COLONEL WILLIAM PRESTON, 1729-1783

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Chapter I: In the Shadow of Colonel James Patton, 1729-1755

The somber foliage of stately trees and the vistas of meadows of more vivid hue provided the setting for the meeting of Elizabeth Patton and John Preston near the Shannon River in Ireland. The two were being ferried across the Irish waterway, he a ship's carpenter and she the daughter of an officer in the Royal Navy. A bond was formed between them that culminated in their elopement in 1724. Soon after, the young couple settled near the bride's home in Newton, a small, inland hamlet in Northern Ireland.[1]

John Preston was quite familiar with the Pattons. He had worked in the Royal Navy with Elizabeth's father and also with her brother James. During "Queen Anne's War" between Great Britain and France, James Patton had distinguished himself as a gallant, young officer in the service of his Queen. After the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713, Patton had purchased a small transport ship and had begun to accumulate a small fortune as he successfully engaged in shipping between Great Britain, Philadelphia, and various Virginia ports. His interest in the later and his information concerning its backcountry had grown with experience, and it is believed that

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[1]Elizabeth Preston Gray, "The Prestons of Virginia" (Bristol, n. d.; hereinafter cited as Gray, "Prestons of Virginia"), 1. Goodridge Wilson, "Smithfield," Daughters of the American Revolution Magazine (hereinafter cited as Wilson, "Smithfield," DAR), XCVII (August-September, 1963), 630.

he also cooperated in transporting Scotch-Irish immigrants to the port of Tappahannock on the Rappahannock River.[2]

Prior to the 1730's, western settlement of the Virginia colony had not progressed past the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains with the exceptions of a few hardy adventurers who engaged in the nomadic traditions of trapping for furs and trading with Indians. Because of the requisits of the land laws of the Royal Colony, few eastern groups were able to persuade the required number of people to travel West to chance a survival in the wilderness; and few wealthy, plantation-based aristocrats were willing to subscribe to a scheme which promised so little return for the required initial investment.[3]

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[2]Janie Preston Boulware Lamb, "'Smithfield' Home of the Prestons, In Montgomery County, Virginia," Virginia Magazine of History and Biography (hereinafter cited as Lamb, "Smithfield," VMHB), XLVII (1939), 109-25. Howard M. Wilson, The Tinkling Spring: Headwater of Freedom (Richmond, 1954; hereinafter cited as Wilson, Tinkling Spring), 22-23. Wilson, "Smithfield," DAR, 630. R. A. Brock, ed., The Official Records of Robert Dinwiddie (Richmond, 1884; hereinafter cited as Brock, Dinwiddie Papers), 8.

[3]Otis K. Rice, The Allegheny Frontier (Lexington, 1970; hereinafter cited as Rice, Allegheny Frontier), 20. Richard L. Morton, Colonial Virginia (2 vols., Chapel Hill, 1960; hereinafter cited as Morton, Colonial Virginia), 420-22. Thomas P. Abernethy, Three Virginia Frontiers (Baton Rouge, 1940; hereinafter cited as Abernethy, Three Virginia Frontiers), 46, 53-54. The land laws required that syndicates desiring legal claims to western territories provide at least twenty armed men and construct a defensive fort accessible to all who joined in the land grant. The General Assembly then granted to each society member a twenty acre town lot, 200 acres of farm land and an exemption from taxes for twenty years.

Realizing that the Virginia frontier must be secure if there was to be continued expansion of the colony, legislative and executive officials of the colony of Virginia in 1730 modified the archaic land laws in order to stimulate settlement. Thus, individual promoters could amass very large western land grants by making a very small investment. The new law allowed a speculator to receive titles to land grants from 10,000 to 100,000 acres on the condition that within two years of the grant, he seat one family for each 1000 acres he claimed.[4]

Quick to foresee the profits to be made from such land speculation, William Beverley of Essex County immediately petitioned for an approved land grant of 12,000 acres in the Shenandoah Valley which initiated legalized settlement with authorized land titles in that area. Beverley lived in a fine Georgian mansion on a great Rappahannock River plantation, Blandfield. Not content with the routine of a wealthy Tidewater aristocrat, Beverley became also one of Virginia's most notable and respected promoters of land settlement in the Valley of Virginia.[5]

In 1736, Beverley and a syndicate of four prominent Tidewater men petitioned and secured from the Governor and

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[4]Rice, Allegheny Frontier, 20. Abernethy, Three Virginia Frontiers, 53-54.

[5]H. R. McIlwaine, ed., Executive Journals of the Council of Colonial Virginia (Richmond, 1930; hereinafter cited as McIlwaine, Executive Journals), IV, 224.

Council an additional patent for 118,491 acres "called the Manor of Beverley . . . beyond the Great Mountains on the River Sherando . . ." The following day, in a move which characterized a fore-planned scheme, the granted interests of Sir John Randolph of Williamsburg, Richard Randolph of Henrico and John Robinson of King and Queen were assigned to William Beverley who became the controlling member of the immense domain.[6]

Desiring to fulfill the necessary conditions of his grant which would then be patented to him by the Governor and Council, Beverley wrote to that ship's captain who had been ferrying Irish and Scotch redemptioners to the Chesapeake Bay region: James Patton. Explaining his immediate need for settlers on his western domain, William Beverley approached Patton with a a proposal that he would sell tracts of land for one-half shilling an acre[7] and that "I should be very glad if you could import families enough to take the whole off from your hands at a reasonable price and tho' the order [of Council (May 5, 1737) for settlement of land in western Virginia] mentions families from Pensilvania, yet families from Ireland will do as well . . ."[8]

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[6]William G. Stanard, "Major Robert Beverley and His Descendants," Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, III (1895-96), 269. Beverley Patent at Virginia Historical Society, Richmond.

[7]Frederick B. Kegley, Kegley's Virginia Frontier (Roanoke, 1938; hereinafter cited as Kegley, Virginia Frontier), 40.

[8]William Beverley to James Patton, August 8, 1737, "Letters of William Beverley," William and Mary Quarterly (here-

Two weeks later, realizing perhaps the large cost of such a venture, Beverley amended his first proposal to Patton. Beverley wrote that he was prepared to offer Patton one-fourth of his land grant if Patton would not only transport settlers to the western frontier, but also assume one-fourth of the expense for such passage. Patton apparently agreed to the proposal for he soon began a series of four to six week trans-Atlantic voyages bound for Virginia with passengers and on his return to the British Isles with peltries and tobacco.[9]

James Patton was quick to foresee the profits which he was insuring William Beverley with the continued importation of settlers. Desirous of protecting his own future interests, he entered into a compact with Beverley and John Lewis, leader of an adjoining settlement to the Beverley Manor. In 1738, the three secured a grant from the governor and Council for a 30,000 acre tract on the Calfpasture, northwest of the Beverley Manor, with the requirement that one person be settled on each 1000 acres.[10]

Patton soon decided to settle with his wife and two children, Mary and Margaret, on the land he had been granted.

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inafter cited as "Letters of William Beverley," WMQ) Series 1, III (1895-96), 226-27. William P. Palmer, ed., Calendar of Virginia State Papers (Richmond, 1883; hereinafter cited as CVSP), I, 217-18.

[9]William Beverley to James Patton, n.d., "Letters of William Beverley," WMQ, 218. Brock, Dinwiddie Papers, 8.

[10]McIlwaine, Executive Journals, IV, 395. Wilmer L. Hall, ed., Executive Journals of the Council of Virginia (Richmond, 1945), V, 82.

Working with Beverley to secure the passage of enough people to settle the land grant, Patton immediately began to commandeer the services of men and families who would follow him into the wilderness of Virginia.[11]

Because of the distance of his new land from the seaboard, Patton sold his shipping interests before journeying to Virginia. Having persuaded his brother-in-law (a man who, according to family tradition, Patton disliked) to journey to the British colony, the two men secured a ship belonging to Walter Lutwidge of Boston, England, to make a one-way passage to Virginia.

On August 26, 1738, the Walpole, an eighty-five ton, six gun vessel, landed its cargo of sixty-six men, women and children on the Virginia shore. Along with the Patton family, John and Elizabeth Patton Preston, and their four children, Letitia, Margaret, Anne and William, James Patton had secured the passage of forty-six others as personal and/or indentured servants. Such a large party of settlers insured Patton of fulfilling his personnel placement obligation for the Calfpasture River land grant.[12]

The Pattons and the Prestons first settled at "Spring Hill" on the South River above present-day Waynesboro,

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[11]Wilson, Tinkling Spring, 22-23. Wilson, "Smithfield," DAR, 630. Gray, "Prestons of Virginia", 1.

[12]Colonial Office, Shipping Returns for Virginia, C. O. 5. (London, 1735-1756), MCDXLV.

Virginia. While the area was included in the Beverley Manor and lay within the county of Augusta which had been formed from Orange County in 1738, it was an unsettled wilderness far from any village or settlement. In 1743 the two families moved closer to the center of the Beverley Patent near a village which Beverley called Staunton.[13] Patton settled upon part of his own land grant known as "Spring Farm," and Preston purchased a 1398 acre tract of land from William Beverley where he engaged in farming, carpentry, and cabinetmaking.

Immediately upon arriving on the western frontier, James Patton assumed a position of leadership commensurate with the potential worth of his property. Before moving to his "Spring Farm" estate, he had been appointed colonel of twelve militia companies in the upper part of Orange County, although in actuality he may never have so served. Soon after, he assumed the judicial position of Chief Magistrate and sheriff of the newly created Augusta County. In 1745 he secured a grant from the governor and Council for 100,000 acres which were located south of the Beverley Patent and of a grant to Benjamin Borden, a New Jersey speculator. This grant included Patton's holdings in the Draper's Meadow area between the New and Roanoke Rivers.

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[13]Joseph A. Waddell, Annals of Augusta County (Richmond, 1886; hereinafter cited as Waddell, Annals of Augusta County), 40. It cannot be ascertained whether Beverley named his Millplace in honor of Lady Gooch, wife of the Governor of Virginia, or for a small town near Kendal, Westmoreland County, England.

At the commencement of the French and Indian War in 1754, Colonel Patton as county lieutenant, was in charge of all the county's militia and of coordinating the county's defenses. Augusta County then included all the land west of the Blue Ridge Mountains and south of the "Fairfax Line" which ran in a southeast-northwest diagonal from the Blue Ridge to the Shenandoah Mountain on the present Virginia/ West Virginia border. Regardless of whether he was motivated by the desire to make money or by the wish to render a public service to the colony, Colonel Patton was a man of such power in western Virginia that he exerted a controlling influence on frontier policies until his death in 1755.[14]

When John Preston died in February, 1747, after only nine years in the colonies, the care of the Preston family fell upon his only son William. Born on December 25, 1729, in Donegal, Ireland, the lad was but seventeen when he shouldered the responsibilities of providing for his family in the frontier world that so completely surrounded them. In working for merchants in the village of Staunton, he mastered elementary mathematics and bookkeeping. To supply

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[14]William G. Stanard, ed., "Journals of the Council of Virginia in Executive Sessions, 1737-1763," Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, XVI (1908), 24. Waddell, Annals of Augusta County, 43, 71. Order Book, Augusta County Records, Staunton, Virginia, (hereinafter cited as Augusta County Records), I, 1. Abernethy, Three Virginia Frontiers, 57.

the deficiencies in the youth's education, his uncle, James Patton, insisted that William be sent for additional study to the Reverend John Craig, a Presbyterian preacher and classical scholar of the community.

Patton, by now one of the most successful and most powerful men along the Virginia frontier, insured that young Preston's be a practical education. Foreseeing the day when his nephew might be his confidential secretary, he required Craig to teach Preston surveying. Although Craig complied with these demands, the minister's love for literature was communicated to his pupil. When William later lived at his Greenfield Plantation in lower Augusta County, he cherished a number of Latin classics in his library which numbered 273 volumes.[15] His formal education was completed.

William Preston returned to his home where he accepted the offer of William Estell, high sheriff of Augusta County, to be his deputy.[16] By 1751 Preston was ready to accept employment with his uncle in a far more important task.

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[15]Thomas L. Preston, Historical Sketches and Reminisences of an Octogenarian (Richmond, 1900; hereinafter cited as T. L. Preston, Historical Sketches), 113-15. Freeman H. Hart, The Valley of Virginia in the American Revolution, 1763-1789 (Chapel Hill, 1942; hereinafter cited as Hart, Valley of Virginia), 26. Will Book, Montgomery County Records, Christiansburg, Virginia (hereinafter cited as Montgomery County Records), B, 152.

[16]T. L. Preston, Historical Sketches, 114-15.

Expansion of English settlement beyond the Blue Ridge towards the Alleghenies impinged upon the borderlands of the French domain in the Ohio Valley. Such rival colonial policies caused relations between the two nations to deteriorate. Claims and counter-claims echoed from the valleys and mountain-ridges to the chancelleries of Europe: which had the better right to settle among and trade with the Indians? As early as 1748 competition between Great Britain and France in the Ohio Valley began to move slowly to climax when it was evident that neither country regarded as final the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle which had just concluded the European wars of the past ten years. Instead, they saw the Treaty as a truce, an intermission between their struggles. England based her claim that her Virginia colony extended so far westward on the exploratory expedition of Thomas Batts and Robert Fallem from Fort Henry near Petersburg in 1671. France rejoined with the claim that the Mississippi-Ohio Valley was a part of Canada because of La Salle's journey of exploration there in the early 1680's.[17]

Crucial to the execution of either government's authority over the vast area west of the Blue Ridge Mountains was the power of the Indians. Since both the British and French

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[17]Morton, Colonial Virginia, 609. Rice, Allegheny Frontier, 33. Harvey Lee Price, "Draper's Meadows and Smithfield" (Blacksburg, 1930; hereinafter cited as Price, "Draper's Meadows and Smithfield"), 2.

sought and obtained alliances, the balance of power was maintained. In 1744, the colonies of Virginia, Pennsylvania and Maryland had secured a treaty with the Indian confederacy of the Six Nations at Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Western lands of the colonies which traversed the disputed areas were open to settlement and free passage for the Indians throughout the colonies was provided as they journeyed to make war on their French-aligned opponents: the Shawnee and the Catawba. In 1751 the British colonies formed another commission to renew the Treaty of Lancaster and to secure further concessions from the confederate Indians. Virginia's Governor Robert Dinwiddie appointed as commissioners Colonel Joshua Fry, Mr. Lunsford Lomax and Colonel James Patton. After all parties agreed to meet at the Indian village of Logstown, about eighteen miles south of Pittsburgh, Patton took William Preston with him as his private secretary. The resulting Treaty of Logstown authorized the British to build a fort at the forks of the Ohio River, but the latter agreed to make no settlements along the River without specific approval of the Council of the Six Nations.[18]

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[18]Preston Papers, Lyman P. Draper Collection, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison Wisconsin (hereinafter cited as Preston Papers, WiHi), introduction. Morton, Colonial Virginia, 533-34, 615, 688. Location of the Treaty of 1752 has been spelled Logtown, Logstown and Logg's Town.

The noble-sounding reservation requiring Indian approval before new British settlements could be initiated was supported by representatives of newly formed land speculating companies. Men such as Christopher Gist of the Ohio Company, James Patton of the Woods River Company and Thomas Walker of the Loyal Company desired that the "approval" clause of the Treaty would cultivate a good will between the Indians and the syndicates which would later benefit the companies' expansion.[19]

Upon completion of the Treaty of Logstown, Preston returned to Staunton where, with the influence and training of James Patton, he qualified as a deputy surveyor. Since until 1770 Augusta County included everything west of the Blue Ridge and south of the Fairfax line, it is not clear where the twenty-three-year-old Preston lived during the next nine years. His family remained on their tract purchased from William Beverley, but because surveys

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[19]William G. Stanard, ed., "The Treaty of Logg's Town, 1752," Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, XIII (1905-1906), 143. Thomas P. Abernethy, Western Lands and the American Revolution (New York, 1937; hereinafter cited as Abernethy, Western Lands), 1-16. Goodridge Wilson, "The First Homemakers of New River," Roanoke Times, September 15, 1968. Goodridge Wilson, "Draper's Meadows: The Facts and Fiction of Early Settlement," Roanoke Times, September 22, 1968 (hereinafter cited as Wilson, "Draper's Meadows," Times). Kegley, Virginia Frontier, 121, 126. The Woods River Company controlled a 120,000 acre patent along the New River, and the Loyal Company, represented by Thomas Walker but regulated by a conglomerate of central-Virginia businessmen, manipulated an 800,000 acre grant along the Virginia/North Carolina border.

indicated that William Preston worked throughout the southern part of the county between the present towns of Fincastle and Radford, it is probable that he lived with the family of David Cloyd on the Roanoke River, about six miles west of Fincastle.[20]

Although historical research cannot substantiate the story, family tradition says that during the first years of Preston's journey through the wilderness, it is probable that he met a young surveyor from eastern Virginia, George Washington.[21] As the two men travelled south of the Roanoke River, they chanced to rest in an open meadow one day. A party of Indians, probably Shawnee, concealed by the high grasses, approached them. Preston had secured the friendship of the local Indians and they had pledged his safety. However, they felt not the same to the dark-

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[20]Lyman Chalkley, Chronicles of the Scotch-Irish Settlement in Virginia (3 vols., Rosslyn, 1912; hereinafter cited as Chalkley, Chronicles), I, 56. Kegley, Virginia Frontier, 506, 177.

[21]Whether George Washington's presence in the area was because of his surveying duties, or because he had been ordered to extend his proposed chain of forts between Winchester and Fort Cumberland to the southern bounds of the Valley (in 1755 he was so ordered) has not been validated. See John C. Fitzpatrick, ed., The Writings of George Washington, 1745-1799 (39 vols., Washington, 1931-1948; hereinafter cited as Fitzpatrick, Writings of Washington). Douglas S. Freeman, et. al., George Washington (7 vols., New York, 1948-1957; hereinafter cited as Freeman, George Washington), II. Fred L. Holmes, George Washington Travelled This Way (Boston, 1935).

haired man who accompanied their sandy-haired friend. As one Indian raised up and readied himself to let fly an arrow at the visitor, "Preston, in the eagerness to talk, flung himself forward so as completely to shelter his friend." The Indian, fearful of hitting Preston, withdrew from the scene along with his company of warriors.[22]

In 1752 Robert Dinwiddie became the new Royal Governor of Virginia after an interim of two and one-half years since Sir William Gooch. Upon his arrival in the Old Dominion, Dinwiddie learned of French encroachments and forts along the frontier. For the purposes of defense and militia recruitment, he divided the colony into four military districts.[23] In 1753 he sent Major George Washington, commander of the northern military district, to deliver a protest to the French. Even if Washington's mission accomplished nothing at once, legal claims to western lands by the English were not allowed to fail by default. The following year the Gov-

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[22]T. L. Preston, Historical Sketches, 33. Washington and Preston remained friends until Preston's death in 1783. When William's son, Francis, was elected to Congress, he met his father's friend in Philadelphia. Washington later gave Francis the horn of a buffalo in remembrance of his hunting ability and it was made into a small ladle with the head of Washington engraved in silver and the Masonic emblem on the outside.

[23]Charles Campbell, History of the Colony and Ancient Dominion of Virginia (Philadelphia, 1860), 448, 460. In 1749, having dedicated twenty-two years of service to the British Colonial Ministry as Governor of Virginia, Sir William Gooch retired to England. Virginia was ruled, in the absence of a Royal Governor, by John Robinson and Thomas Lee, presidents of the colonial Council.

ernor commanded that Washington take a force to hold the forks of the Ohio River and to halt the French. Discovering a well-supplied and ably-defended French force which had built Fort Duquesne at the junction of the Ohio and Monongahela Rivers, Washington withdrew fifteen miles to the Great Meadow which paralleled the Monongahela and built on this inferior site his own Fort Necessity.

Realizing that his small force could accomplish nothing against the larger and now-entrenched French detachment, George Washington sent a plea to Dinwiddie for additional troops. The Governor complied. He ordered James Patton, as county lieutenant of Augusta, to call out the militia to guard the entire frontier and to draft fifty of them to join a force of 200 men to reinforce Washington's fort. Captain Andrew Lewis led the Augusta company to Fort Necessity. When Washington was forced to surrender the fort in July, 1754, the Augusta militiamen marched back to Virginia with their young commander.[24]

The surrender of Fort Necessity was cause for Governor Dinwiddie's appeal to King George II for military assistance. When Dinwiddie asked that two British regiments be assigned to his frontier, the King refused to consider such a request for fear of a declaration of war by France. When it became evident,,however, that the colonial forces could not dis-

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[24]Waddell, Annals of Augusta County, 57. Abernethy, Western Lands, 9-10.

lodge entrenched French regulars, George II ordered that General Edward Braddock go to Virginia with a force of British regulars to clear the forks of the Ohio of the French.[25]

Braddock's forces were to be complemented by the Virginia colonial militia, for whom Virginians complained Braddock showed little regard. The gruff Englishman, a veteran fighter with the Coldstream Guards, noted that "they [the colonial militia] might dodge behind trees if they chose, but he meant to march straight forward with his drums and trumpets sounding, and make an end of the French before Autumn."[26]

Once again Patton was called upon to draft a company to join others marching towards the Ohio. Not realizing the urgency of his required presence with the British/Colonial ensemble, Patton and his nephew, William Preston, travelled to Williamsburg to secure supplies for the proposed militia exercise. On the very day that Braddock was pitched for his fateful battle with the French and the Indians, Patton and Preston were returning to the frontier with a wagon of supplies. Patton also carried with him a blank commission approved by the governor for a commander of a new Ranger

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[25]Lawrence H. Gipson, The British Empire Before the American Revolution (13 vols., New York, 1936-1967), VI, 74. Walter L. Dorn, The Competition for Empire, 1740-1763 (New York, 1940), 288. Edward P. Hamilton, The French and Indian Wars (New York, 1962), xi.

[26]John E. Cooke, Stories of the Old Dominion (New York, 1879), 123. Lee McCardell, Ill-Starred General: Braddock of the Coldstream Guards (Pittsburgh, 1958; hereinafter cited as McCardell, Ill-Starred General), 1. Spelling improved.

company of militiamen. Patton informed his nephew that he believed the right man for the Captain's commission was William Preston.[27]

Realizing that a part of his militia company was already serving with Braddock's army, Patton did not sense the need for calling his company for a muster-roll. He and Preston did not stop in Staunton but travelled up the Valley to the Draper's Meadow community to deliver them lead and powder that had been requisitioned to him and to conclude some business he had concerning the 7500 acres of his patent which had been settled.[28]

Historical interpretations vary concerning events at the Draper's Meadow community during the summer of 1755. Early recordings, based primarily on family tradition, believed that on July 8, 1755, a force of Shawnees descended upon the Draper settlement and killed four inhabitants, wounded one and took three prisoners. James Patton, a guest of the Ingles' and Draper's homes, was shot and killed as he sat at a writing table. William Preston, also a guest, had been sent to the home of Philip Lybrook on Sinking Creek to secure that man's help in harvesting the community's wheat and

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[27]Governor Robert Dinwiddie to William Preston, July 28, 1755. Preston Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia (hereinafter cited as Preston Papers, ViHi).

[28]Goodridge Wilson, "Highway Passes Over Site of Fort," Roanoke Times, May 3, 1970. Waddell, Annals of Augusta County, 72.

therefore did not return to the settlement until the massacre had been completed and the Indians had disappeared.[29]

More recent reports argue than on July 8, 1755, Patton and Preston were still in Williamsburg gathering the frontier supplies and that it was not until July 30, that the Draper's Meadow community was attacked. On that day, Patton, riding ahead of the wagon carrying ammunition, crossed into the New River area to visit the Draper and Ingles families, arrived just as the Indians struck, and was killed before he could resist the attackers.[30] Preston, upon reaching the Meadow's later in the day, did not learn of the barbarous actions until he was in sight of the smoldering buildings. Fearing reprisals against his slain comrade and friends should they later be found, he buried them in common graves with no headstones save the slate shingles of the destroyed homes which he placed over the levelled mounds of earth.[31]

No longer was William Preston in the shadow of James Patton. No longer could Preston look to the sixty-three-year-

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[29]John P. Hale, Trans-Allegheny Pioneers (Charleston, 1931; hereinafter cited as Hale, Trans-Allegheny Pioneers), 23-28. William C. Pendleton, History of Tazewell County and Southwest Virginia, 1748-1920 (Richmond, 1920; hereinafter cited as Pendleton, Tazewell County), 207. Waddell, Annals of Augusta County, 72.

[30]Wilson, "Draper's Meadows," Times. Kegley, Virginia Frontier, 210. Freeman, George Washington, II, 106. Lee Pendleton, "Indian Massacres in Montgomery County, 1755-1756" (Roanoke , 1968), 19.

[31]T. L. Preston, Historical Sketches, 115-16.

old giant for aid or assistance. With the summer of 1755, Preston began to assume the command of that still sparsely settled area of western Virginia which would play such an integral part in the development of local, colonial and national independence. From the time of the Draper's Meadow massacre, William Preston began to cast a shadow of his own which in the next three decades fell over the borderlands between the Ohio River and the Allegheny Mountains where the colonies of Virginia and North Carolina competed for suzerainty.

Chapter II: Indian Fighter, Politician and Land Magnate, 1755-1783

The attack upon the Draper's Meadow community in the summer of 1755 signalled the beginning of a contest between the frontier settlers and the French-supported Indians for the dominion of western Virginia. William Preston, captain of a newly-formed company of Augusta County rangers, successfully petitioned Governor Robert Dinwiddie to dispatch three additional militia companies to search for and destroy the marauding Shawnees. Although the Governor hoped that the Cherokees would ally themselves with the colonists and would bear the burden of chastising the Shawnees, their sworn enemies, he forwarded £200 to support the ranger companies on active duty until Christmas. To Captain Preston, Dinwiddie wrote: "I give you no particular directions, but /only order you/ in general to take care of the frontier of /your county against/ any attempt of the enemy."[32]

As reports along the frontier indicated that the Shawnees were withdrawing to their towns on the Ohio River, Preston allowed his rangers to return home, provided that they hold themselves ready for a forced march if the need arose. On December 15, 1755, Governor Dinwiddie legitimatized Preston's action and issued a proclamation that any further attempt to revenge the Draper's Meadow massacre must wait until

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[32]Robert Dinwiddie to William Preston, September 15, 1755. Brock, Dinwiddie Papers, II, 199-200. Spelling improved.

spring. Then would an armed expedition march against the Shawnee towns in the Ohio valley.[33] Thus, for a brief time, William Preston was able to turn his attention from military to civil affairs.

The colony of Virginia ascribed to the English practice of holding elections to the House of Burgesses only at irregular intervals, regardless of whether these were general elections or by-elections. The governor issued writs for the general elections of burgesses whenever the General Assembly was dissolved. Even through the turbulent decade preceding the American Revolution when dissolutions of the Assembly necessitated more frequent general elections, the most practiced custom for selecting burgesses was the by-elections. These elections were to fill one of a county's two seats vacated by death or resignation.

When Robert Dinwiddie assumed the governorship of Virginia in 1752, after a two year absence of any Royal Governor, he dissolved the old Assembly which had served since 1748. It was to this new assembly that James Patton had been returned in 1754 as a burgess of Augusta

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[33]David E. Johnston, A History of Middle New River Settlement and Contiguous Territory (Radford, 1906; hereinafter cited as Johnston, Middle New River Settlement), 21.

County. One year later Patton was dead, a victim of the Draper's Meadow massacre. The county was required to elect a new burgess to the Assembly.[34]

The laws which regulated the Augusta election of December 17, 1755, dated from the time of Queen Anne when they had been created by the General Assembly. They had survived fifty years of practice with but one amendment. Forty days preceding the election, the governor issued a writ specifying the time and the place of the election which the colony's secretary sent to the sheriff of the county. The sheriff made copies of the writ and sent them to all ministers in the county who were required to read them in the churches each Sunday until the election. The writs were afterwards returned to the sheriff with proof that they had been read. Freeholders possessing 100 acres of unimproved land or twenty-five acres with a house were required to assemble at the county courthouse to cast their votes. Those who failed to vote were fined 200 pounds of

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[34]William G. and Mary N. Stanard, The Colonial Virginia Register (Baltimore, 1965; hereinafter cited as Stanard, Colonial Virginia Register) 132-40. Lucille Griffith, The Virginia House of Burgesses, 1750-1774 (University, 1968; hereinafter cited as Griffith, House of Burgesses), 45. William W. Hening, ed., The Statutes at Large: Being a Collection of all the Laws of Virginia from the First Session of the Legislature in the Year 1619 (Richmond, 1820; hereinafter cited as Hening, Statutes at Large), III, 236.

tobacco and those non-freeholders who attempted to vote were assessed 500 pounds of tobacco to be paid to the county treasurer.[35]

In the autumn of 1755, friends along the Roanoke River asked the twenty-six-year-old Preston to announce his candidacy for Colonel James Patton's old seat in the House of Burgesses. The December election occured just in time for Preston to assure his constituents that military affairs would not prevent his faithful service in civil life.

On December 17, 1755, the Sheriff of Augusta County, James Lockhart, opened the courthouse in Staunton and proceded to direct the day's election. At a time when pre-election campaigning throughout a district was restricted by distance and by poor communications, the candidates, William Preston and Archibald Alexander, championed the practices of election-day speeches before the assembled voters outside the courthouse. Supporters of the candidates attempted to aid the campaigns with ample supplies of grog and bumbo to like-minded constituents. Although details of the events of that day cannot be accurately ascertained, all agree that as the election progressed and as spirits and tempers flared, a riot ensued of such magnitude that Sheriff Lockhart was forced to close the election and declare that no Burgess was elected.

35"An Act for Regulating the Elections of Burgesses. . .", Hening, Statutes at Large, III, 236-38, 337. Griffith, House of Burgesses, 48.

The following year, the Augusta by-election was the subject of investigation by the House of Burgess' Committee on Privileges and Elections in Williamsburg. Under oath, Sheriff Lockhart reported

> I used all the means in my power to comply with the said /election/ writ, but the people were so tumultuous and riotous that I could not finish the poll; for that reason no Burgess could be returned. . . .

He claimed that Richard Woods, David Cloyd and Joseph Lapsley, residents of the Roanoke River region and friends of William Preston, had instigated the riots.

When the three accused men appeared before the House Committee, they declared themselves innocent and they charged Sheriff Lockhart with forbidden election practices. They asserted that Lockhart had struck several freeholders with his staff, that he had pushed some of the assembled voters and that on occasion he had refused to record votes if they opposed his views.

Lockhart retorted that Woods had left the courthouse and had wagered that Preston would be elected. Lockhart also swore that Cloyd, after hearing that the election was going against Preston, declared, ". . . if we cannot carry it one way, we will have it another. I will put a stop to the election."

Peyton Randolph, chairman of the investigating committee, declared in favor of Sheriff Lockhart but reported that no punishment or fine would be levied against the three unruly frontiersmen. A new election writ was secured from the gov-

ernor for Augusta County, and in March, 1756, Gabriel Jones was returned with John Wilson to represent the western county in the House of Burgesses.[36] William Preston was not a candidate in the new election because he had been called to military service.

By 1756, Governor Robert Dinwiddie realized that he could no longer justify postponing an offensive against the Shawnee Indians along the Ohio, if the Virginia frontier was to be free of the Indian menace. The governor was led to believe that the Cherokee Chiefs Onocite and Yellow Bird would join a campaign against the Shawnees. Indian reinforcements would mean a victory for the frontiersmen.

On December 14, 1755, Dinwiddie informed Colonel George Washington, commander of all forces of the colony engaged against the French and Indians, of a proposed expedition, which was later called the Sandy Creek campaign. Relaying the Indian intelligence reports, Dinwiddie wrote,

> The Cherokees have taken up the hatchet against the Shawnese and French and have sent 130 of their warriors into New River and prepare to march immediately to attack and cut off the Shawnese in their towns. I desire they shall be joined with three companies of rangers and Captain Hogg's company /from Fort Vause near Shawsville, Virginia/, and I propose Colonel Stephen or Major /Andrew/ Lewis to be commander of the party of this expedition. . .[37]

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[36] Journal of the House of Burgesses of Virginia, 1752-1758 (4 vols. ed. by John P. Kennedy, Richmond, 1906; hereinafter cited as JHB), 347. Stanard, Colonial Virginia Register, 132-40. Griffith, House of Burgesses, 84. Kegley, Virginia Frontier, 219-21.

[37] Elizabeth P. Gray, "General Francis Smith Preston" (Bristol, 1953), 2. Kegley, Virginia Frontier, 222-24.

Major Andrew Lewis became commander of the expedition and he immediately sent requests to the frontier for men and for supplies. Captain William Preston received orders from Lewis to prepare his command of thirty rangers from lower Augusta County for a six weeks engagement. This involved the commandeering of not only shot and musket, but also bread, wheat, corn flour, and meat.[38]

Preston's rangers gathered at Fort Prince George on the Roanoke River near present-day Salem, Virginia. Most of them were descended from Irish antecedents, but there were among them numerous English, German, Scotch, New England and Pennsylvania immigrants. While most of the men were farmers, there were also weavers, seamen, carpenters, surgeons, tailors, millers, distillers and buttermakers in the company. The average height of the men was five feet four inches, with extremes of six feet and five feet being present. Their average age was a mature twenty-six but their spectrum extended from eighteen to forty-two.[39] The number of men enlisted in five companies at Fort Prince George, and later at Fort Frederick at Dunkard's Bottom near the New River, ranged from 263-340. Complementing the force were 130 Cherokee and Chickasaw Indians.

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[38]Andrew Lewis to William Preston, January 28, 1756, Preston Papers, WiHi, 1QQ94. Kegley, Virginia Frontier 224-25.

[39]List of Preston's Company of Rangers, July 16, 1755-January 1, 1756. Preston Papers, WiHi, 1QQ92.

On February 9, 1756, Preston marched his mounted company from Fort Prince George. Travelling southwestward, probably along the Great Buffalo Trail, the thirty-three man detachment crossed the New River and bivouacked at Fort Frederick. All contingents besides Preston's soon gathered there: the commands of Captains Peter Hogg, John Smith, Samuel Overton, Obadiah Woodson, Robert Breckenridge and the Indians who were led by Richard Pearis. On February 19, the entire force left Fort Frederick under the command of Major Andrew Lewis and began its trek into the western wilderness.[40]

From the outset, the expedition encountered delays and disappointments. Continually hearing of Shawnee raids, but never finding their stealthy enemy, they marched on, beset by heavy, freezing rains. They reached the banks of the swollen North Fork of the Holston River; they scaled the heights to overlook the abandoned valley of Burke's Garden; and they descended once again to the headwaters of the Big Sandy River--but still they saw no Shawnees. The Cherokees threatened to give up the fruitless chase. The terrain worsened. Less game was to be found. Men sickened and animals collapsed as the rain turned into snow. And still they found no enemy.

By the first of March, food had to be rationed. On March 15, Preston recorded in his diary, ". . . this day

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[40]Johnston, Middle New River Settlement, 23. Lewis Preston Summers, Annals of Southwest Virginia, 1769-1800 (Abingdon, 1929; hereinafter cited as Summers, Annals).

my ~~14~~ horse expired and I was left on foot with a hungry belly which increased my woe--indeed it was the case with almost every man in the company." The following day the Cherokee contingent began to prepare bark canoes to carry them down the Big Sandy River to the Ohio region where the Shawnee villages were supposedly located.[41]

A new element of despair threatened the expedition: the disgruntled enlisted militia threatened to return home if they were not fed. Thomas Morton was one of these. Remarkably, he left a diary which poignantly described the "pitable condition /of/ our men looking on /one/ another with tears in their eyes, and lamenting that they had ever entered in to a soldier's life." Describing the camp conditions, Morton continued, there "was little else but cursing, swearing, confusion and complaining, all made worse by the selfishness of the officers."[42]

Whole companies were sent out in search of food, but little was found. When two small elk were killed, they were brought to camp and their meat was divided "to the no small joy of every man in company, for by that time hunger appeared in all our faces and most of us were got weak and feeble . . ."

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[41]Diary of the Sandy Creek Expedition, February 9-March 13, 1756, Preston Papers, WiHi, 1QQ123. Spelling improved. Rice, Allegheny Frontier, 44-45.

[42]"Morton's Diary," Virginia Historical Register and Literary Notebook, IV (July, 1851), 144. Spelling improved.

Once again the men threatened to return home. To offset the crisis, the expedition was divided into two bands: Major Andrew Lewis led one group to a new camp site while Captain Preston commanded the remainder at their base on the banks of the Big Sandy. In a move designed to retain his men at their present location, Preston proposed that the horses be killed and eaten. The men would have nothing to do with such a scheme. For the twenty-six-year-old commander, this was indeed a time of trouble.

By March 12, 1756, friction between the men and the officers had mounted so high that open hostilities threatened. Preston ordered his raithful stalwarts to take all the guns and blankets from those who were rebellicus. Several men deserted but were forcibly returned to camp.

The grave situation of the Virginia rangers was made desperate when the supplies for Major Lewis' contingent were lost as a result of their canoes overturning in the Big Sandy. Preston informed his commander that his men strongly desired to return home. In a noble gesture, Lewis gathered the entire force and exhorted all who were willing to serve their country to follow him to the Ohio. Only twenty to thirty men signified that they would do so and the remaining troops elected to return home. Lewis concluded that he had no alternative but an honorable withdrawal and he announced that he would lead the men back to their homes in Augusta.[43]

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[43]Diary of the Sandy Creek Expedition, February9-March 13, 1756, Preston Papers, WiHi, 1QQ123. Spelling improved.

Although posterity recalls the exploits of George Washington and General Edward Braddock during the French and Indian War, the Sandy Creek Expedition must also be remembered as it was the only offensive action taken by the colony of Virginia in that conflict. Washington's movements in western Pennsylvania, his construction of Fort Necessity, and his loss of that fort to the French had been purely defensive actions; and Braddock's march into the wilderness and his defeat at the Monongahela River had been an imperial offensive comprised primarily of a force of British regulars.[44]

Virginia's failure to strike the powerful Shawnees on the frontier left the western settlements open to attack by Indians who had not been punished for earlier atrocities. In daring campaigns, the Indians not only butchered the disabled and disheartened militiamen who straggled behind or deserted the ill-fated expedition, but they began to make frequent and more daring raids on the exposed settlements.

Three hundred miles to the east at the somnolent capital of Williamsburg, Governor Dinwiddie stormed about in anger. On receipt of an account of the expedition from Captain Preston, the governor was quick to condemn its commanders. Little could he realize that part of the reason for the failure of the offensive was his impatience and his precipitate

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[44]Freeman, George Washington, I, 419, 434, 546-49; II, 55-102. McCardell, Ill-Starred General, 237-250.

action that resulted in an unprepared march which lacked supplies.[45]

Realizing the exposed condition of his colony's frontier, Dinwiddie replied to Preston's earlier letter with the command that one-third of Preston's militia be called for duty to protect the settlers. For the next eight years, along with his responsibilities for his family, William Preston traversed the frontier of his county when necessary in sometimes futile, sometimes successful attempts to halt threatened Indian aggression against his neighbors and compatriots. Additional and stronger forts were built and required militia duty was put on a system of rotation. Preston himself was promoted from Captain to Major in 1758 and to Lieutenant-Colonel in 1759.[46]

Although no one could or did claim that the western settlements of Virginia were now insured against Indian attacks, it is nonetheless evident that increases of military defenses and personnel lessened the raids of the hostile Shawnees and maverick Cherokees. For the first time since James Patton's death in 1755, Preston was able to turn from his demanding

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[45]Preston to Robert Dinwiddie, April 8, 1756, Preston Papers, WiHi, 1QQ124. Kennedy, JHB, 1752-1758, 369.

[46]Dinwiddie to Preston, April 25, 1756, Preston Papers, WiHi, 1QQ125. Francis Fauquier to Preston, November 17, 1758, and June 14, 1759, Preston Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia (hereinafter cited as Preston Papers, ViHi). For accounts of additional frontier fortifications and improved frontier defenses see, Lewis P. Summers, History of Southwest Virginia, 1746-1786, Washington County, 1777-1870 (Richmond, 1903; hereinafter cited as Summers, Southwest Virginia), 67; Preston Papers, WiHi, 1QQ137-164; Hening, Statutes at Large, VII, 189.

assignment as military leader and devote more time to his civil services for the county and for himself.

William Preston's legacy from his uncle, James Patton, consisted of a bold model to follow and an experience to make such emulation possible. As a consequence, Preston was fore-armed and fore-sighted in how best to conduct profitable land speculations. From deputy-surveyor, he soon rose to be surveyor of Augusta, and he reserved for future purchase platted choice lands in the fertile Valley of Virginia and its foothills to the southwest.

His earliest land title was a 520 acre tract on the Calfpasture River in upper Augusta County, which he inherited in 1747 from his father. John and Elizabeth Patton Preston had not secured any land when they first arrived to the colony from Ireland. What was due to the Preston family under the headright system had been transferred to James Patton for his transporting them to the Virginia frontier. They were, in effect, his tenants. In 1747, however, John Preston purchased the Calfpasture tract from his brother-in-law and John Lewis for £15. It is likely that John Preston never paid cash, kind or service before he died in the same year. Because young William inherited two-thirds of the land and all of its obligations, he might have made the payments to his uncle and to Lewis. In 1762 he formally deeded his interest in the family farm to his mother, Elizabeth

Patton Preston, who already had in it a dower interest, for her life with remainder to her youngest daughter, Mary. William's deed recited £100 consideration. It is likely that Colonel Patton forbore collection of the original purchase price while alive and that William Preston merely regularized the gift in 1762 without benefit to his uncle's heirs.[47]

In addition to establishing and managing the previously unlocated lands to which his uncle's estate was entitled under the Beverley grant, William Preston began to amass for himself, through grants and by purchases, increasingly more acreage throughout the western country.[48] Before Patton's death in 1755, the sixty-three-year-old land magnate deeded to his nephew several tracts of unclaimed land as payment for personal services. During the late 1740's, William Beverley sold to the young man portions of his Manor of Beverley in and around Staunton.[49]

During the lull in Indian advances late in the 1750's, William Preston continued his speculative land-purchases,

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[47]James Patton and John Lewis to John Preston, Deed, September 15, 1747. Deed Book, Augusta County Records, I, 375. Chalkley, Chronicles, I, 56.

[48]See Appendix I.

[49]William Beverley to William Preston, 1749, Will Book, Augusta County Records, II, 46. Augusta Deed Book, II, 679.

even though his civic duties replaced his military obligations as obstacles to devoting as much time to his land-oriented business as he desired. When increased population had caused Augusta County's creation from Orange County in 1745, additional services of local government were required. There were, therefore, offices of trust and responsibility for men who already were established on the frontier, if only they would devote enough time to the commonweal from their own concerns. To these offices did William Preston address himself. As Preston was an Augusta County deputy-surveyor, so also was he now a county commissioner, the county sheriff and the county lieutenant. The obligations to these offices may have achieved priority above land-speculation desires of the twenty-nine-year-old frontiersman, but they did not reduce the rate by which his landed estate rose.

Pursuant to his duties as a county commissioner, Preston once reported that the new courthouse for Augusta was completed except for a door the Indians had torn off.[50] As County Sheriff he posted a £1000 bond to insure his faithful performance of his office; and as County Lieutenant, or commander of the militia, he prepared the county for Indian attacks which he hoped would never come.

For two years a relative calm settled over the Virginia frontier. Preston devoted more time to his duties as deputy-

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[50]Kegley, Virginia Frontier, 113. Chalkley, Chronicles, I, 79. Morton, Colonial Virginia, 549-51. Summers, Southwest Virginia, 42-3.

surveyor. His surveyor's book soon filled with the names of people, their amounts of land, and his charges for service. Most of the land he located continued to be in the southern part of the county on the branches and tributaries of the Roanoke River. His fee for locating the land, establishing boundaries, and recording plats with the county was two pounds, one shilling, eight pence for tracts less than 500 acres, and four pounds, three shillings, four pence for larger tracts.[51]

In the summer of 1760 a fear of Indian raids once again swept over the settlers of Augusta, many of whom recalled the Draper's Meadow massacre. Once again the fierce Shawnees were reported to be moving into the plateau and the Valley of Virginia, leaving behind them a path of destroyed homes and slain occupants. Preston sent a plea to Governor Francis Fauquier, who had replaced Robert Dinwiddie in 1758, to call out the militia to defend the country. The governor replied that he could only issue such an order with the approval of the Council and that it was not then in session. Sensing that the frontiersmen were being overly cautious and that their fears were unfounded, the Governor chastised them for abandoning their more advanced settlements for stockades some fifty miles to the East. After all, he reasoned, were not the Indians bound by the Treaty of Logstown of 1752?

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[51]Kegley, Virginia Frontier, 284. Preston Papers, WiHi, 2QQ62.

Fortunately for the inhabitants, Governor Fauquier proved to be right: the Indians did not advance further and they confined their infrequent attacks to the extreme frontier.[52]

In 1761, William Preston was introduced to Susanna Smith of Hanover County. Preston had met the girl's father seven years earlier when the young surveyor had been requested by fellow parishoners in Staunton to employ for them a carpenter who would undertake to construct a church building for the Established Church. He secured Francis Smith, a skilled carpenter.

At the age of thirty-one, eight of which he in part had spent in the wilderness, Preston undoubtedly desired to establish a home and enjoy the fruits of matrimony. On July 17, 1761, Susanna and William were married. Delicately featured and gracefully poised, Susanna complemented her rugged and tall frontier husband. They stayed at his father's home place on the Calfpasture River in that comparatively civilized part of Augusta until after the birth of their first child in May, 1762. They then moved to a farm in the northern Roanoke Valley which William had purchased from Stephen Rentfroe before his marriage and they settled in the house Rentfroe had built. This land lay along Buffalo Creek near the present town of Fincastle, Virginia. Preston first had

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[52]Francis Fauquier to William Preston, June 24, 1760, Preston Papers, WiHi, 2QQ28-29.

bought from Rentfroe a 191 acre tract to which in early 1761 he added 226 acres and 144 acres. This acreage formed the nucleus of a plantation which he soon came to call Greenfield.[53]

Keenly aware that the Peace of Paris which officially ended the French and Indian War did not end the Indian menace to frontier settlements, William Preston, in 1763, hastened to construct a fortified barricade about the mansion at Greenfield Plantation.[54] When in May, 1763, Preston journeyed to upper Augusta County to transact some business, he left his wife and infant daughter at Greenfield. Not long afterwards, two shots announced to Susanna an Indian raid on the house of her neighbors, Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Cloyd, about one-half mile away. Soon Joseph Cloyd rode up on a plowhorse, still dragging its plow. The Indians had so surprised the Cloyd men at work in the fields that, although the Redskins only wounded Joseph, they killed his brother David. The impeturbable Susanna sent word of the Indian attack to Captain Francis Smith, commander of a small garrison of troops on the Craig Creek. She then sent her overseer and two servants to the

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[53]T. L. Preston, Historical Sketches, 117-18, 131. Kegley, Virginia Frontier, 506. W. P. Moore, "'Greenfield' and the Prestons of 'Greenfield' and 'Smithfield'" (Blacksburg, n.d.), 2. James Adams of Wilmington, Delaware to Preston, February 11, 1762, Preston Papers, ViHi. Adams complimented Preston on his marriage and he wrote, you "has got a good and agreeable wife . . ."

[54]Morton, Colonial Virginia, II, 736. Preston Davie, "Greenfield and the Prestons of Greenfield and Smithfield" (Charlottesville, n.d.; hereinafter cited as Davie, "Greenfield"), 1.

Cloyd cabin who soon reported that Mrs. Cloyd had been found barely alive near her burning dwelling. The old lady told her rescuers that after the Indians broke into her cabin, they took what money and whiskey they could find, became intoxicated, tore open her feather beds and tomahawked her. One Indian had used a corn cob to wipe the blood from Mrs. Cloyd's temple and he exclaimed: "Poor old woman." She died the following morning.[55]

The marauders once again proved to be the fierce Shawnees from the Ohio Valley. While supposedly bound to peace by the Peace of Paris, their renegade war parties began to plunder and burn the isolated settlements along the southwestern frontier. Writing to his brother-in-law, the Reverend John Brown, in July, 1763, William Preston related in graphic detail the situation that confronted the exposed homesteads in the Roanoke Valley. He lamented that "all the valleys of the Roanoke River . ... are depopulated, except Captain Ingles with a few families on the New River. . . ." He hoped that his own small fort at Greenfield Plantation would be a sufficient defense, even though twenty of its eighty-seven inhabitants possessed firearms. In near-panic, settlers left their green crops standing in the fields. Colonel Preston took comfort in the fact that no enemy had been sighted since the Cloyd massacre, but he admitted that "their guns are frequently heard and their footing observed,

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[55]T. L. Preston, Historical-Sketches, 118.

which makes us believe they will pay us a visit." Fortunately for the defenders of Greenfield Plantation, the Indians withdrew to the Clinch River and the settlers returned to their homes in time to harvest their crops.[56]

For the next three years the threat of Indian attacks recurred each spring. However, the steady advance of westward settlements in the Virginia colony began to reduce the degree and the frequency of Shawnee inroads upon such places as the Roanoke Valley. In 1764, with a force of 450 militiamen, Captain Andrew Lewis swept through the frontier wilderness and established a defensive line of forts to withstand the infrequent Indian attacks. By 1765, the western representatives in the House of Burgesses, Israel Christian and John Wilson, declared that the frontier had become safe enough for active militiamen to return to their homes. In a bill designed to settle militia accounts, it was also decreed that all the colony's guns, ammunition and provisions be sold at a public auction and that the proceeds be placed in the colonial treasury.[57]

In what proved to be a premature effort, Governor Francis Fauquier, in 1767, appointed William Preston, then thirty-seven-years-old, as his envoy to seek a peace treaty with the

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[56]Waddell, Annals of Augusta County, 116. Spelling improved.

[57]Andrew Lewis to William Preston, April 4, 1765; and John Brown to Preston, June 8, 1764, Preston Papers, WiHi, 2QQ46, 2QQ49. Hening, Statutes at Large, VIII, 127. Stanard, Colonial Virginia Register, 168.

chiefs of the Shawnee and Delaware Nations. On a course parallel to that which he had followed during the Sandy Creek expedition in 1756, Preston and his indentured servant, Dr. Thomas Lloyd, journeyed to meet the Indian representatives at the confluence of the Big Sandy and the Ohio Rivers. There, the Virginians signed a treaty with Chief Cornstalk before returning to Greenfield by a different and unfamiliar route. Preston's party ran out of food while following a branch of the Big Sandy and in desperation ate the buffalo tugs which tied their packs. Illustrating a kind of frontier humor, Preston named the uncharted stream the Tug Fork of the Big Sandy.[58]

Throughout the era of Indian attacks, and continuing afterwards, William Preston developed a profitable land purchasing business.[59] He soon realized that land was to be his most valuable material possession and that he had a readily available source of credit. When prudent foreigners and easterners immigrated into the county in search of land upon which to settle, they sought out the existing landholders who could assure them not only of firm titles and boundaries, but also

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[58]T. L. Preston, Historical Sketches, 76-77, 116-17. It is reported that on the return trip from the Big Sandy, William Preston tied his moccasins too tight and the strings chafed the instep of one of his feet. The foot became infected and Dr. Lloyd was required to perform minor surgery to clean the wound. Preston and Lloyd remained close friends even after Lloyd's term of indenture expired.

[59]See Appendix I.

of the good will so necessary on the frontier for material aid in harvesting, housebuilding, grain grinding and defense. Thus, most new settlers rarely bought land other than that which the old settlers wished to sell. Earliest records for the sales of Preston land date 1759. It is probable that earlier transactions did occur but it is believed that not until that time did Preston reason that he had accumulated enough land to begin the raising of a family and to begin the selling of his excesses.[60]

The purchasing of land and its subsequent development or resale depended on the condition of the frontier at the time of the particular transaction. The forces of nature, the strength of the Indians, and sometimes acrimonious contests between colonists for land and for power often gave a very temporary character to the colonial frontier life. Every-day transactions often were held in abeyance until events, or the manifestation of Providence, made clear who were the victors of these somewhat brutish struggles. Peace on the frontier had less influence on land magnates' patenting of land from the General Assembly than it did on their reselling land in smaller units to new settlers. Only when hostilities with the Indians ceased, was there a sharp rise in immigration to transmontaine Virginia, as the land beyond the Blue Ridge Mountains came to be called.

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[60]William Preston to Thomas Waddell, November 20, 1759, Augusta Deed Book, VIII, 679.

During less peaceful times, land magnates such as the Pattons and the Prestons bought, sold and repurchased land among themselves in a way that would seem fickle, except for the adage that the wise investor is he who gets into, out of, and back into the market as constantly as changing circumstances dictate. Preston's development of his Greenfield Plantation--and later of his Smithfield Plantation--followed such a pattern.

By the time of his death in 1783, William Preston had become one of the largest land owners of Virginia, with lands stretching along the western frontier from the Blue Ridge to the Ohio and located in the counties of Augusta, Botetourt, Montgomery, Washington and Kentucky. Highly conscious of the advantages of centralized control which he had exercized since the death of his uncle, Colonel James Patton, for the benefit of his Patton, Buchanan, Breckinridge and Brown relatives as well as to himself, in his will Preston stipulated that none of his lands could be sold to offset his debts and that the latter should be divided between his wife and children. Upon fulfilling the requirement that she see that his children were educated to the fullest extent of their capabilities, Susanna had the option of living her remaining days at their old home, Greenfield Plantation which encompassed 2,175 acres or at their new home on his 1,860-acre estate in Montgomery County, Smithfield Plantation.

Under Preston's will, his eldest daughter, Elizabeth, received two tracts of land along Potts Creek, a tributary of the James River in Botetourt County. One was 300 acres called Walnut Bottom and the other was 250 acres. At the time of her marriage to William S. Madison in 1779, Elizabeth received from her father's estate, as did her brothers and sisters, whatever portion of slaves and livestock Mrs. Susanna Smith Preston determined reasonable.

John Preston, the eldest son, received the largest acreage in his father's will. He was to assume ownership of whichever plantation Susanna did not choose to occupy. As it was, he inherited the larger estate of Greenfield Plantation with the conditions that he pay to his mother £25 a year in gold while she remained a widow and that when he reached his twenty-fifth birthday he pay from his portion of the inheritance £50 to Anne Preston, the youngest of his sisters.

Francis Smith Preston, the second son who in 1789 won election to the House of Representatives, inherited tracts of land throughout the counties of Montgomery and Botetourt which totaled 2,008 acres. He also had to provide £25 per year in gold for support of his mother and award Anne £25 on his twenty-fifth birthday.

Other children inherited smaller grants of land throughout the Preston domain: for Sarah, who married Colonel James McDowell of Rockbridge County, Virginia, 865 acres in two tracts

along Johns Creek; for Susanna, who married Nathanial Hart of Woodford County, Kentucky, a 700 acre tract on Peak Creek in what is now Pulaski County; for Letitia, who married John Floyd, future governor of Virginia, a 900 acre tract called Thorn Spring, a branch of the New River in Montgomery County, Virginia; for Anne, who died at age thirteen, 390 acres at the forks of Potts Creek in Botetourt County; and for Margaret, who was born after her father's death and who later married Colonel John C. Preston of Walnut Grove in Washington County, an undetermined amount of land as approved by an amended law which allowed property inheritance by a child born after the father's death. Colonel William Preston owned much more land both at the time of his Last Will and Testament and when he died, but they were neither specified nor divided.[61]

There is no way of determining the extent or the value of William Preston's most important possession: land. To date, no record has been discovered for the earlier years of America's pre-Republic era which itemized all or any land values for one particular year or for all or any particular tract. Both land bought and land sold record the payment of only nominal consideration, usually five shillings, or of a purchaser's loan whose principal was not receipted and which was subject to a deed of trust. When the Preston estate was appraised after

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[61]William Preston, Last Will and Testament, March 29, 1777, Will Book, Montgomery County Records, B, 55-61. Lamb, "Smithfield," VMHB, 109-25. Kegley, Virginia Frontier, 594.

the death of William Preston in 1783, there was no mention of his deeded acreage or of its worth but only of the kind and value of his slaves and his personal property. Such an evaluation included 239 head of livestock valued at $1791.75, 42 Negroes worth $4431.65, and 273 volumes of books commanding $194.00.[62]

Whether personally in Augusta, Botetourt, Fincastle, Montgomery or Washington counties, or through agents in Kentucky County, Colonel William Preston exemplified the frontier leader. He was a land magnate who bridged whatever gap there was between the colonial land speculator--personally, as one of a syndicate, or both--and the speculators of the early years of the Republic. Like most "self made" men and "natural leaders," he nonetheless enjoyed the favor of a great patron early in his career--James Patton. Although none can deny Preston's patriotic services, one must admit that his was a leadership which depended upon taking advantage of the Indians by gaining title to their lands, and upon taking advantage of his multiple offices--surveyor, county lieutenant, justice of the peace and Burgess--to overawe possible white competitors. William Preston demonstrated in his own person that, besides blood and hard work, a certain amount of what approached chicanery, was necessary to extend America's empire of liberty.

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[62]William Preston, Last Will and Testament, March 29, 1777, Montgomery Will Book, B, 55-61.

Chapter III: Farmer, Burgess, County Lieutenant 1763-1774

In the mid-eighteenth century, Virginia was a colony of conflicts. As the settlers in the West struggled against the forces of nature and of the Indians, representatives in the House of Burgesses grappled with events which first divided and later re-united them. Few in the General Assembly did not recall the controversies of the 1750's: over the pistole fee claimed by the governor in 1752 and the Two Penny Acts of 1755 and 1758 respecting the payment to clergymen of their fees in tobacco at market or at a fixed rate. Even though the burgesses were keenly aware of past divisions on matters of high principle, they were, in 1763, optimistic of harmonious development.

In 1763, there were few grassy meadows and hand cleared acres between Buffalo Creek and the stockaded house at Greenfield whose virgin soil could be brought immediately under cultivation. In both meadow and crop field, there were still many tree stumps. To William and Susanna Preston, the task before them was clear: to develop their land in ways time-honored in Virginia from a small farm into a large plantation. This rugged frontiersman and his wife did not lack confidence that in time, theirs would surpass in extent and in quality any other homestead west of the Blue Ridge and south of Staunton. In the Roanoke Valley, Greenfield would be, or so they planned,

a transmontaine plantation which could bear comparison to those of the Eastern part of Virginia. It would serve as a center from which men and women of adventurous disposition would depart en route to western lands--preferably purchased from Colonel Preston. In times of frontier trouble, the faint-hearted could here seek safety while reorganizing against the savages. Because Greenfield was located not in the Tidewater or Piedmont sections of the colony, but on the wild frontier, her proprietor realized from the outset that, even if they desired to, he and Mrs. Preston could not reproduce without great modification the way of life tradition of the eastern plantations.

Topographical consideration seriously limited plans for farming the Buffalo Creek plantation. The absence of navigable waterways leading to the ports and warehouses of eastern Virginia restrained what ambitions Preston had for devoting his estate to the production of the staple of the Old Dominion, tobacco. Costly and exhaustive as it was to haul or role hogsheads of tobacco overland, Preston undoubtedly was resigned to at least occasional recourse to tobacco cultivation. The western replicas of eastern farms became so dependent on world markets beyond the American shores that their owners were willing to go to great trouble to obtain cash for the best crops to be had. It was not easy to portage wares from Lynchburg, much less to Richmond, but it had to be done. From Botetourt County to Lynchburg wound the James River, full of rapids and

dangerous rocks at low water, but capable of floating rafts and batteaux at high water. It is little wonder that the towns of Pattonsburg and Buchanan were founded by Preston's uncles at the ultimate head of navigation on that waterway to the East.[63]

Maintaining as his principal economic activity the purchasing and selling of lands to eastern and foreign immigrants, William Preston also developed a profitable enterprise by marketing corn, grains and hemp, in addition to small dealings in tobacco. Expanding his work force to include slaves, overseers and indentured servants, Preston undertook the arduous task of clearing land for crop fields. At a time when corn and wheat sold for £1 and £3 per bushel respectively, Preston realized that production of such foodstuffs might reap maximum returns for a minimum investment when the local markets were but within a thirty mile radius of his home.[64] The situation

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[63]Morton, Colonial Virginia, II, 567, 621-34. See also Dumas Malone, Jefferson and His Time (4 vols. to 1971, Boston, 1948-), I.

[64]The purchase price commanded for slaves suggests that their worth was at a premium. In 1763, Preston purchased a Negro boy, Murray, for £50. See Thomas Fulton to William Preston, 1763, Deed Book, Augusta County Records, II, 174.

In 1768 Preston bartered for a Negro woman, Nell. Her owner demanded £65 plus the purchaser's assumption of Nell's doctor bills. Preston refused to pay but £50. See John Todd to William Preston, April 12, 1768, Preston Papers, ViHi.

Insight into the work of an overseer is recorded in correspondence between Preston and his overseer at Greenfield Plantation. See Preston to James Dalzell, December 5, 1772, Preston Papers, ViHi. Dalzell was to be the overseer of Greenfield for one year. In return for his supervision of four Negroes (two men and two "wenches"), Dalzell was paid one-fifth of all corn, hemp and flax that was harvested.

was analagous to making money in California in 1849 by selling foodstuffs to men intent only on speculating in or mining gold.

Preston's most bountiful and most profitable crop soon came to be hemp. The long, tough fibers of the hemp plant were used in the production of rope and a coarse fabric for bagging. The climate of the western frontier of Virginia was suitable to growing the plant along its valley streams and to strapping the stalk in water until the fibers separated some. When the stalk was "braked" in a manner not very different than the first steps in transforming flax into linen, the resulting cordage was light enough to transport easily.

The needs of the Royal navy and merchant marine had guaranteed since 1650 a constant demand for hemp in Great Britain. A subsidy was paid to encourage colonial production of the fiber, and the American variety proved to be stronger and more durable than its Asiatic counterpart. In 1748, the Virginia General Assembly passed a bill to encourage the growing of hemp by offering to pay four shillings for every 100 pounds of hemp delivered at deepwater ports. As settlement moved westward past the Blue Ridge Mountains, so did the unpleasant, smelly production of hemp. Hemp growers could get cash for this crop while they were still clearing land in which to plant corn and grains.

The price of corn and wheat recorded in a transaction between Preston and a seller. See Matthew Robertson to Preston, November 11, 1761, Preston Papers, ViHi.

On the Alleghany frontier of Virginia, hemp culture continued to be a major product longer than in the eastern part of the state. One reason was that even if a raft, canoe or batteau overturned in the James between Buchanan and Richmond, there could be no water-damage, such as often ruined tobacco.[65]

When in the 1760's, Virginia's frontier settlements expanded southward beyond the Valley of Virginia to the foothills of the Alleghanies, William Preston and other large farm producers petitioned the House of Burgesses to provide aid to their constituents who were threatened by near-exhaustive costs of transporting their hemp. The General Assembly responded in 1766 with an act which created warehouses for the reception of the fiber.

Where before the individual was responsible for conveying his hemp to market, now the justices of a county court were empowered to license keepers of warehouses to buy, store and transport the local crops to available markets. Farmers sold to the nearby warehouses and the proprietors of the storage bins dealt with the markets to the north and east.

Proprietors of hemp warehouses were paid from tax revenues to reimburse them for the costs and risks of delivering goods to distant markets. Because land transportation was perhaps more costly down Virginia's natural corridor to the north, the Shenandoah Valley, than freighting down the James, this

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[65]Hening, Statutes at Large, VI, 144. See also, Katherine K. McNulty, "James Breckinridge" (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, 1970; hereinafter cited as McNulty, "James Breckinridge"), 88.

was developed as an alternate route following the paths that Indians had used for centuries. The only thing which made this northerly trade profitable was that merchants could carry cordage in saddlebags to Philadelphia and Baltimore where they obtained trade goods. If the latter were bulky, oxen and carts were bought to haul them; such goods could not ascend the James or Roanoke rivers. Thus, hemp from western Virginia reached the Atlantic at the Philadelphia and Baltimore naval centers as well as the ports on the James.[66]

By 1768, Preston's Greenfield was one of the largest producers of hemp in what was then Augusta County. The county's farmers produced an average of 100,000 pounds of hemp per year, almost all of which originated in its southwestern portion--the Roanoke River region. Natural demands and bounties pushed the price of hemp as high as £50 per 100 pounds, but the average price paid per hundred-weight was about £40. Not until the Revolutionary War, when American naval and merchant vessels were scattered abroad by the predominant Royal Navy, was there a slump to minimize the profits so long enjoyed by hemp producers.[67] These did not, however, fare too badly because the Commonwealth authorized the payment of taxes and private obligations in hemp.[68]

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[66]Hening, Statutes at Large, VIII, 253-55. McNulty, "James Breckinridge," 88.

[67]Hart, Valley of Virginia, 8-9. Chalkley, Chronicles, I, 146. Sumers, Annals, 109. Hening, Statutes at Large, VIII, 363-64.

[68]Julian P. Boyd, ed., The Papers of Thomas Jefferson (17 vols. to 1971, Princeton, 1950--), III, 250; V, 278, 458, 660; VI, 12-13.

At a time when the western planters and plantation owners were pressing the Virginia General Assembly for relief from their near-subsistance farming programs, the representative body was locked in a struggle with Great Britain for self-imposed regulations. When in 1763, George Grenville became Prime Minister of Great Britain, new causes for dissention confronted Virginia. Due more to British negligence and ignorance of her colonial hinterlands than to a desire to subvert colonial "independence," the Grenville ministry blundered into several measures which grossly affronted the colonists. Faced with a huge debt incurred during the French and Indian War, Grenville looked to the colonies for some revenue and more moral support for taxing residents of the British Isles. With the new Sugar Act and Stamp Act, he proposed to extract money from the colonies by light, efficient taxation. While the former act evoked but mild protest, the later law provoked a violent response which was a bad omen for a tranquil and prosperous future.

News of the stamp tax reached Virginia in the autumn of 1764 while the General Assembly was in session. William Preston, neither a burgess nor in Williamsburg at the time, surely followed with mounting interest and concern the events which began to unfold in the colonial capital. Soon, on November 14, Peyton Randolph, Attorney General of the colony, made for a special committee a series of resolutions objecting to the Stamp Act and proposing a petition to the King.

A month later, the Burgesses agreed upon the text of this petition. At the same time that they asserted their steadfast allegiance to the Crown, they claimed that ever since 1607 Virginians were entitled to the rights of free-born Englishmen. These, they declared, were "natural rights and civil rights as men and descendants of Britons" which would be violated "if laws respecting the internal government and taxation of themselves" were imposed by others.[69] Thus the common greviance was put forth: the Parliament in England could not lay taxation on a people whose representatives were not in Parliament but in the colonial assemblies.

The Virginia petition, along with other colonial petitions concerning the stamp tax, were tabled in Parliament and were not read. The Grenville ministry, heedless of the colonial greviances, on March 22, 1765, passed in to law the Stamp Act. What followed in Virginia exemplified the degree in which the majority of colonial representatives regarded their British allegiance. The once-close division within the General Assembly between conservatives and radicals opened anew. While the followers of House Speaker John Robinson, Attorney General Peyton Randolph and lawyer George Wythe believed that colonial submission to the Act was now required because it had become law, a minority of younger

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[69]Kennedy, JHB, 1761-1765, 256. Griffith, Virginia House of Burgesses, 34-36.

and newly-elected representatives believed their opposition need not be terminated.

As the May, 1765, session of the General Assembly was about to end, only thirty-nine of the 116 delegates remained in the legislative chambers. Patrick Henry and Richard Henry Lee, leaders of the vocal minority of radicals, introduced a motion that the Stamp Act be reconsidered. Momentarily powerless, the conservatives led by George Wythe could only sit in silent horror while Henry read and moved for adoption seven resolutions opposing the Stamp Act. The first five of these declared that Virginians enjoyed the same basic rights of citizenship as did their English brethren. The sixth and seventh proposed that Virginia would not be responsible to any taxation which she did not impose herself. Taxation without representation was so powerful a propaganda slogan that news of Henry's fiery words quickly spread throughout the colonies. All overlooked the fact that none of Henry's Stamp Act Resolves had been voted on when first presented and that the rump assembly had passed by slim majorities only the first five of the seven proposals.[70]

When Governor Francis Fauquier learned that the lower house of the Assembly had passed the Stamp Act Resolves introduced by its "hot and giddy" young members, he immed-

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[70]Kennedy, JHB, 1761-1765, 358. Griffith, House of Burgesses, 36-38. Oscar T. Barck, Jr., and Hugh T. Lefler, Colonial America (New York, 1968; hereinafter cited as Barck and Lefler, Colonial America), 500-01.

iately dissolved the Assembly.[71] Hopeful of replacing Henry's followers with more conservative representatives, Fauquier at the same time issued the writs for a general election.

Because there was no threat of Indian reprisals during the summer of 1765, William Preston believed he could with good conscience leave the frontier long enough to represent his neighbors in the House of Burgesses. As soon as the announcement of the general election reached the settlements in the Roanoke Valley, Preston proclaimed his candidacy for one of Augusta County's two seats. While there is no information concerning Preston's campaign nor of the voting tally, the Journal of the House of Burgesses records that William Preston and John Wilson were seated as the Augusta burgesses in the first session of the General Assembly on November 6, 1766.[72]

The Assembly convened during a moment of good feelings between the colonies and the mother country occasioned by the repeal of the Stamp Act whose news Governor Fauquier had published on June 9. Although not all Virginians had celebrated the repeal as an end to all troubles, by mid-

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[71]Francis Fauquier to Board of Trade, June 5, 1765, as quoted in Griffith, House of Burgesses, 37.

[72]Kennedy, JHB, 1766-1769, 3. William G. Stanard, ed., "The Preston Papers," Virginia Magazine of History and Biography (hereinafter cited as "Preston Papers," VMHB), XXVI (January, 1918), 364. Griffith, House of Burgesses, 46-47.

summer, commerce and business, representatives of confidence, exceeded previous levels.[73] However, the cleavage between the conservatives and the radicals in the House of Burgesses which had been visible during the Stamp Act crisis was not healed; and the two factions almost immediately engaged in a bitter power-struggle.

Knowing the general sympathies of those who had served in the previous House, the leaders of the opposing factions cultivated the favor of the newly elected burgesses. As early as May, 1766, Archibald Cary, a moderate-conservative representative from Chesterfield County who had voted against Henry's Stamp Act Resolves, solicited Preston's vote for Peyton Randolph as Speaker of the House. Randolph seemed well-suited for the position: as a delegate from Williamsburg, the lawyer represented more the economic than the aristocratic interests of the colony and was one of the most popular leaders in Virginia during the decade preceeding the Revolution. The office carried the stipend of £500, but it was the lure of power and prestige, not money which led anyone to seek the Speaker's chair. In December, 1766, Thomas Lewis of Augusta County, sought Preston's vote for Randolph's opponent, Robert Carter Nicholas of James City County.[74] It safely may be assumed that Preston cast his

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[73]Griffith, House of Burgesses, 40.

[74]Archibald Cary to Preston, May 14, 1766, Preston Papers, WiHi, 2QQ95; and Thomas Lewis to Preston, December 16, 1766, Preston Papers, ViHi. See also Kathleen Bruce, "Archibald

vote for the victorious Randolph, but there was no charge of corrupt bargain when Preston in turn was named a member of the House Committee of Public Claims, chaired by Archibald Cary.[75]

It was evident that the western Burgess possessed a bright political future when he cast his lot with the controlling coalition of moderates and conservatives. Preston's exposure to such colonial leaders as George Wythe, Patrick Henry, Francis Lightfoot and "Lighthorse" Harry Lee; Thomas Nelson, junior; and George Washington made significant impressions on the Augusta representative. During the Revolution, he would remember their views concerning the rights and privileges of man, and he would declare his allegiance to American independence rather than follow his many frontier neighbors who sought salvation with the British.

Contrary to a recent account of the Virginia House of Burgesses, William Preston did attend more than the 1766 session.[76] As he prepared to attend the 1766 assembly in March, 1767, the second session of the Assembly, Preston was approached by Bishop James Madison of Augusta who urged Preston to oppose his colleague, Israel Christian's petition to divide

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Cary," Dictionary of American Biography (21 vols., ed. by Allen Johnson and Dumas Malone, New York, 1928-1944), III, 554; Maude H. Woodfin, "Peyton Randolph," ibid., XV, 367-68; Stanard, Colonial Virginia Register, 174.

[75]Kennedy, JHB, 1766-1769, 15.

[76]See Griffith, House of Burgesses, 89.

Augusta County.[77] On March 12, 1767, the opening day of the second session, William Preston compiled a memoranda in the capital city of things that he must do while attending the assembly. Among these were such tasks as employing a surveyor to defend one of his constituent's suits against another man, requesting a reimbursement for two frontiersmen whose lands were damaged by the colonial militia, and purchasing thirty dogwood trees, six leather spoons and six china cups and saucers for an Augusta County resident.[78]

Preston was elected to represent Augusta county until his Greenfield Plantation became a part of the newly created county of Botetourt in 1769-70. From that new county he was elected to the House of Burgesses until 1771.[79] That House journals record no instances of Preston's participation in current affairs suggests that he was no more active a member than George Washington at the same time. Obviously, his Augusta and Botetourt constituents did not object, since they twice re-elected him.

The western frontier which William Preston represented in Virginia's colonial capital was changing rapidly. Trusting

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[77]Bishop James Madison to Preston, March 1, 1767, Preston Papers, ViHi. Madison is given a title he did not possess until the 1780's.

[78]Preston Memorandum, Williamsburg, March 12, 1767, Preston Papers, ViHi.

[79]See Kennedy, JHB, 1766-1769, 79, 135, 221; and Kennedy, JHB, 1770-1772, 3, 10.

in the happy auguries of peace with the Indians, settlers were pouring through the gaps in the mountains, past the frugal Dutch and the bolder British pioneers of the Valley of Virginia, into the valleys and lower ranges of the Alleghany Mountains. While the Proclamation of 1763 had officially limited settlement to the crest of the Appalachian Mountains, unofficial dealings established small, private homesteads and fired the imagination to evolve corporate land speculation schemes larger than the South Sea and Mississippi Bubbles of half a century before. Particularly because land speculation involved prominent persons on both sides of the Atlantic, it was evident almost immediately that the boundary the British government hoped to impose was not realistic. While the speculators maneuvered at Williamsburg, Philadelphia and London, individual pioneers did not wait, but quietly pushed their way west. That Virginia's population increased between 1760 and 1770 by more than 100,000 could not be called a population explosion, but the reservations by the great planters of the best lands of the Tidewater and Piedmont for present and future tobacco cultivation created a situation in which Virginians would denounce the 1763 proclamation and demand much more western land in order to have enough for current needs and modest growth.[80]

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[80]Morton, Colonial Virginia, II, 606. Abernethy, Western Lands, 83. United States, Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1957 (Washington, 1960), 7.

Never had the county seat in Staunton been acceptable to those colonists congregated in the Roanoke Valley. Roads were so bad that to travel sixty miles north to Staunton was only a little less time-consuming than following the James River two hundred miles to Williamsburg. By the end of the 1760's, population was such in the Valley of Virginia's highlands that in 1769, the Virginia General Assembly voted to cut off from its parent the expansive western reaches of Augusta and create the county of Botetourt. It was only two years before the process was repeated and the county of Fincastle was created.

Not to be left behind in the westward expansion movement, Colonel Preston, in 1774, moved his family from Greenfield Plantation to the site of the Draper's Meadow community about fifty miles to the southwest. There he had acquired by repurchase in 1772 lands for a new plantation. Like Greenfield Plantation in Botetourt's frontier days, his new seat was intended also to serve as headquarters for managing the land claims, surveys and sales of the Patton and Preston families. Utilizing the services of his father-in-law, Francis Smith, as an absentee architect of sorts, and those of his nephews Robert and Alexander Breckinridge as builders, Preston completed construction of a well-designed and comfortable house whose defense was assured by a secret tunnel and a chimney

lookout. To honor his wife, Preston christened his new estate Smithfield Plantation.[81]

When Botetourt County was divided in 1772, Smithfield Plantation fell into the newly-created county of Fincastle. The western portions of Botetourt had become populous enough for a local trading economy to develop and for the New River settlers to complain of the distance to the county seat. They hoped that the new county's seat at Fort Chiswell near both the Lead Mines and the New River would be centrally located. The county Fincastle between 1774 and 1776 resembled a slice of pie whose base was the eastern ranges of the Alleghenies and whose angled sides met at Point Pleasant on the Ohio River. It is little wonder that frontier inhabitants continued to petition the Virginia General Assembly for further decentralization and convenient, localized county governments. It was not until in 1776, however, in its first session after declaring its independence as a Commonwealth, that the Virginia legislature responded to the western demands by creating from Fincastle the three huge counties of Montgomery, Washington and Kentucky.[82]

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[81]Preston Papers, WiHi, 1QQ. Hale, Trans-Allegheny Pioneers, 90. Lamb, "Smithfield," VMHB, 109-10, 123-25. McNulty, "James Breckinridge," 8. See also, Crush, "Smithfield," DAR, 632.

[82]Muster Roll Book, Montgomery County Records, 1. Edmund Pendleton to Preston, June 4, 1774; David Mays, ed., The Letters and Papers of Edmund Pendleton, 1734-1803 (2 vols., Charlottesville, 1967; hereinafter cited as Mays, Papers of Edmund Pendleton), II, 91. Pendleton, a moderate-conservative leader of the House of Burgesses, agreed with Preston that Fincastle County should not be divided at so premature a time. See also Crush, "Smithfield," DAR, 632.

For the next twenty years, Smithfield Plantation served as a gateway to the middle western settlements. Aside from his role as a land magnate operating in his own interest as well as for the Pattons and for the Loyal Land Company, Preston commanded the development and cultivation of his farms. At the same time that he continued some of those public service capacities that he had worked for the previous fifteen years, he did not serve as coroner or escheator as he had in Botetourt, but he did in Fincastle qualify and post bond for the positions of justice, surveyor and county lieutenant. Once again the demands of his county limited the time that the forty-five-year-old Preston could devote to his family.[83]

Long before the Peace of Paris in 1763, the colony of Virginia had awarded to its militiamen grants of western land for their wartime services. As long as there was good land available east of the Alleghenies, compliance with the Royal Proclamation of 1763 had been easy. But adventuresome frontiersmen were quick to assert that there was better land in Kentucky than in Virginia. By the 1770's, with Governor Dunmore instructing county surveyors to locate and record tremendous tracts of land for which warrants could be issued

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[83]Lamb, "Smithfield," VMHB, 109. Summers, Annals, 131, 589. Will Book, Montgomery County Records, B, 9. See also Price, "Draper's Meadows and Smithfield," 1.

to war veterans, land which had once seemed so plentiful again became scarcer.[84]

As Fincastle's surveyor, William Preston, in 1774, informed the Governor that almost all good land east of the Allegheny Mountains had been patented. Continuing the Governor's policy, however, Preston began to survey and to record the unoccupied crown lands in the Ohio Valley in direct contravention of the 1763 proclamation. While there were settlers in that area, Preston quite rightly considered them squatters without legal rights to the land they occupied. It was not only obvious that soon pioneers with official warrants would settle on the banks of the Ohio River, but that land magnates such as Preston would acquire valuable lands there, too.

Others than Virginians, however, were entering the restricted areas of the trans-Allegheny west. In 1774, a retired judge from North Carolina, Richard Henderson, organized the Louisa Company, renamed it the Transylvania Company, and decided to lead a settlement into Kentucky in conscious disregard of the Proclamation of 1763. Not only did he not apply for a royal grant but he informed the legislatures neither of North Carolina nor of Virginia of his intentions. So far as the British were concerned, he later claimed legal authority for his actions in the opinion of the Lord Chancellors of Great Britain that no letter patents were neces-

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[84]John Dunmore to William Preston, 1773-1774, Preston Papers, WiHi.

sary to settle upon new lands in India. Both because he wanted peace with the Indians and because it might be useful in future litigation, Henderson concluded a treaty with the Cherokees in 1775. Happily, the Indians remained at peace with the white inhabitants.[85]

Henderson's project to promote a western colonization movement without governmental approval did not go unnoticed. Western land magnates like William Preston and eastern speculators such as George Washington and Governor Dunmore approved neither of Judge Henderson's means nor of his ends. Writing to George Washington in 1775, Preston criticized the North Carolina speculator. "Henderson talks with great freedom and indecency of the Governor of Virginia . . . and says if he once had 500 good fellows in that country he would not value Virginia."[86] Washington replied that "there is something in that affair which I neither understand nor like, and I wish I may not have cause to dislike it worse as the mystery unfolds."[87]

Preston reported to Governor Dunmore that Henderson was conspiring against the lawful authority of Virginia. He

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[85]Barck and Lefler, Colonial America, 483. See also, Davie, "Greenfield," 27. John A. Caruso, The Appalachian Frontier: America's First Surge Westward (New York, 1959; hereinafter cited as Caruso, Appalachian Frontier), 143-45.

[86]Preston to George Washington, January 31, 1775, Preston Papers, WiHi, 15S100. Spelling improved. See also, Caruso, Appalachian Frontier, 146.

[87]George Washington to Preston, January, 1775, Fitzpatrick, Writing of Washington, III, 279. Spelling improved.

predicted that if the North Carolinian was allowed to go unchallenged, the low prices for land which Henderson offered would induce people to leave the western Virginia counties and travel to the extended Carolina colony. Not only would the Virginia colony suffer as a whole, but also the depopulated and exposed frontier would be threatened again by the hostile Shawnees.[88]

Because the Henderson colony traversed the western claims of both Virginia and North Carolina, the two colonial governors joined together to combat the judge. In a joint proclamation, Dunmore and Governor Josiah Martin declared that the Henderson purchase from the Cherokees of the land between the Cumberland and Kentucky Rivers was null and void. Henderson ignored this edict, but it was not until September, 1775, when the First Continental Congress decreed that the Transylvania area could not become the fourteenth colony that Henderson's grandiose scheme collapsed.[89]

The Indians in the Ohio Valley had watched with growing concern encroachments of eastern settlers. The Shawnees' traditional hatred for their southern enemy, the Cherokees, further embittered the Kentucky Indians against Henderson. In a combination with maverick Cherokees, the Shawnees in

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[88]Preston to John Dunmore, January 16, 1775, Preston Papers, WiHi, 4QQ1.

[89]Caruso, Appalachian Frontier, 146. Barch and Lefler, Colonial America, 484.

1773 ambushed in Powell's Valley a group of immigrants being led by Daniel Boone. The explorer's son was killed before the attack was warded off. In the following spring of 1774, the Shawnees took some of Preston's surveyors prisoner at the mouth of the Kanawha River. When the surveyors were released later on, the Indians told them that henceforth they would kill any Virginian found in the Ohio region.[90]

Dunmore aggravated the western problem when in 1774 he sent an armed expedition under Colonel John Connolly to Pittsburgh to give forceful effect to the Governor's claim that that settlement rightly belonged to Virginia and not to Pennsylvania. Connolly seized the fort which encircled the community and he renamed it Fort Dunmore. With the fort as his base, Connolly planned to launch an attack against the Indians and drive them from the Ohio. The Indians interpreted Connolly's movements as the response to their warning given the Virginia surveyors and they made preparations for an extensive campaign. Reports of increased Indian activity soon reached Williamsburg. Realizing the gravity of the situation, Dunmore called out the Virginia militia along the western frontier and placed them under the command of General

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[90]Reuben G. Thwaites and Louise P. Kellogg, eds., Documentary History of Dunmore's War, 1774 (Madison, 1905; hereinafter cited as Thwaites and Kellogg, Dunmore's War), ix, xi. Caruso, Appalachian Frontier, 124. Goodridge Wilson, Smith County History and Traditions (Kingsport, 1932), 45. Elizabeth Preston Gray, "Line of Francis Preston" (Bristol, 1953; hereinafter cited as Gray, "Line of Francis Preston"), 8.

Andrew Lewis. He sent circulars throughout the Appalachian settlements warning inhabitants of the threatened Indian uprisings and advising them to congregate around the nearest forts.[91] As county lieutenant, William Preston was responsible for the protection of Fincastle County.

Because Smithfield Plantation possessed a wooden stockade, many terrified settlers sought refuge there. The situation was so menacing that Preston's brother-in-law, the Reverend John Brown, criticized him for not sending his family from exposed Smithfield to the greater safety of Botetourt, and made accusations that the Colonel ". . . lay too much in the way of the Indians, New River has been the course they came formerly to war and probably will come [again]. . . ." Preston was worried, too. In the confusion and alarm, people were fleeing their homes, inadvertently encouraging the Shawnees to come a-looting. The stockade at Smithfield afforded dubious protection. Worse still, there was not enough ammunition and powder to defend the fort and supply the county militia should they be ordered elsewhere.[92]

As Preston prepared his local militiamen for action, instructions arrived from Williamsburg that he build addi-

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[91]Daniel Smith to Preston, March 22, 1774; and William Russell to Preston, May 7, 1774, Preston Papers, WiHi, 3QQ15, 3QQ23. See also Barck and Lefler, Colonial America, 484.

[92]John Brown to Preston, May 28, 1774, Preston Papers, WiHi, 3QQ29; and Preston to Edward Johnson, August 2, 1774, Preston Papers, ViHi. See also Gray, "Line of Francis Preston," 7.

tional forts at strategic places in the far-flung county of Fincastle. He in turn ordered Colonel William Christian of the Holston River area to muster his company of 126 men and proceed via the Clinch River and Cumberland Gap to the headwaters of the Kentucky River. Later, he commanded Christian to join Andrew Lewis at Point Pleasant on the Ohio River.[93] Learning that the Shawnees were seeking to enlist the Cherokees as allies, Preston acted swiftly to avert being encircled. His desperate plea to the Cherokees to maintain their peaceful alliance with Virginia was successful. Chief Oconastota agreed that the Cherokee nation would keep the peace provided the colony of Virginia respected boundary rights.[94]

Meanwhile, Governor Dunmore and a force of 1500 Tidewater militiamen marched to Winchester and thence to Fort Dunmore at Pittsburgh. While he prepared to engage the Shawnees, the Governor's presence at the forks of the Ohio strengthened Virginia's possession of the disputed frontier outpost against Pennsylvania's claims. He ordered Andrew Lewis to move his southwestern frontiersmen along the Ohio to Wheeling where the two forces would converge.

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[93]John Dunmore to Preston, June 10, 1774; and Preston to William Christian, June 27, 1774, Preston Papers, WiHi, 3QQ39, 3QQ47.

[94]William Russell to Preston, June 10, 1774; and Chief Ocanastota to Preston, July 16, 1774; Preston Papers,WiHi, 3QQ46, 3QQ142. Preston to the Cherokee Nation, June 11, 1774, Preston Papers, ViHi.

Preston issued a call for more available men to report to Smithfield Plantation, ready to march to Wheeling. As he addressed his Fincastle constituents, he suggested that "we may perhaps never have so as fair an opportunity of reducing our old inveterate enemies to reason, if this should by any means be neglected." For the forty-five-year-old commander, the response to his call was discouraging. Few additional men volunteered. Five weeks were spent in preparations to reinforce the Governor and General Lewis. All of Preston's vigor and eloquence could not dispel the realization that the women and children of the New River settlements were poorly defended behind inadequate stockades. Captain William Russell refused to move his Powell Valley volunteers from Fort Preston until other men took their place. Michael Woods on Rich Creek reported that the men he drafted for the expedition refused to leave the defense of their homes and he recommended that they be released from service. Not until a force of two companies under the commands of a Captain Thompson and Captain Daniel Smith were assembled to guard the southwest frontier were the New River militiamen willing to march to the northwest.[95] Because Susanna Preston suddenly became so ill that Colonel Preston decided to remain at his home until she recovered, he assigned his force to his second-in-command, Colonel William Christian.

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[95]Thwaites and Kellogg, Dunmore's War, xvii. Dixon and Hunter, Virginia Gazette of Williamsburg, August 25, 1774. Preston Circular Letter, July 20, 1774; William Russell to Preston, August 16, 1774; Michael Woods to Preston, August 16, 1774; Preston to Arthur Campbell, August 25, 1774, Preston Papers, WiHi, 3QQ139, 3QQ78, 3QQ97 and 3QQ82.

Early in September, 1774, the 232-man Fincastle contingent marched off to rendezvous with their Botetourt and Augusta commrades at Union Camp on the "Big Levels of the Greenbrier," the site of present-day Lewisburg, West Virginia.[96]

As it turned out, Preston never re-joined his command. It was only through letters dispatched from his subordinates that he learned of and transmitted to Williamsburg the colonial victory at the Battle of Point Pleasant on October 10.[97] Lord Dunmore was not at Point Pleasant either, but learned the results of the battle as he marched his troops to join General Lewis. Admonishing western Virginians to prepare to attack the Indian villages at Scioto, if the Indians did not sue for peace, the Governor succeeded in bringing the Shawnee Chief Cornstalk into negotiations which culminated in the Treaty of Camp Charlotte. Not only did the Shawnees agree to keep the peace and to return all prisoners, but by relinquishing all their rights to hunt South of the Ohio River, they in effect gave possession of Kentucky to Virginia.[98]

Preston and his frontier constituents were overjoyed by the results of Dunmore's War: not only did it win Kentucky

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[96]William Christian to Preston, September 7, 1774, Preston Papers, WiHi, 3QQ92. Thwaites and Kellogg, Dunmore's War, 181.

[97]For graphic accounts of the battle of Point Pleasant see William Fleming to Nancy Fleming, October 13, 1774; William Ingles to Preston, October 14, 1774, Preston Papers, WiHi, 2ZZ25 and 3QQ121; and William Christian to Preston, October 15, 1774, Thwaites and Kellogg, Dunmore's War, 261.

[98]Abernethy, Western Lands, 112-13. Barck and Lefler, Colonial America, 484.

for exploitation by Virginia, but also did it ultimately isolate the Shawnees from the Southern Indians and frustrate British frontier operations when the Revolution broke out two years later. As the era of revolution approached, William Preston--frontier magnate, farmer, land speculator, surveyor, justice of the peace, Burgess and county lieutenant--developed increasingly close ties with his colleagues east of the Blue Ridge Mountains: George Washington, Patrick Henry and Thomas Jefferson. They came to rely upon him as the outstanding western leader, and he in turn was heartened by their cordial support. In the escalation of differences between London and Williamsburg, control of western development was becoming the dominant issue. The colonial argument for local control pointed to regulation by the assembly, not to parochial autonomy. However, it would be impossible to deny that the historical bases of Virginians' chief complaint against the Mother Country so enhanced the stature of Colonel William Preston that he deserved among such contemporaries as Washington, Henry and Jefferson an equal place in the mid-1770's.

Chapter IV: Leader of the Revolution in Southwest Virginia, 1775-1783

By the afternoon of April 19, 1775, eight militiamen lay dead on the commons of Lexington, Massachusetts. With news that British regulars had shot and killed these martyrs to colonial dissent, the smoldering fires of emotion blazed high in the hearts of their fellows from Maine to Georgia. For most American colonists, the Revolution now began. However, for those settlers in the isolated hamlets of Southwest Virginia, their break with Great Britain had begun four months earlier at a meeting of representatives of Fincastle County.

In September, 1774, the First Continental Congress met in Philadelphia. This extra-legal convention of colonial representatives discussed the Coercive Acts proposed by the North Ministry and enacted by the Parliament of the United Kingdom of Great Britain. When the American Congress endorsed on October 8, the "Suffolk Resolves" presented by Samuel Adams, it recognized for the colonies their rights to raise troops for defense and to suspend all trade with Britain, Ireland, and the British West Indies, irrespective of Acts of Parliament. But more important, especially for those in Virginia's southwest, an article of these resolutions authorized the formation of local committees of safety to provide for local

defense and to enforce the trade boycott known as the Continental Association.[99]

News of the results of the First Continental Congress soon reached the Virginia frontier. However, because that part of the colony still was engrossed in Dunmore's War against the Shawnee Indians, Congress' request for the establishment of county Committees of Safety was postponed there until the militia companies returned from the Ohio to their homes. Since Colonel William Preston remained at Smithfield Plantation rather than journey into the Ohio Valley during the autumn of 1774, he not only received a copy of the Congress' proposals, sent to him in his capacity as Burgess, but he was in a position to act upon them. He set a tentative date in January, 1775, for the freeholders of Fincastle to assemble at the Lead Mines on the New River to discuss the requests.

On January 20, 1775, representatives of the county's isolated communities assembled at the designated meeting place to consider the proposals of the Continental Congress. Similar to the emotions expressed by the Regulators on the North Carolina frontier, many in Fincastle came to the Lead Mines intending loyally to support the British government, rather than dangerously to flaunt her authority. Much as the North Carolina Regulators declared that they were being deprived of

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[99]Barck and Lefler, Colonial America, 536. Merrill Jensen, The Founding of a Nation: A History of the American Revolution, 1763-1776 (New York, 1968), 495-96. John C. Miller, Origins of the American Revolution (Stanford, 1959; hereinafter cited as Miller, Origins of the American Revolution), 384.

the basic rights of British subjects, not by the British Parliament, but by wealthy, eastern merchants, so, too, many small farmers in the valleys of the New, the Holston and the Clinch rivers believed themselves oppressed by the Tidewater planters and merchants who dominated Virginia through its General Assembly. However, unlike those in the Carolina wilderness, the majority of assembled Fincastle compatriots sided together in support of the congressional proposals.

They created a Committee of Safety with a charter membership of sixteen. Colonel William Preston and Major William Ingles were appointed to represent the northwestern section of the county. Others were elected to speak for those in the various geographical divisions of Fincastle: Colonel William Christian came from the Holston River region; Captains Walter Crockett and James McGavock resided in the Reed Creek and Max Meadows area; and Captains William Russell and Daniel Smith inhabited the Powell Valley and Clinch River outposts. Christian served as the first chairman of the committee, but later Preston succeeded him. In the next eight years, these men tried successfully to avert threatened Indian and Tory uprisings and with no less success they promoted the war effort by supplying the men and materials required to support and to win the patriot cause.

The January assembly on the New River also drafted an address to Virginia's representatives to the Continental Congress. This resolution accurately expressed the feelings of the

majority of representatives concerning the rights of the colonists to defend the personal liberty which leaders claimed to have been removed by a suppressive British Crown and Parliament. Probably drafted by the Presbyterian clergyman, the Reverend Charles Cummings, an elected member of the Committee of Safety, the Fincastle Resolutions first thanked their Congressional representatives for attempting to reconcile the colonies with their mother country. The resolutions next pledged the county's inhabitants to a strict adherence to the Continental Association. While expressing the hope that the differences between the colonies and Great Britain would be resolved, the Fincastle County resolves warned that the county would support King George III's government so long as it acted "constitutionally, and when the grants /laws/ are made by our own representatives. . . ." If such a government were not reinstated, the Fincastle committee declared that they were "deliberately and resolutely determined never to surrender . . . to any power upon earth but at the expense of our lives. . . ."[100]

When George Washington, newly appointed commander of the Continental Army, heard of the Fincastle Resolutions, he exclaimed:

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[100]Charles W. Coleman, "The County Committees of 1774-'75 in Virginia," WMQ, Series 1, V, 94-95, 99, 254. Miller, Origins of the American Revolution, 321. T. L. Preston, Historical Sketches, 127. Goodridge Wilson, "'Fincastle Resolution' Linked to Declaration of Independence," Roanoke Times, 1968. Johnston, Middle New River Settlement, 154. Pendleton, Tazewell County, 340-42.

> Strip me of the dejected and suffering remnant of my army; take from me all that I have left; leave me but a banner; give me but the means to plant it upon the mountains of West Augusta, and I will yet draw around me the men who will lift up their bleeding country from the dust and set her free.[1]

The Fincastle Resolutions were but one of many declarations adopted by county committees throughout the thirteen colonies. While most had been conceived by the more radical elements of the counties, they expressed the common greviences of the inhabitants against the British Crown. Five months after the creation of the Fincastle County resolves, the freeholders of Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, declared that all laws created by Parliament which dealt with America were "annulled and vacated" and they defiantly claimed that all power now came from the provincial and Continental Congresses. At the same time, George Washington returned from the Second Continental Congress in Philadelphia and reported to the Fairfax County Committee of Safety the results of the Congress. He urged their support for the newly created Continental Army which had been gathering to isolate the British in Boston and they proposed their intentions to do so.

The results of the Lead Mines assembly in January, 1775, often have been overlooked as a factor which precipitated the American Revolution. Little historical significance has been attached to the drafted county Resolutions which declared

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[1]T. L. Preston, Historical Sketches, 23-24.

western Virginia's decision to seek independence rather than conciliation within the British Empire.[2]

1775 was a year of conflict for Governor John Dunmore. Having won favor with the western colonists for his successful peace settlement with the Shawnees in the Treaty of Camp Charlotte, he returned to Williamsburg only to find himself scorned and despised for being a token representative of the British government. Before he had removed to the frontier to lead the colonial campaign against the Indians, he had been forced to dissolve the General Assembly for its approval of Thomas Jefferson's proposal to set aside June 1, 1774, as a day of fasting and of prayer for those colonists in Boston being subjugated by a suppressive mother-government for that town's participation in the Boston Tea Party. During the governor's absence from the colonial capital, the prorogued legislators had reconvened in an extra-legal convention which they claimed would do the same work as had been done in the legal House of Burgesses. Disbanding before Dunmore's return, the Virginia Convention established itself as the true representative body of government and it sought to unite the col-

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[2]Freeman, George Washington, III, 358. Gordon S. Wood, The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787 (Chapel Hill, 1969), 224. John Richard Alden, The South in the Revolution, 1763-1789 (Baton Rouge, 1957; hereinafter cited as Alden, South in the Revolution), 196. James T. Flexner, George Washington: The Forge of Experience, 1732-1775 (Boston, 1965), 332. Fitzpatrick, Writings of Washington, XXXVII, 511.

ony against Dunmore and the British. Realizing that little executive initiative would succeed in the Tidewater and Piedmont sections of the colony, Dunmore turned to the more distant western frontier for expected compliance with his proposals.

Thanks to Dunmore, Virginia had acquired from the Shawnees a vast territory in the Ohio Valley from which she could reap a profitable harvest. Suspending the old system of granting land to deserving war veterans, Dunmore intended to exploit the new territory as a grand source of revenue from land sales. When the Governor, in March, 1775, instructed the western counties' surveyors to prepare for sale the newly acquired frontier lands, he ordered William Preston to survey parcels in sizes of 100 to 1000 acres and to sell them at public auction. Hoping not only to settle the virgin territory but also to mold a large geographic section sympathetic with the British, Dunmore was disappointed with the response to his well-reasoned appeal.

Unaware of the degree of enmity between the governor and the Virginia Convention which had reconvened in March, 1775, Preston had initiated Dunmore's proclamation. For three months the western surveyor had located and sold lands to immigrant settlers. It was not until June, 1775, when he received a letter from Thomas Lewis of Augusta County, that he stopped the governor's work. Lewis, a member of the Virginia Convention, related that in the recent colonial conflicts in

Williamsburg several Virginians had been shot by British troops and that Dunmore and his family had fled the capital to an armed British ship. The western representative warned that, unless Preston considered the Dunmore proclamation both null and void, he would be labelled a sympathizer of the governor.[3]

Rumors had begun to spread throughout the Virginia frontier suggesting that Preston was inimical not only to the Virginia Convention but also to the Fincastle Committee of Safety of which he was a member. William Russell of the Clinch River area criticized Preston for having promoted the sales of land for the Governor, and Thomas Lewis threatened Preston that, unless the latter quit his land schemes, he would condemn Preston as a Tory sympathizer.[4]

It was for more than mere advice that Preston wrote to the Virginia Convention. He wanted and got its endorsement as a patriot. As anyone might have expected, the Convention advised that he should stop the surveys. It was, perhaps, his friend Edmund Pendleton who saw to it that at the same time the revolutionary legislature gave its support and confidence in the western Virginian by naming Preston as Fincastle's county lieutenant of the militia. Thus, as the colonial government was fading away while Governor Dunmore refused to convene the

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[3]John Dunmore to William Preston, March 21, 1775; and Thomas Lewis to Preston, June 19, 1775, Preston Papers, WiHi, 4QQ9 and 4QQ20.

[4]William Russell to William Fleming, June 12, 1775, Preston Papers, WiHi, 4QQ19.

General Assembly, William Preston's authority in Fincastle was continued--and, indeed, made paramount--by the extra-legal Virginia Convention; and he prepared his constituents not only for defense but also for the battle for Virginia's independence.[5]

Washington's call to arms was soon relayed to Virginia's county lieutenants who were given the responsibility to secure local recruits. Although the newly appointed Commander-in-Chief asked that all available men enlist in the Continental Army, it became immediately apparent, if it had not been foreseen, that a high proportion of frontier manpower would be required to stay at home to provide local defense. Considering the isolation of the counties of southwest Virginia, their human and material assets, and the necessities of defending hearth and home from Indian and Tory--Southwest Virginia in the next eight years contributed heavily to the continental war effort in both men and materiel.

In June, 1775, threats of renewed Indian hostilities caused William Preston to retain his militia companies for local defense rather than send them across the Blue Ridge to join their

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[5]H. J. Eckenrode, The Revolution in Virginia (Boston, 1916), 35. Herbert Laub, "British Regulation of Crown Land in the West, The Last Phase, 1773-1775," WMQ, Series 2, X, 54-55. Committee of Safety of Virginia to William Preston, October 7, 1775, Preston Papers, ViHi. Edmund Pendleton to Preston, March 30, 1775, Mays, Papers of Edmund Pendleton, I, 100-01. Preston and Pendleton had remained close friend after Preston had terminated his stay in the House of Burgesses. Preston had helped locate choice lands in Fincastle County and Pendleton had remained appreciative.

colonial brethren. The Cherokees, by far one of the most powerful Nations of southern Indians, had become disenchanted with the steady progress of westward settlement into their hunting domains. Even though one tribe within their confederacy had concluded a treaty with the Henderson expedition from North Carolina, the majority of these Indians were opposed to the Caucasian settlement in the valley of the Tennessee. For one year the chiefs of the Cherokee Nation tolerated the invasion of their lands, but their actions foretold a time when toleration would be replaced by violent reaction.

From June, 1775, until May, 1776, William Preston continued a fruitless exchange with the Cherokee chiefs, attempting to persuade them to accept the inevitable westward settlements of pioneers. Smithfield Plantation became the vital link in the communications network between the endangered southwest frontier and Williamsburg. Colonial leaders rightly feared that British agents were at work in the wilderness of the Tennessee River and that they were provoking the Indians to declare war. Western settlers took alarm that they were being forgotten and that no word of their plight reached the revolutionary government in the east. Both East and West looked to William Preston for the aid necessary to quell the threat to the frontier. For the forty-seven-year-old coordinator, the summer of 1776 was one of hurried preparations and anxious waiting for reports as men and supplies were rushed into the isolated hamlets.[6]

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[6]William Preston to Oconastota, Little Carpenter, Judge

The settlements of Watauga near present-day Elizabethton, Tennessee, and on the lower Holston River area became the centers of a war of nerves by the Cherokees. As early as mid-May, 1776, Indian-traders reported to William Preston that they had carried letters from the Cherokees to the Watauga homesteaders that ordered the pioneers to abandon their homes and return to Virginia. Militia commanders near the settlements frantically pleaded with Preston to send more men and ammunition to their assistance. Since he held his authority from the Virginia Committee of Safety, Preston could not obtain or distribute supplies without its approval. However, by the end of May, the Williamsburg committee granted him an additional 200 pounds of powder for defense and he immediately sent it to the needy frontiersmen who preferred to defend their homes rather than retreat to the northeastern stockades.[7]

For the next few weeks, only minimum contact with the Indians was reported. Preston was lucky. At the same time

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Friend and other chiefs of the Cherokees, June, 1775; Thomas Lewis to Preston, August 19, 1775; and Preston to Edmund Pendleton, 1775, Preston Papers, WiHi, 4QQ17, 4QQ29 and 4QQ34. See also, Arthur G. Barnes, "The Virginia-North Carolina Frontier in 1776" (Unpublished M. A. thesis, The College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, 1969; hereinafter cited as Barnes, "Virginia-North Carolina Frontier"), 22.

[7]Gabriel Shoat to William Preston, May 13, 1776; Preston Papers, WiHi, 4QQ38. T. W. Preston, "Some Famous Civilians of Southwestern Virginia," Washington County Historical Society Magazine, XV (November, 1947), 3. Anthony Bledsoe to Preston, May 14, 1776; Gilbert Christian to Preston, May 16, 1776; and J. Beckley to Preston, May 27, 1776, Preston Papers, WiHi, 4QQ39, 4QQ40 and 4QQ48. See also, Barnes, "Virginia-North Carolina Frontier," 27.

that reports from William Russell indicated that his militia companies in Tennessee wanted to return to their families and homes in Virginia, the county lieutenant of Fincastle received approval to draft two additional fifty-man companies to send to the Holston and Clinch Rivers. Large bands of Indians were streaming into the mountain valleys and Russell believed that he would need a minimum of 150 additional armed men if a battle insued.[8]

The months of July and August were relatively peaceful. Scattered, individual Indian depredations were frequent, but a major confrontation was avoided. There was, however, no ready solution to the Watauga settlers' dilemma. They lacked the power to drive the Indians from the area, yet the redskins posed a mortal threat to those who ventured from the safety of the stockades in order to cultivate and harvest crops. It was plain to all that the winter months would bring starvation to Watauga if the grains could not be reaped. The Indians were content to watch and to wait.

Weighing the Watauga crisis against the exigencies of the Continental Congress, the revolutionary government in Williamsburg decided to give a temporary priority to the former. The Virginia Convention issued new orders to an 1800-man force which county lieutenants had succeeded in enlisting in the western part of the state for the purpose of reinforcing the

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[8]William Preston to Edmund Pendleton, June 15, 1776; and William Russell to Preston, July 7-20, 1776, Preston Papers, WiHi, 4QQ50, 4QQ53, 4QQ54, 4QQ55.

Continental Army. The Convention gave the command of this force to Colonel William Christian with orders to search out and destroy the Cherokees in the Tennessee Valley.

On October 6, 1776, William Preston received word that Christian had defeated the main force of Indians in a day-long battle, but that the Virginians had not destroyed their savage enemies. From the hills surrounding the Watauga settlements, the redskins still watched the settlers in their isolated homes.

Although Christian's victory did not insure a permanent peace with the still-hostile Indians, nevertheless, the consequent Treaty of Long Island at Fort Patrick Henry, in May, 1777, gained several results which aided the continental war effort. The commissioners who negotiated this treaty were William Preston, William Christian and Evan Shelby of Virginia; and Chiefs Oconastota, Little Carpenter and Dragging Canoe who acted for the Cherokees. Although not completely pacified, the Cherokees, by making this treaty, ended the possibility that British agents might achieve with the Cherokee Nation an alliance which committed the latter either to British direction or to any sustained campaign against the Virginians. Remarkably, the existence of strong and numerous Loyalist supporters on the Allegheny frontier was to the British a hindrance, not an asset. Because the British had not pledged the safety of isolated Loyalist settlements, but because the Cherokees were incapable or indisposed to distinguish between white Loyalists

or white Patriots, the latter two groups were forced to join in a battle for self-preservation. The decision of the Virginia Convention in 1776 to aid the Watauga settlers was one of the most momentous of the Revolutionary War. It contained both Indian and Loyalist threats. There would be no two-front war in Virginia. And this courageous decision to delay aid to the North in order to help the West served to consolidate the inhabitants' allegience to the new revolutionary government that had come to their aid. By frustrating a British-Cherokee-Loyalist alliance on the Allegheny frontier, Virginia deprived Great Britian of the western arm of a giant two-pronged pincer which, with the victory-ladened British army in the North, might successfully have squeezed life from the infant American republic. Henceforth, British agents and professed Loyalists posed no great threat to the Virginia frontier as they did in North Carolina. Periodic action by local Patriot leaders in southwest Virginia was, however, still necessary to intimidate Loyalist subversion of the Whig or Patriot administrations of the Old Dominion's highland counties.[9]

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[9]William Russell to William Preston, July 23, 1776; Virginia Council of Safety to Preston, July 30, 1776; and James Thompson to William Preston, Preston Papers, WiHi, 4QQ57, 4QQ61, and 4QQ74. Barnes, Virginia-North Carolina Frontier. John Reed, "Reminiscences of Western Virginia, 1770-1790," Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, VII (1900), 124.

Guerilla activities against the isolated patriotic leaders by bands of Tories became so frequent in the spring of 1778 that Governor Patrick Henry ordered William Preston to maintain a garrison of a sergeant and eleven men at Smithfield Plantation, whose stockade afforded protection in case of a general uprising. For the next year, as Preston directed county recruitment of men and supplies for military service, he was forced to keep a watchful eye on those he suspected of being pro-British. He soon discovered the detection of such conspirators against the revolutionary government was not a simple matter. For while some residents of the newly created county of Montgomery refused to support Preston's orders as county lieutenant, most were not so much pro-British as they were anti-conscription and anti-taxation. The frontier had created a strange breed of men. Isolated and often forced to fend for themselves, they were impatient of restraints and discipline, and they were accustomed only to the law of their own desires. Such men were hard to control during the critical era of the Revolution.[10]

Early in the summer of 1779, Preston received an intelligence report that a company of Tories based on the Yadkin River in North Carolina was preparing to march into Virginia

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[10]Patrick Henry to William Preston, May 12, 1778; Preston Papers, WiHi, 4QQ168. David I. Bushnell, Jr., "The Virginia Frontier in History," VMHB, XXIII (1915), 122-23. Patrick Henry to William Preston, December 21, 1776; Preston Papers, ViHi, "Preston Papers," VMHB, XXVI, 368n.

for the purpose of capturing the lead mines on the New River. Learning that a number of the county residents were preparing to join the Tory encampment, he called a meeting of his county's Committee of Safety to devise a plan of counter-attack. Because Fincastle County had been sub-divided into Montgomery, and Washington, Preston asked Colonel Arthur Campbell of the latter county to join him in a combined effort to thwart their common enemy. They agreed on a scheme to surprise the invaders as they passed through the narrow valleys which guarded the New River. In mid-July, the opposing forces skirmished in Black Lick Valley, near present-day Rural Retreat in Wythe County, Virginia. A number of Tories were taken prisoner by the victorious patriots. Colonel Preston was generous in praising Campbell and he declared "your coming from another County with a Company must convince those stupid wretches that they have more counties than one to condend with. . . ."[11]

In spite of this defeat, North Carolina Tories realized they must renew their efforts in southwest Virginia. The Continental Army and the militia of all the states could obtain only a small amount of lead for ammunition from abroad. The lead mines on the New River were the only source for that mineral that was either in in operation or that was known

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[11] "Preston Papers," VMHB, XXVI (1918), 372n. William Preston to His Neighbors, June, 1779; and Preston to Arthur Campbell, July 19, 1799, Preston Papers, ViHi.

east of the Mississippi and, therefore, was one of the chief suppliers of the needed ammunition. Consequently, the defense of the lead mines was of inestimable importance. The national war effort which gradually was accomplishing American independence, would be severely hampered if the mines were captured or destroyed.

William Preston was thoroughly aware of the exposed location of the lead mines and of the growing menace of the Tories. Writing to Governor Jefferson in March, 1780, he warned that a new conspiracy by the Loyalists in the area was afoot. Preston sought broader authority than the existing laws for treason provided because the evidence required for conviction was not the sort that could be found against frontier Loyalists: printing and distributing treasonable literature; making treasonable statements to an assembly of persons; and the like. Frontier Loyalism was more lonely, clandestine and whispered. With a scrupulousness for constitutional niceties that may have annoyed the bluff, forceful Preston, Jefferson advised that Tories should be brought into court for legal prosecution. However, he asked the western county lieutenant not to charge these people, most of whom had been and would continue to be nieghbors, with treason, but with lesser crimes that would be punishable by fines and imprisonment. For Jefferson, the penalty for treason--death by hanging--was punishment appropriate only for a "cannibal." Prudently, he admonished Preston to

set an armed guard over the lead mines.[12] Preston immediately dispatched an order to Captain Walter Crockett in the Max Meadows area to raise a troop which he should march to the lead mines. By the end of June, Crockett's company was at its station.

Preston and his associates debated whether to move against the encamped Tories on the New River in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, or to await their attack at the mines. Crockett and his second-in-command who was Preston's nephew, James Breckinridge, favored mounting an offensive against the Tories. Breckinridge reported the capture of a Tory scout who had been apprehended while surveying the area surrounding the mines. Upon questioning the prisoner, the patriots learned not only that Loyalists were encamped at "The Glades" further up the river, but also that British officers were directing the force.[13]

Faced with such a crisis, Preston concluded that he could no longer deal with the Tories with as much attention to legality as Governor Jefferson desired. Earlier, he had met with the Montgomery County Loyalists and had admonished them to submit to the patriot cause or else move from the

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[12]William Preston to Thomas Jefferson, March, 1780; and Thomas Jefferson to Preston, March 21, 1780, Preston Papers, WiHi, 5ZZ28 and 5QQ24.

[13]Walter Crockett to William Preston, June 24, 1780; and James Breckinridge to William Preston, June 25, 1780, "Preston Papers," VMHB, XXVII, 49, 157-59.

for their own safety.[14] Now, he ordered his captains to move throughout the county and disarm all suspected Tories.[15] A force of 250 mounted militia men from throughout the western counties were placed under Colonel Crockett's command and he was ordered to seek out and destroy the enemy.

At a time when Lord Cornwallis was issuing a call to arms of all Loyalists along the American frontier to join his army as it advanced from Charleston, Colonel Crockett's expedition found but a few Tory insurrectionists who had not hurried southward. Crockett obeyed Preston's order to hold all prisoners for later confinement, but he could not command the leaders of the state militia sent to his aid to do likewise, because they were of rank equal to his own. In moves which today would be considered barbaric, Robert Adams, Jr., James Calloway and Charles Lynch instigated their own forms of justice to deal with Loyalists who fell into their hands. After speedy inquests which found the Tories guilty of treason, the prisoners were hanged by their necks until dead. In 1782 a suit was brought against Preston and other state militia leaders for their actions. Judge Spencer Roane, son-in-law

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[14]William Preston to Michael Price, John and Howard Heavins, James Bone, Jacob Shull, John Wall, _____Harless and Joseph Poppecoughfer, July 20, 1780; and William Preston to Thomas Heavins, August 14, 1780, Preston Papers, WiHi, 5QQ41 and 5QQ55.

[15]William Preston to James Byrn, July 5, 1780; and Preston to Isaac Taylor, July 12, 1780, Preston Papers, WiHi, 5QQ37 and 5QQ40.

of Patrick Henry, found that they were indeed guilty of such deeds as inflicting "thirty-nine lashes . . . without trial or law, on mere suspicion of guilt, which could not be regularly proven." However, the jurist declared that the petitioners had no remedy because of the Virginia Act of Assembly which absolved the patriots who had suppressed a conspiracy against the state by resorting to "Lynch laws" and "lynchings."[16]

William Preston redoubled his efforts to recruit militia when Cornwallis moved into North Carolina. News of the ruthless expeditions of Banastre Tarleton angered the patriotic frontiersmen of Southwest Virginia. Under Colonel Preston's leadership a force was enlisted in Botetourt, Montgomery and Washington to join other companies from Virginia and North Carolina against the British. With less success, Preston appealed to the county lieutenants in Augusta and Rockbridge to join the effort. Throughout September, 1780, Preston directed the slow recruitment of local men whom he sent to Washington County to be trained under the command of Colonel Arthur Campbell. The steady drain on Montgomery's manpower over the past four years was beginning to tell. Walter Crockett lamented that "I have tried all in my power to raise the militia . . .

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[16]Walter Crockett to William Preston, August 6, 1780; Preston Papers, WiHi, 5QQ48. "Lynch Laws," WMQ, Series 1, XIII (1905), 204. Charles Lynch to William Preston, August 17, 1780; Preston Papers, WiHi, 5QQ57. Hening, Statutes at Large, 134-35.

but never /have I seen/ them so backward. . . .I have got with great difficulty about one hundred and fifty including two light horse companies . . ." At last Campbell believed his force at its maximum strength and he moved across the mountains into North Carolina.[17]

During the afternoon of October 7, 1780, Campbell's Virginia frontiersmen encircled a Loyalist force of 800 men led by Major Patrick Ferguson on the bluffs of King's Mountain in southwestern North Carolina. Leading the attack up the wooded slopes to the Tory defenders, Campbell exclaimed, "Here they are my brave boys; shout like hell and fight the devils." Within an hour the battle was over. As white flags fluttered from the mountain plateau, the Loyalists threw down their guns and the victorious Patriots emerged from their concealed vantage points.[18]

The battle of King's Mountain has been considered a major American victory with major consequences. Upon receiving notice of the Loyalist defeat, Cornwallis withdrew ninety miles into South Carolina. His departure broke the Tory spirit to continue to oppose the patriots along the whole frontier of the Carolina's and Virginia, while it heartened

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[17]Walter Crockett to William Preston, October 2, 1780; "Preston Papers," VMHB, XXVII (1919), 165-66. Spelling improved. Preston to George Skillern, September 13, 1780, Preston Papers, WiHi, 5QQ80.

[18]Caruso, Appalachian Frontier, 246-48. Franklin and Mary Wickwire, Cornwallis: The American Adventure (Boston, 1970; hereinafter cited as Wickwire, Cornwallis), 212-16.

the morale of the rebels. General Nathanial Greene's assumption of command of the Army of the Southern Department of War began the process of transforming it into a much more effective fighting force. General Danial Morgan of Virginia came out of retirement to take command of part of Greene's forces. His victory at the "Cowpens" in January, 1781, over Colonel Tarleton prophesied the ultimate defeat of the British under Cornwallis.[19] The tide of victory had at last begun to turn, and with it rose patriotic enthusiasm.

The final conflict in the trilogy of North Carolina battles was ironically a victory for the British, even though it effectively reduced the power of Cornwallis' army. After their victory at the "Cowpens," Greene and Morgan hastily moved their numerically inferior forces northward to the Virginia border. Elements of the British army pursued. Heavy winter rains and swollen creeks and rivers slowed the progress of the two armies as one tried to escape the other. Brief skirmishes occurred before the American army crossed the flooded Dan River. Cornwallis, with neither boats nor pontoons, was forced to end his trek and he moved his army to Hillsborough, North Carolina, to re-group.

General Greene frantically sent out pleas for additional troops, declaring that, once Cornwallis crossed into Virginia,

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[19]Caruso, Appalachian Frontier, 251. Alden, South in the Revolution, 249-50.

the British army could not be stopped. William Preston responded to the general's request by ordering all Montgomery militiamen left in the county to assemble at the Lead Mines on February 10, 1781, and to prepare to march eastward to join Greene's army. Preston was fresh and eager to meet the enemy, but his war-weary militiamen were considerably less so.[20]

On February 18, 1781, Colonel Arthur Campbell and 100 Washington County militia made their rendezvous with Colonel Preston's 350 men and the combined force began its march southeastward. As the more battle-experienced of the two leaders was Campbell, he was in command of the militiamen when, on February 28, they reached the camps of Greene's army on the Dan River. The welcome given them was restrained, inasmuch as the staff officers had expected from southwest Virginia 1100 instead of the 450-man detachment. However, within the next few weeks, Greene's forces grew to about 4400 men and the American General felt ready to re-enter North Carolina.[21]

On March 14, 1781, Greene crossed the Dan River and camped on the outskirts of the small North Carolina town called Guilford Courthouse, near where he intended to attack Corn-

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[20]Goodridge Wilson, "Three Battles Changed Course of Revolutionary War," Roanoke Times, February 8, 1970. William Preston to Thomas Jefferson, February 10, 1781, CVSP, I, 503.

[21]Johnston, Middle New River Settlements, 81. Goodridge Wilson, "Battle of Guilford Courthouse Changed Course of War," Roanoke Times, March 15, 1970. Charles Magill to Thomas Jefferson, March 2, 1781, CVSP, I, 551.

wallis. Although he had nearly a two-to-one advantage in manpower over the British, he realized that the core of his strength comprised only fifteen or sixteen hundred battle-trained Continentals. The remainder of his troops consisted of inexperienced but frontier-toughened militiamen whose obedience and discipline was untested.

Greene divided his army into six regiments with General "Light Horse Harry" Lee's Legions, supported by Colonel Preston's riflemen and Colonel Campbell's cavalry, on the right flank, Colonel William Washington's cavalry on the left flank, and the entire North Carolina militia in the center. Lee's reinforced regiment was ordered ahead of the entrenched American army to determine the position of the British. As they reached Whitsell's Mill on Little Horsepen Creek, Tarleton's cavalry, also scouting ahead of its army, appeared on the other side of the creek.

In the skirmish that followed, Preston's brief, active career with the Continental Army ended. With the first reports of musket fire, Preston's horse became frightened and dashed across a shallow mill pond. Taken by surprise by the animal's action, Preston toppled from his horse and fell into the water. For a brief moment, the fifty-one-year-old colonel was in danger of being captured by the British light-horse company that was pushing Lee's Legions back into the American lines. However, his young kinsman, Major Joseph Cloyd, raced to his commander's side, got his leader on Cloyd's horse and the two reached a less exposed place on the field of battle.

Preston, exhausted by the ordeal, did not return to his command and his troops were assigned to Colonel Campbell. For the next two hours, as he rested behind the dissolving American lines, Preston received word of the slow but methodical retreat of his comrades. He was encouraged by reports that the British were sustaining heavy casualties, but he was dismayed to hear that his unseasoned militiamen were running from the lines of battle. At nightfall, he rejoined the defeated army as it marched northwestward to Troublesome Creek, about fifteen miles from the battlefield, to recouperate from its struggle.[22] Even though the British victory at Guilford Courthouse was, as Colonel Tarleton called it, "the pledge of ultimate defeat" for the crown troops, it was an embarassing loss for the American Army. The unreliability of inexperienced militia had proved to be the nemesis of Greene's expedition.

When reports of the battle reached the new state capital of Richmond, they criticized the western militia's cowardly actions. Although Preston's health had rapidly declined since his ordeal, he penned an able defense of his men. In a letter to Governor Thomas Jefferson, Preston insisted that his men

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[22]Wickwire, Cornwallis, 294-308. C. Stedman, The History of the Origin, Progress, and Termination of the American War (2 vols., London, 1794), II, 333-43. Henry Lee, Memoirs of the War in the Southern Department of the United States (New York, 1870), 263-71. T. L. Preston, Historical Sketches, 129. R. Ernest and Trevor N. Dupuy, Military Heritage of America (New York, 1956), 106-07. Joseph Cloyd had been the young man who had escaped the Indian Massacre near Greenfield Plantation in 1763.

had held their formations throughout the battle until overpowering attackers broke through their lines and they were forced to retreat. Furthermore, he claimed that his men stayed with the retreating army until their terms of enlistment had expired and only then had returned to Montgomery and Washington Counties. He concluded that,

> It gave me great pain that our militia returned so soon; but . . . they did duty on the enemy's line as long as any other that went from behind the mountains . . . I obeyed every order, . . . and underwent the same fatigue . . . that any other Militia officer did while I was on duty. . . .[23]

Even though Lord Cornwallis surrendered his British army at Yorktown in October, 1781, fighting continued elsewhere and troops and supplies were needed from all the colonies. For the next two years, William Preston continued to recruit men for the Continental Army and for the defense of his county against renegade Indians and isolated bands of Tories. However, as the next two years saw overtures of peace between Great Britain and the United States, less urgent were the calls for his assistance. For the frontier aristocrat from Montgomery County, it seemed that, at long last, a time of peace was to come to his domain.[24]

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[23]Caruso, Appalachian Frontier, 251. William Preston to Thomas Jefferson, April 13, 1781; CVSP, II, 36. Spelling improved.

[24]For accounts of militia recruitment and frontier defense, see Thomas Jefferson to William Preston, May 28, 1781; "Preston Papers," VMHB, XXVII (1919), 319-20. William Fleming to Preston, June 12, 1781; James Hayes Papers, University of Virginia,

On the morning of June 29, 1783,[25] William Preston prepared to attend a militia muster of his regiment at the home of Michael Price, about three miles from Smithfield Plantation. Accompanying him was his son, John Preston, and his kinsman, Evan Shelby. Since the day was hot, Preston rested briefly in the shade before undertaking to review his assembled troops. Declaring that his head hurt and that he desired to lay down in Price's house, the old warrior was borne away. Presumably, the fifty-three-year-old Preston had suffered a cerebral stroke. Soon he could not speak. He indicated that he wished to be bled, but those about him refused to comply with his request. Susanna Smith Preston was summoned to perform the gruesome task. However, she did not know the proceedure for bleeding and she was forced to stand by idly while her husband's life came to an end.[26]

William Preston's was a life dedicated to the initiation of a better country, state and county where he and his fellow countrymen might enjoy their liberty and property. He did not

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Charlottesville, Virginia. Preston to William Davie, July 26, and July 28, 1781; and Preston to Thomas Nelson, July 28, 1781, CVSP, II, 255, 266, 264-65. William Preston to his field officers, August 24, 1782, "Preston Papers," VMHB, XXVIII (1920), 346. See also, John C. Miller, Triumph of Freedom: 1775-1783 (Boston, 1948), 610.

[25]The date of Preston's death is uncertain. T. L. Preston, Historical Sketches, records the date as July 28, 1781. However, Preston's tombstone, engraved by his son, Francis, sets the death date as June 29, 1783. As letters were received from Preston after the July 28, 1781,date, it is assumed that the latter date is correct.

[26]T. L. Preston, Historical Sketches, 130-31.

live to learn of the signing of the Treaty of Peace in Paris on September 3, 1783. Neither did he live to enjoy the more tranquil times which settled over his frontier Virginia. But as a Virginia aristocrat, albeit a frontier aristocrat, Preston had been always as conscious of his posterity as of himself.

Chapter V: Conclusion

Often the subject of a biography becomes the symbol of undeserved praise, due either to the possession of virtues extraordinary in his time or to superlative traits which with little reason are undeservedly attributed to him. Considering the broad spectrum of late colonial and revolutionary leaders in Virginia, it is not surprising that William Preston did not achieve wide popular or historical fame. In truth, he was too provincial and too confined in his sphere of influence to affect during his fifty-three-year lifespan the sequence of events in Virginia as a whole, much less of the nation. However, when in any appraisal of the settlements and the development of transmontane Virginia in the eighteenth century, William Preston has been reckoned one of the most prominent participants in and shapers of events which molded that section of the Old Dominion.

Born of parents who themselves possessed no political, social or economic power, William Preston was as a youth a tenant immigrant on the Virginia frontier who, at an early age, assumed the care of his mother and sisters. He was diverted from what might have been the life of a small farmer by his prominent benefactor and uncle, James Patton. For Preston, Patton secured an education and a foothold in the public and military offices which later won for the young frontiersman the foremost place of leadership and responsibility in the western counties of the colony. By taking advan-

tage of the duties and the powers of his multiple offices--surveyor, sheriff, county lieutenant, justice of the peace and Burgess--Preston initiated and insured for himself and his heirs a land-based dominion which would reap them the harvests of a wise investor.

But more important than the offices which he occupied, the young leader assumed control from his uncle an immense domain, which, by 1783, was more than 100,000 acres in extent, and which dotted the borderlands between the Ohio River and the Allegheny Mountains. Preston cultivated his advantages by seizing every opportunity after Patton's death in 1755 to increase his influence and thereby to safeguard and expand his family's possessions in the hinterland of Virginia, which was soon to include most of Kentucky. Preston's personal and public interests in the geographical section in which he resided grew as he ably defended and enlarged first his Greenfield Plantation on Buffalo Creek and later his Smithfield Plantation, south of the Draper's Meadow community. He created a Preston dynasty in Virginia and Kentucky, based not only upon ability, priority, possessions and kinship but, above all, upon conscientious public service.

As the western frontier became more closely integrated with the older, eastern section of Virginia, Preston's interest in and concern for his section prompted him to seek election to a seat in the House of Burgesses. At a time when the divisions between Great Britain and her colonies were becoming distinct, Preston noted with growing concern the

effect of these conflicts first on the county of Augusta, then of Botetourt, next of Fincastle and finally of Montgomery. Influenced in Williamsburg by the examples set by his colleagues--Edmund Pendleton, Patrick Henry, Peyton Randolph and George Washington--he seemed never to have weighed or adopted any high-principled philosophy on the basic right and privileges of man. Whatever philosophic principles might have interested such men as George Mason or Thomas Jefferson, Preston's conception of the American Revolution was infinitely pragmatic.

Any examination of that frontier magnate's career must contradict the speculative notions that the frontier of America provided a source of democratic principles. Preston's was a life devoted to the acquisition of western land. For him, the cause of independence was independence to acquire more land, free of restraints imposed from afar which inhibited the cause of progress and, indeed, of civilization.

Preston's life was one in which strong men sought to tame the forces of Nature--the forests, the wild beasts, the unploughed land and the irresponsible red aborigines. In creating a new empire of liberty, men like William Preston did not doubt that the people themselves could be relied upon to protect the rights of all citizens, to insure the blessings of peace and prosperity, and to acknowledge the leadership of men like himself.

Appendix I

A Partial Listing of Land Transactions

In Which William Preston Had An Interest

Date	Type of Transaction				Acreage	Persons From, To, or With	Location
	B	S	G	C*			
1747	x				520	Wm. Beverley	Calfpasture R.
1749	x				365	Wm. Beverley	Augusta County
			x		685	Beverley Patent	Augusta County
1750	x				334	Alex. Wright	Augusta County
1751	x				215	Geo. Campbell Sam. Fencher	Calfpasture R.
1752	x				277	James Brown	Augusta County
1754	x				626	James Davis	Catawba Creek, Roanoke River
				x	5600		Roanoke River
1757	x				145	James Coyle	Shenandoah R.
	x				200	James Davis	Augusta County
1759	x				191	Stephen Rentfroe	Greenfield Pl.
	x				203	John Marshall	Catawba Creek
		x			145	Thos. Waddell	Augusta County
1760	x				335	Tobias Smith	Roanoke River
			x		340		Roanoke River
			x		175		Roanoke River
1761				x	1200		
	x				226	St. Rentfroe	Greenfield Pl.
	x				141	St. Rentfroe	Greenfield Pl.
1762	x				¼	John Stewart	Staunton
		x			500	Mary Preston	Calfpasture R.
1763	x				142	Jos. McDonald	Tinkers Creek
	x				1½	Thos. Fulton	Staunton
1764	x				400	Executors, James Patton	James River
		x			1½	Danial Kid Robert Button	Staunton
1765		x			130	Howard Hinds	Augusta County
		x			204	Dan. McCormick	Augusta County

*B: Bought

S: Sold

G: Granted

C: Claimed

Appendix I

(Continued)

Date	Type of Transaction				Acreage	Persons From, To, or With	Location
	B	S	G	C			
1766	x				191	Executors Geo. Robinson	Augusta County
1769				x	1050		Potts Creek, James River
1770	x				220	Wm. Lee	Botetourt Co.
	x				82	Paul Garrison	Catawba Creek
	x				626	John Davis	Catawba Creek
		x			196	Sol. Simpson	Botetourt Co.
1771		x			94	Rob. Galloway	Botetourt Co.
1772	x				202	Jos. Jenkins	Looney's Creek Roanoke River
	x				760	Francis Smith	Botetourt Co.
	x				23	Jon. Clerk	Catawba Creek
		x			95	John Galloway	James River
		x			195	Rob. Caldwell	Catawba Creek
		x			277	John McDougal	
		x			22	Thos. Madison	Roanoke River
			x		136		Botetourt Co.
			x		90		Botetourt Co.
1773	x				315	Ed. Winston	New River
			x		220		Botetourt Co.
			x		393		Roanoke River
1774	x				255	Wm. Ingles	New River
		x			400	Rob. Galloway	Potts Creek
			x		3000	King George	
			x		1000		Falls of Ohio
			x		1000		Forks of Ohio
			x		1000		Elkhorn River
1775	x				347	Jos. Phipps	Cove Creek
		x			220	Wm. Ward	James River
		x			60	Wm. Lauderdale	James River
		x			250	Jos. Phipps	James River
				x	1000		Kentucky River
1776		x			220	John Burk	Barber Creek
1778		x			41	Geo. Robertson	Roanoke River

Appendix I

(Continued)

Date	Type of Transaction				Acreage	Persons From, To, or With	Location
	B	S	G	C			
1779	x				150	Henry Smith	Potts Creek
	x				900	Thos. Pickens	New River
		x			102	Jo. Armstrong	Big Meadow
		x			147	Wm. Wilson	James River
		x			684	Peter Hager	Augusta County
		x			320	Peter Hager	Augusta County
1780	x				985	Thos. Walker	New River
		x			150	Wm. Madison	Botetourt Co.
		x			165	Jo. Thompson	Botetourt Co.
		x			90	Jos. Reyburn	Botetourt Co.
		x			175	H. Waterson	Botetourt Co.
		x			196	J. Snodgrass	Botetourt Co.

Totals For This Listing

Number of Acres Bought.....9377 3/4

Number of Acres Sold.....3009 1/2

Number of Acres Granted.....8039

Number of Acres Claimed.....8850

Compiled From the Court Records Of

Augusta County

Botetourt County

Fincastle County

Montgomery County

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COLONEL WILLIAM PRESTON, 1729-1783

by

Bruce Douglas Tuttle

(ABSTRACT)

William Preston, frontier aristocrat, was active in the settlement and development of Virginia's Appalachian frontier during the second half of the eighteenth century. An immigrant of Irish antecedents, Preston enjoyed the favor of his benevolent uncle, James Patton, and succeeded him as the area's principal land magnate. By taking advantage of his multiple public and military offices--surveyor, sheriff, county lieutenant, justice of the peace and Burgess--Preston assumed the foremost place of leadership and responsibility in the western counties of Augusta, Botetourt, Fincastle and Montgomery.

Preston's was a life devoted to the acquisition of western land. His personal and public interests in transmontane Virginia grew as he ably defended and enlarged first his Greenfield Plantation in Botetourt County, and later his Smithfield Plantation in Montgomery County. By the time of his death in 1783, the frontier land baron controlled more than one hundred thousand acres which dotted the borderlands between the Ohio River and the Allegheny Mountains.

Preston's active participation in the American Revolution was more the result of a desire to insure an independence

to ingross more land, free of restraints imposed from afar, than to initiate democratic freedoms that were the goal of Virginia's leading Revolutionary theorist, Thomas Jefferson.

In any appraisal of the settlement and the development of transmontane Virginia, William Preston has been reckoned one of the most prominent participants in and shapers of events which molded that section of the Old Dominion.