

BLACKBURNS AND THE FORT BLOUNT ROAD

By James Cummins

Upper Cumberland Researcher – Vol. XXVI, No. 2

Summer 2001, Cookeville, TN

Following are excerpts from a monograph by James Cummins, 5118 Saratoga Avenue, San Diego, CA 92107.

(His article refers to Blackburns Fork, Roaring River, Jackson Co. TN.)

The Blackburns had a fort (fortress/stockade and blockhouse) sometimes called “Fort Blackburn,” kept an “ordinary (Inn or Stand) and facilities for travelers to eat and spend the night, provided food and supplies for travelers and their livestock, most likely had a blacksmith shop, and had a settlement of enough families to operate everything and to survive against the wilderness and the Indians. Blackburns was the first fort and settlement after leaving Campbell’s Station (near Kingston) and crossing about 70 miles of mountains and Indian land.

People traveled in wagon trains escorted by armed guards. A wagon train with 15 or 20 armed escorts was quite a collection of people to stop and spend the night, and several wagon trains could have been there some nights. After crossing about 70 miles of mountains and Indian land, both people, animals, and wagons were quite likely ready for rest, repair, refurbishment, re-supply, and blacksmith services.

Blackburns fort and settlement was a colorful little boom town for a few years. Many prominent famous people traveled through there, and many colorful events transpired there. When the Walton Road opened in 1801, its reason for being was greatly diminished.

In 1806, the Jackson County Court and County Site/Seat was to be at Blackburns until Williamsburg was ready.

The Blackburns were located at the intersection of the Fort Blount Road and Blackburn Fork creek. The road was the very first road from East Tennessee to the Nashville area, and was the only such road for eight years from 1788 to 1796, during the era in which the nation was being forged, the Constitution was adopted, and Washington became President. Numerous settlers, travelers, and prominent people traveled back and forth through here. It is said that people are buried every few feet along the Fort Blount Road. Blackburns was the only stopping place between Campbell’s Station to Blackburns (more than 70 miles) was mostly Indian land until 1806. The Blackburns may have maintained a presence there as long as 50 years or more, from 1763 until 1837 or longer.

Beginning after 1796, when roads were constructed through the Double Springs area, the Blackburns also developed a presence in the Double Springs area. The Blackburns kept an “ordinary.” Benjamin Blackburn was Postmaster from 1803 until 1817 or maybe 1822. There was a Blackburn Baptist Church. And so on. They may have had a fort near Double Springs, but the Indian threat was rapidly diminishing by then.

However, existing convenient (library) information is sparse, incomplete, scattered, confused, and flawed. It is a segment of local, regional, State of North Carolina, and State of Tennessee history, which will be lost forever unless something is done.

THE EARLY ROADS. In order to properly understand, sort out, and reconstruct other events, one must first know and understand the early roads. It is well known that the buffalo were good at finding the best way to get through, and that other animals, and then Indians, and then hunters and explorers, and then settlers all tended to use the buffalo trails. The buffalo had a interest in getting to the “licks” along the Cumberland River.

If one knew the lay of the land, or by viewing topographic maps, it is obvious that the best route from the Algood area to the Cumberland River would be to follow East Blackburn Fork (creek) and its tributaries and then follow Flynns Creek. The buffalo may have gone to “White Plains” (Algood area) to graze.

The North Carolina Government hired Peter Avery to mark a way from the East to Nashville. Thus Avery marked a way during the winter of 1787-1788, which became known as “Avery Trace.” A “trace” is just simply merely “a marking.” During the summer of 1788, Avery Trace was widened into a “wagon road.” In the strictest technical sense, it was a “trace” only until the “wagon road” was opened up. The road was known by various names. People in the Nashville area called it the North Carolina Road (road to the Cumberland area.) It was the only such road for eight years from 1788 until 1796.

From the Algood area to the Cumberland River, this road generally followed East Blackburn Fork and its tributaries, and then followed Flynns Creek, and crossed the Cumberland River at Fort Blount. In 1796, another road was opened up from the Algood area via Double Springs and Chestnut Mound, crossing the Cumberland River near the mouth of the Caney Fork River. Thus, in 1796, the one road became known as the Fort Blount Road and the other road became known as the Caney Fork Road. In 1801 the Caney Fork Road (generally) was improved and called the Walton Road.

Common sense tells one any number of things. There would soon be various cross roads from one road to the other, like from Double Springs to the head of Flynns Creek. And these old roads did not stay the same very long. If a stretch of road got too bad, someone would open up a loop around the bad place. A settler would open up a loop around by his house, and people would start using that loop. So it soon got to be a network of roads, which made it harder for the Indians to know where to ambush travelers.

See Chapter 3 for my gggg-grandfather, **Thomas Shirley Anderson who md **Judith “Juda” Robinson.***

Thomas Shirley Anderson lived in Blackburn Fork, Roaring River, Jackson Co. TN.

ajlambert.com