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THE NEW RIVER FRONTIER SETTLEMENT ON THE VIRGINIA–NORTH CAROLINA BORDER 1760-1820

by Paula Hathaway Anderson-Green*

Analysis of the eighteenth-century frontier in the New River Valley, on the western Virginia–North Carolina border, illustrates significant factors of the settlement pattern in the antebellum Piedmont and Appalachian South. Particularly notable is the leadership role exercised by individuals of the class termed "plain folk,"[1] a group whose contribution to the Old South is sometimes overlooked. The industry and self-sufficiency of this group is especially evident in the New River settlement, which was geographically remote from the East, at the southern end of the Valley of Virginia, on the western side of the Blue Ridge Mountains.

Although some historians, notably Frank L. Owsley, have devoted careful attention to the plain folk,[2] in general writers continue to focus on the antebellum South in terms of only three classes: planters, slaves, and poor whites. Indeed, there still is particular danger of such misinterpretation in regard to the Southern back country, i.e., the western hill and valley section running from Virginia through the Carolinas to Alabama, generally viewed as populated predominantly by poor whites.[3] Although recent historians have issued some correctives to this misunderstanding of the Southern frontier, few detailed studies of individual Southern back-country pioneers, and their settlements, have yet been published.[4] It is hoped that this study of one such settlement, the New River frontier border community, will help fill the gaps in our knowledge of a notable people and era.

The first settlers on the New River land belonged to the generation that established the earliest American frontier. Although the census of 1790 shows only five percent of the total population living west of the mountains,

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[1] Frank Lawrence Owsley, "Foreword" in *Plain Folk of the Old South* (Baton Rouge, 1949).

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] The origin of this view can be traced to William Byrd's colonial travel narratives, which express an attitude of contempt for frontier settlers along the Virginia–Carolina border; this attitude was often reiterated by later writers and historians.

[4] Examples of such studies are Robert W. Ramsey, *Carolina Cradle: Settlement of the Northwest Carolina Frontier, 1747-1762* (Chapel Hill, 1964), and James W. Hagy, "The Frontier at Castle's Woods, 1769-1786," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, LXXV (1967), 410-429.

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this group was the vanguard of a steady stream of western pioneers.[5] While historians have stressed the significance of the early American pioneers, Robert W. Ramsey points out that little is known about the individuals who initiated the frontier movement:

> Many able historians have recognized in their works that the frontier was really synonymous with the people who occupied it . . . yet the writing has been largely general in nature, particularly with regard to the colonial period . . . remarkably few individuals are identified and assessed.[6]

This paper will analyze the New River border frontier, an area encompassing part of present-day Grayson County, Virginia, as well as Ashe and Allegheny counties, North Carolina, in order to identify many of the first-generation settlers in the river valley and adjoining creek areas, and, in addition, to discuss their origins, motivations for migration and settlement, location of new home sites, and in general, lifestyle.

The dominating feature of the area which attracted these settlers was the New River. This river, which originates in northwestern North Carolina and flows into southwestern Virginia, was first discovered and named in 1654 by Colonel Abraham Wood, who had been commissioned by the Virginia House of Burgesses to explore new lands.[7] Although at first referred to as Wood's River, it was named New River. Actually one of the oldest rivers in the world, it is a remnant of the great prehistoric Teays River which traversed almost half the continent before it was drastically altered by the last ice age; only that portion known as the New River remained in almost its original state.[8] Into this valley of pristine wilderness, Wood ventured in the seventeenth century. There is no record of the particular route Wood took on his exploration, but Summers surmises "that he first struck the river not far from the Blue Ridge near the present Virginia–North Carolina line," since travel was then all east of the mountains.[9] At this spot there was easiest access to the river. As evidence of Wood's presence, there is in Floyd County, Virginia, today a Wood's Gap, where a branch of New River runs through a Blue Ridge mountain pass.

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[5] William W. Sweet, *The Story of Religion in America* (New York, 1930), p. 205.

[6] Ramsey, *Carolina Cradle*, p. xi.

[7] Lewis Preston Summers, *History of Southwest Virginia, 1746-1786* (Richmond, 1903), p. 36. There is some disagreement over the date of the river's discovery; Thomas Perkins Abernethy says it was 1671.

[8] United States Senate, Ninety-Third Congress, *Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Public Lands of the Committee on Interior on S. 2439* (Washington, 1974), p. 88.

[9] Summers, *History of Southwest Virginia*, p. 35.

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Despite the early date of Wood's discovery, no settlers came into this frontier area for well over a hundred years, and then they entered by a different route, coming south from Pennsylvania along the Great Wagon Road through the Valley of Virginia. Thus the New River Valley was first settled further north, near present-day Blacksburg (then called Draper's Meadows). The southern stretch of New River on the Virginia–Carolina border remained wilderness much longer, because the main route of travel by-passed the area; as Thomas Perkins Abernethy explains: "The reason for this is obvious. The main route through the Valley, the oft-mentioned Warrior's Trace, did not continue westward but crossed the Blue Ridge at the Staunton River water gap." [10] Thus the pioneers on the Wagon Road actually crossed the Blue Ridge coming *east* and detoured around the southwest corner of Virginia, where the Valley narrows near New River. When settlers finally did penetrate into this natural cul-de-sac, about the 1760s, they established families that remained there, intermarrying and perpetuating their Anglo-Saxon-Celtic culture, even to the present day.

More than forty first-generation New River families who came into that border area between 1760 and 1790 have been identified through study of county land, tax, and marriage records, court cases, wills, and militia lists, as well as United States census and pension records. The majority of settlers did not come alone, but as members of large extended families, usually those of married brothers headed by a father-patriarch, or by a widowed mother.[11] Further, an extended family of one surname was generally linked to two or more other families by intermarriage and by other associations that extended back in time over thirty or more years before the settlers arrived in the New River Valley. Thus their settlement on the southern frontier must be viewed in the larger context of the massive population movements of the eighteenth century.

From 1730 until the Revolution vast numbers of settlers journeyed west and south, primarily along the famous Wagon Road. Previous studies have described this heavily traveled pioneer route in some detail, locating its exact path from Philadelphia to the Yadkin.[12] There were other roads that joined the Wagon Road with eastern Virginia. "Connecting the lower Shenandoah Valley with Alexandria, Colchester, Fredericksburgh, and Falmouth, were

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[10] Thomas Perkins Abernethy, *Three Virginia Frontiers* (Baton Rouge, 1940), p. 53.

[11] Ramsey, *Carolina Cradle*, p. 192, identifies this pattern in Carolina.

[12] Jack M. Sosin, *The Revolutionary Frontier, 1763-1783* (New York, 1967), p. 44.

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four main wagon roads that followed the gaps in the Blue Ridge."[13] Analysis of the origins of settlers shows that they entered the New River Valley and its surrounding mountains from three sources: eastern Virginia; the Yadkin, North Carolina, area at the end of the Great Wagon Road; and counties of western Virginia, Maryland, or Pennsylvania that were situated on or near the Wagon Road.

A breakdown of these settlers' points of origin shows the pattern in greater detail. Those folk who came from outside Virginia originated in North Carolina, 4 families; Maryland, 1; Pennsylvania, 12; New Jersey, 9; and the New England area, 2. Those New River settlers who came from other Virginia counties originated in Amherst, 2 families; Bedford, 2; Botetourt, 2; Caroline, 1; and Shenandoah, 1. Two pioneers specifically named towns, Culpeper and Richmond.[14] In some cases members of the same family may have indicated different counties as place of birth. The majority of the newcomers did not traverse the entire Wagon Road, 435 miles from Philadelphia to the Yadkin, in one unbroken journey. Often a group of families stopped for some months or years in a county of the northern Shenandoah Valley before moving on further south. Another factor to be considered is that the county name for a particular place sometimes changed, as new counties were set off from older counties when the population increased. In general, however, the pattern of origin for the New River settlers is clear: a minority came from eastern Virginia and North Carolina, while the majority were born in the Pennsylvania–New Jersey area.

Prior to 1755 the New River border country was remote wilderness which had been settled by very few (even the Indians used that country only as hunting grounds), yet the entire area was claimed by the Loyal Land Company. Dr. Thomas Walker, the active head of the company, dominated land speculation in southwestern Virginia from the end of the French and Indian War to the Revolution.[15] According to Abernethy, "Walker had powerful connections among the political leaders of the Tidewater and among the magnates of the Valley."[16] Other prominent members of the Loyal Company were Peter Jefferson, Thomas Meriwether, John Lewis, and Edmund Pendleton. The Loyal Land Company, formed in 1749, received from Virginia a grant of 800,000 acres, beginning at the boundary of Virginia with North Carolina and running northwestward "to the North Seas," with only the

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[13] *Ibid.*

[14] An appendix filed with the manuscript for this article lists pioneers' names and places of origin.

[15] Thomas Perkins Abernethy, *Western Lands and the American Revolution* (New York, 1937), p. 60.

[16] *Ibid.*

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requirement to survey the said land.[17] The vague language of this grant led to disputes between the Loyal Company and the Greenbrier and the Ohio companies, which had received grants the same year.

A year before the enormous grant to the Loyal Company, another, smaller grant of 10,000 acres on the waters of New River had been made to a group who soon assigned their rights over to Walker, Jefferson, and associates. At that time Walker made a survey of the territory, which established the boundary between North Carolina and Virginia as far as the Laurel Fork of the Holston River.[18] Then in 1749, after receiving the 800,000 additional acres, Walker and a band of men set out on another surveying trip, a journey which Walker recorded in his famous journal. An entry made on the second day describes their entrance into the New River frontier:

> March 13: We went early to William Calloway's and supplied ourselves with Rum, Thread, and other necessaries & from thence took the main wagon Road leading to Wood's or the New River. It is not well cleared or beaten yet, but will be a very good one with proper management. This night we lodged in Adam Beard's low ground . . . afterwards we crossed the Blue Ridge. The ascent and descent is so easy that a Stranger would not know when he crossed the Ridge.[19]

Although the entrance was easy, the territory into which the men traveled became difficult to traverse; they went only as far north as Draper's Meadows (Blacksburg).

Disputes between the Loyal Company and the Ohio Company over their territories brought on legal proceedings which stopped all surveys until June 1753. On this date the Council of Virginia renewed the Loyal Company's grant, and allowed four more years to complete the surveying.[20] Also in 1753 another large grant in Southwest Virginia was made to the Walker group: the lands of the Peach Bottom area of present-day Grayson County, Virginia, in the New River Valley.[21]

According to Summers, by July 1753 Walker "hurried" to survey and sell land to purchasers at £3 per hundred acres, exclusive of fees. By the end of 1754 he had surveyed and sold 224 separate tracts of land, containing 45,249 acres.[22] Settlement of the New River frontier, however, was

[17] Sosin, *The Revolutionary Frontier*, p. 33; also Abernethy, *Western Lands*, p. 7.
[18] Summers, *History of Southwest Virginia*, p. 46.
[19] *Ibid.*, pp. 796-797.
[20] *Ibid.*, p. 52.
[21] Lyman Chalkley, editor, *Chronicles of Scotch-Irish Settlement in Virginia: Extracted from Original Court Records of Augusta County, Virginia*, I (Rosslyn, Va., 1912), p. 314. Also in Summers, *History of Southwest Virginia*, p. 51.
[22] Summers, *History of Southwest Virginia*, p. 52.

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further delayed by the troubles of the French and Indian War, which broke out in 1754, just as Walker had been cleared to make his surveys. No doubt the hostility of the Indians to English pioneers, especially stirred up by this war, and the complications of the disputes over land grants kept most settlers away from the New River land until the 1760s.

Although some of the hardiest pioneers had gone into the New River frontier in the 1750s, they had been forced to leave because of the Indian wars. Yet many of these did return. For instance, Heinrich Grob, a Swiss-German emigrant carpenter, who had arrived in Pennsylvania about ten years earlier, went in 1752 as far into southwest Virginia as the Fort Chiswell area, near present-day Wytheville.[23] After being forced out by the Indians the following year, he went on into North Carolina to the Yadkin, but he returned to Southwest Virginia in 1773 and claimed 636 acres on Tate's Run, a branch of Reed Creek in Wythe County. Some of his descendants moved a little further south into present-day Grayson County, nearer New River, and founded Grubb's Chapel Baptist Church, which is still flourishing today.

Andrew Baker from Yadkin, North Carolina, one of the first pioneers to claim land on the banks of the New River near the Virginia–North Carolina border, had an experience parallel to that of Henrich Grob. Driven out by Indians about 1754, Baker returned approximately ten years later, bringing reinforcements, the Cox, Osborne, and Hashe families.[24] This settlement by the Baker and associated families illustrates a typical pattern: "These groups did not move into the public domain in ignorance of their exact location; but rather, like the children of Israel, they sent their Calebs and Joshuas ahead to spy out the land and prepare the way."[25] Certainly Andrew Baker was a Joshua on the New River frontier. After his initial essay when he came from the Yadkin Valley in the 1750s but was driven back by the Indians, he returned about 1765 with enough people to make a permanent settlement. Probably Andrew Baker was related to the Samuel Baker whom Ramsey identifies as operating a public mill on Davidson's Creek in the Yadkin Valley in 1753; this Baker came from either Chester County or the Susquehanna Valley in Pennsylvania.[26]

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[23] Mrs. A. K. Spence, "Heinrich Grobb, Swiss Emigrant to Virginia," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, L (1942), 69-74; also discussed in Ramsey, *Carolina Cradle*, p. 91. Ramsey makes one correction to Spence's information.

[24] Chalkley, *Court Records of Augusta County, Virginia*, II, 143.

[25] Frank Lawrence Owsley, "Patterns of Migration," in *The South: Old and New Frontiers, Selected Essays of Frank Lawrence Owsley*, edited by Harriet Chappell Owsley (Athens, Ga., 1969), p. 22.

[26] Ramsey, *Carolina Cradle*, p. 53.

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The Osborne, Cox, and Hashe families, who accompanied Andrew Baker on his return to New River, were also originally from Pennsylvania. The interrelationship and association of the New River pioneers prior to and during migration into the southern frontier again exemplify the pattern that Owsley delineated:

The method of migration and settlement in the South was fairly uniform during the pioneer period. Friends and relatives living in the same or neighboring communities formed one or more parties and moved out together, and when they had reached the promised land they constituted a new community, which was called a "settlement"—and still is so called. Settlements were frequently miles apart, and the inhabitants of a single settlement would be more scattered than they had been in the old community in the East; and other settlers would come in after the first trek in smaller groups or in single families and fill in the interstices. These later comers would often be relatives or friends of those who had come first, or friends of their friends.[27]

The Osborne clan is a typical example of the extended family that pioneered together, guided by the family patriarch, who in this case was Ephraim Osborne, Sr., a fur trader for some years in the Yadkin Valley of North Carolina. He arrived at the New River frontier with his wife, some daughters, and five sons: Ephraim, Jr., Enoch, Stephen, Jonathan, and Solomon.[28] One of the daughters, Eleanor Osborne, was married to William Hashe; her brother Enoch was also married to a Hashe. According to oral family history as told in Southwest Virginia, the Hashe and Osborne families had lived near each other in Philadelphia, and then had traveled south together. That oral tradition has been substantiated by land and tax records of Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania, which show the Hashe and Osborne names listed in the townships of Upper Dublin and Whitemarsh, Philadelphia County, along with other surnames (Cox, Phipps, Livesay, Howell) that later appeared on the New River frontier.[29]

The Osborne, Hashe, and Cox families took up lands near each other along the New River in Virginia, near the border of North Carolina. The Hashe land was located where Bridle Creek empties into the river; the Osborne tract was between Bridle and Saddle Creeks, opposite the Baker site across the river; and the Cox land a little further south toward the state line. In some cases the tracts of land crossed the state boundary. These

[27] Owsley, "Patterns of Migration," in *Selected Essays,* p. 21.

[28] United States Archives, Record of Jonathan Osborne of Virginia, in "Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty Land Warrant Application Files, 1832" in Record Group Fifteen, *Records of the Veterans Administration,* Microfilm M 804, Washington, D. C.

[29] *Landholders of Philadelphia County, 1734,* I (Publications of the Genealogical Society of Pennsylvania, 1898), 180.

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early settlements are documented in court cases some of the men later undertook in 1805 to protect their claims against the encroachments of an intruder named Newell.[30]

In the course of thirty to forty years these settlers, and those who joined them, transformed the New River frontier from wilderness to cultivated farms, although much acreage was still left in timber. The Joshuas and the Calebs who first came in the 1750s and 1760s found a varied landscape that ranged in elevation from 2,500 feet on the bottomlands to the highest point, 5,719 feet at Mt. Rogers; the hills were densely forested in black walnuts, white and yellow poplars, chestnuts, oaks, hickories, and extensive pines. However, the land was practically devoid of human habitation. In a letter dated 1811 from Ashe County, North Carolina, a T. McGimsey wrote, "That tract of country called Ashe County was first settled in the year 1755. Capt. Jno. Cox informs me he recollects when there was but Two or Three Hunters Cabbens from the Lead mines to the Head of Wataga."[31]

The lead deposits near New River were discovered in 1756, and a mine was opened there. One of the operators was John Chiswell of Williamsburg, proprietor of the Raleigh Tavern. In 1758 a fort was built not far from the lead mines, on the Valley of Virginia road just west of the eighty-first meridian, and given the name Fort Chiswell.[32] Log cabins and forts were the first structures erected in the area; these forts were probably only fortified cabins.[33] There was also a fort located at Peach Bottom Creek, and another, according to some sources, at the Osborne cabin site.[34]

The need for forts is evident, as various Indian tribes resented the settlers' intrusion into their hunting grounds. An incident illustrating this occurred to three of the Osborne brothers on a deer-hunting expedition into Watauga, North Carolina. While sleeping by their campfire on a wet night, they were suddenly attacked by Indians. Solomon was killed; Ephraim, Jr., and Enoch were separated in the dark confusion, but each managed to return to the New River settlement.[35] Such were the hazards of pioneer life.

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[30] Chalkley, *Court Records of Augusta County, Virginia,* II, 143.

[31] A. R. Newsome, "Twelve North Carolina Counties in 1810-1811," *North Carolina Historical Review,* V (1928), 419.

[32] Abernethy, *Western Lands,* p. 79; Summers, *History of Southwest Virginia,* p. 69.

[33] Louis K. Koontz, *The Virginia Frontier: 1754-1763* (Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1963), p. 283.

[34] United States Archives, Record of John Cox, Jr., of Virginia, in "Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty Land Warrant Application Files, 1832" in Record Group Fifteen, *Records of the Veterans Administration,* Microfilm M 804, Washington, D. C.

[35] Benjamin Floyd Nuckolls, *Pioneer Settlers of Grayson County, Virginia* (Bristol, Tennessee, 1914), p. 172.

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The will of John Hashe, dated 1784, Montgomery County (present-day Grayson County), Virginia, provides another glimpse of the pioneer family.[36] Typically, this patriarch was known to all succeeding generations as "Old John." Listed in the will were his wife, sons, William, Thomas, and John "by the second wife," a grandson, Richard Hall, and two sons-in-law, Enoch Osborne and Francis Sturgill. A first-born son, John "by the first wife," was cut off with only five shillings. That is probably the John Hashe who was named in the tax lists of Shenandoah County, Virginia, in 1785. Possibly all of the family stopped off for a while in Shenandoah County on their move south from Philadelphia, and then all except one branch moved on again to the far end of the Valley, the cul-de-sac of the New River area where the final homestead was established. The possessions bequeathed in this will of 1784 are the simple implements of the first-generation frontier home before elemental luxuries were acquired: a feather bed, large pot, frying pan, butter dish, beacon and six spoons, two spinning wheels, one riding saddle, and "all other furniture."

Life at that stage of the frontier settlement must have been austere, but the lure of land which enabled men to set up an independent existence overcame any hesitancy. During the years of the first generation on the southern frontier—the third through the sixth decades of the eighteenth century—the British government was actively encouraging the westward expansion in America, with the intention that the transmontane settlers would create a buffer zone against the Indians, and also would counteract French influence beyond the Alleghenies.[37] At this time hundreds of English, Scotch-Irish, and, to a lesser extent, German and French Huguenot pioneers poured into the southern back country. However, at the end of the French and Indian War it seemed that westward expansion might be checked when the British government in the Proclamation of 1763 decreed that there would be no white settlement west of the Appalachian divide.[38] By this action the government in England completely reversed its former position, seemed to nullify the land company grants, and left in limbo the frontiersmen who had already entered southwestern Virginia and northwestern North Carolina claiming homesteads. According to Sosin, "This prohibition caused much concern, particularly among Virginians who had settled west of the mountains along the Monongahela, Greenbrier, and

[36] Will of John Hashe, Montgomery County, Virginia, Will Book B, Clerk's Office, Montgomery County Court House, Christiansburg, Virginia.

[37] Sosin, *The Revolutionary Frontier*, p. 4.

[38] Abernethy, *Western Lands*, p. 11. Also discussed by Sosin and Summers.

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New Rivers but had been forced by the French and Indian raids to evacuate."[39] Now that the war had ended, the British administration wanted to pacify the Indians in order to secure the eastern seaboard; thus back-country men felt they had little support from the crown or the Tidewater officials. In outrage, settlers west of the 1763 Proclamation Line refused to pay their quitrents because the new policy seemed to deny their right to settle.[40]

In 1766 the Loyal Company warned settlers on its grant to get out until matters were arranged; the back-country men then petitioned the Virginia House of Burgesses, which wrote to London urging that settlement beyond the mountains be allowed. At that time the Board of Trade in England urged colonists to wait until a definite boundary was established. Then in 1768 the Treaty of Hard Labor Creek was signed with the Cherokees: the boundary line was fixed from North Carolina north to Chiswell's Mine and thence direct to the mouth of the Kanawha River.[41] Frontiersmen in Southwest Virginia were shocked and incensed at the placement of this line, as many of them had already settled or made claim to land further west. The Augusta court records show that Andrew Baker and others returned to their lands during the period 1765-1768. The significance of that date of return has been noted:

> By December 1768, Walker communicated the result of the treaty to the emigrants along the borders, and no longer could the settlement of the country be postponed. In the winter of 1768 and the early part of 1769, a great flood of settlers over-ran southwestern Virginia and advanced as far south as Boone's Creek in East Tennessee.[42]

The great flood of pioneers into these lands in defiance of the newly concluded treaty demonstrated the determination of individuals to make their own fortunes. Their actions had results, for in May of 1769 the boundary line was moved westward to the Holston River and drawn from there to the mouth of the Kanawha, as established by the Treaty of Lochaber, South Carolina.[43]

From the time that the boundary disputes were settled until the outbreak of the Revolution, the New River frontier filled up rapidly. Many of the newcomers had prior relationships to the earliest settlers in the area, who had acted as forerunners for them. As land began to fill up with settlers,

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[39] Sosin, *The Revolutionary Frontier*, p. 15.
[40] Abernethy, *Western Lands*, p. 11.
[41] *Ibid.*, p. 64.
[42] Summers, *History of Southwest Virginia*, pp. 92-93.
[43] Abernethy, *Western Lands*, p. 71.

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the pioneers cultivated fields and built churches, introducing the middle-class lifestyle that most of them had known on the eastern seaboard. The establishment of organized religion was of importance to the settlers. Many of the earliest settlers were of Quaker background, from such heavily Quaker areas as Loudoun County, Virginia; Chester County, Pennsylvania; and Burlington County, New Jersey. A Quaker meeting was established in the New River border frontier section by Friends from New Jersey about 1785. Their certificates were sent first to Deep River Monthly Meeting in North Carolina, but then eventually to the Mount Pleasant Meeting (later merged with the Chestnut Creek Meeting) of Grayson County, Virginia. It appears that the Mount Pleasant Meeting was "laid down" about 1826 because of the migration of most of its members to Ohio and other western areas.[44] Another reason for the decline in Quaker influence was the conversion of many settlers to the Methodist and Baptist churches, which were gaining strength on the frontier in the late eighteenth century. Fox Creek Baptist Church was constituted in 1782 close to the Virginia–North Carolina line in Grayson County.[45] A Methodist chapel was built on the New River at Bridle Creek at an early date; Bishop Francis Asbury preached there in 1788 on one of his many journeys through the colonies. The bishop recorded in his journal that he enjoyed the hospitality of the home of Enoch Osborne, who was Asbury's host on that occasion and at other times:

> Thursday, 22 [March 1792]. We made an early start for friend Osborne's, on New River, fifteen miles distant. Here we were generously entertained. After talking and praying together, we were guided across the river, for which I was thankful. Arriving at Fox Creek, we crossed it eleven times, and tarried that night with C________, a *nominal* member of the Society of Friends, who used us very well.[46]

Enoch Osborne, Asbury's host, assumed a commanding position in the New River Valley as a Methodist church leader, magistrate for Montgomery County, captain of the militia during the Revolutionary War, and justice for Grayson County.[47] That he did so is not surprising in light of the fact that he was a member of the Osborne family which had exerted such leadership elsewhere. Ramsey has identified Enoch's father, Ephraim, Sr., as a relative of two early North Carolina pioneers: Caleb Osborne, originally

[44] William W. Hinshaw, *Encyclopedia of American Quaker Genealogy* (Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1936; supplement, 1948), Supplement to Volume I, p. 12.

[45] Arthur L. Fletcher, *Ashe County: A History* (Charlotte, North Carolina, 1963), p. 150.

[46] Francis Asbury, *The Journal of Francis Asbury, Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, II (New York, 1821), 710.

[47] Nuckolls, *Pioneer Settlers*, p. 90.

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from Elizabethtown, New Jersey, and Alexander Osborne, a prominent leader on the northwestern North Carolina frontier.[48] Alexander Osborne, who was also born in New Jersey and lived for a while in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, was established as a justice of the peace in North Carolina by 1749. Furthermore, Alexander Osborne was instrumental in establishing a classical school near his home in frontier North Carolina in order to educate his son. Although the Osbornes lived on the frontier and survived by use of wilderness skills such as hunting and trapping, as well as by farming, still they and others brought ideas of the seaboard lifestyle with them, and they intended to establish such a society in their new region. Abernethy says, "contrary to the popular conception that those who pushed the frontier westward were uncouth, uneducated but picturesque figures . . ., most of them were men of position and good education . . . leadership was at least as restricted as it was in the older communities."[49] Historians have recognized that the leadership contributed to the South by outstanding sons of the "plain folk," in alliance with the planter-aristocrat, was a major factor in antebellum Southern culture.[50] Thus we should not be surprised to see that, just as Alexander Osborne exerted leadership in Rowan County, North Carolina, so Enoch Osborne led in the foundation of a middle-class society in the New River border area.

The Osbornes and several other leading New River families were among the pioneers of English or Welsh ancestry; in discussing the influence of this group on the frontier, Ramsey states that:

> Although a majority of the settlers on the northwest Carolina frontier were Scotch-Irish Presbyterians or German Lutherans, a significant number were of English or Welsh origin and of Quaker or Baptist persuasion. The importance of this group on the frontier was considerable, for most of the sheriffs, clerks of the court, lawyers, and justices of the peace were of Quaker or Baptist origin.[51]

Frontier pioneers of British ancestry often came from eastern seaboard areas where their families had lived for several generations. Ephraim and Caleb Osborne were native-born colonists; such men had their motives, too, for pushing out to the southern frontier. James G. Leyburn, historian of the Scotch-Irish, also pays some attention to the native-born pioneer and claims that there were "many who had . . . been born in Pennsylvania. As younger

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[48] Ramsey, *Carolina Cradle*, pp. 49, 82n, 177. Alexander Osborne is also discussed in Jethro Rumple, *A History of Rowan County, North Carolina* (Salisbury, North Carolina, 1881).
[49] Abernethy, *Western Lands*, pp. 80-81.
[50] Owsley, "Plain Folk," in *Selected Essays*, p. 42.
[51] Ramsey, *Carolina Cradle*, p. 130.

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sons, ambitious men, or those dissatisfied with the crowding in a growing region, they were looking for better opportunities elsewhere."[52]

Caleb Osborne, a notable example of this group, had an even more compelling reason to leave the eastern seaboard than most, for he had been involved in a famous colonial real estate litigation case. On April 13, 1745, a bill was filed in a New Jersey chancery court by which certain East Jersey landholders, including the Earl of Stair, tried to oust many settlers around Elizabethtown, New Jersey. The settlers, known as the Clinker Lot Right Men, had derived their titles to land from grants made eighty years earlier; however, by the eighteenth century, after changes in proprietorship, some grants were thrown into doubt. In July 1744 many of the men whose land titles were threatened sent a petition regarding the case to England.[53] Among those signing the petition was Caleb Osborne, kinsman of Ephraim Osborne (probably of Pennsylvania) with whom he later migrated to North Carolina. It is interesting to note that many surnames on the petition in New Jersey later show up in the New River frontier, including those of Halsey, Sturgis, Young, Wright, Williams, and Whitehead. (There seem to be too many correlating names for coincidence. Although the first names do not all correspond, that fact may indicate the lapse of a generation from one location to another.) The relationship of Caleb Osborne to Ephraim, who later left North Carolina to move to the New River area, proves a definite link between the New River frontier and the Elizabethtown petitioners. Although the Clinker Lot Right case went to court in 1745, litigation dragged on, and this was no doubt a reason that some individuals gave up and moved on to take up lands on the frontier. Probably Alexander Osborne, who had left New Jersey for Pennsylvania and then North Carolina, urged both Caleb and Ephraim to move. The court case of the Clinker Lot Right Men never came to a decision, "being thus settled practically in favor of the defendants";[54] by that time, however, many of the original petitioners were no longer in New Jersey.

As we have seen, the majority of the New River settlers came from New Jersey or Pennsylvania, where many of them were closely associated before they moved. Tolles has shown that the Delaware River Valley, including both its New Jersey and Pennsylvania sides, was a "single economic province and . . . a single cultural area."[55] Records of Quaker meetings indicate that

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[52] James G. Leyburn, *The Scotch-Irish: A Social History* (Chapel Hill, 1962), p. 206.

[53] *New Jersey Archives*, First Series, VI (Somerville, New Jersey, 1918), 206-215.

[54] Edwin Francis Hatfield, *History of Elizabeth, New Jersey* (New York, 1868), p. 75.

[55] Frederick B. Tolles, *Quakers and the Atlantic Culture* (New York, 1960), p. 117.

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the population on both sides of the Delaware were in constant touch with each other. Similarly, the Presbyterian churches provided opportunity for such interchange of visits and, in particular, drew together colonists of various backgrounds: New England Puritans, who were part of the "spill-over" into New Jersey, newly arrived Scotch-Irish, and a few French Huguenots. In their pre-Appalachian days many New River families were located in the New Jersey counties of Essex and Burlington, and in Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania, and adjoining Delaware Valley counties. As the westward movement developed, these same families moved by stages through the Susquehanna and Cumberland valleys into the Shenandoah. Their close-knit relationships must have been a significant element that sustained them on the frontier.

A number of historians have discussed fully the motives for this mid-eighteenth-century pioneer movement. It is time to focus on more of the individuals who constituted the movement and describe their settlement in the New River frontier. The Cox family from Pennsylvania, previously mentioned in connection with their migration into the New River area, consisted of a group of brothers with their widowed mother. Although this type of grouping was not as common as that of patriarch and sons, it was not unusual. Ramsey explains that frequently families moved soon after the death of a father, and he enumerates a lengthy list of patriarchal deaths that resulted in "an exodus of sons or nephews to the Shenandoah Valley and Carolina."[56] The Coxes were of Scottish origin. According to one version of oral family tradition, the Cox brothers came directly from Scotland to Southwest Virginia. That, however, is unlikely. Another version of the family history holds that the mother, Mary Rankin Cox, was the widow of the Joshua Cox who died in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. Lancaster County, in the Cumberland Valley, was heavily Scotch-Irish until 1820, by which time most of that group had moved on south and west.[57]

Both John and David Cox were prominent leaders in the early New River settlement. They were both rather large landholders with properties extending across the state line.[58] Also they were slaveowners, on the minor scale found in western Virginia. John Cox had eleven slaves, the largest number belonging to one owner in that frontier area in 1790.[59] As a result of his

[56] Ramsey, *Carolina Cradle,* pp. 21-22.

[57] *Ibid.,* p. 142.

[58] Augusta B. Fothergill and John Mark Naugle, editors, *Virginia Tax Payers, 1782-1787* (Baltimore, 1966), p. 29.

[59] United States Census, 1790, Wilkes County (Morgan District), North Carolina, report in *Heads of Families at the First Census, 1790, in North Carolina* (Baltimore, 1966), p. 123.

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status, John Cox was one of the three men named county commissioners at the creation of Ashe County, North Carolina, in 1799. During the Revolutionary War both brothers assumed leadership positions: John became captain of a militia group, and David, a lieutenant. These men are representative of those western Virginia and North Carolina pioneer leaders who labored to turn the wilderness into an orderly region of farmlands. The culture such leaders established had a distinctly aristocratic tone complementing that of Piedmont and Tidewater Virginia. Abernethy claims that "their leadership was as powerful in their respective bailiwicks as was that of the old Virginia families east of the mountains." [60] That type of man whose forceful character led in the establishment of an agrarian community in the New River border settlement is certainly exemplified by the Cox brothers. The prosperous level that the New River lifestyle had attained by 1818 is indicated by David Cox's will, which bequeaths to his eight sons land, money, slaves, and books.[61]

These New River families, even those that were slaveowners, may be classified as "plain country folk." As defined by Owsley, this "group included the small slaveholding farmers; the non-slaveholders who owned the land which they cultivated; the numerous herdsmen on the frontier; and those tenant farmers whose agricultural production . . . indicated thrift, energy, and self-respect." [62] That summary does, of course, indicate a gradation of status, although all of these groups may be called middle class. As a further clarification of this matter, Robert P. Fulton defines the middle class of antebellum Virginia as follows, "mostly farmers owning a few slaves and horses and between 100 and 500 acres" while the upper middle were "individuals owning 500 to 1,000 acres." [63] Data for an Appalachian county just north of Grayson show that in 1830 nearly forty percent of the adult white male population was in the middle-class category.[64]

A man's status is usually reflected in the architecture of his home; thus it was for the plain folk of western Virginia and North Carolina as well as for other Southern sections. As the earlier, austere stage of frontier life evolved slowly into a more prosperous agrarian society, the prominent families in the New River Valley region began to replace log cabins with the

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[60] Abernethy, *Three Virginia Frontiers*, p. 59.

[61] Will of David Cox, Grayson County, Virginia, Will Book, Clerk's Office, Grayson County Court House, Independence, Virginia.

[62] Owsley, "Plain Folk," in *Selected Essays*, p. 34.

[63] Robert P. Fulton, "Sectionalism and Social Structure: A Case Study of Jeffersonian Democracy," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, LXXX (1972), 75.

[64] *Ibid.*

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southern "I" houses, two-storied with white clapboard siding and long, one-storied porches; many of these are still to be seen in the area today. Such a house wherever it was built connoted "agrarian stability . . . the home of the middle-class farmer who carried much of the predominantly English folk culture of the eastern South." [65]

Although there were distinctions of social standing in the Southern Piedmont and Uplands, there was no sharp division of groups such as existed in the Tidewater. On the southern frontier, "important forces that diminished the feeling of class stratification and helped in the creation of a sense of unity . . . were the association of rich and poor in all religious activities and in the schools, and the frequent ties of blood kinship between them." [66] Kinship ties were generally complex and important in a remote, closed-off area such as the New River Valley and its surrounding mountains. The earliest arrivals in the New River Valley were closely associated and interrelated families who usually had the best-situated, largest tracts of land, and held the prominent positions of leadership, while those who came ten or twenty years later had to take smaller, more remote tracts back on the creeks. Yet because the population was relatively small and choice of mates was limited, marriages did take place without great regard for status. Even though certain families within the valley tended to favor each other for choice of mates (such as Hashe-Halsey-Osborne marriages), eventually the interconnections through marriage included almost everyone in one vast network. W. J. Cash notes this general pattern in the South, "the degree of consanguinity among the population of the old Southern backcountry was very great. . . . Hence by 1800 any given individual was likely to be cousin, in one degree or another, to practically everybody within a radius of thirty miles about him." [67] In such a situation it was impossible for even the leaders of a settlement to hold themselves apart from and superior to the rest of the people.

The intricacies of kinship groupings are demonstrated in the Anderson-Bonham-Runyon family connections. This interrelationship was established in Burlington County, New Jersey, before entry into the southern back country; however, such family interweavings intensified on the remote frontier. In New Jersey, Cornelius Anderson was married to Catherine Runyon, whose sister Martha was wife to Hezekiah Bonham. Further,

[65] Henry Glassie, *Pattern in the Material Folk Culture of the Eastern United States* (Philadelphia, 1968), p. 99.

[66] Owsley, "Plain Folk," in *Selected Essays*, p. 37.

[67] W. J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York, 1941), p. 27.

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Cornelius's sister, Catherine Anderson, married Samuel Bonham.[68] The Cornelius Anderson family moved southwest by stages; his name surfaces in Augusta County, Virginia,[69] and finally the same name appears on the New River frontier in the 1790 Wilkes (now Ashe) County, North Carolina, census.[70] Furthermore, the related family of Bonhams also moved steadily west and then south. The name Bonham is of English Puritan origin; the family entered New Jersey from Massachusetts in 1666, possibly leaving Massachusetts because they had become Quakers.[71] From New Jersey they moved in the eighteenth century into Chester County, Pennsylvania, then to Loudoun County, Virginia, and finally into Southwest Virginia. Joseph Bonham, who was on the tax list in Loudoun County in 1782, died and left a will in Wythe County in 1803.[72] After entering the New River area the Bonhams and Andersons became closely associated with the Hashe and Osborne families; numerous marriages took place among these clans.

The Livesay family was also closely associated with the Andersons even before the New River era. George Livesay and Peter Anderson were both born at Fort Bedford on the Wagon Road, and stayed together throughout their pioneer migrations.[73] George married Peter Anderson's sister Nancy. The two men each took up land on Fox Creek of New River in present-day Grayson County in the 1780s. George Livesay was one of nine children of a Thomas Livesay who had settled on the Blackwater River in Pittsylvania County, Virginia, by 1770, when he was involved in a court suit there (*Livesay* vs. *Whithall*).[74] This Thomas is possibly descended from the Livesay family of Pennsylvania, which was established in 1681 by the arrival of Thomas Livesay, Quaker, of Cheshire, England.[75] The Livesay name appears in the same township lists of early eighteenth-century Philadelphia County, as do the names of Hashe, Osborne, Cox, and Phipps; all of these surnames later appear in the New River settlement. The Thomas Livesay who followed the Wagon Road to Pittsylvania County, Virginia, was an enterprising investor in land and mining interests; besides the 507

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[68] Samuel Jeremiah Bonham, *The Bonham Family* (Niles, Ohio, 1955), p. 98.

[69] Chalkley, *Court Records of Augusta County, Virginia,* II, 62.

[70] United States Census, 1790, Wilkes County, North Carolina, in *Heads of Families,* p. 120.

[71] Bonham, *Bonham Family,* p. 26.

[72] Fothergill and Naugle, *Virginia Tax Payers,* p. 12.

[73] United States Archives, Record of Peter Anderson of Virginia, in "Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty Land Warrant Application Files, 1832" in Record Group Fifteen, *Records of the Veterans Administration,* Microfilm M 804, Washington, D. C.

[74] James Livesay, *Livesays in the United States* (Jackson, Mississippi, 1971), p. 7.

[75] *Ibid.,* p. 8.

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acres of his homestead, he had 5,000 acres on a branch of the Cole River of Montgomery County (presently Kanawha County, West Virginia) in 1781. Further, he and three others owned land on Smith Mountain for mining purposes in 1785; then two years later he formed the Livesay-Holiday copper mining partnership in Franklin County. His son George continued the pioneer movement westward. After he and Peter Anderson had lived in the New River Valley over thirty years, they moved again (leaving some descendants in the New River area), and settled in Hawkins County, East Tennessee, in 1819.

Ezekiel Young, also a first-generation pioneer at New River, is representative of those plain folk who came into the colonies as indentured servants. According to the Young family tradition, Ezekiel was born in Bristol, England, about 1753 and was indentured for the passage to America. He probably arrived in Philadelphia, and possibly was related to the Youngs on the Elizabethtown, New Jersey, petition. At any rate, Ezekiel is said to have served in the French and Indian War and then sought adventure as a hunter on the southern frontier, near Saltville, Virginia. Finally he established his home place on Little Fox Creek of New River, became a lieutenant in the Montgomery County militia, sired five sons, and after a full life died in 1800.[76]

During the establishment of the culture of their region, the leaders on the southern frontier—the militia officers, lawyers, teachers, merchants, physicians, clergy—whatever their social origins, imitated, consciously or unconsciously, aspects of the aristocratic style of life in the Piedmont and Tidewater. Further, although the number of slaves was not great, the fact that there were slaveholders added to the leading frontier families' identification with those to the east of the mountains. Historians vary in their opinions concerning the degree of aristocratic or democratic characteristics in the lifestyle of the southern back country. W. J. Cash stresses the frontier conditions that prevailed throughout the South up to the eve of the Civil War, emphasizing the democratic characteristics that the frontier produced. On the other hand, Abernethy and Sosin tend to emphasize the aristocratic tone of life in the frontier South. A summary of Sosin's position refers to "the stubborn determination of the elite to transplant unchanged the culture they had known in the East."[77] All acknowledge, however, that frontier conditions did alter the transplanted culture. Owsley stresses the intercon-

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[76] Nuckolls, *Pioneer Settlers*, p. 50, only gives brief mention to Young.
[77] Ray Allen Billington, "Foreword" to Sosin, *The Revolutionary Frontier*, p. ix.

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nections of folk and gentry, and shows that leadership for the South in the professions and business came out of the most talented and refined families of the plain folk.

Thus analysis of the 1760-1820 era of the New River Valley frontier settlement shows that the first-generation settlers were extended families of predominantly English and Scottish "plain folk" background, who had the determination to establish a solid, middle-class agricultural lifestyle. The families who entered this western Virginia–North Carolina area ranged from those whose progenitors had arrived on the coast of America over one hundred years earlier to those who had made the crossing themselves; all of these pioneers were intent on becoming independent landholders. Although some of the men who first penetrated into the New River region probably preferred a solitary wilderness existence, that type soon moved on West through the nearby Cumberland Gap. The ones who remained in the New River settlement were generally people characteristic of the yeoman world: Ephraim Osborne, Sr., fur trader; Ezekiel Young, indentured servant turned frontier hunter and homesteader; John Hashe, farmer; the Cox brothers, militia leaders during the Revolution. Such was the type which transformed the wilderness into Grayson and Ashe counties, and established their distinct Southern Appalachian culture. There where the Valley of Virginia ends in the New River valley and hill region, the descendants of these eighteenth-century settlers have remained, remote and isolated until recently by their closed-in geography, self-sustained yeomen, perpetuating the solid evidence of the pioneer achievement.[78]

[78] Filed with the manuscript of this article in the library of the Virginia Historical Society is an appendix, "Some Early New River Pioneers," which lends additional support to the thesis of this article.

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