

America's Ruckers and Kin in Early Middle Tennessee

With the Revolution seemingly over, and liberty holding reign, the thrilling prospect of westward expansion would stir the soul of many an early American. One exciting destination for whom was the great and untamed wilds of a particularly thriving region that would, with the signing of the statehood proclamation by President George Washington on June 1st, 1796, be named, "Tennessee," the 16th state. With its fertile plains, its rolling hills, and its green mountains, Tennessee is divided into three geographic regions: West, Middle, and East (represented by three stars on the state flag). Accompanying the names of the early pioneer families who settled the middle region of Tennessee is a notable list: Donelsons, Robertsons, Jacksons, Martins, and others, including Ruckers.

Following the pioneers' lead, a good number of early settlers arrived in the region utilizing the Revolutionary War land bounties their families had earned through military service. During that early period the capital city was located on the Stones River in the growing town of Murfreesboro, in Rutherford County, in Middle Tennessee. However, later, in 1843, the state capital was moved north by about 40 miles, across the county line into flourishing Nashville, on the Cumberland River, in Davidson County.

The following is not intended as an exhaustive list of the members of the named families.

Captain Benjamin Rucker of Amherst County, Virginia, born c. 1729, was a planter, lawyer, sheriff, and justice of the peace. He married an Elizabeth (*) c. 1757 and had a large family and a large plantation. Benjamin and his brother Anthony, in 1775, were the inventors of the James River Batteaux/Bateau, a boat designed with the capacity to transport up to 9,000 pounds of tobacco. The vessels were also used for transporting large amounts of military supplies, and occasionally for the transportation of men. Between 1820 and 1840 at least 500 Bateau and more than 1500 Bateamen were operating between Lynchburg and Richmond, Virginia. In 1776 Benjamin served in the Revolutionary War as a captain. Benjamin and Elizabeth's large family included four sons who married four Reade sisters:

- (1.) James, born Sept. 04, 1758, married Nancy Anne Reade (James' first wife, E. Tate, was the mother of the Elizabeth Rucker, mentioned later).
- (2.) Thomas, born c. 1760, married Sarah "Sallie" Reade.
- (3.) Gideon, born May 06, 1772, married Joyce "Joycey" Reade.
- (4.) Bennett, born May 31, 1779, married Johanna "Joanna" Reade.

The four Reade sisters were the daughters of William Reade (a second cousin of Pres. George Washington) and wife Johanna Jones (daughter of Thomas Jones and wife Sarah Hancock) of Bedford County, Virginia. This Reade family are descendants of Colonel George Reade and wife Elizabeth Martiau (daughter of Nicholas Martiau and wife Jane Bartley, noted settlers of Jamestown), who are also the ancestors of not only Thomas Nelson, Jr. and Pres. George Washington, but ironically, also of the current English queen, Elizabeth II via their shared ancestor, Englishman/Colonial American, Robert Porteous (the 4th great-grandfather of the late

Queen Mother), who after many years in the American colony returned to England. All four couples of the Reade-Rucker unions moved to Middle Tennessee by the 1790's where they were early settlers of note amongst the growing population:

(2.) Thomas Rucker's home, in 1804, served as the first Rutherford County court. Some years later, in 1811, his land was considered for the location of a new county seat, but another location was chosen at Murfreesboro. The four industrious Rucker brothers, each a minister of a different church denomination, had large plantations and thousands of acres of prime Middle Tennessee farm land along the Stones River in the eastern part of Rutherford County, where county lines, in 1836, were changed as Cannon County (county seat, Woodbury) was formed from eastern Rutherford County. The brothers' adjacent lands straddled both sides of the new county line.

These Middle Tennessee Rucker families also had other historic ties to the region. One such tie was with (1.) James Rucker's daughter Elizabeth, who married Severn Donelson, son of Tennessee pioneer John Donelson, and brother of first lady and pioneer Rachel Donelson Jackson. Severn and Elizabeth Rucker Donelson produced a set of twin boys, but because Andrew and Rachel could not have children, Severn and Elizabeth decided to share one of their twins with the yearning couple. The boy was raised at The Hermitage, home of the Jacksons, with the name Andrew Jackson, Jr.. After Elizabeth was widowed, she lived for a time with her son at The Hermitage, where in 1828, she died. Elizabeth's remains rest at the The Hermitage's cemetery.

Some Donelson/Jackson descendants at The Hermitage married kin of another Tennessee founding pioneer, legislator of three states, and Revolutionary War officer, Henry County, Virginia's, General Joseph Martin, who, along with early explorer Doctor Thomas Walker, many years prior, had stopped at a spring near a gap in the mountains that had, up to that point, separated Virginia from the wild west. With the last of their rum remaining, the two explorers gave a toast to the Duke of Cumberland, giving rise to the name of the Cumberland Gap, the Cumberland Mountains, and the Cumberland River. Gen. Joseph Martin also worked with Tennessee founding pioneers John Donelson and James Robertson, as well as Native Indian leaders, on American settlement treaties, including the Hopewell Treaty.

Elizabeth Rucker Donelson's father, (1.) James Rucker, was also the father of Doctor William Reade Rucker who married Susan Childress, sister of first lady Sarah Childress Polk, and had at least two daughters. These two daughters, Sarah and Johanna, stayed at the White House with their aunt and uncle, President and Mrs. James K. Polk, while attending college in Washington D.C.. One of the two sisters, thought to be Sarah Polk Rucker (named for her aunt), appears in a recently discovered photograph standing on the front steps of the White House with the Polks and other dignitaries, including Dolly Madison. **Much of President Polk's diary, in which he includes mention of his Rucker nieces and his Rucker brother-in-law, is published on-line.

Samuel Hervey Laughlin was born in 1795 in Washington County, Virginia (son of John Laughlin and wife Sarah Duncan, a daughter of Virginians pioneering lands on the frontier when they

were taken as prisoners of war by British forces at Riddle's Station, near Martin's Station in 1780). Laughlin began the practice of law in Murfreesboro in 1815. He served several terms as city alderman, as the third mayor of Murfreesboro (but the first to hold the office full term) and as a state representative. He was a Murfreesboro classmate, friend, and colleague of James K. Polk, and went to D.C. with Polk when he was elected president. Laughlin was also the editor of a Nashville newspaper, administrator of the U.S. land office, and author of an 1840's journal in which he detailed the history of the early political scene of Middle Tennessee, as well as many personal details of his life and the lives of his friends and neighbors, such as meeting his wife Mary Clarke Bass (daughter of Rutherford County's Captain James Bass and wife T. Loundon). His wife's sister Temperance Weston Bass (previously married to Smith) became the second wife of another son of (1.) James Rucker when she wed planter Benjamin Reade Rucker of Maple Shade. Yet another son of (1.) James Rucker, Samuel Reade Rucker (veteran of the War of 1812), who, like Laughlin, served as mayor of Murfreesboro and in state politics, and who, as a young man, was also captured by the charms of the same Miss Mary Clarke Bass. With Laughlin winning Mary's hand, Samuel Reade Rucker went on to marry Martha "Mattie" Bedford Martin. Some of Laughlin's kin included among the early settlers of the area were: Sharpes, Lockes, and Duncans. ***Laughlin's extensive journal is also published on-line.

(2.) Thomas Rucker's son Doctor Edmund Rucker was born in 1800. He married Louisa Winchester (daughter of Sumner County's General James Winchester, of Cragfont, and wife Susan Black) and had a large family. Their son General Edmund Winchester Rucker, a self-taught civil engineer, joined the Confederate Army at the outbreak of the Civil War as a private and quickly moved up through the ranks to colonel. Rucker served as a brigade commander with General Nathan Bedford Forrest at the Battle of Franklin in Williamson County and at the Battle of Nashville in adjacent Davidson County where he was shot and captured and suffered the loss of an arm. The war ended before his planned military promotion took place. Rucker's ranking as general, although well deserved, is an honorary title. After the war he and Gen. Forrest were partners in building railroads. Rucker became an industrial leader in Birmingham, Alabama, owning productive steel mills and coal mines. He died on April 13, 1924 and is buried in Birmingham's Oak Hill Cemetery. Gen. Edmund Winchester Rucker is the namesake of the U.S. army post, Fort Rucker, Alabama.

(3.) Gideon Rucker and wife Joyce Reade had a large plantation on Locke's Creek and a large family, including two girls who married two sons of the aforementioned Gen. Joseph Martin (son of Albemarle County, Virginia's Captain Joseph Martin, Sr. and wife Susannah Chiles, granddaughter of Colonel John Page and wife Alice Luckin) and wife Susannah Graves of Spotsylvania County, Virginia. Gen. Martin's son Captain Lewis Graves Martin married (3.) Gideon Rucker's daughter Belinda America Rucker in Murfreesboro, in 1816. Capt. Lewis G.'s brother, the Hon. John C. Martin, Esq., married another daughter of (3.) Gideon Rucker, Sophia Rucker (named for her aunt Sophia Rucker Burrus). Hon. John C. served five terms as county executive of Cannon County, Head Justice of the Cannon County Courts, and was responsible for the construction of the Cannon County Court House in Woodbury, in 1836. This Judge John C. Martin is buried at Cannon County, Tennessee. Capt. Lewis G. and four of his brothers served in the War of 1812, while their eldest brother Colonel William Martin of Smith County, Middle

Tennessee, served in the Revolutionary War alongside their father. (3.) Gideon Rucker's first Middle Tennessee home, near Rucker's Knob at Porterfield, was built by 1804. His second home built in nearby Readyville, Cannon County, was finished by 1816. During the same early period two additional brothers of Capt. Lewis G. and Hon. John C., also moved to Middle Tennessee, to Maury County (county seat, Columbia), Alexander and Thomas Martin. These two brothers married two daughters of John Fendall Carr and wife Elizabeth Dalton. Back in Virginia, the Carrs were close associates of Thomas Jefferson (Jefferson's sister Martha married his best friend, Dabney Carr). Carr is buried at Monticello. When growing up, Gen. Joseph Martin's father's plantation was located adjacent to Thomas Jefferson's father, Peter Jefferson's, plantation. Amongst other notable friends, these men were friends and associates of Patrick Henry, Colonel Benjamin Cleveland (Gen. Joseph Martin and Col. Cleveland married sisters, Susannah and Mary Graves), Major John Redd of Henry County, Virginia (Redd also kept a diary, much of which is also published on-line), and the Fighting Gamecock, General Thomas Sumter.

Some other historically notable cousins of the five Martin brothers of early Middle Tennessee include: first cousin General William Martin, Jr., bachelor of his home Rural Plains in Franklin, Williamson County, Middle Tennessee (son of Gen. Joseph Martin's brother Captain William Martin, Sr. and wife Rachel Dalton). Gen. William Martin, Jr. (with ranking promotions) served in the War of 1812 with Jackson at the Battle of New Orleans (not to be confused with his first cousin of the same name, one of the five brothers, Col. William Martin of Smith County, who fought at the same battles, but who was often at odds with Andrew Jackson). Gen. William Martin, Jr. was in charge of the 9th brigade in 1825, when it was reviewed by the Marquis de Lafayette and Gen. Jackson at The Hermitage and he led Lafayette's tour of America that same year. One of Gen. William Martin Jr.'s sisters, Sarah "Sallie" Martin, married Colonel John Hughes in Henry County, Virginia. The Hugheses joined Martin in Williamson County. Another sister, Virginia "Jincey" Martin and husband Samuel Clarke, who also went to live in Williamson County, were the parents of Sarah "Sallie" Martin Clarke (a descendant of George Rogers and William Clark), wife of General John Sumner Russwurm (first cousin of Thomas E. Sumner) of Williamson County and later, of Murfreesboro, in Rutherford County.

Many family get-togethers in the Middle Tennessee of the 1820's and 1830's were most certainly filled with storytelling, interesting conversation, and lively political debate, but many of their familiar exchanges would eventually become long distance correspondences as some of the succeeding generations would set out for places on the new frontier, like Missouri, Texas, and California--where stories and diaries and mementos of the early pioneer life of Tennessee would be passed down for generations.

*(Genealogy researchers are actively seeking a source for the maiden name of Benjamin Rucker's wife Elizabeth, born c. 1729)

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Sources include: The Lyman C. Draper Papers, The Virginia Calendar Papers, **The James K. Polk Diary (The Diary of James K. Polk During His Presidency, 1845 to 1849 Now First ... - James Knox Polk - Google Books), ***The S.H. Laughlin Journal

(http://www.frontierfolk.net/ramsha_research/laughlin.html), Research of Gary Boyd Roberts, Massachusetts genealogist, Thomas D. Mackie, Director of the Amherst County Historical Museum, Records of Grace Episcopal Church at Yorktown, Virginia, and my own genealogy research conducted from Middle Tennessee, J.E. Bunch.