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Source: *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, FALL 2002, Vol. 61, No. 3 (FALL 2002), pp. 161-181

Published by: Tennessee Historical Society

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.com/stable/42627701>

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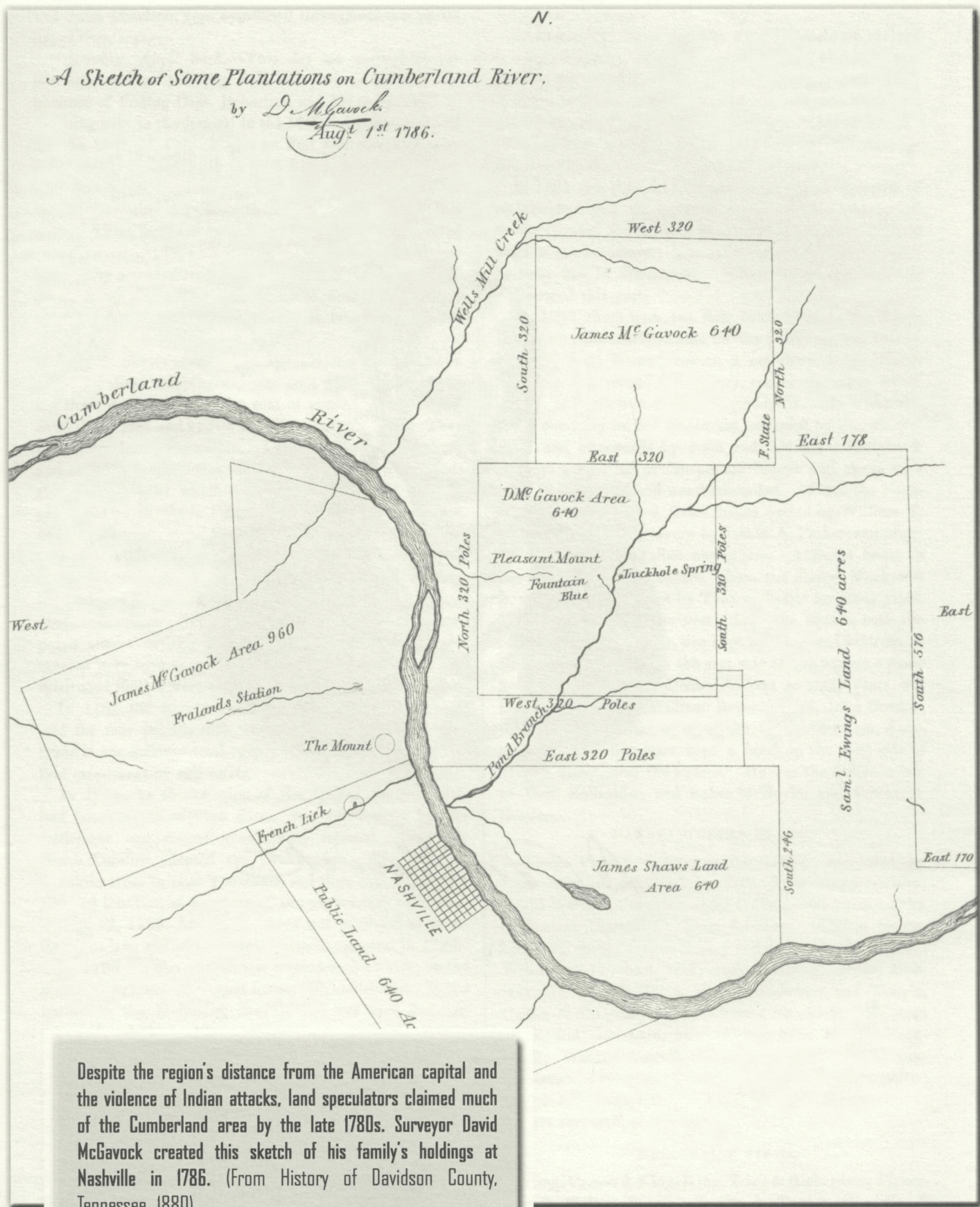
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# Land Speculation, Popular Democracy, and Political Transformation on the Tennessee Frontier, 1780-1800

By Kristofer Ray

Washington administration agent I. H. Williamson was rather optimistic in the summer of 1789. Clearly relieved that American government had stabilized under the new Constitution, Williamson informed frontier leader James Robertson that North Carolina's Cumberland District problems were about to dissipate. The new Indian Commissioner General Benjamin Lincoln, he wrote,

will impress the Southern Indians with an idea that trifling is at an end, and that they must seriously treat and faithfully abide by what they promise. It is possible that the troops will be left as a barrier on the frontier to see that neither parties [sic] break the treaty. This I believe is the beginning of general Peace and security against the Indians.<sup>1</sup>

He added, "If you have seen any News Papers you may have observed that Congress Have established a Post on the Ohio, not with much hope as you must be assured, of collecting many Duties on Goods brought up the Mississippi, but to part fair and let Spain see that the new Government is resolved to maintain its Claim to the Navigation of that River."<sup>2</sup>

Williamson's faith in a burgeoning frontier/government relationship would prove premature. Due to a group of influential land speculators, the transition from North Carolina frontier to federal territory and ultimately into the state of Tennessee would be difficult. Taking advantage of both the lenient statutes of North Carolina and an unstable Confederation government, speculators in the 1770s and 1780s established frontier stations, fortified settlements, as focal points from which to survey contested lands. The stations, in turn, increasingly concerned local Indian tribes, who grew to believe "what was told some years ago by the Kings people i.e. if our elder brothers here overcome them, they would at last take all our hunting

grounds and bring us to nothing."<sup>3</sup> By the late 1770s, white encroachment led to confrontation between Cherokees and the eastern Watauga settlements, and after 1780, between the Chickasaws and the new group of settlers led by Robertson, Richard Henderson, and John Donelson in the Cumberland basin.<sup>4</sup>

As early as 1783, Spain received reports of armed Cumberland-to-Mississippi River expeditions and became convinced that, as nineteenth century historian John Haywood noted, "settlers on the western waters were of the warlike character as already to manifest an inordinate ambition and vast projects for conquering all the countries on the eastern shore of the Mississippi."<sup>5</sup> Hoping to establish a buffer zone between themselves and this American threat, Spanish ministers thus closed river navigation and signed treaties of friendship with the Cherokee and Creek Nations.

Such ongoing intimidation severely affected the economic and social stability of white settlers and led them to demand aid both from North Carolina and the Confederation government. When neither proved willing to help, settlers and speculators looked for an alternate solution: a powerful central authority that would stabilize the economy, protect personnel and stations, stimulate immigration, and ensure that Spain would allow settlers access to the port of New Orleans.<sup>6</sup> Their attempts at procuring these ends generally fell into three categories. First, as James Robertson made clear, there was always the possibility of looking abroad:

In all probability we cannot long remain in our present state, and if the British or any commercial nation who may be in possession of the mouth of the Mississippi would furnish us with trade, and receive our produce there cannot be a doubt but that the people on the west side [of] the Appalachian [sic] mountains will open their eyes to their real interest.<sup>7</sup>

More often, the region's leadership employed extralegal means of support, the results of which were governing authorities such as the Watauga Association, Cumberland Compact, and the state of Franklin. After 1788 a third option won out, however; leading speculators found that the new American government could provide the authority they were seeking, as well as the stability necessary to establish themselves as the political leaders of the Southwest.<sup>8</sup> Given that several already maintained ties to (or were in their own right) influential Federalists, it comes as no surprise that they easily transferred their support to the new government.

This partnership would end by the early 1790s when the Washington administration and its eastern political allies realized that aggressive land speculation was costing the government millions of dollars in revenue, and was leading to a frightful escalation in settler-Indian warfare by pushing white settlers onto contested land in the Cumberland basin. Their conclusion -- that Southwestern conflagration grew out of a land-grab impulse that left Indian tribes more in need of protection than white settlers -- came at a moment when the cash-poor government was looking for ways to exploit western resources and begin lowering the country's sizeable debt. Seeing that better opportunities for federal control lay in the land rich northwest, they implemented a defensive Southwestern policy that effectively alienated not only the otherwise supportive territorial elite but also the region's growing population.<sup>9</sup> The end result was that Federalist interests gave way to a new, powerful "Jeffersonian" political culture that offered nascent but growing democratic institutions and that would not falter until well into the nineteenth century.

Although potentially profitable, land speculation had operated as a destructive force almost from its arrival in North Carolina's "western district." Indeed, prior to the 1760s the area was part of a wider European market that brought the Chickasaws in the west and Cherokees in the east together with white traders into what John R. Finger has called a middle

ground -- a realm in which Southwestern Indians interacted with European cultures but were not dominated by them.<sup>10</sup> This middle ground began to erode in the years

after the Seven Years War, when white explorers and long hunters began to appear in significant numbers in the district. Personalities such as Daniel Boone captured the popular imagination with their extended hunting exploits, but his and his colleagues' activities went beyond the mere harvesting of game animals. John Campbell, for example, "a very early pioneer of Southwestern Virginia," managed to explore "the valley of the Holston as early as 1764, and purchase an ancient survey, where he and his father and his family afterwards settled."<sup>11</sup>

Thousands of Virginians and North Carolinians, as well as Pennsylvanians and Marylanders soon would follow his lead. These people moved into the backcountry to start anew, and in many cases looked to the possibility that the seemingly endless supply of "empty" land might provide them with a consistent source of income. Despite the presence of increasingly unhappy Indian tribes, then, many leading western figures began to press for abrogation of the Royal Proclamation of 1763.<sup>12</sup>

Thus in the late 1760s the middle ground came under the withering attack of American expansion. Specifically, the 1768 Treaties of Fort Stanwix and Hard Labor gave expansionists access to vast ranges of the territory south of the Ohio River. It would only get worse. In 1775, for example, Richard Henderson's



Ostenaco, like many Cherokee leaders, tolerated the colonial traders of the 1750s, and he traveled to George III's court as a British ally in 1762. But by the 1770s, encroaching white settlements in Tennessee triggered more than twenty years of Indian warfare. (From a drawing by Sir Joshua Reynolds, 1762)

Transylvania Company negotiated the sale of twenty-seven thousand square miles in central Kentucky and Tennessee away from the Cherokees.<sup>13</sup> The problem with such a massive acquisition was that for local Indian tribes -- particularly the Cherokees -- notions of manhood and tribal order were closely connected to rites of hunting and thus to the large range of land that made up the Transylvania purchase.<sup>14</sup> When combined with the increasing number of white settlers moving into the eastern district, Henderson's activity provided too serious a threat to Southwestern tribal traditions.

In short order Virginia would reject the claim as destructive to the interests of the crown. Nevertheless, Henderson's efforts and eastern encroachment led the Chickamaugas, a renegade group comprised of disgruntled Cherokees, runaway slaves and disparate white traders, and the main band of the Cherokees to fight in order to stave off encroachment.<sup>15</sup> Certainly white settlers understood the situation. As Franklin governor and land speculator John Sevier made clear in a 1785 letter to North Carolina Governor Alexander Martin:

You cannot be insensible that North Carolina in opening her land Office tolerated all the lands on the North side of the Tennessee as far up as the mouth of Holston's river to be entered. Have you been informed that within this limit there is several Indian Towns, and the greater part of all the corn plantations belonging to the Chickamoggy lie on the north side of the Tennessee, together with all the principal part of their hunting ground? If not, I can assure your Excellency it is the case, and this alone I have sufficient reason to believe is the principal reason why the Indians commit hostilities.<sup>16</sup>

As Sevier intimated, North Carolina's Revolutionary land statutes only reinforced tribal decisions to go on the offensive. Although "the old north state" officially frowned upon Henderson's 1775 purchase, a solid faction of its political elite nevertheless provided golden opportunities for speculators who were willing to work within their legislative framework. In 1777, for example, the North Carolina General Assembly passed a land act that created boundaries for the "western district" that covered the entire area of modern Tennessee, even though only approximately 2,000 white immigrants were settled along a few eastern rivers.<sup>17</sup> In 1782, moreover, the assembly, in response to British threats, offered Continental recruits a minimum of 640 acres and a slave in the Cumberland district. They based this action on the belief that settlers should have free access to the land surrounding the few

stations that comprised the new settlements.<sup>18</sup> The following year, legislators most effectively challenged Indian authority by opening all un-granted land in the region to settlement, an action which they justified by pointing out that North Carolina needed to repay war debts and that Indians (specifically, the Cherokee) had forfeited their claims by allying with the British.<sup>19</sup>

In passing this last "land grab" act the North Carolina General Assembly created an atmosphere that was particularly advantageous for a select few speculators. The reason, as historian Thomas Abernethy once noted, was simple: even if he could (and wanted to) hold on to war certificates, the average North Carolinian could only secure a warrant after a potential tract had had its boundaries located and marked.<sup>20</sup> Without the means of getting to the military district, or for paying for the surveys, most veterans found that their certificates were meaningless. Faced with this reality, and with a need for real money in the post-war economic recession, many soldiers sold their claims to speculators for bargain prices. Those who kept them often were later swindled.<sup>21</sup>

Once in possession of the land warrants, speculators sent front men to the Cumberland district with orders to carry out the necessary surveys and run the all-important land office.<sup>22</sup> Native Americans, of course, quickly came to view these settlers as a threat.<sup>23</sup> And what better response to land encroachment than to attack the settlements? If millions of tribal acres were grabbed and surveyed from the small station at Nashborough, then why not go after the source of the problem?<sup>24</sup> Ultimately they did so -- and with such force that many settlers considered permanently leaving the region.

Given that both the settlements' future and their reputations as an influential elite depended on their ability to develop the region, frontier leaders appealed to North Carolina and the Confederation government for assistance.<sup>25</sup> They were quickly disappointed. For North Carolina, the issue was simple -- although it provided more than generous land laws and allowed for the seating of western district representatives, the assembly was not willing to offer anything more than token military and economic aid. To settlers the Confederation government seemed equally indifferent. The Treaty of Hopewell of 1785 provided a typical example: it left white settlers on the "wrong" side of new boundaries for the Watauga district and provided that the Cherokees could punish trespassers as they saw fit. Such an affront to their legitimacy led frontiersmen and speculators alike to believe that the government represented "an inhuman lack of concern for the plight of white settlers on the frontier."<sup>26</sup>

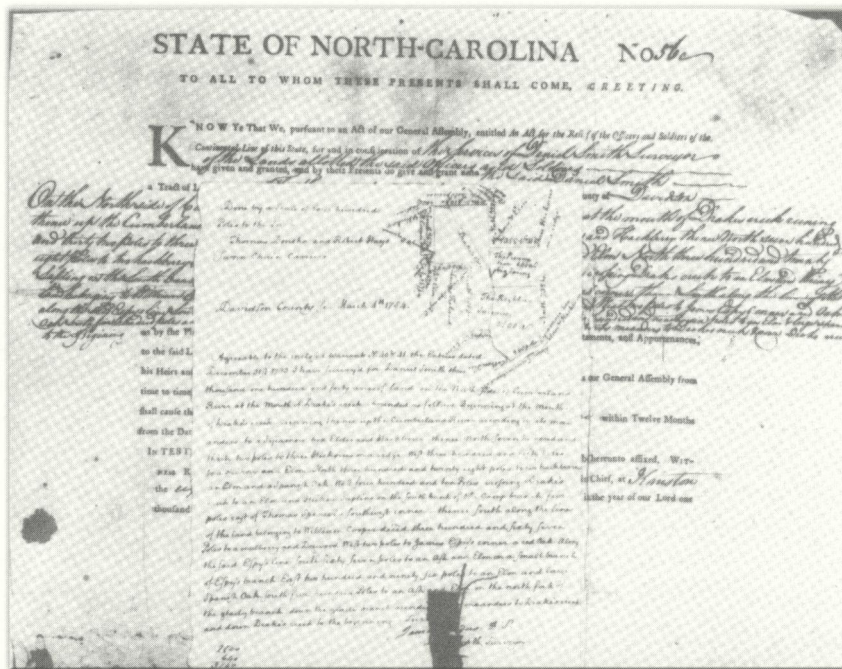
This “lack of concern” seemed only to get worse in 1786 when John Jay, hoping to negotiate the opening of Spanish ports on the Iberian Peninsula, proposed that the United States agree to a twenty-five-to-thirty year closure of the Mississippi. To those with frontier interests this was absolute apostasy. Losing the river trade would not only minimize economic opportunities for the few settlers already on the Cumberland frontier, it would also severely limit immigration and thus future growth. Perhaps Daniel Smith made the point most clearly when he noted that Mississippi navigation was “as the light of the sun, a birth-right that cannot be alienated.”<sup>27</sup>

The response from frontier leaders was twofold. On the one hand, speculators quickly negated the limiting nature of Confederation Indian treaties by doing “the best we can to open the land office once more [so as to] Grant all the Western Country and leave Congress no further hopes of obtaining it from us to whom it justly belongs.”<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, key frontier leaders moved towards the establishment of alternative sources of investment and settlement protection. Their efforts led to the scenario deemed most dangerous by Confederation and eastern leaders.<sup>29</sup> Following the example of James Wilkinson in Kentucky and led by Superintendent of Indian Affairs Dr. James White, Tennesseans offered their services to the Spanish government and “assured [them] that the western country would surely secede from the United States and unite with Spain and England in order to obtain access to the entire length of the Mississippi River.”<sup>30</sup> As young Andrew Jackson later remarked, allying with the Spanish simply was “the only immediate way to obtain a peace with the savage.”<sup>31</sup>

In 1788 advocates of a stronger federal government hoped to bring order to this rather muddled environment.

And, realizing that it could provide the centralized authority necessary to enhance land values and thus long-term investments, most speculators went along.<sup>32</sup> The problem was convincing the rest of North Carolina that coming under the new government provided palpable short and long-term benefits -- no small task given that Anti-Federalist forces had already mobilized so effectively as to

undermine ratification. In 1788, their advantage proved too strong for Federalist partisans, but after New York and Virginia approved the new government most North Carolinians accepted reality and endorsed the new Constitution.<sup>33</sup> At approximately the same time the legislature ceded to the new government the western district, with the stipulations that it guarantee all old land titles, protect the institution of slavery, and otherwise establish the new territory under the provisions



**In the early 1780s, North Carolina passed land grant acts that opened the door for a Tennessee “land grab.” Daniel Smith’s land grant encompassed more than 3,000 acres on Drake’s Creek near the Cumberland, where he lived from 1784 until his death. (Tennessee State Library and Archives)**

of the Northwest Ordinance of 1787. Thus in 1790 the new federal government created the Territory of the United States South of the River Ohio.<sup>34</sup>

In that year, the region was largely comprised of lands used by Chickasaws, Cherokees, and Chickamaugas, as well as scattered white settlements totaling 28,649 residents in the eastern district and 7,049 in the Cumberland.<sup>35</sup> These settlers offered little opposition to the transfer of authority to the new federal government, despite lingering local perceptions of “shabby” treatment by the Confederation government.

They did, however, draw from their early experiences to develop a relative level of popular democracy. Following the example created by the 1772 Watauga Association, the 1780 Cumberland Compact protected and fostered land distribution, and gave all freemen over the age of twenty-one the right to vote for a local twelve-man court.<sup>36</sup> Throughout the 1780s, moreover, common Tennesseans

used militia organizing and electioneering as a means of advancing "their views on local, state, national and international issues."<sup>37</sup> Militias in fact tended to serve as a political outlet unlike almost any other for the frontier settler; in addition to overseeing such government functions as census enumeration, they provided the most meaningful exchanges and contested elections in which these men were involved throughout the pre-territorial period.<sup>38</sup>

This democratic impulse clearly had its limits. Because settlers maintained traditional notions of deference, no one outside of the small clique of speculator gentry provided any substantive input on questions that mattered in terms of institutional development at either the territorial or federal levels. Although it was voluntary and conditional on the frontier, as it was for most areas in the colonial and revolutionary South, adherence to traditional political cultural forms ensured that a paternal system would evolve with little input from below.<sup>39</sup> Virginian Arthur Campbell, for example, a man often regarded as unusually democratic for his era, noted that although "a real republican system is a delightful object for me to contemplate; I am not so deficient in the knowledge of mankind, as not to doubt the wisdom and virtue of a people that are yet far from being enlightened."<sup>40</sup> In the Mero District the trend away from wider political participation was particularly pronounced, as seven out of eight legislators and eighteen of twenty-four

county court judges were either speculators or employed by them.

After 1790, the restrictive nature of the Northwest Ordinance only tightened speculator control. Specifically, the Ordinance's provisions gave the governor nearly unlimited power over his territory by giving him the authority to convene a legislature, as well as the ability to appoint "the necessary officers of Government, that is Justices, Sheriffs, Constables, Clerks, Registers, and Militia officers of every grade below a General."<sup>41</sup> Controlling these positions -- most prominently the militia officers -- ensured that the electioneering of the earlier period would become less significant. Population and the ordinance, in short, meant that no formal mechanism could emerge through which Tennesseans could challenge elite control. While one may grant that, in the broadest

sense, public perception continued to play a role in molding the course of government, the fact that "leading men acceded to ideas about popular sovereignty" nevertheless was more abstract than it might have seemed.<sup>42</sup> Whatever the elite had in common with settlers

simply stemmed from the fact that in the territorial period the two groups had similar goals -- to reduce Indian assaults, assure land titles, protect land value, enhance economic growth, and foster immigration.

The six-year territorial period thus served as a vehicle for speculators' interests, where high levels of land accu-

[ 56 ]

*Schedule of the whole number of persons in the territory of the United States of America, South of the River Ohio, as taken on the last Saturday of July 1791, by the Captains of the Militia within the limits of their respective districts.*

		Free white males of 21 years and upwards, including heads of families.	Free white males under 21 years.	Free white females including heads of families.	All other persons.	Slaves.	Total of each county.	Total of each district.
<b>WASHINGTON DISTRICT.</b>								
Counties.	Washington . . .	1009	1792	2524	12	535	5872	
	Sullivan . . .	806	1242	1995	107	297	4447	
	Greene . . .	1293	2374	3580	40	454	7741	
	Hawkins . . .	1204	1970	2921	68	807	6970	
	South of Fr. Broad	681	1082	1627	66	163	3619	28649
<b>M E R O DISTRICT.</b>								
Counties.	Davidson . . .	639	855	1288	18	659	3459	7042
	Sumner . . .	404	582	854	8	348	2196	
	Tennessee . . .	235	380	576	42	154	1387	
		6271	10277	15365	361	3417		35691

*Note.* There are several Captains who have not as yet returned the Schedules of the numbers of their districts, namely: In Greene County, three—in Davidson, one—and South of French-Broad, one district.

September 19th, 1791.

W<sup>m</sup>: BLOUNT.

William Blount saw great opportunity in forwarding his land deals if he could gain appointment as governor of the new Southwest Territory in 1790. The first census of the region that year enumerated almost 36,000 settlers, which included 3,400 slaves. (From First Census of the United States, 1791)

mulation and jealous protection of reputation became a prerequisite for offices of any regional or national significance.<sup>43</sup> William Blount perhaps provides the perfect example, as his political stature in North Carolina (in addition to his legislative and Congressional service, he had also acted as a delegate to the 1787 Federal Convention), combined with his vast holdings in the western district, virtually ensured that President George Washington would appoint him to the all-powerful post of territorial governor. Blount clearly recognized the position's potential. "The appointment is truly important to me," he wrote to John Steele, "more so in my opinion than any other in the Gift of the President could have been, the Salary is handsome, and my Western lands had become so great an object to me that I should go to the Western Country to secure them and perhaps my presence might have enhanced their value."<sup>44</sup> Moreover, given his long-standing position that "it is a principle with me never to . . . stand between a friend and a benefit," Blount's formal appointment meant that land speculators would come to represent the overwhelming majority of the new territorial government.<sup>45</sup>

His first act as governor further solidified his network. Upon his arrival in the Southwest Territory the new governor visited all of the major settlements, familiarizing himself with local concerns and legitimizing the power of local authorities. In effect, this "swing around the circuit" created a group of loyal lower-level elites that remained part of his "machine" until well after statehood. Loyalty to Blount in turn helped several aspiring lawyers -- including John McNairy, Archibald Roane, Andrew Jackson and John Overton -- establish themselves within the political structures of their respective locations. Subsequently they would use their positions as springboards to leadership in the early statehood years in Tennessee.<sup>46</sup>

Control by this speculator elite also meant that the residents of the Territory South of the River Ohio would closely follow their political allegiance, first, with the Washington administration. Although there was certainly no Federalist "party" in 1790, the territory's leadership came into power believing that President Washington would create an atmosphere conducive to speculation, immigration, and commerce. Accordingly, they were more than willing to support federal policies and continued to do so after internal squabbling had produced out of Washington's cabinet the coalitions later labeled "Hamiltonian" and "Jeffersonian." Even so, the lust for land by Blount and his fellow speculators proved to be so insatiable that it soon managed to alienate the administration and its allies.

The problem first emerged in 1789 when, despite specific orders from the administration to cease trespassing, southwestern speculators pressed Georgia to sell its western (or Yazoo) lands. Blount, as well as ex-governor of Franklin John Sevier, soon became part of the Tennessee Yazoo Company, which was looking to purchase the land surrounding the Muscle Shoals area in the great bend of the Tennessee River.<sup>47</sup> Unsuccessful in this endeavor, the new governor in 1790 generously construed directions from Secretary of War Henry Knox that he re-affirm or revise the Cherokee boundaries that had been in relative limbo since the Treaty of Hopewell.

The resulting Treaty of Holston was, as Knox noted, "materially different from the one suggested in his instructions," and in fact was so egregious, that it, "combined with the attempts of the Georgia [Yazoo] companies, would have pernicious effects" on settler-Indian relations.<sup>48</sup> Washington proved sympathetic, and despite public support for Blount's treaty the President quietly provided a deputy agent and fifteen hundred dollars in gifts to placate unhappy Cherokee leaders. His actions, however, did little to stop the incessant stream of settlers, surveyors and speculators who continued their activity despite the new treaty.<sup>49</sup> As Cherokee leader the Bloody Fellow lamented to Blount: "The talks we had [with the administration] was that we should not war with one another, and that [settlers] should not encroach on our land. But in place of that they are daily encroaching and building on our land; this is not what [we] had agreed upon."<sup>50</sup> The situation was bad enough that by the fall of 1792 younger Cherokees rejected the advice of tribal elders and began to apply more forceful means of protecting their territory.

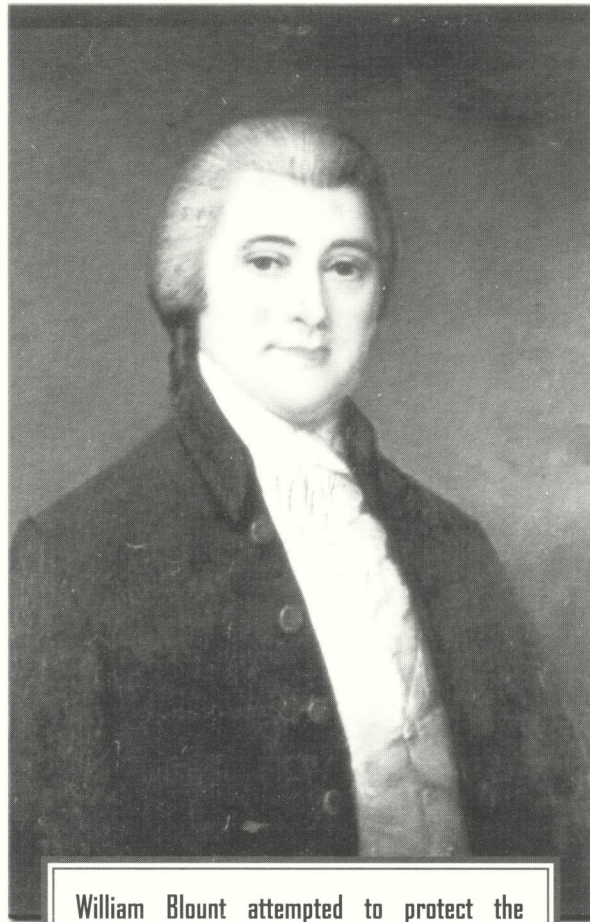
Problems with the Creeks and Spanish made the situation more precarious. Indeed, the Yazoo intrigue of 1789 in conjunction with the Holston treaty's speculator-friendly boundaries put Creek and Spanish lands as well as Mississippi navigation within the easy grasp of a growing number of white Americans. The Creeks had already attacked the eastern settlements in Georgia because of their fears of excessive encroachment; these new developments were enough to make some Creek leaders fear that the young Republic might overrun their boundaries. In response, the Creeks decided to attack and destroy white settlements, particularly in the Cumberland. Their decision to go on the offensive also reflected the nature of their alliance with Spanish officials. The Spanish often reminded Southern tribes (most specifically the Creeks, but Cherokees and Chickamaugas as well) that they were "not like Americans -- first take your land, then treat with you, and give you little or nothing for them."<sup>51</sup> Extensive



Spanish-tribal interaction virtually ensured that a new round of hostilities would become inevitable.

Although South Carolinian Andrew Pickens reported in 1792 that the Spanish were using “all their influence with the Southern Indians to engage them against the United States,” speculators seemed not to appear overly concerned.<sup>52</sup> After all, argued Governor Blount, the only thing that was needed to maintain territorial stability was a “vigorous national war . . . to bring the Indians to act as they ought.”<sup>53</sup> Such an action, he told his political allies, would surely occur. “Congress, who alone have the right to declare war,” he wrote to James Robertson, “or in other words to order offensive operations are to meet on the 5th Instant, November and no doubt is to be entertained, but they will do what the dignity of the government requires and redress the sufferings of their frontier citizens.”<sup>54</sup> A few months later, after escalating assaults led settlers to demand some level of military retaliation, Blount made clear to Robertson that he should not “despair of the protection of Government. Congress ended their session the 4th, Instant and no doubt have left power in the hands of the President to manage Indian affairs as he shall judge proper and in that case there is the greatest certainty that he will cause perfect justice to be done.”<sup>55</sup> Perhaps the governor most explicitly expressed his commitment to the Washington administration when he wrote of the Genet conspiracy -- one supported by speculators across the old Southwest -- that “All attempting to injure our happy Government, the best yet discovered, serve to strengthen and to call more fully into view its worth.”<sup>56</sup>

Yet by autumn of 1793 the continued federal hesitancy to offer any substantive monetary or military assistance threatened Blount’s pro-administration coalition, leaving



William Blount attempted to protect the Tennessee region from Indian hostilities and the influence of the Spanish. Through much of his term, he hoped that Congress would wage a “vigorous national war...to bring the Indians to act as they ought,” and thereby ensure territorial stability. The federal government never met his expectations. (Portrait by Washington B. Cooper, Tennessee Historical Society)

him in the unenviable position of having to relay to the Cumberland district that

[because] the most rigid economy is enjoined on me by the federal government as well as protection required by the inhabitants of the territory which I ever feel a pleasure in granting as far as in my power, I cannot enlarge my order . . . more than to allow in the whole a company of mounted Infantry on duty at any one time to act together or separate as you shall judge proper in advance on the frontiers.<sup>57</sup>

Initially, Blount blamed an unsympathetic Congress, commenting to James Robertson:

I can assure you with great pleasure that no man on Earth has a more just idea of the Indian business than the President, having benn [sic] much acquainted with the perfidy of the Indians at an early age, and it is only to be lamented that Congress with which the power of peace & war rests have not hitherto understood it as well as everybody else seems to have done, and it is equally to be lamented that Beard and other foolish uninformed people have done

the cause of the suffering frontier people so much injury in the eyes of the people of the Atlantic states. It is to be hoped that the next Congress will be more enlightened.”<sup>58</sup>

He soon became aware, however, that the problem was worse than he had thought; the entire “Federalist” coalition, not just its Congressional wing, was explicitly retreating from any appearance of support for the territory. The reason, it seemed, was that high levels of speculation (most strongly reinforced by a State Department report in 1791 showing that as little as 300,000 acres were available to the government) not only violated instructions not to

encroach upon Indian country, but also minimized the potential for federal control of available land.<sup>59</sup> Anecdotal reports from the territory only made Federalists more cynical. As agent James Seagrove pointed out, “I find the Creeks have been killing some white people on their Western frontiers. In my talks with the Indians, I am led to believe that the people killed, belong to a settlement South of the Cumberland river, and on lands that never have been sold, or ceded by the Indians; that those people have repeatedly been ordered off by the Indians, but will not go.”<sup>60</sup>

Other evidence indicates that Seagrove’s anecdotes were accurate. By early 1793 speculators had come to maintain such a brisk pace of activity that reports from the

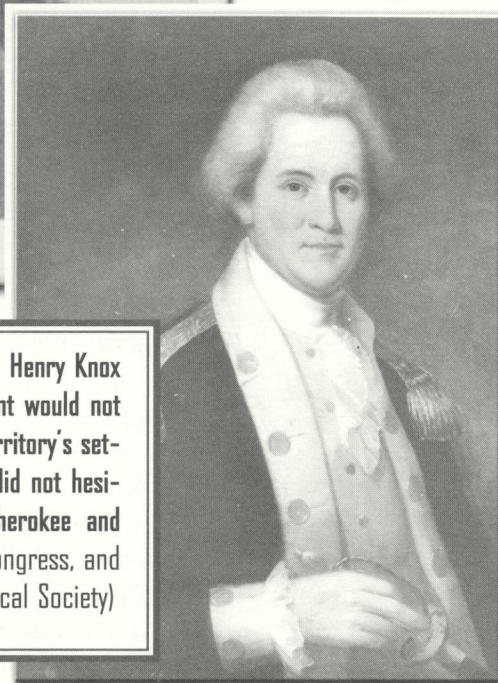
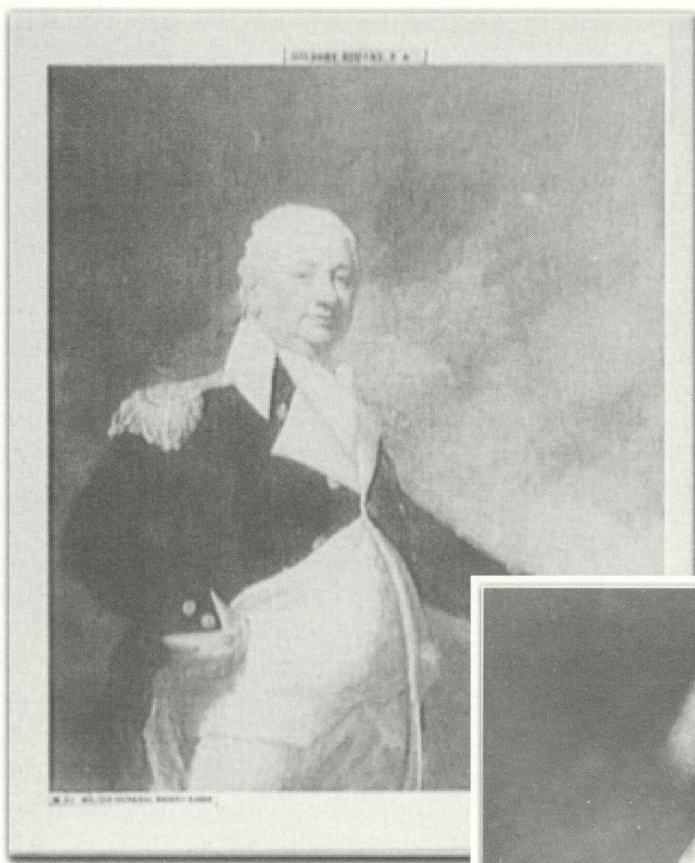
Cumberland district often blurred the distinction between encroachment and Indian attack. Resident John Nichols provides a key example. While reminding William Lytle “to purchase me a small tract of land, from Capt Davis of Newbern . . . [of one hundred acres of] land near Eaton’s old station,” he delivered the news that “you’re old friend Col Isaac Bledsoe was unfortunately killed and scalped about the middle of last month.”<sup>61</sup> And amidst this bloody situation larger-scale land grabs continued unabated. In 1794, for example, Martin Armstrong and Stockley Donelson wrote to North Carolina Secretary of State James Glasgow of a potential opening that eventually would embroil all of them in scandal. “We are ever Sensible of your Friendship,” they wrote to him in Raleigh,

and it would be ingratitude at This Period to Secret The lucrative views That now presents to us more capital in the Western Territory Than any yet discovered. Our communications are good. We wish you to be connected in the benefits That may after wards accrue [sic] and without ceremony We are desirous to purchase all the Military and State Land warrants That may be had on reasonable terms to cover a tract of Sixty Thousand Acres.<sup>62</sup>

Governor William Blount shed even greater light on the extent of the land grab. Looking to complement his already substantive holdings, he admitted to James Robertson:

Your part of the land [in middle Tennessee] I would not purchase generally at any price but it may be that I may purchase your part of particular tracts if we can agree in the price and ten cents [per acre] is the very highest I will give for any tract be the quality what it may. Don’t suppose I have opened a market for Cumberland Lands and want to purchase to sell again to immediate profit for I pledge you my word and honor I have not and I believe I never shall unless I would possess myself of a large body laying together near the settlements say from sixty thousand to hundred thousand acres in a body.<sup>63</sup>

In short, as the new Federalist



Secretary of War under George Washington, Henry Knox let Blount know that the federal government would not pay for an Indian war brought on by the territory’s settlers. Militia leader John Sevier, however, did not hesitate to mount expeditions against the Cherokee and Creek. (Knox portrait on left, Library of Congress, and Sevier portrait on right, Tennessee Historical Society)

coalition was coming into existence they became aware that the government held few prospects of controlling the territory through centrally organized land sales. With little opportunity of lowering its indebtedness in the Southwest Territory, they simply had no incentive to authorize large-scale military expenditures.<sup>64</sup> Secretary of War Henry Knox thus asserted that offensive measures were “a very great and . . . insupportable evil. Everything depends upon your exertions to avert the event of a war, that will be reluctantly entered into and at best but illy supported.”<sup>65</sup> Only a year later Knox -- ironically, himself a speculator of the first order -- better encapsulated the emerging Federalist consensus when he wrote to Blount that “it is not to be supposed that [the United States] will support the expenses [sic] of a war brought on the frontiers by the wanton blood thirsty disposition of our own people.”<sup>66</sup> Perhaps the *Knoxville Gazette* best summarized the emerging Federalist position when it lamented that the government was “not disposed to believe that the necessity of justice really exists, and if it does, that it is the Indians that should be protected and not the whites.”<sup>67</sup>

As Indian attacks increased in number and ferocity, the administration's defensive strategy hamstrung a territorial government that was obligated to carry out federal orders, and left many settlers, particularly in the Cumberland, wondering, “What are the blessings of Government to us? Are we to hope for protection? If so, when?”<sup>68</sup> By 1793 tensions reached the boiling point -- so much so that territorial secretary Daniel Smith wrote of a palpable “spirit for war against Indians [that] pervades people of all Ranks so far that no order of Government can stop them.”<sup>69</sup> Incidents of settler raids were so prevalent, and were deemed such a threat to territorial interests, that Smith authorized an “exploratory expedition” that would enable militia General John Sevier to halt individual acts of vigilantism and show settlers that the government was doing something to “pursue and chastise [sic] the enemy.”<sup>70</sup> Sevier's militia burned several Creek and lower Cherokee villages in Georgia before returning to Knoxville in October of that year.<sup>71</sup>

The Sevier expedition certainly slowed the determination of roving bands of Cherokees, Creeks, and Chickamaugas to crush the Cumberland settlements. It did not stop them, however, and in 1794 the territorial leadership once again appealed to the federal government for help. When no significant aid was forthcoming many began to re-evaluate their position vis-à-vis the Washington administration. As Mero district attorney Andrew Jackson wrote:

I fear that their Peace Talks are only Delusions; and in order to put us off our guard; what motives Congress are governed by with Respect to their pacific Disposition towards Indians I know not; some say humanity dictates it; but Certainly she ought to extend an equal share of humanity to her own Citizens[.] this country is Declining very fast, and unless Congress lends us a more ample protection this Country will have at length to break or seek protection from some other Source than the present.<sup>72</sup>

A large number of Cumberland settlers went a step further. Whereas Jackson searched for a political solution, many settlers by the spring and summer of 1794 once again turned to individual acts of “justice.” James Taylor's account provides merely one example. In a letter to William Lytle he pointed out that “the Indians are very troublesome on the frontier of Cumberland,” and that when Indians killed “5 persons in my neighborhood, about 100 men followed them, came up with them on the head of the Elk river, killed them and took 2 squaws which composed the whole party.”<sup>73</sup> Even as Blount moved towards the creation of a territorial legislature to address public concerns over Indian assault, a more formal “spirit of war” sprang from a district militia that proved quite willing to engage in indiscriminate attacks on nearby Indian settlements. Perhaps the most infamous instance occurred in August of 1794 when near constant offensives led Cumberland general James Robertson (and, some argue, Governor Blount, despite his federally ordered neutrality) to authorize an unrestricted raid on the Chickamauga settlements to the southeast. The militia destroyed the Indian towns of Nickajack and Running Water before triumphantly returning to Nashville.<sup>74</sup>

Of course, Robertson's activity, in conjunction with Sevier's late 1793 campaign, served only to infuriate the Federalist coalition in Philadelphia. By 1795, the government had become so hostile that no amount of Indian depredation could justify to them the need for an offensive counter-attack. Newly appointed Secretary of War Timothy Pickering, for example, responded to Blount's request for federal troops by stating, “Upon the whole, sir, I cannot refrain from saying that the complexion of some of the transactions in the south-western territory appears unfavorable to the public interests.” As such, he made clear, “All ideas of offensive operations are to be laid aside and all possible harmony cultivated with the Indian tribes.”<sup>75</sup> Pickering proclaimed that Blount should cease complaining about Indian depredations, noting, “Tranquility on the frontiers is not to be expected while we permit our Citizens to encroach on Indian lands. One

species of robbery affords as just grounds of hostility as the other.<sup>76</sup> The secretary's hostile review was by no means a lone voice, either; territorial Congressional delegate James White consistently had to defend settlers against Federal charges of being "blood-thirsty and semi-savage."<sup>77</sup>

By late 1794 Blount was stuck between a territory dangerously close to mutiny and a federal government that had decisively rejected requests for military aid.<sup>78</sup> By early 1795 even local Indian tribes noted the district's precarious existence. As Bloody Fellow pondered, "For many years they have been killing the People of this Country; is it that this country is not under the Protection of the U. S., or is it that the President is uninformed of the many murders and Thefts committed by the Creeks?"<sup>79</sup> With this question ringing in his ears, Blount considered any means by which to extricate the territory from its quagmire. Privately, he remained open to outside sources of support, which in 1796 would lead to not-so-quiet feelers to the British for assistance in placing part of the Southwest under the crown.<sup>80</sup> In public, however, he made clear that "the wished for period [of peace] will never arrive until this Territory becomes a State and is represented in Congress."<sup>81</sup> He was aware that such a step would lessen his near hegemonic authority, but Blount nevertheless believed that Congress could not ignore the needs of a new state.<sup>82</sup> After two-plus years of bloody confrontation, the territory overwhelmingly agreed; as John Sevier pointed out in a 1795 legislative report, "the great body of our constituents are sensible of many grave defects of our present mode of government and of the great and permanent advantages to be derived from a change and speedy representation in Congress."<sup>83</sup> With the public clearly behind him, and with a subsequent enumeration that showed 77,262 residents, Blount moved forward with a constitutional convention for January of 1796.<sup>84</sup> Within four

weeks, the convention unanimously approved a document that was submitted to Philadelphia for approval.

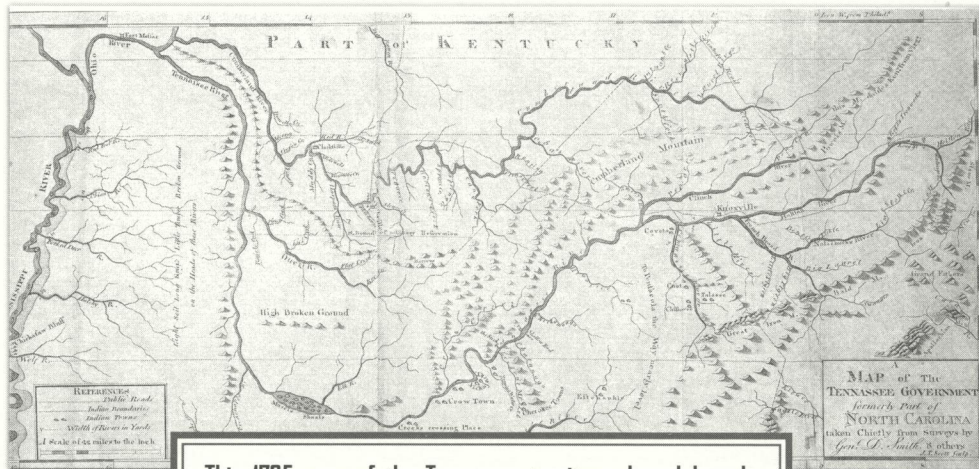
Over this same period Blount and his political

machine moved towards an alignment with the Jeffersonian-Republican coalition, a group that drew upon western interests as a source of conceptualization for building

the new nation.<sup>85</sup> Federalists were less than pleased. Given the increasingly rancorous nature of the debate between the two "parties," the territorial leadership's movement into the Jeffersonian camp meant that

statehood "would have the most serious effects [because it would provide] one twig of the electioneering cabal for Mr. Jefferson."<sup>86</sup> Since 1796 was a presidential election year, party leaders (particularly in the Federalist-controlled Senate) fought Tennessee's petition on four grounds: that the North Carolina cession, in conjunction with the Northwest Ordinance, required Congress to create new states; that the territorial census was improperly executed because it lacked federal oversight; that the new Tennessee constitution was faulty; and that it was counter to federal law.<sup>87</sup> Although the Jeffersonian-dominated House of Representatives managed to quiet the opposition and throw its collective support behind statehood, it would take a sympathetic conference committee finally to force the entire Congress into approving statehood, only two days before the end of the session.

The unsurprising result of this contentious debate was that Federalism fell even further in the estimation of both the territorial administration and most settlers, and the state subsequently gave its three electoral votes to Jefferson. For many within the political elite, voting against their former allies became a sort of vendetta. Newly elected Senator Blount, for example, noted "Truth is that I have taken a great agency in this election and have been induced to do so by the part the adverse party took



This 1795 map of the Tennessee territory, based largely on Daniel Smith's surveys, reveals how closely American citizens lived to the Indian frontier. The Federalist government's refusal to provide protection pushed Tennesseans further toward the Jeffersonian-Republican political coalition. (Tennessee State Library and Archives)

108. *The first Session of the Fourth Congress 1796.**February the 2<sup>d</sup>**The following Message, with the Copy of the Letter therein referred to was this day delivered to both Houses of Congress**Gentlemen of the Senate, and of the House of Representatives**I transmit herewith the Copy of a letter dated the 19<sup>th</sup> of December last, from Governor Blount to the Secretary of War stating the avowed and daring designs of certain persons to take possession of lands belonging to the Cherokees, and which the United States have by Treaty solemnly guaranteed to that Nation. The injustice of such intrusions, and the mischievous consequences, which must necessarily result therefrom, demand that effectual provision be made to prevent them.**United States  
February 2. 1796**G. Washington*

The treaty period of 1795-1796 removed some of the last major obstacles for white settlement in East and Middle Tennessee. However, lack of Federalist support for Tennessee is still reflected in this message from George Washington to Congress in February, 1796, which calls for provisions to prevent Tennesseans from their "daring designs" to take possession of Cherokee lands. (Library of Congress)

against the admission of the State of Tennessee."<sup>88</sup> Perhaps a more important result of their antipathy, however, was the elimination of a Federalist interest in the new state's early political culture, meaning that there was no opposition through which a party system could come into existence. To the contrary, early national Tennessee became a bastion of Jeffersonian-Republicanism. Although economic and ideological differences rapidly emerged, this one-party political system would last well into the nineteenth century.<sup>89</sup>

Amidst the statehood debate frontier settlers also

managed to obtain a modicum of peace with the Indians. Although certainly not the only reason, a critical element in this detente was Spain's withdrawal from Southwestern intrigue. By 1794 the Spanish government had become convinced that European conflicts were spiraling out of control. As it focused more on achieving peace with Revolutionary France, it negotiated an American treaty that both opened the Mississippi River and ended Spain's informal support of Indian hostilities. Although they would sporadically meddle in the Southwest until Napoleon sold Louisiana in 1803, Spanish withdrawal nevertheless left the Cherokee and Creek nations without a powerful source of moral and material assistance.<sup>90</sup>

For the Cherokees this development, combined with the destruction of the Northern pan-Indian alliance at Fallen Timbers and the desire of tribal elders to reestablish contact with the Blount administration, led them to do all in their power to put a halt to the assaults upon the Cumberland settlements. Although the Creeks resisted a bit

longer, losing Spanish and Cherokee support, in conjunction with a potential war with the Chickasaws, led them to pursue peace in 1796. Some Native American resistance would continue into the early part of the nineteenth century, but the treaty period of 1795-1796 removed some of

the last major obstacles for white settlement in East and Middle Tennessee. This in turn led to a flood of immigration, which gave speculators the opportunity to re-start the cycle of exploitation in West Tennessee.<sup>91</sup>

By that point, of course, most Federalists had come to endorse Timothy Pickering's assessment that Southwestern settlers were "the least worthy subjects of the United States."<sup>92</sup> Subsequent events only reinforced their view.<sup>93</sup> William Blount's efforts while a U. S. Senator to acquire Louisiana for the British, for example, proved to Federalists that the ex-governor had operated in a manner unbecoming an officer of the federal government. Even after he resigned and hastened back to Knoxville, Federalists charged him with treason and commenced impeachment proceedings.<sup>94</sup> In 1797, moreover, the new Adams administration decided to re-define Tennessee's still vague southeastern Indian boundary in an attempt to build peaceful relations with the Cherokees. Unfortunately, they appointed Benjamin Hawkins, Andrew Pickens, and James Winchester to survey the line -- the former two being men Governor John Sevier called "inveterate enemies to this country."<sup>95</sup> Such an affront upset the state's leaders, and led some, including a newly re-invigorated William Blount, to call for open resistance. The situation became so dangerous that the war department ordered out two companies of federal troops to ensure the commissioners' safety. From Knoxville Colonel Benjamin Howard commented on the situation. In a letter to William Preston he wrote,

I am sorry to find you and your Brother officers rendered unhappy between the daring demagogues of faction and the unfortunate misled; instead of being considered the protectors of your Country are viewed as the Engines of oppression and your toils rewarded only by the suspicions and insults of those around you. Certainly the people have had time to reflect & see the reasons upon which the Government acted in their removal also to discover that it was not a wanton exercise of power but a measure that grew out of necessity.<sup>96</sup>

Ultimately, only Governor Sevier's political savvy kept the state from plunging into armed chaos. By alternately appealing to the local populace, remonstrating to Philadelphia, allowing for the implementation of Federal policy, and serving as a treaty commissioner to the Cherokees, Sevier kept the peace and got the Adams administration eventually to purchase confiscated squatter land.<sup>97</sup>

Yet for Federalists, their problems with the

"Jeffersonian" leaders in Tennessee went beyond just treason and mutiny. Indeed, amidst the boundary controversy emerged another scandal that confirmed to Federalist partisans that their long-standing fear of the region was well warranted. In early 1798 newly appointed Senator Andrew Jackson "was informed by a Mr. Charles of the rascality carried on at Nashville" in the land office, and deemed it worrisome enough that it was "sufficient inducement to make it known to the Governor of North Carolina" of potentially fraudulent activity by North Carolina speculators.<sup>98</sup> When North Carolina Governor Samuel Ashe initiated a formal inquiry he received word of a large "number and variety of frauds, perjuries and forgeries, [which] the gentlemen of the board [of inquiry] have strong grounds to presume have been committed, with procuring military warrants and grants, in all stages of business both on this, and the other side of the mountains."<sup>99</sup>

Judge H. O. Tatum of Tennessee soon provided the framework through which the frauds occurred: "Many locations originally made by A and recorded, now appear to be the property of B and this by erasing the name of A and the number of the warrant, and inserting the name of B and the number of his warrant, and this can be proved by comparing the file, with the book of Record." Moreover, there was the problem of

permitting blank locations to be filed and carried forward to the books, and perhaps some years after a warrant, and the name of the owner is annexed to the location as it stands in the books, by which such person, in many instances, has a location older than his warrant. And should it so happen, as it often will, that some other person has made a fair entry subsequent to the [aforementioned] blank one, the filling of this blank, in the manner I have mentioned has rendered the honest locators right doubtful, it not appearing on the books at what time the warrant & name was annexed to the blank location.<sup>100</sup>

Many speculators were even bolder. Ashe's investigating commission ultimately reported that officials issued military warrants to individuals who had not served in the Continental line, had gone AWOL, or were dead. The commission also presented evidence that speculators had assigned themselves as attorneys for veterans or their heirs and subsequently issued warrants under their own name.<sup>101</sup>

Public disclosure of widespread fraud sent shockwaves through unknown and prominent speculators alike.<sup>102</sup> Most embarrassed were men such as Sevier, William Blount, Stockley Donelson, and North Carolina Secretary

of State James Glasgow, all of whom were connected to millions of acres in fraudulent claims. Concern over extensive public exposure was so great that Governor Sevier refused to allow Governor Ashe access to the fraudulent warrants. Several other conspirators met at Blount's home in Knoxville to destroy the most dubious claims. In North Carolina, William Tyrrell and James Glasgow even hatched a plan to burn down the statehouse in Raleigh, lest the illegal warrants end up in Governor Ashe's possession.

The land fraud conspiracy clearly justified Federalist leaders' decision to discard their conceptualization of "nation building" and employ a restrained and confrontational policy on the Southwestern frontier. Historian John Murrin has pointed out that Federalists firmly advocated western settlement -- but also insisted that it should follow "an orderly process . . . closely supervised by the government, with a major role for the United States Army."<sup>103</sup> That they were much more successful on the Northwestern frontier -- and much more willing to engage in said policy -- did not diminish their abstract desire for the same in the South. The problem was that Southwestern speculators simply had a different idea of the means by which government should centralize its control. Whereas the Washington administration wanted an organized process that would maximize land sales for federal coffers, the territorial elite wanted the government merely to sanction and develop their activities by securing land titles and providing the military and economic support necessary to foster migration. When Federalists saw the extent to which this policy undermined their notion of development, and the extent to which speculation had already minimized available land, they had little reason actively to alleviate territorial problems with Indian tribes.

Simply put, the lack of land for sale in the Southwest turned Federalist leaders against the territory. If more had been available for use by federal authorities, perhaps they would have acted more sympathetically -- as they did with speculators in the Northwest, Maine, and within the confines of the New England Mississippi Land Company.<sup>104</sup> Once these seeming allies turned against each other, Jeffersonian-Republicanism would become the only lens through which Tennesseans could fulfill the envisioned social, commercial, and political promise of their region.<sup>105</sup> As nineteenth century Tennessee gradually took on the characteristics of a more settled state, Federalism became little more than a derogatory label placed upon political enemies.<sup>106</sup> Perhaps an 1808 letter to the *Carthage Gazette* provided the best example of nineteenth century Tennesseans' devotion to Jefferson's coalition. "It is true,"

wrote "A Citizen," "that of all objects, that of ascertaining that your candidate is immovably attached to Democratic Republican Principles, is the most important."<sup>107</sup>

Thus by the early nineteenth century Tennessee had undergone transformations that I. H. Williamson could not have foreseen when he wrote to Robertson of the burgeoning relationship between the region and the government -- from the contested zone of interaction among Spanish, Indians, and the small but increasing population of slaves and white settlers to a speculator-controlled political and economic system about to transform. Although the Cumberland district had barely more than 11,500 residents when Adams was elected, over the next twenty-five years it would mushroom into a white and slave population of 287,501 that was increasingly committed to plantation agriculture, banking, and land speculation.<sup>108</sup> Because of this growth the Cumberland River would become a highway for trade goods, which, in turn, would create a mercantile class that relied upon the produce of local cotton and tobacco farmers so as to perpetuate the increasingly vibrant economy. By 1818, in fact, merchants and planters would combine to become noticeable engines for economic expansion. "The commercial and agricultural capabilities of our country," noted the Nashville *Clarion*,

are every day opening to our view new sources of wealth and enterprise. A few years since and this portion of our country was a wild and trackless desert [sic], where nothing but savage inhabitants crossed the traveller's path -- but now he is greeted by the busy face of the bustling merchant, and the steady *phiz* [sic] of the plodding and industrious planter who give to him a comfortable and hospitable reception.<sup>109</sup>

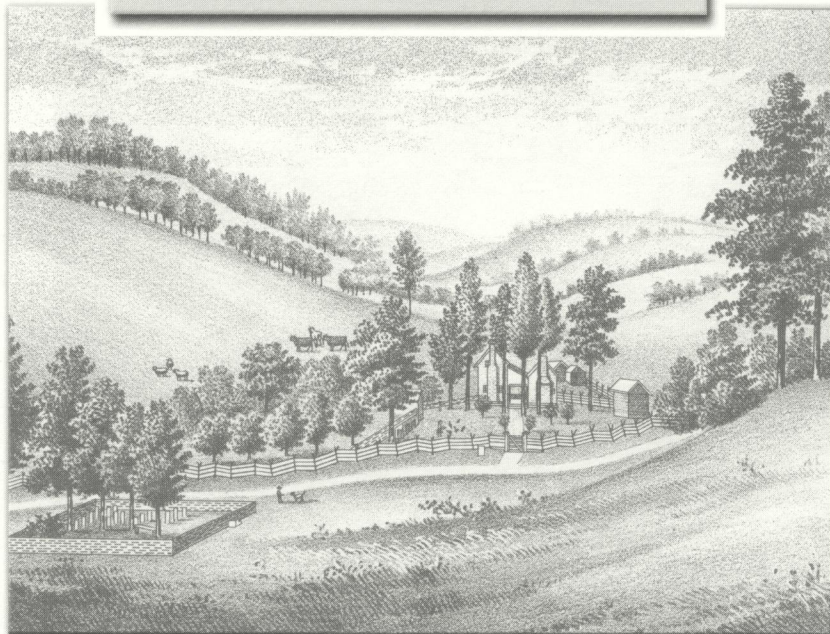
Perhaps the *Clarion* best characterized the emerging entrepreneurial impulse when it proclaimed that "If people would do as much for opening streams, and improving roads, as nature has done for the soil and climate, Tennessee would be the most desirable district in the union."<sup>110</sup>

In short, in twenty-five years a vibrant liberal capitalist, albeit slave, society would take shape on the western frontier. And such economic and demographic change placed those who inherited the territorial government in a political quandary. On the one hand, even as the elite espoused the "democratic" rhetoric of the Republican party, the reality was that they clearly differentiated between republican notions of the rule of the people and the practical application of popular democracy. As to the

former, they understood the legacy of the Revolution and plainly endorsed the principle that freemen had earned the right to political participation -- which explains how and why a local democratic flair could emerge amongst a limited and contested territorial population. Even if they accepted the idea of popular sovereignty, however, the elite nevertheless carried into statehood their belief in the key features of colonial and revolutionary southern political culture, including honor, deference, paternalism and personal networks. "The people," they felt, was an abstract idea to be carted out as a tool of self-promotion and vindication during highly contested state and federal elections. Although cognizant of local issues, in other words, they simply believed that "the people" needed only to provide their votes for the appropriate disinterested gentleman and then leave them to maintain a virtuous form of government.<sup>111</sup> Speculator Arthur Campbell sheds significant light on elite paternalism. "Under the Constitution of the United States," he wrote,

Every honest station of life is honorable, since they are all part of the great social body. Between the Chief Magistrate and the People, the great and the mean, the rich and the poor, the acute and the dull, the learned and the ignorant There is no difference as to the rights of citizenship, but in possession of different powers, and in the discharge of different offices peculiar to each capacity and useful to all; and if one of them have a just demand for submission and obedience, for honor and respect, for convenience and ease; the other have as just a claim for protection and defense, for the administration of justice and the preservation of equal liberty, for the supply of their wants and the relief of their distresses, for *instruction* and *good* example.<sup>112</sup>

By the early nineteenth century, Tennessee had been transformed from a contested territory to a region of merchants and planters. This pastoral view of Henry Compton's homestead near Nashville belies the region's early history of land speculation and Indian wars. (From *History of Davidson County, Tennessee*, 1880)



Speculator Ebenezer Brooks and early Tennessee Governor Archibald Roane were even more blunt in their assessment. In a letter to David Campbell in 1796 Brooks warned the young man, "I would caution you as a young adventurer in the political world against the impulses of enthusiasm. I tremble with apprehensions for you and the friendly citizens with whom you reside lest by some unlucky turn of affairs you should become Democratically Mad."<sup>113</sup> Only a few years later Roane wrote to Campbell in asking him further to pursue government service that the "people's"

mode of education in life points out to them the station in which they are destined to act. But it is not so with you. One thing I trust you will always bear in mind that it is a duty you owe to yourself and your connections and to your country, not to bury your talent in the earth, but to look forward to the time when you may be called by your fellow citizens to assist in moving the wheels of Government.<sup>114</sup>

Perhaps a July 4th, 1801, toast -- a ritual which David Waldstreicher has reminded us helped to reinforce notions of status and power within the community -- best illuminates their paternal understanding of "the people." "To the freemen of Tennessee -- may they exercise the right of suffrage with judgment, and remember that the welfare of themselves and posterity, requires that men of patriotism, talents and integrity should alone be preferred to office."<sup>115</sup>

On the other hand, the destruction of the territorial government ensured that the political elite would have to appeal to the rapidly expanding population in order to maintain their positions of power. In effect, they would have to accede to nascent democratic impulses, and they came to the belief that the best way to do so was to take



advantage of the organization provided by the state's militia system.<sup>116</sup> In the years after 1796 they saw that virtually all of the state's electorate belonged to militia companies. Cognizant that they could provide a solid foundation from which to maintain traditional political networks, the elite electioneered to place themselves and their allies in key positions of martial leadership.

In so doing, however, they sparked an unanticipated side effect: as Davidson County up-and-comer Isaac Roberts noted, their machinations generated "a significant rise in partyism in Mero District."<sup>117</sup> A burst of contested militia elections suddenly gave middling and lower men - including the miniscule population of free black men, who both voted and served in militias -- the opportunity to establish an elite endorsed precedent for political opposition. Extraordinary demographic growth ensured that this nascent democratic activity soon would explode into an unprecedented level of political consciousness amongst the middling and lower sorts in middle Tennessee.

Thus in the early years of statehood emerged a blend of old political understandings with new democratic realities, and the result was a "Jeffersonian-Republican" system that revolved around contested definitions of political honor but saw the elite use high voter turnout in local militia elections as a means of maintaining and enhancing their power base. This political blend would set the tone of political life in early national Tennessee.

<sup>1</sup> This paper was produced in part through the support of a Tennessee Historical Society Wills Fellowship for research in the THS collections at the Tennessee State Library and Archives. The author wishes to thank Harry Watson, William Barney, Wayne Cutler, Carroll Van West, Cynthia Cumfer and George Clements for their thoughtful criticism and stimulating discussions. Thanks also to Jim Holmberg and Mark Wetherington both for their hospitality and their help in navigating the impressive collections at the Filson Historical Society. I. H. Williamson to James Robertson, 31 August 1789, *American Historical Magazine* I (January 1896): 89-90.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> "The Journal of Daniel Smith, September 25, 1779," *Tennessee Historical Magazine* I (March 1915): 51.

<sup>4</sup> John R. Finger, "Tennessee Indian History: Creativity and Power," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 54 (Winter 1995): 299.

<sup>5</sup> John Haywood, *The Civil and Political History of the State of Tennessee from its Earliest Settlement up to the Year 1796* (Knoxville, 1823), 188, 144.

<sup>6</sup> As Andrew Cayton has shown, speculators were committed to the rapid commercial development of the West, and a critical prerequisite was the establishment of a strong government. See Andrew Cayton, "'When Shall We Cease to have Judases?': The Blount Conspiracy and the Limits of the 'Extended Republic,'" in *Launching the "Extended Republic": The Federalist Era*, ed. Ronald J. Hoffman and Peter J. Albert (Charlottesville, 1996), 156-189. As Kentuckian John May emphasized, the Mississippi river was critical to this commercial development: all speculators were aware, he noted, that "The Value of Land here will much depend on the Convenience of Navigation." John May to Samuel Beall, 15 April 1780, quoted in Stephen Aron, *How the West Was Lost: The Transformation of Kentucky from Daniel Boone to Henry Clay* (Baltimore, 1996), 117.

<sup>7</sup> James Robertson to Alexander McGillivray, 3 August 1788, *American Historical Magazine* I (January, 1896): 81.

<sup>8</sup> Leading speculators in this period included Confederation and Constitutional Convention delegate William Blount and his brothers, Richard Henderson, Stockley Donelson, William Tyrell, John Donelson, John Sevier, David Campbell and James Robertson. Robertson and Blount, in fact, worked in tandem to amass huge amounts of land in middle and western portions of the region. Index to North Carolina Land Grants, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee. See also, Thomas Abernethy, *From Frontier to Plantation in Tennessee: A Study in Frontier Democracy* (Chapel Hill, 1932).

<sup>9</sup> Federalists at the time were more than cognizant of what might result from this policy. As Andrew Cayton has noted, Secretary of War Henry Knox warned that it would create "separate interests in the Trans-Appalachian West." See, Knox, "Report to George Washington," 22 January 1791, as quoted in Cayton, "'Separate Interests' and the Nation-State: The Washington Administration and the Origins of Regionalism in the Trans-Appalachian West," *Journal of American History* 79 (June, 1992): 41.

<sup>10</sup> Finger, "Tennessee Indian History: Creativity and Power", 296. See also, Finger, *Tennessee Frontiers: Three Regions in Transition* (Bloomington, 2001), chapter 2. Finger expanded upon the concept formulated by Richard White in *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (New York, 1991). Although first contact took place in 1540 with Hernando de Soto's expedition, it was not until the seventeenth century that any meaningful interaction took place. For more on first contact, see, Lawrence Clayton, Vernon Knight, Jr., and Edward Moore, eds., *The de Soto Chronicles: The Expedition of Hernando de Soto to North America in 1539-1543* (2 vols., Tuscaloosa, 1993). See also, "De Soto Expedition," in *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture* (Nashville, 1998), 862-863.

<sup>11</sup> Unknown author, Campbell Family Papers, Rare Books and Special Collections Library, Perkins Library, Duke University.

<sup>12</sup> Bernard Bailyn, *Voyagers to the West: A Passage in the Peopling of American on the Eve of the Revolution* (New York, 1986), Part One.

<sup>13</sup> On treaties, Finger, *Tennessee Frontiers*, 42. Although no tribes specifically lived on this land, many considered it a common area for hunting. As such, one could argue that the Cherokee had no direct reason to "sell" the land. For more on Henderson and the Transylvania Company, see Aron, *How the West was Lost*; Mark Miller, "Richard Henderson: The Making of a Land

Speculator" (M.A. thesis, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1975); and James Pate, "The Chickamauga: A Forgotten Segment of Indian Resistance on the Southern Frontier" (Ph.D. Diss., Mississippi State University, 1969).

<sup>14</sup> One explanation for the sale of the land was that it provided a means by which elder Cherokee could control younger members of the tribe. Cherokee matrilineal tradition dictated that men had little to no formal control over younger men from different clans. One way to keep them under control, however, was for tribal elders to provide them with gifts. From this perspective, elders were merely trying to keep younger warriors -- whose hunting lands and thus their masculinity was already under attack from white expansion -- from starting an all out war. See, Sheidley, "Unruly Men: Indians, Settlers, and the Ethos of Frontier Patriarchy In the Upper Tennessee Watershed, 1763-1815" (Ph.D. Diss., Princeton University, 1999), 74-78. For more on Cherokee gender relations, see Theda Perdue, *Cherokee Women: Gender and Culture Change, 1700-1835* (Lincoln, 1998); and "Women, Men and American Indian Policy: The Cherokee Response to 'Civilization,'" in Nancy Shoemaker, editor, *Negotiators of Change: Historical Perspectives on Native American Women*, (London, 1995), 90-114.

<sup>15</sup> Finger, *Tennessee Frontiers*, 70. See also, Pate, "The Chickamauga: A Forgotten Segment of Indian Resistance on the Southern Frontier." This situation helps explain why Southwestern Indians sided with the British in the emerging Revolutionary struggle.

<sup>16</sup> John Sevier to Alexander Martin, 22 March 1785, in William Clark, ed., *State Records of North Carolina*, Vol. XVII, 1781-1785 (Wilmington, 1994), 624.

<sup>17</sup> Finger, *Tennessee Frontiers*, chapter 3.

<sup>18</sup> The 1782 law fixed the amount of land offered to veterans at 640 acres for privates, 1,000 acres for non-commissioned officers, subaltern, 2,560, captain, 3,840, major, 4,800, lieutenant colonel, 7,200, colonel, 7,200, and brigadier general 12,000. *Laws of North Carolina, 1782*, Chapter 3, North Carolina State Library and Archives.

<sup>19</sup> J. G. M. Ramsay, *Annals of Tennessee to the End of the Eighteenth Century*, (Philadelphia, 1853).

<sup>20</sup> Abernethy, *From Frontier to Plantation*, 58. The process worked as follows: after a warrant was obtained in North Carolina, it was sent to Martin Armstrong in Nashville, who would then send out surveyors to have it marked. The warrant was then returned to the Secretary of North Carolina, who would officially record it.

<sup>21</sup> By 1789 speculators had executed approximately 3,300 military warrants that totaled of 2,789,224 acres -- ten percent of the land in present day Tennessee. Index to North Carolina and Tennessee Land Grants, Tennessee State Library and Archives. The policy also had a longer-term effect on the western district: it helped to create a political system in which a few speculators determined major policy issues. And this does not even begin to describe the bribery that took place between men of relative means. Thomas Polk, for example, noted that he had to pay as much as 2,250 pounds merely for the *opportunity* to purchase

60,000 acres in the military district, "because no certain entries can be made otherwise." Thomas Polk to John Gray Blount, 5 July 1783, *John Gray Blount Papers I* (Raleigh, 1954), 68.

<sup>22</sup> Case in point: the Cumberland Compact of 1780 was signed by 256 people looking "to get out to the land." Goodstein, *Nashville, 1780-1860*, 2.

<sup>23</sup> Nashville, for example, was initially created to protect a land office from Indian attack. See Goodstein, chapter one. Recent archeological evidence at Bledsoe's Station, moreover, shows that Cumberland settlers were less than the poor squatter so often portrayed by historians. To the contrary, residents of this station maintained fine china and accouterments available only to people of relative wealth. See Kevin E. Smith, "Bledsoe's Station: Archeology, History and the Interpretation of the Middle Tennessee Frontier, 1770-1820," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 59 (Fall 2000): 175-187.

<sup>24</sup> Confrontation between the Chickasaws and the Cumberland district ended in 1783, at which time the Creeks, Cherokees and the Chickamaugas became the primary attackers. The Spanish, moreover, were equally skeptical. After all, settlers, speculators, and the Spanish alike realized that the Mississippi and its surrounding delta would play a critical role in the economic development of the region, and that newly arriving Cumberland immigrants would push for uninhibited passage to New Orleans. See Craig Symonds, "The Failure of America's Indian Policy on the Southwestern Frontier, 1785-1793," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, 35 (Spring 1976): 29-45.

<sup>25</sup> Cayton, "Separate Interests and the Nation-State," 58. Through the course of the 1780s, eight out of nine delegates to the North Carolina legislature from the western district were major speculators. See, Goodstein, *Nashville, 1780-1860*, chapter one.

<sup>26</sup> Symonds, "The Failure of America's Indian Policy," 30.

<sup>27</sup> Daniel Smith, "A Short Description of the Tennessee Government," in Daniel Smith and Willie Blount, *Tennessee Beginnings*, 22-26. In 1796 the Tennessee Constitution made it clear that the new state's right to Mississippi Navigation was nonnegotiable. Tennessee Constitution, listed in Robert White, ed., *Messages of the Governor's of Tennessee, Vol. I* (Nashville, 1952), Appendix A.

<sup>28</sup> Thomas Purson to James Robertson, May 23, 1787, *American Historical Magazine I* (January, 1896), 78.

<sup>29</sup> Malcolm Rohrbough has noted that this was a common phenomenon for western speculators of all types. See Rohrbough, *The Trans-Appalachian Frontier: People, Societies, and Institutions, 1775-1850* (New York, 1978), 45.

<sup>30</sup> Jo Tice Bloom, "Establishing Precedents: Dr. James White and the Southwest Territory," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 54 (Winter 1995): 326. White's activities were simultaneous to James Wilkinson's attempts to unify Kentucky with Spain. See Haywood, *Civil and Political History*, Chapter 6; Thomas P. Abernethy, *The South in the New Nation, 1789-1819* (Baton Rouge, 1961), chapter 3.

<sup>31</sup> Andrew Jackson to Daniel Smith, 13 February 1789, as quoted in Robert Remini, *Andrew Jackson and his Indian Wars* (New

York, 2001), 31.

<sup>32</sup> Daniel Dovenbarger, "Land Speculation in Early Middle Tennessee: Laws and Practice" (M.A. Thesis, Vanderbilt University, 1981), 111.

<sup>33</sup> William S. Powell, *North Carolina Through Four Centuries* (Chapel Hill, 1989), 227-229.

<sup>34</sup> Clarence E. Carter, ed., *The Territorial Papers of the United States*, Vol. IV (Washington, D.C., 1936), 3-8, 13-17, 18.

<sup>35</sup> Carter, *Territorial Papers*. Establishment under the statutes of the Northwest Ordinance meant that the federally appointed governor and three justices would wield nearly unlimited political power, something made all the more unique by the sparsely settled nature of the new territory. See, Rohrbough, *The Trans-Appalachian Frontier*; and Peter S. Onuf, *Statehood and Union: A History of the Northwest Ordinance* (Bloomington, 1987).

<sup>36</sup> *Three Pioneer Documents: John Donelson's Journal, Cumberland Compact, and the Minutes of the Cumberland Court* (Nashville, 1964). Is such wide-ranging "democracy" any wonder? Given the geographic, political and economic isolation of the Cumberland stations, a democratic system amongst the few settlers was the only prudent means of survival.

Perhaps the best-known foray into local government came in the form of the state of Franklin. Having grown increasingly concerned that both the North Carolina Assembly and the Confederation Congress had abandoned them to the Cherokee, opportunistic Watauga settlers used North Carolina's proposed 1784 land cession to create the state of Franklin. It was immediately opposed by the mother state because its presumed ability to issue land grants interfered with North Carolina speculators' prerogatives. As such, it was rejected by the Confederation Congress and then assaulted by North Carolina and her "Loyalists" in Tennessee. Franklin would cease to operate after 1788. Samuel Cole Williams, *History of the Lost State of Franklin* (Johnson City, 1924); James W. Hagy, "Democracy Defeated: The Frankland Constitution of 1785," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 40 (Fall 1981): 239-256; and Robert Remini, *Andrew Jackson and the Course of American Empire, 1767-1821* (New York, 1977), 47.

<sup>37</sup> Cynthia Cumfer, "'The Idea of Manhood is so Various': An Intellectual History of Tennessee, 1768-1810" (Ph.D. Diss., University of California at Los Angeles, 2001), chapter 6, esp. 404-405, 433. See also, Remini, *Course of American Empire*, 15-16; Michael Toomey, "Prelude to Statehood: The Southwest Territory, 1790-1796" (Ph.D. Diss., University of Tennessee, Knoxville, 1991); Rohrbough, *The Trans-Appalachian Frontier*, chapter two; and Goodstein, *Nashville, 1780-1860*.

<sup>38</sup> On census enumeration, see "Circular Letter From Governor Blount," in Carter, *Territorial Papers*, 49-50. Of course, public perception also played a role in molding the course of government. The elite had to maintain a presence in the territory lest they lose support, and during the 1790s the continuous Indian assaults ensured that on more than one occasion their leadership was tested. Goodstein, *Nashville, 1780-1860*, chapter one; Cumfer, chapter five. Nevertheless, the transfer of eastern precedents ensured that territorial leadership would remain with

elite property holders, and thus that the institutional framework would revolve around the protection of property rights. See, Toomey, "Prelude to Statehood"; and Rohrbough, *The Trans-Appalachian Frontier*.

<sup>39</sup> Finger, *Tennessee Frontiers*, chapter 7. See also, Richard Beeman, *Evolution of the Southern Backcountry: A Case Study of Lunenburg County, Virginia, 1746-1832* (Philadelphia, 1984).

<sup>40</sup> Arthur Campbell to Archibald Stuart, 27 February 1786, Campbell Family Papers, Duke University. It was only a few years before that Sevier and his supporters had replaced Campbell's rather utopian vision of Frankland with the much smaller, less democratic and speculator-driven state of Franklin.

<sup>41</sup> William Blount to John Gray Blount, 7 November 1790, in Alice B. Keith, ed., *The John Gray Blount Papers* Vol. II, 1790-1795, 131. Blount's declaration supports Donald Ratcliffe's observation that the peculiar climate created by the Northwest Ordinance severely restricted party development. The territorial governor simply was independent of local controls of any form. See Ratcliffe, *Party Spirit in a Frontier Republic: Democratic Politics in Ohio, 1793-1821* (Columbus, 1998), chapter one.

<sup>42</sup> Cumfer, chapter 6.

<sup>43</sup> See, Joanne Freeman, *Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic* (New Haven, 2001).

<sup>44</sup> Blount to John Steele, 10 July 1791, Carter, *Territorial Papers*, 30-31. See also, Remini, *Course of American Empire*, 51.

<sup>45</sup> Blount to John Sevier, 6 July 1798, Tennessee Historical Society, Miscellaneous Files, MF#678, Tennessee State Library and Archives. In total, all of the appointed territorial positions were heavily engaged in the speculation industry, as were most of Blount's personal appointments, from militia generals John Sevier and James Robertson to smaller positions such as Davidson County attorney general Andrew Jackson. Goodstein, *Nashville, 1780-1860*, Chapter one. See also, Remini, *Course of American Empire*.

<sup>46</sup> The speculator-political elite did not have total control over the territory's political institutions, to be sure. As Toomey and Goodstein have reminded us, county courts controlled local situations almost entirely, and thus needed little support from the new territorial government. This helps to explain why Blount could avoid the establishment of a territorial legislature until it suited his political purposes. Toomey, "Prelude to Statehood" and Goodstein, *Nashville, 1780-1860*. Aron has noted a similar domination by land speculators in Kentucky during this period. See Aron, *How the West was Lost*. Just as Beeman has noted for southwestern Virginia, however, early Tennessee county courts did not maintain law and civil order so much as they established basic services and facilities essential to life on the frontier. See Beeman, *Evolution of the Southern Backcountry*, chapter two.

<sup>47</sup> The Yazoo land speculation enterprises were comprised of three land companies -- the Virginia, South Carolina, and Tennessee Companies. Although initially unsuccessful, a 1795 revival of some of their claims would later become famous in the Supreme Court case *Fletcher v. Peck*, in which Chief Justice John Marshall upheld the principle of the sanctity of contract regardless of the means by which the land grants were obtained. See C.

Peter Magrath, *Yazoo: Law and Politics in the New Republic: The Case of Fletcher v. Peck* (New York, 1967). Of course, Blount's interest in the Muscle Shoals went back a few years. Together with Sevier, John Donelson, and Richard Caswell, he had attempted as early as 1783 to obtain access to the "Great Bent." See, William Blount to John Donelson, 17 May 1783, and John Sevier to William Blount, 7 October 1785, in the *John Gray Blount Papers* Vol. I, 57, 221. Their activity was so extensive that it garnered the notice of leading men outside of the territory. Virginia colonel William Butler, for example, wrote to Benjamin Harrison that John Donelson was sent by North Carolina to treat with the Chickamauga so that he could lay plans for the purchase of lands "on the North side of the Tennessee River." Benjamin Logan to Benjamin Harrison, 11 August 1783, Bullitt Family Papers, Oxmoor Collection, The Filson Historical Society, Louisville.

<sup>48</sup> Knox also made clear the reasons for such pernicious reactions: "The Cherokees would complain, and with justice, that all assurances given by the new government . . . were deceptions, and calculated to ensnare them." Henry Knox to George Washington, 10 March 1791, Carter, *Territorial Papers*, 50-52.

<sup>49</sup> Although mostly ineffective and ultimately recalled, Leonard Shaw manifested the emerging Federal concern over Southwestern land grabbing when he attempted to persuade the Cherokee that "Governor Blount had wronged them out of their lands." James Carey to William Blount, 19 March 1793, in Walter Lowrie and Arthur St. Clair, eds., *American State Papers, Class II, Indian Affairs*, Vol. I (Washington, D.C., 1932). See also Toomey, "Prelude to Statehood," chapter three; and Remini, *Andrew Jackson and his Indian Wars*, 31.

<sup>50</sup> Bloody Fellow to William Blount, 10 September 1792, *American Historical Magazine* II (January 1897): 70-71.

<sup>51</sup> Haywood, 359.

<sup>52</sup> Andrew Pickens to Charles Pinckney, 13 September 1792, Carter, *Territorial Papers*, 117-118.

<sup>53</sup> Blount to Daniel Smith, 17 June 1793, Carter, *Territorial Papers*, 274-275.

<sup>54</sup> William Blount to James Robertson, 27 October 1792, *American Historical Magazine* II, 83.

<sup>55</sup> Blount to Robertson, 12 March 1793, *American Historical Magazine* II, 279.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.* For more on Citizen Genet's activity on behalf of the Girondist government in France, see Harry Ammon, *The Genet Mission* (New York, 1973); and Albert Hall Bowman, *The Struggle for Neutrality: Franco-American Diplomacy During the Federalist Era* (Knoxville, 1974).

<sup>57</sup> Blount to Robertson, 25 September 1793, *American Historical Magazine* III, 75.

<sup>58</sup> Blount to Robertson, 28 August 1793, *American Historical Magazine* II, 371-372.

<sup>59</sup> Carter, *Territorial Papers*, 93.

<sup>60</sup> James Seagrove to William Knox, 24 May 1792, *American State Papers, Indian Affairs* I, 296.

<sup>61</sup> John Nichols to William Lytle, 8 May 1793, William Lytle Papers, #445-z, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library,

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

<sup>62</sup> Martin Armstrong and Stockley Donelson to James Glasgow, 12 June 1794, in Dyas Collection, John Coffee Papers (Tennessee Historical Society), Microfilm AC#814, Reel 6, Box 15, Folder 15, TSLA.

<sup>63</sup> Blount to Robertson, 19 January 1794, *American Historical Magazine* III, 282-283. Blount simultaneously was involved in heavy speculation in Kentucky land. See Blount to John Smith, 20 January 1794, *John Gray Blount Papers* II, 350-351. In 1795 Governor Blount would find just the Tennessee acreage for which he was looking, and together with John Sevier (and others) he revived the Tennessee Yazoo Land Company to attempt to purchase the four million acre Muscle Shoals area. Although the land was clearly under the control of the Creeks, and the Georgia legislature would in 1796 repeal the purchase authorization, the Tennessee Company nevertheless operated in the hopes that it would attract European buyers and jump-start a land industry that had stagnated under the weight of Indian attacks.

<sup>64</sup> As opposed to the Northwest Territory, where, according to Jefferson, "there remain[s] at the disposal of the United States, upwards of twenty-one Millions of Acres." Report of the Secretary of State to the President, 8 November 1791, Carter, *Territorial Papers*, 99.

<sup>65</sup> Henry Knox to William Blount, 15 August 1792, in Carter, *Territorial Papers*, 162-164.

<sup>66</sup> Knox to Blount, 26 August 1793, Carter, *Territorial Papers*, 299-300. The government took this position even as they were sinking increasing amounts of money into protecting the Northwest's potentially lucrative tracts of land. Moreover, Knox was such a notorious speculator that he was alternately honored and despised by those living in the Maine district of Massachusetts. See Alan Taylor, *Liberty Men and Great Proprietors: The Revolutionary Settlement on the Maine Frontier, 1760-1820* (Chapel Hill, 1990).

<sup>67</sup> Letter of a Philadelphia gentleman to his correspondent in Knox County, 19 March 1795, in the *Knoxville Gazette*, 24 April 1795.

<sup>68</sup> *Knoxville Gazette*, 6 April 1793, as quoted in William Masterson, *William Blount* (Baton Rouge, 1954), 241.

<sup>69</sup> Daniel Smith to Henry Knox, 19 July 1793, Carter, *Territorial Papers*, 280-283.

<sup>70</sup> Haywood, 307, as quoted in Symonds, "The Failure of America's Indian Policy", 40. One of the more critical vigilante assaults came in the form of Captain Hugh Beard's militia attack on Cherokee leader Hanging Maw's family. The massacre infuriated the administration and further convinced them of the necessity of Southwestern defensive policy. It also increased the level of frontier assaults initiated by local tribes. See Masterson, *William Blount*, chapter nine.

<sup>71</sup> Finger, *Tennessee Frontiers*, 144.

<sup>72</sup> Andrew Jackson to John McKee, 16 May 1794, James Spencer Bassett, ed., *The Correspondence of Andrew Jackson*, Volume I (Washington, D.C., 1926), 13.

<sup>73</sup> James Taylor to William Lytle, 5 March 1794, William Lytle

Papers, #445-Z, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

<sup>74.</sup> Toomey, 140. See also, Masterson, *William Blount*, and Ramsey, *Annals of Tennessee*.

<sup>75.</sup> Pickering to William Blount, 23 March 1795, *American Historical Magazine* IV (April, 1899), 182.

<sup>76.</sup> *Ibid.*, 184-185.

<sup>77.</sup> Bloom, "Establishing Precedents," 331. More specifically, White wrote to Blount in March, 1795, that "your candid and generous statements of the necessity of Congress resenting the outrages committed against your Government by the Creeks, occasioned a person in high office to observe that the ardor you showed for that object indicated a disposition interested for the purpose." Only ten days later, he went a bit further: "You will not be surprised that Congress is unwilling to act with spirit against the Creek Indian, for if any representations could have excited this government to a just feeling, in this particular, the different statements given by your Excellency would have had that effect." James White to William Blount, 19 March 1795, *American Historical Magazine* IV, 178. White to Blount, 29 March 1795, *American Historical Magazine* IV, 178.

<sup>78.</sup> Potential mutiny would not have come at the expense of the leaders of the territory. The threat was to the federal government, in the form of separate settlements with Spain or Britain. As Malcolm Rohrbough has noted, "abandoned" frontier residents always turned to local institutions for protection. In this case it would have ensured that the territorial elite remained in control of the population. Rohrbough, *The Trans-Appalachian Frontier*, 45.

<sup>79.</sup> Bloody Fellow to William Blount, 3 January 1795, *American Historical Magazine* IV, 93.

<sup>80.</sup> Blount's conspiracy was abetted by the fact that he and other major speculators were plunged into a recession in 1796 and 1797. Frontier conspiracy, then, underscored the connection between economics and American identity: Spanish intrigue in the 1780s would protect settlers and speculation enterprises from Indian raids; Blount's conspiracy in 1796-1797 would revive speculator fortunes by opening new land for sale and under the protection of the British empire. In short, frontier conspiracy was less a rebellion against the federal government than protection of commercial growth. See Cayton, "When Shall We Cease to Have Judases," 160, 163; and Buckner F. Melton, Jr., *The First Impeachment: The Constitution's Framers and the Case of Senator William Blount* (Macon, 1998). See also Robert Remini, *Course of American Empire*, chapter ten.

<sup>81.</sup> Blount to Robertson, 22 November 1794, *American Historical Magazine* III, 374.

<sup>82.</sup> To be sure, Blount had begun to ponder the question of statehood early on, and in 1793 had even created the legislature with an eye towards just such a resolution. By 1795, he might also have had another goal in mind: positioning himself for the United States Senate. The evidence is of course shaky, but it is curious that he was careful to place all of his close political allies in the Constitutional Convention, where they could approve his measures and then go to their various districts and support his

candidacy. See William Alphonso Walker, "Tennessee, 1796-1821" (Ph.D. Diss., University of Texas, 1959), chapter one. See also Masterson, *William Blount*.

<sup>83.</sup> *Journal of the Proceedings of the House of Representatives of the Territory of the United States South of the River Ohio, 1795* (Knoxville, 1795).

<sup>84.</sup> Carter, *Territorial Papers*, 404-405. The convention quickly came under the control of Blount and his political allies, thus ensuring that state government would continue the territorial leadership. The contrast in regional population, however, is startling -- since the 1791 census the territorial population had doubled, but the middle district had gone from 7,000 to only 11,000. Such a pronounced difference bred significant political tension between east and central Tennessee, and as we shall see, the population explosion of the early nineteenth century would only magnify the problem. See Remini, *Course of American Empire*, and Abernethy, *From Frontier to Plantation*.

<sup>85.</sup> James Lewis has noted that many of the government efforts to placate the Southwest drew from their conception of "neighborhood", and from the American need to control it lest the republican experiment fail. See Lewis, *The American Union and the Problem of Neighborhood: The United States and the Collapse of the Spanish Empire, 1790-1829* (Chapel Hill, 1998). See also, Drew R. McCoy, *The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America* (Chapel Hill, 1980).

<sup>86.</sup> Chauncey Goodrich to Oliver Woolcott, 13 May 1796, in George Gibbs, ed., *Memoirs of the Administrations of Washington and John Adams, Edited from the Papers of Oliver Wolcott, Secretary of the Treasury*, Vol. I (New York, 1846), 338-339, as quoted in Samuel C. Williams, "The Admission of Tennessee into the Union," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 4 (Winter 1945): 313.

<sup>87.</sup> Perhaps Charleston Federalist William Loughton Smith most eloquently laid out these objections in his speech in the House debate on admission, *The Debates and Proceedings in the Congress of the United States 4th Congress, 1st Session*, (Washington, D.C., 1834), 1300-1304.

<sup>88.</sup> Blount to John Sevier, 27 September 1796, as quoted in Masterson, *William Blount*, 298.

<sup>89.</sup> Contrary to what Donald Ratcliffe noted for the Ohio Territory: he points out that statehood was an essential step towards the development of a modern party contest. Ratcliffe, *Party Spirit in a Frontier Republic*, chapter one. The existence of a one party system in Tennessee would continue relatively unchallenged until after the panic of 1819. See for example, Charles Sellers, "Banking and Politics in Jackson's Tennessee, 1817-1827," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 41 (1954-1955): 61-84.

<sup>90.</sup> This is not to say, of course, that Spanish intrigue came to an end with Pinckney's Treaty, for their empire was extremely sluggish in removing obstacles to river navigation and continued to whisper into the collective ear of Southwestern tribes, as Samuel Mitchell pointed out in 1800: "The [Spanish] interpreter has told the Indians that the United States and his Catholic Majesty were on a good understanding, and advised the Indians to act

friendly," he wrote to David Henley. "They told the Indians that the Spaniards were not in their hearts friendly to the United States, but by treaty they must act so. I have my doubts as to the intentions of the Spaniards [...] they must have something more in view than the friendship of those Indians." Samuel Mitchell to David Henley, 17 January 1800. David Henley Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University.

<sup>91</sup> Western Tennessee would remain under Chickasaw control until 1818, although North Carolina speculators such as Stockley Donelson had claimed millions of acres as early as 1784. Younger generation speculators did likewise; John Overton, for example, claimed ownership of the Chickasaw Bluffs (the area that eventually became Memphis) as early as 1797. Included in this younger generation were Overton, Andrew Jackson, Andrew Erwin, and John and David Campbell. See Stanley J Folmsbee, "Sectionalism and Internal Improvements in Tennessee, 1796-1845" (Ph.D. Diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1939); and St. George L. Sioussat, "Some Phases of Tennessee Politics in the Jackson Period," *American Historical Review* XIV (1908), 51-69.

<sup>92</sup> Pickering to Rufus King, June 4, 1795, in Charles King, ed., *The Life and Correspondence of Rufus King*, Vol. 1 (New York, 1971), 106-107.

<sup>93</sup> Their reactions also show the extent to which the "first party system" hinged upon fears that political opponents were bent on destroying the new constitutional order. See Joanne B. Freeman, "The Election of 1800: A Study in the Logic of Political Change," *Yale Law Journal* Vol. 108 #8, (June 1999), 1959-1994. See also, Freeman, "Dueling as Politics: Reinterpreting the Burr-Hamilton Duel," *William and Mary Quarterly* LIII (April 1996), 289-318.

<sup>94</sup> Perhaps Indian agent Benjamin Hawkins best summarized the Federalist position as regards the Southwest territory when he stated that the Blount conspiracy would "eventually be productive of service to the U.S. by an exposure of those dirty intriguers and their villainous plots to involve the government in confusion, difficulties, and distress." Benjamin Hawkins to David Henley, 4 June 1797, David Henley Papers, Duke University. The local population responded by admiringly electing Blount to a term in the state senate, where his peers quickly elevated to speaker. For more on Federalism and the Blount Impeachment, see Melton, *The First Impeachment*.

<sup>95</sup> Walker, 104. See also Masterson, 300.

<sup>96</sup> Benjamin Howard to William Preston, 13 March 1798, Preston Family Papers, Joyes Collection, The Filson Historical Society, Louisville.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid. In the process of appeasing all sides -- and because of Blount's hostile activity -- Sevier managed to establish himself as Tennessee's most powerful politician of the early nineteenth century.

<sup>98</sup> Andrew Jackson to John Overton, 22 January 1798, Claybrooke Collection, microfilm #812, reel 2, Box 5, Folder 4. Tennessee Historical Society Collection, Tennessee State Library and Archives..

<sup>99</sup> Edward Jones to Samuel Ashe, 17 March 1798, *Governor's*

*Papers: Samuel Ashe*, 1796-1798, Volume 21, North Carolina State Library and Archives.

<sup>100</sup> H. O. Tatum to Samuel Ashe, 9 February 1798, *Governor's Papers: Samuel Ashe*, 1796-1798, NCSLA.

<sup>101</sup> Report of Gaither, Graham and Locke to Samuel Ashe, 24 March 1798, *Governor's Papers*, Vol. 21, NCSLA.

<sup>102</sup> William Lytle was typical of smaller speculators. A Revolutionary War captain from Orange County, North Carolina, Lytle had managed by 1796 to obtain 8,010 acres of prime Davidson County real estate. By 1810, he personally held title to approximately 22,000 acres in middle Tennessee. Of the land acquired in Davidson County alone Lytle owned title to 6,000 acres, while his brother Archibald held another 2,010. Davidson County tax receipts, 16 November 1795 and 11 June 1796, William Lytle Papers, SHC.

<sup>103</sup> John Murrin, "The Jeffersonian Triumph and American Exceptionalism," *Journal of the Early Republic* 20 (Spring 2000): 12. See also Lewis, *The American Union and the Problem of Neighborhood*, and Richard Ellis, "The Market Revolution and the Transformation of American Politics, 1801-1837," in Melvyn Stokes and Stephen Conway, *The Market Revolution in America: Social, Religious and Political Expressions, 1800-1880* (Charlottesville, 1996), 153.

<sup>104</sup> The Yazoo land titles owned and executed by the New England Mississippi Land Company eventually turned into a national political issue left unresolved until the Marshall court tackled the problem in the landmark case *Fletcher v. Peck*. See Magrath, *Yazoo*.

<sup>105</sup> Even after embracing the Jeffersonian coalition, however, many of the Tennessee elite maintained Federalist positions. John Sevier, for example, wrote to William C.C. Claiborne amidst the Quasi-War with France that militias were "not a force by any means sufficient to protect our country against the invasions of regular armies, and suffer me to say that if attacked by the French, and our opposition is to be by militia only, that our expectations of defense will be illusive, vain and visionary." Sevier to Claiborne, 11 June 1798, John Sevier Papers, First Administration, GP-2, Reel 1, Box 1 Folder 5, TSLA.

<sup>106</sup> In some cases the derogatory use of "Federalism" supplanted the use of "aristocracy" as the epithet of choice, although as the nineteenth century progressed they tended to be used interchangeably. For more on the divisions within the Jeffersonian ranks, see John Lauritz Larson, *Internal Improvement: National Public Works and the Promise of Popular Government in the Early United States* (Chapel Hill, 2001); Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846* (New York, 1991); and Ellis, "The Market Revolution and the Transformation of American Politics." A satirical poem in the 1810 *Carthage Gazette* perfectly summarized middle Tennessee's nineteenth century relationship with Federalism (and interestingly, the Tertium Quids as well, a nineteenth century group of renegade Jeffersonians that seemed not to be too popular on the Tennessee frontier):

"What is the creature, or thing,

called Anglo Federalism," asked 'Jonas'?

'Tis a serpent in the grass,  
 'Tis a noisy braying ass;  
 'Tis a wolf in sheep's attire,  
 'Tis a reptile, call'd a liar;  
 'Tis of tyranny the tool,  
 'Tis a creature nam'd a fool;  
 'Tis a fox to guard a goose,  
 'Tis old Beelzebub let loose;  
 'Tis a most prepost'rous thing,  
 Freemen sighing for a king --  
 Standing tamely to be spit on,  
 Kick'd and buffeted by Britain --  
 'Tis what patriots all despise;  
 'Tis a traitor's dagger hid,  
 'Tis that weathercock—a quid;  
 'Tis a monster of the seas,  
 Waging WAR but crying PEACE;  
 'Tis ambition raving mad."

*Carthage Gazette and Friend of the People*, 29 June 1810. For more anti-quid sentiment, see the open letter to John Randolph in the 16 March 1810 edition of the *Gazette*.

<sup>107.</sup> 'A Citizen,' in the *Carthage Gazette*, 19 September 1808, Roll 100, TSLA.

<sup>108.</sup> United States Census, 1800, 1820 (Washington: Gales and Seaton, 1801, 1821). See also Goodstein, *Nashville*, 1780-1860, Appendix table one.

<sup>109.</sup> *The [Nashville] Clarion and Tennessee Gazette*, 16 June 1818.

<sup>110.</sup> *Ibid.*, 5 January 1819. Daniel Dupre has noted similar entrepreneurial elements in frontier Alabama. See Dupre, *Transforming the Cotton Frontier: Madison County, Alabama, 1800-1840* (Baton Rouge, 1997).

<sup>111.</sup> Certainly this was the case with the 1796 constitution. Acknowledged by contemporaries and historians alike as one of the most democratic documents of its era, the document was created by an elite convention and never offered to the people for approval. Amy H. Sturgis, "'Charged with Republican Notions': Western Constitutions, 1775-1796" (M.A. Thesis, Vanderbilt University, 1995). Comparison between Northwestern Constitutions and Tennessee's Constitution reveals an interesting ambiguity regarding race relations on the frontier. The 1802 Ohio Constitution, as Donald Ratcliffe notes, explicitly rejected slavery but simultaneously disfranchised the African-American population. The 1796 Tennessee Constitution, by contrast, explicitly protected slavery but simultaneously accepted the principle that the free black population had the right to vote. Ratcliffe, *Party Spirit in a Frontier Republic*, chapter two.

<sup>112.</sup> Arthur to David Campbell, 29 January 1799, Campbell Family Papers, Duke University. See also Ebenezer Brooks to Arthur Campbell, 6 July 1798.

<sup>113.</sup> Ebenezer Brooks to David Campbell, April 1796, Campbell Family Papers, Duke University.

<sup>114.</sup> Archibald Roane to David Campbell, October 19, 1800,

Campbell Family Papers, Duke University.

<sup>115.</sup> David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820* (Chapel Hill, 1997); *Tennessee Gazette*, 8 July 1801.

<sup>116.</sup> There certainly was a precedent for doing so. When initiating the 1784 pan-western movement known as Frankland, leader Arthur Campbell specifically supported legislative representation based on militia participation. Because all freemen had to take part in militia musters, he reasoned that voter turnout would be superior to the tiny turnouts of regular elections. His vision of democracy was eventually undermined, and his greater-Frankland experiment was replaced by the much smaller and less democratic state of Franklin. See James William Hagy, "Democracy Defeated: The Frankland Constitution of 1785," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 60 (Fall 1981): 243. Of course, the precedent was made stronger by the fact that militias had served important government functions for years prior to the territorial period -- everything from guarding prisoners to collecting taxes to serving as a slave patrol. See Cumfer, 424-425. See also Sally Hadden, *Slave Patrols: Law and Violence in Virginia and the Carolinas, 1700-1865* (Cambridge, 2001).

<sup>117.</sup> Roberts to John Sevier, 22 November 1796, John Sevier Papers, First Administration, GP-2, Box 2, Folder 1, TSLA.