

William Preston, Revolutionary, 1781*

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As 1781 began, news arrived of a crushing defeat the Americans had inflicted on British Lieutenant Colonel Banastre Tarleton at Cowpens, South Carolina, on January 17. American Brigadier General Daniel Morgan — using militia from Georgia, the Carolinas, and Virginia — had routed the English. The fact that Cornwallis still possessed superior manpower created a need for Greene to have more soldiers if he was to wage an effective campaign. Word now arrived that Cornwallis was on his way toward the Moravian towns in North Carolina; from there he was expected to head toward Virginia in order to destroy the Lead Mines. Once again, as earlier in the Revolution, Virginia looked to Preston and Montgomery County for ammunition from the Lead Mines and for more soldiers. Preston called his fellow county officers together on February 8 and ordered out all of the militia. In spite of a great decline in his own health “from frequent apoplectic premonitions,” he decided to join the men going to the Carolinas and called his sixteen-year-old son Francis home from school to take care of the family. Jefferson wrote Preston that Cornwallis, “maddened by his losses at the Cowpens & Georgetown,” had burned his wagons so he could move more quickly toward Virginia, and he urged Preston in the “most earnest terms” to collect a quarter of his militia and send them immediately to help Greene — “I cannot believe you will rest a moment after receiving this till you see your men under march.” Preston had already acted, and county militiamen were assembling at the Lead Mines.

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Preston's Last Campaign

On February 18 Preston marched with 350 riflemen to join militia units from Botetourt and Washington counties to combine with the forces of General Andrew Pickens of South Carolina near Hillsborough, where Tarleton's Legion waited. Even while marching, Preston got word from Pickens that the English were on the move, making it expedient that the Patriot forces harass the British rear guard to prevent them from getting to a place where naval ships could come. He pled, "For God's sake don't delay." Pickens followed this initial message with another one urging: "General Greenes dependence lies greatly on the mountain men. I am sure you will not delay."¹

Very few details are known about the role of Preston and his men in Greene's skirmishes with the English during February and March 1781. On their way to their assigned locations, they passed through Moravian towns in North Carolina. The accounts of their visit written by Moravians living in Salem provide an interesting picture of this group of Montgomery militiamen both before and after they engaged in battle.² The Moravians generally found Preston's men to be very "orderly" when Preston was present — a great contrast to soldiers from other areas.³ An advance party of Preston's men, "most of them drunk," arrived in the Moravian town around February 21 without their leader, frightening several church members. In contrast, five blacksmiths from Preston's unit were very orderly and began working on horse shoes once they arrived. The next morning Preston's soldiers continued to create a disturbance and had to be entertained with organ playing and "other interests." But once Preston and Walter Crockett arrived, the whole atmosphere changed. Their initial meeting was "unusually hearty on both sides, and Colonel Preston assured us of his favor and that nothing that we had suffered from his soldiers should go unpunished." He also promised that none of his men would be quartered in their homes but would stay in the magazine, sheds, and stables around town. After everyone settled down, the following idyllic scene took place according to the Moravians:

Colonel Preston, his officers, and many privates listened to the organ, and the Colonel had a most friendly conversation with Br. Marshall about our affairs, looked at the bark-mill with interest, and said once that he prized this day as one of the most

pleasant in his life.... In the Tavern it was as quiet as though only two men were there. The soldiers, around their camp-fires, were also orderly, and when there was a hard rain during the night they withdrew into the sheds and stables with all modesty.

Another account related that after Preston took possession of their stables, the soldiers “behaved very well” after the Moravians supplied them with bread, meat, and corn. By 9:00 p.m. “it was so quiet that no one would have known that so many men were in the town.” On February 23 Preston left with his men, but before they left, Preston gave the Moravians a “letter of thanks, written and signed by his own hand, expressing his appreciation of all the good and friendly service which had been given to him here. At leaving he spoke most affectionately to us.” In contrast, later that same day another group came demanding food and drink “and some of them went further.” Several days later South Carolinians commanded by General Andrews Pickens stole hats from the Moravians and took bread without paying for it. On the same day, more men from Preston’s unit, led by Joseph Cloyd, arrived on their way to join Preston and provided a contrast to the other soldiers: “They were very polite and obliging, and spent the night here.” These accounts suggest some of the atmosphere and leadership Preston was able to engender among those who served under him. He conveyed a relatively effortless style of leadership based on his aura and example rather than an authoritarian approach.

Once Preston’s militiamen arrived in the Hillsborough area, the Loyalists, who had been forced to join Preston’s army to keep from having their lands confiscated, deserted, reducing his force considerably. Preston did not leave a detailed account of what transpired except to report that they did “hardy duty” under General Pickens for twelve or fourteen days on the enemy lines without the benefit of full provisions. He further reported: “Part of the men were in one action, and the whole in a second; in both overpowered by numbers, and in the last broken and dispersed with the loss of their blankets.”⁴ From other accounts, it is known that Preston became part of Lieutenant Colonel Henry Lee’s Legion and Pickens’ soldiers from South Carolina, with these three units moving between Greene’s American army and English forces led by Cornwallis in the area around Troublesome Creek and Reedy Fork (southeast of modern-day Fayetteville).⁵ In the process of their maneuvers, Preston’s forces along with other

American forces engaged Tarleton's soldiers on March 2 near a plantation on the Alamance River. In the initial encounter, the Americans managed to kill several English soldiers, but the British then defeated the Americans in a counterattack. Many of the wounded were brought to Salem for care before being sent home. And for the next two days after the battle, the Moravian towns began to experience "commotion . . . in full force, for one party after another came from the army with riderless horses" sent away from the battle area by Greene due to a lack of forage. Part of these were reportedly "all Colonel Preston's horses and about fifty of his men." The Moravians again provided food, shelter and, in some cases, spiritual comfort.

After the Alamance River defeat, Greene repositioned his forces, placing Preston at Wetzell's Mill a few miles from the previous encounter at Alamance River, as a way of keeping the English from attacking the main force of the Americans. On March 6 the Americans were again soundly defeated. Preston's militiamen complained that the "burthen, and heat, of the Day was entirely thrown upon them, and that they were to be made a sacrifice by the Regular Officers to screen their own Troops."⁶ In this brief skirmish, Preston's daughter related that her father, who was riding a "large fiery young horse that took freight at the report of the guns," took off through a mill pond, with the result that Preston was thrown off the horse with British light troops on horses breathing down his back. At this point, Colonel Joseph Cloyd dismounted and helped the overweight Preston get on Cloyd's horse, saving his life.⁷ In commenting on this accident a few weeks later, John Floyd told Preston, "I do not think it reasonable that you should stand in the fighting department" and offered to "stand in your place if I can have timely notice by Express." He asked, "Is she [Mrs. Preston] willing for you to engage personally in war?"⁸

By this time the colonel was having difficulty keeping his militia in the field, and he decided to return home.⁹ Preston and William Campbell's men were reentering the Moravian towns by March 7. Some were wounded, some without shoes or stockings, and others "utterly worn out." Starving for food, some of the men broke into a spring house and took all of the eggs, but after Preston arrived around March 10 he got things under control and "looked after the wounded with all love and faithfulness." Illustrating his courtesy, Preston and his fellow officers later wrote a note of thanks to the Moravians in

Salem “for their polite behavior, the hospitable manner in which they received and treated the Troops; and the Inconvenience to which they put themselves to entertain them, and to make their stay one Night Comfortable.”¹⁰ Preston even took time to discuss literature with these devout people, and he borrowed *Greenland History* from one of their members.¹¹

Criticism and Other Problems

Soon after Preston and his men left on March 15, the main American force under Greene fought a drawn battle with the British at Guilford Courthouse. And before long Preston began to hear “illiberal Reflections . . . being wantonly thrown out against my Character by several Gentlemen down the Country” for his leaving the army early and calling out the Montgomery militia without state approval.¹² Preston also felt a need to defend his early departure to Jefferson:

It gave me great pain that our Militia returned so soon; but I will venture to say, they did duty on the Enemy’s lines as long as any other that went from behind the mountains, and much longer than some. I obeyed every order that I received either from Genl. Green, Gl. Pickens or Colo. Williams of the Maryland line; and underwent the same fatigue, watching, fasting and Danger, that any other militia officer did while I was on duty.¹³

Jefferson accepted his explanation by chiding: “This Narrative was not necessary with us for your personal Justification.” He found Preston’s actions “not only justifiable but laudable.”¹⁴ Other Preston friends such as James Robertson were just “heartily glad you escaped out of the hands of your enemies in Carolina.”¹⁵

But William Preston’s problems were not over. The Cherokees, who had earlier appeared to be on the verge of attacking the frontier, still remained a potential problem and, with the English army threatening Virginia, there was the need to pacify them. The Virginia Council, as a result, appointed Preston along with Colonel William Christian and Major Joseph Martin to meet with commissioners from North Carolina in order to “treat with the Cherokee Indians on the subject of peace.”¹⁶ Preston found it necessary to decline the appointment because of the distance he would be required to travel to the negotia-

tions and his “very infirm state of Health, together with the Care of the Militia, which engrosses far the largest part of my Time.”¹⁷

Preston’s efforts to support Virginia’s cause during the rest of the Revolution were an embarrassment to him. As colonel of Montgomery County, he would frequently be called upon by Virginia to raise a certain number of militia to help out the cause, but he could not produce the men. In late March the Virginia Council passed an order requesting that several counties including Montgomery raise one fourth of their militia to reinforce Greene’s army in the South.¹⁸ Preston warned Jefferson that he would do his best but did not expect any success because of the continued disaffection of at least half of his militia and the fact that most of his men and officers “have been so harrassed with hard Duty for near a Year past that they begin to complain for want of Time to attend their Farms for the Support of their Families.”¹⁹ Added to these problems was the fact that he had only five companies to cover a frontier of eighty miles, so that if he drew militia from those areas, their families would be left exposed to ongoing Indian attacks. Preston, as a result, could not even find enough men to guard the strategic Lead Mines, now in great danger from Loyalists.²⁰

When word came that Cornwallis had crossed the James River near Richmond in pursuit of Lafayette, Jefferson immediately wrote Preston requesting that he send all available men to help the French general. He reminded Preston: “The whole Country lies open to a most powerful army headed by the most active, enterprising & vindictive officer who has ever appeared in arms against us.”²¹ Preston tried to meet the orders in two ways. He initially wrote to Colonel Walter Crockett, asking him to raise soldiers as requested by the governor — “I can only beg of you for Heaven’s Sake to spare no pains, but use every possible Exertion to raise these men by the time appointed.”²² Preston also tried to encourage his men by taking a ride through the county, urging them to rendezvous and march but to “little purpose.”²³ Then in June when Banastre Tarleton raided Charlottesville in an effort to capture Jefferson and his fellow legislators, who had fled there recently from Richmond, Preston was again requested to raise men, a request which he could not fulfill.²⁴ And when another request was made in July, a frustrated Preston wrote the new governor, Thomas Nelson, Jr., to explain the reasons for Mont-

gomery County's dismal record in responding to calls for soldiers. Dissaffection, already at more than one half, was "gaining Ground every day." In the previous year, after spending one month attempting to put down a Loyalist insurrection, he did not believe "one Proselyte was gained." By now he knew that some of the Loyalists who had agreed to serve in the Continental Army had deserted. With so many Loyalists, the Whigs were afraid to leave their properties and families to their "mercy." Just as important was the large frontier area to be protected from Indians, who usually visited them two or three times a year. For these reasons, he found it "impossible" to comply with the governor's orders.²⁵ To Colonel William Davies, Commissioner of the Virginia War Office, he was even more pessimistic about his chances: "I might venture to add as my Opinion that such is the Temper and Situation of the People, that if the Fate of the United States was to depend on this draught being complied with on the part of the Private men of our Militia, they would not go."²⁶ All of these problems, including the possibility that Greene would call for men, led Preston's old friend, Thomas Lewis, to commiserate:

You live in a rascaly County So do I & so dos every body a majority of Rascals will render any place Rascaly. I wish it were in my power, to retire with Some few I could name from such rascaly Sceens as too frequently present themselves.²⁷

Apparently the state gave up on getting soldiers from Preston, and no further requests were made. However, the war office sent a circular to Preston requesting his assistance on getting clothing together to help the cause.²⁸ When Cornwallis surrendered to the Americans on October 19, 1781, at Yorktown, tensions on the frontier decreased and William Preston, in an "infirm State of health," turned his attention to "private affairs."²⁹

Business Successes

In many ways the Revolution actually bolstered Preston's business interests, and he took advantage of every opportunity. In particular, a strong market developed for hemp, the major crop produced at Greenfield and Smithfield. With no imports coming from England, citizens relied on the coarse linen made from hemp, and the state counted on the local ropewalk factories to produce all of their war

needs. This market placed Preston in such a strong position that he could not grow enough hemp to meet the demand. In fact, he did not even have to look for people to buy his hemp since Edward Johnson in Manchester purchased all he could produce and continued to negotiate most of his business deals throughout the war. In this kind of market, he could generally barter his hemp for any needs he had, or he could demand cash as inflation continually increased the value of hemp. For example, in 1779 Johnson set up a joint venture with Preston in which slaves, who were in high demand, would be bartered for hemp.³⁰

Preston also served as Johnson's business agent on the frontier, looking for hemp wherever he could find it, and they also engaged in other deals to procure the valuable hemp. On at least one occasion, Johnson sent three wagons loaded with such scarce items as iron and salt in order to get hemp, on which he would now pay a 5 percent commission. After suggesting a price of £700 per ton of hemp, he told Preston that he was willing to go higher to get enough for his ropewalk factory. By October 1779, with inflation rampant, Johnson asked Preston not to establish any firm contracts before the hemp arrived at his store because he would pay the going rate at the time it arrived. And still hemp continued to rise in value faster than any other crop.

Johnson and Preston had only one major argument during their business ventures. Preston felt uncomfortable taking a commission from his brother-in-law for finding hemp, but Johnson insisted that those running the ropewalk factory expected to pay commissions. If it had only been for Johnson's personal use, he would not have given Preston a commission, "but as you threaten never to do me another good office without your request is granted if you insist upon it I must comply."³¹

The only signs of trouble in Preston's business operations were disturbing reports from his various properties including Greenfield. In early 1779 he engaged Robert Harris as new overseer at Greenfield. Harris, who arrived in May 1779, reported that the plantation looked like the neighbors were just waiting to confiscate it and that he faced a major task in repairing the fences that protected the crops from animals.³² Other reports from renters were similarly bad. In one case, many fences had been destroyed and hogs had gotten in and damaged the corn and hemp for a loss of £1,000.³³ From these scant accounts

concerning hemp and properties, it is clear Preston tried to keep his business affairs going during the traumatic concluding years of the war. But aside from these activities and the fact that he grew flax, wheat, rye, barley, corn, potatoes, turnips, hay, oats, and probably cotton and cabbage on his farms, little else is known.³⁴ He also continued his successful distillery business.³⁵

And of course he continued to work or rent his lands. For example he rented land on the New River, known as Dingus's Old Place, for six years to Mathew Kennedy. In exchange, Kennedy agreed to teach one of Preston's slaves how to weave, with Preston providing all materials. The agreement specifically stated that Kennedy did not have to make any buildings or clear any ground except what he needed to support his own family. What Preston was really thinking about was having Kennedy run a ferry over the New River with Kennedy to receive half of the fares and Preston the other half.³⁶ What is clear is that Preston did very well with his business activities during the war; for example, in late winter 1780 he reassured his nephew, John Brown, Jr., whom he was helping financially to attend William and Mary College, that he could easily assist him:

Don't let yourself be straitned, nor suffer the thoughts of it to sit heavy on your mind. For what I can spare, I will send it with the same Pleasure as to my own Son; and believe me, I have a good prospect of making pretty largely out of my Distillery & other means this Spring.³⁷

As the Revolution ended, the major economic problem confronting all families in Virginia was a dramatic increase in inflation, a frequent subject of letters to Preston.³⁸ Since most of his wealth was in land and easily bartered crops, he probably survived these economic problems better than his poorer neighbors.

Surveying Results

Preston's activities as a surveyor naturally suffered during the last years of the war. From 1779 through 1781 the Montgomery County Record of Plotts shows no activity by either Preston or his assistant surveyors.³⁹ But he received numerous inquiries about previous land questions arising primarily from grants given to soldiers in earlier years or in regard to Loyal Company land grants in Kentucky.⁴⁰ In the spring

of 1779 the Virginia legislature enacted two laws that attempted to deal with past problems and to look ahead to the future for how Virginia should grant or sell its lands in the west. To settle past problems, the law approved all surveys made by county surveyors or their assistants before January 24, 1778. This law made many people happy, for it certified such longstanding practices as previous headrights, treasury rights, and military bounties. Preston must have been pleased also because, in effect, it approved the 200,000 acres already surveyed by the Loyal Land Company, for whom he had worked as a surveyor in earlier years. Other companies such as the Ohio Company, which had not yet surveyed their lands, lost all of their claims. All past claims had to be completed within one year, although this deadline was extended four times.⁴¹ Another 1779 law reopened the Virginia land office and set up detailed provisions on the appointment of surveyors and how they were to conduct their business.⁴²

Almost immediately after passage of this bill, Preston began to get requests for settling previous land claims that had gone dormant during the early years of the Revolution. For example, Jefferson requested that he look up land entries for Colonel Byrd's widow so that she could claim lands given her husband by governor's warrants.⁴³ Preston also had to send individuals to Williamsburg to find the original patents for lands at the College of William and Mary so that he could meet the deadlines of the new law.⁴⁴ Some of the requests dealt with land issues in Montgomery County, but the majority revolved around surveys completed by Preston's surveyor in Kentucky, John Floyd, as part of the Loyal Land Company properties when Kentucky was still part of Montgomery County.⁴⁵ Preston also took personal advantage of the law by sending his own warrants to Floyd, asking him to survey five separate pieces of property of five hundred acres each.⁴⁶ The effort to honor past military warrants was so successful that by May 1780 no lands were left for newcomers under state warrants as provided by the law.⁴⁷

Preston's personal landholdings dramatically increased during the last years of the Revolution. It was almost as if he was deliberately trying to put together an inheritance for his rapidly increasing family at a time of declining health. Between 1779 and 1781 Preston received grants of land from the state amounting to 10,431 acres, most of it in Kentucky coming as a result of military warrants from the

earlier war against the French and Indians in the 1760s. Many of these lands were never surveyed, and later generations of his family would lose them because they could not get to Kentucky fast enough to claim them.

He also engaged in buying and selling lands amounting to 2,035 acres of purchases for a cost of £2,973.17 and 1,343 acres of sales for £1,343.⁴⁸ His biggest single land acquisition during his lifetime also became official when he inherited Robinson's Tract on Woods River (now known as New River) from his father, who had died more than thirty years before.⁴⁹ As the last year of the Revolution began in 1781, Preston found it necessary to prepare a codicil to his will since so much had changed since his previous one. The codicil, which ended up governing his final estate settlement two years later, focused on reallocating his lands, taking into consideration his new purchases and the increase in his family.⁵⁰ This substantial land acquisition late in the war was clearly done with one goal in mind. He wanted to leave each of his children, who now numbered eleven (Letitia was born in 1779 and Thomas Lewis in 1781), a substantial piece of property.⁵¹

Preston's Extended Family

Preston's devoted attention, not only to his own family but to his broader extended family, continued during the final years of the Revolution. One of the nephews he showed the greatest concern for was John Brown, Jr., who was attending William and Mary College with Preston's financial help. In a series of twelve letters written to his uncle over an eighteen-month period, Brown shows a love, affection, and generosity for his uncle which illustrates the close relationship Preston had with many of his nieces and nephews.⁵² He showed his generosity to his nephew in an open-ended offer for his nephew to get money whenever he needed help on Preston's account with John May, one of Preston's business colleagues who lived in Williamsburg.⁵³ It is also seen in the frequent solicitations by the nephew for advice from his uncle on topics such as which classes he should take and who he should study with. One of the classes Preston advised him to take was fencing!⁵⁴ Brown, the preacher's kid, recognized that Williamsburg posed some real temptations to a young person, and given the fact that Preston was still considering William and Mary College as a possible

college for his own sons, Brown's analysis must have made Preston think twice about such a choice:

Vice prevails much in this place but it is of such a kind, that it has a tendency rather to disgust than allure. It is by no means disguised under the Specious appearance of Virtue, but Open, Profane, & contrary to the Sentiments of a Rational Mind. upon this account I think the danger is not so great, & hope by Shunning bad company, by proper Vigilance, together with Divine Aid to avoid this Whirlpool into which so many sink irrecoverably.⁵⁵

In spite of this analysis, Preston still hoped his sons could join Brown so "that such a parcel of swinging mountaineers would be able to stand their hands at a crowded Table, not overloaded, with fat roast beef."⁵⁶ Other relatives also sought advice. For example, after nephew John Breckinridge was elected to the Virginia legislature in 1781, he mentioned his discomfort in going to a position "that I have the smallest Knowledge of, and which I should imagine, would require a good deal of Prudence and Caution." He hoped his uncle would provide him with any cautions that might serve as a "Guide to my Conduct."⁵⁷

Illness

As the Revolution ended, Preston was not a well man; in a letter to Thomas Lewis informing him of his brother Andrew's death, it appears he knew he was nearing the end of his life and he turned philosophical in trying to comfort his friend:

For my part I can almost cry out, "my Soul is weary of my life." The loss of less than half a dozen of Friends more, exclusive of my Family, would make me do so most heartily. Still I believe it to be our Duty to submit without Complaint to the Dispensations of Providence however adverse or Disturbing they may appear to our benighted minds. . . . I would add a short Prayer, That the God of our Fathers may prepare You & I & our Connexions for this certain Change from time to Eternity, and that we may cheerfully resign the Trouble of this World for the well grounded hopes of a Better.

Preston then gave a strong clue on his own feelings about his prospects for living much longer. He regretfully turned down being an executor of Lewis's estate:

At an advanced Age, in a declining state of health, tied down to numerous helpless Family of my own, engaged for the ill fated Estates of two deceased Friends and their worse fated Posterity; I am afraid I cannot act in the Trust your good Brother and My Friend was pleased to repose in me.⁵⁸

Preston must have looked back on the years of the Revolution with mixed feelings. He could be satisfied about the progress made in his own business, land, and family affairs. But he had only been able to help the revolutionary cause against the Loyalists, Indians, and English in a very limited way. The fact that the Loyalists had not been able to more openly support the English in Montgomery County, in contrast to the large organized effort in the Carolinas and Georgia, was an achievement he could be proud of. And limiting the Indians to minor skirmishes due to the efforts put up by his militiamen relieved the rest of Virginia of a major defensive problem. But in an overall sense, he could not claim any major credit for the war's outcome. For the remaining eighteen months of his life, he would continue to focus on the same basic themes that had dominated his life during the Revolution — public affairs, Indians, business, and family.

Endnotes

Abbreviations used in the endnotes:

DM = Draper Manuscripts, State Historical Society of Wisconsin

LC = Library of Congress

LPF = Letter from Letitia Preston Floyd to Benjamin Rush Floyd

LoV = Library of Virginia, Manuscript Division

PP-DM = Preston Papers, Draper Manuscripts, State Historical Society of Wisconsin; transcription by S. C. Stuntz is available at The Filson Club, Louisville, Kentucky

PP-LC = Preston Family Papers, 1727–1896, “f” series at Virginia Historical Society as microfilmed and catalogued by the Library of Congress

PP-VHS = Preston Family Papers, “a” through “e” series, Virginia Historical Society

RVHS-UVA = Roanoke Valley Historical Society as filmed by the University of Virginia

VMHB = *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*

WMC = College of William and Mary

WMQ = *William and Mary Quarterly*

WP = William Preston

1. WP to Thomas Jefferson, 10 February 1781, in *Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Julian P. Boyd et al. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950–), vol. 4, p. 579 (hereafter referred to as *Jefferson Papers*); Thomas Jefferson to WP, 15 February 1781, PP-LC, p. 1104 and Auditor's Accounts, William Preston Papers, LoV; Andrew Pickens to WP, 20 February 1781, *The John P. Branch Historical Papers of Randolph-Macon College*, vol. 4 (June 1915), p. 323 (hereafter referred to as *Branch Papers*); Andrew Pickens to WP, 21 February 1781, *Jefferson Papers*; WP to Thomas Jefferson, 13 April 1781, *Jefferson Papers*, vol. 5, pp. 437–8; and Letitia Preston Floyd to Benjamin Rush Floyd, 22 February 1843, *The Richmond Standard*, 18 September 1880 (hereafter cited as LPF Letter). Only one third of the militia showed up, greatly disappointing Preston. He expected more for several reasons — the enemy was only a day's ride away from the Lead Mines, that time of year was very slack, and he wanted only a short tour of duty. WP to Governor Thomas Nelson, Jr., 28 July 1781, *Calendar of Virginia State Papers and Other Manuscripts Preserved in the Capitol at Richmond* (Richmond: Virginia State Library, 1875–1893), vol. 2, p. 264 (hereafter *Calendar of State Papers*). Jefferson asked that all of the lead be sent to him rather than half to the south as previously ordered, on the basis that the state was being invaded and had a greater need. Thomas Jefferson to Manager of Lead Mines, 19 January 1781, PP-LC, p. 1101.
2. These accounts written in diary style by the Moravians can be found in Adelaide Fries, ed., *Records of the Moravians in North Carolina* (Raleigh: State Department of Archives and History, 1968), pp. 1680–7, 1715–7, 1744–7 (hereafter referred to as Fries, *Moravians*).
3. Soldiers from Botetourt could be very rough and insolent. Margaret Campbell, sister of Arthur and William, complained to one of her brothers on 29 December 1780 that soldiers from Botetourt “insulted me a good deal and Gave me the worst Language ever I got from any one that traveled the road.” Describing them as “mean Raskils,” she hoped her brother would never have to argue with them. PP-VHS, Mss1 P9267c16.
4. WP to Thomas Jefferson, 13 April 1781, *Jefferson Papers*, vol. 5, p. 438.
5. Charles Magill to Thomas Jefferson, 10 March 1781, *Jefferson Papers*, vol. 5, pp. 115–6; Patricia Givens Johnson, *William Preston and the Allegheny Patriots* (Pulaski, Va.: B.D. Smith & Bros., 1976), pp. 283–90.
6. Charles Magill to Thomas Jefferson, 10 March 1781, *Jefferson Papers*, vol. 5, p. 115.
7. LPF Letter.
8. John Floyd to WP, 26 April 1781, DM, 17CC pp. 135–7.
9. WP to Thomas Jefferson, 13 April 1781, *Jefferson Papers*, vol. 5, p. 438. Charles Magill in a letter to Jefferson on 10 March 1781 wrote of repositioning soldiers after the Wetzell's Mill defeat, but noted that many of the “Riflemen” used this as a “plausible excuse for their return home.” *Jefferson Papers*, vol. 5, p. 115.
10. Fries, ed., *Moravians*, vol. 4, pp. 1910–1, and Auditor's Accounts, William Preston Papers, LoV.

11. Later Preston wrote the Moravians with his impressions of the book. According to the Moravian diary, Preston wrote “that he had read with interest and sympathy what our Brethren had endured for the good of the heathen, and that he had never before read anything like it. ‘Certainly,’ wrote he, ‘the hand of the Lord was with them, His wisdom guided them through all, and His grace supported them wonderfully. Through His blessing have they reaped a rich harvest, and have brought so many stupid heathen to the Church and to Christ the great and previous Head thereof. Such examples of disinterested fear of God are all too rare in our times.” Fries, *Moravians*, vol. 4, p. 1793.
12. WP to Thomas Jefferson, 10 April 1781, *Jefferson Papers*, vol. 5, p. 398.
13. WP to Thomas Jefferson, 13 April 1781, *Jefferson Papers*, vol. 5, p. 438.
14. Thomas Jefferson to WP, 21 April 1781, *Jefferson Papers*, vol. 5, p. 524.
15. James Robertson to WP, 30 March 1781, PP-VHS, Mss1 P9267b5.
16. 24 March 1781, H. R. McIlwaine, ed., *Executive Journals of the Council of Colonial Virginia* (Richmond: The Virginia State Library, 1925–1930), vol. 2, p. 318 (hereafter McIlwaine, *Journals of the Council*). Jefferson informed Preston on 24 March 1781 of the appointment. *Jefferson Papers*, vol. 5, pp. 236–7.
17. WP to Thomas Jefferson, 10 April 1781, *Jefferson Papers*, vol. 5, p. 398.
18. 29 March 1781, McIlwaine, *Journals of the Council*, vol. 2, p. 322.
19. WP to Thomas Jefferson, 10 April 1781, *Jefferson Papers*, vol. 5, p. 398.
20. WP to Thomas Jefferson, 13 April 1781, *Jefferson Papers*, vol. 5, p. 437, and WP to Governor Thomas Nelson, Jr., 28 July 1781, *Calendar of State Papers*, vol. 2, p. 265. Some of Preston’s friends felt the Loyalist problem had been reduced. James Thompson wrote him on 2 June 1781: “I understand you have been much Troubled your way with the Torreys but I am informed they are Pretty well Dispersed.” PP-DM, 5QQ p. 96. In terms of success on recruiting, Walter Crockett reported to Preston on 17 May 1781 that only eighteen men and three captains had shown up as required. He expressed frustration that if the law was not enforced no one would come. At the same time, he recognized that since most of these men were “obliged to work and Raize thire Living out of the Ground” it would always be hard to raise the 350 or 400 men that were constantly requested by the state. *Branch Papers*, pp. 324–5.
21. Thomas Jefferson to WP, 28 May 1781, *Branch Papers*, pp. 328–9. This was not the first reminder Preston received from Jefferson that he wanted his militia sent south. On 21 April 1781 Preston got similar orders. Thomas Jefferson to WP, 21 April 1781, *Jefferson Papers*, vol. 5, p. 524.
22. WP to Colonel Walter Crockett, 2 July 1781, *Branch Papers*, pp. 330–1, and “Preston Papers,” *VMHB*, vol. 26 (October 1918), pp. 321–2.
23. WP to Governor Thomas Nelson Jr., 28 July 1781, *Calendar of State Papers*, vol. 2, p. 265.
24. William Fleming to WP, 12 June 1781, *Branch Papers*, pp. 329–30, and “Preston Papers,” *VMHB*, vol. 26, pp. 320–1.
25. WP to Governor Thomas Nelson, Jr., 28 July 1781, *Calendar of State Papers*, vol. 2, p. 265. Governor Nelson’s appeal came to Preston on 19 July 1781. He promised Preston that “vigorous exertion this campaign will insure to America

- what she has been contending for." Greene was close to recovering the south and needed only a little extra help. ("Preston Papers," VMHB, vol. 26, pp. 110–11, and *Branch Papers*, p. 333). The request came from Colonel William Davies that Preston send one seventh of his militia to the south to join Greene. Two days later Davies increased the order to one fourth. Colonel William Davies to WP, 15 and 17 July 1781. ("Preston Papers," VMHB, vol. 26, pp. 109–10, and *Branch Papers*, pp. 331–2). On 17 July 1781 the Virginia Council voted the one-fourth request, 17 July 1781, McIlwaine, *Journals of the Council*, vol. 2, p. 357.
26. WP to Colonel William Davies, 28 July 1781, *Calendar of State Papers*, vol. 2, p. 266.
 27. Thomas Lewis to WP, 1 August 1781, PP-DM, 5QQ p. 97.
 28. Circular from War Office, 25 September 1781, PP-LC, p. 1118.
 29. 20 July 1781, *Journal of the Council of State*, vol. 2, pp. 361–2; WP to Governor Thomas Nelson, Jr., 28 September 1781, *Calendar of State Papers*, vol. 2, p. 501.
 30. Edward Johnson to WP, 14 and 24 July 1779, PP-LC, pp. 1025, 1029. In his desperate attempts to get hemp, Johnson received a bad lot of the crop "not worth the Carriage, it appears to me to have got rotten in the stack and the chief of it got wet on the road so that it's fit for nothing but stuffing saddles." Edward Johnson to WP, 29 August 1779, PP-LC, p. 1032. Some of Johnson's dealings were directly with James Norvell, who was renting property from Preston, but Johnson kept Preston informed in a general way of their business dealings. Edward Johnson to WP, 28 October 1779, PP-LC, p. 1039. In their efforts to establish a price level for their business, Johnson tried to get Preston to take a fourteen-year-old slave. The skipper on the slave boat liked him so much he offered Johnson £1,800 Continental currency for him, whereas Johnson had paid £1,500 for him. Because inflation was running so rampant, Johnson had a tough time setting a price for the young slave but tried to equate previous prices with the current market. He figured he would have cost £65 earlier when one ton of hemp cost £35. So now when hemp was of greater value, he offered him to Preston for two tons of hemp. Johnson ended up keeping the young slave but continued his efforts to have Preston purchase him. On 28 October 1779 Johnson offered him to either Preston or Norvell "as low as possible, but if the terms should not suit you I will direct a price to be put on him to your hemp." Johnson wrote that "a better boy than he is from Character cannot be found." Illustrating the extreme inflation taking place, Preston then offered to pay 1½ tons of hemp, which Johnson thought was a very fair price since he had only recently seen a smaller slave sold for £2,300. PP-LC, pp. 1039, 1048.
 31. Preston apparently lost money on one of their transactions when he was not able to cover the cost of transportation and commission charges for a load of salt and sugar. Johnson hoped Preston would get "credit with your Country folks, for your great tenderness to them, but I fear you will not." Edward Johnson to WP, 28 October 1779, PP-LC, p. 1039. Apparently Preston became very sensitive over these comments, because Johnson responded, "you certainly know me better than to suppose I meant the smallest reflection on your Integrity or attention in the mention of your Country folks. I assure you I did not dream

- that you wou'd have taken the Expression in any other than a laughable light & shall in future be more Careful in Writing, & am as I was then satisfied that you acted as you thought best for my interest." By December Johnson was expressing optimism that with Preston's help and that of other counties he would find enough hemp to keep the ropewalk factory running through the winter. Edward Johnson to WP, 10 December 1779, PP-LC, p. 1048.
32. Robert Harris to WP, 26 February 1779, PP-LC, p. 1013, and Robert Harris to WP, 31 May 1779, Preston-Radford Papers, University of Virginia Library, #6353.
 33. Robert Preston to WP, 4 September 1779, PP-LC, p. 1033.
 34. Johnson asked Preston for flax so that his wife and others could use their three spinners. 14 July 1779, PP-LC, p. 1025. Thomas Tate and David Carr, who worked for Preston at Greenfield and on Catawba River, gave an accounting of grain products on 24 July 1781. PP-VHS. Preston entered into an agreement with Richard McCoy as an overseer for Smithfield in which McCoy agreed to be responsible for supervising the field hands in growing several kinds of crops using his own horses and plough. He was also to repair and build fences. In exchange, he would receive one seventh of the crop, two barrels of corn, hay, and rough fodder for his own stock during the winter, and enough tanning leather to make a pair of shoes for each of his family. Richard McCoy Agreement with WP, 27 March 1781, PP-LC, p. 1107. On 29 March 1780 Johnson informed Preston he would send cotton seed at the first opportunity. PP-LC, p. 1068. John Brown, Jr., Preston's nephew attending William and Mary College, sent him an ounce of cabbage seed on 7 March 1780. PP-DM, 5QQ p. 20.
 35. John Floyd to WP, 5 May 1780, DM, 17CC pp. 124–7.
 36. WP Lease to Mathew Kennedy, 2 March 1780, PP-LC, p. 1060. Other agreements did not turn out as well for either party. Preston had to go into arbitration with David McNeely, who was supposed to build fences on one of Preston's plantations as part of his rental agreement. Arbitrators agreed with Preston that McNeely had not fulfilled his part of the agreement and ordered him to either carry out the assignment or pay Preston £200. 21 May 1781, PP-VHS. Thomas Tate and David Carr informed Preston they did not plan to continue their agreement to work at Greenfield because the house was "not fit to live in," but they agreed to put in a fall crop. 24 July 1781, PP-VHS.
 37. WP to John Brown, Jr., [March 1780], PP-LC, p. 1055.
 38. Thomas Madison wrote Preston on 9 November 1780: "the Scarcity & Demand for money is great. . . . The Demand for Money will continue, till a new Emission takes Place. which will be done." PP-DM p. 5QQ 86. After the Revolution ended, inflation increased even more dramatically, with John Breckinridge writing Preston from Williamsburg on 26 November 1781: "As to Store Goods, they are many Hundred P Cent higher than they formerly were, and sold chiefly for hard money. You perhaps can form some Idea of the Prices, when I assure you, a Person cannot live in Town, one Day, for less than two thousand dollars. I saw the exchange of fifteen hundred for one, given for Store Goods." He had chosen to live five miles out of town to save money and for the exercise of

- riding his horse into town. Even so it was costing him about seven shillings per day to live. PP-DM, 5QQ p. 100.
39. The only exception was five surveys completed by Preston for himself and William Thompson as executors for James Patton in November 1779. Montgomery County Record of Plotts A, 1773–1782, LoV, vol. 33, p. 239.
 40. The intricate politics involved in western land dealings during this period can be traced in Thomas Perkins Abernethy, *Western Lands and the American Revolution* (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1937), pp. 217–57, and in John E. Selby, *the Revolution in Virginia, 1775–1783* (Williamsburg: The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1988), pp. 230–2.
 41. “An Act for adjusting and settling the titles of claimers to unpatented lands under the present and former government, previous to the establishment of the commonwealth’s land office,” William Waller Hening, *The Statutes at Large: Being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1969 reprint of 1819–1823 edition), vol. 10, pp. 35–50. Further extensions were made at the fall session 1779, the spring sessions of both 1780 and 1781, and the fall session of 1781. Hening, *Statutes*, vol. 10, pp. 177–80, 237–41, 403, 484–8.
 42. “An act for establishing a Land office, and ascertaining the terms and manner of granting waste and unappropriated lands,” Hening, *Statutes*, vol. 10, pp. 50–65. Edward Johnson sent Preston a copy of the land act on 29 August 1779 and asked for advice on how he could get land in Kentucky to give his five boys: “Should he purchase it from officers or from the State or whether it would not be better to get some one to purchase for me lands already settled.” PP-LC, 1032. Johnson later approved Preston’s overture to John Floyd to purchase lands for him and guaranteed that he would “Cheerfully comply with any Contract he makes.” Edward Johnson to WP, 10 December 1779, PP-LC, p. 1048. Preston received approval as a surveyor for Montgomery County on 11 March 1780 and from the county on 5 April 1780. Preston Family Papers, WMC, 39.1 P91, Folder 1, and *Montgomery County Order Book 2, 1774–1782*, LoV, vol. 20, p. 292. On 19 January 1780 Preston nominated John Breckinridge to serve as Deputy Surveyor. Breckinridge Papers, LC, vol. 1, p. 68. Before he took up office, the legislature passed a new law providing that deputies be tested by an individual appointed by the county court. Hening, *Statutes*, vol. 10, p. 353. Breckinridge wrote Preston about his concerns that he had not yet perfected his skills but was as good as others who had gotten commissions. He promised that if given a commission, “I will promise not to stretch a Chain until I am thoroughly Master of the Business,” December 1780, *Breckinridge Family Papers*, RVHS-UVA. Later in this period, Preston nominated David McGavock on 7 February 1781 as an assistant who was approved after examination by James McCorkle on 6 November 1781. *Montgomery County Order Book 2, 1774–1782*, LoV, vol. 20, pp. 306, 314.
 43. Thomas Jefferson to WP, 22 October 1779, Auditor’s Accounts, William Preston Papers, LoV; Thomas Jefferson to Mary Willing Byrd, 24 October 1779, *Jefferson Papers*, vol. 3, p. 113.

44. John May to WP, 20 October 1779, PP-LC, p. 1036.
45. Preston's first request came from John Stadler on 21 July 1779, only one month after the Virginia legislature reopened the land office. PP-LC, 1028. On 29 July 1779 Colonel William Russell wrote asking for advice on how his son could get a patent for the father's lands in Kentucky. PP-DM, 5QQ p. 3. On 30 July 1779 Preston's old boss, Thomas Lewis, wrote about getting title for lands granted in Kentucky to Charles, his deceased brother. PP-DM, 5QQ p. 4.
46. Other relatives included a warrant for 1,000 acres for John Breckinridge and two warrants of 500 and 1,500 acres for Letitia Breckinridge. PP-VHS, Mss1 P9267b7. William Breckinridge reported to Preston that Floyd had located Preston's warrants on lands adjoining those he already owned on Bear Grass Creek and the Elk Horn. William Breckinridge to WP, 1 June 1780, PP-DM, 5QQ p. 31.
47. John Floyd to WP, 5 May 1780, DM, 17CC pp. 124–7. Helping alleviate these problems were Indian attacks in Kentucky that lasted through 1781, making it impossible for anyone to even think about surveying when their very lives were in jeopardy. Floyd sent numerous accounts to Preston of their problems with Indians, including John Floyd to WP, 25 August 1780, 26 April, 11 August, and 30 September 1781, DM, 17CC pp. 130–2, 135–9.
48. February 1779, *Botetourt County Deed Book 2, 1773–1780*, LoV, vol. 1, pp. 383–4; 8 February 1779, *ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 375–8; 2 September 1779, *Montgomery County Deed Book A, 1773–1789*, LoV, vol. 1, pp. 216–20; 29 November 1779, *Augusta County Deed Book 23, 1779–1783*, LoV, vol. 11, pp. 191–4; 1 December 1779, *Land Office Grants B, 1779–1780*, LoV, vol. 43, pp. 167–8, 206–7; *Breckinridge Papers*, LC, vol. 1, pp. 39, 58; 9 January 1780, 10 April 1780, 13 April 1780, *Botetourt County Deed Book 2, 1773–1780*, LoV, vol. 1, pp. 502–3, 504–7, 507–13, 513–6; 21 March 1780, *Augusta County Deed Book 23, 1779–1783*, LoV, vol. 11, p. 195; 23 March 1780, *Montgomery County Records, Misc. Records, Correspondence and personal papers*, LoV, Folder O; 5 April 1780, *Montgomery County Order Book 2, 1774–1782*, LoV, 20:292; 15 July 1780, PP-LC, pp. 1079, 1080; 15 July 1780, *Land Office, Grants A, 1779–1780*, LoV, 42:679–80; 17 July 1780, *Land Office, Grants B, 1779–80*, LoV, vol. 43, pp. 423–4, 426–7; *Breckinridge Papers*, Library of Congress, Box 2; 20 July 1780, *Land Office, Patents E, 1775–1776, 1780–1781*, LoV, vol. 46, pp. 48–9; 1 September 1780, Lyman Chalkley, *Chronicles of Scotch-Irish Settlement in Virginia* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1966; originally published in 1912), vol. 3, p. 574; 14 September 1780, *Augusta County Deed Book 24, 1783–1785*, LoV, vol. 11, pp. 30–2; 7 September 1781, *Montgomery County Deed Book A, 1773–1789*, LoV, vol. 1, pp. 240–2; 7 November 1781, *Montgomery County Order Book 2, 1774–1782*, LoV, vol. 20, p. 315; 20 December 1781, *Robert Preston Family Papers*, William and Mary College, 39.1 P92.
49. 23 December 1779, *Land Office Grants B, 1779–1780*, LoV, vol. 43, pp. 262–3.
50. See Appendix F for details on the codicil. Codicil to Preston Will, 14 February 1781, PP-VHS, Mss1 P9267b17 and PP-LC, p. 959.

51. Letitia, named after Preston's sister, was born on 29 September 1779 and baptized in December by her Presbyterian uncle, Reverend John Brown. Thomas Lewis, named after Preston's second cousin and military colleague, was born on 19 August 1781 and was baptized by Reverend Craighead. John Floyd Family Bible, Bible Records, VHS, Mss6:4F6695:2, and Preston Family Bible, VHS, Mss6:4 P9266:1.
52. All of these letters have been printed in "Glimpses of Old College Life," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 1st Ser., vol. 9 (June, October 1900), pp. 18–23, 75–83 and can be found in PP-DM, 5QQ pp. 1, 10, 14, 17, 18, 20, 22, 25, 39, 63, 82–3.
53. John Brown, Jr. to WP, 30 March 1779 and 15 February 1780, PP-DM, 5QQ pp. 1, 18.
54. John Brown, Jr. to WP, 15 February 1780, PP-DM, 5QQ p. 18.
55. John Brown, Jr. to WP, 30 March 1779, PP-DM, 5QQ p. 1.
56. WP to John Brown, Jr., [March 1780], PP-LC, p. 1055. Brown's father also suggested that Preston not send away his sons but suggested he continue hiring someone to teach them at home. He reminded Preston, "Your parental care for the education of your dr Children is very natural & praise worthy." Reverend John Brown, Sr., 29 May 1781, PP-DM, 5QQ p. 95. While these discussions went on, Preston continued to receive books at home. Granville Smith sent Preston two volumes of a "Roman History" and wrote him: "The books you mention I will procure & if it is possible to get them though such at this time are very scarce." 14 February 1780, PP-LC, p. 1059. Edward Johnson sent him eight newspapers and some magazines on 28 October 1779. PP-LC, p. 1039. William Graham wrote from Liberty Hall Academy requesting that he donate on a permanent basis a set of Fordyce's books on preaching he lent earlier. 2 August 1780, PP-LC, p. 1082.
57. John Breckinridge to WP, 22 April 1781, PP-DM, 5QQ p. 94.
58. WP to Thomas Lewis, 29 September 1781, PP-VHS, Mss2 P9265b.