

Willie Blount (1768 April 18 - 1835 Sep 10)
(Half-brother of William Blount; Third Governor of Tennessee)

Compiled for Blount Mansion Association by Dean Novelli, 2020.

GENEALOGICAL DATA:

BORN: 1768 April 18, Blount Hall, Bertie County, North Carolina
DIED: 1835 Sep 10, Nashville, Tennessee
AGE AT DEATH: 67 yrs. / 4 mos. / 22 days
BURIED: Initially buried at Blount's plantation "Bakerdon" in the private family cemetery. In 1878 his body was exhumed and reinterred at Greenwood Cemetery, Clarksville, TN; then Gov. James D. Porter officiated at the ceremony

PARENTS: Jacob Blount (1725/6 - 1789 Aug 17)
MARRIED three times; fathered twelve children, nine lived to adulthood
Hannah (Salter) Baker (unk - 1782/4?) Jacob's second wife
MARRIED 1765 Nov 25; five children, two lived to adulthood; daughter of Col. Edward Salter; widow of William Baker

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

HALF-SIBLINGS: Known children of Jacob and Barbara Gray (Jacob's first wife) by birth order; 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

SIBLINGS:
Known children of Jacob and Hannah (Salter) Baker by birth order; five probable children, two children died in infancy; Willie was the eighth of nine children Jacob fathered that lived to adulthood
Harvey (1766 April 18 - 1773) age: 6/7
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 twice; widowed once; first wife preceded him in death; (some sources report additional marriages but they can not be verify)

FIRST WIFE: Lucinda Baker (1786? - 1806)

MARRIED: 1802, Montgomery County, Tennessee

AGES : Lucinda 16, Willie 34, an eighteen year difference

CHILDREN: Willie and Lucinda had two daughters

Eliza Ann (1803 - 1830?)

Lucinda (1805 - 1830)

SECOND WIFE: Mrs. Mary White (dates unknown)

MARRIED: 1812 Feb, Knoxville, Knox County, Tennessee

AGES : Mary ?, Willie 45,

CHILDREN: Willie and Mary had no known children

EDUCATION: Probably schooled at home and by tutors before studying at both King's College (later Columbia) and College of New Jersey (later Princeton) and later reading law with Judge John Sitgreaves in North Carolina

Willie Blount (1768 April 18 - 1835 Sep 10)

CHRONOLOGICAL HIGHLIGHTS:

- 1768 BORN: Willie Blount at "Blount Hall," Bertie County, North Carolina
- 1783 August STUDENT: at the College of New Jersey (Princeton University)
- 1788 READING LAW: with Judge John Sitgreaves, New Bern, NC
- 1789 Aug 17 DIED: Jacob Blount, age 63; Willie's father
- 1791/2 MOVED: to Southwest Territory to assist half-brother, Territorial Governor William Blount as one of his private secretaries
- 1796 STATEHOOD: was present and active behind the scenes when Tennessee became the sixteenth state of the union
OFFERED JUDGESHIP: was appointed a judge on Superior Court of Law and Equity (the equivalent of today's state Supreme Court) but DECLAINED to take the office
- 1800 March 21 DIED: William Blount at Blount Mansion, Knoxville, TN; half-brother of Willie Blount
GUARDIAN: became guardian along with Hugh Lawson White to William Blount's three boys after William's death
- 1802 MARRIED: Lucinda Baker age 16, Montgomery County, Tennessee
MOVED: to "Bakerdon," Montgomery County, Tennessee
- 1803 WROTE: a history textbook: *A Catechetical Exposition of the Constitution of the State of Tennessee*
BORN: Eliza Ann "Nancy" Blount (dates unknown); married ?? ?? Dabney
- 1805 BORN: second daughter, second child Lucinda Baker Carolina (1805 - 1830?); married ?? ?? Dortch
- 1806 DIED: 1st wife Lucinda (Baker) Blount; age 20
- 1807 ELECTED: to the Tennessee house of Representatives for Montgomery County; severed one two year term
- 1809 ELECTED: Governor of Tennessee, his first term
- 1811 ELECTED: Governor of Tennessee, his second term

- 1812 Feb MARRIED: to Mrs. Mary White, a widow, at Knoxville, TN; Willie's second marriage
- 1813 ELECTED: Governor of Tennessee, his third and last consecutive term allowed by law
- 1815 ELECTED: Governor of Tennessee, his second term
- 1825 RAN FOR TN HOUSE: against incumbent; finished third in 3-way race splitting Jackson vote allowing Adams support to win
- 1827 RAN FOR GOVERNOR: against Sam Houston and Newton Cannon, lost badly with less than 3% of vote; Houston won with 56%
- 1829 ELECTOR: from Tennessee in the 11th Presidential Election; Jackson supporter
- 1830 DIED: his youngest daughter Lucinda???
- 1833 ELECTOR: from Tennessee in the 12th Presidential Election; Jackson supporter
- 1834 DELEGATE: to the 1834 TN Constitutional Convention from Montgomery County, TN
- 1835 Sept 10 DIED: while visiting Wylie Johnson, near Nashville, TN
BURIED: in the family cemetery at "Bakerdon," Montgomery County, TN
- 1878 RE-INTERED: Willie's body was exhumed and reinterred at Greenwood Cemetery, Clarksville, TN

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH of:

Willie Blount (1768 April 18 - 1835 Sep 10)

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 Willie Blount (1768 - 1835) — 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

Willie Blount was born April 18, 1768 to Jacob Blount and Hannah (Salter) Baker at "Blount Hall," his father's plantation outside New Bern, North Carolina in Craven County. Jacob Blount had moved to Craven County about fifteen years earlier with his first wife Barbara Gray. Together Jacob and Barbara had seven children before she died in 1763. Jacob remarried in 1765 and had five more children with his second wife the widow Hannah (Salter) Baker (daughter of Col. Edward Salter, a Revolutionary War leader from Pitt County, NC). Two of Hannah's five children, both boys — Willie and Sharpe — lived to adulthood. Unlike their seven older half-siblings, who were born in leaner times, Hannah's children were born into a prospering mercantile family which became only more prosperous as they grew up.

The nine surviving Blount siblings and half-siblings (seven boys and two girls) seemed to enjoy good relationships with each other and as was typical of the times were supportive of the family throughout their lives. Two in particular, Willie and the oldest of Jacob's children William, almost twenty years apart in age, became close associates if not friends. William as the oldest was denied opportunities that his younger siblings were able to take advantage of; one in particular was education. William received some tutoring at home before going to work with his father as a teenager. Given his later rise to prominence, William's lack of formal education didn't appear to hurt him but it did give him firsthand experience of what a good education meant. William saw to it that Willie would have the advantage of an education he didn't have, seeing to it that Willie attended City College in New York (the predecessor of Columbia University) and the College of New Jersey (that became Princeton). In 1783, Willie is known to be at school in New Jersey along with

Richard Blackledge Jr., the son of Jacob's business partner where both gained experience and contacts, as well as education they couldn't have obtained in North Carolina at the time. Later Willie read law with the distinguished lawyer and judge John Sitgreaves, one of North Carolina's first federal jurists.

When William Blount was appointed territorial governor of the Southwest Territory in 1790 and moved with his family to the region, Willie was a single, well educated lawyer in his early twenties ready and able to assist his big brother in the opportunity of a lifetime. William brought Willie with him as one of two personal secretaries (Hugh Lawson White was the other). This put Willie at the center of territorial administration. He was also an integral part of William Blount's political operation and later assisted both William and John Gray in their land speculation. These experiences would serve Willie well in later life when he became governor of Tennessee.

What specific role Willie played in 1796 when the Southwest Territory organized itself into a the State of Tennessee isn't known. He was not an elected delegate but it is likely he was present and assisted his brother William, who was president of the convention. While not a convention delegate and therefore not technically a founding father, Willie was present at the birth of the state of Tennessee. Well known and apparently well respected as a lawyer, Willie was appointed as a judge on Superior Court of Law and Equity (the equivalent of today's state Supreme Court) in the newly created state. Apparently he did not seek nor want this office. Shortly after his selection and without ever sitting on the bench (or at least never issuing an opinion in a case), Willie resigned from the bench.

In 1797 when William Blount was forced into bankruptcy it was Willie who obtained control of Lot 18 and Blount Mansion, the farm on Barbara's Hill and twenty-seven enslaved persons, among other property. Willie essentially acted as a guardian or caretaker for William's property, protecting it from creditors and enabling the Blount family to continue living in the mansion, while William tried to rebuild his ruined business.

In 1800, when William died, Willie, along with Hugh Lawson White became guardian to the three boys, Billy, Richard and Jacob. Since Willie controlled the Blount Mansion, the farm and the enslaved people necessary to run both, there was no required sale of assets that usually follows the death of a man like William Blount. (William essentially had no assets to sell and distribute to heirs or pay creditors.) Moley Blount and her children continued living in the mansion as before but in considerably reduced circumstances. Willie held what few assets there were for his nieces and nephews, and apparently transfer property to (some of) them as they came of age or in the case of the girls probably when they married.

It was about this time, that Willie met his future wife Lucinda Baker who was originally from Bertie County, North Carolina but had moved with her parents, Major John Baker and Ann (Norfleet) Baker to the Nashville area. Willie was frequently in middle Tennessee (as he was when William died) on presumably both

public business (as in politicking for the territorial governor) and private business (as in handling land speculation transactions for his brothers John Gray and William or practicing law for himself). It is likely that he met Lucinda there during one of these extended visits. They married in 1802 and moved to Montgomery County about fifty miles northwest of Nashville, near where Clarksville is today. They settled on a plantation Willie called "Bakerdon" presumably in honor of his wife. Two girls, Eliza Ann (called Nancy) and Lucinda were born before their mother died in 1806. Willie did not immediately remarry as was the common practice in such circumstances. Who raised the girls, ages one and three when their mother died isn't known. Since they live nearby, it is likely that Lucinda's parents took charge of the girls at least until they were a little older.

In 1807, the year after his first wife died, Willie actively sought public office for the first time running for and winning a seat in the Tennessee House of Representatives for Montgomery County. When his two year term expired, instead of seeking re-election, he sought higher office running for the vacant governorship of Tennessee. (John Sevier had just finished his third consecutive term in office and was constitutionally prohibited from running again. Consequently it was an "open seat" one with no incumbent to contend with as an opponent; always a good time to seek office.) The contest for the governorship that year amounted to a political generational race not just happening in Tennessee but in every state, as the founding generation of the nation aged out of public life and a younger cohort who were just children, if alive at all, when the Revolutionary War was fought. The pioneer was founding father William Cocke, age sixty-one and a the youngster, literally a little brother of an ex-governor, representing the next cohort to run the politics in the state and the nation was forty-one year-old Willie Blount.

Most historians attribute Willie's nearly 2 to 1 winning margin, less to politics and more to demographics, seeing the election as nothing more than a popularity contest between regions of the state (a competition that still exists in today's state politics). Middle Tennessee where Willie lived had outpaced East Tennessee, where Cocke lived, in growth. With a much larger population, Middle Tennessee easily elected its regional or "favorite son" candidate. (Willie Blount 13,686 votes (69.1%) defeats William Cocke 8,435 votes (38.1%), out of 22,121 cast; a 5,251 (23.8%) vote margin of victory.) There is also no denying that Willie was both popular and well respected, and he likely benefited from the last remnants of his brother William Blount's political allies. He ran again for governor in 1811 and 1813, easily winning re-election both time, as he was unopposed both times. Although in 1813, Willie did attract 45 protest votes making his winning percentage only 99.79% instead of one hundred percent like in 1811.

In 1811, the start of his second two year term, Willie was joined by his nephew William Grainger "Billy" Blount in state office. Billy was elected Secretary of State (a legislative position versus an executive position as it is today), by the state legislature. It gave Willie a trusted and capable relative in a key state office just as Tennessee and the nation was about to face their greatest crisis since its founding: the War of 1812.

Gov. Willie Blount had many notable accomplishments during his six years in office, in particular a much needed re-organization of the courts, superseding the Superior Court of Law and Equity (of which he was briefly a member) with the Supreme Court of Errors and Appeals and establishing circuit courts necessary to accommodate the growing population. Another important success was the completion of the Cumberland Road connecting Nashville and Knoxville, a vital internal improvement since the Tennessee River was not reliably navigable to Knoxville. Willie also promoted educational reforms as governor; just one of the many times he showed support for education during his life time. But when Willie is remembered — if he is remembered at all — it is for leading the state during a time of war that gave Tennessee its enduring nickname. Initial response to the declaration of war against Great Britain was a call for 1,500 volunteers from Tennessee by the federal government. Willie turned to militia Gen Andrew Jackson and asked him to take charge. Quickly Jackson recruited a force reported to be from 2,500 to 3,500 men for a one year enlistment.

Militiamen need equipment to fight a war and equipment costs money. The federal government was in no position to immediately provide funds, but did authorize \$10,000 in expenditures to be reimbursed — later. It was up to the states, meaning governors to arm their own militias and pay for it. Willie, using his decades of personal connections, quickly pulled together the needed resources and by the end of the first year of the war had raised \$35,000 on his own initiative. Undoubtedly, his nephew Secretary of State William Grainger Blount assisted the governor in both raising money and organizing the war effort. But for the ever imperious future president Andrew Jackson, things could not move fast enough. With the governor's knowledge and consent, Jackson had started preparing the militia for war months before it was declared. Once the needed supplies arrived, Jackson had a volunteer army armed, trained and ready to march in an impressive amount of time. However Tennessee militias participated in little actual fighting in the first year of the war. After their year enlistment was up, many citizen-soldiers went home.

Then came the Fort Mims massacre in August 1813 and the war seemed very real and close to home. Another call for volunteers went out. With the very real threat of a Creek army invading Tennessee, another 3,000 men at least if not more, went under arms. (Some sources put it at 6,000 new enlistees.) Finances were just as challenging in the second year of war. With no guarantees of future federal support and an under developed banking system that precluded securing loans or selling bonds, Willie relied on his personal contacts to pay Tennessee's war expenses. Demonstrating remarkable leadership, the governor was able to secure over \$300,000 in additional private financing by the end of the war (roughly \$4.5 million in 2020) an extraordinary sum at the time, especially considering Tennessee's level of economic development. All the borrowed money was reimbursed by the federal government and Willie, true to his Blount mercantile background, charged a 1.5% to 2.5% service fee for personally securing the financing. It was apparently paid without dispute.

Besides the financial contribution of the state, at least 6,000, maybe 9,000 and possible as many as 20,000 Tennesseans volunteered for military service over the course of the not quite three year war. Many fought at the decisive battle of Horseshoe Bend in March 1814 where the Creek threat was crushed. Later more Tennesseans became legends with Andrew Jackson at the Battle of New Orleans in January 1815. It was a remarkable show of support, accounting for from 2.2% to 7.5% of the state's total population going under arms at some point of the war. It is for its citizens overwhelming response in a time of national need that Tennessee earned the nickname it still carries today: the Volunteer State.

After successfully winning a second term as governor with 100% of the votes (he ran unopposed), Willie Blount still a widower seven years after Lucinda died, remarried. The widow Mrs. Mary White of Knoxville became Willie's second wife in February 1812. Nothing is known about who Mary was, not her parents or her maiden name, not even which White she was married to is known for certain. (She is reported to be the widow of a Hugh White, who has been incorrectly identified as Hugh Lawson White which isn't possible since he died in 1840. Nor was she James White's wife Mary. She died in 1819 still married to the founder of Knoxville who died in 1821.) If she out lived Willie and where she was buried isn't known. And perhaps most important unknowns: if they had child and if those children survived to adulthood; not known.

Tennessee's first war-time governor term-limited out of office in September 1815; perfect timing to enjoy the peace his efforts had brought about. (The War of 1812 ended by the Treaty of Ghent in December 1814 and hostilities ceased in February 1815.) Willie, now forty-seven choose to serve the "peace" by retiring from active public life for the quiet of the a planter's life at "Bakerdon." He spent the rest of his life occupied with family and farm, contemplation of history and religion, corresponding and occasionally giving lectures on those subjects, and promoting education. However on two different occasions former governor came out of retirement and ran for public office.

In 1824 James Monroe announced his retirement, making that year's election for US President an open seat. It was a hotly contested election drawing four candidates but was essentially a two-way race between the former Federalist now nominally a democratic-republican (it was the only national party at the time) John Quincy Adams, the first son of a former president to run for the office and the populist war hero from Tennessee Andrew Jackson who was in the process of creating Jacksonian Democracy out of Jefferson's Democratic-Republican party. This was the election Jackson claimed he lost because of the "Corrupt Bargain" where the House elected Adams president when neither had a majority of the electoral college but Jackson had won the popular vote.

It must have been too much for Willie, a stalwart Jackson man, to bare sitting on the sidelines as this outrage against his man took place. In 1825, ten years out of office and just as long out of the public's view, he decided to run for his local state

house seat against an incumbent Democratic-Republican, the same party as Willie. A third candidate who supported Adams won with a plurality of just 39% of the vote when the two Jackson supporters split the Democratic-Republican vote, costing the party the seat. Willie polled third with 1,533 votes (27%) out of 5,632 cast. Even in the early days of party politics (and these were the very early days) what Willie did — coming out of retirement to run against an incumbent in your own party — would be seen as a problem and discourage for the obvious result above. This was a political mistake, the kind that Willie's older brother William would never had made and would likely have cautioned Willie against making.

After his last place finish in the state house race where his running cost the party a seat in the state legislature, you would think Willie would retired from politics for good. Yet for some reason known only to Willie Blount, he decided to run for governor two years later. Perhaps the fifty-nine year-old saw an opportunity (it was another open seat election), that was too tempting to pass up. Or maybe he had another deeper motivation. The hotly contested 1827 governor's race resulted in a humiliating third place finish for Blount, in a two-way race between the rising star of thirty-four year-old Sam Houston, who won with 56% of the vote, and Congressman Newton Cannon, who would run again for governor finally winning in 1835. The ex-governor and old man in the race, Willie Blount received 1,784 votes out of a total 78,956 cast; less than 3%.

Even the humiliation of the governor's race didn't stop Willie from running as a Jackson elector in the 11th Presidential Race two years later. Willie easily won and like the entire Tennessee electorate he voted in favor of Andrew Jackson for President, helping elect his life-long political ally to the highest office in the land. Willie enjoyed the experience so much he ran again as elector in 1833 and won; voting for his friend Andrew Jackson as president a second time.

When otherwise not running for office, Willie retired to his plantation Bakerdon, his grandchildren (his and Lucinda's two daughters had five surviving children) and his intellectual pursuits. Willie also took an interest in genealogy and lamented not having a family tree. He told one niece, that he didn't even know the names of his grandparents. Willie's mother Hannah (Salter) Baker Blount died when he was about 12-14 years-old

Willie was a life long advocate for education something he likely picked up from his older brothers William and Reading; both were academy trustees in North Carolina when Willie was growing up. William continued as a Blount College trustee in Knoxville. Willie also had the benefit of personal experience in an education few others could obtain even if they could afford it. He was active in his nephews' (Billy, Richard and Jacob), education after their father William died. Over the course of his lifetime he was a trustee at three different schools: Blount College in Knoxville, Cumberland College in Nashville and Rural Academy in Clarksville. He wrote at least one "textbook" *A Catechetical Exposition of the Constitution of the State of Tennessee* intended to be used with school children. In retirement he expressed the desire to write on several topics including a comparative analysis of Tennessee's two

constitutions with the federal version. Unfortunately for history, he died before he could begin the work.

When a second state constitutional convention was called for 1834, Willie was enticed to run for an elected position one last time. How could former Governor Blount, a lawyer who was present (but not a delegate) at the first Tennessee constitutional convention in 1796, not answer the call to assist in writing a new constitution in 1834. Willie was selected as a delegate from Montgomery County. One of sixty delegates at the convention, the now sixty-six year-old Willie was recognized as the senior statesman that he was and made significant contributions to the new document. In particular, Willie was able to address from first hand experience the limitations placed on the governor by the first constitution. A strengthened executive office was one notable change in the 1834 constitution that Blount was instrumental in bringing about. He also contributed to the court and educational reforms. This would be Willie's last big public moment. The new constitution was easily ratified in March 1835, a few months late Willie died.

Willie was visiting Wylie Johnson near Nashville when he died on September 10, 1835. He was sixty-seven years-old. Initial internment was in the family cemetery at Bakerdon outside Clarksville; an area called Mt. Carmel. In 1878 his body was exhumed and reinterred at Greenwood Cemetery, Clarksville, TN. Then Gov. James D. Porter officiated at the ceremony where a large obelisk of Tennessee marble was unveiled to mark Willie Blount's new resting place.

Willie Blount was perhaps not as politically astute (cunning) or charismatic (popular) as his older half-brother was reported to have been but he was just as successful maybe more so than William Blount. And even more so than his half-brother, Willie Blount's legacy has been over shadowed and almost completely forgotten today. Both men made significant contributions to their adopted home state of Tennessee. Yet their memory has been eclipsed by having lived along side large-than-life Tennesseans such as John Sevier, Sam Houston and Andrew Jackson.

Where Willie lived when in Knoxville is a matter of speculation. It is likely he lived with his brother's family for at least part of the time in the 1790s. After 1797 Willie actually owned Blount Mansion and didn't transfer the deed to Billy until 1818. But that doesn't mean Willie lived there all that time. He married and moved to "Bakerdon" in Montgomery County by 1802 and that became his principal home for the rest of his life. However Willie was governor from 1809 to 1815 at a time when Knoxville was still the state capital. It is possible that Willie used Blount Mansion when he was in town during the legislative session as the "Governor's Mansion." It is possible that Willie is responsible for both expansions to the house: the west wing and second floor, and later the east wing and cellar. Exact dates for the additions aren't known but roughly coincide with his terms as governor.