Recollections of 18th Century Virginia Frontier Life
Letitia Preston Floyd, Wife of Governor John Floyd
Introduction by Wirt H. Wills
Transcription by June Stubbs

The following text, written by Mrs. Letitia Preston Floyd in 1843, is an early account of the Preston family's remarkable story and a vivid description of events on the early Virginia frontier.

Letitia Preston, daughter of Colonel William Preston, lived as a child at Smithfield in what is now Blacksburg, Virginia, during the eventful later years of the American Revolution and the turmoil on the frontier. She married her second cousin John Floyd in 1804 just before he entered the Medical College of The University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. He had been born in the wilds of Kentucky in 1783, twelve days after his father Colonel John Floyd died from wounds sustained in an encounter with Indians. Col. Floyd had been William Preston's chief surveyor and had married Jane Buchanan, a cousin of Col. Preston. Dr. John Floyd was Governor of Virginia from 1830–1834. The first child of Letitia Preston and Dr. Floyd, John Buchanan Floyd, was born at Smithfield and also served as Governor of Virginia in 1849–1852.

Mrs. Floyd was 64 years old when she wrote her history and was recounting things from a fairly distant past. As far as is known, her sources consisted only of family correspondence and records along with memories of conversations with members of her family. She probably wrote the initial draft in response to a letter sent to her by Mr. Lyman C. Draper of Buffalo, New York, who wished to "collect material for a work entitled Sketches of the Pioneers." She refers to this request in a letter to her son Benjamin Rush Floyd and includes a version of the history in that letter.¹

The manuscript published here was transcribed on October 13, 1846, by James Cochran.² It is unclear whether he was copying an original draft written for Lyman Draper (if such ever existed) or was extracting the Preston family history from the letter to Rush. The whereabouts of any earlier version, if extant, are unknown. Cochran's copy was sent to the Montgomery County Branch of the Association for the Preservation
of Virginia Antiquities, Blacksburg, Virginia on September 28, 1995, by J. T. Carpenter, Jr. of Charlottesville, Virginia. It was among the papers of Mr. Carpenter's cousin, Thomasina (Tommassa) Goss, a Preston descendant and contributor of items to Smithfield.

The document, as we have it, is reproduced here with strict adherence to the original paragraphing, spelling, punctuation, and grammar. It does not have some of the wording included by Mrs. Floyd in the letter to her son Rush and represents only about half of that letter, suggesting that the letter was a later document, and that the document here may have been copied from the first penning of her expected response to Lyman Draper. The second half of the letter includes a history of Colonel John Floyd, Mrs. Floyd's father-in-law, and more information about her brothers and sisters and their families.³ (This latter half is to be published in the second volume of this journal.)

The account in the present paper lists William Preston's birthday as November 25, 1729. Other versions⁴ and Patricia Givens Johnson's book, William Preston and the Allegheny Patriots⁵, have his birthday on December 25 or 26, 1729. Interestingly, John Frederick Dorman⁶ states that December 25, 1700, was the birthday of Elizabeth (Patton) Preston, mother of William Preston, as well as the day of her death in 1776. Could there be a mix-up in reporting William Preston's birthday?

The letter to Rush Floyd was published in four installments in the Richmond Standard on June 5, 19, 26 and July 3, 1880. The Virginia historian and newspaperman, R. A. Brock, transcribed the letter with 35 footnotes under the title Incidents in the Border Life in Virginia and credited Professor George Frederick Holmes of the University of Virginia for the "valuable, graphic, and highly interesting narrative."⁷ It is important to note that Professor Holmes was married to Eliza Lavalette Floyd⁸ and, therefore, was a brother-in-law of Rush Floyd. He may well have had in his possession the original letter from Mrs. Floyd. In footnote 33, Brock acknowledges that the published account was extracted from a "volume obligingly loaned us by Professor Holmes" and promised to publish further materials from that volume.

Whether James Cochran, in copying the document in 1846, was extracting the Preston family history from Mrs. Floyd's letter to her son or was making use of an earlier version, his transcription gives us an early version of Mrs. Floyd's recollections of her father and his family, friends, and adventures. This narrative is usually referred to in its newspaper version of 1880, but the version that follows may be the earliest to surface yet. It constitutes a major source of information about William Preston and his life and family for all subsequent authors.
History of “The Preston Family”
Copied from Mrs. Letitia Floyd’s manuscript, 1843
Mrs. Gov. Floyd
James Cochran — October 13th 1846

Col. James Patton was born in Ireland, in the town of Newton, Limeraddy, in the year of our Lord 1692; he was bred to the sea and was in the wars of England with the Low Countries, and served as an officer in the royal navy; after the treaty of Utrecht, he procured a passenger ship and traded to the Colony of Virginia at “Hobbe’s Hole” on the Rappahannock river; he penetrated the then wilderness of the state, as far as Orange county, thence across the Blue Ridge, and commenced a settlement near Waynesboro in Augusta county; he crossed the Atlantic twenty three or four times, his traffic was peltries & tobacco, his return cargo was, what was then termed “redemptioners” (i.e.) poor families of Irish etc. (but with him they were all Irish), who served a given time for their passage; in this way a greater part of Augusta county was settled. The descendants of these emigrants have furnished the West with many of its Governors, Senators, Judges etc. distinguished literary men, and many married into the imperial family of Virginia, as the historian Burke terms Pocahonta’s descendants of our State.—

Col. Patton had four sisters, two of whom married men of “quality”; (this state of things kept the other two unmarried) his youngest sister, Elizabeth, whilst crossing the river Shannon (in Ireland) was attracted by the beauty & deportment of a young man by the name of John Preston, on enquiring, he was found to be a Ship-Carpenter, nothing daunted by his humble occupation, an understanding took place between them, and Miss Patton consented to a runaway match; this step placed her out of the pale of her family; Her brother Col. Patton had, by this time, obtained governmental distinction in Virginia, as well as a grant of land from Gov. Dinwiddie, of two or three hundred thousand acres. Col. Patton determined to remove his family from his fair residence White Haven to his estate in Augusta County; he proposed to his brother-in-law John Preston to accompany him to America, and for his services as shipwright to secure to him a grant of four thousand acres of land; Preston did not hesitate, he embarked with his three daughters and only son William Preston, who was then eight years old: In the summer 1735 both parties settled in Augusta County; Preston seven miles below Staunton and Col. Patton at Spring Hill Farm, the late seat of Judge Briscoe Baldwin, about ½ mile from Staunton — As Preston had left the seaboard, his pursuits
James Patton was born in Ireland, in the town of Ballymena, in the year of our Lord 1692, he ran away to sea, and was in the wars of England with the Low Countries, and served as an officer in the royal navy; after the Treaty of Utrecht, he purchased a passenger ship and traded to the West Indies and the West Coast of Africa. Happening, however, to peace at the latter date, he crossed the State, as far as New York, thence he crossed the Pelile Ridge, and commenced a settlement near Waynesboro in Augusta County; he crossed the Atlantic twenty three or four times, his traffic in peltries and tobacco, his return cargo was what was then termed "redemptioners" (i.e. poor families of Irish stock with whom they were poor breed), who served a given time for their passage; in this way a greater part of Augusta County was settled. The descendants of these emigrants have furnished the West with many of its governors, senators, judges and distinguished literary men, and man

Fig. 1. A photocopy of part of the first page of the 1846 transcription by James Cochran.

were changed, and he worked at the cabinet trade — A singular augury of a native Irish woman, viz., that William Preston would get his Uncle's fortune, so impressed Mrs. Patton, (who was a proud haughty woman) that no intercourse was allowed between the families — Seven years after their landing John Preston died at Gibson's old place, eight miles below Staunton, Mrs. Preston was then in straightened circumstances. She sent her son to her brother (Col. Patton) with a message, the young-
est daughter of Col. Patton knew her cousin, but her mother did not. Peggy Patton afterwards Mrs. Buchanan passed her cousin William Preston off for a neighbour’s son, for fear that her mother would turn the lad out of doors, if she had known him to be her nephew William Preston, at this time, William was 15 or 16 years old; Mrs. Patton’s dread of his getting the fortune of the family by marriage with one of her daughters, urged their early marriage; one to a kinsman of hers by the name of Thompson (a very rich man), and the other to Col. John Buchanan; shortly, after their marriage, Mrs. Patton died; this event led her husband to look into the situation of his sister’s family; Col. Patton placed his nephew with the Rev. Mr. Craig, pastor of the Tinkling Spring Congregation (7 miles below Staunton); a classical education was not attempted, because Wm. Preston was thought to be too much grown; However, an excellent course of history, Mathematics, and penmanship was afforded — Col. Patton had the affairs of the then Mountain region intrusted to his care by Gov. Dinwiddie — Mrs. Preston was induced to remove to Hanger’s (Judge Baldwin’s seat) for the purpose of affording her son an opportunity of posting Merchants’ books & whatever writing Col. Patton needed.

Col. Patton left his seat and removed to Staunton & lived at his sister’s house, shortly after that, he was sent to Log Town somewhere near Pittsburg, to make a treaty with the North-Western Indians; William Preston, then 18 years of age, was made his private Secretary.

I remember to have read Col. Patton’s journal written by himself with the speeches of Oconastoto the old Mingo Chief — After peace was made Col. Patton came up to the extreme Western Counties (now/1840) of this State — He located all the fine lands of Upper James River, Catawba, and the Amsterdam lands in Botetourt County — He then came to North Roanoke, Strouble’s creek, embracing the Blacksburg lands, and Smithfield, the present residence of Gov. James Patton Preston — After that he came to Burks Garden and the “Rich Valley on Holstein. in which the celebrated Salt works of Mrs. Sally Preston and Mr. Wm. King are situated; Col. Patton tried to rally the settlers to defend the Country from the inroads of the Indians on the frontiers of Virginia; this he was unable to effect — All the settlers from South Holstein to South Roanoke left the country and went below the Blue Ridge — Patton maintained his ground as did Col. Wm. Inglis — Philip Barger and Philip Lybrook, on Sinking creek — on the 8th July 1755 it being Sunday a party of Indians came up the Kenawha, thence to Sinking creek, thence to Strouble’s creek — Inglis & Draper, brothers in law, were living at Solitude. the present seat of Col. Robert T. Preston. The Indians came to Barger’s
LEMLA PRESTON FLOYD

(½ mile nearer the Mountain) & cut his head off & put it in a bag; Barger was a very old man then came to Inglis’ & Drapers, and killed old Mrs. Draper, two children of Col. Inglis’, by knocking their brains out on the ends of the Cabin logs — took Mrs. Inglis and her son Thomas, a boy of ten years of age, prisoners, as well as her sister-in-law Mrs. Draper Jr., who was trying to make her escape with her infant in her arms, but she was shot at by the Indians, who broke her arms by which means the infant was dropped — the Indians picked the infant up, & knocked its brains out agains the Cabin logs — Col. Patton that morning having dressed himself in his uniform, and getting his nephew William Preston to sew up in the fob of his small clothes thirty English guineas, told him to go to Sinking creek to get Lybrook to help take off the harvest, which was then ready to cut; Preston went very earley — After breakfast, Col. Patton sat down to write, the Indian War whoop was heard and five or six of them surrounded the cabin to set it on fire — The Col. always kept his sword on his writing table — he rushed to the door with it in hand and encountered the Indians — Patton was almost gigantic in size — he cut two of the Indians down — in the mean while another warrior had levelled his gun and fired & killed the brave old pioneer — After Patton fell the Indians ran off in the thicket and made their escape before any pursuers could be brought together — Lybrook & Preston came through the mountains by an unfrequented route, having arrived at Smithfield they found Col. Patton, Mrs. Draper (the mother of Mrs. Inglis) & the (three) children*, (and) buried (them); The whole settlement *(The Floyd mss. has only “three children buried” but I suppose that “and” & “them” were unintentionally omitted.) was destroyed; The Indians on their return stopped at Lybrook’s, and told Mrs. Lybrook that they had killed two men, one woman and three children, and requested her to look in the bag that they had brought with them, and she would see an old acquaintance, she did so, and immediately recognised the head of Philip Barguer who was a very old man — Mrs. Inglis, her oldest son a lad of ten years of age, & Mrs. Draper her sister-in-law, were taken to the Indian towns on the other side of the Ohio river, they travelled down the Kenawha or as it is sometimes called New river, & through the North eastern part of Kentucky. In three months after her captivity Mrs. Inglis gave birth to a daughter; her sister-in-law had been traded off to another tribe of Indians as was her son. Three months after the birth of her child Mrs. Inglis determined to run away from the Indians, who were dreadfully cruel to her; another impulse was her great desire to see her husband, which made her undertake a journey unparalleled in the incidents of a Pioneer’s life; She and a Dutch woman, who was taken from the
upper part of Ohio, determined to escape together from the Indian towns; Mrs. Inglis left her child asleep in a bark cradle, although she was aware that according to Indian character the child would be killed as soon as its mother was missed — A series of remarkable events occured to them on the route — Mrs. Inglis keeping up the water Courses; when she got to the Ohio river, she and the Dutch woman tied logs together with grape vines, thus making a raft on which the two crossed the Ohio river; they were frequently near famishing with hunger, living on blackberries, sassafras leaves, frogs etc., and in one instance eating a snake they found dead and a raccoon they found in a great state of decomposition — All means failing a proposition was made that they should cast lost [lots] to see which should be eaten by the other; the lot fell upon Mrs. Inglis; who understanding her travelling companion’s temper, promised her a sum of money to refrain from killing her; Col. Inglis was a a very rich man & this proposition had the desired effect — Mrs. Inglis stepped off, leaving the Dutch woman to find her way as best she could — After many weeks travelling Mrs. Inglis arrived at Inglis’ ferry on New River the residence of Col. Inglis — She was afterwards the mother of a highly respectable family, who have been always distinguished for bravery and honesty — her grand children live on the place which she made such efforts to return to. These transactions took place in the year of Braddock’s defeat. Mrs. Inglis lived to a very great old age; I remember to have seen her fifty years ago at a large Baptist Convention, thirty miles from her home, she was then (eighty) years old, looked florid and erect.—

My father, Col. William Preston was the only son of John Preston & Elizabeth Patton and was born in Ireland in the town of Newton Limeraddy14, on the 25 November 1729; when he was seven or eight years old, his father emigrated to the Colony of Virginia. His father was remarkable for his fine personal appearance, great industry and unabated piety; his mother’s qualities were masculine understanding, great ambition and impetuosity of temper — humble fortune, which she brought upon herself by marrying a Ship Carpenter was powerfully resisted — She was, however, left a widow with a family of four daughters, and an only son, who was but a stripling at his father’s death — The forest was to be conquered, this her young son did by daily labour, cutting down trees, & making fences — After Mrs. Patton’s death, Mrs. Preston removed to Hanger’s near Staunton, her daughters were skilful needle women, it was the age of cross stitch embroidery and they wrought diligently at this their business, and obtained a sufficient sum of money to buy a negro woman. A little while afterwards, a young Presbyterian clergy man from Ireland, by the name of John Brown, settled in Staunton and
became attached to Margaret Preston, the second daughter, & married her; He then moved to Rockbridge and took charge of a congregation, & preached for fifty years (42 years — corrected by Jos. Mc Dowell) at New Providence meeting house — The eldest daughter Letitia Preston married Col. Robert Breckenridge, a man of wealth, who had been married before and had two sons by that marriage. The third sister Anne Preston married a young gentleman by the name of Francis Smith — during this period Col. William Preston was employed by William Estill high sheriff of Augusta County, to ride as his deputy — The year after Preston and Col. John Buchannan were elected Burgesses to the house of Burgesses Preston was requested by the Congregation of Episcopalians of Staunton to procure a carpenter living near Hanover C. H. by the name of Francis Smith to undertake the building of a church for them; he kept a tavern near Hanover C. H. & was applied to by Col. Preston to attend to the building; Mr. Smith was a rich man and had an extremely beautiful daughter by the name of Susanna, who was educated by the Rev. Patrick Henry. Col. Preston was soon attracted by her beauty and manners; he addressed her and they were married on the 17th July 1761. In the summer of 1757 Col. Preston had been appointed a Commissioner to hold a treaty with the Shawnee & Delaware Indians, at the mouth of the (Big Sandy) Ohio. Col. Thomas Lewis of Rockingham was likewise a Commissioner, but did not accompany the party — The treaty was made (I think) with Oconostato, who was now old, and a chief called Cornstalk — Col. Preston endured singular hardships in this expedition; he had tied the strings of his moccasins too tight, they chafed the instep of one of his feet, which produced partial mortification. The skill of a physician by the name of Thomas Floyd saved his life; Floyd (a redemptioner) had been purchased by Preston a year or two previously, finding him a man of great education & fine knowledge of Medicine; the Doctor was made the Companion of Preston, and died, very many year afterwards, the firm friend of the Preston family — On their return from the mouth of the Sandy, they took up through a rugged region — got so entirely out of food as to be compelled to eat the Buffalo tugs, which tied on their packs, and hence the stream was called/named by Preston the Tug fork of (the) Sandy — The County of Fincastle (Botetourt?) was taken off the County of Rockbridge about the year 1764, Col. Preston obtained the Surveyor’s place, which determined him to leave Staunton, he settled at Greenfield near Amsterdam a very valuable estate, yet in the possession of his grand daughter — Having some business to transact in the County Court of Augusta in the month of May he left his family at Smithfield early in the morning. Mrs. Preston was startled by the firing
of two guns in quick succession at a neighbor’s house within half a mile of hers. Shortly afterwards Mr. Joseph Cloyd rode up on his plough horse with the gears on, telling Mrs. Preston that the Indians had killed his brother John, shot at him, and missed him, although his shirt was powder burnt, that they had gone to the house and he expected had killed his mother — Mrs. Preston sent a young man, living at her house, to Capt. Francis Smith to bring his troops to pursue the Indians; she wrote a letter to him, which was without fear or trepidation; she then sent a white man and two negro men to Mr. Cloyd’s, where they found Mrs. Cloyd tomahawked in three places; all the household destroyed, the money carried off, (Mr. C. had a large quantity stored away) Mrs. Cloyd was perfectly in her senses, and told all the circumstances of the savage revelry, getting drunk, ripping up the feather beds, and one of them taking a corn cob and wiping away the blood from her temples, exclaiming “poor woman”; she died the next morning — After this irruption of the Indians there was a pause in their depredations — I think in the year 1765 an expedition was ordered by Lord Botetourt the Gov. of Virginia at that time, and the command given to Col. Byrd, who penetrated as far as the Tennessee line, what his success was I am not able to say, but think that the settlements were insecure — In 1733 (1773 perhaps) Col. Preston became possessed of Draper’s Meadows, (now Smithfield). The County of Botetourt was divided and Col. P. determined to follow the Surveyor’s office — Whilst Col. Preston lived at Greenfield Col. Patton (Buchannan?) determined to leave his residence near Pattonsburg and remove to Reed creek and settle at “Anchor & Hope”, a splendid estate Col. Patton had given his daughter Margaret; on his journey, he stopped at Greenfield, was taken sick and died after several weeks of illness, whilst on his deathbed, he desired Mrs. Preston to take charge of his daughter Jane, then ten years of age, which was done. Col. Buchannan made Col. Preston the executor of his immense estate; a long & unbroken friendship existed between them. Buchannan is favourably mentioned by Genl. Washington (Spark’s Life of Washington). During Col. Preston’s residence at Greenfield, in the year 1770, a young gentleman by the name of John Floyd was introduced to him by Col. Joseph Cabell of Buckingham County as very well qualified to assist as deputy in the Surveyor’s office — It was always a rule of Col. Preston’s, to require of every young man, who was employed in his office, to teach school six months at least, thereby finding out his temper, diligence habits, & trustworthiness — Mr. Breckenridge’s, Mr. Smith’s children and my brothers, & sisters, constituted Mr. Floyd’s school. When my father removed to Smithfield in 1773 Col. Floyd accompanied him — In the Autumn of
that year Col. Preston and Col. Nathaniel Grist were appointed to make a treaty with the Cherokee Indians & I think the Chickamugga, at Long island on the Holstein river in the State of Tennessee — The treaty was made and the Southern indians were quiet — In the March of 1774 Col. Preston removed my Mother & her children to Smithfield, there was a Fort or Stockade around the house, into which several of the neighbour’s families came for safety, because the North Western Indians made constant attempts on the Settlements; Major John Taylor’s (who married a niece of Col. Buchannan) was one of the families — Mr. Robert Preston, Capt. James Charlton, his brother Frank and Cap’ John Lucas were mainly the persons who defended the fort — In the year 1774 my brother Gov. James Patton Preston was born at Smithfield; Mrs. Preston’s confinement was so protracted by Typhus fever, that a nurse for her infant was procured by the kindness of Mrs. Van Lear, who affectionately took upon herself that office; she was the mother of the Rev. John Vanlear. During the summer and autumn of 1774 the entire region north west of the mountains of Virginia was put in commotion by the movements of the Indians on her borders — The Gov. of the State Lord Dunmore made a visit as far as Fincastle in Botetourt Co. to organize an expedition against the tribes — Shawnees, Guyandottes, & Delaware Indians. Genl. Andrew Lewis, who had served in Braddock’s war as a Col. and in the old French War as a Major, was appointed Commander of the expedition; his youngest brother Col. Charles Lewis of Bath Co., Genl. A. Lewis’ son Samuel, and his nephew Thomas Lewis, Thomas Lewis of Rockingham Co. and Andrew John Lewis & his nephew-in-law Capt. Frog were all in his army. I think that Col. William Christian, Col. Wm. Fleming & his brother-in-law were also Col. John Stuart were all in the campaign. The battle of Point Pleasant was fought on the 10th October 1774: Col. Charles Lewis was killed, Col. Samuel Lewis was wounded; Capt. John Lewis of Rockingham was killed; Capt. Frog was killed, as was Monroe the brother-in-law of Col. Charles Lewis; Col. Floyd was sent on a foraging expedition and did not return until the day after the battle; I remember distinctly to have read a letter from Col. Thomas Lewis of Rockingham to my father, giving an account of the battle — Col. Preston was detained by the illness of his wife, who was not expected to survive. The year after the battle the Country of Kentucky attracted much attention; Col. Preston’s surveyor’s office comprehended all of that beautiful state; he sent Col. Floyd out on an exploring expedition, with a view to take up lands for the benefit of Floyd and himself; for a long time it was supposed that Floyd was killed by the Indians, he however returned to Smythfield by the way of Guyandotte & Coal river,
after having endured hardships, which few could have survived — In the summer of 1776 the Revolution fairly commenced; all plans for the settlement west were suspended; Col. Preston found himself surrounded by a neighborhood of Tories who kept him continually on the alert to prevent them from murdering himself and family, as well as every other Whig in the County; Genl. William Campbell of Washington County; Col. Arthur Campbell of the same county a brother-in-law of Gov. Campbell, Col. Patrick Lockhart of Botetourt; William Madison son-in-law of old Col. Preston, were all good Whigs, and kept the Tories at bay; Col. Preston was intently engaged in educating his family and improving his valuable estates, which he had by this time acquired; to effect the first named purpose he procured a gentleman by the name of Mr. Aaron Palfreman, this person was a poet and a scholar, he was the correspondent and friend of the celebrated Miss Carter the poetess. Mr. Palfreman in a drunken frolic had consented to marry a beautiful woman, who had been represented to him by his friends as a lady; next morning finding that he had been made a dupe of and his wife a woman of the town, he embarked in a few hours for America, on landing at Williamsburg Col. Preston met with him and procured him and ever after kept him in his family as a teacher — Col. Preston; Col. Thomas Lewis of Rockingham, Genl. Andrew Lewis of Botetourt, Mr. John Madison & Col. Fleming of Augusta engaged Mr. Gabriel Jones an Englishman to select libraries for them in London; This Mr. Jones was Mr. —— first partner in the practice of Law; a good selection of the Classics, Ancient history, the distinguished poets of England, the dictionary of the arts & sciences, a sort of Encyclopedia, with many polemic and religious productions constituted the libraries; here I would remark that the use of these libraries gave each family possessing them a station which outranked very many wealthier families than the above named.— The multiplicity of business growing out of the Surveyor's office, organizing the Counties and their civil politics seemed to occupy all of his time and energies; in addition to this he held extensive correspondence with many of the then active Whig partisans of the Revolution; in this business he was greatly assisted by his nephew John Breckenridge, who was undergoing the ordeal of teaching school at Smithfield; Mr. Breckenridge studied law at William & Mary College, and married Miss Polly Cabell, second daughter of Col. Joseph Cabell, he received a large fortune by her, in 1792 he removed to Kentucky and acquired great celebrity as a lawyer; presented the famous “alien & sedition” laws; was elected to the Senate of the United States, where he made a great display of Political knowledge and oratory that never was equalled by Gouvernir Morris who was in the Senate at the
time; Mr. Breckenridge was made attorney general of the U States by Mr. Jefferson, in which Office he died, leaving four sons of distinguished talents; his eldest daughter Latitia married Genl. P. B. Porter secretary of War in J. Q. Adam’s administration — After Mr. Breckinridge left Smithfield, his brother Genl. James Breckenridge took his place as assistant surveyor, & teacher, but previous to this period there was a company formed, called the “Loyal Company” for the purpose of entering lands in the Western Counties of Virginia, Dr. Thomas Walker of Albemarle, Judge Edmund Pendleton, and one or two others composed it; much surveying being required and Col. Preston was employed, which still increased his estate; Col. Preston planned many of the military movements of that period; he was a man of consummate judgment, and unremitting industry, he planned the campaign, which made the demonstrations in North Carolina, that led to the battle of Guilford and that of King’s Mountain; his health had greatly declined from frequent apoplectic premonitions, yet he undertook as commandant of his own County to march into North Carolina to join Genl. Green at Guilford; you will see an account of this matter in Lee’s memoirs of the Revolution. A skirmish had taken place at Whitsell’s Mill a short distance from the main battle, Col. Preston was riding a large fiery young horse that took fright at the report of the guns and dashed through the Mill pond, threw off Col. Preston, who was likely to be cut down by the British lighthorse, at this moment Col. Cloyd dismounted, & put Col. Preston on his horse and thereby saved his friend & officer’s life; this signal service was always held in memory by Col. Preston, & ever after sincere friendship existed between them; Cloyd was the young man who escaped, when his mother & brother were killed near Greenfield; he married an excellent young lady without fortune, which so displeased his father that he was banished from the paternal roof; Preston furnished him money which enabled him to purchase the estate which his son David Cloyd now lives on — After Col. Preston’s return from North Carolina his health continued to decline; in the month of June 1783 he had spent the evening [with] his intimate friend Genl. Evan Shelby (the father of Gov. Isaac Shelby) and on the next morning (28th June) he prepared to attend a Regimental muster at Michael Price’s three miles from Smithfield, his eldest son Genl. John Preston, then a youth, accompanied him, as did Genl. Shelby; the day was exceedingly hot, after being on the field a few hours he beckoned to his son John to come to him; he complained of a pain in the head, desired to lie down on Price’s bed; in a short time afterwards requested his son to help him on his horse, he wished to go home, when the horse was brought to the door he made an attempt to put his foot in the stirrup, but sank down,
was caught by his son, who laid him on the bed, by this time he had lost
his speech, but took his son's hand, rolled his sleeve up and made a sign
to bleed him, this Genl. Preston could not do; Mrs. Preston was sent for
who immediately reached the place, Col. Preston's reason had not been
staggered in this conflict; he caught his wife's hand, kissed it, shed tears,
and again made a motion to be bled, this could not be done from con-
sternation and ignorance, soon after the stentorian breathing of apo-
plexy came on, about midnight he breathed his last.

Col. Preston was above the ordinary height of man, he was 5 ft. 11
in., large, inclined to corpulency, was ruddy, had fair hair and hazel eyes;
his manners were easy & graceful, he had a well cultivated intellect and
fine taste for poetry. I remember reading several productions of his to
my Mother in praise of her domestic virtues; on the 12th April 1783
Col. Floyd was killed & when this news reached Col. Preston, such was
the feeling produced by it that from that time Col. P was never seen to
smile. — Mrs. Preston died on the 18th June 1823, this excellent lady
expired after having lived a widow forty years, she desired to be buried in
the same grave with her husband, this was done, a tombstone was placed
over their grave by their second son Genl. Francis Preston — No portrait
of either was ever taken — Col. Preston and wife had twelve children;
The oldest was Mrs. Elizabeth Madison, who married the second son of
Mr. John Madison the father of Bishop James Madison the learned Presi-
dent of Wm. & Mary College, also the father of Thomas Madison who
married the youngest Sister of Patrick Henry, also of Gov. George Madison
of Kentucky who married Miss Jane Smith the niece of Col. Preston.—

The Ilnd child was Genl. John Preston, who married Miss Polly Radford,
daughter of Col. Wm. Radford, an officer in the Revolutionary War.
Illd was Genl. Francis Preston, who married the only daughter &
heiress of Genl. William Campbell of King's Mountain memory, her
Mother was the third sister of Patrick Henry.
IVth was Mrs. Sarah McDowell the wife of Col. James McDowell of
Rockbridge County. She was the mother of Mrs. Susan Taylor, Mrs.
Thomas H. Benton of Missouri and her only son is Gov. James McDowell
of this State.
Vth was Anna who died at 13 years of age.
VIth was Major William Preston who was a captain in Genl. Wayne's
army, he married Col. George Hancock's second daughter, Hancock
was a Revolutionary officer.
VIIth was Mrs. Susanna Hart, who married Nathaniel Hart of Ken-
tucky, whose father was killed at the siege of Boonesborough.
VIII was Gov. James Patton Preston, who married the second daugh-
Letitia Preston Floyd

ter of Mr. Robert Taylor of Norfolk, Gov. P was wounded at the battle of Christel's field in Canada during the last war, he is yet living at Smithfield, is a pensioner, a gentleman of exceedingly graceful manners greatly beloved by his neighbours & relations.

IX was Mrs. Mary Lewis, she was the wife of Capt. John Lewis an officer of the Revolution, he was entitled to half pay during his life, he was the proprieto of the celebrated Sweet Springs of Va (My ancestor E. C. G.16

X. was Mrs. Letitia Floyd, who married Gov. John Floyd of Va, the youngest son of Col. John Floyd and Jane Buchanan.

XI. was Thomas Lewis Preston, who married Miss Edmonia Randolph, the second daughter of Col. Edmund Randolph of Williamsburg; Col. Randolph was once aide to Washington, Attorney General of the U. S., the Secretary of State under Washington's administration.

XII was Mrs. Margaret Preston, who married Col. John Preston of Washington County, Va, who was a very distant relation of the Va Preston family.—

Endnotes

1. This letter dated February 22, 1843, was sent from Cavan, the Floyd home in Burke's Garden in Tazewell County, Virginia.

2. James Cochran was probably James C. Cochran, son of Margaret Lynn Lewis Cochran (1808-1876), granddaughter of William Preston, although he would have been only 16 years old at the time. See John Frederick Dorman, The Prestons of Smithfield and Greenfield in Virginia (Louisville, Kentucky: Filson Club, Inc., 1982).

3. See Richmond Standard, July 3, 1880. Typed copies of the newspaper version are in the Special Collections, Newman Library, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Virginia.

4. See note 3.


7. See note 3.


9. Limavady is probably the actual place meant.

10. At this point in the manuscript a left bracket occurs, but it appears to have been inserted later.

11. A mark that may be a right bracket occurs here.

12. At this point a right bracket occurs, but it appears to have been inserted later.

13. The asterisks and parenthetical insertions are in the text, and appear to be notes added by James Cochran.


15. The place meant here is probably Greenfield, since Smithfield was not completed until about 1774.

16. This parenthetical note was interlined by an unknown commentator.