

IRON HOOP FROM A GUNPOWDER KEG EXCAVATED FROM SITE OF MOORE'S FORT

Copyright and All Rights Reserved
Big Stone Gap, Virginia
October 2021

Lawrence J. Fleenor, Jr.



This object was dug up in September 2020 near the estimated southwestern corner of Moore's Fort at Lower Castlewood, Virginia. A back hoe was used. The excavation was done under the direction of Mr. Frank Kilgore, with the owner, Mr. Steve Banner, in attendance. It came from a depth estimated to be at about a foot in silted soil sitting on a shale base. The fort spring is about fifty feet to the north, and can be identified by two or three massive sycamore trees. They were looking for post holes from the palisaded fort. It was given to me by Mr. Kilgore over my objections. I gave cleaned it up, and returned it to him.

Moore's Fort was built by the Holston Militia in 1774 in Lord Dunmore's War, and was also staffed in the Revolution. Daniel Boone was in command in 1774-75. His infant son is buried here in the fort graveyard.⁽²⁾

The object is made of blacksmith forged and welded primitive soft iron. The weld was done so expertly that it cannot be found, making the object a perfect circle. There are tacks rusted into holes placed about every 2-3 inches around the circumference. The spacing between the tack holes is random. The width is 5/8ths inch, and the circumference about 38 inches. It is a hoop for a wooden keg from the frontier period. Given its provenance, it likely came from a 25 lb. black powder keg.

The site of the fort is a horseshoe shaped prominence protruding into a pond. There is a spring flowing from the roots of a giant sycamore tree at the tip of the prominence.



At the left is reproduction of a frontier era powder keg was coopered for Fort Loudoun State Historic Area in Vonore Tennessee. Fort Loudoun was a British Fort during the French and Indian War dating 1756-1760 before it was captured by the Cherokee.

Cooperage, or wooden-staved containers, were all purpose vessels in urban, rural, domestic and industrial environments. Gunpowder was shipped and stored in several different sizes of cask. The volatile and fragile nature of gunpowder required a special container. A coopered cask was ideal because it created a virtually air tight environment to protect the powder from surrounding humidity and elements. Casks are extremely durable, easy to move by rolling, and, when bound in copper, brass, iron or saplings, created an ideal environment protected from the potential of premature combustion.⁽¹⁾

British military of the 18th century used several different sizes of copper or sapling bound casks to ship gunpowder throughout the empire. Cask sizes included quarter kegs, half kegs, kegs, half barrels, and barrels. Quarter kegs (holding 6.25 lbs) and half kegs (holding 12.5 lbs) were mostly found in civilian use. Kegs (25 lbs), half barrels (50 lbs), and barrels (100 lbs) were mostly employed for military purposes.

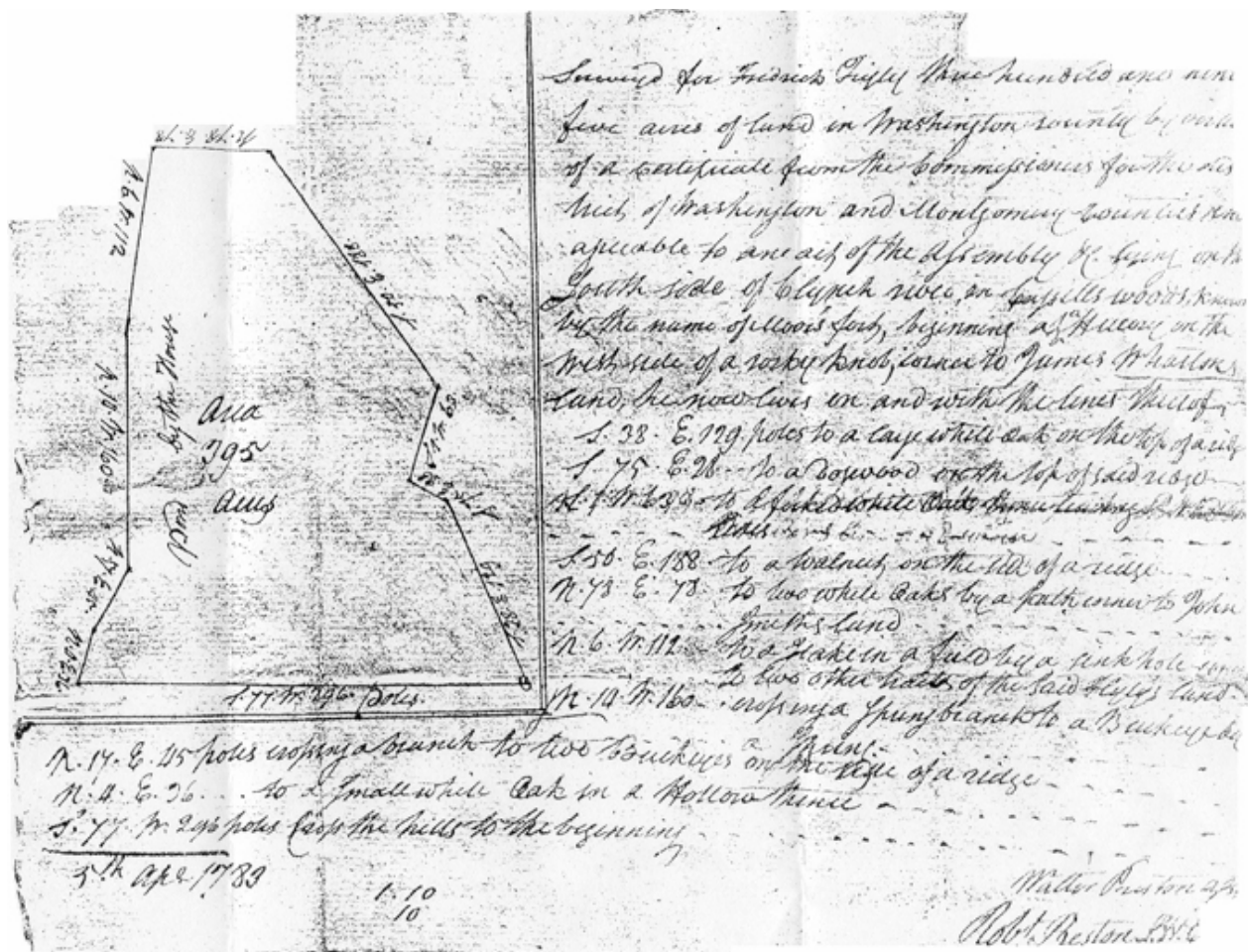


SATELLITE PHOTO
SITE OF MOORE'S FORT

NOTE THE PROMINENCE
OF HIGH GROUND
POINTING INTO THE
POND – THE SPRING IS
AT THE TIP OF THE
PROMINENCE

⁽³⁾

This is a copy of the surveyors drawing of the original land grants that contain the fort and its pond. They prove the location of the fort. These drawings are at the Library of Virginia. Note that the drawing is not laid out to north. Rotate the schematic ninety degrees clockwise.



(2)

Below is a photo of the area of the fort, spring, and pond today. A dam has been thrown up about three feet high at the discharge of the pond, flooding the area around the spring. Even during a dry October there is still a strong current of water coming out from under the sycamore. The high dry area seen through the gaps in the trees is the site of Moore's Fort, located in Lower Castlewood. The keg iron hoop was found about thirty feet behind and to the left of the photographer. Due to the dam, the land is more marshy than it was during the fort area. A good guess is that trash, like the hoop, was pitched out of the fort into the area below the spring. The road leading to the fort from the south can be seen in the satellite image, as well as the road continuing on to Burton Fort to the north. Blocking entry into the interior of what is now Scott County by Indians from Ohio was the reason the fort was placed here. Russell's Fort in Upper Castlewood served similar function at Guest's (Gist's) Ford. The area above the spring has not been searched for evidence of the fort. An excavation by hand trowel and screen needs to be done here.



Bibliography

1 - <https://www.jamestowncooperage.com/fort-loudoun-gunpowder-casks.html>

2 – Fleenor, Lawrence – Forts of the Holston Militia

3 – Google Earth