

William Blount (1749 March 26 - 1800 March 21)
(Framing Father of US Constitution, governor Southwest Territory, US Senator for TN)

Compiled for Blount Mansion Association by Dean Novelli, 2020.

GENEALOGICAL DATA:

BORN: 1749 March 26 "Rosefield", Bertie County, NC
DIED: 1800 March 21 Blount Mansion, Knoxville, TN
AGE AT DEATH: 50 yrs. / 11 mos. / 23 days
BURIED: 1st Presbyterian Church Cemetery, Knoxville, TN

PARENTS: Jacob Blount (1725/6 - 1789 Aug 17)
MARRIED three times; fathered twelve children, nine lived to adulthood
Barbara Gray (unk - 1763 April 8)
MARRIED 1748 (unk-<1763 April 8);
seven known children; five boys, two girls

STEP-MOTHERS:

Hannah (Salter) Baker (unk - 1782/4?)
MARRIED 1765 Nov 25; five children, two lived to adulthood;
daughter of Col. Edward Salter; widow of William Baker

Mary Adams (dates unknown)
MARRIED 1787 Aug 9; no children, **WIDOWED** 1789 Aug 17
when Jacob Blount **DIED**

SIBLINGS: Known children of Jacob and Barbara Gray by birth order; William was the first-born of seven children; five boys and two girls
William (1749 March 26 - 1800 March 21) age 50
Ann "Nancy" Gray
(1750 Oct 3 - 1805 May 21) age 54
John Gray (1752 Sept 21 - 1833 Jan 4) age 70
Louisa (1755 Jan 17 - ca. Fall of 1788?) age 33
Reading Blackledge
(1757 Feb 22 - 1807 Oct 13) age 50
Thomas (1759 May 10 - 1812 February 7) age 52
Jacob (1760 Nov 5 - 1801 Jan 22) age 40

HALF-SIBLINGS:

Known children of Jacob and Hannah (Salter) Baker by birth order;
five children, two children died in infancy
Harvey (1766 April 18 - 1773)
Willie (1768 April 18 - 1835 Sep 10) age: 67;
(pronounced Why-lee) third governor of Tennessee
Sharpe (1771 April 4 - 1810) age 28/29

GENEALOGICAL DATA (cont.):

MARRIAGES: Married once; preceded his wife in death
WIFE: Mary "Molsey" Grainger (1760 - 1802 Oct 7) age 42
MARRIED: 1778 Feb 12
AGES : Mary 17/18, William 29; a twelve (12) year difference

CHILDREN: William and Molsey's offspring by birth order
Cornelius (1778/9) DIED in infancy; dates unknown
Anne "Nancy" Harvey (1780 Oct - 1832) age 51/52
Mary Louisa (1782 - 1847 Feb 14) age 64/65
William Grainger (1784 - 1827 May 20) age: 42/43
Blount (1787 - 1790 Oct 26) age 3
Richard Blackledge (1789 - 1858?)
Jacob (1791 - 1809) age 18
Barbara (1792 Sept 16 - 1836 Nov 30) BORN on
Barbara's Hill; age 44
Eliza Indiana (1795 March 19 - 1835 Nov 23) BORN in Blount
Mansion; age 41

William and "Molsey" Blount had nine (9) children; five (5) boys and four (4) girls, seven (7) lived to adulthood.
Two boys (Cornelius and Blount) died young, before the family moved to Knoxville.
The three (3) boys came to Knoxville in 1792, while the two (2) girls stayed in North Carolina with relatives.
Two (2) girls (Barbara and Eliza Indiana) were born in Knoxville.
A total of six (6) of Blount's seven (7) surviving children lived at Blount Mansion at sometime; there is no record of Anne "Nancy" Harvey Blount living full time in Knoxville

EDUCATION: Unknown. William was presumably educated at home by his parents.
At age fifteen (15) he began receiving instruction from a tutor.
There is no record of William attending an academy or university.

William Blount (1749 March 26 - 1800 March 21)

CHRONOLOGICAL HIGHLIGHTS:

- 1749 BORN: William Blount at "Rosefield," Bertie County, North Carolina; the home of his maternal grandfather, John Gray a Scottish planter
- 1755? Jacob Blount MOVED family to New Bern, NC; built "Blount Hall"
- 1763 April 8 DIED: Mary Gray Blount, William's mother
- 1764 EDUCATION: At age fifteen William began formal lessons with a tutor, previously he was taught at home
- 1765? Jacob Blount MARRIED second wife, Hannah (Salter) Baker
- 1775 AMERICAN WAR of INDEPENDENCE with Great Britain BEGINS with armed conflict at Concord and Lexington, MA
- 1776-1782 APPOINTED purchasing agent and later APPOINTED paymaster in support of the Revolutionary War; continued in various NC paymaster posts to end of war
- 1778 February 12: MARRIED William Blount to Mary Grainger of Wilmington, NC; twelve years his junior (17 and 29); her family was similar in class to the Blounts
William and Molyse set up household at Blount's plantation "Piney Grove" Martinsborough (now called Greenville), NC
- 1778/9 BORN: Cornelius Blount; DIED in infancy; dates unknown
First Child / First Boy / First Child Death
- 1780 BORN: Ann "Nancy" Harvey Blount; Second Child / First Girl
APPOINTED Official Commissary (purchasing agent) to Gen. Horatio Gates Continental army; continued as a paymaster
- 1780-1784 MEMBER of the North Carolina House of Commons
- 1782 BORN: Mary Louisa Blount; Third Child / Second Girl
- 1782-1783 SELECTED North Carolina DELEGATE to the US Continental Congress
- 1783 Treaty of Paris formally ENDS the AMERICAN WAR of INDEPENDENCE with Great Britain
- 1784 BORN: William Grainger Blount; Fourth Child / Second Boy

- 1785 OUT OF PUBLIC OFFICE for the first time since Revolutionary War started eight years ago
Special Agent for North Carolina at he Hopewell Treaty
- 1786-1787 SELECTED North Carolina DELEGATE to the US Continental Congress
- 1787 BORN: Blount Blount; Fifth Child / Third Boy
SELECTED North Carolina DELEGATE to the US Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia, PA;
SEPT 17, SIGNED US Constitution; one of only thirty-nine (39) men to sign making Blount a "FRAMING FATHER" vs. a Founding Father (those who signed the Declaration of Independence)
- 1788-1790 MEMBER of the North Carolina State Senate
- 1789 MEMBER of the North Carolina Convention to ratify the US Constitution
BORN: Richard Blount; Sixth Child / Fourth Boy
AUG 17 DIED: Jacob Blount, age 63; William's father
- 1790 APPOINTED Territorial Governor of the Territory of the United States South of the River Ohio (Southwest Territory) by President George Washington and was simultaneously APPOINTED Superintendent of Indian Affairs for the Southwest
RESIGNED from NC State Senate to take Federal Offices
October: Blount set up a temporary capital at Rocky Mount in Upper East TN; the Blount family remained in North Carolina
- 1791 DIED: Blount Blount age 4; Fifth Child / Third Boy / Second Child
Death
BORN: Jacob Blount; Seventh Child / Fifth Boy; last child born in NC
July 2: SIGNED Treaty of the Holston at mouth of First Creek
- 1791 Oct 3: Knoxville Founded / James White's Lotto of 64 Lots
- 1792 Mary "Molsey" Blount with three (of her five) children (all under twelve) and as many as twenty-seven (27) slaves moved to Knoxville from Greenville, NC by way of Rocky Mount, TN
Construction of Blount Mansion begins; family lives on farm where "The Hill" (aka Barbara's Hill or Ayres Hill), UTK is located today
- 1792 BORN: on Barbara's Hill: Barbara Blount; Eight Child / Third Girl
- UNKNOWN MOVED: into Blount Mansion (probably late 1792 or early 1793)
- 1795 March 19 BORN: Eliza Indiana Blount; Ninth (and last) Child / Fourth Girl; only Blount child born in Blount Mansion
As Territorial Governor, Blount led statehood effort, calling first for a census and then for a constitutional convention

- 1796 Jan/Feb: Blount served as President of Tennessee Constitutional Convention held in Knoxville
 June 1: Tennessee is admitted as the sixteenth United State
 June 1: Duties as Ter. Gov. and Super. of Indian Affairs terminated with Tennessee admission to the United States
 ELECTED to the United States Senate from Tennessee
- 1797 July 7: IMPEACHED: In a partisan split, the US House voted (41 to 30) to hold impeachment hearings investigating Blount
 July 8: A bi-partisan supermajority of the US Senate voted (25 to 1) to EXPEL Blount for his role in the Blount Conspiracy, (six senators not voting including Blount, the one no vote was for technical reasons)
 Blount posted a \$20,000 BOND with US Senate and fled to Tennessee but diverted to North Carolina to be with injured wife
- 1798 ELECTED to the Tennessee State Senate and ELECTED as Senate Speaker when James White resigns to make way for Blount
- 1798 Jan 14: US House votes five articles of impeachment against Blount
 Feb 5: US Senate sent Congressional Sargent-at-Arms to Knoxville to bring Blount back to Congress; mission fails, Blount stays in TN
- 1799 January: US Senate held hearings on House Impeachment charges against Blount; case is dismissed (14 to 11) for lack of jurisdiction on January 14
- 1800 March <10 DIED: Mary Grainger, at Blount Mansion, Knoxville; buried in 1st Presbyterian Church Cemetery, State Street, Knoxville, TN; mother of Mary "Molsey" Blount and William's mother-in-law
 March 21 DIED: William Blount at Blount Mansion; buried in 1st Presbyterian Church Cemetery, State Street, Knoxville, TN; husband of Mary "Molsey" (Grainger) Blount and father of her nine children

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH of

William Blount (1749 March 26 - 1800 March 21)

FAMILY BACKGROUND

The Blount genealogy traces itself back to Norman Knights who fought with William the Conqueror in the 11th century (Battle of Hastings, 1066 ACE, subject of the Bayeux Tapestry). Their descendants settled in Suffolk and Lincolnshire, the East Midlands on the North Sea coast of England. In the 17th century, Walter Blount arose from this Anglo-Normand stock. He produced four sons and four daughters to provide for. Given the prevalence of primogeniture at the time, there is little surprise two of Walter's sons would immigrate to the New World to seek their fortune.

James and Thomas Blount arrived in the American Colonies in 1664 and settled in Isle of Wright County, Virginia. A large Blount family line in America — that includes William Blount (1749 - 1800) — originated with Thomas who soon moved south to North Carolina, where he and his decedents prospered. One such descendent, Thomas' grandson Jacob Blount (1726-1789), eventually settled with his family in the New Bern, Craven County, on the Neuse River off of Pamlico Sound. The central region of the Eastern Shore of North Carolina.

LIFE SUMMARY

William Blount was born 26 March 1749 to Jacob Blount and Mary Gray at "Rosefield," Bertie County, NC, the plantation of his maternal grandfather, John Gray a Scottish planter. Jacob moved his young and growing family further south to New Bern, Craven County about 1755 and there he built Blount Hall (burned in 1953). William was educated at home, presumably by his parents until the age of fifteen when a tutor took over educating the Blount children. It is unlikely that William attended an academy or university but instead at an early age entered the family mercantile business.

With the outbreak of the American War of Independence, the twenty-seven year-old Blount was appointed a purchasing agent for a local militia. What else would you do with a merchant's son who can read, write and do sums in his head? Give him a gun and make him an infantryman?[See **BLOUNTS IN THE AMERICAN WAR of INDEPENDENCE** below.] How about promote the purchasing agent to paymaster, a position William held in one increasing capacity after another (local militia to brigade level to NC army) until the end of the war, at which time Blount was serving as Official Commissary to Gen. Horatio Gates' army.

Blount's political career began in 1780 when he was elected a member of the North Carolina House of Commons. He would serve in the House for two terms and while a member was selected as a North Carolina delegate to the Continental Congress for 1782-1783. When his term expired in 1784, Blount took a break from public service for the first time since 1776 and presumably spent time with his family at "Piney Grove," his plantation near present day Greenville, NC.

In between becoming a revolutionary purchasing agent and running for political office for the first time, Blount married. Mary "Molsey" Grainger was a vivacious young woman from Wilmington, NC, twelve years William's junior. The young couple set up house at William's plantation, "Piney Grove." A son, Cornelius soon arrived but died in infancy. The Blount's will have eight more children, seven who outlived both the parents.

It wasn't long before Blount was recruited to go back to Continental Congress. It was while serving as a North Carolina delegate during 1786-1787 in New York, that he was recruited to represent North Carolina at the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia. After all Blount was already in New York. It was easier (i.e. cheaper) for the state to send him than someone from North Carolina. Blount saw it as another opportunity at advancement and became a delegate. He contributed almost nothing to the constitution or apparently the conversation as he spent most of the summer in New York attending to business.

Blount did arrive in Philadelphia in plenty of time to become one of thirty-nine (39) men who signed the US Constitution and are therefore called the "Framing Fathers" of American democracy (vs. "Founding Fathers" who signed Declaration of Independence). And signing day, September 17, 1787 is celebrated each 17 September as "Constitution Day "in remembrance. (Blount Mansion host's special Constitution Day events, such as the Dr. Paul Bergeron Lecture.)

After serving in the North Carolina House of Commons, the Continental Congress and signing the US Constitution, over the last decade, Blount decided to run for state senate in North Carolina. He was partly motivated by embarrassment at North Carolina rejecting the initial US Constitution that had Blount's signature on it. In 1789, he was instrumental in assuring North Carolina 's ratification once the Bill of Rights was amended to the document. It was while serving as a state senator from 1788-1790 that Blount was picked by President George Washington to serve as governor of the Territory of the United States South of the River Ohio. He was simultaneously appointed Superintendent of Indian Affairs for the Southwest. The job required he move to and live in the newly formed Southwest Territory.

Blount welcomed the appointment as territorial governor as another opportunity to advance his business interests as he wrote to his brother John Gray:

"I thank you for your Congratulations on my Appointment and I rejoice at it myself for I think it of great Importance to our Western Speculations...." [Wm Blount to JGB, 1790 June 26, from Greene Ville [Piney Grove], NC]

The Blount brothers, William, Thomas and John Gray (who at one time control 3,000,000 acres; equivalent in size to the state of Rhode Island), were among the largest land speculators in the nation, when such activity was rampant in the elite class they came from. Prominent men involved in speculation included nine signers of the US Constitution, George Washington among them. Even so the Blount's large holdings paled in comparison to Robert Morris of Pennsylvania who

was the largest land speculator of them all. Morris owned as many as 6,000,000 acres, an area the size of Maryland. But for William Blount to be governor of a territory where he own vast amounts of land gave him an enormous business advantage.

Blount also knew many of the leading men in the territory such as John Sevier, former governor of the failed State of Franklin (1784 - 1788), men the new territorial governor would need on his side to succeed. He had attended the Hopewell treaty conference (1786) as an observer and was familiar with the native chiefs. And perhaps most important, Blount owned as many as one million acres, mostly in west Tennessee. Being Territorial Governor put him in the perfect position to advance his personal interests.

But he was wary of being Superintendent of Indian Affairs, concerned that it would be "laborious and disagreeable" and "next to impossible to keep the peace" between the settlers and the Native American people.

Neither appointments were welcomed at "Piney Grove" where Moley, Blount's wife of twelve years had reservations about leaving their comfortable Eastern Carolina gentry life of privilege for a log cabin on the frontier. William shared his concern with John Gray:

"...yet I foresee it will give me much Trouble[,] for Moley is much distressed about the Prospect of my Absence or danger or both[,] but at all Events the duties of so advantageous an Appointment must be attended to as soon as directed by the President...." [Wm Blount to JGB, 1790 June 26, from Greene Ville [Piney Grove], NC]

Besides the on going threat of Native American attacks, there were the Blount children to consider; five at the moment, all under ten. What would the boys (William Grainger, Richard Blackledge and Jacob) turn into growing up on the frontier? And how could Moley raise her daughters (Anne Harvey and Mary Louisa) to be fine gentlewomen and find suitable husbands when they live in the wilderness?

Blount enlisted the assistance of his brother John Gray Blount to convince Moley to move to the territory:

"I should be glad of your being at Green Ville as often as convenient and saying such Things in an indirect manner as might induce a disposition in Moley to visit the ceded Territory at least in the course of the next Spring for sooner I shall not be ready —" [Wm Blount to JGB, 1790 Sep 22, from Alexandria [VA]]

Living in a log cabin was the apparently a deal breaker for Moley, or so the family legend would have us believe. The story goes, the decision to move to the Southwest Territory was won when William promised Moley he would build her a

"mansion" when they arrived in Knoxville. Blount Mansion, a National Historic Landmark since 1965, is the result of that promise. (Compare the modest original Blount Mansion with Jacob Blount's Blount Hall; see photograph below.)

In October 1790, Blount moved to upper East TN and established a temporary territorial capital at William Cobb's "Rocky Mount" (near present day Johnson City) while his family remained in North Carolina.

On 2 July 1791 Blount concluded the Treaty of the Holston with over forty Cherokee chiefs. With a boundary line clearly established, settlement in the Southwest Territory grew. On October 3, the city of Knoxville was founded when James White conducted a lotto for 64 half acre lots. Blount had selected the site as the territory capital and named the new city for his immediate supervisor, Secretary of War Henry Knox. (A common practice as a way to secure patronage from the namesake hopefully ensuring the new community's survival.) Eventually Blount obtained lot number 18 and began building Blount Mansion on it sometime in 1792.

With the treaty came a measure of stability and peace to the Southwest Territory, at least for the moment. It was time for Blount to end the separation with his family. Molsey (likely pregnant with Barbara) with several young children and possibly dozens of enslaved people travelling with her (including Hagar and Venus), made their way from Rocky Mount where they had been since December of 1791 to Knoxville by April 1792.

After Molsey's caravan from Rocky Mount arrived, the family moved into a log cabin, on a hill just west of second creek. The spacious — by local standards — structure was built especially for the Blount family as temporary quarters while the mansion William promised Molsey was completed. It was here that Molsey gave birth to her eighth child and third girl, Barbara Blount. That place went on to be called Barbara's Hill. Today it is known as "The Hill" (also identified as Ayres Hill for a later benefactor) on the University of Tennessee campus at Knoxville. Blount owned about 200 acres on Barbara's Hill. It was from this farm that the mansion was likely supplied with produce, firewood, eggs, milk and meat as required in the years to come. The farm on Barbara's Hill was passed down to William's heirs who later sold it to the then East Tennessee College in 1828.

How long it took to complete the simple hall and parlor house that made up Blount Mansion at its beginning isn't know. Since Barbara was born September 16, 1792 in a log cabin, it was likely 1793 before the family moved. Many building materials necessary for a mansion had to be imported. Window glass came from Richmond, Virginia by horse. Fine woodwork, chair rails and baseboard — likely from Blount's own mills in North Carolina — were shipped by way of raft down the French Broad River to the mouth of First Creek.

Blount's period of territory governor saw him face several challenges, both external and internal. Despite being a Revolutionary War veteran, Blount was a political, not a military leader. There was continued, often bloody conflict between settlers and Native Americans. The Chickamauga, a branch of the Cherokee, were

particularly warlike, especially as settlers continued to violate the treaty boundary and claim Native American land for their own. Settlers were killed and Native Americans in retaliation. Blount, not respected as a military leader, was rather ineffectual in preventing revenge killings by settlers against Native people. Ordered to stand down and not pursue a punitive attack, militia groups disobeyed the governor's orders. In one case a village of Cherokee at peace with the settlers was attacked for revenge for an act by different Native people, the Chickamauga. Other times, at Blount's behest, local militia leaders were able to prevent further bloodshed. Eventually a peace of a sort prevailed.

Blount's style of management, if not leadership as Territorial Governor was autocratic. He refused to call a territorial legislature into session for over three years after his appointment. This allowed Blount to govern by edict or direct order, with little to no input or oversight from anyone, save the three territorial judges appointed to serve with him. It was an efficient business approach to getting things done, but ill-suited to governing a democracy. Political pressure built on Blount and eventually elections for representatives were held. Four years after Blount became territorial governor, the first and only Territorial General Assembly met in August 1794 for a one year term. Almost immediately the legislature began to push for statehood.

In 1795, with the Chickamauga at peace and an influx of new settlers in the territory Blount called for a census; one of the requirements for admission listed in the Northwest Ordinance. There were at the time eleven counties in the territory. It was the county sheriffs' obligation to count all the inhabitants in their jurisdiction for this census. The sheriffs already occupied with other duties were in no hurry to undertake the tedious, time consuming task — especially with no additional compensation being offered. In order to encourage the count to take place, a bounty was offered for every person counted. Suddenly counting people had a financial reward attached to it and the sheriffs responded. When the census was completed over 77,000 inhabitants were counted in the territory well above the 60,000 threshold set by Congress in the Northwest Ordinance. A referendum was held and sentiment in the territory ran 3 to 1 in favor of statehood. In November, Blount called for a Constitutional Convention to convene in Knoxville on January 11, 1796.

Accordingly, fifty-five delegates, five each from the eleven counties in the territory were selected. Blount, a delegate for Knox County, was elected president of the convention and presided over the undertaking. Committees were formed and Blount found himself on the committee responsible for drafting the constitution. Daniel Smith was elected chair and Blount offered his office as a meeting space. Consequently it was in Blount's office that the first constitution for the state of Tennessee was drafted; primarily by Daniel Smith.

Blount made one notable contribution to the Tennessee constitution. Article 11 titled the Declaration of Rights contained thirty-two sections or rights modeled after the Bill of Rights (the first ten amendments to the US Constitution). Blount contributed number twenty-nine which read:

"Sect. 29th That a equal participation of the free navigation of the Mississippi is one of the Inherent rights of the Citizens of this State; it cannot therefore, be conceded to any Prince, Potentate, Power, person of Person whatever."

Section Twenty-nine, part of the Declaration of Rights to the Tennessee constitution, along with the rest of the constitution was endorsed by the delegates on February 6, 1796 and forwarded to the US Congress for further action. In little more than a year Article 11, Section Twenty-nine will be at the heart of the treason charge against William Blount that results in his expulsion from the US Senate and impeachment by the US House.

But before that could happen, the newly self-declared state of Tennessee awaited admission into the union of states. It was the first state formed from a separate territory and not from part of an existing state. As such, Tennessee was creating a precedent with its unique process. But its admission to the union was not a forgone conclusion for several reasons.

First the petty one. Tennessee didn't ask permission. Article IV Section Three of the US Constitution is clear that Congress is in charge of admission of states. Apparently Congress thinks it means when they deem a territory ready (or politically appropriate) for admission they'll ask it to join the union. The notion that the Southwest Territory can decide on its own they want to be the state, hold a convention and declare themselves Tennessee was not one Congress appreciated. And petitioning Congress to be admitted to the United States by sending newly elected Senators and Representatives as the petitioners, was not how it's suppose to work. But work it did — after some fierce debate in the House and even nastier in the Senate. The Sixteenth state of the United States Tennessee was admitted on June 1, 1796, hereafter known as Statehood Day and celebrated every June 1 as Tennessee's birthday.

Tennessee's unorthodox method of gaining admission to the United States — forming a state then asking to join vs. the constitutionally mandated process of Congress inviting a territory to join the union and then forming a state — was dubbed the "Tennessee Plan." It has been attempted successfully by six other states: Michigan (1837), Iowa (1846), California (1850), Oregon (1859), Kansas (1861), and Alaska (1959). New Mexico (1912) tried and failed in 1850. In the 20th century, it was tried by the Territory of Puerto Rico which has yet to gain admission.

The next reason is simple partisan politics. Tennessee was politically in the model of a Jeffersonian democracy or Democratic-Republican as the party was later called. In 1796, the US House was controlled by the Democratic-Republican representatives. Admission was opposed by Federalist members, mostly from New England and northern coastal states. In May, US House accepted Tennessee's admission with a partisan vote of 43 to 30, along mostly sectional lines; west/south vs. east/north.

However, the Federalists controlled the US Senate and the presidency with John Adams. They knew that admitting Tennessee would strengthen their political

enemies. They had nothing to gain and something to lose by acting with "civic virtue" by admitting the new state so the Federalists choose not to; at least for awhile. The fierce debate centered on the "incentivized" therefore corrupt census but also included harsh criticism of Blount. His tenure as territorial governor, his business practices and his reputation in general were used against Blount by the Federalists in an attempt to delay the inevitable. But on May 31 the US Senate finally admitted Tennessee. But it refused to accept their elected officials.

Tennessee, after creating a constitution in February, held elections to fill certain offices such as governor, and US Congress, while waiting to hear about statehood. These newly elected members of congress or so they supposed, were William Cocke and Blount as senators and as congressman Andrew Jackson, the future seventh president of the United States. The US Senate ordered that new elections for federal offices must be held. Tennessee followed the order and re-elected the same three men to serve.

On 1 June 1796, Tennessee official became the sixteenth state of the United States. Although it took the effort of many men (and women) over a number of years, William Blount serving as governor of the territory and president of the constitutional convention, can make as legitimate a claim as anyone to be the "Father of the State of Tennessee." (John Sevier supports may disagree.) He would now add being one of the first two senators from only the third state admitted to the original union of thirteen colonies to his list of accomplishments.

William Blount, formerly of North Carolina, now a representative of the people of Tennessee, took his seat in the US Senate, August 2, 1796. He would have preferred to be governor of Tennessee. But the ever popular John Sevier also wanted the position. Between serving as Governor of the State of Franklin and being known as Nolichucky Jack, "the Scourge of the Cherokee," John Sevier had a reputation as formidable opponent in either politics or war. Blount was smart enough not to challenge him. Sevier would be the first governor and Blount would have to settle for US Senator and being governor second. After all John Sevier would term limit out of office (three consecutive, two year terms; as specified in the TN constitution) at the same time Blount's senate term ended in 1802. They could switch offices and carry on as usual. What could go wrong? A lot actually and most out of Blount's control. Before he finished a year in the senate, Blount's political and financial lives will be in ruin. It would have helped if he hadn't written the letter.

It begins in 1796 when global politics (i.e. war in Europe involving England, Spain and France) raises concerns in America that the Mississippi River could be closed to US traffic. This led the Panic of 1796-1797, essentially a real estate bubble. The "Smart Money" as the investors like to call it, turned on the western lands as investments. This led to a lack of buyers and falling prices. William Blount owned as many as 1,000,000 acres of western land, much of which was purchased with borrowed funds.

Blount had been speculating in land for years and was now up against the worst financial crisis of his life. Creditors brought suit and won decisions against

him. While in North Carolina, two creditors moved to have him arrested. It was only Blount's immunity as a US Senator that prevented him from being placed in custody. It was in this atmosphere of a collapsing real estate market and creditors demanding payments, on loans to buy real estate, that he became involved in what was later called the "Blount Conspiracy".

Essentially, Blount and others, in particular John Chisholm (of the eponymous Traven), conspired with a foreign nation, England to provide arms and other support to oust Spain from Florida and New Orleans which would ensure open navigation of the Mississippi River. White settlers, Cherokee and Creek warriors would make up the invasion force. Blount, who's shown above to have no meaningful military leadership skills, would lead the force against New Orleans, or so he writes in the infamous Carey letter (see letter). The letter in question among other things describes the conspiracy in some detail, including Blount's role. This incriminating evidence falls into the hands of Indian Agent David Henley. A political foe of Blount's, Henley forwarded the document to his political allies in Philadelphia and the letter was eventually read aloud on the floors of both houses of congress.

Reaction was swift and decisive to the "Blount Conspiracy." The result was Blount's impeachment by the US House on July 7 and a day later expulsion from the US Senate on July 8, 1797. Condemnations of his conduct and lack of "civic virtue" from his patron George Washington, current President John Adams (never a fan of Blount) and others followed. After enduring what must have been for Blount a humiliating and excruciating experience on the floor of the senate, he posted a \$20,000 bond, got on a horse and rode south post haste. Traveling back roads and avoiding major settlements Blount was planning to meet his wife on the road to Tennessee. Molsey who had been visiting in North Carolina had suffered a shattered arm in a carriage accident and was recovering in Raleigh. Blount diverted his route to be with his injured wife and stayed with Molsey for several months as she struggled to recover.

Regardless of his creditors or Federal disapproval, Tennesseans greeted Blount with open arms on his return to Knoxville in September 1797. An escort, consisting of volunteer cavalry and a "large concourse of citizens" led by founder James White, met him outside of Knoxville. Why not? Blount was impeached for trying to keep the Mississippi River open to commerce. The same right Blount had put into Article 11, Section 29 of the Tennessee constitution. Seen as essential to its growth, it was a very popular position in the state and on the western frontier in general. So why not cheer him for trying to protect Tennessee's interests when the federal government wouldn't. Isn't that what elected officials are for: to promote the interest of their constituents? In a show of support, Knoxville founder James White then a member of the 2nd Tennessee General Assembly as a State Senator for Knox County resigned his office. Blount was elected to fill the vacancy. The State Senate then honored Blount by electing him Speaker of the Senate for its second session held in 1798. When his term expired in 1799, Blount didn't seek reelection.

It was at this time Blount was forced into bankruptcy by the circumstances that led to the conspiracy and his political downfall. Being a shrewd businessman,

Blount made a clever move that today would be illegal. He took his Mansion and lot 18 it was built on, his 200 acre farm, and million or so acres in west Tennessee, along with twenty-seven enslaved persons he owned (making Blount one of the larger slaves owners in the state) and transferred all of these assets to his half-brother Willie Blount. Then William declared himself bankrupt with no assets left for his creditors to seize and sell. The move ruined him with the credit markets and left him little opportunity to recover but his brother Willie managed to hold on to much of it for William's children to inherit. (See **deed for full inventory of transfer** tbd)

Meanwhile, Blount's impeachment was moving forward in congress. In January 1798, the US House voted five articles of impeachment against Blount and forwarded them to the senate. In February, the US Senate sent the sergeant-at-arms (a position it was necessary to create for this purpose) to Tennessee to bring Blount to Philadelphia to stand trial. Blount, ever the generous host, entertained his potential jailer for several weeks at Blount Mansion. When it became obvious that Blount had no intention of going willingly and that no one in Knoxville would assist as a posse in his arrest, the sergeant-at-arms returned to Philadelphia empty handed.

In January 1799, Blount's trial — without Blount in attendance — begin in the US Senate. Being the first impeachment trial in American history it was well attended by the Supreme Court justices, other judges, former revolutionary leaders and gentleman alike. Blount's allies had arranged the services of two of the best lawyers available who put forward a simple, vigorous and successful defense: the senate lacked the jurisdiction to try a member of congress. After lengthy argument, the senate ruled on January 14 that it lacked jurisdiction and dismissed the impeachment charges against Blount without ever hearing the case on its merits; establishing a precedent that congress cannot impeach a member of its own body. A precedent that still stands today.

While this national drama was playing out in Philadelphia, William had remained in Tennessee. However, Molsey and several of their children were still in North Carolina. Finally recovered from her injuries, Molsey with her mother Mary Grainger and the children returned to Knoxville sometime after spring 1798. The oldest girls Ann (who was known as Nancy) and Mary Louisa, now of marriageable age were being courted by Henry Irwin Toole and Pleasant M. Miller, respectively. The oldest boy, Billy was being taught by Rev. Samuel Carrick at Blount College. Molsey and her mother were busy attending to the children and entertaining at Blount Mansion. For the first time in several years (with the exception of Ann who remained in North Carolina) William Blount's family was together under one roof and by all appearances experience a period of domestic tranquility if not bliss.

Unfortunately for Blount this domestic bliss didn't extend to his continued political and business ambitions. He declined to run for his previous US Senate seat and instead went into the Tennessee General Assembly. With a national appointment as Brigadier General being offered to John Sevier, it appeared that Blount's long term ambition of the governorship would happen two years earlier

than he hoped. Sevier turned down the appointment dashing Blount's immediate hopes. When his credit ruined and his partnerships in disarray, Blount's business venture didn't fair any better. And Knoxville, while thriving as the state capital, was suffering its own challenges. Not unusual on the frontier or even atypical of the settled coastal areas, a series of epidemics — most likely malarial or Yellow Fever — plagued Knoxville.

In 1800, as winter gave way to spring another epidemic of fever broke out in Knoxville, shattering the tranquility at Blount Mansion. Few households were spared but none were as hard hit as the Blount's. Family friend John Summerville was present and related the sad tale to Thomas Blount. Summerville's letter is quoted in its entirety (his spelling and punctuation is retained):

"Sir

The melancholy task of detailing to you the distressing events which have taken place in your Brother Williams family within the last month, devolves on me.

On the 10th instant Mrs. Grainger was buried after a short illness of a bilious fever — during her sickness Mrs. Blount was confined a day or two & Miss Loisa had a severe attack for three days, but is now in perfect health. — The day after Mrs. Grainger was buried Billy was attacked with a very violent bilious fever, which had nearly cost him his life — he is now well, tho not recovered his strength, — before he was considered out of danger, his father on the evening of Saturday the 15. instant after reading newspapers in the piazza 'till it was so late he could not distinguish a letter, was taken very suddenly with a violent chill in 1/2 hour after drinking coffee, (at which he felt as well as he ever did) to this succeeded a violent fever & that night & the next day he was delirious — Monday & Tuesday he appeared so well that no doubt was entertained of his immediate recovery, but before Wednesday morning (for that night he felt so well that he would suffer no person to sit up with him) he caught a second cold which seized upon his lungs — he was blistered a second time — his disease appeared to make a stand, neither growing better nor worse, 'till 5 o'clock Friday morning the 21st when it suddenly changed for the worse & death appeared in every feature, he thus continued 'til about 10 — when a very profuse perspiration come on, which immediately changed his looks & feelings for the better & all around him felt a confidence in his recovery renewed — for my part, who was with him constantly, I never felt more confidence in the recovery of any person than I did of him 'til 4 o'clock when he started up very suddenly; said he could lie no longer, I placed myself behind him — I had scarcely got myself fixed, before death struck him — I laid him down, amazed at the change, & prepared to close his eyes — but using vinegar to his temples, nostrils & the palm of his hand, revived him again so much that he spoke frequently, tho' incoherently — about 3/4 after four he lost the use

of his speech & then from all appearances & his actions his sensis returned — he turned his eyes upon me as I leaned over him weting his lips watching every breath that he breathed — looked stedfastly at me some minutes, tryed to speak — and finding that he could not he turned away his head — his eyes immediately filled and the tears rolled in large drops down his cheeks for several minutes, and at 21 minutes after 5 — he breathed his last

never was a death more unexpected — his continued deleriam & our ignorance of the danger he was in, has prevented an arrangement of his affairs — of which he said nothing to any person. —

Mrs. Blount has been confined to her bed very ill ever since this unhappy event happened — She is now I am happy to say, out of danger of a severe attack & will in a day or two be able to leave her bed. — Willie is yet in Nashville — but it is expected he will immediately return on hearing of the death of his Brother — I am very respectfully

Your Obt Sr
Jo Summerville"

[John Summerville to Thomas Blount, 1800 March 27, from Knoxville]

In March, Mary Grainger, Blount's mother-in-law, fell ill with a "bilious fever." Next was Billy who was in serious peril, when Mrs. Grainger died. Then Molsey and Mary Louisa were stricken but recovered. William Blount attended to his sick family, while burying his mother-in-law. As Billy improved and was no longer in danger, William relaxed only to fall ill himself. He seemed to recover, only to relapse a few days later. William Blount died at home in Blount Mansion on March 21, 1800. He was six days shy of his fifty-first birthday.

Molsey still in her sickbed and undoubtedly suffering grief from the double loss of her mother and husband just days apart was unable to attend William's funeral. It was left to Blount's frequent ally, sometime rival Tennessee Governor John Sevier to lead the mourners as Blount was laid to rest in the 1st Presbyterian Church cemetery. Half-brother Willie Blount, who was in Nashville, rushed back to Knoxville and took charge of the family. All the children recovered as did Molsey, but likely broken in body and spirit, she never really recover. Her body ailing and jaundiced, Mary "Molsey" Grainger Blount died two years later on October 2, 1802. Just forty-two years old, Molsey was buried next to husband.

BLOUNTS IN THE AMERICAN WAR of INDEPENDENCE

Contrast William's military service with that of his father and brothers; John Gray, Reading, Thomas and Jacob Sr. and Jr.

William, the oldest at 27 and still single became a purchasing agent and paymaster, rising to commissary of Major Gen. Horatio Gate's Continental Army. William made the most of these opportunity to rise both in business and politics in North Carolina.

Thomas and Reading, both teenagers 17 and 18 respectively, joined the 5th NC Regiment which organized in Wilmington in 1776. The 5th NC was officially assigned to the Continental Army in 1777. It was at Valley Forge, the battles of Brandywine, Germantown and Monmouth, the siege of Savannah and the entire regiment was captured at Charlestown in 1780. Thomas was captured in 1778 and held prisoner in England before being exchanged. When exchanged in 1780, Thomas was appointed Adjutant General (military chief administrative office) to Major General Richard Caswell's North Carolina militia. He rose to the rank of Brig. General in the North Carolina Militia before becoming a US Congressman in 1793.

Reading originally served under General Jethro E. Summer. He eventually became a major in the 5th and along with his father Jacob, Gen Summer and others, was a founder of the North Carolina chapter the Society of Cincinnati, comprised exclusively of revolutionary war officers (and later their descendants). Thomas was one of three delegates chosen to represent the society at the Philadelphia Constitutional Convention as an observer.

John Gary, the second oldest at 24 and like William single, stayed out of the military completely and devoted his war time efforts to the family businesses. After all what's a war without a war profiteer. Perhaps to ensure they stayed out of combat or was it true love, both William and John Gray married in 1778, just as the fighting got serious and America's prospects grew dimmer.

Jacob Sr. apparently served as a local militia paymaster while the Blount's' youngest brother Jacob Jr., who was 15 at the outbreak of the war, was likely kept out of the conflict. Their even younger step-brothers Willie and Sharpe were too young to be considered for any military service.

Six Blount officers are listed in Heitman's Register and Dictionary of the US Army as serving from North Carolina in the Revolutionary War. The first four are Jacob and his sons. The last two are likely cousins of Thomas Blount's other descendants

Jacob Blount	Paymaster	North Carolina Militia
William Blount	Paymaster	Third North Carolina Regiment
Thomas Blount	Lieutenant	Fifth North Carolina Regiment
Reading Blount	Captain	Third North Carolina Regiment
Jesse Blount	Commissary	Eight North Carolina Regiment
James Blount	Captain	Second North Carolina Regiment

MATERIAL FOR POLITICAL / IMPEACHMENT / "CIVIC VIRTUE" SECTION

Both positions — as purchasing agent and paymaster — brought Blount privileged information and with that opportunities he could use to his and his family's mercantile advantage. For example in 1777 Blount learned that \$300,000 in Continental Currency was being sent to North Carolina for disbursement. William alerted his brother John Grey, imploring him to quickly submit Blount invoices for immediate payment in the more valuable Centennial Currency (before it runs out) rather than the depreciated (from 30 to 1, to 150 to 1) North Carolina script.

The Blount's' also operated a privateer, a war ship of a sort, that could seize cargo at sea and sell it as "prizes of war" on the docks of New Bern. Buyers on the docks representing Blount interests would buy the cargo. Military stores would be bought up by William as a purchasing agent for the Revolution while more valuable items like sugar would be sold to the domestic market.

Such actions as self dealing, are unethical and traditionally considered corrupt - when not actually illegal as many are today. They are frowned upon as behavior unbecoming someone holding a position of public trust as Blount did as paymaster. To use his job for his own self interest is the opposite of "civic virtue" (putting the interest of your country before your own), a concept essential for a constitutional democracy to function. Many of Blount's contemporaries in politics and business both in NC and nationally were appalled by his conduct. A smaller subset of colonists-cum-revolutionaries would look upon this self dealing as business as usual and might even choose to emulate Blount's business tactics. After all they were working for the Blounts — so far.

Blount's complete lack of civic virtue extended to his political career which began in 1780 when William was elected a member of the North Carolina House of Commons where he served until 1784. His political career ended with his death in 1800 at age fifty. In between Blount amasses a political career of opportunism, always on the look out for way to gain an advantage, exploit a situation and make a business transaction go in his favor. Ultimately he was expelled from the US Senate in 1797 for violating his oath of office as a Senator from Tennessee. The US House impeached him for treason but he was never tried. At death not took him at a young age he likely would have been Tennessee's second governor following John Sevier when the first governor term limited out of office in 1802.

word count: 428