UPPER OHIO VALLEY

HISTORICAL REVIEW

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In this issue:

Wheeling and the Ohio Valley in the National Story

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Volume 45, No. 2 **Spring-Summer 2026**

UPPER OHIO VALLEY HISTORICAL REVIEW

Single Copies: $5.00

Founded by the Wheeling Area Historical Society in 1968, the **UPPER OHIO VALLEY HISTORICAL REVIEW** is the only publication of its kind in the northern panhandle of West Virginia. Dedicated solely to local history topics, it has become a treasured publication and valuable tool for studying and learning about our geographic area. Wheeling National Heritage Area Corporation (WNHAC, later Wheeling Heritage) continued the tradition, editing and publishing the **REVIEW** from 2010-2018. Ownership of the **UOVHR** publication was transferred in the second half of 2018 to the Ohio County Public Library in Wheeling.

UOVHR content has historically included articles, transcribed documents, book reviews, and accounts of the economic, political, social, and cultural history of the greater Wheeling area contributed by historians, researchers, and scholars. Any editorial views expressed by authors do not necessarily reflect the views of the **OCPL**.

OCPL is honored to publish the **UOVHR** and continue this great tradition for years to come.

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UPPER OHIO VALLEY HISTORICAL REVIEW

NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Readers:

Happy 250th Birthday America!

The Ohio County Public Library is presenting a three-pronged celebration of America's Semiquincentennial. Firstly, this special edition of the Review explores the upper Ohio Valley's role in 250 years of American history from the Revolutionary War itself, to transportation, to West Virginia statehood's impact on the Civil War's outcome. Secondly, the People's University is presenting an eight-part series called "Revolution and Constitution," which will explore the War for Independence as well as the best ideas of the Founders and Framers. Thirdly, our main archival exhibit is now "A Republic — If We Can Keep It," which features land grants signed by Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, James Madison, John Marshall, Patrick Henry, and Edmund Randolph. We hope this multifaceted celebration and critique of our relatively young experiment in republican democracy — exploring 250 years of successes, failures, and redemptions — will remind us that our democracy is still radical, still fragile, and perhaps more than ever, still in need of our vigilance.



Seán Duffy, Editor

Frontier Warfare and Survival: Wheeling in the Revolutionary War

by Michael L. Giorgianni

As our nation celebrates 250 years of independence, it is fitting to revisit the courageous individuals and their often-overlooked actions that defended the unsafe frontier from the British and their Native American allies. Although Wheeling and the upper Ohio valley may not have been the site of many nationally well-known battles, a reexamination of the region's critical role in the fight for independence is in order. Strategically located on the Ohio River, and at the edge of expanding settlements, Wheeling was at a vital defensive position against the British - Native American alliance. Prior to the first shots of the war in 1775, a hostile climate existed in the region between settlers and some of the Native American tribes. Localized raids and violence were common. The British exploited this combative relationship and armed many of the warriors who were more than willing to attack settlements in the Wheeling area. The war for independence in the western theatre was fought in a completely different manner than the better-known eastern theater, but would require the same passion and fearless actions.

The Harsh Frontier of Western Virginia

The remote frontier in the Revolutionary War era stretched west of the Appalachian Mountains into the interior of North America. Western Pennsylvania, western Virginia, and Kentucky saw an increase in colonial settlers following the French and Indian War in 1763. The land that settlers were moving into was already home to several Native American tribes such as the Mingo, Seneca, Wyandot, Shawnee, Delaware, Lenape and others. In 1768, the Treaty of Fort Stanwix began to shape the direction of settlement lines in the region, however not all regional tribes agreed with this treaty. The Shawnee began to see more settlement into lands they felt belonged to their tribe and confrontation quickly followed. By 1774, most of the cooperation that had existed between Native Americans and settlers had ended, leading to Dunmore's War, led by the royal gover-

nor of Virginia. An indication of how unwelcoming the region had become for settlers is revealed by the name Wheeling itself. Wheeling, when translated from the Delaware language means "place of the skull." Legend states that the severed head of a settler was fixed to a pole by local Native Americans to deter others.

The Need for Defense: Fort Henry



1908 postcard of Fort Henry and Zane block house, adapted from the painting by J.A. Farris, 1882. OCPL Archives.

In 1774, Wheeling had approximately 25 cabins. The settlers, out of necessity, recognized the need to build fortifications due to rising tensions and the start of Dunmore's War. In the summer of 1774, the regional military command, located at Fort Pitt, sent Captain William Crawford and Colonel Angus McDonald with 400 men to assist Ebenezer Zane and John Caldwell to construct Fort Fincastle, later to be renamed for Governor Patrick Henry. [1] In a letter preserved in the Pennsylvania archives, John Connally, based at Fort Pitt, told Crawford "to proceed to Wheeling and complete the fort." Dunmore may not have directly ordered the fort's construction, but wrote to Connally on June 20, 1774, "I entirely approve of the measures you have taken to build a fort at Wheeling." [2]

Fort Henry, although not a regional center of power such as Fort Pitt, did demonstrate the serious need for local fortifications beyond what had been constructed privately throughout the Upper Ohio. Located on a hill above the Ohio River and covering approximately one half of an acre, Fort Henry was a base of operations and safe place for residents facing danger with little to no warning. Most fortifications near Wheeling had been privately built and included a stockade surrounding a blockhouse. Most Native American raids lasted only several hours and did not require the construction of extensive structures or constant garrisons of defenders. Fort Van Meter, located approximately nine miles southwest of Romney in Hampshire County, is an example of a privately constructed fortification. Fort Henry, a symbol of strength and resilience on the frontier, would be tested on two well known raids and sieges in 1777 and 1782 prior to its operational use ending in 1783.

The Siege of September 1777 and "McColloch's Leap"

1777 is well known for many events that greatly shaped the Revolutionary War. Although lesser known, but equally as impactful to the war in the west was the attack and siege on Fort Henry on September 1. Throughout the spring and summer of 1777, rumors were spreading that warned of raids by Native Americans in the upper Ohio region. [3]

On August 2, the regional commander at Fort Pitt, General Edward Hand, warned Lt. Col. David Shepard at Fort Henry and all other local militia companies of the threat. Shepard responded by ordering 11 militia companies to report to Fort Henry. There were reports of minor fighting near the fort as at least six companies arrived bringing the strength to about 300 men and an unknown number of local families. Accounts suggest the character of the militia now tasked with defending the Wheeling area was not of high quality. Discipline was barely observed and if there was no immediate fighting or opportunity to plunder, the men would return home. The responsibility to feed and supply the

garrison fell on the local population or desertion would occur in high numbers. Unfortunately, the harvest of that year was not good, leading to a lack of enough food for the gathered militia. Additionally, scouts would return from daily patrols without making any contact with hostile Native Americans. This led to Lt. Col. Shepard writing General Hand the following on August 28: "We have not seen any sign of the Indians since I wrote you last and we keep out scouts and spies every day…Capt. Shannon's men seemed uneasy to go home and as I saw no appearance of the Indians I let them go." [4]

The militia serving under Captains Joseph Ogle and Samuel Mason and some local civilians were the only defenders remaining at Fort Henry by the end of August. The total number of defenders was less than 100. Observant and hostile Native American warriors became aware of Fort Henry's weakened defenses, realized their opportunity, and planned an attack.[5] The warriors were mainly made up of Wyandot and Mingo, however they were also joined by some Shawnee and Lenape. Many accounts of the battle were recorded many years after the siege, and are inconsistent on details such as the total number of attacking warriors and defenders.

On the morning of September 1, 1777, four men, under Ogle's command left the fort and were attacked near Wheeling Creek. One man was killed. The remaining three escaped back to the fort to warn others. Captain Mason, after hearing of the initial attack, left the fort with his men to find the warriors. Predicting this response, the warriors quickly surrounded Mason and his men. Mason himself was wounded and his men quickly fell back to Fort Henry. Ogle had followed Mason's lead to provide support and also came under heavy fire by the warriors who outnumbered the defenders.[6] Quickly after the fighting began, urgent messages were sent for help. The first to arrive were Captain van Swearingen and 14 men from Cross Creek, about 20 miles to the north. Surprisingly, these men were not attacked as they entered

the fort. Next to answer the call was Major Samuel McColloch with approximately 40 men from Fort Van Meter. McColloch and his men would not be so fortunate and were attacked when approaching the fort leading to one of Wheeling's most celebrated and legendary stories. McColloch bravely served as a rear guard to his unit until all of the men were safely inside Fort Henry. But in those chaotic moments, McColloch became separated from the fort and his men. Finding himself alone and in a dangerous predicament, McColloch was forced to flee on horseback up Wheeling Hill with warriors in hot pursuit. Reaching the top of the hill, he found himself surrounded in all directions except the steep cliff of approximately 150 – 300 feet.[7]



"McColloch's Leap" from Lewis, *History of West Virginia in Two Parts*, 1889. OCPL Archives.

McColloch's skill as a horseman and desperation to avoid capture led him to guide his horse over the nearly vertical cliff. The horse was able to find enough footing and courage to slide and skip to the bottom uninjured. McColloch was able to make it to the opposite bank safely as the warriors carefully watched this remarkable act without firing. The warriors did not follow McColloch and did not attack the fort after witnessing this feat. They did burn 25 cabins, and stole or killed 300 cattle in the surrounding area.

This first siege of Fort Henry saw 23 of its defenders killed.[8]

The Siege of 1782 and Betty Zane's "Gunpowder Exploit"

The three-day siege of Fort Henry is often viewed as one of the last battles of the Revolutionary War. Paired with Betty Zane's epic gunpowder run, these three days in September 1782 rank as regional legend. Nearly a year after the American victory at Yorktown, this siege reflects the vastly different war on the frontier and foreshadows the type of fighting that would dominate the region for the next decade. The British and their Native American allies planned two onslaughts for the summer of 1782. The first attack was a successful advance into Kentucky in August. Following this move, the second offensive was an assault into northwestern Virginia led by Captain Andrew Bradt and his company of 50 loyalists from Butler's Rangers and approximately 300 Native American warriors.[9]

On the evening of September 11, 1782, a scout notified Fort Henry of Bradt's approaching force. At the time, the fort did not have a garrison of defenders, serving only as a safe place for the residents. The proximity of the attacking force did not allow time for a warning or call for support from nearby militia.[10] Only the people of Wheeling were able to take cover and defend Fort Henry. The other immediate issue was the critically low supply of gunpowder. Due to the fort not having a constant garrison, it was decided to store most of the gunpowder in the nearby Zane blockhouse, which was occupied by Ebenezer Zane, his wife, several other relatives, friends, and slaves. Fort Henry was commanded by Ebenezer's brother, Silas, a colonel in the militia.[11] The fort itself had approximately 20 men and 40 women and children, including Ebenezer and Silas's teenage sister, Elizabeth. Accounts suggest that Captain Bradt demanded the fort be surrendered, which was quickly refused in fear of torture and death at the hands of the Native Americans. Bradt's men had limited supplies and no artillery to weaken the fort, which would impact their decision-making.

The first assault was made after dark. The defenders pushed back the attacking force as they attempted to burn the fort. Two more assaults on both Fort Henry and Zane's blockhouse followed that night with significant contributions coming from everyone, including Ebenezer's slave and the women.[12] The situation facing both sides was similar, as both the attacking force and Fort Henry's defenders had very little gunpowder remaining on hand. Bradt's men attempted to mask this by keeping up a constant fire on Fort Henry.



Etching, "Heroism of Elizabeth Zane" from *The American Magazine*, Volume 12, p. 605, 1881. OCPL Archives.

The morning of September 12 provided the critical moment. Elizabeth Zane made history by making a dash of approximately 70 yards from the fort to the Zane blockhouse. Realizing the blockhouse contained the needed powder, the defenders decided one of them should make the dangerous run to retrieve as much as could be carried. Elizabeth Zane volunteered immediately. Others suggested that a man might be better for this task. Elizabeth allegedly replied "and should he fall, his loss will be more severely felt. You have not one man to spare; a woman will not be missed in defense of the fort."[13] The others agreed, and she ran out of the fort as soon as the gates were opened. The enemy did not fire at Elizabeth as she ran towards the blockhouse. Their hesitation may have been due to her gender and being unsure of her intended mission. Once at the blockhouse, a tablecloth was wrapped around her and powder poured into it so she could run back to the fort. The British and

Native Americans now realized her mission and fired at Elizabeth as she returned to the fort. But none of their bullets found their mark. Betty Zane's fantastic bravery combined with the poor aim of the attackers saved Fort Henry. The run would forever be known as Betty Zane's "gunpowder exploit." [14] Several accounts have reversed the order of this famous run and Colonel Zane did not include a description in his report to Fort Pitt. Bradt and his men made one more night assault before leaving the area. Zane reported only having one man wounded.

The siege of 1782 may indeed have been one of the last battles of the war, but to many in the upper Ohio valley region, it was just one on many scenes of violence on the western frontier that would extend for the next decade. The war on the frontier shaped our nation as settlers bravely pressed west into lands boldly defended by many whose names have been lost to history.

Michael Giorgianni is a lifelong western Pennsylvania resident with a deep passion for American history, particularly the Civil War and the role of Pittsburgh in our nation's development. He has taught middle school social studies in the Hempfield Area School District for over 25 years, inspiring generations of students with his enthusiasm for the past. Michael is especially drawn to human interest stories found throughout history and is excited to share his research and meet fellow history enthusiasts. He has also seen his research extend beyond presentations with several articles published onto the website Emerging Civil War. Michael earned a Bachelors in Secondary Education - Social Studies from Clarion University of PA in 1998 and a Masters in Education - Curriculum and Instruction from the University of Pittsburgh in 2002.

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Bonded Generals: The Marquis de Lafayette in Wheeling and James Varnum in Marietta, Ohio

by Phillip S. Greenwalt



Image: Lafayette College.

With the passing of George Washington twenty-six years prior, the gentleman who stepped from the swaying boat tied up along the wharf of the northernmost town in Virginia ranked high on the list of celebrities. For he was a living link back to the years of Washington, when the "Father of the Country" strode the earth. In fact, he was considered a surrogate son, further cementing the link; his son was named in honor of the late Virginian, military leader, and president. That offspring's name? George Washington Lafayette.

Which meant that the man strolling confidently but showing his age, being in his seventies, and the tough years that fell in between the last time he was in America, was the Marquis de Lafayette.

The famous Frenchman, who, as an aspiring military officer, eagerly adopted the cause of American independence from Great Britain, had returned. In fact, when he walked up the wooden

dock into the town of Wheeling, it marked the only time the Marquis put his two feet on what became, thirty-eight years later, the state of West Virginia in 1863. [1]

He arrived around noon on the *Harald*, a steamboat operating on the Ohio River, stepping foot onto Beymer's Landing at the end of Ninth Street. Judge Alexander Caldwell, whose brother helped erect and defend Fort Henry during the American Revolution, had been tasked with giving the public address. Lafayette, by this point in his American journey, was well-versed in how to reply. And locals deemed his delivery to be most gracious; probably with a nod or a few words of thanks and appreciation. Then it was off to Edward Graham's Virginia Hotel before the Frenchman attended a public ball thrown in his honor.

After a night's rest, Lafayette departed, leaving behind memories that lasted a lifetime for those souls of northwest Virginia.

Meanwhile, in Marietta

Many miles to the south, if one leisurely floated or sailed down the Ohio River, sat the town of Marietta, Ohio, which had sprung up like so many new metropolises as the Ohio Country became more settled in the last decade plus of the 18th century. Settlers came from all along the eastern seaboard, including the tiny former colony of Rhode Island, one of the original thirteen. Hailing from that colony



Portrait of James Mitchell Varnum by Charles Willson Peale, Wikimedia Commons .

with a brigadier general commission in the Continental Army during the American Revolution was James Mitchell Varnum.

Although born in different hemispheres, in different circumstances, both Varnum and Lafayette had made major contributions to the cause of American independence. Both had now traveled to the near-western fringes of that burgeoning country before the term "Manifest Destiny," with its full spectrum of meaning, entered the American lexicon. One hoped to see what he had bled for, persevered for, and helped create one last time before venturing back across the Atlantic Ocean to spend his days in much-deserved retirement, however that looked, for the busybody that was Lafayette. The other looked to spend his remaining days on the fringes of the United States, watching what he bled for, preserved for, and helped create, while presiding over a slice of it as a judge.

The one link, besides geography and accolades rightfully bestowed on Lafayette and Varnum, that also tied the men together was their viewpoint on African Americans, both free and enslaved, and their prospective contributions to America's founding and future.

Varnum entered the world on December 17, 1748, in Dracut, Massachusetts, attended Harvard College beginning in his mid-teens, and then transferred to Rhode Island College — renamed Brown University in 1804 — where he was a member of the first graduating class in 1769. Rhode Island and Varnum became intertwined from that point forward. The year after graduation he married Martha Child, who went by "Patty," and in 1773, the couple settled in East Greenwich, Rhode Island, where they oversaw construction of a house near the town hall.

Varnum was a lawyer who, in one case, represented his friend Nathanael Greene, who would later become a major general in the American Revolution. According to the National Park Service, Varnum proposed the idea of enlisting African American soldiers in the Continental Army, leading to Rhode Island author-

izing the enlistment of both African Americans and Native Americans. The seed of this idea germinated into two regiments, the 1st and 2nd Rhode Island. The latter was commanded by a cousin of Nathanael Greene, the second most important military commander of the war. Varnum pitched a formal proposal to the Rhode Island General Assembly to help fill the gap in enlistment quotas after gaining approval to do so from Washington. The assembly voted to allow the enlistment of indentured servants, indigenous peoples, and former slaves. [2] Those who served were granted their freedom, and although the colony's enslaved population was low, and limitations on the time given for enlistments, which directly affected the numbers that could be recruited by Varnum. Although the regiment never gained full strength, the 1st Rhode Island Regiment participated admirably in the Battle of Rhode Island on August 29, 1778. [3]

Furthermore, this unit, unfortunately, would be the last integrated military organization in the United States Army until the Korean War. Varnum's thinking and initiative created a viable solution and an attempt to broaden what the "life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness" line meant in the Declaration of Independence. After his service in the war, Varnum served in the Continental Congress in various stints throughout the 1780s and continued to grow his legal practice. He was a brilliant attorney, and at 39, he was appointed a judge in the newly opened Ohio Territory. Unfortunately for the country, Varnum contracted tuberculosis and died approximately seven months after arriving in Marietta, Ohio.[4]

Meanwhile in South Carolina

Varnum was not the only one thinking in terms of what war meant for the enslaved. A certain European officer and member of lower mobility came face-to-face with it before he even put two feet on North American soil.

According to the National Park Service, Lafayette arrived in America at age 19 in 1777, landing to aid the fight against the

British. Along with Lafayette in his traveling party was Baron de Kalb, who later sacrificed his life for the cause, falling at the Battle of Camden in August 1781. After a few days of respite at Huger's plantation home near Georgetown, South Carolina, Lafayette made his way to Philadelphia to join the war effort. We can speculate on how much this first interaction with the institution of slavery affected Lafayette, but without question, it left at least a lingering memory.

Lafayette dedicated a portion of his remaining years to championing, although unsuccessfully and usually with more idealism than realism, the plight of enslaved blacks, their freedom, and ideas on how to end slavery that set up the formerly enslaved for success. And delicately discussing these ideas with American elites such as Washington and Thomas Jefferson, both of whom had enslaved populations on their various properties. Lafayette's views about the importance of freeing the enslaved are summed up best by this attributed quote.

"I would never have drawn my sword in the cause of America if I could have conceived that thereby I was founding a land of slavery!" [5]

The Bond Between Two Generals

Varnum and Lafayette had crossed paths during the American Revolution. When both were serving in Rhode Island, according to Varnum's cousin Ellen Fry, "Nights were spent in conviviality…" [6]

Although they never met after victory, which both Lafayette and Varnum had bled and sacrificed to achieve their progressive views, especially on the role and advancement of both free and enslaved African Americans, created another bond between the two generals.

Phillip S. Greenwalt is the co-founder of Emerging Revolutionary War and a full-time historian with Emerging Civil War. He is the author or co-author of seven books on the American Revolutionary and Civil Wars. He has worked for the National Park Service for 19 years in a variety of parks and roles. Phillip is a native of Baltimore, Maryland and a 2008 graduate of Wheeling Jesuit University with a degree in history.

End Notes

1 American Battlefield Trust. (n.d.). Lafayette Tour Marker, Wheeling, West Virginia (WV-137). American Battlefield Trust.

2 National Park Service. (n.d.). General James Varnum. Valley Forge National Historical Park. U.S. Department of the Interior.

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Land Grants & the Gnadenhutten Massacre

by Seán P. Duffy

One of the most sought after commodities in the 18th century American colonies was land. Land ownership was the key to higher status in society. So, when the Revolutionary War started, as the colonies had no real currency or precious metals with which to recruit and pay troops, western land was used as a natural (and plentiful) incentive for young men to enlist as soldiers and to be recognized for their service.[1] In fact, land speculation was one of the root causes of the war itself.[2]

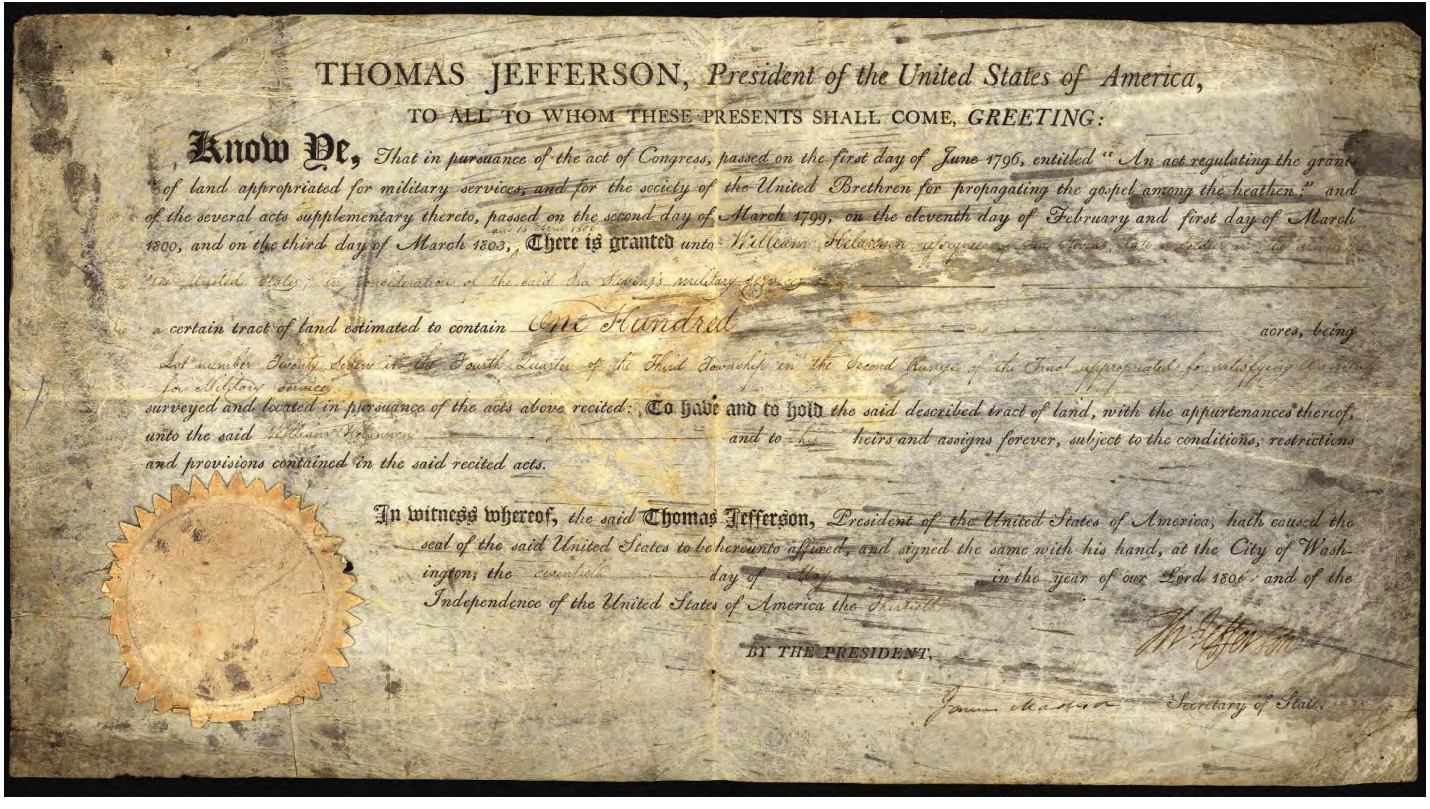
In 1776, men who enlisted for three years were awarded $20 and 100 acres. After the war, each state controlled the distribution of land. Virginia gave its soldiers land in the Ohio Territory.[3]

When the United States federal government was established in 1789, it assumed responsibility for the pensions of Revolutionary War veterans.[4] Grants were signed by the president himself, and used to encourage westward expansion. Every president before Andrew Jackson personally signed such grants, until an act of Congress allowed for secretarial signatures.[5]

When we at the Ohio County Public Library sought vintage artifacts from our archives for an America 250 exhibit, there really was only one viable option. Thus, in our America 250 Main Exhibit, “A Republic -- If We Can Keep It,” exhibit, you will see authentic, vintage examples signed by Presidents John Adams and Thomas Jefferson, as well as by Secretaries of State James Madison and John Marshall. You will also see an example from the Military Bounty Land Acts from 1796, signed by President James Monroe, which designates land near Steubenville, Ohio.

Images and transcriptions of these presidential land grants follow. They can be seen in-person in the exhibit now through the end of 2026. After that time, a request can be made to OCPL Archives to see the documents. As a print advantage, you may also view the backs of the grants where significant.

1806 land grant signed by President Thomas Jefferson and Secretary of State James Madison.



THOMAS JEFFERSON, *President of the United States of America,*

TO ALL TO WHOM THESE PRESENTS SHALL COME, *GREETING:*

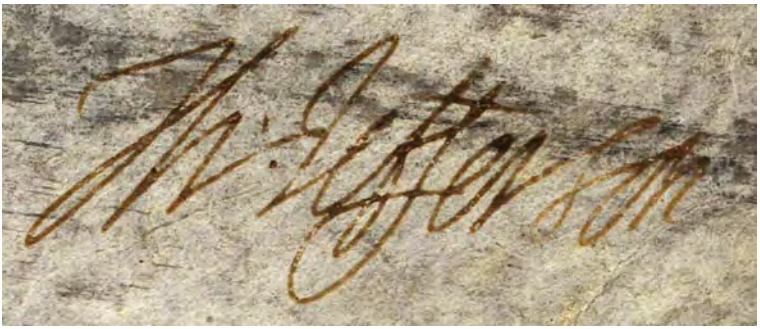
Know Ye, *That in pursuance of the act of Congress, passed on the first day of June 1796, entitled "An act regulating the grants of land appropriated for military services, and for the society of the United Brethren for propagating the gospel among the heathen;" and of the several acts supplementary thereto, passed on the second day of March 1799, on the eleventh day of February and first day of March 1800, and on the third day of March 1803,* **There is granted** *unto William Helderson [illegible] the United States in consideration of the said [illegible] military [illegible]*

a certain tract of land estimated to contain One Hundred [illegible] acres, being Lot number Twenty Seven in the Fourth Quarter of the Third Township in the Second Range of the Tract appropriated for satisfying Warrants for Military Services surveyed and located in pursuance of the acts above recited: **To have and to hold** *the said described tract of land, with the appurtenances thereof, unto the said William Helderson [illegible] and to his heirs and assigns forever, subject to the conditions, restrictions and provisions contained in the said recited acts.*

In witness whereof, *the said* **Thomas Jefferson,** *President of the United States of America, hath caused the seal of the said United States to be hereunto affixed, and signed the same with his hand, at the City of Washington, the twenty-third day of May in the year of our Lord 1806, and of the Independence of the United States of America the Thirtieth.*

BY THE PRESIDENT,

James Madison *Secretary of State.*





Transcription of Jefferson/Madison land grant:

THOMAS JEFFERSON, President of the United States of America

To All To Whom These Presents Shall Come, Greeting:

Know Ye, That in pursuance of the act of Congress, passed on the first day of June 1796, entitled "An act regulating the grants of land appropriated for military service, and for the society of the United Brethren for propagating the gospel among the heathen:" and of the several acts supplementary thereto, passed on the second day of March 1799, on the eleventh day of February and first day of March 1800, and on the third day of March 1803, There Is Granted unto William Helannen assignee of Ira Stevens, late a soldier in the army of the United States, in consideration of the said Ira Steven's military service A certain tract of land estimated to contain one hundred acres, being Lot number Twenty Seven in the Fourth Quarter of the Third Township in the Second Range of the Tract appropriated for satisfying warrant for Military service surveyed and located in pursuance of the acts above recited. To Have and to Hold the said described tract of land with the appurtenances thereof, unto the said William Helannen and to

his heirs and assigns forever, subject to the conditions, restrictions and provisions contained in the said recited acts.

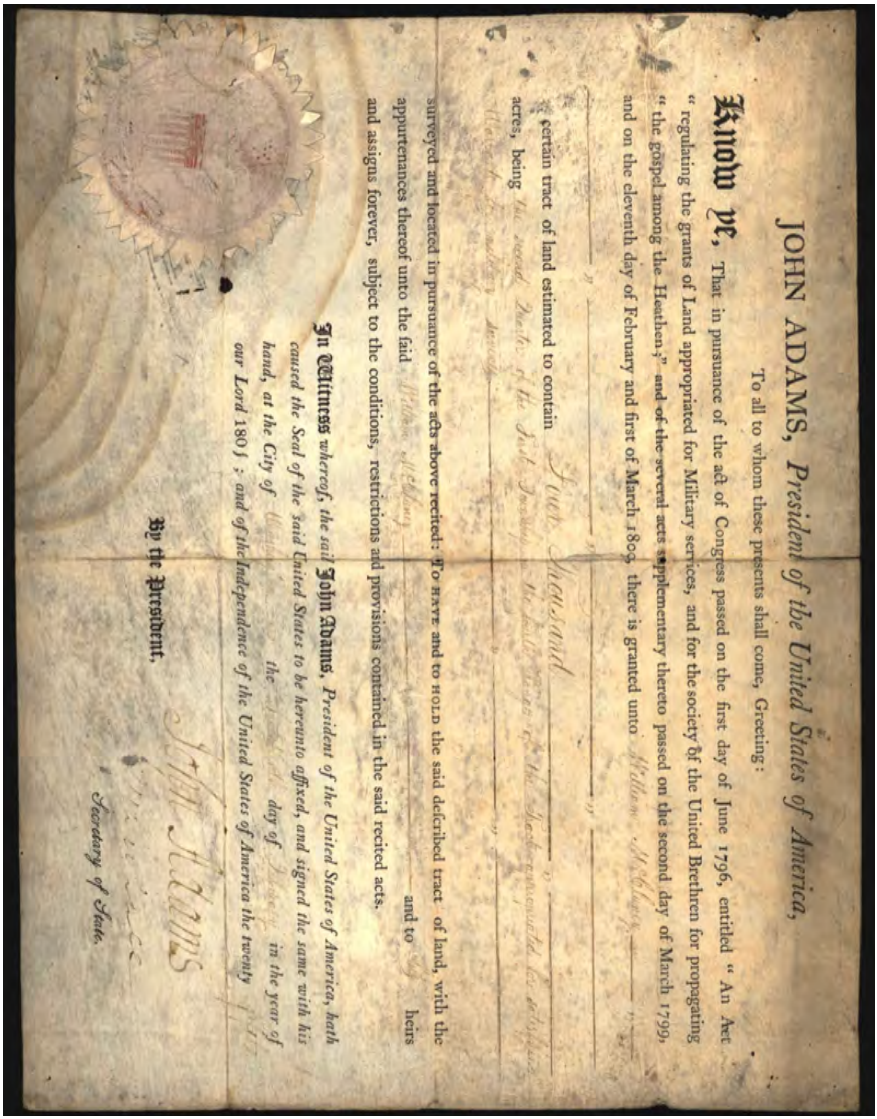
In witness whereof, the said Thomas Jefferson, President of the United States of America, hath caused the seal of the said United States to be hereunto affixed, and signed the same with his hand, at the City of Washington; the twentieth day of May in the year of our Lord 1806; and of the Independence of the United State of America the thirtieth.

By the President, *Thomas Jefferson*

James Madison *Secretary of State.*







JOHN ADAMS, *President of the United States of America,*

To all to whom these presents shall come, Greeting:

Know ye, That in pursuance of the act of Congress passed on the first day of June 1796, entitled "An Act "regulating the grants of Land appropriated for Military services, and for the society of the United Brethren for propagating "the gospel among the Heathen;" and of the several acts supplementary thereto passed on the second day of March 1799, and on the eleventh day of February and first of March 1803, there is granted unto

certain tract of land estimated to contain acres, being

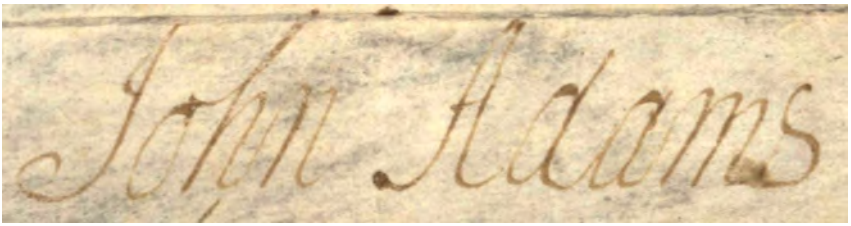
surveyed and located in pursuance of the acts above recited: To HAVE and to HOLD the said described tract of land, with the appurtenances thereof unto the said and to heirs and assigns forever, subject to the conditions, restrictions and provisions contained in the said recited acts.

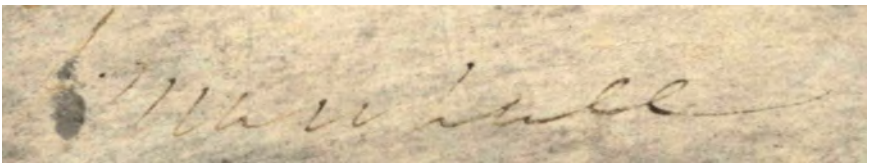
In Witness *whereof, the said* **John Adams,** *President of the United States of America, hath caused the Seal of the said United States to be hereunto affixed, and signed the same with his hand, at the City of the day of in the year of our Lord* 180 *; and of the Independence of the United States of America the twenty*

By the President.

Secretary of State.

1801 land grant signed by President John Adams and Secretary of State and future Supreme Court Chief Justice John Marshall.





Transcription of Adams/Marshall land grant:

JOHN ADAMS, President of the United States of America

To all to whom these presents shall come, Greeting:

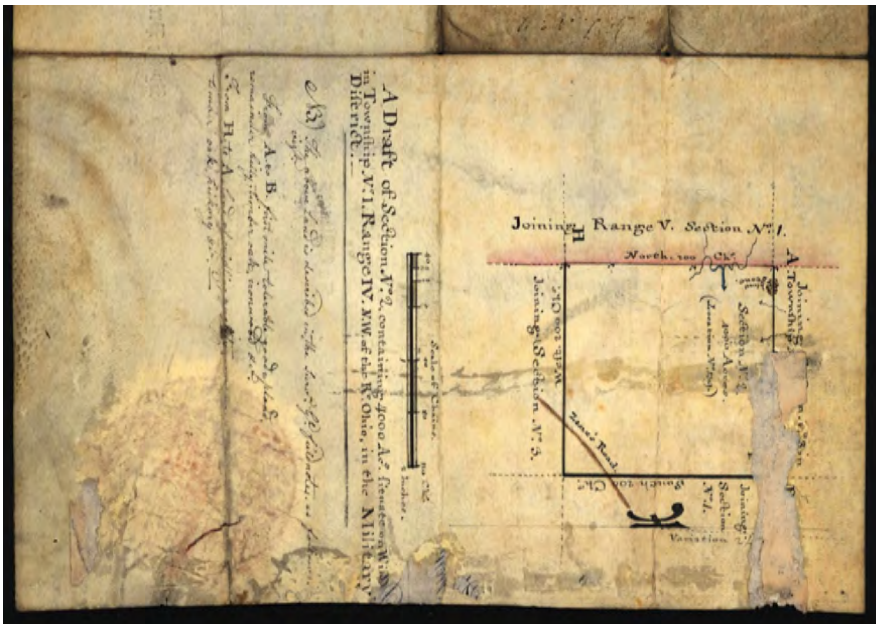
Know Ye, That in pursuance of the act of Congress, passed on the first day of June 1796, entitled "An Act " regulating the grants of Land appropriated for Military service, and for the society of the United Brethren for propagating "the gospel among the Heathen;" and of the several acts supplementary thereto, passed on the second day of March 1799, and on the eleventh day of February and first of March 1800, there is granted unto William McCluney certain tract of land estimated to contain Four Thousand acres, being the second Quarter of the First Township in the fourth Range of the Tract appropriated for sales or in Warranty for military services surveyed and located in pursuance of the acts above recited. To Have and to Hold the said described tract of land, with the appurtenances thereof unto the said Williiam McCluney and to his heirs and assigns forever, subject to the conditions, restrictions and provisions contained in the said recited acts.

In witness whereof, the said John Adams, President of the United States of America, hath caused the Seal of the said United States to be hereunto affixed, and signed the same with his hand, at the

city of Washington, the seventeenth day of February in the year of our Lord 1801; and of the Independence of the United State of America the twenty fifth

By the President, *John Adams*

John Marshall *Secretary of State*



The back of the John Adams/John Marshall land grant.





JAMES MONROE, President of the United States of America,

TO ALL TO WHOM THESE PRESENTS SHALL COME, GREETING:

KNOW YE, That

having deposited in the General Land Office a Certificate of the Register of the Land Office at

whereby it appears that full payment has been made for

of the Lands directed to be sold at by the Act of Congress, entitled

"An Act providing for the sale of the Lands of the United States, in the Territory north west of the Ohio, and above the mouth of Kentucky River," and of the Acts amendatory of the same, There is granted, by the United States, unto the said lot or section of Land above described: To have and to hold the said lot or section of Land, with the Appurtenances unto the said heirs and assigns forever.

IN TESTIMONY WHEREOF, I have caused these Letters to be made PATENT, and the Seal of the GENERAL LAND OFFICE to be hereunto affixed.

GIVEN under my hand at the City of Washington, the day of in the year of our Lord one Thousand eight hundred and and of the Independence of the United States of America the forty

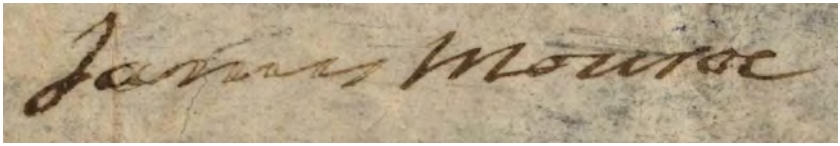
By the President,

Commissioner of the General Land Office.

Recorded Volume

Page

1819 land grant signed by President James Monroe, himself a Revolutionary War veteran.



Transcription of Monroe land grant:

JAMES MONROE, President of the United States of America

To All To Whom These Presents Shall Come, Greeting:

Know Ye, That William Gamble of Jefferson County Ohio having deposited in the General Land Office a Certificate of the Register of the Land Office at Steubenville whereby it appears that full payment has been made for the North East quarter of section three in township fourteen in range seven of the Lands directed to be sold at Steubenville by the Act of Congress, entitled "An Act providing for the sale of the Lands of the United States in the Territory north west of the Ohio, and above the mouth of Kentucky River," and of the Acts amendatory of the same, There is Granted, by the United States, unto the said William Gamble the quarter lot or section of Land above described: To have and to hold the said quarter lot or section of Land, with the Appurtenances unto the said William Gamble his heirs and assigns forever.

In testimony whereof, I have caused these Letters to be made PATENT and the Seal of the General Land Office to be hereunto affixed. GIVEN under my hand at the city of Washington, the twenty-first day of May in the year of our Lord one Thousand eight hundred and nineteen and of the Independence of the United States of America the forty third.

By the President, *James Monroe*

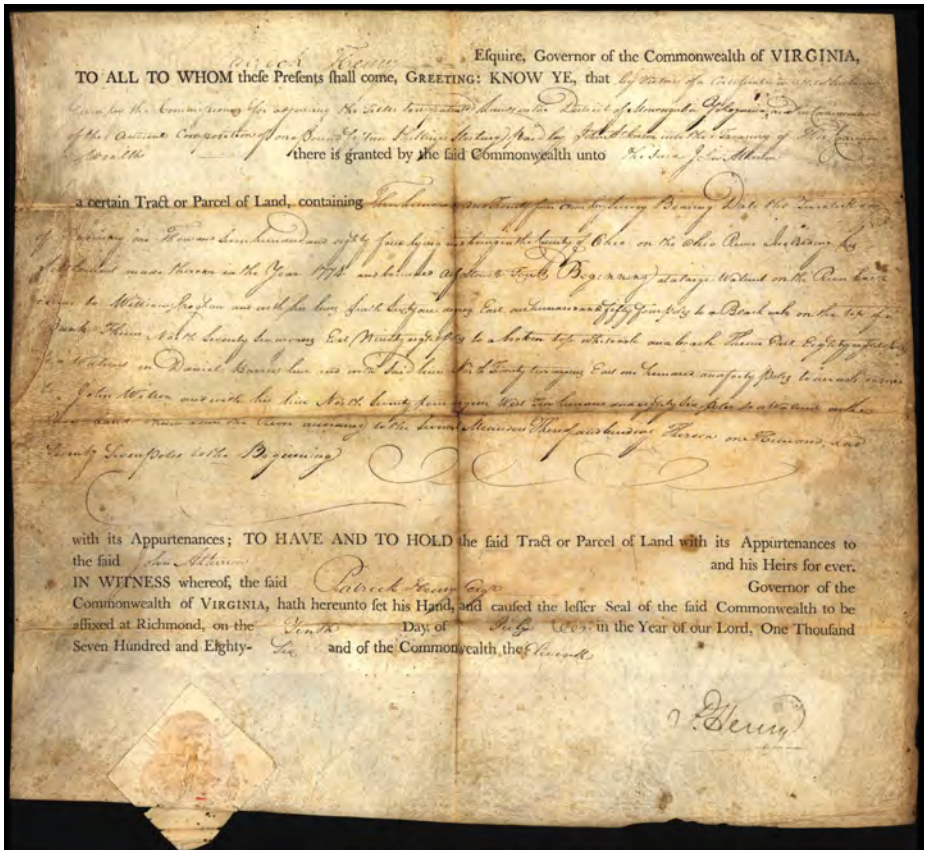
Recorded Volume 22 *Page 3 of 5*

Josiah Meigs Commissioner

of the General Land Office.



The remaining two grants, though not Revolutionary War payments, are signed by significant players in the Founding Era, governors Patrick Henry and Edmund Randolph (on loan from the Archives of the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston), a signer of the Constitution. These are land grants that prove a settler bought parcels of land in the Ohio territory. They contain interesting landmarks, including specific types of trees, to mark the boundaries of the parcels.



Esquire, Governor of the Commonwealth of VIRGINIA,

TO ALL TO WHOM these Presents shall come, GREETING: KNOW YE, that

there is granted by the said Commonwealth unto

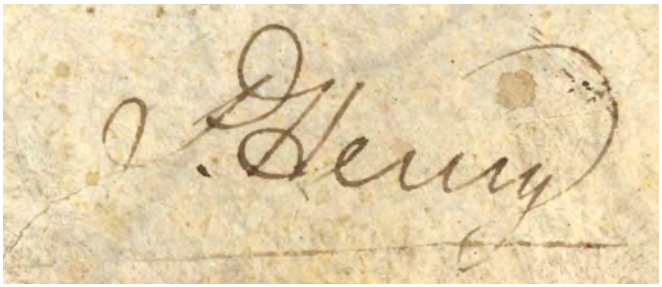
a certain Tract or Parcel of Land, containing

with its Appurtenances; TO HAVE AND TO HOLD the said Tract or Parcel of Land with its Appurtenances to the said and his Heirs for ever.

IN WITNESS whereof, the said Governor of the Commonwealth of VIRGINIA, hath hereunto set his Hand, and caused the lesser Seal of the said Commonwealth to be affixed at Richmond, on the Day of in the Year of our Lord, One Thousand Seven Hundred and Eighty- and of the Commonwealth the

P. Henry

1786 land grant signed by Governor of Virginia Patrick Henry, the fiery anti-federalist who famously said, “Give me liberty or give me death!”





The back of the Patrick Henry land grant.

Transcription of Patrick Henry land grant:

Patrick Henry Esquire, Governor of the Commonwealth of VIRGINIA, TO ALL TO WHOM these Presents shall come, GREETING: KNOW YE, that by virtue of a certificate in right of settlement

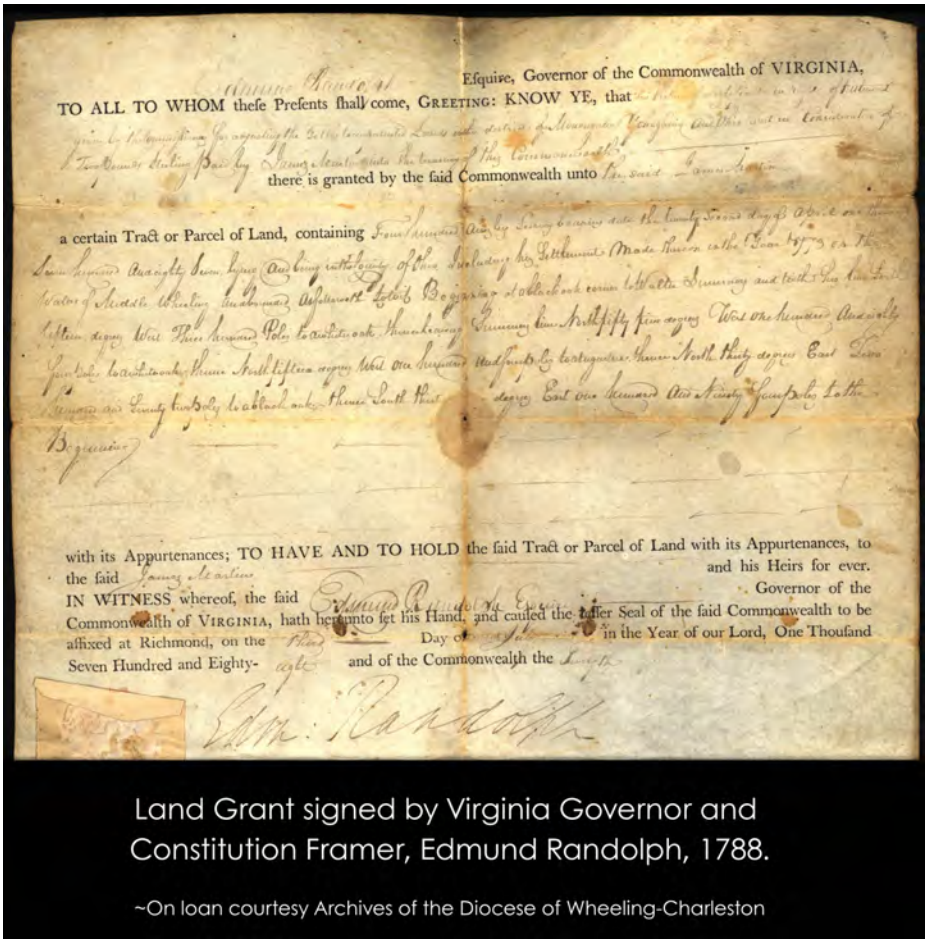
Given by the Commissioners for adjusting the Titles to certificate Lands in District of Monongalia of Ohio Youghiogheny and in Consideration of the ancient composition of one pound fifteen shillings sterling paid by John Atkerson into the Treasury of this commonwealth there is granted by said Commonwealth unto The said John Atkerson a certain Tract or Parcel of Land, containing Three hundred and twenty four acres by Survey Bearing Date the twentieth day Of February one Thousand Seven hundred and eighty four lying and being in the County of Ohio on the Ohio River him leaving his Settler's cut made thereon in the Year 1774 and bounded as followeth to wit South Beginning at a large Walnut on the River bank corner to Williams Grohgan and with

his lines. South Sixty-one degrees East. one hundred and Fifty Four poles to a Black oak on the top of a Banks. Thence North Seventy Six degrees East Ninety eight poles to a broken top white oak and back. Thence East Eighty-Eight poles to a walnut in Daniel Harries line and with said line North Twenty two degrees East one hundred and forty poles to an ash corner To John Wilson and with his line North twenty four degrees West. Two hundred and eighty five poles to a Walnut on the River bank. Thence down the River according to the Several meanders Thereof said leavings. Thereon one Hundred and Seven of Seven poles to the Beginning. with its appurtenances; TO HAVE AND TO HOLD the said Tract or Parcel of Land with its Appurtenances to the said John Atkerson and his Heirs for ever.

IN WITNESS Whereof, the said, Patrick Henry Esquire Governor of the Commonwealth of Virginia, hath hereunto set his Hand and caused the letter Seal of the said Commonwealth to be affixed at Richmond, on the Tenth Day of July in the Year of our Lord, One Thousand Seven Hundred and Eighty-six and of the Commonwealth the eleventh

P. Henry





Land Grant signed by Virginia Governor and Constitution Framer, Edmund Randolph, 1788.

~On loan courtesy Archives of the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston



Transcription of Edmund Randolph land grant:

Edmund Randolph Esquire, Governor of the Commonwealth of VIRGINIA,TO ALL TO WHOM these Presents shall come, GREETING: KNOW YE, that by virtue of a certificate in right of settlement given by the Commissioners for adjusting the Titles

to Certificated Lands within district of Monongalia Youghiogheny and Ohio and In consideration of two Pounds Sterling paid by James Martin into the treasury of this Commonwealth there is granted by said Commonwealth unto The said James Martin A certain Tract or Parcel of Land, containing Four hundred acres by Survey bearing date the twenty second day of April one Thousand Seven hundred and eighty-seven, lying and being in the county of Ohio, including his settlement made thereon in the year lying on the Waters of middle Wheeling and bounded as followeth to wit Beginning at a black oak corner to Walter Summers and with his line South fifteen degrees West three hundred Poles to a white oak. Thence leaving Summers line North fifty five degrees. West one hundred and eighty four poles to a white oak. Thence North fifteen degrees West one hundred and four poles to a sugar tree. Thence North thirty degrees East Two hundred and seventy two poles to a black oak. Thence South thirty degrees East one hundred and ninety four poles to the Beginning, with its appurtenances; TO HAVE AND TO HOLD the said Tract or Parcel of Land with its Appurtenances, to the said James Martin and his Heirs for ever.

IN WITNESS Whereof, the said, Edmund Randolph Esquire Governor of the Commonwealth of Virginia, hath hereunto set his Hand and caused the letter Seal of the said Commonwealth to be affixed at Richmond, on the Third Day of July in the Year of our Lord, One Thousand Seven Hundred and Eighty-eight and of the Commonwealth the twelfth

Edm. Randolph





The back of the Edmund Randolph land grant.

The Gnadenhutten Massacre



Engraving of the Gnadenhutten massacre in 1782, from Henry Howe's book *Historical Collections of the Great West.*

Interestingly, the two federal grants signed by Jefferson and Adams mention a series of Acts passed by Congress from 1796 to 1800, titled, "An Act regulating the grants of Land appropriated for Military service, *and for the society of the United Brethren for propagating the gospel among the Heathen."* [emphasis added].

The latter term refers indirectly to victims of the "Gnadenhutten Massacre," during which 96 Christian pacifist Lenape (Delaware) native people were deceived, falsely accused of making raids, bound, and then bludgeoned to death and scalped by members of the Pennsylvania militia during the Revolutionary War in 1782.[6] According to one sources, the women and girls were systematically raped before the murders occurred. Instead of resisting, the pacifist victims reportedly sang hymns and prayed. [7]

This atrocity took place just outside an Ohio village founded by the Moravian Christian missionaries who had converted the Lenape. This was a mere 58 miles from Wheeling in the Tuscarawas Valley. There is now a monument in place at the site.

In addition to compensating Revolutionary War veterans, these laws were intended to provide reparations for this massacre, which Benjamin Franklin wrote, had given him "infinite Pain and Vexation." [8]

End Notes

1 Blaakman, M. *Speculation Nation: Land Mania in the Revolutionary American Republic*. University of Pennsylvania Press. 2023.

2 "Real Estate and the Revolution," JSTOR, online: https://daily.jstor.org/real-estate-and-the-revolution/

3 "Land for Service: How Revolutionary Soldiers Were Paid in Acres" AgnetWest online: https://agnetwest.com/land-service-revolutionary-soldiers-paid-acres/

4 Graves, W. Pension Acts: An Overview of Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty Land Legislation and the Southern Campaigns Pension Transcription Project. https://revwarapps.org/revwar-pension-acts.htm. 2017.

5 University of California, Autry Museum of the American West. Land grant for military service to William and James Taylor signed by Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, 1897, 1807. Online https://oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/c8td9w3m

6 Sterner, E. *Anatomy of a massacre : the destruction of Gnadenhutten*, 1782. Westholme, 2020.

7 Thompson, R. *A Woman of Courage on the West Virginia Frontier: Phebe Tucker Cunningham*. Arcadia Publishing. 2013.

8 Sterner, E. "Moravians in the Middle: The Gnadenhutten Massacre." *Journal of the American Revolution*. Online: https://allthingsliberty.com/2018/02/moravians-middle-gnadenhutten-massacre/

Wheeling: Connecting the Nation

by Michael L. Giorgianni

Introduction

In the reexamination of Wheeling and our nation's 250 years of growth, struggle, and accomplishment, a quote by the French geographer Reclus occurred to me.

"Geography is history in place, history is geography in time"

Clearly, Wheeling's location on the Ohio River in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains has dictated the region's development. Since its roots were established by Ebenezer Zane in 1769, Wheeling and the surrounding region have played significant roles in the development of our nation. From the earliest Native American relations, the Revolutionary War, and as a bold strong point and symbol of resilience as our population pushed further west. This river town of 500 residents in 1800 would see its importance climb due to its advantageous location, as transportation on the water grew into steam powered ships, and as land and rail infrastructure improvements were funded through public and private projects of the 19th century. The gateway to the west came through the upper Ohio River valley as pioneers, merchants, artisans, and dreamers of all kinds ventured proudly forward filled with hope. The established east coast, and its people, would now

be linked to the ever expanding west and its endless opportunities — directly through Wheeling.

Connecting West to East

George Washington and others recognized the need to connect the region and people west of the mountains to the populated east coast. Washington's ideas were rooted in the trips made to this region thirty years earlier as a surveyor and during the French and Indian War. The future first president also made a five-week journey in the fall of 1784 and remarked on the issue in the following way.

"The western settlers, from my own observation, stand as it were on a pivot, the touch of a feather would almost incline them (either to England or to Spain) … The way to avoid both, happily for us, is easy, and dictated by our clearest interest. It is to open a wide door, and make a smooth way for the produce of that country to pass to our markets." [1]

Washington, an astute politician and invested land holder, saw the political importance and commercial benefit of establishing communications between west and east. The early 1790's, during Washington's presidency, demonstrated the lack of connection through events such as the Whiskey Rebellion, continued fighting with Native Americans, and British military presence in the west. Interestingly, but not directly related, the National Road, when built, would pass directly through the site of our new nation's greatest internal test in southwestern Pennsylvania. The Federal government ended the Whiskey Rebellion by a massive show of force, led directly by Washington in 1794. A different, but equal, federal commitment would be needed to construct a national road, one larger than any previous federal public works project, and one which aimed to gain a handle on the frontier as well as to provide a means of transporting people and goods.

The Move Toward a National Road

George Washington, Albert Gallatin, Henry Clay, Thomas Jeffer-

son and others are some of the individuals responsible for carrying the idea of the National Road to reality. These men had life experiences, economic, and political interests that shaped their viewpoint on the matter. Believing in the importance of the project is one thing, but developing a funding plan, with solid political backing for such a project was a herculean task. The difficulty did not end there, as a route would need to be chosen, contracts issued, and a construction project completed across several states in some of the most difficult terrain in the eastern part of the continent. A factor that may have swayed politicians to support the project occurred on March 4, 1789. The first Congress was scheduled to meet for the first time, but there was no session due to not having a quorum. Factors affecting this delay included severe weather and the consequent poor condition of the roads.[2] Both houses of Congress would not have a quorum until the first week of April.

The dream of a federally funded road to connect the west and east was such a bold idea that President Thomas Jefferson initially doubted the authority of the federal government for such a project. An even more difficult obstacle was funding the project. Brilliantly, in February 1802, Gallatin proposed to Congress an idea that ten percent of the net proceeds of federal lands sold would be applied to constructing roads connecting the Potomac River to the Ohio River. Congress agreed but lowered the amount to five percent. This proved to be a significant amount of money as sales of lands amounted to approximately $20 million over the next 35 years. The official legislation was passed in 1806, and the project was initially named the Cumberland Road.

Planning a route was extremely difficult even when Braddock's Road was primarily followed to Uniontown, Pennsylvania. As the road was being planned, the political workings of Pennsylvania politicians, including Albert Gallatin, may have aided Wheeling and the upper Ohio River valley in a big way. Gallatin was very much aware that Jefferson needed Pennsylvania's support in the



National Road at Pleasant Valley. 1888. Brown photo. OCPL Archives.

upcoming election, and that state's approval for the road directly told Pres. Jefferson that the route should include Uniontown and Washington, Pennsylvania. This route would differ from Braddock's Road as it moved northwest from Uniontown toward Washington instead of heading directly toward Pittsburgh. In the first stages of planning, the road was set to meet the Ohio River between Wheeling, Virginia, at that time, and Steubenville, Ohio. Later designs called for the road to be extended toward central Ohio, which Wheeling was in line with, while also being approximately 30 miles west of Washington, Pennsylvania.

The National Road's western terminus being at Wheeling, and not at Wellsburg or another location, is due in large part to Colonel Moses Shepard and his wife Lydia Shepard efforts and influential connections. Accounts suggest the Shepard's influence and close relationship with Representative Henry Clay played a direct role in ensuring that the road ran directly through their Elm Grove estate. Shepard Hall, now known as Monument Place, was

one of the most impressive structures in the region for a family that was equally impressive. To demonstrate this amount of influence, diverting the road to this Elm Grove location would require the road to cross Wheeling Creek twice with bridges needed at both sites. This request was not seen as out of line, and Shepard actually received the contracts to build the needed bridges. Showing their gratitude, the Shepard's honored Henry Clay with a 15-foot monument built on their property. Wheeling would forever be a center of transportation, an inland port, and center of commerce with the joining of the National Road and the Ohio River.

The Ohio River Gateway

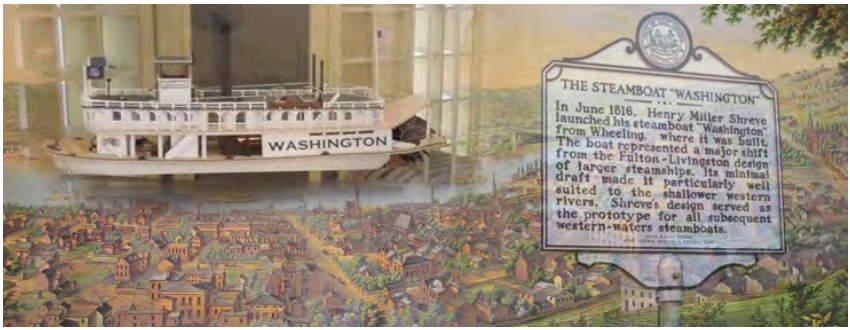
Travelers on the National Road described an impressive amount of goods being moved through Wheeling on the Ohio River.[3] Already in a prime location for commerce, Wheeling's economy was boosted by the arrival of the National Road in 1818. The wide variety of goods that reached Wheeling could be sent upriver to Pittsburgh or moved to eastern cities on the road. Items of all sorts were also transported downriver to ports along the Ohio River and as far as Louisiana. An article in the *Wheeling Times and Advertiser* stated the following;

"The road invites to its smooth pavement, both travel and produce, from the roads and canals that intersect it from the north and south, passing through as productive a land as exists on Earth." [4]

A traveler to Wheeling would come across people of all sorts and from many different places. Many centers of business and ports of entry, as Wheeling was made by Congressional Act in 1831, were remarkable places. Travelers would commonly see pottery works alongside factories and mills, tanneries, markets, and retail shops of all kinds. As many different types of business thrived in Wheeling, many wrote about the impressive iron foundries and crews working the furnaces day and night. A merchant from Baltimore stated "Wheeling certainly is the nail city. I have never

seen so many in my life."[5] The merchant counted 20 wagons, filled with containers full of nails heading west on the National Road. The nail industry was so successful that related industries such as the construction of kegs to hold the nails also became lucrative. Wheeling had grown into a thriving place after the road and river met in 1818.

Origin of the American Steamboat



A model of the steamboat *Washington*, built by John Bowman.

As modern residents of the region attend events at Wesbanco Arena, many may not realize they are parking or walking at the site of the birthplace of the American steamboat. The state historical marker placed at the corner of Sixteenth and Main streets salutes this proud Wheeling achievement. Henry Miller Shreve began constructing the steamboat "Washington" on the north bank of Wheeling Creek in September 1815. Currently, this is the site of the south parking lot of Wesbanco Arena.

Several features of the *Washington* distinguish this steamboat as the inaugural American steamboat. She was the first with a flat-bottomed hull; the first with high-pressure steam engines; and the first to be built as a double decker. Sadly, she was also first steamboat to have a boiler explosion. On June 3, 1816, the *Washington* was launched on her maiden voyage destined for New Orleans. Tragedy struck six days out, near Marietta Ohio, when one of the engine's cylinders exploded. Almost the entire

crew and passengers experienced injuries. Seven people were killed immediately followed by several others succumbing to their injuries in the following days. The *Washington* was repaired and continued to New Orleans on October 7, 1816. This journey was followed by two trips to Louisville and a third trip to New Orleans. The successful trips are widely considered the birth of steam powered river navigation. At that time. the peak of technology and design for water transportation was centered at Wheeling. [6]

The Wheeling Suspension Bridge – 1849



From "Souvenir of Wheeling," Ward Bros, Columbus, Ohio, 1885. OCPL Archives.

The National Road and being the site of the birth of the American steamboat did much more than put Wheeling on the map. Both of these events cemented Wheeling as a center of transportation, industry, and commerce of all sorts. As the 19th progressed, nothing displayed Wheeling's significance to our nation's development quite like the Wheeling Suspension Bridge, which was completed in 1849. The bridge celebrated the longest deck span (1,010 feet) from 1849 until 1866, and was the oldest vehicular suspension bridge in use until being closed to vehicles in 2019

due to safety concerns. [7] The completion of the bridge was more than an engineering marvel, as its funding and construction overcame both instate and out of state obstacles and legal battles, which reached the Supreme Court. Neighboring Pennsylvania, particularly influential business leaders and politicians in Pittsburgh, correctly saw Wheeling as a legitimate economic threat in the advancing infrastructure and business development into the west. By 1840, Wheeling had grown to become Virginia's second largest city. Wheeling suffered from something that neighboring Pittsburgh did not have to deal with at the time. The state leaders in Virginia focused resources and attention on projects that sent commerce towards Richmond and the seaport at Norfolk. Pittsburgh benefitted from the Pennsylvania state leaders wanting infrastructure connections from Philadelphia to move towards Pittsburgh. Clearing these obstacles, which lasted for decades, did not diminish the bridge's importance and demonstrated a resilience that the upper Ohio valley should celebrate.

The Railroad Arrives – 1853

The first train arrived in Wheeling on January 1, 1853 on the recently completed Baltimore & Ohio Railroad. The importance of this first rail line connecting the Atlantic coast with the Ohio River was recognized by many and the following excerpt was printed in *The Wheeling Intelligencer* on January 4, 1853;

"There has seldom occurred in the annals of our city an event of more importance than the opening of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, which is to be celebrated on the 11th and 12th of this month. For near a quarter of a century the project of connecting the city of Baltimore with the Ohio River at Wheeling, has been claiming the attention of our citizens and the public, and now we are called upon to celebrate in a few days the accomplishment of the great event, so important in its bearing upon the great Commercial interests of the entire union."

Similar to the difficulties overcome in the completion of the



A B&O train stranded at Triadelphia during a flood, 1888. OCPL Archives.

Wheeling Suspension Bridge, the railroad's struggle involved the conquering of geography, the rapid advancement of transportation technology, and various political issues. This connection at Wheeling would aid the communities along the line and forever change towns and cities from Harpers Ferry to Benwood. Wheeling's residents understood the significance of this occasion, lighting the bridge with approximately 1,000 lights and holding a formal reception at the courthouse. A massive celebration was held on January 11, 1853 with *The Wheeling Intelligencer* printing the following excerpt on the next day.

"Yesterday morning dawned upon thousands who had come by steamboats, by coaches, on horses and on foot, from near and far, to participate in the commemoration of one of the greatest works of the age — the completion of the unbroken link connecting the Chesapeake with the waters of the Ohio.

At an early hour the streets were thronged with a multitude of all ages, sexes, and conditions which was increased by the successive arrivals of various steamers crowded with passengers. Among them we noticed the steamer WM Knox, with a large number of citizens from Marietta, and the American Star, with a handsomely uniformed company, the "Steubenville Grays," commanded by Capt. Webster. This company and the Bridgeport Artillery, commanded by Capt. Grubb. Presented an imposing pres-

ence in our streets. By noon, a dense crowd was assembled along the line of the track in Centre Wheeling, as far as the eye could see, awaiting the arrival of the cars."

Without question, Wheeling was ready to celebrate this historic moment.

Conclusion

Wheeling's role in the growth of our nation began prior to the official birth of our nation 250 years ago. The state of West Virginia would not be admitted to the union until 1863 as the counties that would be included as the 35th state had proven to be significantly different from the other regions of Virginia for many years. West Virginia has been labeled a northern, southern, eastern, and western state by people throughout the country in its history. The reasoning behind these descriptions may have had merit to people at different times and for different reasons, however a depiction of the upper Ohio valley in the 19th century certainly must include the moniker "Gateway to the West." From our federal government's first public infrastructure program, the National Road, to the mid-century arrival of the railroad, Wheeling was both the western terminus and would become a hub of transportation. Wheeling will forever be connected to this noteworthy part of our nation's growth and as the Wheeling Gateway Visitors and Heritage Center takes shape, the connection to our past will remain strong for many years to come.

End Notes

1 Ierley, M.. 1990, *Traveling the National Road: Across the Centuries on America's First Highway*. The Overlook P*ress*. page 20.

2 Ibid, page 31.

3 Jordan, P.D. 1948, *The National Road,* The Bob-Merrill Company.

4 *Wheeling Times and Advertiser*, June 9, 1843.

5 Jordan, page 114

6 Bowman, J. (July 19, 2015) *Wheeling: Birthplace of the American Steamboat,* http://archivingwheeling.org.

7 Walker, B. (September 24, 2019) West Virginia Department of Transportation.

Mountaineers Are Always Free: West Virginia's Origins in the Fires of Civil War

by William Kerrigan

West Virginia is unique in being the only state created in the inferno of Civil War. Forced to choose between their identities as Americans and Virginians, the region's residents did not all agree on which allegiance to prioritize, complicated by the ebb and flow of occupying armies. The ways those in Virginia's west responded to the war was conditioned by a long history of conflicted feelings, including pride to be living in one of the young nation's most culturally, economically, and politically significant states, but also a long history of resentment and conflict with a state government controlled by an unresponsive and ungenerous eastern elite. West Virginia's war story is often marginalized in traditional narratives of the American Civil War which focus on large scale battles fought between regular armies, on now famous battlefields. In Virginia's west, the war divided communities and spared no one, and forced western Virginia leaders to seek creative solutions amid occupation.

The distinctive shape of the state which emerged from the conflict reflected the war's complexities and was the result not just of the desires of locals, strategic, but also larger political and economic concerns. While West Virginia's war often gets short shrift in broad histories of the conflict, what happened there had a significant impact on the war's ultimate outcome. The Union army's ability to maintain control of the northern and western parts of the future state — and especially the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad —

was critical to the Union's grand strategy. Conversely, the Confederacy's ability to maintain the allegiances and establish periodic military control of many of the future state's eastern and southern counties blunted Union efforts for a quicker victory.

Two questions about western Virginians during the Civil War have long been debated by historians. First, what were allegiances of the region's residents at the outset of the conflict, and second, what role did the institution of slavery — the central cause of the conflict — play in determining these allegiances. The earliest histories of West Virginia's war emphasized citizen loyalty to the Union, overcounted the number of westerners who enlisted in Union armies, and undercounted the number who served in Confederate units. The best estimates we have today suggest that West Virginians enlisted in Union and Confederate units in roughly equal numbers. Much harder to measure are the numbers who engaged in "irregular warfare" as home guards, partisan rangers, and "bushwhackers," often beyond the direct control of the governments they claimed to support. Recent scholarship on irregular warfare has drawn attention to the important role these actors played in determining the war's outcome, and in disputed regions like western Virginia, these irregulars had an outsized impact on events. "It is impossible to understand the Civil War without appreciating the scope and impact of the guerilla conflict," Daniel E. Sutherland writes. "Guerillas helped check invading armies at every turn." [1]

Furthermore, noncombatants, including women, and enslaved and free African Americans, also played a significant role in West Virginia's war. Women encouraged or discouraged the participation of sons and husbands. They supported armies by raising funds and knitting clothes for soldiers, engaged in quiet resistance against occupiers, served as spies and in a few cases disguised themselves as men and took up arms.[2] Enslaved African Americans "through small, isolated actions . . . engaged in a continuing struggle to assert their humanity in daily dramas: in un-

derstated forms of challenges, such as malingering or stealing, and property crime; or in overstated forms, such as violent and open resistance to slaveholder authority," notes historian William A. Link. The presence of a significant number of enslaved persons in Greenbrier and Monroe counties appeared to unite much of the white population with the cause of the Confederacy when, in the spring of 1861 an enslaved man named Reuben was arrested, tried, and hanged for allegedly plotting an insurrection. But once the war began, the impact of enslaved people in a community was mixed. Charles, who led a small group of slaves out of Monroe County to Union camps at Fayetteville in the first days of 1862 told Union Colonel Rutherford B. Hayes, that poor whites were already beginning to resent the fact that they were being forced to participate in all night slave patrols to protect the property of rich whites. When they struck for freedom, however, they were denying communities aligned with the Confederacy the value of their labor. [3]

When it came to questions about who should govern the region during and after the war, only adult white males possessed a formal political voice. For many white male Virginians, this right was still new, as Virginia had been among the last states to end property qualifications for voting. The eastern slaveholding elite had resisted extending the right to vote to poor white men, believing they constituted a threat to the institution of slavery. In February of 1861, western Virginians selected delegates to a state convention in Richmond called to discuss the question of secession. In general, western Virginia delegates expressed much greater skepticism about joining the emerging Confederacy than their eastern counterparts, and often faced heckling, threats, and abuse for questioning the wisdom of secession. When secessionists secured a majority of the convention on April 17, pro-Union western delegates returned to their home counties, sometimes under threat, and began planning a response.

Leaders aligned with the Confederacy acted quickly to try to shore up support for the Confederacy in the west, seizing the arsenal at Harper's Ferry, and beginning soldier recruitment drives in the west, several weeks before Virginia secession was formalized at the ballot box. Unionist western Virginians first gathered in Wheeling on May 13th and while Harrison County's John Carlile called for the formation of a new state, the majority concluded it would be unwise to do so before voters had an opportunity to vote on secession in a May 23rd referendum.[4] That referendum passed across the state but failed overwhelmingly in many western Virginia counties. Open voting, where a voter's choice was visible to anyone at the polls, probably contributed to landslide decisions for or against the measure in specific localities.

In contrast to pro-Confederate Virginia's early action in the west, Lincoln moved cautiously, concerned that the presence of Union troops in the region before locals had an opportunity to express their views on secession in a May 23rd referendum might be interpreted as a form of intimidation. The Union forces under George McClellan moved into the state in the days after the referendum and secured some key early victories in western Virginia in the early months of the war. These victories created space for pro-Union western Virginians to establish a functioning independent government and to shape the region's political future. Unionist western Virginians reconvened in a Second Wheeling Convention on June 11th, and created the Restored Government of Virginia on June 19th, issuing "A Declaration of the Rights of the People of Virginia" to explain their act. By August, the movement for separation from Virginia had gained steam, and a committee on the division of the state proposed a new 39 county state to be named "Kanawha" but soon changed to "West Virginia." After the proposal was put before voters in the proposed new state, a first Constitutional Convention gathered at Wheeling on November 26th to begin the work of state-creation.[5]

The question of boundaries consumed much of the Restored Government's energy. In the counties that eventually became part of the new state of West Virginia, fate was not simply determined by popular feeling. It was also tied to Union strategic interests and outcomes on the battlefield. This was especially true in the lower (northern) Shenandoah Valley, which is today part of West Virginia's eastern panhandle. The area included Harpers Ferry and the strategically important B & O Railroad. After much debate, on December 13 the convention affirmed that West Virginia would include the originally proposed thirty-nine counties, plus the southern counties of Pocahontas, Greenbrier, Monroe, Mercer and McDowell, where support for the Confederacy remained strong. Seven additional counties in the east would be added if voters there chose to join the new state. Jefferson, Berkeley, Morgan, Hampshire, Hardy, and Pendleton counties did so, but under conditions of Union occupation which no doubt affected the outcome. The seventh, Frederick County, changed hands between Confederate and Union forces repeatedly during the war, and never held an election.

Delegates crafted a state constitution that retained many of the features of Virginia's structure, with a few significant differences. Rejecting the old Virginia county court system, which had placed too much power in a governor-appointed elite, West Virginia's constitution made county and state offices elective. The governor's term was set at two years, but without term limits. The existing legislative structure consisting of county level magistrates, circuit courts, and a supreme court of appeals remained, as did a guarantee of suffrage to all white men over age twenty-one. A desire for public education resulted in a provision for free schools as soon as economically feasible.[6]

A second question debated by historians is what role the issue of slavery played in West Virginia's creation. Certainly, the institution was much less significant in the west than it was in the east. But enslaved people toiled in almost every county in 1860, and

in some western counties, they constituted a substantial portion population. One in four persons in Jefferson County were enslaved in 1860, and one in ten in Greenbrier, Monroe and Kanawha Counties. The issue of slavery and its future in the new state also needed to be addressed and from the outset Unionist western Virginians were not of one mind on the question. In a recent monograph on the creation of West Virginia, Scott A. MacKenzie has argued that at the outset, white western Virginians had as deep a commitment to slavery as eastern Virginians; they simply concluded that secession would not protect slavery but accelerate its demise.[7] While it is true that some western leaders were pro-slavery and even owned slaves, the MacKenzie thesis fails to explain why West Virginia's leaders so quickly accepted the abolition of slavery as a condition of statehood in 1863. A more credible explanation is that decades of struggle for political equality with the eastern slaveholding elite meant that many western Virginians deeply resented the power and arrogance of the large planters, and by 1862 they were blaming the suffering and chaos the war brought on the arrogance of these elites. Agreeing to end slavery would weaken the power of this overbearing class, and for that reason, more than a commitment to abolition on moral grounds, most of West Virginia's founders quickly consented to emancipation as a condition of statehood. [8]

Pressure from the federal government to ensure the new state would be a free state did cause a few prominent defections. Most notable of these was Harrison County's John S. Carlile, an early statehood advocate. It appears he used his role as a senator for the Restored Government of Virginia to sabotage the statehood movement if the antislavery condition remained. A revised draft of the West Virginia constitution that emerged from John S. Carlile's Senate Committee on Territories on June 23, 1862, proposed adding fifteen counties to the new state. The additional counties were in the Shenandoah Valley, where the institution of slavery was far more entrenched. It was also a region that remained partially under Confederate control. Had Carlile's

amendment been accepted, it would have effectively killed West Virginia statehood, and the committee rejected Carlile's scheme. Massachusetts Senator Charles Sumner then proposed an amendment that would emancipate all enslaved peoples on July 4th, 1863, and that was also defeated.[9] Ultimately, Virginia's other senator Waitman Willey and Ohio Senator Benjamin Wade proposed a compromise amendment on slavery that would come to be called the Willey Amendment: all enslaved people under the age of twenty-one on July 4, 1863, would become free on their 21st birthday. With this compromise, the U.S. Senate voted to approve West Virginia's statehood on July 14, 1862, and after much debate the House of Representatives followed suit, approving the admission of West Virginia on December 10. President Abraham Lincoln signed the bill creating the new state on December 31, 1862.

The voters of western Virginia went to the polls on April 4th, 1863, with Senator John Carlile urging them to reject statehood. In an election boycotted by western Virginians who supported the Confederacy and in which nine counties (mostly in the far southern reaches of the new state) submitted no election returns, voters ratified the West Virginia constitution 28,321 to 572.[10] It appears that by 1863, the vast majority of western Virginians who supported statehood were willing to bring slavery to a quick end in the state. Decades of resentments against the elite large planters of the east, hardened by the conviction that their arrogance was responsible for all the current suffering and chaos secession had wrought, combined with the relatively modest importance of slavery to northwestern Virginia's economy, suggest that whatever proslavery views many West Virginia leaders had previously espoused were not strongly held. John Carlile's defection from the statehood movement he created was indeed significant. But more significant is how few of West Virginia's leaders followed him out the door.[11] In the wake of the vote Lincoln issued a proclamation on April 20 that set the date for statehood

sixty days hence. On June 20, 1863, the state of West Virginia entered the Union. Three months later, the new legislature of West Virginia adopted the state's seal, which depicts quite effectively the predominant viewpoint of the state's founders. Two common men, adorned with the tools of free laborers frame a large boulder etched with the date of the state's founding. A red Phrygian cap, long a symbol of emancipation is front and center, just above the motto Montani Semper Liberi (Mountaineers are Always Free). It is a near perfect representation of the viewpoint of West Virginia's founders.



West Virginia's state seal as it appeared in 1876. Public domain image.

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End Notes

1 Sutherland, D. *A Savage Conflict: The Decisive Role of Guerillas in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2009), ix.

2 Important recent work on women's actions in the Civil War include Thavolia Glymph, *The Women's Fight: The Civil War's Battles for Home, Freedom, and Nation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2022), and Stephanie McCurry, *The Women's War: Fighting and Surviving the American Civil War* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2019). See also Kerrigan, *West Virginia's War* (Athens: Ohio Univ Press, 2025), 153-80.

3 Link draws on the concept of "infrapolitics" developed by historian Robin D.G. Kelley, to show how the choices enslaved people made, both before and during the conflict, shaped the political choices enslavers made. William A. Link, *Roots of Secession: Slavery and Politics in Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 4-5. See also Kerrigan, *West Virginia's War*, 78-83; 114-17.

4 Wittenberg, E., Sargus, E., and Barrick, P. *Seceding from Secession: The Civil War, Politics, and the Creation of West Virginia* (California: Savas Beatie, 2020), 41-3.

5 Rice, O. and Brown, S. *West Virginia: A History* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1993), 141.

6 Ibid., 141-45.

7 MacKenzie, S. *The Fifth Border State: Slavery, Emancipation, and the Formation of West Virginia, 1829-1872*. (Morgantown: WVU Press, 2023), 146. For an alternative view, see Kerrigan, *West Virginia's War*, 128-130.

8 Woods, M. "Mountaineers Becoming Free: Emancipation and Statehood in West Virginia," *West Virginia History New Series*. Vol. 9, No. 2 (Fall 2015), 37-71 offers a notable alternative to MacKenzie's understanding of how the statehood movement came to embrace emancipation, one which emphasizes the actions of enslaved western Virginians themselves, and the alliances they formed with Union troops.

9 Rice and Brown, *West Virginia*, 147-8.

10 Wittenberg et al., 116.

11 Wittenberg et al., 79-82.



Exhibit intro and conclusion:

A Radical Plan Turns 250 Years Old

The Founders who signed the Declaration of Independence and the Framers who drafted the U.S. Constitution created something new and radical. Drawing on the traditions of ancient Greece and Rome, the English Magna Carta, the enlightenment ideas of John Locke, and the Iroquois Confederacy (Great Law of Peace), among many other historical sources, they created a democratic republic that limited governmental powers while protecting *'inalienable' rights* — what Abraham Lincoln would later call a '*government of the People, by the People, for the People*.' The Framers made the Constitution amendable so mistakes could be corrected and the obsolete could be updated. But they did not know if it would succeed where so many other experiments had failed. Now, 250 years later, it remains the responsibility of '*We the People*' to maintain and fortify our precious democracy. We are surrounded by some of humanity's best

ideas. We have overcome some of its worst. But the struggle continues. It never ends. It is a process of hope and renewal — what has come to be known as the *American Spirit*. And that is what this exhibit honors and celebrates. Happy 250th birthday, America!

An Imperfect Union

When he learned the names of the delegates who would be attending the 1787 Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia, Thomas Jefferson, then in Paris serving as U.S. Minister to France, wrote to John Adams, praising the delegates as "*an assembly of demigods*." But Jefferson, the primary author of the Declaration of Independence, also knew that governments consist of men — not gods, not kings — and that men can become tyrannical. Therefore, he believed, just governmental powers must come from the people – from the *consent of the governed*. The Framers, in drafting the preamble to our Constitution, understood that a government by and for the people must aspire to "*form a more Perfect union*," recognizing that true perfection must always be worked toward, though perhaps never finally achieved.

Indeed, the 1787 convention delegates had the wisdom to create, in Article V of the Constitution a means by which the document could be amended to address errors or omissions, and to account for changing times. To date, our Constitution has been amended 27 times, the first 10 of which, known collectively as the "*Bill of Rights,"* were expressly added to protect citizens from their own government's potential abuses of power.

The Founders and Framers were brilliant and well-versed in the historical blueprint for effective self-government, but they were also flawed human beings — all of them white

men of property. Many, like Jefferson, owned other human beings. They made mistakes and they compromised. Their reticence to address forthrightly the paradox of slavery within a republic supposedly founded on the equality of all people led to a brutal civil war in which more than 600,000 Americans died. After the war, during a period often described as the "Second *Founding*" the enactment of the 13th Amendment ended slavery, the 14th guaranteed equal protection under the law for Black people, and the 15th extended the right to vote to Black men. The war was followed by a noble effort to bring about meaningful racial equality, a period known as "*Reconstruction*." But the project was soon betrayed and abandoned in favor of a dark age of "Jim Crow" segregation, featuring nearly 5,000 lynchings of Black Americans and numerous acts of terrorism by white supremacists using extreme violence against successful black communities such as in Tulsa, Oklahoma in 1921.

The original founding documents also did no favors for Indigenous people, who were persecuted and ill-treated throughout American history, only officially being named citizens in 1924. And it wasn't until 1920, nearly a century and a half after the Constitution was ratified that the 19th Amendment extended the right to vote to women, and that only after heartbreaking decades of struggle and protest by suffragists and their allies. The *Civil Rights Movement* of the 1950s and 1960s fought for social justice and equality for African Americans and for all Americans. Its victories, hard won but tenuous, remain under assault to this day by those who would turn the clock back.

A More Perfect Union

When asked about the new Constitution, Benjamin

Franklin said it was "*a republic, if you can keep it*." The republic Jefferson's "demigods" forged is imperfect, but they had the wisdom to allow for change. Our republic can become better — "more perfect."

And *We the People* have the power to make it so.

~text by Seán Duffy and Brian Kammer

Title Explained: A Republic — If We Can Keep It

On September 17, 1787, as the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia finished its vital and contentious work, Ben Franklin was asked whether the delegates had created a monarchy or a republic. "A republic," Franklin famously replied, "if you can keep it." Franklin's words remind us that self-government is fragile and difficult and must be guarded diligently, especially by the governed. And that is the reason our America 250 exhibit was named for Franklin's keen insight, based as it was on many years of wisdom and experience. In recognition of these existential truths and in the glow of our nation's Semiquincentennial, your library is offering a multifaceted celebration and critique of our relatively young experiment in keeping a republic, exploring 250 years of successes and failures, beginning with this Main Exhibit and also including our new People's University Series: Revolution and Constitution, and this Summer Edition of the *Upper Ohio Valley Historical Review*, which explores the Valley's role in 250 years of American history.





Harriet Tubman was a resistance leader, warrior, and suffragist. The best known conductor of the Underground Railroad, she also served as a nurse and spy for the US Army during the Civil War, and fought for the right for women to vote. In our exhibit, she represents all those who have worked and sacrificed for 250 years to overcome the errors of the Founding and to move us toward a "more perfect union."

Take a virtual tour of the full exhibit. Just scan the code!



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Try a virtual tour of the exhibit!