, the authority of the General had been challenged—Williams' letter of defense could scarcely have been construed otherwise. Though the full intensity of their enmity was not to flame until several years later, it rankled and smoldered from this time forward. That they were on amicable terms after their collaboration at Horse Shoe Bend is indicated by a long and friendly letter of Jackson's in May, 1814, concerning the provisions which he thought should be included in a treaty with the Creeks and the arguments used with the Cherokees and the Chickasaws to secure a cession of all their claims north and east of the Tennessee River. "I will be happy to hear from you when you reach the city," he concluded, "with a tender of my respects to your lady and best wishes to yourself."⁹² But much water can flow under a bridge in six months, and friendliness can turn to enmity in even less time.

The active military career of Colonel Williams was drawing to a close, however, and on June 15, 1815, he was honorably discharged.⁹³ In July he wrote to the Secretary of War and enclosed orders from the Adjutant General's Office, Headquarters Division of the South, showing that his troops of the 39th Regiment had been ordered and would march in a few days to Fort Deposit, on the Tennessee. He reported a quantity of goods, clothes, arms, etc.: "General Jackson declines giving any order relative to military stores. . . . As soon as the troops march from this place I shall consider myself out of service."⁹⁴ Meanwhile, Colonel Williams' undiminished popularity in East Tennessee led the Hawkins County grand jury to propose him as the next governor of Tennessee.⁹⁵

Although his military career had ended, other spheres of activity were awaiting him. On October 10, 1815, he was elected to fill the vacancy in the United States Senate caused by the resignation of George W. Campbell. On December 4 he was sworn in and took his seat. Subsequently, he was elected for the full term of six years, beginning March 4, 1817,⁹⁶ which meant that for seven years and five months, until March 3, 1823, he served as a senator from Tennessee.

⁹² Jackson to Williams, Nashville, May 26, 1814, Monroe Papers (Manuscript Division, Library of Congress), Writings to Monroe, XIV, No. 1763.

⁹³ Heitman, *Historical Register*, 1041.

⁹⁴ July 12, 1815, NA, RG 94.

⁹⁵ *Nashville Clarion and Tennessee Gazette*, Nov. 1, 1814.

⁹⁶ *Biographical Directory*, 114; *Nashville Clarion and Tennessee Gazette*, Oct. 14, 1817.

There his ability was quickly recognized. Almost immediately he was placed on the Committee on the President's Message, and soon thereafter on the Committee for Military Affairs, of which he was chairman during most of his term in the Senate. In this capacity, he and the Committee were confronted by a resolution from the Senate which directed them to inquire into the expediency of providing by law for the attendance of witnesses at court martial trials, a measure favored by the Secretary of War. Other problems considered were the reorganization of the medical staff of the army and a more effective organization of the Military Academy.⁹⁷ John Quincy Adams thought that the reduction of the army was the most important reform effected during this period. This reduction, together with all other important changes of organization, was based upon plans furnished by Generals Jacob Brown and Winfield Scott, but it was carried through Congress chiefly by the agency of John Williams of Tennessee.⁹⁸

While in the Senate, he opposed the appointment by the federal government of a committee to fix the boundary line between Kentucky and Tennessee, believing that these states should settle this dispute for themselves, which proved to be the procedure followed. On April 3, 1816, he voted for the United States Bank Bill and during the same year in favor of a protective tariff. In 1820 he cast his vote for the Missouri Compromise.⁹⁹

He never forgot nor neglected, however, those projects and developments of immediate moment to the people of his own state. Before his election to Congress, he had been actively interested in the Byers-Russell Turnpike Company and its construction of a road to Georgia by way of Unaka Mountain. Late in 1815 he reported that this road was nearly completed and lacked only the authorization of the federal government to be put into operation.¹⁰⁰

In 1816 he and Governor Joseph McMinn served as commissioners for Tennessee, with Colonel Return J. Meigs acting on behalf of the United States, in negotiations with the Cherokees for purchase of the Indian claims on the north side of the Tennessee and west of a line

⁹⁷ Nelson, "Williams Family Name," *loc. cit.*; Secretary of War (J. C. Calhoun) to Williams, Chairman of Military Affairs Committee, Feb. 8, 1817, Jan. 16, Feb. 3, 1818, Jan. 19, 1819 (Military Book, 1818-1820, p. 231), NA, RG 94.

⁹⁸ Charles Francis Adams (ed.), *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams* (Philadelphia, 1874-77), VII, 446-47.

⁹⁹ *Knoxville Register*, 1815-1823, *passim*.

¹⁰⁰ Williams to Secretary of War, Washington, Dec. 27, 1815, NA, RG 94.

from the eastern boundary of Madison County (of Mississippi Territory) to the Tennessee Islands on the Coosa. On July 20 they assembled with the chiefs at the agency, where talks continued until August 2, when they were precipitately broken off. Various reasons were assigned by the commissioners. Williams blamed the influence of certain white men who had identified themselves with the Indians and had written to the War Department concerning the motives of the commissioners. He asked that copies of these communications be sent to Governor McMinn.¹⁰¹ Meigs said the Indians refused the price offered; it was not in his power to increase it, "and Governor McMinn and Colonel Williams would not take on themselves the responsibility of offering more." Governor McMinn reported to the Secretary of War that "your instructions were read and explained, and the sum total ordered to be given was distinctly proposed by Colonel Williams in the precise manner contained in your directions before referred to."¹⁰²

When early in 1819 a treaty which supplemented one negotiated by Jackson and McMinn in 1817 finally was signed, the Indians ceded all claims to territory north of the Tennessee and to a valuable tract between the Little Tennessee and the Hiwassee within the state of Tennessee as well as to claims in North Carolina and a considerable tract in Georgia. After this transaction, as Colonel Williams saw the situation, the land between the Little Tennessee and the Hiwassee now unquestionably belonged to the state of Tennessee, as originally intended by the Compact of 1806. It might well take the place of the patrimony—lands or other natural assets—which many other states had received at their formation. Tennessee possessed no such legacy; as a result internal improvements had been neglected. Now by the acquisition of this territory, the federal government offered the state the means for creating funds for such purposes. According to his plan, this area would be surveyed into sections, half-sections, and quarter-sections, designated as first, second, third, or fourth-rate land and

¹⁰¹ *Knoxville Register*, Aug. 10, 1816; Williams to Secretary of War Crawford, Knoxville, Aug. 13, 1816, NA, RG 94.

¹⁰² Meigs to Crawford, Cherokee Agency, Aug. 19, 1816, *American State Papers, Indian Affairs*, 2 vols. (Washington, 1832-1834), II, 113-14; McMinn to Crawford, Knoxville, Oct. 25, 1816, *ibid.*, 115. Meanwhile, Jackson, David Merriwether, and Jesse Franklin had obtained a Cherokee cession of some land south of the Tennessee, and the next year Jackson, McMinn, and Merriwether obtained additional cessions which included the Sequatchie Valley in Tennessee. W. R. Garrett and A. V. Goodpasture, *History of Tennessee* (Nashville, 1905), 135.

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would be so noted on a map showing water courses and mill seats, also. The legislature then would fix a minimum price for each tract and offer it for sale. Such procedure would prevent individuals from purchasing land worth \$20 per acre for \$2.00. If sold under proper regulations, this land would net the state at least \$2,000,000, which properly invested in bank stock at the usual rate would yield \$160,000 annually. Appropriated to the improvement of the leading roads and the cleaning out of the river courses, such income would be of immense consequence to all the people of the state. Should the opportunity be neglected, then Tennessee must rely on direct taxation not only for the expenses of the state government but for improvements as well. Many other states, by the prudent handling of resources had provided themselves with turnpikes, had improved the navigation of rivers, and had given education to their poor children. Tennessee, he said, should imitate them. From the time of his entering politics, he had kept this plan in mind. Now its realization seemed possible.¹⁰³

Then began the series of events which at their conclusion were destined to remove Colonel Williams from the scene of national politics—the controversy with Spain over the southeastern boundary, the repercussions of Jackson's campaign against the Seminoles, with his precipitate invasion of Spanish territory and seizing of Pensacola. The entire proceedings have been the subject of many investigations, much criticism, and many alibis. Suffice it to say here that Colonel Williams was among those who did not approve, and to criticize Old Hickory was not the way to hold his friendship.

In 1819 Jackson accused Colonel Williams of spreading false information damaging to his reputation on two matters: the report, which apparently was quite widespread,¹⁰⁴ that Jackson had invested in real estate in Pensacola and then, as he put it, "in order to enhance the vullue of my property . . . had marched my army there and seized the place"; and the story that Jackson had "made the reservation of the salt lick in the chickasaw treaty for myself, and that the ink had not dried on the treaty before I had obtained a lease for it."¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ Williams to Editors, Washington, Mar. 3, 1819, *Knoxville Register*, June 24, 1825 (republished).

¹⁰⁴ Adams (ed.), *Memoirs*, IV, 90ff.

¹⁰⁵ Jackson to William Williams, Hermitage, Sept. 25, 1819, Bassett (ed.), *Correspondence*, II, 430-31.

That Jackson attempted to build up some parallel between his campaign and that led by Colonel Williams in 1812, or that he was trying to secure evidence damaging to Williams is apparent from letters written at this time to members of the former Mounted Volunteers. He sought replies to such questions as: Were you an officer? Who appointed the officers? Was the group truly voluntary? Did you have any engagements with the Indians and the Negroes? Were the company and its actions approved by the general government? Were the men paid for their services?¹⁰⁶

Colonel John Brown attempted to effect a reconciliation between the two, his proposal being that they meet in a friendly manner, letting their quarrel drop without explanations by either. Jackson's reply was a flat no, unless

Colo. Williams will say to me Senatorial priviledges aside, we will soon put an end to our dispute[.] I will place before him the injuries he has attempted to heap upon me, and the attonement necessary to [be] made, provided he admits the facts, or substantiating them. Should he refuse to do this I may yet a little be compelled to bear with the injury untill I can with honor retire to private life and lay down my commission. Then having all the rights of a citizen, I Can protect my reputation without the *cry of military usurpation.*¹⁰⁷

Dr. J. G. Bronaugh, then in Washington, attempted, at Jackson's request, to secure information for the General. "In gratitude," Jackson wrote,

I sincerely thank you for the Trouble you have taken to discover the declarations, and slander of that subtle fiend Colo. Williams . . . when he would attempt to insinuate any thing relative to my private and moral charector or any particular act of mine as a military man I will punish him. he has I know, in dark innuendoes and secrete and confidential information endeavored to injure me in congress.

The reason he had asked Dr. Bronaugh to secure this information was to obtain proof, "believing from what I know of him that he would deny anything to shield himself from punishment or danger."¹⁰⁸

A far cry from the days preceding Horse Shoe Bend! The sources of Dr. Bronaugh's information remain anonymous. According to John Quincy Adams, who was in a position to know the sentiments of official Washington, Jackson's bitterest critics were John C. Calhoun,

¹⁰⁶ P. M. Miller to Jackson, Sept. 22, 1819, *American State Papers, Military Affairs*, 7 vols. (Washington, 1832-1861), I, 769.

¹⁰⁷ Jackson to Col. John Brown, Oct. 8, 1819, Bassett (ed.), *Correspondence*, II, 437-38.

¹⁰⁸ Jackson to Bronaugh, Hermitage, Feb. 12, 1820, *ibid.*, III, 13.

William H. Crawford, William Wirt, and John Forsyth, not John Williams:

Crawford has been a worm preying upon the vitals of the administration within its own body. He was the instigator and animating spirit of the whole movement, both in Congress and at Richmond, against Jackson and the Administration. In all the vicissitudes of the Spanish negotiation, wherever there has been difficulty or prospect of failure he has been felt when he could not be seen. . . .¹⁰⁹

That Colonel Williams was an active partisan of William Crawford, there can be no question, but that he stooped to slanderous falsehood rests only upon the suspicions of Andrew Jackson.

Williams carried his opposition to the Spanish negotiations to its logical conclusion and was one of four senators to vote against the ratification of the treaty with Spain in 1820-1821, as John Quincy Adams said, "from party impulses, connected with hatred of General Jackson. . . ."¹¹⁰

When in 1823 John McNairy sought to act as mediator in the feud, Jackson listed his reasons for his enmity toward Colonel Williams. They had parted friends at Fort Jackson, he said, and had not met since. He obtained an order from General Pinckney for Williams to return to Knoxville to superintend recruiting for the 39th Regiment. In 1814, upon reaching Mobile, he was informed through the *Knoxville Gazette* that he was to be arrested upon charges "emanating as private advice detailed from Col. Williams and the officers of his Regt." In 1815, at New Orleans, a friend had advised him that charges had been sent or signed by all the officers of the 39th. Upon returning to Nashville, he met Hugh L. White, who assured him that Williams could not be guilty of the acts with which Jackson charged him. Jackson replied that he would be pleased to have an interview with Williams in Knoxville as he passed through that city on the way to Washington. He had remained there for two or three days and was informed that Williams came there after his arrival but left immediately "for a part of the country he was not in the habit of visiting." Jackson was confined by sickness, but Williams had not called to see him.

These explanations are followed by three later charges: Williams' expressions on the Seminole question; his false assertions to members of Congress "that I had no standing in my own state"; the charges of

¹⁰⁹ Adams (ed.), *Memoirs*, V, 315.

¹¹⁰ Thomas H. Benton, *Thirty Years' View*, 2 vols. (New York, 1854-1856), I, 17; Adams (ed.), *Memoirs*, V, 285-86.

speculation in Florida land and the salt works "have convinced me that he is amongst the most unprincipled men I ever knew." So, the General concluded, there could be no reconciliation until Williams made personal advance for it,¹¹¹ on terms, one may presume, stated earlier to Colonel Brown. No reference is made to Williams' refusal to relinquish the military stores to General Taylor nor to the rebuff administered to Jackson at that time.

Throughout this bitter controversy, however, Senator Williams continued to remember the folks back home and to keep their welfare constantly in mind. In 1819 the trustees of the Baptist society notified the public that he had generously given a parcel of land as the site for a meeting house. When, by mistake, settlers were ordered off the public land near Highwassee (Hiwassee), he immediately laid the matter before the Secretary of War.¹¹² Then, early in 1823, he introduced into the Senate a resolution authorizing Tennessee to sell her vacant lands north and east of the reservation line for such price as the legislature might deem expedient. A bill with such provisions passed the Senate on February 5, 1823. By the Compact of 1806, which had remained in force, the state was prohibited from selling land at less than the minimum price set for that sold by the United States government. By this revision, however, many small pieces which otherwise would have remained vacant might be disposed of for 50, 25, or even 12½ cents per acre, the amount which eventually became the sales price. Such sales would add to the revenues of the state.¹¹³ One editor estimated that this law would produce no less than \$210,000 from the Hiwassee district alone.¹¹⁴

Thus, one of his last official acts in Congress was to sponsor a bill which consummated a plan held in mind from the date of the ratification of the Indian treaty in 1819. Also, during that last year of service, a bill was reported from the Senate Military Affairs Committee providing for the establishment of a national armory on the western waters, the location to be determined by a skilled engineer. Williams wrote to Governor William Carroll, expressing the hope that the citizens of

¹¹¹ Jackson to John McNairy, Sept. 6, 1823, Bassett (ed.), *Correspondence*, III, 207-208.

¹¹² *Knoxville Register*, April 28, 1818; *Nashville Clarion and Tennessee Gazette*, Feb. 1, 1820.

¹¹³ *Nashville Constitutional Advocate*, Jan. 14, 1823; Williams to the Editors, Feb. 5, 1823, *Knoxville Register*, Feb. 21, 1823.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, Apr. 18, 1823.

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Correspondence, III,
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to the Editors, Feb. 5,

Tennessee would call to the Executive's attention the suitable sites in their state: "Perhaps no state in the union contains more situations for water power than Tennessee—In East Tennessee they are to be found in every county." He named Bell's works on the Big Harpeth; Stone Fort on Duck River; the iron works near Sparta—all "are admirable situations for a national armory."¹¹⁵ Here he was the prophet, foreseeing the value of national locations which were to be capitalized upon a hundred years later.

After the adjournment of the Seventeenth Congress, Colonel Williams returned to his home state to campaign for re-election with powerful forces aligned against him. He had supported William H. Crawford and opposed the ascendant star of the Hero of New Orleans. Already, in 1822, the Tennessee legislature had nominated Jackson for the presidency at a meeting Jackson failed to attend because he had been forewarned of the resolution, and he did not wish to be placed in the position of seeking the honor, "never having been a applicant for any office I have filled. . . ."¹¹⁶ In Nashville three not disinterested friends, John Henry Eaton, John Overton, and William B. Lewis, constituted themselves a triumvirate for the promotion of Jackson's political fortunes. They agreed that they dared not permit the re-election to the Senate of so powerful an enemy of their favorite as Colonel Williams was.

But who could defeat him? According to established precedent, one senator was elected from East Tennessee and one from the West.¹¹⁷ Candidates discussed in addition to Colonel Williams were W. G. Blount and John Rhea. Some Jackson supporters believed that the former was the stronger and the candidate for them to endorse:

To be or not to be, is the awfull struggle with the colo, and not *to be*, is what I'm for. Things seemed to have been, under the guidance of heaven, all going on smoothly, for the defeat of the *horse shoe* Colo. —until the ancient and late hon. Mr Rhea declined a reelection in his district. . . .¹¹⁸

With that turn of affairs, more maneuvering was necessary. Apparently, many of Jackson's supporters desired only a clear statement

¹¹⁵ Williams to Carroll, Washington, Feb. 1, 1823, *Knoxville Register*, Feb. 28, 1823.

¹¹⁶ Jackson to Andrew J. Donelson, Aug. 6, 1822, Bassett (ed.), *Correspondence*, III, 173.

¹¹⁷ *Niles' Weekly Register* (Baltimore, 1811-1849), Oct. 25, 1823.

¹¹⁸ Gen. Richard G. Dunlap to Jackson, Knoxville, July 2, 1823, Bassett (ed.), *Correspondence*, III, 200.

from Williams that he would endorse the General for the presidency, but any such assurance he refused to give. Two friends wrote to Jackson: "In matters of election we well know from experience, that a luke warm supporter will do more mischief than an open enemy, and that you shall ever receive the hearty and open support of this *man* is what we cannot believe[.]"¹¹⁹

As election time approached, indications concerning its probable outcome were not too encouraging for the partisans of the man who "never sought an office." Less than a week before the meeting, P. M. Miller and John Rhea still were being discussed as candidates opposing Colonel Williams.¹²⁰ Neither of these, Jackson's proponents feared, could accomplish his defeat. In this emergency but one course remained—the General himself must enter the contest. In explaining the situation, Jackson wrote: "it was thought expedient by my friends that my name should be brought out. . . . every intrigue that could exist, and indeed corruption was resorted to. my name was brought forward 4 days before the election. . . ." ¹²¹

On October 1, when the legislature met in the Representatives' Hall, the names of only two candidates were placed in nomination: "Hon. John Williams, and Gen. Andrew Jackson." An attempt was made by the senate to delay the election from Wednesday until Friday at two o'clock, but the house rejected the proposal. When the votes were tallied, Jackson had won by ten, the count being, Williams, 25 and Jackson, 35.¹²² For the first time, the tradition of choosing the senators from the two divisions of the state had been disregarded. On no similar occasion in the history of Tennessee had more interest been excited. According to the editor of a Knoxville paper, "The friends of each contended with much solicitude for their favorite candidate, though all was conducted in harmony." One might well place a question mark after this concluding statement, for at this time certainly harmony could never exist where Jackson and Williams were concerned: "He is with all his *fury* decidedly the most cunning man I have ever encountered. I speak from *experience* as you all will before the contest is over

¹¹⁹ William Brady and T. Williamson to Jackson, Sept. 20, 1823, *ibid.*, 209-10.

¹²⁰ *Nashville Constitutional Advocate*, Sept. 27, 1823.

¹²¹ *Knoxville Register*, Oct. 3, 1823. See also Jackson to Gen. John Coffee, Oct. 5, 1823, Bassett (ed.), *Correspondence*, III, 210-11.

¹²² *Knoxville Register*, Oct. 10, 1823; Extract from the House of Representatives of Tennessee Legislature, Oct. 1, 1823, *Nashville Constitutional Advocate*, Oct. 4, 1823.

in the H. of Repr.," Williams warned Martin Van Buren, then in Congress.¹²³

One recent student of Tennessee politics during this period suggests that Pleasant M. Miller, who aspired to replace Williams in the Senate, was his original and scheming opponent. To further his ambitions, he aligned himself with the Overton-Blount faction, which sponsored the entire Jackson presidential boom for the personal aggrandisement of John Overton, John Eaton, and Major William B. Lewis. Jackson's nomination for the presidency by the Tennessee legislature in 1822, he says, was the work of Pleasant Miller, John Overton, and Felix Grundy, none of whom preferred Jackson or thought he had a chance to become a major contender.

By the time of the senatorial election in 1823, the supporters of Miller realized that he could count too many personal enemies to defeat Williams. Neither could Rhea muster the necessary votes. In this dilemma, Eaton and Lewis had Jackson's name placed before the legislature as the only hope of furthering their own ambitions. Overton and Grundy by this time, somewhat appalled by the upsurge of Jackson's presidential stock outside of Tennessee and dismayed at his emerging social philosophy, actually sought to kill his presidential candidacy by the re-election of Williams. However, the boom they had helped to generate now was beyond their control; unintentionally, they had aided Andrew Jackson on his way to the Senate and eventually to the White House.¹²⁴

Though defeated for the Senate, Colonel Williams' political activities were not concluded. In 1825 he became a candidate from Knox County for the state senate, for which position he was defeated by James Anderson, 982 to 931.¹²⁵ Then, in November, came recognition for his services and ability in his appointment by President John Quincy Adams as chargé d'affaires to the Federation of Central America, with headquarters in Guatemala. According to his instructions,

Our relations with the Republic have been at once friendly and flattering to the United States. One of its Provinces, you are aware, offered to unite itself to this Confederacy. We wish to give extension and strength to these relations, and great reliance would be placed on your

¹²³ *Knoxville Register*, Oct. 10, 1823; Williams to Van Buren, Nov. 25, 1824, Van Buren Papers, IV.

¹²⁴ Charles Grier Sellers, Jr., "Jackson Men with Feet of Clay," *American Historical Review* (New York), LXII (Apr., 1957), 537-51.

¹²⁵ *Knoxville Register*, Apr. 15, Aug. 5, 1825.

zeal, discretion and patriotism, in accomplishing that object, if you should see fit to accept the appointment. . . . Happy to be the organ of communicating this distinguished proof of the President's confidence to you.¹²⁶

Replying, Colonel Williams accepted the mission and promised to start for Washington early in December. Following his arrival, he was commissioned on December 29, 1825, and served until December 1, 1826.¹²⁷ Before this assignment he again was being mentioned in the Winchester and Sparta newspapers as a probable candidate for governor: "Whether he will become a candidate on his return or not, we are not authorized to say,"¹²⁸ was one editor's conclusion.

On February 10, 1826, the Chargé was instructed to proceed from Norfolk on the U. S. corvette *John Adams*. Upon arrival at his post, he was first to obtain an exchange of the ratifications of the Treaty of Peace, Amity, Commerce and Navigation, which had been concluded on December 5, 1825. Also, the idea of a canal across Nicaragua had been presented by Antonio José Canaz, envoy extraordinary from the United Provinces of the Centre of America, who had negotiated the treaty. The Chargé was instructed to ascertain if accurate surveys had been made and to determine the existing facilities for such a waterway. In addition to these responsibilities, he was to obtain all possible information concerning Guatemala, its physical conditions, boundaries, government, relations with other powers, and trade advantages.¹²⁹

Remuneration was fixed at \$4,500, an outfit equal to a year's salary, and a quarter salary for his return. On March 10 the envoy drew upon the Secretary of State for \$1,125, in full for his second quarter's salary. Traveling by way of Havana, Cuba, which he had reached by April 10, he arrived at his post of duty on May 2, where he was introduced to Mr. Sosa, secretary of foreign affairs, who presented him to President Manuel José Arce. His first official business concerned the ratification of the December treaty. Because of the requirement by the constitution that both houses of Congress approve such ratifications, many circumstances brought delays, so that the final exchange was not effected until August 2.¹³⁰

¹²⁶ Henry Clay, Secretary of State, to Williams, Nov. 10, 1825, Records of the Department of State, NA, RG 59.

¹²⁷ Williams to Henry Clay, Nov. 25, 1825, *ibid.*; *Biographical Directory*, 2019.

¹²⁸ *Nashville Whig*, Dec. 26, 1825.

¹²⁹ Clay to Williams, Feb. 10, 1826, NA, RG 59.

¹³⁰ Clay to Williams, Feb. 11, 1826; Williams to Clay, Mar. 10, Apr. 10 (Havana), Aug. 3 (Guatemala), 1826, *ibid.*

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Before that date the Chargé already was thinking nostalgically of home and family. Writing to Secretary of State Henry Clay, he requested that an order be issued for a ship of the West Indian squadron to take him on board at Amoa (Omoa) during the coming winter.¹³¹

In the meantime, during the remainder of his sojourn in Guatemala he busied himself with other phases of his instructions. He reported that a movement had been initiated for settling the disputed boundary with Mexico; that the objectionable tariff passed earlier in the year had been suspended, and in all probability would be revised when Congress met again;¹³² that he had made suggestions for the reform of the civil code, including the introduction of the writ of *habeas corpus*, trial by jury, and Livingston's Louisiana Code. The failure of the British loan might lead the Guatemalans to banking, he thought, and he suggested that they adopt a national system rather than allow the creation of individual or local banks. Whenever feasible, he took excursions throughout the country to learn about its problems and assets first hand. Also, the possibilities of the canal were not neglected. Even a minor uprising, which allowed President Arce to consolidate his power and for the time being to become virtually a dictator, did not prevent the Chargé from taking a six-day trip through the country for a last survey of its resources.¹³³

Colonel Williams arrived at Pensacola on or about January 6, 1827, and reached his home near Knoxville in February. Upon his return the citizens of that city, "wishing to testify their estimation of his public services on his last mission, their respect for him as a private citizen and to congratulate him on a safe return home," invited him to "partake of dinner" at the home of Captain Boyd. The company sat down to an "elegant and sumptuous dinner at about 3 o'clock," after which many toasts were drunk.¹³⁴

According to family tradition, during his absence his wife, with the help of the Negroes, burned bricks and built a house on the Dandridge Pike, about two miles from Knoxville. She had not written of

¹³¹ Aug. 4, 1826, *ibid.*

¹³² Williams to Clay and to Poinsett, Aug. 4, 1826, *ibid.*

¹³³ Williams to Clay, Aug. 23, Nov. 24, 1826, *ibid.*; Adams (ed.), *Memoirs*, VII, 144-45.

¹³⁴ Williams to Clay, Jan. 6, 1827, NA, RG 59; *Knoxville Register*, Feb. 7, 14, 1827.

the change, and when he arrived, he failed to recognize his own home. There was considerable amusement at his expense, it seems, when all was explained.¹³⁵

Having resigned his position in national affairs, he plunged almost immediately into state politics. In April he announced his candidacy for senator from Knox and Anderson counties,¹³⁶ thus precipitating one of the bitterest political campaigns in the history of the state. From the date of his announced candidacy until the election in August, vitriolic attacks against him were constant. The *Knoxville Register* violently opposed him. He was criticized because, it was said, he would not promote Jackson's candidacy for the presidency—he was an Adams and Clay man, favorable to a national bank. The newspaper diatribes, anonymous for the most part, were unrestrained and exceedingly bitter.¹³⁷

Even Hugh Lawson White, Williams' brother-in-law, entered the fight in favor of his opponent, James Anderson, who had defeated him in 1825. One reason, at least, for White's attitude was the Colonel's advocacy of a national bank. White complained to Jackson: "Col: Williams is pouring out all his wrath upon me, in public and private speeches. For these things I care not. He is a mean politician who can get no man to lye upon him."¹³⁸

When the votes were counted, the defeat of 1825 had been avenged, for the final tally showed Williams the victor by 1585 to Anderson's 1216.¹³⁹ The *National Intelligencer* advised:

We have the pleasure to state that Col. John Williams, our late minister to Guatemala, has been elected to the State Senate by a handsome majority, after a violent contest. We mention this fact with satisfaction, because a person at a distance from the scene can hardly imagine the violence and bitterness with which a prominent citizen is persecuted in that State who dares to oppose the predominant feeling there on the subject of Presidential candidates; and it has been Col. Williams' fortune to be opposed to the popular current in Tennessee, having been, at the last election, in favor of Mr. Crawford, and always decidedly adverse to the election of General Jackson to the Presidency.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁵ Nelson, "Williams Family Name," *loc. cit.* This building is now a part of the State School for the Deaf, Negro Division.

¹³⁶ *Knoxville Register*, Apr. 11, 1827.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, Apr. 11, to Aug. 2, 1827, *passim*.

¹³⁸ White to Jackson, June 19, 1827, Bassett (ed.), *Correspondence*, III, 365.

¹³⁹ *Knoxville Register*, Aug. 9, 1827.

¹⁴⁰ Reprinted in *ibid.*, Sept. 5, 1827.

While in the state senate Williams again aroused the anger of the Jacksonians by opposing a resolution introduced by Aaron V. Brown which advocated an amendment to the United States Constitution giving the election of the President directly to the people. Such an amendment, Brown contended, would prevent the consummation of any more corrupt bargains such as the one he claimed had been concluded between John Quincy Adams and Henry Clay by which Andrew Jackson had been denied his rightful election to the presidency in 1825. In his reply Williams insisted that there was no proof that any corrupt arrangement had existed between Adams and Clay. When the resolution came to a vote, Williams cast one of the two votes which were recorded against it in the senate.

Colonel Williams quickly impressed his fellow legislators in other ways. He was appointed a representative from the senate on a joint committee to draft rules for the transaction of business and for the regulation of intercourse between the two branches of the legislature. Later, he was appointed to the Committee of Enrolled Bills and added to the Committee on Internal Improvements.¹⁴¹

During the session he introduced a number of bills: to amend an act concerning old titles to land and the limitations of actions arising therefrom; to provide for the relief of female debtors; upon the petition of citizens of Anderson County, to construct a turnpike from Martin's in Walnut Cove to the Kentucky line; also, upon the petition of citizens of Knox County, to restore the rights and privileges of citizenship to John Shirk, convicted of petit larceny.¹⁴²

Remaining firm to principles expressed earlier, he introduced resolutions: to require entry takers to report on oath to the legislature the amount of money received and by whom paid; to require the president and directors of the Bank of Tennessee to report to the legislature the amount of money received from each entry taker, the amount loaned annually in each county, from the establishment of the bank to the present, designating how the loans were secured and all changes in securities as well as the institution's expenses from its establishment; to ask a report from the president and directors of the old Bank of Tennessee to this General Assembly concerning liens on real estate

¹⁴¹ *Knoxville Register*, Nov., 1827, *passim*; *Tennessee Senate Journal*, 1827, pp. 6, 39, 76.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 27, 28, 36, 60, 72.

substituted for personal securities, with the names of endorsers released and an estimate of probable losses likely to result from such substitutions; to request the Committee on Internal Improvements to consider the expediency of employing a skilled engineer; to investigate a possible reduction in the compensations allowed to the printers of laws and journals of the state; to inquire into the expediency of appropriating part of the interest accruing from funds in the new state bank toward defraying the costs of state government; to investigate the advisability of providing by law for the punishment of sheriffs who failed to make proper returns of the election for governor, as directed by the constitution; to transfer to the United States Supreme Court several reserved cases under the treaties with the Cherokees.¹⁴³

Approximately nine years of activity remained to Colonel Williams after the adjournment of the Tennessee senate, but never again did he offer his services for any office. He had been provoked into being a candidate for the legislature in 1827, he said, "by persons who ought to have been my friends. On ascertaining that I would have no opposition at the next election, I withdrew."¹⁴⁴

Not that opportunities for political preferment were lacking. President John Quincy Adams reveals in his memoirs that he preferred Colonel Williams for the office of secretary of war.¹⁴⁵ He was offered appointment as a justice of the state supreme court but declined it.¹⁴⁶ In 1831, after Jackson had become President, he wrote: "Within the last twelve months I have been strongly urged to represent this district in Congress which I could do almost without a struggle. But I have determined not to go to Washington to be put under the *bow of the Emperor*."¹⁴⁷

His quarrel with Jackson and his opposition to the people's hero continued. Jackson apparently saw or thought he saw Colonel Williams' influence in every criticism leveled at him during his campaign in 1828, whether it concerned the Dickinson duel, the Burr conspiracy, or Pensacola: "I am branded with every crime, and Doctor McNary, Col. Erwin, Anderson and Williams are associated for this purpose."¹⁴⁸

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 22, 23, 28, 46, 63, 70, 100, 101.

¹⁴⁴ Williams to Van Buren, Mar. 22, 1831, Van Buren Papers, XIII.

¹⁴⁵ Adams (ed.), *Memoirs*, VII, 547, VIII, 4.

¹⁴⁶ *Biographical Directory*, 2019.

¹⁴⁷ Williams to Van Buren, Mar. 22, 1831, Van Buren Papers, XIII.

¹⁴⁸ Jackson to John Coffee, June 20, 1828, Bassett (ed.), *Correspondence*, III, 409. See also Jackson to Maj. William Lewis, Aug. 13, 1828; Jackson to Brig.-Gen. Richard K.

That Williams' evaluation of the General remained unchanged, even after his election to the presidency, is suggested by his willingness to oppose his re-election and advocating "putting in any other of a little better capacity and who has not descended from Tory stock."¹⁴⁹ His opinion of Jackson, as repeated by John Floyd, a former Jackson supporter, was that "he [Jackson] never determined on the ruin of any man that he did not succeed." In a similar vein Williams wrote, "I was hurt at the removal of Major Callaway late Marshall of E. Tennessee because he was my personal friend. I had withdrawn from public life & it was cruel to punish a man because he had a good opinion of me."¹⁵⁰

While retaining an interest in public affairs in the years between 1829 and 1837, Colonel Williams devoted himself mainly to the practice of law in Knox and nearby counties. He remained the supporter of every enterprise for the public welfare and as such was a promoter of the projected Louisville, Cincinnati & Charleston Railroad Company, being a member of its first board of directors, which position he held during the remainder of his life.¹⁵¹ His interest in political happenings did not end. It merely ceased to express itself in officeholding. In 1833 he reiterated his conviction that he could have been elected to Congress at any election for years past. "But I have declined all public employment. I still however feel a deep interest in the *Welfare* of my country without the means of rendering any service."¹⁵²

When the nullification controversy clouded the national sky, he confessed that

For the last four years I have lost confidence in the perpetuity of our political institutions. I have read in history of the downfall of ancient Republics the ruin of our own. I sounded the [tocsin?] of alarm without effect. Many of my best friends would not hearken. They ascribed my opposition to every motive but the true one. I have suffered proscription and persecution little short of the Spanish Inquisition without exciting even the sympathy of my old friends. Thus opposed and abandoned I determined for the remainder of my life to devote myself to my personal concerns.

Call, Aug. 16, 1828, *ibid.*, III, 422, 426. The "associates" were Dr. Boyd McNairy, the president of the Nashville bank, Col. Andrew Erwin, and Col. William P. Anderson.

¹⁴⁹ Williams to Van Buren, Mar. 22, 1831, Van Buren Papers, XIII.

¹⁵⁰ John Floyd to Williams, Dec. 27, 1830, John Floyd Papers (Manuscript Division, Library of Congress); Williams to Van Buren, Mar. 22, 1831, Van Buren Papers, XIII.

¹⁵¹ Rothrock (ed.), *French Broad-Holston Country*, 505-506. Cf. Goodspeed Publishing Co., *History of Tennessee—Knox County* (Nashville, 1887), 820.

¹⁵² Williams to John Floyd, Knoxville, Jan. 5, 1833, John Floyd Papers.

He saw clearly the logical outcome of this confused state of national politics:

My heart sickens at the almost certain prospect of having our once happy land deluged with our kindred blood. My skirts are clear of censure & I thank God for it. I voted for the tariff of 1816 with the double view of raising revenue & protection. I then & still believe it was constitutional. No one doubted at that time (that I remember) except Mr. Randolph. On most subjects he was considered under a hallucination. The seeds, however, sown by him at that time have taken deep root & now threaten to dissolve the Union. . . . The conduct of So. Carolina cannot be justified on any principle consistent with the theory of our Govt. The suppression of insubordination in that quarter will add to the power of Jackson already too great & is therefore to be deplored.

Then, his comments turned to that other problem which to him was a national disgrace—the treatment of the Indians:

For myself I will say that I will not shed the blood of So. Carolina for nullification & sustain a more odious nullification in Georgia. The former are under a delusion & and have my sympathy whilst the latter are animated by sordid avarice & a wish to oppress the helpless & unprotected Indians. The conduct of Georgia is sufficient to excite the wrath of Heaven on our Country—If our land should be visited with War, Pestilence & Famine it will be nothing more than a just dispensation of Providence for our national crimes.¹⁵³

This interest in Indian affairs remained prominent in his mind, for in April, 1837, he reported to President Van Buren that he had spent the greater part of the past winter at New Echota, attending to professional business before the commission "under the late treaty with the Cherokees." The John Ridge faction of the Indians, with whom the treaty of removal had been made, did not constitute, he estimated, one-twentieth of the Cherokees, and John Ross, who "possesses a more absolute control over the common Indians than the Pope does over his Papal dominions," had been telling them that the treaty was not valid. Consequently, they were making preparations to remain and might have to be removed by force, which would lead to an Indian war. Williams suggested that another treaty be made and that an additional sum be paid to the Cherokees, the money to be invested half in the Georgia railroad and half in the Charleston. Such procedure, he believed, would pacify them, and they would then go west in good humor.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ Williams to Van Buren, Apr. 2, 1837, Van Buren Papers, XXVI. He probably meant the Hiwassee Railroad, projected from Knoxville to the Georgia line (later the East Tennessee and Georgia R. R.), and the Louisville, Cincinnati and Charleston R. R.

Then, in the midst of activity and plans came serious illness—bilious fever.¹⁵⁵ Almost three years earlier, on December 8, 1834, he had written his last will and testament:

Entertaining great confidence in the prudence and discretion of my wife, Malinda Williams I hereby give & bequeath unto her and her heirs and assigns forever all my estate both real and personal. I hereby constitute and appoint my said wife sole Executrix of this my Last will and Testament.

Some estimate of that estate may be calculated from an order of the court in 1835, allowing him to report and to "pay a single tax thereon: 531 acres 1 free pole of land; 17 slaves and 1 carriage."¹⁵⁶

Now, realizing apparently that he did not have long to live, he added a codicil, simplifying the procedure for that prudent wife: "It is my will and desire that my said Executrix be not required to give any security for the administration of my said estate. Witness my hand and seal this the 8th day of August 1837." But the unsteady hand could no longer form a signature and was forced to be content with the "X—his mark," instead. Two days later, on August 10, at his home near Knoxville, death ended the career of Colonel John Williams, aged 59. Associates characterized him as possessed of graceful, courtly, dignified manners. His complacent and benevolent countenance, however, made him accessible to his humblest acquaintances. These qualities endeared him to all classes of people.¹⁵⁷

At the December, 1837, session of the Knox County court, his will was duly attested by John L. and Alexander Williams, and Malinda Williams qualified as sole executrix.¹⁵⁸ In a few months, however, on March 2, 1838, she followed her husband to the First Presbyterian churchyard, the settlement of the estate still incomplete.

The influence of Colonel John and Malinda Williams did not end in either 1837 or 1838. Of their ten children, six lived to maturity.¹⁵⁹ One of their sons, Joseph Lanier, served in the House of Representatives from March 4, 1837, to March 3, 1843. Later he was appointed by President Lincoln as judge of the United States District Court of the Dakota Territory.¹⁶⁰ Another son, John, was elected to the Tennessee

¹⁵⁵ *Nashville Banner and Nashville Whig*, Aug. 16, 1837.

¹⁵⁶ Knox County Estate Book No. 6 (Knox County Courthouse, Knoxville), 162; Minutes of the County Court of Knox County, Book No. 16 (Knox County Courthouse, Knoxville), 42.

¹⁵⁷ Goodspeed, *History of Tennessee*, 819.

¹⁵⁸ Minutes of the County Court of Knox County, Book No. 16, pp. 240-41.

¹⁵⁹ Rothrock (ed.), *French Broad-Holston Country*, 506.

¹⁶⁰ *Biographical Directory*, 2020.

legislature in 1845, 1847, and 1857. He was a stalwart champion of the Union cause in the War Between the States and was one of the prime movers in the calling of the Union conventions in Knoxville and Greenville in 1861.

The feat which Colonel John would have applauded most heartily, perhaps, remained for his great-grandson. One daughter,¹⁶¹ Margaret McClung, married Chief Justice Richmond Pearson, of North Carolina. Their daughter Sallie named her son for his grandfather—Richmond Pearson Hobson. Certainly, the young naval lieutenant who on June 3, 1898, rode the collier *Merrimac* into the bottleneck of the harbor at Santiago de Cuba, there to blow her up amid the fire of Spanish ships and the exploding of torpedoes, was a kindred spirit of the Colonel who organized and led a troop of mounted volunteers hundreds of miles against an enemy known only by report. Both, perhaps, were animated by the same dauntless daring of the forebear who rode horseback across miles of enemy-infested country, a sick baby in her lap and a boy of two and one-half years behind her.

The years have not been kind to Colonel John Williams. Perpetuation of his memory has been allowed to rest too much upon the weathered slab, which few ever see, in the First Presbyterian churchyard at Knoxville. It was his fate to oppose a popular hero; so, he has shared the neglect meted out to many another Tennessean whose achievements were overshadowed by the figure of the state's first President.

Colonel Williams refused to compromise principles for the sake of expediency, accepting instead retirement from public life. Certainly his services to his country and his adopted state merit more recognition than a piece of gray stone in one of its older cemeteries.¹⁶²

¹⁶¹ The other children who lived to maturity were Mary Lawson, who married DeWitt McNutt; Cynthia, who married Dr. John Kennedy and later Robert Williams; and Susan, who married John Leese Moses. Joseph L. married Malinda Williams, and John II, Rhoda Campbell Morgan.

¹⁶² Information has just reached the writer that a portrait painted by Eleanor Wiley is to be presented to the state by the great-granddaughters of John Williams, Misses Mary H. and Jane Williams of San Antonio, Texas, to be hung in the State Capitol.

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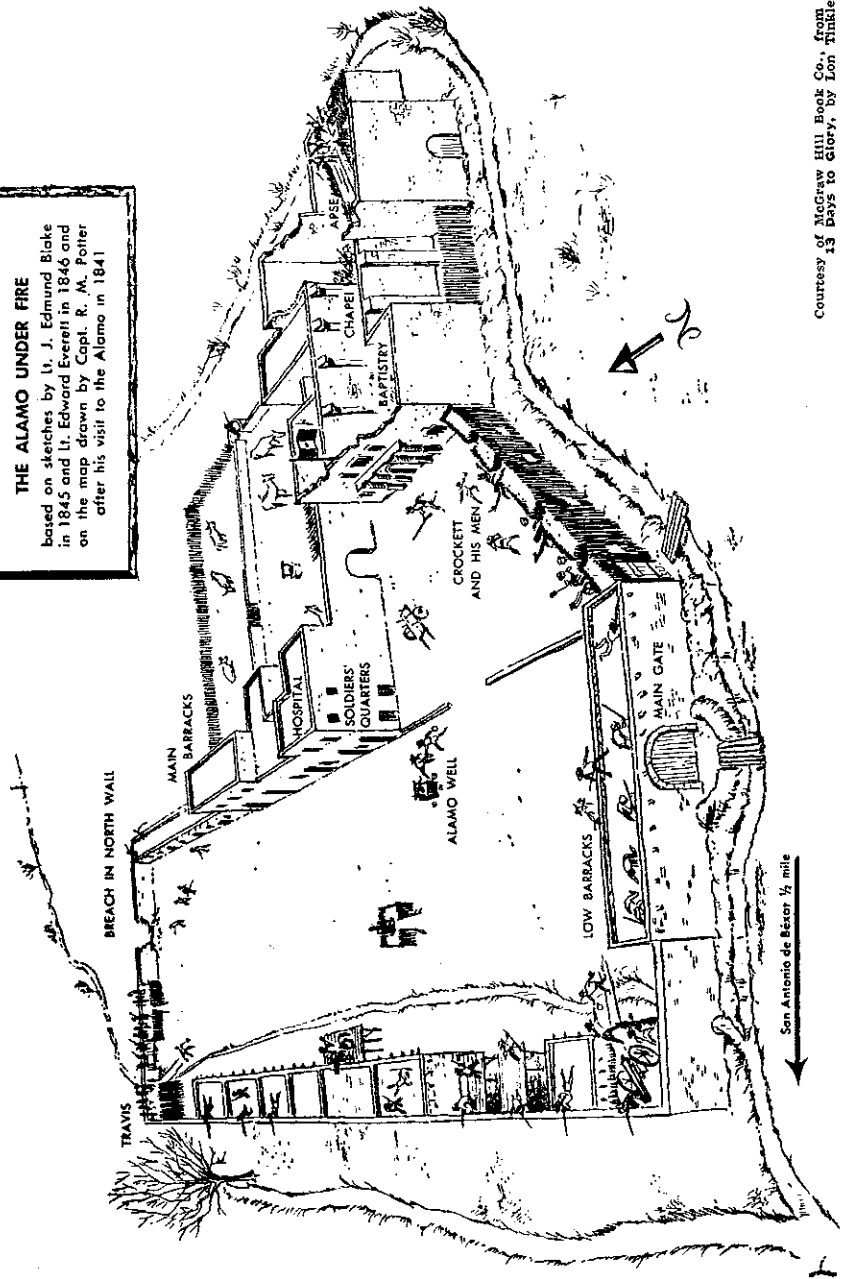
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THE ALAMO UNDER FIRE
based on sketches by Lt. J. Edmund Blake
in 1845 and Lt. Edward Everett in 1846 and
on the map drawn by Capt. R. M. Potter
after his visit to the Alamo in 1841



Courtesy of McGraw Hill Book Co., from
13 Days to Glory, by Lon Finkle