

BIOGRAPHY OF STEPHEN ROBINSON SR.

By Pam Pollard

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Biography of Stephen Robinson, Sr.



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Stephen Robinson Sr. was the son of **Edward and Judith Southall Robinson**. He was born about 1745, according to records submitted to the Daughters of American Revolution.¹ DAR records show him born in Goochland County, Virginia, and Cumberland County, Virginia [perhaps because this part of Virginia later became Cumberland County]. There are all kinds of birth dates for him in various family genealogies, and his birth date is uncertain, but falls sometime between 1740-1750 based on the 1830 U. S. Census.¹ **Stephen** married **Elizabeth Holland**, daughter of Dr. **George Holland** and his first wife, **Sarah Ford**, on 13 June 1774² in Louisa County, Virginia. **Stephen** and **Elizabeth Holland Robinson** had eleven children: **George** (1775-Aft 1850), **Polly** (1776-?), **Stephen** (1778-1846), **James B.** (1780-1853), **Jane** (1782-?), **Edward** (1784-1812), **Sally** (1790-?), **Augustin** (1794-?), **Nancy** (1796-?), **John** (1798-1877), and **Archibald** (1800-?). All were born in Virginia except **John** and **Archibald**. **Stephen's** son, **James B. Robinson**, married **Elizabeth Fite**, the daughter of **Leonard Fite** who moved into Smith County, Tennessee along with **John Fite** and **Adam Dale**, c. 1796. [See pp. 53-57 of this issue of *Ansearchin' News*.]

American Revolution Service

Stephen fought in the American Revolution, serving as a private in the Militia of Virginia.¹ His service is listed in the Auditor's Account Book XVIII, at the Virginia State Archives in Richmond, Virginia, as a Revolutionary War Veteran, Virginia line, and he was paid on 19 Apr 1784 for 1781 service. He is also listed in **Gwathmey's** Historical Register of Virginians in the Revolution.⁸ **Stephen** and his father, **Edward**, also sold beef to the Revolutionary Army.²⁰

In the year 1782 he is found on the Cumberland County, Virginia "Continental Census".³ He is still living in Cumberland County, Virginia, on the 1790 Census, reflecting that there were 5 in his household and that he owned 3 slaves.⁴

Move to Tennessee

Stephen conveyed his Virginia land to his brother, **Field Robinson**, in 1797 just before moving his family to Tennessee. **Stephen** had also finished with the settlement of his father's estate as his executor, and he is believed to be the eldest son.¹⁸

About 1797, **Stephen** and "**Betty**" **Holland Robinson** left Cumberland, Virginia, and were living in Smith County, Tennessee, along with their nine children who made the trip with them. Their eleventh and last child, **Archibald** or **Archie**, was born soon after they came to Tennessee.

Goodspeed's History says, "**John Robinson** born circa 1799 (b. 27 January 1798) near Nashville, was brought as an infant to a country infested by Indians, to Temperance Hall".⁵ At the time of the arrival of **Stephen Robinson**, the Temperance Hall area was an unbroken canebrake which was infested by many Indians who were both treacherous and troublesome. There were extremely large numbers of wild animals, and bears often roamed the lands which **Stephen Robinson** had purchased.¹⁷

In *Hale's History of DeKalb County, Tennessee*, he states that **Stephen Robinson** settled near Temperance Hall.⁶

In *Webb's History of DeKalb County, Tennessee*, **Webb** states, "**Adam Dale** was the first to settle permanently in what is now DeKalb County. He probably explored the area in 1797 and returned to Nashville. The next year he came back with **Stephen Robinson** and two brothers, **Leonard** and **John Fite**, who brought the first wagon into the Smith Fork Valley. These men, like most early settlers, were looking for good land. They were not, however, penniless wanderers; all four of them were settled family men, and all were relatively prosperous".⁷

Continued on page 14



Biography of Stephen Robinson, Sr., cont.

In Webb's *Bicentennial History of DeKalb County*, he says: "**Stephen Robinson** was the first settler at Temperance Hall, and he owned land and at least three slaves in Cumberland County, Virginia as early as 1827. His grandfather, **John Robinson**, had been a slaveowner¹⁰ and **Stephen's** mother, **Judith**, had sufficient property to make a will dividing it among her children.¹ By the time **Stephen** made his own will in 1828 (he died in 1835), he owned fourteen slaves, more than a thousand acres of land, an apple orchard, and a rather substantial house judging by the part of it he left to his wife: "the two sellar rooms, two west rooms on the first floor and the west room above the stairs".¹¹

The **Hollands** were also people of some wealth. **Betty's** grandmother, **Judith Holland**, bequeathed four hundred pounds each to four of her grandchildren in her will.¹ **Judith Holland** did not sign her name to her will, nor did **Stephen's** mother, **Judith**, or his grandfather, **John**, to theirs. **Stephen** was literate, however, as were his children. The accounts of his nieces in Virginia at the time **Stephen** left there show expenditures for books and tuition,¹³ and **Stephen** left one of his grandsons \$200 for his education.⁹ The early citizens appear to have had considerable concern for the education of their children, and as the population grew, for the establishment of schools. They were even more concerned with the establishment of law and order. The earliest pioneers of the Cumberland River area in 1780 set up a government under the Cumberland Compact, and DeKalb County citizens were under the jurisdiction of a county government from the time of their first arrival. In 1803, **Stephen Robinson** was on a Smith County jury.¹⁴

In 1820 **Stephen** is found on the Federal Census for Smith County.¹⁵ He is listed as **Stephen Robertson Senior**. There are no other **Robinsons** listed. There were 14 slaves in his household and 8 persons were working in agriculture. He had six persons in his household and 14 slaves. Since his

youngest child was born c. 1800 (**Archie**), and there were 2 males and 1 female under 10, it's possible he had another family or grandchildren living with them. These could perhaps be the three children of **Sally Robinson Simpson**, as **Augustin**, her brother, was appointed their guardian in 1822. **Sally** was living in 1828, but is referred to in her father's will as **Sally Robinson** and not **Sally Simpson**. Again in 1830 there were small children in the household as well as a male 30-39 who could be their father.¹⁶

Stephen's Death

Stephen Robinson, Sr., and **Elizabeth "Betty" (Holland) Robinson** spent the remaining years of their lives at their home in Smith County near the present location of Temperance Hall (now DeKalb County). **Stephen Robinson, Sr.**, died in September, 1835, and "**Betty**" died about 1838. **Stephen Robinson's** will is dated 11 March 1828 and was recorded in Smith County on 16 September 1835.¹⁹ An inventory of the personal property of this estate is very lengthy and contains such items as glassware which one would not expect to be found in this area at such an early date.

There is speculation as to the location of the graves of **Stephen Robinson, Sr.**, and **Elizabeth (Holland) Robinson**. It's possible that they were buried on their farm where **Ethel (Sykes) Hayes** now lives. Others are of the opinion that they must have been buried at the **Edward Robinson** Cemetery on the west side of Smith Fork Creek about three-fourths of a mile below Dowlstown. Three very old graves in this cemetery are covered with large flat rocks which are thought by some descendants to be the graves of **Stephen** and **Elizabeth**.¹⁷

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15. 1-10, 2; Free White M, 26-44, 1; Free White M, 45 & Over, 1; Free White F, under 10, 1; Free White F, Over 25; 1, 14 Slaves,

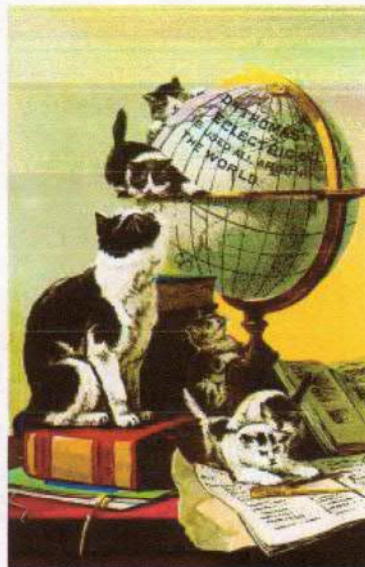
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