

- **Claiborne County (TN) Progress**

## **Nell Quesenberg Report**

**June 5, 1980**

### **THE HUNTER'S MOON**

By Nell Quesenberg

In North America in 1785, only a thin eastern-most ledge of land was settled. To the West, there was a large expanse of land, some parts so timbered as to be impenetrable, except for the traces of wild animals, also used by the red Indian tribes that were presently host of this continent.

Powell Mountain River and Valley lying in Lee County, Virginia, and also in Hancock and Claiborne counties of Tennessee, were named for Ambrose Powell, a member of Dr. Thomas Walker's exploring party of 1750. In spare moments, Ambrose Powell enjoyed carving his name on trees. Later, early settlers would give his name to this area, notwithstanding, that the river had first been called Beargrass because of the heavy growth of grass along its course.

By the time George Yoakum I, his wife, Margaret, their children and his two brothers-in-law, John and Peter Van Bebber, established Yoakum Station, near 1785, in Powell Valley, Tennessee, the land had been fought for by the French, the Indians, the English and the Spanish.

Always, for the majority of any long settled population, rules of correctness are laid down. However, early America was a time for selfness and self-direction because only the bold were there. These early border people were the mist as compared to the rain of people who would come later when the wilderness was tamed.

It was now autumn of the Yoakums' seventeenth year in Yoakum's Station. Isaac, Peter and George II were already born when the family left Yoakum's Station, Powell Valley, Lee County, Virginia. Feltz, Robert, Margaret and Nancy, now nine, were born in Powell Valley, Tennessee.

Several families now lived in the settlement, in log cabins, outside the walls of the fort. Many were friends and relatives of the Yoakums, whose connections, like the Boone family, went

all the way back to Pennsylvania and even to Europe. The families, with a sense of settling, had established a Primitive Baptist church called Davis Creek Chapel.

Along with the other families, much of the Yoakum land outside of the fort had been cleared. George I and his sons had built a cabin inside the fort of hued logs covered with white oak shingles. Inside the large comfortable cabin was their finely chiseled limestone fireplace with its high fire board and fire hook for their cooking pots. Also in this room was their sturdy furniture, tables, cupboards and benches made mainly of planed walnut or pine.

The beds were roomy, square wooden frames fastened with pegs. Margaret lined these beds with corn husks, pelts and feathers of the softest down. Wardrobes and chests lined the walls of these bedrooms made bright with brilliant splashes of color from dyed woven rag rugs and patchwork quilts stitched together from cloth Margaret had corded, spun and wove.

Also inside the fort was the Yoakum store house, blacksmith's shop and stable, plus a few cabins that the other families occupied in case of attack and they must again live behind high wooden walls.

In the Yoakum store house was an assortment of goods. Material, needles, small tools from pots from the blacksmith shop, rifles, powder, lead, handmade vine baskets, pots, jute, pitchers, mugs and crocks of molded baked clay.

Occasionally, a few fine hand-crafted pieces of furniture, such as ornate dressers and chests, would be displayed in the store. Too, there was the Indian trade. These red men, in the process of being assimilated into this new white world of the wilderness, brought in large heavy pelts to exchange for whiskey and other goods of their fancy.

Just now, George was examining one of the long rifles in his new shipment of goods from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He had been told the extended barrel assured greater accuracy than with one of the old-type muskets. Also, the smaller bore required less powder and a smaller ball for each shot, taking only twenty seconds to load. This long rifle would shoot an average of fifty yards; however, the gun had a kick backwards.

Margaret was putting away the tea and dry goods. Seeing some of the new pewterware, she exclaimed softly. George glanced up from the rifle, noticing the shiny brown bun of her hair pressed into waves toward her lovely curving cheek. He, as always, felt started by her beauty.

Margaret was now forty-six, four years older than himself. However, there was yet a freshness in her face, and her soft brown eyes were those of a girl. George, too, possessed the strong vigor of lingering youth. His bold dark eyes and large curving nose under still dark hair, belied middle age.

It was that time in autumn when the length of those few nights and days became of equal duration. The moon, while nearly full, glows with a particularly brilliant light. At this time, the moon is called by some the Harvest Moon and by others, whose blood as in ancient times arouses for the labor of the chase, it is called the Hunter's Moon.

So it was that several men at the station, gathering their dogs and their guns, traveled deep into the Cumberland Mountains, breathtakingly covered by the refulgent gold and red colors of fall. They were after Bruin, the black bear. That solitary, inoffensive creature was plentiful throughout the Cumberland Mountains. He supplied the settlers with a large amount of their winter's meat, tallow and luxurious pelts.

Today, October 28, 1802, was to be the last day of George Yoakum I's life. He who was ordinarily a dead shot, placed his shot with his new rifle a little high and to the left. Bruin screamed his pain. With great horny, ripping claws he tore at the dogs, as they, in hot blood, made their snapping biting rush. From the gun's sudden backfire, George I slipped on a mossy rock, falling back into the undergrowth. He favored his ankle as he stood to reload. Raising his gun again to take aim at Bruin, he saw the furious animal was only yards away. He again fired at the angry animal, but with awful terror felt the brute's strength matched against his own. Each swipe of the bear's long forearms, hanging from their black, hairy, strongly sloping shoulders, reached through to his bones. He felt himself being pulled forward toward the flat forehead, mad rounded eyes, toward the large canine-shaped teeth and jaws. Then he saw Margaret's sweet loving face, his children, his father Valentine, his mother, along with his young brothers and sisters, being killed by the Shawnees. He saw himself kill three braves as a lad, large and strong and fleet of foot - fled, fled, fled.

Thus died George Yoakum I, founder of Yoakum's Station, the Father of Powell Valley, Tennessee, from whom all the Claiborne County Yoakums are descended, including my mother, Louise Yoakum Marchio, her cousin, Richard Austin "Dick" Yoakum, who, along with our Missouri cousin, Maude Yoakum Kincaide, made this story possible.

