

THE FIRST PEOPLE FROM THE OLD WORLD TO COME INTO THE GREATER HOLSTON VALLEY IN VIRGINIA

A Presentation at the Blockhouse Visitor's Center
At Natural Tunnel State Park
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Big Stone Gap, Va.

The Holston River begins at Groseclose, Virginia, which is near the Mountain Empire Airport just to the east of Rural Retreat, and runs out of Virginia into Tennessee at Bristol. It ends at Knoxville where the Tennessee River begins. The Militia structure of Virginia considered it to include the Clinch and Powell Rivers, which technically are tributaries of the Tennessee. We will use this ancient definition in today's discussion.

Who were the first adventurous people from the Old World to come into the Greater Holston Valley? We will begin with a list of individuals, but it will soon become apparent that these individuals represented larger groups, of which they were just examples. These groups were defined by national origin, DNA, religion, and politics. We will find ourselves considering all these issues in this discussion.

It is appropriate to examine the settlement of this area because functionally it is a tight funnel that contained the massive migration of settlers to the interior of the United States. To put it in another way, it was the historic social meat grinder that made America and Americans. The Appalachian Mountains presented a formidable barrier to migration to the Midwest. The main trail from the East through the mountains to the interior of the continent from the coast all the way from New York to the Carolinas went through the Greater Holston Valley. Indeed, Natural Tunnel State park is astride the reunion of the two main branches of that road. The road has many names, which include the Delaware term for it, Athawominee, which translates as the "Warrior's Path". It is also called the Wilderness Trail, the Blue Grass Trail, the Boone Trail, or simply the Great Road to Kentucky.

The Indians of record who lived here were the Yuchi (also called the Hogoheegee). They made salt at Saltville, and traded it at Chilhowie. Their trade network extended all the way into Texas. They had died out from smallpox by 1714, and the Cherokee took over the region.

Hernando de Soto explored the southeastern United States starting in 1540. This was 67 years before the English settled in Virginia. His main point of operations in the Holston Valley was from near Knoxville, Tennessee. It is debated

whether or not his expedition followed the Holston upstream into Virginia or not. There is no doubt that he dispatched two members of his party, Juan de Villalobos and Francisco de Silvera, to look for gold in present Lee County. There are the first individuals from the Old World to have visited Virginia, and the Wilderness Road and the Greater Holston Valley in Virginia.

In 1567 the Spanish under Alferez Moyano attacked the Yuchi at either Saltville or Chilhowie, and did much death and destruction. Later, one of these Spaniards married a Yuchi and took her to Florida to live. This story predates that of the English / Powhatan marriage between Pocahontas and John Rolfe by half a century.

Following the Spanish Christian's victory over the Spanish Muslims in 1492, the infamous Spanish Inquisition began, and lasted for 300 years. The end result was that most of Spain's Muslims, Sephardic Jews, and Gypsies were either murdered, or sold into slavery in the New World. Many were bought by the English settlers of Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, and the Carolinas. Their existence is well documented in the laws of Colonial Maryland and of Virginia. Racially, these people were Caucasians, having been among Europe's earliest inhabitants. They had spilled over across the Straights of Gibraltar, and had inhabited what thousands of years later was to become the Province of Mauritania of the Roman Empire. A people of many names, we will use the term 'Berber' to refer to them. They were conquered by the Arabs, and were forcibly converted to Mohammedism. They later had invaded Spain, where they settled as the 'Moors' or 'Muslims'.

Contrary to the slaves in the English colonies of North America of sub-Saharan origin, an escaped Berber slave had only to walk over the hill, change his name, and he was a free man. Thousands escaped into the interior of North Carolina, which was well beyond the reach of the law.

In the mid 16th Century Spain placed six colonized garrisons composed of both men and women expelled from Spain during the Inquisition from the North Carolina coast to the Little Tennessee River. Only the easternmost one of them was ever accounted for. Recently an old inscription on a prominent rock in Hooper's Bald high in the North Carolina Smokeys on the Indian trail to the Cherokee capital, Chota, on the Little Tennessee has been deciphered. This inscription is a set of abbreviations in Medieval Castillian, which was the language used by Sephardic Jews. It is dated Sept. 15, 1615. Translated, it reads "Morning-Prayer-Married". It commemorates the marriage of two Sephardic Jews. The only possible explanation compatible with known history is that this man and this woman were remnants of one of these Spanish garrisons.

Between 1671 and 1673 Thomas Batts (Battes), Thomas Woods, and Robert Fallam (Fallows) of current Petersburg, Virginia sent expeditions west into North Carolina to look for potential trade associations with the Indians. They encountered

bearded white people in the deep interior of North Carolina who told them that they were "Portagee". At about that time Portugal and Spain were one country.

In 1673 on one of these expeditions Woods sent along his indentured English servant, Gabriel Arthur. It was Arthur's task to learn the language of the Cherokee. He travelled with the Cherokee to Ohio, and on his return trip the next year he travelled back east to his home in Petersburg on the Wilderness Trail, being the first person of Old World extraction to have seen Cumberland Gap. As such, Arthur became the first British subject to travel through the Holston Valley.

Analysis of the death rate of the first smallpox epidemic to hit the Cherokee in 1730 shows that they had intermarried with someone of Old World origins to such an extent that about half their DNA was Old World by that time. Smallpox epidemics reoccurred about every five years or so, and with each occurrence selectively killed off the Cherokee with the purest Indian blood, leaving a predominantly Old World populace.

In 1749 German Moravians, Sabbatarians, and Brethren from Pennsylvania were settling Dunkard's Bottom (Radford, Virginia) on the New River, and found there a "kind of white people who wore deer skins, lived by hunting, associated with the Indians and acted like savages."

Modern DNA analysis shows a widespread pattern of Berber and Gypsy blood in the Holston Valley and other neighboring parts of the USA. Taking all this together, it documents that the first settlers in the Holston Valley of Old World extraction were the refugees of the Spanish Inquisition.

In the early 1700's Britain was burdened with tens of thousands of German refugees. In the half century before the Revolution 30,000 immigrated to Pennsylvania, and from there, on down the Great Valley of Virginia. Also there were the Germans who had lived in the Swedish Colony of Delaware. In 1748 Stephen Holsteiner, whose family came from Delaware, became the first European to live in the Holston Valley, which is named after him. He settled at the head spring of that river near Groseclose.

Prior to 1749 Jakob Kassell (Castle) moved from Radford to Castlewood. He is the first European settler documented in Clinch Valley.

In 1743 Col. James Patton led a surveying expedition from Eastern Virginia as far as Kingsport, and possibly on to Cumberland Gap. He built and settled in the 'Town House' in Chilhowie in 1748. On his 1743 expedition he ran into Charles St. Clair (Sinclair) who was living on the Holston River south of Chilhowie at St. Clair's Bottoms (Sinclair's Bottom's). Evidently St. Clair had lived there for a long time, as he was very familiar with the entire greater Holston Valley. He was squatting on Patton's land, but they worked out a deal whereby St. Clair guided Patton through the area and showed him where the best land was, and in exchange Patton gave him

the land where he was living. In this manner, St. Clair helped to determine where many the present towns and cities in Holston Valley are located.

In 1745 Col. John Buchanan, another surveyor, later to settle at Aspenvale near Seven Mile Ford of the Holston River, was passing through Dunkard's Bottom (Radford) and there met a German trader named Samuel Stahlnacker.

In 1749-1751 two surveying expeditions left eastern Virginia, and left the first written records of British exploring parties penetrating the Greater Holston Valley. Dr. Thomas Walker, in the services of the Loyal Company, left the Tidewater in 1749 by the old calendar, or 1750 by the new calendar, and led his own surveying expedition down the Holston Valley. While passing through Chilhowie he met Stahlnacker, who was living there. Walker proceeded down the Wilderness Trail where he was surprised to find a settlement on Reedy Creek, which is US 11W between Bristol and Kingsport. Stahlnacker was abducted by the Indians in 1754 at the beginning of the French and Indian War. The Walker Expedition missed Moccasin Gap, and got to Rogersville before he realized that he had missed the trail. He cut across country to regain the Wilderness Trail in Lee County. They went as far as Pineville, Ky., before they turned north, and then cut back east through present West Virginia.

At the same time Christopher Gist left to explore the Ohio River Valley for the Ohio Company. His only companion was a young Black boy named Tom. They spent the winter with Indians in Ohio, and then turned east by Winding or Sounding Gap (Pound / Jenkins Gap). They came up Indian Creek between Pound and Glamorgan, and crossed into the head of Guest's River, which was named after him. He proceeded down that river until he got caught in a Laurel Hell in Norton, and then took to the top of the mountain that is named after him, and proceeded to Coeburn, where he camped to rest for a while in the corner of Guest's River and Tom's Creek. Tom, therefore, not only became the first Black of record to have come through the Holston Valley, but also the first to have a topographic feature named after him, Tom's Creek.

At the same time that the Germans were pouring into the Holston Valley, an Irishman named Benjamin Burden (Borden) began the commercial importation of the Irish into Virginia via the Rappahannock River. Col. William Beverly then obtained a land grant that covered most of present Augusta County. He build an Irish colony there that he called Beverly Manor. The two families intermarried. Thousands of Irish poured into the Valley of Virginia, including such families as the Campbells. Major Charles Campbell discovered the Yuchi Salt works at Saltville, married the daughter of Col. John Buchanan, and settled in at Aspenvale. His brothers John, and Arthur, and son William founded their plantation at Royal Oak, present Marion. Another Irishman, William King, managed the salt works at Saltville, and his brother, James, founded Kingsport.

Thousands of Germans and Irish filled the Great Valley of Virginia up during the 1740's. The French and Indian War sent hundreds fleeing into North Carolina, where the Cherokee received them in peace. Independent communities of Berbers all the way to the South Carolina border lived in peace with the Cherokee. Intermarriage occurred. The result was that a population of mixed blood and culture developed in the Yadkin Valley of North Carolina in the 1740's and 1750's.

A large commerce in deer hides developed between merchants on the coast with the Indians of the interior. The hides were sent to London and Paris where they were turned into suede gloves and purses. By the 1740's large numbers of descendants of these Europeans with Indian blood and culture began to compete with the Indians in this trade. These men would disappear into Southwest Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Missouri for one to three year hunts. They became known as 'the long hunters'.

The Irish Wallen clan and their friends, the Newmans (German Neumann) made Blackwater and Wallen's Creek Valleys their special honey holes. Jacob Goldman (a German) and his sons hunted in the Minisink area of Scott County, where there is a hollow named after them. The salt Buffalo Lick behind the present post office in Blackwater was a major attractant of large game, and the Newmans, Wallens, Goldmans, and Cox (Cocke) clans of long hunters left their names on the map in the area of Little Stock Creek and Black Water (which is a corruption of the German term for brackish water, Brack Wasser).

In 1769 James Knox raised a party of 40 long hunters in the New River Valley between Boone, North Carolina and Mouth-of-Wilson in Virginia. Among them were a man named 'Clinch', and an 11 year old boy named John Baker. This large party travelled together, with Clinch pealing off to go to his hunting camp at the head of the river that was to bear his name, and went to Big Flat Lick on the Cumberland River just east of present Pineville, Ky. Here they split up, with the young inquisitive Baker taking off up the Cumberland River. He went all the way to its head spring, which is located where Black Mountain, Indian Mountain, and Pine Mountain all come together at Flat Gap Virginia / Kentucky. He built a rock house at the spring, which still stands, and used its salt laced water both to sustain himself, and the combined rock house / spring as a hunting blind. The flat ground on top of the site where the mountains come together is known as Baker's Flats to this day. His Rock House is known as Baker's Rock. The shadows of this place contain the origins of the Kentucky River, the Cumberland River, Powell's River, Guest's River, and the Big Sandy River. In the spring all the men regathered at Big Flat Lick and returned home.

Of course, the most famous long hunter of them all was Daniel Boone. Initially his favorite honey hole was on Boone's Creek near Johnson City, Tennessee. He travelled there from his various homes near Boone, North Carolina via Trade, Tennessee / North Carolina, Mountain City, Tennessee, Damascus, Virginia, and on down the Holston River. He soon became restless, and longed for the Blue Grass of

Kentucky. He got involved in real estate development, and this personal history combined led him to become an icon for figuratively leading the migration to Kentucky and points beyond.

In 1771 these independent people of the Yadkin got into a full scale war with the English planters of the eastern parts of the State. After an all day pitched battle on the Alamance River, these 'Regulators', as they called themselves, lost. The governor of North Carolina and his militia came after them, driving them from their homes and hanging those whom he could catch. The largest mass migration in colonial America was the result, as thousands of fleeing Regulators poured into Southwest Virginia and East Tennessee.

The Irish tended to get the best land along the South Fork of the Holston River, while the Germans formed an almost pure colony in the North Fork Valley. Regulators of mixed German blood tended to join their kin in the North Fork, while the Irish / Berber mix headed for the most remote mountains that they could find. Good examples would be Powell Mountain, Stone Mountain, Guest's Mountain, and Black Mountain.

The Shawnee and the Mingo in 1774 attacked the settlements in Lord Dunmore's War. The frontier was fortified. The Anderson Blockhouse and Carter's Fort were built. With scarcely a breathing spell the Revolution broke out in 1775, and in 1776 the British incited the Cherokee into war on the Holston Settlements. These two strong points, plus Black's Fort in Abingdon saved the future United States. The ethnic mix of Berbers, Germans, and the Scots-Irish turned the tide of the Revolutionary War at the Battles of King's Mountain and of Cowpens.

After the Revolution was won, another mass migration to the central United States passed down through Natural Tunnel State Park. This time, an estimated 25% of the persons going west on the Wilderness Road were enslaved Blacks. Where else on earth can the story of America be seen in such a small geographic space?

DISCUSSION POINTS

1 – The Wilderness Road made possible the settlement of America west of the Alleghanys

a – otherwise it would have been settled by the French route of the Ohio River, New Orleans, and the Mississippi

b – almost certainly it would not have been part of the United States of America – the State of Franklin, the Burr Conspiracy, the French settlements, The Knights of the Golden Circle

2 – The American as a separate ethnic was born here, especially the Southern Ridge Runner

3 – It is one of the two places where the American language was begun, the other being New England