

GENERAL JOSEPH MARTIN

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Big Stone Gap, Va.

Largely forgotten today, Joseph Martin played a role in the late Eighteenth Century events of Southwest Virginia and in East Tennessee unequaled by any other person. He was an explorer, trader, land speculator, soldier, politician, Indian agent, national scape goat, and the first settler of Lee County, Virginia.

He was the second of three men of that name, his father having settled in present Albemarle County in 1729 as a neighbor of Dr. Thomas Walker, Ambrose Powell, Peter Jefferson, James Madison, and the Lewis and Clark clans. He had come from Bristol, England a few years earlier, aboard the ship 'Brice', and had married Susanna Childs. The couple's first child was Joseph Junior, born in 1742.

The boy did not take to schooling very well, and his father apprenticed him out to a carpenter. He was too wild for this, and at age sixteen he ran away and joined the British Army during the French and Indian War.

After the war, he returned home and married Sarah Lucas (Lewcas) in 1762. Martin worked as a fur trader, as a farmer, and as a land overseer for his wealthier neighbors, and became more closely connected to Dr. Thomas Walker.

At this stage in his life he was later described by his son, William, as having been "large of stature, six feet high, weighed 200 and one of the finest figures of a man you ever saw, with prepossessing, commanding appearance, courteous, intelligent, knew no fear ..."

Walker was chief land agent for the Loyal Company which owned 800,000 acres of undeveloped frontier land in western Virginia. Despite future Lee County's location in Indian land protected from white settlement by the Royal Proclamation, Walker and his co-investor in the Loyal Company, the Royal Governor of Virginia, were encouraging settlement of their land, notwithstanding that the Governor was responsible for the enforcement of the Royal Proclamation. Walker offered Martin 21,000 acres if he would become the first settler on Company land in present Lee County. Martin jumped at the chance. Walker had actually made the same offer to another group lead by the Kirtley brothers and by a Captain Rucker, with the first to arrive taking all. Martin's group, which included his brother Brice, left on March 1, 1769 and was the

second to get away. Martin pushed relentlessly, and after getting lost "in the cane break and laurel" between the Valleys of the Holston and the Powell (named after Ambrose Powell), and describing himself as being "completely exhausted, weak from hunger, and very discouraged' he found the Hunter's Trace on their arrival in present Lee County March 26th. The competing group did not arrive until April 15th.

Martin's party quickly cleared land and built cabins on their claim, which was at present Rose Hill. Martin wrote a letter describing the area. "The place we are now settled in is waters of Beargrass, called by the hunters Powell's River about a mile from the foot of a large ledge of mountains called Cumberland much resembling our Blue Ridge only considerably larger, much steeper and running the same course."

One evening, a party of Indians came in to Martin's camp. One brave grabbed Martin's long rifle and a scuffle developed and Martin wound up with the rifle. The Indians left in a surly mood, and Martin's party fearing a vengeful retaliation, packed up and returned to Eastern Virginia. Martin had satisfied the stipulations for acquiring the land, and retained ownership through several treaty and legal problems.

With his earnings from this adventure Martin bought a large tract of land in Henry County and built an estate there on the banks of the Smith River. He called the home "Scuffle Hill" in recollection of how he had earned the money to pay for it in that scrape with the Indian at far away Rose Hill.

In 1775 Martin was made agent for the Transylvania Company and was given specific authority to control the settlement of Powell Valley. Actually, the Loyal Company and the Transylvania Company had legally competing claims to the ownership of the land in Lee County, an issue not settled in the courts until the next century. Martin and another group of settlers returned to his "Station" at Rose Hill. Between January and June they built a fort which was described by John Redd, a member of the party: "Martin's Fort was on Martin's Creek. The fort was located on the north side of the creek. There was some 5 or 6 cabins; these built some 20 feet apart with strong stockades between. In these stockades there were port holes. The station contained about half an acre of ground. Their shape was a parallelogram. There were two fine springs near the station on its north side. The station was not reoccupied after 1776, or during the Revolutionary War." In fact, the Indians ran the party out of Powell Valley a second time soon after they had finished building their settlement.

Soon thereafter, Martin joined the Holston Militia as a captain. Virginia's governor, Patrick Henry, appointed him as Virginia's agent to

the Cherokee, and during the winter of 1776-77 he was stationed at Fort Patrick Henry near Long Island in both capacities. He built a stone house to store the goods sent by the government for distribution to the Indians. The Cherokee customarily expected any outsider doing significant business with them to marry one of the tribe. This functioned as an insurer of good behavior on the parties concerned. The British Indian agents had usually complied. Martin married Betsy Ward, who was the daughter of the most prominent woman of the Cherokee Nation, Nancy Ward. Nancy was called "The Wild Rose of the Cherokee" and had the authority of a Chief in council. She was the daughter of Chief Oconostota, who was the brother of Emperor Attakullakulla, or Little Carpenter. Attakullakulla was the father of the famous defiant chief of the Chickamauga Cherokee, Dragging Canoe. By an earlier marriage to Chief Five Killer, Nancy had had a son named Little Fellow. These family connections were important in the unfolding relationship between Martin and the Indians. Martin's wife, Sarah Lucas, knew of and sanctioned this polygamous relationship.

Despite these tangled responsibilities and relationships, Martin was ordered to take eighty men from that garrison to the Rye Cove Fort following the murder by Indians of Isaac Crisman and his family. Apparently the Cherokee had the direct route from Fort Patrick Henry to Rye Cove closed at Moccasin Gap, as Martin took the indirect route via Black's Fort at Abingdon. While the company was crossing Clinch Mountain by Little Moccasin Gap strung out in single file, they were fired on by Indians, who fled after the single volley which wounded one militiaman with five musket balls.

Martin proceeded to Rye Cove, where he remained until the first of May. His stay at Rye Cove was eventful due to an attack lead by Little Fellow. Martin and Little Fellow fought each other in hand to hand combat, though neither was harmed. Their being brothers-in-law probably explains this exceptional outcome. It was also during this tour of duty that messengers from the Kentucky militia were dispatched to Rye Cove to seek aid in the relief from the attacks on the Kentucky settlements. The Indians surrounding the fort killed one of the messengers, but one of the Indians was wounded and crawled off into a cane. Martin himself went in after him and killed him. When he and his garrison were ordered back to Long Island. He stayed at Fort Patrick Henry until the peace treaty was signed with the Cherokee July 1st.

Throughout 1778 he engaged in counterespionage against the British Indian Agent. Martin wrote John Stuart, the British Superintendent for Indian Affairs, Southern Department, and feigned turning traitor. The British were not fooled, and Stuart commissioned a white man named Gray and a party of Chickamaugans to assassinate Martin. They found him in

the home of his Grandfather-in-law, Chief Oconostata, who refused to give him up. The hit team skulked around for a while, but upon reflection they returned home.

The Chickamauga Cherokee did not sign the treaty of peace when the other Cherokee had done so, and they continued to make war on the Holston, Clinch, and Powell Valleys. In April 1779 Col. Evan Shelby lead an amphibious expedition against the Chickamauga towns, an event that caught Indian Agent Martin in these villages. Shelby had sent warning to Martin but the messenger drowned in route. It is not recorded how Martin got out of that scrape.

In 1780 the Revolutionary War was coming to a climax. The British were rampaging at will throughout the South, and they had the Mingo, Shawnee, and Cherokee ravaging the frontier. The British threatened to cross the mountains and to hang the leaders of the settlers. The militia's customary military strategy was to carry the war to the enemy, so they resolved to cross the mountains themselves and to attack the British. However, the fear that the Indians would attack the settlements in the militia's absence resulted in a complex rear guard action. The militia of the Clinch Valley forts would remain in place to defend against the Shawnee and Mingo. There was no militia to spare to defend the Holston and French Broad settlements, so Martin was given the task to neutralize the Cherokee diplomatically during the militia's absence. This, perhaps, was his finest hour, because he did succeed in this effort, and by so doing he made the victory at the Battle of King's Mountain possible.

The Cherokee began to attack the settlements again and in January 1781 when the militia had returned from King's Mountain Martin was part of the expedition against the Overhill Cherokee in the area of Tellico and Hiwassee. He met with outstanding success, and was able to dictate peace terms requiring the chiefs to meet with him as Indian Agent at Long Island on the Holston. Despite this newest peace treaty with the Cherokee, British Indian Agents succeeded in provoking more raids into Powell Valley and against Fort Blackmore. Martin, now a Colonel, was dispatched with a company of militiamen into Powell's Valley where they chased the Indians all the way into Tennessee, to the junction of the Powell with the Clinch.

Sarah Lucas Martin died in 1782, and two years later Martin married Susannah Graves, who also accepted his relationship with Betsy Ward. Indeed, Martin took his Indian son back to Eastern Virginia to get an education., and Susannah graciously received Betsy when she visited Scuffle Hill.

After the end of the Revolution pressures for settlement of the Cherokee land greatly increased, and Martin gradually saw his role as one of finding a formula to protect the Cherokee. Oconastota actually charged him with the task of finding an equitable settlement for the Cherokee. Martin had some temporary secesses and negotiated boundary lines and payment in trade goods for the Cherokee. Hatred of Martin by the settlers began to become an open sore.

About 1783 Martin became a North Carolina State Senator representing Sullivan County (now Tennessee). Somehow he kept his commission in the Virginia Militia, and even was promoted to general. He conducted campaigns against warring Indians who did not quit fighting when the British did at the signing of the treaty ending the Revolutionary War. He also served on road commissions in Virginia during this period.

In 1783 the Governor of Virginia directed that a fort be built at Cumberland Gap and that fall Martin returned to Powell Valley and built his "New" or "Lower" Station on Station Creek (the westernmost of the two Sttions in Lee County) two miles from Cumberland Gap. It was constructed as a blockhouse, rather than as a palisaded fort like the "Old" or "Upper" Station at Rose Hill.

In 1784 Georgia appointed him commissioner to deal with settling the status of the Cherokee lands around Muscle Shoals, Alabama.

Irreconcilable conflict arose when North Carolina opened its land office and began to distribute land in the French Broad Valley to Revolutionary War veterans. Martin was still that State's Indian agent, and was not informed of the change in policy. He was also still Virginia's Indian agent to the Cherokee, and that State continued to pursue the policy of keeping settlers out of Indian treaty lands, specifically the French Broad. At this point, the Congress of the Confederation took Indian affairs out of the hands of the States, and appointed a commission that included Martin to deal with the Cherokee. The Treaty of Hopewell was the result, and was the first treaty between the United States of America and the Cherokee.

The practical effect of the treaty was to infuriate the settlers, who felt that they had been sold out by the national government. In 1784, East Tennessee seceded from North Carolina and formed the State of Franklin, with the old Indian hater John Sevier as governor. Far Southwest Virginia was invited to join. Martin clearly saw that the intent of the new State was to take by force all the Cherokee lands, and that the only way he could prevent this from happening was to ally himself with the national authority and with North Carolina, which opposed the secession. The governor of North Carolina ordered the

arrest of John Sevier, and the Franklinites surrendered in 1788. This would seem to have been a great victory for Martin, but it was the beginning of the end of his role on the frontier. Even though he received more promotions for his successes, he was so alienated from the settlers that he became unable to function.

His son William was killed on his way to Georgia by a Creek Indian in 1786. As late as 1787 the Cherokee were still raiding Powell Valley and in the fall of that year Virginia removed him as Indian Agent, possibly because he had been unsuccessful in stopping the Indian raids.

In 1788 Martin sold his Lee County holdings, and in 1789 he returned to his Scuffle Hill family, never to return to far Southwest Virginia and Northeast Tennessee. His commission as United States Indian Agent was allowed to expire. What happened to Betsy Ward is not recorded. His Old and New Stations were still garrisoned by militia as late as 1792 when Powell Valley was threatened by an invasion of 1000 Cherokee warriors.

In 1793 Martin was elected to the Virginia General Assembly, a post he kept for twelve years. In 1795 he helped negotiate boundary disputes between Virginia and the States of Tennessee and of Kentucky.

In 1808 the British were again inciting the Cherokee to warfare, and the aged Martin was commissioned one last time to make peace. He returned from the trip to Tennessee worn out, and died of a stroke on December 18, 1808.

His white children included Brice, John, Joseph, Lafayette, and William. His children by Betsy Ward are not documented, but the William that was killed by a Creek Indian likely was one of them, as the white William was a well known attorney in Henry County, and lived to write a biography of his father. Who the William Martin that owned land on Indian Creek and who died in Lee County in 1821 was is not known. Neither is it known if the Brice Martin that owned land among Joseph's holdings between Rose Hill and Ewing was his brother or his son.

Today, the irreconcilable Indian fighters like John Sevier, William Blount, and the Shelby brothers are well remembered. Towns, schools, and other things of importance are named to commemorate them. Joseph Martin, the peace maker, is best remembered by the creek which starts at the spring that supplied his Upper Station and which bears his name. Perhaps it is fitting, as it is a favorite of trout fishermen, who pursue their peaceful passtime in its cool waters.

MARTIN'S LEE COUNTY LAND HOLDINGS

The accompanying maps show the constellation of Martin properties centered around his Lower or New Station near Shawnee, Tennessee, and his Upper or Old Station properties around Rose Hill and Ewing. There was a total of 1,349 acres running from US 58 in Virginia to Harrogate, Tennessee that was the Lower Station tract. The state line between Tennessee and Virginia at that time ran south of Harrogate and all these properties were entirely in Virginia.

The Upper Station properties owned by Joseph Martin total 2,775 acres, including 365 acres that Joseph sold his right to James Campbell before he registered them with the State Land Office. In addition there are two tracts in the middle of this string of tracts that belonged to Brice Martin which totalled 1,220 acres. It is not known if this Brice Martin was the son or the brother of Joseph.

In addition Joseph Martin owned four tracts of land down Martin's Creek near its mouth and in the watershed of Four Mile Creek, which totaled 1,126 acres. He also owned 291 acres at Dot next to the Rocky Staton tract of Isaac Chrisman, Jr. This brings the total land holdings of Joseph Martin within the historic bounds of Lee County, Virginia to 5,541 acres.

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