

William Grainger "Billy" Blount (1784 – 1827)

(Fourth child and second son of William and Molsey Blount)

Compiled for Blount Mansion Association by Dean Novelli, 2020.

GENEALOGICAL DATA:

BORN: 1784 "Piney Grove," (near Greenville), Pitt County, NC

DIED: 1827 May 20 Paris, Henry County, Tennessee

AGE AT DEATH: 42/43

BURIED: Paris City Cemetery, Paris, Henry County, Tennessee

PARENTS: William Blount (1749 March 26 - 1800 March 21) age 50
MARRIED 1778 Feb 12

Mary "Molsey" Grainger (1760 -1802 Oct 7) age 42
William and "Molsey" Blount had nine (9) children; five
(5) boys and four (4) girls, seven (7) lived to adulthood

SIBLINGS: Fourth of nine children and oldest surviving boy of William and
"Molsey" Blount; see list of siblings under parents'
genealogical entries

MARRIAGES: Never married

CHILDREN: No known issue

EDUCATION: Educated at home by private tutor Dr. Nicolas Fournier, later at
Blount College by the Rev. Samuel Carrick; read law (not
known with whom) in Knoxville, TN

William Grainger "Billy" Blount (1784 – 1827)

CHRONOLOGICAL HIGHLIGHTS:

1784 BORN: at "Piney Grove," (near Greenville), Pitt County, NC

1787 Sept: Billy's father SIGNED the US Constitution as representative from
North Carolina

1789 Aug 17 DIED: Jacob Blount, age 63; Billy's grandfather

1790 Billy's father William Blount APPOINTED territorial governor of
Southwest Territory

- 1791 October: William Blount's family MOVED to Rocky Mount, near Johnson City, TN; Nancy and her sister Mary Louisa are sent to stay with their Aunt Anne Harvey in Tarboro. NC
- 1792 Spring: William Blount family MOVED to Knoxville, TN
- 1797 July: Billy's father William Blount, a US Senator from TN is EXPELLED by the US Senate and IMPEACHED by the US House
- 1800 March <10 DIED: Mary Grainger, Billy's maternal grandmother
March 21 DIED: William Blount, Billy's father
WARD: became ward of Willie Blount and Hugh Lawson White
- 1802 DIED Oct 7: Mary "Molsey" (Grainger) Blount, Billy's mother
- 1805 LICENSED: to practice law in Tennessee
DIED March 21: Anne "Nancy" Gray (Blount) Harvey, Billy's aunt who was living in Blount Mansion, Knoxville, TN at the time
- 1811 ELECTED: Secretary of State for Tennessee by state legislature; served during his uncle's Gov. Willie Blount's last two terms
- 1812 August WAR DECLARED: War of 1812 between US and Great Britain begins
- 1815 Feb WAR ENDS: hostilities cease War of 1812 ends
ELECTED: to serve as US Representative in the Fourteenth Congress from 2nd TN congressional district; replaced John Sevier who died in office
- 1817 ELECTED: to a second term as US Representative in the Fourteenth Congress from 2nd TN congressional district
- 1818 Oct 20 DEED TRANSFER: Willie Blount transferred ownership of Blount Mansion to William G. Blount
- 1819 DECLINED: to run for a third term in the US Congress; retired from public life at age 35
- 1820 April 19 DEED TRANSFER: William G. Blount transferred ownership of Blount Mansion to his brother-in-law Edwin Wiatt (Wyatt)
- 1826 June MOVED: to Paris, Henry County, Tennessee
- 1827 May 21 DIED: at Paris, Henry County, Tennessee; buried Paris City Cemetery

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH of:

William Grainger "Billy" Blount (1784 – 1827)

FAMILY BACKGROUND

See entry under parents William Blount (1749-1800) and Mary "Molsey" Grainger (1760 - 1802) for Family Background

LIFE SUMMARY

William Grainger "Billy" Blount, was born May 21, 1784 to William Blount and Mary "Molsey" Grainger at "Piney Grove," Pitt County, NC, his father's plantation near present day Greenville. William and "Molsey" Blount had nine (9) children; five (5) boys and four (4) girls, seven (7) lived to adulthood (four (4) girls, three (3) boys). Billy was the second son and fourth child of the large Blount family. Since his older brother, Cornelius, died as an infant (before Billy was born), he was the oldest surviving son.

William Blount (Billy's father), like his father Jacob, was a successful businessman involved in plantations, mills and distilleries, import and export, lending money for interest, and as a means to further his business ambitions politics — local, state and national. But above all else, William was a land speculator. Blount's success and his failure, as well as that of his siblings, notable his half-brother Willie, casts a long shadow that his children will grow up under.

In 1791, Billy was seven years old when his mother Molsey Blount moved with him and his two younger brothers, Richard and Jacob, to the Southwest Territory to be with their father. William Blount had been appointed governor of the Southwest Territory the previous year and had set up a temporary territorial capital at William Cobb's "Rocky Mount" near present day Johnson City, TN. They would spend the winter at Rocky Mount before moving on to Knoxville which became the permanent capital of the territory, in the spring of 1792. It was here that the Blount boys would grow up.

Little is known of Billy's childhood other than references to his health and education in family letters mostly between the Blount brothers William, John Gray, Willie, Thomas and Jacob. Outbreaks of fever periodically swept through households and whole communities, often taking the young, the infirm and the elderly. The Blount household was no different. In October 1790 while William Blount was in the Southwest Territory establishing his governorship, John Gray wrote from North Carolina to inform him that his four year old son "Blont" [sic] had died of "the Ague & fever." Billy and Jacob (another of William's sons) had both been ill but were recovering.

In 1794, William writes to John Gray to tell him of his boys education and to encourage him to send his own son to Knoxville for schooling:

"— Mr. Fournier is with me teaching Billy and Richard French & the former Music[.] I wish you would send your son Thomas next Spring... if you wish him taught Latin it can be done well & cheap by the President of Blount College the Reverend Mr. Carrick... in the Course of a year the College which is to be erected in this Town will be in Readiness for Tuition. —"

[Wm Blount to John Gray Blount, 1794 Oct 26, from Knoxville]

Billy and his brothers Richard and Jacob, as well as, their sisters Barbara and Eliza would all attend Blount College when old enough. The School, one of two established by the territorial legislature in 1794, was named for William Blount and would eventually occupy a two story building at what is today the southeast corner of Gay and State Streets, just four block from Blount Mansion. Until that building was completed about 1802, Rev. Mr. Carrick taught out of his home or at the near-by Lebanon-in-the-Forks Presbyterian Church, in east Knox County. William thought highly of Rev. Carrick as he noted to John Gray when Billy began attending the school:

"— Billy commences the Latin Grammer on Monday in a good Class with the Reverend Mr. Carrick the President of Blount College at this place who as a Teacher in every respect I am taught [thought?] to believe is equal to any [in] america —"

[Wm Blount to John Gray Blount, 1797 Nov 27, from Knoxville]

The next reference to Billy was in spring 1800 when he was sixteen years old and an outbreak of "bilious fever" hit Knoxville very hard. Several members of the Blount household were taken ill and Billy's father and grandmother died from the disease. (See William Blount bio sketch for details.) His Uncle Willie Blount, who would play a significant role in Billy's life going forward, writes to William's brother Jacob with the news:

"Mrs. Grainger died about ten days before our brother, of a similar complaint — My Sister [William's wife Molsey] and her Sons William & Jacob were sick about that time, Billy had like to have died, he was save in all probability by very severe blistering — Knoxville was never more sickly than about that time —"

[Willie Blount to Jacob Blount, 1800 May 25, from Knoxville]

When their father died in March 1800, William's three boys — Billy, Richard and Jacob — became wards of Willie Blount and Hugh Lawson White. Their guardians saw to the boys continued education.

After Billy's father died in 1800 circumstance were financially difficult for the family. William's expulsion from the US Senate and near simultaneous bankruptcy in 1797 had left the family in financial difficulties. William had not had time to recover from these set backs when he died. Then in October 1802, Billy's mother Mary

"Molsey" Blount died. What little there was in the way of an inheritance was controlled by Willie but at eighteen Billy was too young to inherit. The family suffered another tragic blow when, a few years later, their beloved aunt, William's sister, the widow Mrs. Anne Gray "Nancy" (Blount) Harvey died while on an extended visit at Blount Mansion. Aunt Annie (or possibly Aunt Nancy but only her brother Thomas seemed to call her Nancy) had raised Billy's oldest sister Nancy, and was helping to look after the little girls Barbara and Eliza when struck down by fever.

In 1805, the same year Aunt Annie died, twenty-one year old Billy received a license to practice law in Tennessee. It isn't known who Billy "read law" with. (There were no law colleges as we know them today. To learn law you essentially apprenticed with a lawyer: sat in their office, watched them at work and "read law" books to learn the profession.) It was possible he studied with his uncle who was also a lawyer but Willie Blount reportedly moved to Montgomery County in Middle Tennessee in 1802. Considering the noted lawyer and judge of the Superior Court of Tennessee Hugh Lawson White was also Billy's guardian, he probably learned law in White's Knoxville office. Until he began his political career, Billy apparently practiced law in Knoxville to earn his living.

When William Grainger "Billy" Blount became aware of, let alone interested in politics is an interesting question with no historical records to answer it. It is speculation to suggest he was always aware of politics given what his father did. Billy could have overheard countless conversations about business, politics, shipping, weather and horses, between his father and the men visiting him. Did he listen, and if so, what impact did it have on Billy? He was eight years old when they moved to Knoxville where his father was governor and Native American chiefs came to negotiate with him. At twelve he might have watched as the first Tennessee constitution was written in his father's office. And when the disgrace of expulsion and impeachment, and separate financial ruin hit William and the family, Billy was more than old enough to follow the various political and economic arguments. At sixteen his father died. At eighteen his mother died. At twenty-one Billy got his law license and his favorite Aunt Annie died. (It is reported by one researcher that it was Billy who purchased and placed the three large ledger markers on his parents' and aunt's graves. It is not known when or at what cost, Billy had this done, if at all. But if Billy did order the monuments then he is responsible for getting his father's and his mother's age at death wrong and calling his aunt "Annie," the only time anybody in the family did.)

If not before, Billy became actively involved in politics after his Uncle Willie was elected Governor of Tennessee in 1809.

Two years later, Billy was elected by the state legislature to serve as Secretary of State. At that time, the Secretary of State was a legislative position not an executive office (like it is today). Billy was responsible for overseeing a variety of state activities and vital records; (e.g. issuing business licenses or tracking militia costs). He was instrumental in assisting Gov. Willie Blount in Tennessee's efforts during the War of 1812. (The war effort that earned Tennessee the nickname "Volunteer

State.") He also oversaw another running (the second of three) of the disputed Walker Line that eventually established the boundary between Tennessee and Kentucky. Billy served as Secretary of State for four years, 1811 - 1815; the last two terms of the three his uncle served as governor and the entirety of the War of 1812.

In 1815 when former Tennessee Governor then US Representative John Sevier died, Billy was encouraged to run for Sevier's 2nd congressional district seat. In a hard fought and close election Billy won by 228 votes against John Cocke (son of William Cocke namesake of Cocke County, TN). Billy, a Democratic-Republican (the party of Jeffersonian democracy), defeated Cocke again in 1817 by an even narrower margin of just 198 votes out of 7,056 cast. After two terms in congress, Billy had enough of politics and retired from public life in 1819. (With Billy stepping down, John Cocke was finally able to win the seat and served five consecutive terms in congress.)

William Blount's financial difficulties, subsequent bankruptcy and transfer of property to his brother Willie, makes determining his children's inheritances virtually impossible. It is known that some of his children did receive land. Billy was one of them. According to Knox County deed records Willie Blount transferred Lot 18 on which Blount Mansion was built to William G. Blount in 1818. Why 1818 and not sooner? Willie moved away from Knoxville in 1802 and Billy turned twenty-one, the legal age to inherit in 1805. So why didn't Willie wait so long to transfer the property to Billy? The answer isn't known. Who lived in the house and when during this period isn't clear. Even though Willie moved west, as governor for six years it would be very convenient to have Blount Mansion to live at when the legislature was in session since Knoxville was the state capital at the time. And there was no reason for Billy not to keep living there as he had since he was eight years old. But what Billy did with the mansion once he owned it, is unknown.

In 1820, less than two years after obtaining title, Billy transferred the property to his-brother-in-law, to Dr. Edwin Wiatt (Wyatt), his youngest sister Eliza's husband. The Wiatts had married in 1816 and lived in Knoxville. Billy was apparently close to Eliza and her family. In June 1826, Billy who remained single all his life and the Wiatts moved from Knoxville to Paris, Henry County, Tennessee, about a hundred miles due west of Nashville. It is possible that the Blount children inherited land in the area from their father William who speculated in western Tennessee lands. This is speculation. What is known is that shortly after moving west Dr. Wiatt died. Billy would follow him in death less than a year later.

William Grainger "Billy" Blount died on May 20, 1827 in Paris, TN. The cause is not known. He was between 42 and 43 years old. Willie noted to John Gray at Billy's death that "— He never had an Hours' health after he left Knoxville—." Billy never married and has no known children. He was buried in the Paris City Cemetery, Henry County, Tennessee.