

BENJAMIN WILSON BRANCH A

Benjamin Wilson (A1#1) was born November 30, 1747, in that portion of Frederick County now known as Shenandoah County, Va. He spent his early life on his father's farm on Trout Run near Wardensville, he now Hardy County, W. Va.

Family historians say there is no record of his patenting any land in the Hampshire-Hardy County area as did his father and some of his brothers.

On September 4, 1770, he married Ann Ruddell, born September 20, 1754 and daughter of Stephen and Mary (Bird) Ruddell of Ruddell (now spelled Ruddle), Pendleton County. The town was founded by the Ruddells and is located on the South Branch of the Potomac River, 6 miles north of Franklin, the county-seat. Ruddell was about 50 miles southwest of Benjamin's home at Wardensville. Ann Ruddell was less than 16 years of age at the time of her marriage.

Attorney H. M. Calhoun, Sr. of Franklin, W. Va., president of Pendleton County Historical Society, in a letter of Sept. 23, 1931, stated in substance, Benjamin and Ann lived in a house which he built on the banks of the South Branch River near the village of Ruddle. Nearby is a fine spring called the "Wilson Spring" and a deep hole in the river, called the "Wilson Hole", fine for fishing. He also stated The Pendleton County Historical Society had recently erected an appropriate marker in the yard of the house subsequently built near the site of the old house; further, he never found where Benjamin had title to this or other lands in Pendleton County, "as it was then owned by Seriah Stratton and had been passed down successively to the present owner."

This last statement indicates that Benjamin must have had a lease purchase agreement with the person who had title to the land, as was the custom in those days. Such agreements then were not a matter of public record.

Claude Wilson Maxwell of Elkins, W. Va., (see A1#2), a great, great, great grandson of Benjamin, states in his articles on family history, Benjamin explored the Tygart's Valley country during 1770-1771 and in the early spring of 1772 he and Ann, with several other families, moved to this Valley where they erected three forts for protection against the Indians.

For 150 years after Virginia was first settled at Jamestown in 1607, the colonists had advanced steadily westward toward the top of the Alleghenies (also spelled Alleghanias) or "Endless Mountains" as the Indians called them. The vast territory beyond these mountains was claimed by the French until the close of the French and Indian War in 1763, when it was ceded to England.

Then followed ten years of peace on the frontier. Since this territory west of the Alleghenies now belonged to England, the settlers began to arrive in the Virginia Valleys in considerable numbers. The Indians regarded these settlers as trespassers and met them with the tomahawk. In early 1774, the peace was broken by scenes of carnage and bloodshed.

As a result, the Virginia Legislature in 1774 authorized the invasion of the Indian Country north of the Ohio River and subjugation of their tribes. Two armies were mobilized. One was made up from the southern part of Virginia under General Lewis. It was to descend the Great Kanawha River to the Ohio where Point Pleasant is now located. The other army was made up from the northern

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part of Virginia under Governor Lord Dunmore. It was to assemble at Fort Cumberland, move to Fort Pitt (now Pittsburgh), then down the Ohio River to the mouth of the Hocking River and thence to the Scioto River near where Circleville, Ohio, now stands.

Captain Benjamin Wilson with his volunteers reported to the northern army under general orders. Upon arrival, he was raised to the rank of Colonel and placed upon the Governor's staff. His brothers William Wilson, Jr. (A4#1) served as a private in the southern army under General Lewis at the Battle of Point Pleasant, and Archibald (B2#1) in the northern army under Lord Dunmore.

The southern army under General Lewis reached the Ohio River and on October 10, 1774, and in the greatest battle staged against the Indians up to this time, this pioneer army of probably 1,200 volunteers fought the Battle of Point Pleasant against the Five Nations and their allies of a similar number under Chief Cornstalk. Following the battle they pursued the Indians northward into their country and forced them to ask for peace.

At the conclusion of the war, Colonel Wilson was a member of the Peace Council held October 19, 1774, at Lord Dunmore's headquarters, Camp Charlotte, 7 miles south of Circleville, Ohio.

It is stated that Cayuga Chief Logan took part in the Battle of Point Pleasant, but refused to attend the Peace Council at Camp Charlotte -- his reply to Dunmore's invitation through representatives being "He was a warrior, not a councillor".

Wither's Chronicles of Border Warfare of 1831 and others credit Colonel Benjamin Wilson with the following report of the address made by Shawnee Chief Cornstalk, head of the confederacy of Indian nations and their allies, at the Camp Charlotte Peace Council:

"When he arose, he was in no wise confused or daunted, but spoke in a distinct and audible voice, without stammering or repetition and with peculiar emphasis. His looks while addressing Dunmore, were truly grand and majestic, yet graceful and attractive. I have heard the first orators of Virginia - Patrick Henry and Richard Henry Lee - but never have I heard one whose powers of delivery surpassed those of Cornstalk on that occasion."

Colonel Benjamin Wilson's name appears today with the names of the other members of Lord Dunmore's staff in bronze on the monument marking the site of Camp Charlotte and the Peace Council in Logan Elm State Park about 7 miles south of Circleville, Ohio.

AN INDIAN RAID

By Hu Maxwell, Great, Great Grandson - From His History of Randolph County.

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In 1777, Colonel Benjamin Wilson built Wilson's fort on his own farm as a place of refuge from the Indians, during the long and bloody year which began that year. The settlers, in time of danger, fled to that fort. It was never attacked by Indians, but a number of persons were murdered by them within a few miles. Colonel Wilson's activity, as an Indian fighter, and protector of the settlement, is mentioned elsewhere in this book. At that time he was an officer in the Revolutionary army, and he was assigned the duty of defending the settlers of Tygart's Valley. He was furnished with no regular soldiers for that duty, but depended upon volunteers from the surrounding settlements, and one summer he had part of one company of Hampshire County militia. The volunteers were usually sufficient, but once, at the time of the Leading Creek massacre in 1781, they refused to follow the Indians who were retreating with their prisoners toward the Ohio River. The militia thus called out usually served without pay, and perhaps none of them thought of pay at that time. But many years afterwards, when pensions became common, some of the survivors asked for pay, as is shown by the court records of Randolph.

None of Colonel Wilson's family ever fell victim to the savages, but on more than one occasion their escape was narrow. Mrs. Wilson was a brave and heroic woman whose courage and presence of mind once saved her own life and the lives of her three children. The event occurred late in the fall of 1777. Indians had broken into the settlement about Valley Head and had murdered the Connollys. Colonel Wilson hurried in pursuit of them with thirty men. It was so late in the season that no incursion by Indians was expected, and the settlers had been taken by surprise. They were busy in their fields shucking their corn. Colonel Wilson owned a farm west of the river, in what is now the Caplinger Settlement, as well as the farm east of the river, on Wilson's Creek, where his fort stood; and at the time of the Indian raid his family were living in a cabin west of the river, about two miles distant, temporarily while the crop was being gathered. When he went up the river in pursuit of the Indians, he left his wife and three children at the cabin, with a slave named Rose, a Guinea negress whom he had bought. She was born in Africa and had been brought over on a slave ship. The three children were, Mary, aged six, William B., aged four and Stephen, aged two.

Late in the afternoon while Mrs. Wilson and Rose were milking the cows, the young horse came dashing up from the range with wild excitement and with peculiar movements. Mrs. Wilson cried to Rose: "There are Indians near! The horse has seen them. That's the way he acts when he sees Indians! Catch him quick--we must fly to the fort or we will be massacred!" While the negress was catching the horse, Mrs. Wilson, with wonderful coolness and presence of mind, worthy the daughter of Captain Ruddell, took one of her strong petticoats, tied both ends, put the two older children in it as a sack, with their heads out, threw the sack over the horse's back, one child on each side. Then with the baby in her arms, she mounted the young horse bareback, and told Rose to run for her life and to cross the river on the footlog. Then she gave the rein to the young horse, which was snorting and prancing as though it could see or smell the Indians. The horse was apparently as eager to escape the savages as she was, and went at full speed toward the fort. The river was past riding on account of rain and melting snow; but it was a matter of life and death, and Mrs. Wilson, with her precious burden, did not halt, but plunged in and swam the horse for the other side. When in mid-stream she discovered that the child on the up-stream side, Mary, had struggled from the sack and was bobbing up and down against the horse's side, held there by the strong current. Mrs. Wilson caught her by the clothes and brought her safe

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to shore. Then readjusting the children in the sack, she rode with them to the fort. The alarm by this time had been given and several families were arriving at the fort. The Indians plundered the settlement west of the river. It is probable that Mrs. Wilson and her children would have been murdered in a few minutes had she not made her escape when she did.

It is proper to state that Rose, the faithful slave, also escaped. A few minutes after Mrs. Wilson reached the fort, Rose put in an appearance, carrying a churn of cream on her head, and remarking: "I did not mean that the Redskins should have this cream!"

PUBLIC ACTIVITIES

The site of Colonel Wilson's first home in Tygart's River Valley was at the mouth of Chenoweth or Wilson's Creek, four miles north of Beverly and three miles south of Elkins, in what was formerly the District of West Augusta, which included all lands of Virginia west of the Alleghenies to the Ohio River.

In 1776, two counties were formed out of this District -- Ohio at Wheeling and Monongalia, which included numerous counties involved in our story. Colonel Wilson, living in Monongalia, became its first representative in the Virginia Legislature at Williamsburg. He continued in office until 1784, when Harrison County was formed out of it. Harrison was very large and included what was several other counties formed later. Being now in Harrison the Colonel became the first Clerk of its County Court, which he held till 1814, when his son John succeeded him. He also served as its first representative in the state legislature until 1785, when he was instrumental in having Randolph County formed out of Harrison County.

Since the Colonel's home was now in Randolph County, he and his Brother John represented it as delegates at the Virginia Constitutional Convention held in June, 1788 at Richmond, for ratification of our National Constitution.

Maxwell's History of Randolph County states, it is believed that Colonel Wilson moved from Randolph County in 1787 to a new home in Harrison County on Simpson Creek where he purchased 400 acres of land from William Lowther.

In these pioneer days few people would have sufficient education to fill county offices. Many could neither write their names or were able to read.

From Minnie Kendall Lowther's History of Ritchie County, partly formed from Harrison County in 1842, it appears that Colonel Wilson served simultaneously for a short time as Clerk of the County Courts of both Harrison and Randolph counties and that his home must have served as court house for both counties. This would also indicate that few people were interested in such office as it did require some education.

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STORY BY MINNIE KENDALL LOWTHER

The first county seat of Randolph County is said to have been kept at the home of Col. Ben Wilson four miles from Beverly, and the following amusing anecdote is told of his transference of this local seat of government to another individual, and of his removal to Clarksburg where he finally passed to the confines of the tomb, at the age of eighty years:

During the Civil War, when the soldiers were stationed at Beverly (in 1864), a short time after their arrival, George Renscraft, one of the number, noticed a peculiar hole in the ground around which the soldiers and the civilians gathered from day to day to pitch horseshoes. His attention being especially attracted to the size of this hole, he remarked to an old gentleman standing near, that this ground must have been used for the purpose before the war; the old gentleman, heaving a reminiscent sigh, said, "Yes, my young man, I am high unto seventy, and I was not born when the first horseshoes were pitched into that hole." And he then proceeded to tell him its unique history:

He said, as above mentioned, that the county seat was kept at the home of Col. Ben Wilson, and that at Beverly, four miles distant lived one Jacob Westfall. One day Col. Wilson came riding down the path past the Westfall residence and found Mr. Westfall out pitching horseshoes in his yard, all alone.

"Having a good game?" asked Col. Wilson. "Good enough," was the reply. "I'll bet I can beat you," said the Colonel. "I'll take the bet," replied Westfall. "How much?" asked Col. Wilson.

"Whoever beats gets the courthouse," replied Westfall. "It's a bargain," replied Col. Wilson, who had everything to lose and nothing to gain as he already had the courthouse, but he was a great old codger to take chances. So the game began and continued until night and Westfall flaxed the Colonel on every proposition, and won the bet."

This same evening Col. Wilson made Jacob Westfall deed a quarter of an acre, which included this play-ground, to the public forever, and according to the provisions of this deed an individual could play when, and as long, as he pleased, and no one could hinder him.

The next day Col. Wilson sent Westfall the county seat, books, papers and so on, to Beverly, and shortly after sold out and removed to Clarksburg.

This piece of ground is still used as a horseshoe play-ground and will doubtless continue to be thus used until the end of time, as no one has the power to molest this lot.

This is said to be the only piece of real estate in the world that has such a title. When the new courthouse at Beverly was under contract, the court undertook to sell this lot, but found upon investigation that it belonged to the public, and that the county had no authority over it. Consequently, it lies there vacant as it did a century ago--a monument dedicated to the simple game of horseshoe--and the men and boys haunt it today as they did in the days of Col. Wilson.

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Note: Beverly continued as the county-seat of Randolph County until 1900 when transfer was made to the City of Elkins, it having been chosen in 1898 by a vote of the people.

BUSINESS ACTIVITIES

Upon moving to Harrison County in 1787, Colonel Wilson became very active in business. He built a flour mill, a saw mill and a woolen mill for carding, spinning, weaving, coloring and cloth dressing; besides he engaged in other enterprises, acquiring a great amount of land and cleared several farms. He not only speculated in land in his home state, but also in and around Newark, Licking County, Ohio, where his brother Archibald (B2#1), several children, nephews and nieces settled.

There is no record of his ever visiting Licking County to inspect this land but circumstances would indicate that he must have done so. He may have visited his old comrade, Elias Hughes, the County's first settler.

"THE WILSON SECTION"

Licking County, Ohio, was formed out of Fairfield County March 1, 1808. Newark, its county-seat, was laid out in 1801. Elias Hughes, an Indian fighter under Colonel Wilson, was the county's first settler in 1795, some five miles below Newark in the Licking River bottom and in an old Indian cornfield.

Hughes fought in the Battle of Point Pleasant in 1774 and was from the Harrison-Randolph County area of West Virginia.

The Fairfield County, Ohio, deed record of September 19, 1806, shows John Rathbone, merchant, and Eunice, his wife, of New York City, in consideration of \$2,500.00, granted, bargained and sold to Benjamin Wilson of the County of Harrison and State of Virginia 2,000 acres of land consisting of three tracts, 1500 acres, 300 acres and 200 acres, being part of Twp. 2, Range 12 of U. S. Military Lands.

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The Fairfield County records further show that Benjamin Wilson and wife Phoebe sold nine tracts out of this 2,000 acres by separate deeds, all dated June 15, 1807, to the following:

Archibald Wilson (B2#1), his nephew	389	acres	for	\$1,167.00
Abraham " (B1#2), his brother	66	"	"	200.00
John " (C1#2), " "	250	"	"	750.00
Jacob " (C2#2), " "	296	"	"	600.00
Job " (C5#2), " "	245	"	"	490.00
Isaac " (C6#2), " "	250	"	"	500.00
James Warden	71	"	"	212.00
Aron Baker	300	"	"	900.00
Samuel Davis	200	"	"	600.00
Totals	2,067	"	"	\$5,419.00

Hill's History of Licking County states that the Colony bought this land in 1802 and his nephew Jacob (C2#2) came to Licking County as its "Pioneer" Wilson settler in the spring of 1803, when he built a cabin on the 296 acres. This indicates that Benjamin had entered into some kind of installment purchase agreement and had possession of the land long before receiving title to the land and was permitted to sell it on similar terms.

Land townships in the U. S. Military Tract were 5 miles square and contained 16,000 acres; whereas in other U. S. surveys the standard land township was 6 miles square and contained 23,040 acres.

This venture of the Colonel was very profitable -- he bought 2,000 acres wholesale for \$2,500.00 and 5 years later at retail, he had sold 2,067 acres for \$5,419.00 out of the original plat of 2,000 acres.

According to a deed dated June 4, 1810 of Licking County deed record Vol. D, he next purchased from John Rathbone May 26, 1808, an adjoining tract of 2,000 acres for \$2,773.00 plus any back taxes to 1803, thus giving him one fourth of township #2 or 4,000 acres as platted but containing 4,218.9 by actual survey later.

The Licking County Atlas of 1875 describes the "Wilson Section" as the northeast quarter of township #2, range 12 of the U. S. Military Lands.

The Fairfield County records further show that Colonel Wilson purchased seven smaller tracts totaling 671 acres. N. W. Hill in his Licking County History of 1881 states that twenty families of William Wilson, Sr. descendants settled on this celebrated "Wilson Section", the southern boundary of which in 1881 was within a few rods of the northern out-lots of Newark, Ohio.

Of the witnesses to the signatures of Colonel Benjamin and Phoebe Wilson on the nine deeds executed June 15, 1807 at Clarksburg, Harrison County, Va. when conveying the 2,067 acres of the first 2,000 acre tract to its purchasers, was that of their son Archibald B. Wilson (A9#2), not quite seventeen years of age. All of these deeds were later recorded in Vol. F of the Fairfield County, Ohio records.

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CONCLUSION

Colonel Wilson was a member of the Board of Trustees of Randolph Academy of Clarksburg from 1788 till 1799. In politics he was said to have been a Federalist.

When the war of 1812 began, he was commissioned as a Colonel of the Third Division, Twentieth Brigade of the U. S. Army, but owing to advanced age, he was soon given an honorable discharge.

His name is found on page 750 of N.S.D.A.R. Patriotic Index of 1966 as having served as a Colonel of the Virginia in the American Revolution.

His first wife, Ann Ruddell Wilson, died at the family home near Clarksburg, Va., June 15, 1795.

Benjamin then married on December 15, 1795, Phoebe Davison, daughter of Major Daniel and Prudence (Izard) Davison of Harrison County, who was in her nineteenth year of age. She died June 24, 1849.

His death occurred December 2, 1827. He was buried in the old Brick Church Cemetery at Bridgeport, W. Va., where his two wives also rest.

Obituary - Clarksburg Enquirer, December 13, 1827

Departed this life on the 2nd inst, at his residence in Harrison county, Col. Benjamin Wilson senr. having two days before completed 80 years of age. A short time before his death he sustained a slight injury on one of his legs, so inconspicuous at first as to produce neither pain or inconvenience, but the wound soon inflamed and was succeeded by Gangrene which terminated his life.

The deceased was a native of the County of Shenandoah, in Virginia, and served as a Lieutenant in the Expedition under Lord Dunmore against the Indians, and acquired by his zeal and attention to his duty the confidence of his superior officers. He had assigned to him the command of the troops that guarded the council when the treaty of peace was made by Lord Dunmore with the Indians; on his return from that expedition he settled in what is now the County of Randolph at that time a wilderness. The war of the Revolution ensued, his previous military reputation, his zeal in the cause of the Revolution, and the known vigor of his character, soon made his residence the rallying point of the hardy settlers in that exposed county, and Wilson's Fort is yet pointed out by many to whom it furnished protection and refuge, in the perilous times of the Revolution. The deceased was early in the Revolution, appointed a Captain in the Virginia forces, and in 1781 he received the appointment of Colonel. During the war he was the organ thro' which most of the military and civil business of that part of the state in which he resided was transacted--he was a member of the Legislature from the County of Monongahalia for several sessions previous to the year 1784, in which year the County of Harrison was established and at the organization of the county he became the Clerk of the County Court, the duties of this office did not however withdraw him entirely from the theater of politics; he was selected as a delegate to the convention, in 1788, which ratified the constitu-

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tion of the United States---his excellent understanding and the purity of his character acquired for him great influence and respect among the illustrious men who composed that Body.

From that period the deceased continued to perform the duties of his Clerkship until the year 1814, when he resigned it, and devoted himself exclusively to the care of domestic life, and although as a public man, in times most difficult, he rendered important services to his Country. In the various relations of private life he was eminently useful, the conduct of the deceased, thro' the whole course of his long life, was marked by the most unvarying adherence, to order and punctual in business---with habits regulated by industry and prudence; he was yet bountiful and hospitable, and without any other means, than arose from his own industry, he was enabled to educate & provide for the maintenance of a larger family than has devolved upon many men in these times.

The deceased had by two marriages 30 children of whom 24 were living at the time of his death, and for all of whom he was enabled to make a moderate provision, the posterity of the deceased at his death besides 24 children was 73 grand children 32 great grandchildren and one great grand child making in all 136, added to the other virtues of the deceased he was habitually pious; his religion was practical, his benevolence embraced in its scope the human family and his long life was devoted to a strict regard of its precepts and by his example to the inculcation of them in others---"Not to speak ill of the dead" is a maxim vouchsafed by charity but if there had been a single act in the life of this excellent man over which charity would place its mantle that act has long since been forgotten.

Note: A copy of the newspaper containing the above obituary is preserved in the West Virginia Historical Library. This copy made from one furnished by the Library.