

FROM THE UPPER CUMBERLAND OF PIONEER TIMES

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This book deals with the pioneer history of what was formerly a remote, backwoods section of Tennessee, adjoining the wilderness hunting grounds of the Indians. From this state, however, it progressed into that of a delightfully easygoing, friendly, rural section. And finally, with the building of modern highways, better schools, and electric power projects, it has now taken great strides toward developing into one of the truly progressive districts of our State.

For addition local and biographical information the reader should refer to such excellent works as A. R. Houge's *History of Fentress County*; w. R. McClain's *History of Putnam County*; W. T. Hale's *History of Warren, County*; and Monroe Seals' *History of White County*.

EARLY SURVEYS AND SETTLEMENTS

Settlement of the Cumberland valley was first promoted by the Transylvania Company of North Carolina, after its purchase from the Indians of that part of their hunting grounds extending from the Kentucky River southwardly "to the head spring of the most southerly branch" of the Cumberland River, "thence down that river, including all its waters, to the Ohio River." After selling land to many of the first settlers in Kentucky, and on the Cumberland, Transylvania's title was litigated in the courts of Virginia, where it was decided that while Transylvania had secured a good claim to whatever title the Indians may have possessed, it had secured none whatever from the sovereign State of Virginia, which held the legal title by virtue of royal grants, hence could not give clear titles of conveyance. Later North Carolina followed the Virginia ruling respecting Transylvania's sale of land in the Cumberland valley.

At the close of the Revolution the State of North Carolina was financially indebted to her soldiers and undertook to settle the account by issuing compensatory grants of western land in the amount of 640 acres to privates, 1,000 acres to noncommissioned officers, 2,500 acres to subalterns, 3,800 acres to captains, and so forth. For this purpose an act was passed setting aside a large tract of land to be known as the "Military Reservation," and located southwest of the Transylvania Purchase. It was while this Reservation boundary line was being run that Transylvania's title was declared void. Immediately thereafter the North Carolina legislature, by an act dated May 17, 1783, changed the location of the Military Reservation so as to include Transylvania's former Cumberland settlement – the new boundary to "begin on the Virginia line where the Cumberland River intersects the same; thence south 55 miles; thence west to the Tennessee River; thence down the Tennessee River to the Virginia line; thence east with said Virginia line to the beginning." After being surveyed in 1784 this new boundary was known as the "Commissioners' Line," and North Carolina began issuing warrants for tracts of the sizes indicated above, to be located within its bounds, but not to include any of the lands already conveyed by the Transylvania Company under color of title. All these Transylvania settlers were given preemption rights.

The eastern boundary of the new Military Reservation was long known as the "Meridian Line." It began at the Virginia line, on the east bank of Cumberland River; thence "South 5 degrees East," through the Upper Cumberland section, to a point some distance south of Caney Fork River, crossing the latter near the mouth of the Calkiller. This line was about a mile east of the present city of Cookeville.

The boundary of the Military Reservation became the subject of considerable dispute with the Cherokees, and was dealt with in both the Treaty of Hopewell (1785) and the Treaty of Holston (Blount's Treaty, of 1791). The new boundary, as described in the first of these treaties, was temporarily blazed in 1785. It was described again in the second treaty, and officially surveyed in 1797 by Brig. Gen. James Winchester, accompanied by a commission to the Cherokees. It is always mentioned thereafter as the "Indian Boundary." The eastern part of this boundary was run "North 45 degrees East," by the compass, and extended from the head of the West Fork of Stone's River to a point on Cumberland River near the mouth of Rock Castle River in Kentucky.

Beginning about 1786, the earliest settlements in the Upper Cumberland centered around Lilydale – located on the East-West Trail, in what is now Clay County; Dixon Springs, Fort Blount, and Blackburn Springs, the latter three being located on the North Carolina military trace. By the fall of 1797 all of the best land to the west of the Indian Boundary had been taken, new settlements having been started at Carthage, Rome, Liberty, Laurel Hill, Monroe, Windle, Gainesboro, Hilham, Beech Hill, Livingston, Alexandria, Elmwood, and Gordonsville. On the eastern side of this line lay the Cherokee country, where a good many white families also held tomahawk rights, hoping to perfect their titles in the future.

In 1803, while campaigning for the office of Governor of Tennessee, John Sevier strongly advocated the procurement of all remaining Indian lands for white settlement. After that, more people began crossing the border to stake out prospective claims in the Indian country. This is illustrated in the following extract from a letter by Capt. Sampson Williams to Judge Andrew Jackson, dated July 20, 1805:

He (John Sevier) has got a number of Jackson County people on fire with the idea of shortly getting over the Indian line, and two men are now already at work on the Indian side, near Maj. Russell's. One of the men's name is Joseph Taylor.

By the Third Treaty of Tellico, dated October 25, 1805, most of the Wilderness, was finally purchased from the Cherokees, and settlements sprang up around such places as White Plains, Rock Island, Sparta, McMinnville, Milledgeville, and Mount Granger.

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