Preface

A cultural collision between native people and Europeans began on the North American continent in the 1500s and has lasted nearly five centuries. In the late 1700s crucial parts of that monumental conflict unfolded in the Cumberland River basin, in what would become Middle Tennessee. Over two million people are now living in and around the places where various parts of the struggle took place, but very few have more than the vaguest knowledge of the most important events of that time, of where those events took place, of the various contexts in which they occurred, of their significance, or of the people who were involved in them and in the early settlement of the region.

A widespread lack of familiarity with local frontier history might largely be the result of the limited nature of the first written histories of the region, and of the corresponding limitations of the highly derivative works that followed. There has been no shortage of additional information about the people and places and events of those times, but that information has been widely scattered, and accessing it has been difficult as well as time consuming. Most of the details regarding people and places fall within the realms of genealogy and local history, but there are broader questions to be answered, questions that go beyond the scope of those details. It seems reasonable to ask whether, without the tenacity of James Robertson and a few others, the Cumberland settlements and Kentucky would have become part of the United States as soon as they did. And it seems reasonable to ask whether what took place in the region during the 1780s and 1790s has contemporary political and military relevance. In order to answer those questions, and others, it is necessary to learn more than what is contained in early works of regional history, or in their derivatives.

The history of the Cumberland settlements began to receive considerable attention in 1820 when, as part of a statewide effort, the Tennessee Antiquarian Society was formed. The minutes of the society contained the following resolution—"one member shall be appointed to collect, state in chronological order, and communicate to the society the history of the early settlement of Tennessee by the whites, the inroads made upon them at different times and sections by the Indians, the means employed to defeat them, and who were the principal actors and sufferers."

The individual who took the lead in that effort was Judge John Haywood, who attempted to fulfill the goals of the society by writing a pair of books that were published in 1823. Haywood's preface in one of those books, The Civil and Political History of Tennessee, contains the author's modest self-assessment—"he knows himself unequal to the task, but his hope and expectation is that some future historian may ... represent the historical occurrences ... embraced in this volume in a style of elegance suited to the high merit of the actors."

The future historian that Haywood anticipated could have been Lyman Draper, but Draper sought to write about an area much larger than Tennessee, and although he accumulated an immense amount of information, he never wrote the book he had set out to write. It fell to A.W. Putnam to try and achieve Haywood's expectation of elegance. Putnam's History of Middle Tennessee was published in 1858, and over the 100 years that followed, a number of other historians made various contributions to the written frontier history of the region, usually taking the bulk of their material from Haywood and Putnam. An exception to works that relied too heavily on Haywood and Putnam was Harriette Simpson Arnow's Seedtime on the Cumberland, which made its appearance in 1960, and was an inspiration for this book. And there were other inspirations.

I was intrigued by frontier life and by Indians well before I read Ms. Arnow's wonderfully detailed book in the middle 1970s, and I was intrigued well before my discovery, in the mid-1950s, of an arrowhead in the gravel of my driveway on Clearview Drive, a few miles southwest of downtown Nashville. By then I had already been wondering whether Indians or pioneers might have ever been in my neighborhood. A year or two later, when I was a fifth grader at Woodmont School, I had an assignment to write a report about frontier times. I didn't find out that in 1780, during a pursuit of an Indian war party, James Leeper, one of the frontiersmen mentioned in my report, had passed a little more than shouting distance from where I lived. And in sixth grade, when a homework project compelled me to build what was meant to pass for a miniature Indian village, I hadn't known that some 800 years earlier there was an actual village less than 300 yards from where my house stood.

Part of the focus of this book has been to identify places where historical events pertaining to the frontier occurred—places that are located, neighborhood by neighborhood, across Middle Tennessee. And because frontier times were closely tied to the prehistoric period, the places of prehistory have received focus as well. The details of most prehistoric sites cannot be recovered—those details have been irretrievably lost, and most of the sites have been long forgotten. During some 15,000 years of human occupation, the significance of places must have been established and then forgotten countless times. In the earliest period a small nomadic band would have had a memorable experience on a hunt, or battled a rival group, and certain places would have become identified with events of importance. Then those who had been present died away, and within a few generations, as other locales took on importance, the significance of earlier places was lost to time. That cycle continued over thousands of years as native cultures developed in what would ultimately be called the Cumberland Valley, and the cycle only came to an end with the collapse of the local prehistoric culture in the 1400s. Tools, weapons, skeletal remains, and pottery were left behind to establish habitation sites, but the details of all the lives and all the events that played out on those sites were lost, along with the specific significance of every once-notable place.

Aside from the rather vague information that surrounded the early roaming of Peter Chartier, an individual who may well have passed through the region in the latter 1600s, the first event that took place in what became Middle Tennessee, and ultimately appeared in print, probably dates from around 1760, when Joseph Charville worked as a boy in a trading post located at what would be known as the French Lick. Almost 70 years later James Robertson heard Charville give an account about having been on the Cumberland in his youth, and some three decades after that, Robertson related what he had heard to John Haywood, who later included it in his book, The Natural and Aboriginal History of Tennessee. Before settlement, early information from participants was rare, but then details about the Cumberland frontier became increasingly more abundant.
Most of those who came to the region in the late 1700s lived out their lives and left behind no written accounts, but a few eventually wrote about what they had witnessed, while others ultimately conveyed their experiences to interviewers such as Lyman Draper. Those accounts slowly accumulated over the years, and even after the death of the last survivor, family stories that had been passed down from pioneer ancestors would occasionally be written down, and some would find their way into an obscure book or article, or into an archives. A considerable number of historical accounts—accounts that shed light on the first years of settlement—have remained scattered and relatively inaccessible.

So despite all of the good work that had been done by historians, there was still a great deal more to do. Not only were the dates of events given in early histories frequently incorrect, and not only did the veracity of important sources often go unexamined, fictional details of various events had been added, and inaccurate versions of accounts—particularly involving the earliest years of settlement—had long been taken as fact. Most of John Donelson’s journal was not written in 1780 during a long and perilous river voyage. Most of that account was largely composed as much as 40 years later by his son. The overland party led by James Robertson that set out for the French Lick was not the large cavalcade of immigrants it was reputed to have been—the group seems to have originally numbered less than twenty. It is highly unlikely that anyone walked across the Cumberland on Christmas Day, 1779—the river apparently didn’t freeze until well after Christmas. And while a number of other occurrences were also misreported or mythologized, crucial events had received less attention than was merited.

After over two centuries there were still no comprehensive accounts of either the Renfroe’s Station massacre or the massacre on the Stones River, both of which took place in 1780. The account of the attack on the Bluff Station in 1781, of the Coldwater Expedition in 1787, of the attack on Buchanan’s Station in 1792, and of the Nickajack Campaign in 1794 were all somewhat incomplete. The locations of numerous frontier sites and the routes of early roads were yet to be identified. Detailed perspectives of the various Indian groups that bordered the area, and the differences between those groups, were yet to be presented. And many accounts that had become available, such as the highly-detailed information provided by Edward Swanson (and contained in the John Haywood Papers at the Tennessee State Library and Archives), or that had been long-overlooked, such as Draper’s crucial interviews with Armistead Miller and Johnson Farris, remained unknown to most of those with an interest in the frontier history of the region.

Those wanting to know more about an array of early political or military circumstances, about individuals, about where events took place, or those wanting more detailed accounts of particular events, were required to embark on difficult and time-consuming searches in archives or libraries, as well as online, in hopes of finding additional information. There seemed to be a clear need for a more complete and accurate history of early settlement, and it seemed possible that if enough pieces of the frontier past could be collected and compiled, such a history might be conveyed, in large part, not from the perspective of an historian writing over two centuries later, but from the perspectives of individuals who had experienced that past.

The book is an attempt to piece together a highly detailed historical mosaic of frontier times using, as much as possible, the words of individuals who witnessed those times. A great deal of background and context has been provided to help the reader understand what took place, and along with written information, a considerable number of maps have been included to show the locations of forts and trails and streams, and the sites where events occurred. Expanded endnotes have been included to provide additional information, and to explain some of what is shown in the various maps.

So rather than a traditional history, this is a compilation of material from books, government records, and early newspaper articles, and what could be found in letters, memoirs, interview notes, and oral traditions that survived into contemporary times. While some continuity may be lost by presenting source information instead of the usual distillation of that information, and while reading such relatively unprocessed material might be challenging, it is hoped that considerably more will be gained by the reader learning, as directly as possible, about the early frontier directly from those who were there. It is also hoped that being immersed in the details of frontier life will bring the reader to a much deeper understanding of what it was to live during that period.

It is important to note that while there have been no embellishments or enhancements of the original accounts, in a number of instances there has been considerable editing—mostly in the form of resequencing and deletions—for reasons of clarity and focus. It is suggested that the reader consult source texts to evaluate the original information, and to determine what editing decisions were made. What may be most in need of explanation is the presentation of narratives in which one individual experienced an event, and later conveyed the details of that event to someone else, who then wrote down the account. When that was the case, the wording of the narrative has been changed from the originally-written third person, to the originally-narrated first person. A second or third person “he” or “they” has been changed back to the “I” or “we” that the participant would have used in the initial exchange with the writer of the account. In those instances the participant, not the scribe, is cited as the source, and when an account has been changed to the first person, that has been stated in each endnote.

The creation of this compilation has been highly subjective, and would have been executed in a hundred different ways by a hundred different individuals. That subjectivity is even more pronounced with respect to the material that has been presented to provide readers with a context for what took place in the Cumberland Settlements. An historian who was more familiar with the source information pertaining to the various native nations, and with the sources pertaining to British, French, and Spanish colonial history, may well have chosen a more elegant set of selections. The lengthy section with which this book concludes is intended to convey what became of certain individuals, how relations with the Creeks, the Cherokees, and the Chickasaws were ultimately resolved, and how various aspects of our prehistoric and frontier past have been an enduring but declining presence over the last two centuries. The epilogue is also intended to convey how contemporary culture has continued to define itself through its chronic destruction of its own past.
Since we set out for the General Assembly, the Indians have killed seven inhabitants: Captain David Steele, James (Ireson), Peter (Barnett), John Stewart, two of the name of Martin, one Jones, and wounded sundry others. We judge the invaders to be the Creek nation – allies to the King of Spain. We request that your Excellency write to the minister of that court. His influence might prevent further effusions of blood.

Forty-one of our inhabitants have been massacred within 12 months, nearly all by Creeks. Will North Carolina suffer her citizens thus to be cut off? We are sorry to say the General Assembly heard it, in a measure, unfeelingly. Alexander McGillivray is now under the Court of Spain, and is a man of consequence with that nation – we suppose his influence superior to any other person amongst them. If the minister of Spain would write to him, we conceive he could prevent further effusions of blood.

I lament the deplorable situation of the inhabitants of Davidson and Sumner counties. Was my power of relieving your distress equal to the wishes I have for your safety and happiness, they should be of short duration. My ignorance of your particular situation, and the grounds of your disputes with the Indians, renders it a matter of great delicacy to offer you advice.

Your situation appears similar to others who have made a settlement in the neighborhood of savage nations. From the early settlements in the eastern parts of this continent, the same difficulties have occurred, but by a series of patient sufferings, manly and spirited exertions, and an unconquerable perseverance, they have been subdued. I am convinced from several of the inhabitants of Nashville, that they are not more deficient in wisdom and virtue than the first settlers of other parts of America. I should suppose that the safest line of conduct in your weak and defenseless situation would be to cultivate a good understanding and friendly intercourse with the savages till you acquire greater strength by an accession of numbers.

James Robertson
Anthony Bledsoe
January 4, 1788
(to Samuel Johnston
Governor of North Carolina)

I

1788

James Robertson and Anthony Bledsoe, the leaders of the Cumberland settlements, returned early in the year from the last journey they would make together. In the months that lay ahead, one of them would see the slaughtered remains of his slain child, while the other would be shot and die an agonizing death. And as calculating men in distant places plotted how best to exploit the region politically, militarily, and economically, a boy would be thrust into the brutal and tragic beginning of what would become an epic adventure.
The Killing of Morgan and Gibson

In February both Charles Morgan, my brother-in-law, and Jordan Gibson, an old man, left Morgan’s Station and were on their way to my mother’s house. It was near night, in the forest. When they were within a few hundred yards of our residence - at the forks of the road where the trace came in from Bledsoe’s Lick - Gibson was killed at the first fire. Morgan was wounded in attempting to save Mr. Gibson. Morgan was pursued by two Indians. He was troubled with asthma, and when weary and closely pursued, would tree. The Indians shot at him once or twice, but missed. Finally, as he turned a fence corner less than 300 yards from James Harrison’s house, he was shot in the back, scalped, and then another shot entered his shoulder.

Several persons stationed at Mrs. Hall’s ran out, and William Martin, William Ridley, and I searched for the bodies. We found Gibson dead, scalped, and stripped, and Morgan badly wounded. Next morning Captain William Martin went in pursuit with eight or ten men, but owing go the swollen condition of the streams and backwaters, did not overtake them. George Winchester, who had some knowledge of surgery learned in the army, attended Morgan, who survived 14 days. Winchester often attended the wounded, always without pay, and when necessary would sometimes go by night to see his patients - so anxious did he feel for their recovery.

A few weeks before, John and Ephraim Peyton, Edmund Jennings, John Hardin, Henry Turney, and five others went in pursuit of Indians. Near Obed’s River they found an Indian camp, which they concluded they would attack that night, but the Indians were on the alert. The Peyton party succeeded in getting all the Indians’ horses, some 13 in all. It was thought that this same party of Indians were those who ambushed Gibson and Morgan.

William Hall

Governor Johnston

Some time ago I received letters from some gentlemen beyond the mountains. It is not my opinion that the Court of Madrid, or any of their officers, have the least share in abetting the grievances they complain of. By what I could collect, most of those who have been murdered had ventured at too great a distance from the inhabitants, and were shot down by Indians who were hunting. Nor did it appear that they were in any considerable number, but rather consisted of straggling hunters who murdered for the sake of plunder.

Governor Samuel Johnston
March 5, 1788
(to the Honorable D. White)

A Trap and the Killing of Peyton Robertson.

In February there were savages everywhere. Their tracks were seen very near town. The people were warned to be on the lookout, and to avoid exposure. The Indians had stolen corn from almost every crib. The wolf trap set to catch an Indian had never taken a prisoner. In a crib near Heaton’s Station were several casks of beans, from which it was suspected the Indians helped themselves at night by inserting an arm between the logs. Traps were set in the beans, and chained to logs inside. One of the traps was sprung, and the man standing close to the outer wall could not withdraw his arm through the crack. That broken arm required splints and bandages, and that lazy white man did not remain many months in the Cumberland settlements.

William Hall
Early in March the Indians approached the sugar camp near the station of Colonel Robertson, where young Peyton Robertson, John Johnson, and some other boys were gathering sap and taking it to the camp, where it was to be boiled down to molasses and sugar. These boys saw the Indians rushing in to cut off retreat to the camp and house. They fled in different directions.

They were fallen on by Indians. Young Robertson made some efforts at defense, but was overpowered and killed. His head was cut off and stuck on a pole within view of the station. John Johnson endeavored to secrete himself, but was discovered and taken prisoner.

_Grief_

I am not able to express my pain and surprise when I view the hostile operations carried on against the inhabitants of this country. Every precaution has been used to prevent your displeasure, or irritate your people. The letter in which you complained of ill treatment from the Americans, together with their encroachments on your territories, gave me much uneasiness.

Those aggressors live in Georgia, a different state, and we are not culpable for their misconduct, nor had we the most distant idea that by our making a settlement here, we should incur the displeasure of any tribe of Indians. We only claim those lands that the Cherokees ceded to Colonel Henderson and Company in open treaty in 1775. I flattered myself that the expedition, which necessity compelled me to carry on against people living below the Muscle Shoals, would meet with your approval. For many years I have exerted myself to see the strictest justice done to all red people. Last fall, when a formidable army was about to march to lay the Cherokee nation desolate, I prevented their march with the utmost difficulty, by which I incurred the displeasure of my best friends.

Last summer Indians killed an affectionate brother, and three days ago an innocent child – I had the mortification to see one of my children killed. From my earliest youth I have endeavored to arm myself with a sufficient share of fortitude to meet anything that nature might have intended me. But to see an innocent child so uncommonly massacred by people who ought to have both sense and bravery, has in a measure unmanned me. It is a matter of no reflection to a brave man to see a father, a son, or a brother fall on the field of action, but it is a melancholy incident to see a helpless woman or an innocent child tomahawked.

At the same time a neighbor’s child, about thirteen years old, was taken prisoner. I am persuaded that humanity will induce you to extend your influence through the Creek nation, and protect the boy. He will be of little service to the person who captured him, compared to the consolation it must give a fond father and a tender mother whose grief is beyond expression. Let me hope sir, for the future, you will put a stop to depradations of this kind – that if disorderly persons act repugnant to your orders, you will bring them to punishment. If measures of this kind are not immediately adopted, common sense declares to the world that we must shortly be embroiled in a war.

James Robertson
March 15, 1788
(to Alexander McGillivray)

**The Spanish Perspective**

The people who are coming down toward the Ohio River and to the back lands of the territory are, for the most part, Americans devoted to the expelled English government, or recent immigrants from Europe without any attachment to the United States. In the conversations and writings of the new immigrants, Congress is openly ridiculed. Great Britain laughs about it in silence. She forsees that those new settlements, opposed to the laws and imposts with which Congress wants to load them, will open a new area for the consumption of English goods.

Britain will be able to supply them every article of necessity or luxury from Canada. The scarcity of factories in the United States being notorious, the Canadian merchant will always have the advantage over the American. It will necessarily follow that the influence of the British nation will increase day to day over that of the United States. England is secretly trying to hold the affection of the Indians, in order to use them as she occasionally used them in the last war – like well trained bulldogs, setting them on and calling them off at will.

I do not think that McGillivray is informed of the designs of the Court of London beyond what his own sagacity tells him, but he unwittingly sustains the British influence among the Southern Indians. Nevertheless, to cut loose from McGillivray will be to lose at one stroke all we have gained with the Indians, and hand them over irretrievably to the Americans. God forbid that the United States make friends and ally themselves with the Indians.

The conspirators, or Adventurers, covet the navigation of the Mississippi. After the adventurers, the most covetous is the United States, although it is to be believed that they will not begin anything, at least directly, until they have more strength than is given them by their present misgoverned debility. But until they are sure of the obedience and concurrence of the inhabitants of the Ohio Valley, the most powerful and formidable claimant is England.

Before manifesting her designs on the Mississippi, the policy of England will be to encourage the inveterate hate that the greater part of the Indians have toward the Americans, to take the immense territories back of the Colonies, to enclose and narrow them down, and in the end to take all of the vast continent of North America. In addition to the Indians, she has numerous partisans, not only among the Ohio settlements, but in the United States. What is an ambitious and haughty nation like England capable of doing to get revenge on her revolted vassals, and to compensate herself for the war?

By providing the Indians with arms and munitions for their hunts and self defense, we will have in them an important barrier against the adventurers, or the Americans, and later against the English when they lift the veil with which they try to cover their present sordid machinations – which they can never put into practice if the Indians are separated from them.
With the Indian trade being carried on by the English firm, Panton, Leslie, and Company, it will continue to advance the influence of London over the savages. McGillivray, besides having a part in the profits of the firm, is the soul, the resource, and the absolute director of the Creek Nation. It will be well to send some Spanish subjects to reside among the Indians, with secret orders to watch McGillivray and some Englishmen, as well as some Americans who are there. It is necessary for us to give them a continuous exchange of their peltries for the articles which long use has made indispensable to them, without which they will undoubtedly turn from us into the arms of the United States.

Vizente Manuel de Zespedes
March 24, 1788
(to Don Antonio Valdez)

A Stark Admission

Agreeably to your request, I will be explicit and candid in my answer. I will not deny that my nation has waged war against your country for several years past. We had no motives of revenge, nor did it proceed from any sense of injuries sustained from your people. But being warmly attached to the British, and being under their influences, our operations were directed by them, against you, in common with other Americans.

Alexander McGillivray
April 1, 1788
(to Robertson and Bledsoe)

Divided Chickasaw Loyalties

Tuskapotapa and Esksato of the Chickasaws arrived here. Tuskapotapa received his presents, but told me when he went to his land he should send the Americans a talk not to send any more talks; that he had taken hold of the Spaniards by the hand, who he looks upon to be the same as he used to visit at Mobile, when the English was there. He saw many English and they seemed to be one people. I believe Pioimingo of the Chickasaws received the same presents as Tuskapotapa. Pioimingo is going to send for 15 horse (loads) of ammunition that is at Cumberland for the use of that nation.

Alexander Fraser
April 15, 1788
(to Governor Miro)

The Death of William Ridley

A party of Indians stole horses on April 17th from Benjamin Morgan's Station, four miles up Bledsoe's Creek, above Winchester's Station and near to Greenfield. A runner came from Morgan's to Winchester's for men to go and intercept the Indians. James Winchester, John D. Blackmore, James Clendening, Roger Gibson, John Hickerson, William Neely, Basil Fry, William Ridley, a Bledsoe, and I, all mounted, volunteered. Five from Morgan's – Henry Ramsey, James Gamble, and Isaac, Joseph, and William Morgan – followed on the trail. I led the former party and Ramsey the latter.

My party struck Long Creek of Barren River, followed about two miles down the northern bank, and camped within 60 yards...
of the Indian trail. About dusk Ramsey’s party was looking for a camping place when they overheard my party making some noise, and concluded it was the Indians. They secreted themselves, awaited till about midnight, and fell upon the camp. Ridley and Hickerson were on guard, the others asleep. Ramsey’s party all fired at the same time, and Ridley, standing with his back to the fire, was shot through the body. All except Neely and I jumped up and ran off. We treed and raised a loud yell, which so deterred our assailants that they fell back. All returned to Morgan’s Station except Isaac Morgan, who had got lost. Those of my party who took flight, soon returned to camp.

William Ridley survived about an hour and died. The next morning, Isaac Morgan was discovered creeping towards the camp to discover what effect was produced. A mutual recognition took place, and the sad accident was revealed for the first time. On Henry Ramsey’s return, he said if he had not killed a large half-breed standing before the fire, he need never shoot at another. He had a good sight and shot through the body — aiming at the hand in his belt. Ridley was shot through the hand as well as the body. Ramsey and all concerned were much grieved at the occurrence. Ridley, a large, fine fellow, was a sergeant in my command.

The Killing of the Montgomery Boys

Some ten or fifteen families, including our own, moved six or seven miles from Mansker’s Station to Drake’s Creek and had settled in the fall of 1786. In the spring of 1788, the Indians came to Mr. Montgomery’s, about three miles below us. The men being at work some distance off, three little boys – John, Robert, and Thomas Montgomery – were cutting cane a little distance from the house. One of the boys, who had been scalped the year before, had his thigh broken, and he had limped out to where his brothers were. The Indians coming upon them, killed and scalped them all, leaving them in a heap in the canebrake. Although much alarmed, we did not go back to Mansker’s Station. In 1788 I helped build a fort at the head of Drake’s Creek, on the top of the ridge, called the Ridge, or Hamilton’s Station. It afforded protection to some fifteen or twenty families of us.

John Carr
1857

Dr. White and the Spanish

Your good friend Mr. James White has shown me a letter which informs me of murders committed among your people by the savages. I am surprised to learn there is suspicion that Spain has promoted these barbarities. Rest assured that the King is the friend of the United States. I shall be happy to do all I can to serve the will of the inhabitants of the Western Country.

Diego de Gardoqui
Spanish Minister
April 18, 1788
(to Governor Samuel Johnston)

Mr. James White communicated to me a letter from your Excellency, from the frontiers of North Carolina, wherein the cruelty of the savages is complained of, and that it is feared this may have happened through the instigations of the subjects of Spain. The Spanish government entertains good will to the United States. It would prevent any outrages upon their citizens.

Diego de Gardoqui
April 18, 1788
(to Elijah Robertson)

I now have the services of Don Jaime (James White). I am discussing the various views with him. We are arriving at an understanding, and I have reached the point of drinking to his health. My idea is that he leaves here and goes to the state of Franklin, to spread what seems convenient to me. If I achieve this, I shall direct him to Natchez or New Orleans. If this rapidly-growing young empire unites as it grows, it may, in a few years, be dangerous because of its population, character, and geographic position. I consider it of prime necessity to watch this community of laborers, hunters, and enterprising people who are free and without religious restraints or laws, and who thrive on a rich soil and in a good climate where they are arriving in great numbers from all parts of the world.
Don Jaime shall start immediately. I have tried him from many angles, and I find him consistent. I believe he is sincere. He says that if the matter is as ripe as he thinks, he will have no difficulty carrying it out in the open, but he charges the strictest secrecy. Don Jaime told me that his aims are to serve us and himself, because he expects as a reward to be able to settle happily among us.

Diego de Gardoqui
April 18, 1788
(to Conde de Floridablanca)

In consequence of the representations from the western country, I urged the subject on the minister of Spain. He absolutely disavows that what happened could have been through their subjects. He promises to write to their Governor recommending their influence with respect to our frontier. The difficulty of procuring gold induced me to trust to my salary as Superintendent of Southern Indians, but no services to the United States can be rewarded, considering the present state of their treasury. Therefore, I have to make this apology for quitting an appointment to which my country had done me the honor to name me.

James White
April 21, 1788
(to Governor Samuel Johnston)

**Emissaries to the Creeks**

Early in 1788, the Sumner and Davidson County people held a meeting at Colonel Davidson’s, 10 miles above Nashville on the north bank of the Cumberland, to conclude what to do next to conciliate the good will of the Creeks. They were too far off to march and war against. It was agreed to send a letter to McGillivray to obtain our Cumberland people. They represent that they are reduced to extreme distress by the excursions of our warriors. To obtain our peace and friendship, they are willing to submit themselves to any conditions that I shall judge to impose on them. Thinking it would be a greater inducement to me to favor them, they told me that they would become subjects to the King, and that Cumberland and Kentucky were determined to free themselves from a dependence on Congress, as that body could not or would not protect their persons or property, nor encourage their commerce. Where there was no protection, no submission was due.

The chiefs and delegates of Cumberland are Colonels Robertson and Bledsoe, and Ewing and two others. They sent in proofs of the purchase of the Country of Cumberland more than 40 years ago by a Virginia company from the Northern and Cherokee Indians. I kept my own opinion close from them. My answer was that when I held my first grand convention, these matters should be discussed, and in the meantime all hostilities on our parts should cease.

Alexander McGillivray
April 25, 1788
(to Governor O’Neill)

**Governor Johnston**

The citizens of our western frontier were not well informed when they attributed the cruelties experienced by the savages to the connivance of the subjects of his Catholic Majesty. I shall inform the citizens on the western frontiers, and use my utmost influence to promote sentiments of good will towards their neighbors, the subjects of his Catholic Majesty.

Governor Samuel Johnston
May 8, 1788
(to James Gardoqui)

**Massacre and Captivity**

My father, Colonel James Brown, came from the north of Ireland at seven years of age, was raised in Culpepper County, Virginia, and married there to Jane Gillespie. I was born on the second day of August, 1772, in Surrey County, North Carolina. We moved to Guilford County when I was an infant, and I went to school very young and learned how to read and write. My father was very active in the Revolutionary War – he was a contractor for the army, and fired the first gun on the British that brought on the battle of Guilford Court House.

When the land office was opened at Hillsboro in 1783, he obtained certificates for his services, and entered several tracts of land in the neighborhood of Nashville. He got some of his land surveyed, and moved some hands and a part of his stock in the fall of 1784. Before he started with his family, he was taken sick, and was not able to close his business for near three years. My father had some black people that he did not care to keep. He sold them and two plantations. He took tobacco in payment for them, and sold that in Richmond, Virginia, for goods.

It was a time of professed peace with the Cherokee Indians, and as one or two boats had been built in East Tennessee in 1786 or 1787, and went down the Tennessee, up the Ohio, and up the
Cumberland to Nashville getting there safely, my father concluded to go the same route. Our boat was half-keel, seven feet wide and fifty feet long, with ten oars to her so we could go up the stream, as well as down. The sides were four feet high with two inch plank, and with port holes to shoot through, and we had a swivel aboard that, if we should be attacked, could cut them down faster than they could come.

I suppose my father had more goods on board his boat than was in Nashville at that time. Boxes of goods was on each side of the boat, and our chest and bureaus on top of them. We had a passway through the middle so that the women and children could be safe if we should be fired on by the Indians. My father had a permit to go down the river according to the Hopewell Treaty, but the Chickamauga and Tuskegee and Chattanooga and Running Water and Nickajack and Crow Town Indians were a lawless set.

We passed the Chickamauga town in the night, but about sunrise on the ninth of May, 1788, as we passed Tuskegee, Cotteotoy, the head man of the town, came aboard our boat. We treated him kindly, but when he went away he sent runners down to Running Water and Nickajack towns, and got a man by the name of John Vann, who said he was a white man and dressed like a white man, to talk for them. Vann, who was a half-breed, and 40 Indians came up the river in four canoes, with a flag for each canoe. The canoes came two by two, side by side, holding up white flags.

The river was very high, and them coming up the river and us down, there was little time before we met at a mill above the town of Nickajack. When they came in speaking distance, my father ordered them not to come any nearer – there were too many of them, and if they did, he would fire on them. We had wheeled our boat, leveled our swivel and had our mates ready to dash them in pieces. Vann answered it was a peaceable time, and they only wanted to see where we were going, and to trade with us if we had anything to trade. My father was going to an Indian country, and he would not break a treaty. They appeared like naked Indians, and my father ordered the gunner not to fire. They had their guns and tomahawks covered up in the bottom of their canoes.

They appeared friendly, and they succeeded in getting on board of our boat. We floated probably half a mile. The river was over the bottom in many places. We were a mile above the Nickajack town, and seven or eight other canoes came dashing out through the cane, and the Indians in them also came aboard. They began to plunder our boat, and put our property into their canoes. My father requested Vann not to let them do so. He said the head man was not at home, but would be home that night. He would make them bring back everything, and one of them would pilot us over the Muscle Shoals, as it was dangerous. But all his talk was to deceive us. There was not less than a dozen canoes, and more than a hundred Indians in and round the boat.

While the Indians was robbing the boat, my father and myself was in the stern of the boat. Negroes, young men, children, and my mother was all in the bow. A dirty, black-looking Indian caught me by the arm and was about to kill me with a sword. My father took hold of him and said that I was one of his little boys, and he must not touch me. The Indian let me go, and I started to go to the bow of the boat, where Vann was. I believed what he had said.

As soon as my father turned his back, the fellow that was about to kill me struck my father and cut his head nearly half off. I looked back and another Indian had my father in his arms. I
seen that his head was on one side, but I did not see blood. The fellow caught him in his arms to throw him off the boat so that he would not die in the boat. My father's arms was over the fellow's shoulders, right at the door of the boat. They went into the water, they separated, and my father turned on his back — his eyes was set in his head as he sank down.

I knew that he was a good swimmer, and thought that he was stunned and would rise, but he did not. I thought that he had run under the boat and come out on the other side. I ran there, and then to the stern, and then back, and it was then I thought that he was drowned. I ran to the bow and it was just landing. The Indians had taken my mother and three little sisters and my brother out of the boat and into their canoes. I informed my youngest brother that an Indian had drowned our father.

Before our boat reached shore at the upper end of the town of Nickajack, an Indian wanted me to go out of the boat and into a canoe. I was large enough to help his mother hoe corn. I refused, not dreaming I was a prisoner. The same fellow, called Kiachattalla, brought an old white man and his wife, who said, "My boy, I want you to go home with me." I inquired where he lived, and he said his house was about a mile out of town. I told him we would continue our journey in the morning, but I supposed I could go home with him that night. After landing at the mouth of the branch that ran into the river near the middle of the town, I went to the top of the bank. I saw my mother at a distance, but saw her no more.

I later learned that Kiachattalla had told the old man that when they got into the frolic of killing the men, I was so large that they might knock me over. I turned to one of my brothers and said I would be back early in the morning. The old white man said, "I want to go right now." I went along with him, and not halfway to the house, I heard guns firing. I thought they were a trying to see how our guns would shoot. The guns were killing my brothers, and the other young men that was with us.

Before I went, the Indians were telling my brothers and the other young men of a certain house in which they could stay till morning. The house was toward the lower end of the town, and a young man would pilot them. James Brown, Jr., 21 years old, John Brown, 19, William and John Gentry, both young men, Isaiah Bays, John Griffin, and John Flood were going along a path skirted with cane, and all were shot from ambush. John Brown, Flood, and Griffin were shot dead in the trail. The others broke and ran. William Gentry was killed with knives in a house, and they took his scalp.

Just before this, Kiachattalla discovered Isaiah Bays partly hidden in the cane under the bank of Nickajack Creek. He shot and badly wounded Bays, who nevertheless swam the creek. As he reached the shore, he was met by two Indians, one of whom aimed a blow at his head with a tomahawk. It fell upon his shoulder. Bays, a powerfully strong man, seized this Indian and threw him. At this instant the other came up, and Bays also got him down. He had them both under him, got the bloody tomahawk with which they first had wounded him, and had raised it when he instantly expired from his mortal wounds and almost unearthly exertions.

Seeing this, Kiachattalla pursued John Gentry. James Brown, Jr. had broken and endeavored to strike the creek higher up. As he got to the cane, a party of Indians headed him. He then tacked for the river, was intercepted, and again wheeled, when an Indian threw a tomahawk which struck and killed him about the same time Bays was killed. John Gentry was the last killed. Some 50 or 60 Indians were engaged in these atrocities.
The old white man, an Irishman, lived about a mile out of town. The road from Running Water to Nickajack led by his spring. His name was Tom Turnbridge, and he had come to America long before the Revolution as a soldier, and had deserted. At length he got into the Cherokee nation, and had been there for eighteen years. His wife was French. She said her name was Polly Mallett. She had been taken prisoner when a little girl down by Mobile, and was raised by the Indians. They had been living together sixteen years, but had no children. She once had an Indian husband, by whom she had a son, Kiachattalla. She was exchanged after this, but conscious of her degradations, declined her freedom. The family consisted of Turnbridge, the old woman, the old woman's son, Kiachattalla, and the old woman's grandson, Charles Butler. Kiachattalla was only 22 years old, but a fearful warrior. It was said he had killed six white men when he was in war parties of Creeks and Shawnees on the Kentucky Road. (He was) then the overseer of the town, and the leader of their dances.

He gave me to his mother, telling her that I was large enough to help her hoe corn.

We had not got there fifteen minutes before a very large, corpulent old squaw came in, the sweat falling in big drops from her face, and appeared very angry at old T urnbridge and his wife. She told the old white people that they had done very wrong in taking me away, and said I ought to be killed – all the rest were killed and I was so big that I would see everything, be a man after awhile, and get away, pilot an army there, and have them all killed. I must be killed. But the talk was all in the Indian language of which I understood nothing, nor what she went on to say – that her son would be there in a few minutes, and he would kill me. The old man said, "Boy, you may keep good heart. All of your friends are killed, but you will not be hurt." He directed me to sit on the side of the bed, which stood behind the door, and getting up, he stood in the door, looking along the road that led to the town. In 10 or 15 minutes the Indians – the old squaw's son, Cotteotoy, with ten of his men - came through the cane. The old man did not see them till they reached the corner of the house. They inquired if there was not a white man in there. The old man said, "No, but there is a bit of a white boy." The fellow said he knew how big I was, and I must be killed.

Old T urnbridge plead for me, that I was his son's prisoner and must not be killed. He came right up to T urnbridge, face to face, with his tomahawk raised. The fellow still insisted on killing me. As Cotteotoy was a great man and usually did as he pleased, and Kiachattalla was only 22 years old, no greater insult could be offered him. He asked T urnbridge if he was going to be my friend. Had T urnbridge admitted it, Cotteotoy would have killed him instantly. T urnbridge stepped out of the door and said, "Take him along." Cotteotoy, a very large Indian, came at me with a tomahawk in one hand and his butcher knife in the other, but the French woman begged him not to kill me in the house. Catching me by the hand, Cotteotoy jerked me up by the arm and dragged me out of the house.

There was one Indian in front of the door with his gun, one on the right with his tomahawk raised, and one on the left with his knife in his hand. Another was standing with my brother's scalp in his hand – the hair was very long and platted, and another with Griffin's scalp. These scalps were the entire skin on the head, so that they could divide them up. I saw it was death, and I asked T urnbridge to ask them to let me pray. He said it was not worthwhile, for they all appeared in a rage. They began to pull my clothes off to keep from bloodying them. As soon as they got them off, I fell on my knees and began to pray as loud as I could. The French woman prevailed on them not to kill me there on the road, where she carried water. She begged them to take me out to the mountains, where the wolves would eat me up. They answered that they would take me to Running Water town, where they would have a frolic knocking me over, as there was no white people there.

The old white man said, "My boy, get up and put on your pants. They will not kill you here. You have to go with them." I don't believe they went more than 40 yards from the house before they stopped and gathered around me. I fell upon my knees and was trying to pray. I opened my eyes, and looking up I saw one of them smile. Cutting my eyes around, I saw every countenance changed from vengeance to mildness.

Cotteotoy stopped there and said he must not kill me, for I was Kiachattalla's prisoner. He had taken a negro woman out of the boat, and if he killed me, Kiachattalla would kill his negro – all the Indians in the nation could not keep him from it. Kiachattalla was about six feet high, strong and active, and was also the leader of their ball plays. But the wretched old mother said she would have my hair anyhow. She came up behind me with an old dull knife and loosed my hair, and gathering a lock from the crown of my head, she cut off a parcel and then kicked me in the in the side. The man called back to T urnbridge to come for me, that he loved me and would not kill me. The Indians said it was the negro he loved, not me. He went off with all my clothes except my pants. These occurrences took place on Friday, May 9th, 1789 – a clear, warm day – about two o'clock.

At the taking of the boat, two Creeks captured my mother and four children – Jane, ten years old, George, eight, Elizabeth, seven, and Polly, five – and left for the Creek Nation that night. A party of Cherokees pursued them the next morning, took Jane and Polly, and brought them to Nickajack. My mother and George and Elizabeth were taken to the Creek Nation. Mrs. Bays, the mother of Isaiah, and four negroes – two males and two females – were also taken prisoner.

Old Breath, the head man of the entire town, came home that same night, and was much displeased at what they had done. He desired them to bring me to town and let him see me. Accordingly the old French woman took me in on Sabbath morning, and when he saw me, he directed the old woman to tell me to come and shake hands with him, which I did. He seemed very solemn. He then directed her to inform me that I would have to become an Indian, or I could not be saved. I would have my hair cut off like theirs, he would put me in his family, and I must call him Uncle, and call Kiachattalla brother. But I must be careful not to let the Creek Indians catch me – they would kill me.

They cut off all my hair except a patch on top of my head to tie feathers to, bored holes through my ears, and painted all about like theirs, he would put me in his family, and I must call him Uncle, and call Kiachattalla brother. But I must be careful not to let the Creek Indians catch me – they would kill me.

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They cut off all my hair except a patch on top of my head to tie feathers to, bored holes through my ears, and painted all about my eyes and ears. T urnbridge sold the salt out of an old salt bag and made me a shirt out of it. The shirt had a breach in the breast of it, and it only came down to my waist. They took away my pantaloons, and in exchange merely gave me a piece of coarse cloth about four feet long and ten or fifteen inches broad. I had a short pair of leggings, and my thighs were bare. They started me hoeing corn, and I was blistering with the sun and getting sick, but the Indians kept a store, and Indians were often there, trading.

Their appearances and everything they did or said was new to me, that stood the sun.

They greased my sores with bear's oil, and after that a skin came ing corn, and I was blistering with the sun and getting sick, but the Indians kept a store, and Indians were often there, trading.
causing me to watch them very closely. Old Turnbridge told me I
must not do so – it always makes an Indian angry to look at him.
About two weeks after I was taken, I was going to the spring with
Charles Butler, the old woman’s grandson. He went everywhere
with me, to let me know who were Creeks, for they might kill me.
I did not know a Creek from a Cherokee. We saw several Indians
sitting about the spring. The little boy seemed alarmed. I went
down, dipped my bucket, and started for the house. Two of them
jumped on their horses and galloped by my side. I glanced at one
of them – he had one side of his head painted red and the other
black, and a scalp on his breast. In a moment he was down by my
side, and had a white oak stick about four feet long and one inch
in diameter at the butt. He struck me on the side of the head.
His second blow knocked me out of the road, but his third stroke
barely struck me. He said afterward that if he could have knocked
me down he would have beat me well.

He had been away with Shawnee Indians – there was six of
them – and on his way home they heard the war had broke out.
They concluded to come by East Tennessee, and killed two little
boys out feeding some cattle. The whites followed them and killed
them – and on his way home they heard the war had broke out.

About two weeks after I was taken, I was going to the spring with
Turnbridge’s wife, Old Hughey, was concealed, painted black, in the high weeds of
the fence corner. His tomahawk was raised to kill me as soon as I
came to the end of my row.

In the fall, at the big spring a mile from our house, Turnbridge
took me with him trading for bear’s oil. I had a long stick in
my hand. A large Creek fellow came along and pulled the stick
away, and gave me a severe cut across my shoulders. Turnbridge
jerked the switch out of his hands. In a few days, Charles But-
ler went with me to pull some roasting ears for the old Irishman.
We passed a fellow going along our road, and the boy inquired
if I knew that fellow. He said that is the man that caused you to
be whipped at the spring, and it was him that run you with his
knife. We went on, and I was cutting corn with the knife they had
given me. When I was twenty yards from the road, he came along,
stopped, and inquired what I was cutting his corn for. I answered
it was not his – I had made the corn. He said I was a liar and
started towards me, very angry. I ordered him to stop – if he came
to me I would put that knife in him. He clapped his hand down
for his knife, but had none. He swore and raved, and ran to get a
stick with which to make battle. It was only 70 or 80 yards to the
house that had formerly served me as a place of refuge, and I took
off. Two or three young men there took after him with their dogs,
but they could not catch him. They would have used him badly.

I had a long spell of bilious fever the fall I was with them, and
they used every means to enable me to recover my health – sweat-
ning me over pine boughs, vomiting me, as well as scratching me.
They would take six or eight brass pins, push them about three-
quarters of an inch through a small stick. Then they would rake it
down the breast and back, all around as far down as their waists,
so that sometimes they will be bloody from head to foot. They
did this twice a year. They used a gar’s bill to bleed me with. Al-
though I was not able to do much for several weeks, I still had to
cut wood and carry water, as usual. The Indians became afraid of
the white people, and moved in the winter to the Crow Town,
about 50 miles down the river. They returned to Nickajack the
next spring. I later took the bilious fever and was scarcely able
to do anything for several weeks. The winter was very hard, and
many other things took place.

Joseph Brown

A Letter from the Settlements

We had a very hard winter and a middlin cold spring. Creatures
suffered somewhat, for the frost killed a good deal of the cane.
Corn may now be had here for one quarter of a dollar per bushel.
If the season is good, I want to get 20 acres of corn planted this
year. We had a middlin troublesome summer last year, and like-
wise about seven people killed at Cumberland and on the road
between this and Kentucky in the course of last winter, and early
this spring.

We have had still times these two months past. We sent two
men early this spring to the Creek nation to treat for peace, which
the Creeks granted. They said that they sent a number against us
last fall on account of one of their head warriors being killed on
the Cold Water expedition. Ninety road cutters are to start out
next Monday to blaze the road better, and do some cutting to
Holston. Another party is to go sometime in July to clear it about halfway, and about September 1st a large party is to go cut it to the Holston, and be a guard to the people that will be moving to this country this fall.

Try to trade for some corduroy for jackets and breeches for the boys, and likewise some things for your mother, and for Sally and Esther. They are all grown up now, and as we have frequent opportunity of going to sermon, they want to appear like other people. What few goods come to this country are at such an extravagant price that it is out of poor people’s power to purchase them. I think you would not stay longer at Watkins Creek if you would come and see this country, but I don’t take upon myself to advise you to it for fear of the danger of the road.

Samuel Shannon
May 31, 1788
(to his son)

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**Spanish Designs**

I consider the news that the deputies from Cumberland gave McGillivray very interesting. It shows the general ferment there and in Kentucky about separating from Congress. In respect to the propositions made to McGillivray by the inhabitants of Cumberland to become vassals of his Majesty, I have made no reply. Cumberland will very probably follow the example of Kentucky.

Governor Miro
June 15, 1788
(to Don Antonio Valdez)

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**James Cole Mountflorence**

Whilst here securing land under warrants assigned to him, and for the benefit of others, James Cole Mountflorence was actively involved in political discussions and movements. He was probably here as the secret agent of our government, the character of which he had acted for our Commissioners in Europe. He frequently bought and sold lots and tracts of land, gave dinner and wine parties generously, talked politics knowingly, gallanted ladies handsomely, circulated extensively, and flourished grandly. The reliable information he possessed of the state of our domestic and foreign relations made him an acceptable guest.

A.W. Putnam
Circa 1858

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**The Scalping of Jesse Maxey**

The Indians wounded Jesse Maxey a short distance from Asher’s Station. He could not escape. He fell, they scalped him, and as he lay upon the ground they thrust a butcher knife into his body, and departed. He was conscious all the time. He thought the knife wound must prove mortal, and he offered up his final prayer. He was found in this helpless and bleeding condition, was taken to the station, and recovered. He said they used him very roughly in jerking off his scalp.

A.W. Putnam

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**John Sevier and Cherokee Murders**

While the head men from Hiwassee were coming to meet in a conference to which they were invited, a party from your settlements went round and murdered seven of the Indians, who were peaceably working in their cornfield. Also, nine were murdered at Chilhowee, and 30 have been slaughtered on the Tennessee. The inhabitants of Chota and five other towns have been forced, by the outrages committed on them, to abandon their settlements and crops of corn, and to fly to this side of the mountains for peace and protection. A friendly letter was written to them, requesting them to return and live again at their towns, and to send a runner with a white flag.

A few days after this, a party from among you came to Citico, and murdered two Indians who had remained in their houses. The party then proceeded to Chilhowee and raised a white flag, on which Old Tassel, Old Abraham, his son, and the Leech - Indian chiefs remarkable for their fidelity - came out in the character of ambassadors, under a flag of truce. But they were attacked and murdered. The objects of these murders were harmless and peaceable, and almost defenseless. It is unworthy of American valor and heroism, which bled in the cause of liberty, to kill and plunder a few unarmed savages who wish for nothing but to possess their lands and kill their venison in peace. They are our allies and friends, friends to whom the protection of the United States has been granted by the most solemn treaties. Far be it from us
to imagine that this unmanly attack has been perpetuated with the approbation of the whole people we now address. All people have bad men among them. We flatter ourselves that this letter will have its due effect in preventing such disorders for the future.

Justices of the Court,
Abbeville County,
South Carolina
July 9, 1788
(to the people on the Nolichucky, French Broad, and Holston)

The Indians have continued to commit hostilities on our frontiers. The war with the Cherokees has now become general, although in part unjustly brought on. Colonel Sevier, contrary to the Council of Officers, fell on Kiewkah on the Hiwassee in June, and killed, it is said, about 20 Indians. A short time after, Sevier and his party arrived in the town of Chilhowee, opposite to Old Abram’s house, and hoisted a flag.

Abram’s son ferried them over. This done, they fell on the Indians in Abram’s house, killed the Tassel, Hanging Maw, Old Abram, his son, Tassel’s brother and Hanging Maw’s brother, and took Abram’s wife and daughter – altogether a scene of cruelty. They brought in 14 scalps. Not a single person from this county abetted or assisted in it, but reprobate the measures. Colonel Sevier discovers every mark of contempt to the laws of this state, and holds in derision those that are in allegiance. I fear his conduct may involve us in a war with the Creeks. Sevier went down the Hiwassee in two canoes with 40 men on a second tour, but found the towns evacuated.

Thomas Hutchings
July 11, 1788
(to Colonel Joseph Martin)

An Attack at Bledsoe’s Fort

There were only a few men in the fort at Bledsoe’s Lick. Not expecting any attack, a party of them were in the room occupied by Colonel Anthony Bledsoe. A little schoolmaster, George Hamilton, was sitting in front of the fire singing at the top of his voice. The Indians, prowling about the place, found a hole in the back of the chimney. One of them, poking a gun in at the crevice, fired upon the singer, striking his chin and passing around his jaw. He just escaped with his life.

The Indians then cut down one of the window shutters with their tomahawks, and trying to get in at the window, Hugh Rogan fired an old musket out amongst them, and they left that part of the stockade. At another quarter of the fort, firing in amongst a large number of children at Mr. Donahue’s cabin, they succeeded only in killing a large dog stretched before the fire. The old man, seizing a bucket of water, threw it upon the fire, extinguishing it. Finding they could achieve nothing, the Indians left.

William Hall

A young man named Hamilton had been employed to teach the children of Isaac Bledsoe and others. Hamilton, two daughters of Katherine Bledsoe – Peggy and Polly – and Polly Desha, were in Hugh Rogan’s room. The Bledsoe fort had two immense rooms, with a hall between them. The doorways of the hall had never been made, the inmates of the fort believing that the high stockades around the fort would protect them. The chimney of Rogan’s room was built on the hallway. In the back wall of the fireplace was a hole half a foot square, through which persons in the hall could discern what went on in the room. After the fire was made, this hole was usually stopped by placing a garden hoe against it, but this night it had been forgotten.

Mr. Hamilton sat before the fire. The girls had insisted upon his singing them a song. Hugh Rogan was some distance from the fire, reading, and a little negro boy was dancing around the room. Just as Hamilton lifted up his voice in song, an Indian shot him from the hole in the fireplace. Rogan had laid some powder on the mantel, thought it had been thrown in the fire by the negro boy, and was about to administer chastisement when he was undeceived. Indians had entered the grounds, and the din of warfare began. The girls tried to escape to their father’s side of the fort, but Rogan barred the door and yelled to the wounded Hamilton to drag them under the bed. Rogan took his stand near the window, took his musket, and banged away. The musket made such a terrific noise, and did such good service in killing and wounding the Indians that they left the stockade. All the time this conflict raged, Isaac Bledsoe stood holding the door ajar, fearing that the girls might seek his protection. He knew that if they did, and if he could not rush out at once and succor them, they would meet with death.

Lucinda Boyd
1894
The Killing of Anthony Bledsoe.

The Indian troubles of 1788 induced Colonel Anthony Bledsoe to abandon his station at Greenfield, and remove to his brother’s near the Lick, which the stock frequented and which was near Winchester’s Mill. A company of Evans’ battalion, under the command of Captain William Martin, built a blockhouse between our residence and Mr. Harrison’s. Isaac Bledsoe had a small station, not well-stockaded. He lived in a large, old-fashioned Virginia double house, with a passage between. One of these apartments was assigned to his brother’s family.

Sally Bledsoe Shelby
 circa 1844
(to Lyman Draper)

It was very troublesome times with the Indians. Colonel Anthony Bledsoe had left the Greenfield tract, and was living in one end of my father’s house. The 20th of July, 1788, I was in the house of my father, Isaac Bledsoe. The occurrences of that night made a deep and lasting impression on my mind. I was about ten years of age at that time. About midnight, after the families had retired to bed, James Clendening announced that he had discovered some Indians near the houses.

Mary Bledsoe Read
 circa 1848

About nine o’clock of a bright, moonlight night, hearing the dogs bark and expecting George Winchester, Colonel Bledsoe went into the passage, followed by Samuel Campbell. A single gun fired, and Colonel Bledsoe was shot through the breast – the same ball passing into Campbell. Bledsoe survived till sunrise, and Campbell till the succeeding afternoon.

Sally Bledsoe Shelby
 (to Lyman Draper)

The Indians lay in ambush about 40 yards in front of the passage dividing the house, and with a view of drawing out those in the house, a portion of the Indians rode rapidly through a lane by the house. Anthony Bledsoe and his servant man, Campbell, arose and walked into the passage – both were shot down. Colonel Bledsoe was shot with a large ball, which struck within a half inch of his navel, and passed straight through his body, coming out his back.

William Hall
 circa 1848

Campbell was shot dead. Anthony Bledsoe, having fallen, was drawn into the house. There was difficulty in getting light. At length Hugh Rogan went to the kitchen and got fire. When the light came, the wound was examined and discovered to be mortal. His intestines were shot and torn, and what is called his caul fat came out to a considerable length. He was in extreme agony. There was great confusion in the room, great lamentation and grief among the family and those present, and a momentary attack was expected from the Indians.

Anthony Bledsoe asked my mother, Caty Bledsoe, what she thought of his case. She told him he must inevitably die, and that he ought to make preparation for another world. He seemed to have a great deal of concern about that. After a little while, my mother suggested that four of his oldest children were girls, and if he died without a will, his girls would get none of his lands, and she suggested his making some provisision for his daughters.

He seemed to hesitate, and said he did not know who they would marry, but that if they would have it wrote, he would make a will. He said he wanted his Kentucky and Holston land sold, and the proceeds applied to the education of his children. He wanted a small tract of land given to his daughters, the balance of his lands to be equally divided among his sons, the four oldest negroes to be kept by his wife during her life, and the balance of the property to be equally divided among all his children.

Mary Bledsoe Read
Isaac Bledsoe stepped to the passage, called, and told Clendening that he must come and write his brother’s will; that he was so confused and agitated that he could not write it himself. They got a table and placed it near Anthony Bledsoe. Bledsoe was suffering great pain. Caty Bledsoe got up behind him in the bed and supported him.

William Hall

My mother got behind Anthony Bledsoe, and held him up with her knees. He talked little, but sensible. He signed his name to the will. My father was present during the whole time of the writing of the will, and was over him when he died. He continued to suffer imminently till his death – no mortal could have suffered more. In addition to Sally, the eldest daughter, who had married David Shelby, and Betsy, who shortly afterward married James Clendening, at his death Colonel Bledsoe had Rachel, Susan, Thomas, Anthony, Isaac, Polly, Abram, and Henry. Prudence was born after the death of her father.

Mary Bledsoe Read

Colonel Bledsoe was about six feet, blue eyes, black hair, bald, and usually wore a wig. He was a religious man – an Episcopalian.

Sally Bledsoe Shelby

Colonel Anthony Bledsoe was bald-headed, about middle sized, heavy formed, dark eyes, fresh and well-looking.

Reverend Robert Bell
circa 1844
(to Lyman Draper)

The day after the death of Colonel Bledsoe, Sarah Shelby went with her husband, son, and servants to Bledsoe’s Lick to attend his funeral. The distance was ten miles, and David Shelby, armed with a rifle and holsters, went in advance, Sarah Shelby went, and was followed by a negro, who carried a rifle.

Dr. John Shelby
(to Elizabeth Ellet)

Bereaved of her husband, sons, and brother-in-law, Mrs. Bledsoe was not only obliged to undertake the charge of her husband’s estate, but the care, education, and the settlement in life of her children. These duties were discharged with unwavering energy and patience. Through all this trying period of her life, she exhibited a decision and firmness of character which bespoke no ordinary intellect.

Elizabeth Ellet

McGillivray has told a resident of this place that the American residents of Cumberland had sent two deputies offering him 300 cavalry for whatever use he thought best. I suggest that as a result of the arrival of the ship at the Mosquito Coast, and the passing of the whites to that vicinity, the Indians may be stirred up. McGillivray, Panton, and other royalists wishing to fortify a post to hold some port on the coast, may unite with the inhabitants of Cumberland to form an independency, or some other purpose inspired by the King of England.

Governor O’Neill
July 28, 1788
(to Governor Miro)

An Intriguing Letter

The Indians still continue their incursions, though trifling to what we experienced in the spring. I imagine it must be Cherokees or some outlying Creeks who are not acquainted with your orders. Colonel Anthony Bledsoe was killed by a small party about two weeks ago. We have expected some of the Creeks in from you, but none have yet arrived.

I have provided a gun which Mr. Hoggatt thinks will please you. I have caused a deed for a lot in Nashville to be recorded in your name, and beg that you will let me know whether you will accept a tract or two of land in our young country. In all probability we cannot long remain in our present state. If the British, or any commercial nation who may be in possession of the mouth of the Mississippi, would furnish us with trade and receive our produce, the people on the west side of the Appalachian Mountains will open their eyes to their real interest.

James Robertson
August 3, 1788
(to Alexander McGillivray)

An Enticement

Between the Appalachian Mountains and the Mississippi River, a space of 250 miles, is a beautiful country of gentle hills and extensive plains watered with large rivers. By the assistance of great numbers of creeks and small rivers which run into the Tennessee and Cumberland, there are few places where produce cannot be transported by water to any part of the world during the spring and summer. The soil exceeds my highest expectation. The vast crops of corn it will yield are well known. I am certain 25 bushels an acre of wheat and rye may be raised. Oats and barley flourish, and flax, hemp, cotton, and tobacco grow luxuriantly. The climate is such that horses, cattle, and sheep support themselves in the woods during the winter months. I think there is great encouragement here for emigrants.

Esubious Bushnell
September 5, 1788
(letter from Nashville)

Spanish Fears

All I write I have kept in secrecy in order that neither Panton nor McGillivray might learn I have misgivings about them.
The Killing of John Blackburn.

The Indians came to Buchanan's Station in September. John Blackburn, standing on the bank of the creek near the spring, was fired upon by ten or twelve of them at the same time. He was killed, scalped, and left with a spear sticking in his body.

J.G.M. Ramsey 1853

The Opening of the New Road

The new road was first explored by Colonel Thomas King and Major Robert King, who marked it westwardly from Knoxville, past the Crab Orchard, and on to the western foot of the mountain – there finding such uneven ground on their route as was unsuitable for marking, until they crossed the Caney Fork a few miles above the mouth of Smith's Fork. They marked from thence to Nashville. Soon after this, Benjamin Castleman and John Kennedy were prevailed upon to go and mark that part of the road not marked by the Kings. Some circumstances proving unfavorable, they returned, marking as they went, and continued their course towards Knoxville. The Indians fired on them near Clinch River and killed Kennedy. Castleman escaped to Knoxville.

On September 10, 1788, four captains' companies – a guard of upwards of 100 – rendezvoused at Nashville under the command of Major Kirkpatrick, and started on to Knoxville. We traveled a way that was marked by Major Robert King. On the third night we camped at Mansker's Creek; the fourth night at a big spring on South Fork. The next day we crossed the Caney Fork and camped the fifth night within a half mile of the Mine Lick. A drove of buffalo was at the lick, something startled them, and they ran through our camp. We killed one or two. The next day we got to the mountain and camped the sixth night near a cave spring. The seventh night we camped at the Crab Orchard, the eighth night near Clinch River. We had orders for every man to shift for himself.

On the eighth and ninth of October, the families that was to go on met at a spring within about half a mile of John Adair's Station. We started back from there the 10th of October, crossed Clinch River at the Pawpaw Ford, and camped on the bank of the river. The next day we crossed Emery's River, on the fourth night we camped at the Crab Orchard, and the fifth night camped at the Standing Up Rock. The sixth night we encamped at a small creek, and there was a false alarm when one picket fired at some-
thing he thought to be a wolf. On the seventh day we camped at a creek, and the next day crossed Cumberland River at the Salt Lick, and camped on Salt Lick Creek. We began to be in want of provisions, and Charles Burks and I was sent to Isaac Bledsoe's Station. Men were sent out with provisions, and met them. They got to Sumner County in about three days, and then went about in different directions.

Edmund Swanson
circa 1823

About May, a pack-horse road was marked out from Nashville, via Buchanan's Station, to (the Holston River) by Thomas and Robert King, George Fields and others, out on a surveying tour to the Cumberland country, and blazed it out on their return. About August, Isaac Bledsoe, Ephriam Peyton, James Lynn, George D. Blackmore, James Clendening, and I, and others, 31 in all, marked out a way on the north side of Cumberland – crossing the river at a salt lick, then up Martin's Creek, thence struck the other trail. In the fall, with 100 men, Kasper Mansker went to East Tennessee as a guard to escort emigrants, and on their return Andrew Jackson came to the Cumberland Country.

William Martin

I was born in Guilford County, North Carolina, in 1769, and came as one of a body of men, horse and foot, enlisted to cut a military road through the wilderness. The number of troops intended to be enlisted was 200, the complement could not be made up, and consequently I came out with about 100, many of those who started having deserted on the borders of the settlements. (Captain John) Hunter was commander of the troop of horse in which I served. He was afterwards killed by the Indians below Nashville. Nearly all with whom I came finally met the same fate. On my arrival I was stationed at Mulherrin's and Buchanan's forts – afterwards I went to Nashville, then consisting of the old fort and a few cabins.

Samuel Blair

AN AMBUSH AVOIDED

In September I was living in a close settlement at Stone Lick, three miles east of Robertson's Station and within a mile of Nashville, with a few other families – William Gillespie, Alexander Ewing, James Bosley, Samuel Martin, and others. At Robertson's Station, two Indians ran up in open day, fired upon the station, and fled to draw out pursuers. Elijah Robertson followed with eight others. I was one of them. We went two miles south when Robertson said he judged from the actions of the two, that they were designed to lead us into an ambuscade of a larger number and he ordered a return. Some were anxious to continue the pursuit, but Robertson's counsels prevailed. We afterwards learned from the Indians, through returning captives, that the Indians numbered 100, and had formed a complete net on either side of the trail, but half a mile beyond where Robertson relinquished the pursuit.

Hugh F. Bell
1844
(to Lyman Draper)

THE ARRIVAL OF McNairy and Jackson

The new road from Campbell's Station to Nashville was opened on the 25th of September, and the guard attended to escort such persons as were ready to proceed. About 60 families went on, amongst whom were the widow and family of the late General Davidson, and John McNairy, judge of the Superior Court. On next October 1st, the guard will attend at the same time for the same purpose. The road is much better, and nearer by 150 miles, than that by way of Kentucky, the distance being only 182 miles.

State Gazette
of North Carolina
November 28, 1788
Andrew Jackson and myself moved together from North Carolina, and arrived at Nashville in October, 1788.

Judge John McNairy
1827

Rachel Donelson Robards

In the fall of 1787 I became a boarder in the family of Mrs. (Betsy) Robards, the mother of Lewis Robards. I had not lived there many weeks before I understood that Captain Robards and his wife lived very unhappily, on account of his being jealous of a Mr. Short. The uneasiness continued to increase, with great distress to the mother, until early in 1788. Lewis had written to the widow Donelson, requesting that she take her daughter home, as he did not intend to live with her any longer. Mrs. (Lewis) Robards' brother, Samuel Donelson, came up to carry her down to her mother's in the summer or fall of 1788. I well recollect the distress of old Mrs. Robards, on account of Rachel going away. In unreserved conversations with me, the old lady always blamed her son.

John Overton
1827
(to R. C. Foster)

Cherokee Retribution to the East

We wish to inform you, concerning the women and children that were killed at Gillespie's Fort. The Bloody Fellow's talk is that he is not like you are. You kill women and children, and he does not. He came and ordered them off the land. He ordered them to surrender and they should not be hurt. They would not, and he stormed Gillespie's Fort and took it. When you move off the land, we will make peace and give up the women and children. You must march off in 30 days. Five thousand men is our number.

Bloody Fellow
Categiskey
John Watts
The Glass
October 15, 1788
(to John Setzer, Joseph Martin, et al)

The Killing of Dunham and Askew

My first experience of Indian massacres was immediately after my arrival in the vicinity of Nashville, when Joseph Dunham and Hardy Askew were killed near Isaac Johnson's fort. They had started to town that day, and the Indians, lying in wait at the end of the lane, fired on them. They fell just at the edge of the woods, east of the fort. The two young men were soldiers in the guard with which I came to the country. Several were killed in that same neighborhood immediately afterwards. Not far from the same place, the Indians soon killed a man named Jacob Mills.

John Davis
circa 1852

A Communication from the Cherokee

Whenever we are invited into a treaty, and bounds are fixed, the white people settle much faster on our lands than they did before. They think we will not break the peace, and they will strengthen themselves and keep the lands. You know this. You told us at the treaty that if any white people settled on our lands, we might do as we pleased with them. They come and settle close by our towns, and some of the Chickamauga people came and killed a family, contrary to our desire. We could not help what the Chickamauga people does.

Then the white people came and drove us out of our towns and killed some of our beloved men, and several women and little children. We are now like wolves, ranging about the woods to get something to eat. Nothing is to be seen in our towns but weeds, grass, and bones. But for all this, we will lie still – we will not do any more mischief if the white people will stop.

William Elders,
Cherokee Chief
November 3, 1788
Survivors of the Brown Party

John Weatherford, who is immediately back from the Creek Nation, says that an old gentlewoman whose name is Brown, with five daughters and one son, are now prisoners in the Creek Nation. She was bought by Mr. John Goldfin for four pieces of shroud and one horse load of powder and lead. Mrs. Brown informed Weatherford that they were going down the Tennessee, but were decoyed by a Cherokee half-breed. The greatest part were murdered – her husband drowned. The negroes together with some stills were taken off towards Detroit by the French at Muscle Shoals. She also informed that three of her party were prisoners at Chickamauga. One of them is a lad and he works in silver – his friends may know him by that. I am preparing to send an express to McGillivray in order to obtain Mrs. Brown.

Joseph Martin
November 14, 1788
(to Kentucky Gazette)

From McGillivray

I will continue to persist in measures most proper to keep off the nation from further hostilities against Cumberland. Except for a few mares and colts brought in by hunters, there has been no other mischief done your settlement this past summer and fall by my people.

Alexander McGillivray
December 1, 1788
(to James Robertson)

John Sevier and Piomingo

There is many of our people that want to live in your country, and rent some of your land. Would it not be good to rent some of your vacant land that now lies grown up with big trees, grass, and weeds, and is of no service to you? By renting it to white people you could receive a large quantity of goods every year like it was for nothing. These white people would make gunpowder and lead, and all sorts of clothing for your use. Such people on your own ground could learn your children to do such things, by which you could come to be a great and beloved people. The Great Spirit above would let the sun shine good upon you when you come to know His ways.

John Sevier
December 15, 1788
(to Piomingo)

Dr. White and the Spanish

The inhabitants in Kentucky approach 100,000. The settlements of Cumberland and the new State of Franklin are still in their beginnings. The borders of His Majesty’s dominions, and all valleys of the rivers that flow toward the center of those dominions, are full of strange and unknown people. Such people will cause misgivings if they are allowed to join the United States and become subject to its decisions. Luckily, their interests can be directed as differently as the course of their waters. These western people have a natural community of interests with Spain. The commerce and friendship of no nation can be as useful to the people settled on that side of the mountains as the trade and alliance with Spain. Circumstances favorable to this interest presented themselves (after the arrival of ) Gardoqui in the United States.

During this time, the vexations and jealousies began to cause murmurs in the new settlements against those on the eastern side of the mountains. A dispute having occurred between the United States and the State of North Carolina about the sovereignty of that district, its inhabitants set up the new State of Franklin. People whom the United States considered as subjects were entering Spanish territory, and this might bring the lamentable consequences of either expelling them, or forcing them to submit to the authority of the Sovereign. Therefore Gardoqui thought of using these people as a barrier, which could easily be done with the concurrence and help of those in possession of the country. He foresaw that the fortune of these western people would serve as a stimulus for all the others to preserve their independence from the American republic. Gardoqui proposed that I cross the mountains and promote among those people the idea of considering the King’s protection.

The State of Franklin was inclined toward a union with Great Britain. When Spain was mentioned to them as a better hope, they replied that Spaniards were opposed to the liberty of the human race, and no liberality could be expected from them. Nevertheless, since then they talk of a connection with Spain. In the State of Franklin they were divided into two parties – one that is for the Government of North Carolina, and the other in favor of the new state, which was the most numerous. But since their opponents had the protection of North Carolina, the people of Franklin were losing ground until they received the message of Senor Gardoqui.

The motive Senor Gardoqui had for persuading me to undertake this journey was that I had been the first to dedicate myself to the matter, and because of my knowledge of the country. They showed the ardent desire to assist the officers of His Majesty against whoever opposed them in their vicinity. John Sevier wrote to the Spanish Minister in New York that they wished to place themselves under the protection of the king. This enterprise will be the first example of the dismemberment of a dominion whose union will each day take on more formidable proportions. I am sure this example will be extended.

I flatter myself that your Excellency will classify this business as an introduction to matters of greater importance, and that your Excellency will permit me to make a suggestion. There is a great expanse of land between the possessions of the King and the Tennessee River. Permit these people to settle near the boundary, but within the limits of Louisiana and under the protection of Spain. For the privilege of any employment, or lands to cultivate, an essential condition will be the taking of the oath of fidelity to the King, and the abjuration of every other power. Let them be permitted to embark their products at Mobile, or on the Mississippi, or Spanish ships. This will bind them through affection as through interest.

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Don Diego Gardoqui sends me an individual with a letter for the Governor of New Orleans. This person, going under the name of Jacques Dubois - his real name being Mr. James White - informed me of the motive that has taken him to that province. My zeal and duty obliges me to tell your Excellency what I think about it.

Up to now England has been the most dangerous enemy to be feared, but at present there is on the American Continent a sovereign state which has the ambition to expand, and since its people are accustomed to overcome difficulties, none seem to them insurmountable. According to White, North Carolina has not ratified the new government, and unless it changes its policy it will find itself separated from Congress.

On the western side of the Appalachian Mountains, extending almost to the Mississippi, more than 200,000 inhabitants are settled in Kentucky, Franklin, and Cumberland. Being cramped, these people have decided to live under a separate government. It seems that almost inaccessible mountains were placed by nature to divide these countries. The power of Kentucky, Franklin, and Cumberland is what we are trying to diminish. This power will become fearful.

Joseph de Ezpeleta
December 29, 1788
(to Don Antonio Valdez)

The Establishment of Tennessee County

Whereas the great extent of Davidson County renders it inconvenient to the inhabitants to attend courts, musters, and elections, be it enacted that Davidson County be divided by a line beginning on the Virginia line, running south along Sumner County to the dividing ridge between Cumberland River and Red River, the westwardly along the ridge to the head of the main south branch of Sycamore Creek, then down to the mouth, then due south across the Cumberland River to the Davidson County line. All that part of Davidson County to the east shall remain Davidson County, and all that to the west shall be a county by the name of Tennessee.

General Assembly
1788
(legislative act)

The Mero District

Be it enacted that the counties of Davidson, Sumner, and Tennessee are hereby erected into a separate district by the name of Mero.

General Assembly
1788
(legislative act)

At the last session of our General Assembly, the county of Davidson was again divided, and the western part called Tennessee County, the western boundary being the Tennessee River. A new district was established, including Tennessee, Davidson, and Sumner Counties, and distinguished as the Mero District, after Governor Mero of New Orleans. At the earnest recommendation of Colonel James Robertson, Colonel Daniel Smith, a man of great prudence and bravery, was appointed Brigadier General of this district. From so judicious an appointment, and the friendly disposition of Mr. McGillivray, there is every reason to believe that the people of the western region will continue in peace.

Unidentified Writer
January 22, 1789