

PIONEERS IN MONONGALIA COUNTY.

By Hu Maxwell.

In what I may say in the the present article I shall consider Monongalia county as it was before it was subdivided to from other counties—the territory embraced in the original county. That area has been divided and again divided until now it forms twenty-five counties or parts of counties, three in Pennsylvania and twenty-two in West Virginia. The Pennsylvania counties taken from territory once partly in Monongalia are Green, Washington and Fayette. The West Virginia counties taken wholly or in part from Monongalia are Preston, Tucker, Randolph, Pocahontas, Harrison, Marion, Taylor, Barbour, Webster, Braxton, Calhoun, Roane, Jackson, Wood, Ritchie, Wirt, Gilmer, Lewis, Upshur, Doddridge, Pleasants and the present county of Monongalia. It is thus seen that when the county was formed it covered a considerable part of the present State of West Virginia, as well as a small portion of Pennsylvania. I have estimated the county's area at 8,485 square miles. It is the purpose of this article to speak concerning the pioneers who planted permanent settlements here, and, so far as possible, it is the purpose to be guided by records. That is, it must appear that the settler had a permanent interest in the country, and showed his interest by making a home, before he can be classed as one of the pioneers. Of that class of persons who came and went, as wanderers or adventurers, we know so little that we shall not attempt to assign them a place in the redeeming of the region from the wilderness. They had a part to perform, and in many ways their work was of high value, but the scope of this article includes only those who took up land, and made homesteads, and were finally given title to the homesteads by the State of Virginia.

The Revolution was drawing to a close before Virginia appointed commissioners to hear evidence concerning settlements in Monongalia county and to grant certificates to those who were entitled to homesteads. Those commissioners held meeting at different places within the county in 1779, 1780, 1781 and 1782. Men who had made improvements and who wanted to claim homesteads (which gave 400 acres for a very small fee) went before the commissioners and proved their claims. They were given certificates setting forth the facts, and directing the survey of their claims. The earliest settlements within the area afterwards included in Monongalia county, on which homestead rights were based, were made in 1766. There were settlers within the region before that time, but they never filed claims for lands.

There was a settlement by two families, Files and Tygart, in the present county of Randolph in 1753, but the Indians (in a time of peace) broke up the settlement. The Eckarly brothers built a cabin on Cheat River, in Preston county, a few years later, but Indians killed two of the brothers. It is usually stated in histories that Thomas Decker planted a colony on the site of Morgantown in 1758, and that the settlement was destroyed the next spring by Indians. This is probably a

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myth, pure and simple, but if such a settlement was made, it was not permanent, and no claim for a homestead was ever based on it, so it need not be taken account of in this article. Thus it is seen that the permanent settlement of the territory afterwards embraced in Monongalia county began in 1766.

THE FIRST SEVEN.

At the beginning of the year 1766 the whole region west of the Alleghenies, north of the Greenbrier River and south of the mouth of the Youghiogheny, and eastward of the Ohio, was an unbroken and an uninhabited wilderness, so far as we know. If there was so much as an Indian within the region, his camp was only a temporary one. Great Britain had forbidden the settlement of the country by her subjects, and Pennsylvania and Virginia (then loyal provinces) had enacted laws to deter such settlers as should be disposed to cross the mountains. These laws were yet in force in 1766. It was a forbidden country. The Pontiac war was over, and there was peace; but yet no permission had been given by Virginia to anybody to make homes west of the mountains. This should be borne in mind, because those who settled in 1766 outlawed themselves by so doing. They defied the proclamation which forbade such settlements. No doubt they hoped to escape discovery, and thought to remain until the laws, which they were violating, should be repealed. They were not disappointed, if such were their plans. When the time came, they were awarded homesteads where they settled in 1766.

Seven men made settlements in 1766 in the region under consideration. The homestead law called any kind of habitation, if it was meant to be permanent, "a settlement." To locate at a certain place was to "make a settlement." The seven men who made settlements in 1766 did not all locate together. Three were within a few miles of one another. Thomas Merrifield located on Horner's Run, a branch of Booth Creek, in the present county of Marion. Richard Merrifield and Moses Templin located "on Lost Run, near Simpson's Creek." I have not been able to determine just where that was, but it was near the boundary between the present counties of Harrison and Marion. It is probable that all three men settled in the present limits of Marion county. I presume the exact places could be determined by tracing land titles in that vicinity back to the first homesteads, but I have not tried to do it. Moses Templin sold his claim to Richard Merrifield, to whom the homestead certificate was issued. I have never found further trace of Templin.

In the same year James Workman penetrated to the region now forming Gilmer county and built his cabin and became a settler. His cabin stood on the west bank of the Little Kanawha. He sold his claim to William Stewart.

The fifth of the first seven settlers established himself at the confluence of Black Fork and Shaver's Fork of Cheat River, where the county seat of Tucker county now stands. He was a Welshman, John Crouch, who came to America with two brothers in 1750. He lived on

Cheat River not more than five years, probably not so long, and sold his claim to Adam Hyder, who was a very early settler in that vicinity, but not so early as 1766. John Crouch removed to Tygart Valley and located at the mouth of Shaver's Run, below the village of Huttonsville. Here his son John was born, the first white child born in the present territory of Randolph county. Crouch died before the Declaration of Independence and his property, under the English law, went to his eldest son. That is said to be the only instance in the upper Monongahela Valley of property descending by law of primogeniture. The son who thus inherited the property was subsequently killed by the bite of a rattlesnake.

In the same year, also, William Roberts took up his home at Dunkard Bottom, on Cheat River, in what is now Preston county. He settled near the spot where the unfortunate Eckarlys met their fate several years before. He held his ground, and fifteen years afterwards received his reward by being granted a homestead covering part of the Dunkard Bottom.

Nicholas Decker located land and made his home on the Monongahela, near the mouth of Decker's Creek, in 1766. This was, as I believe, the first white man's abode at or near the site of Morgantown. I suppose that the creek was named for him, although I have no positive evidence of it. I have little faith in the story of Thomas Decker's settlement in 1758 and its destruction in 1759. So far as I know it depends for its authority upon Withers's *Border Warfare*, and while it is not to the purpose to enter into a discussion of all the pros and cons here, it is sufficient to cast doubt upon the whole story to know that some of the details given by Withers could not possibly have been true, and the others were very improbable. To this is added the positive statement, entered of record fifty-five years before Withers' book was published, that Nicholas Decker's settlement in 1766 was "prior to any settlement made near the same." That statement is found in the entry of Nicholas Decker's claim. Its presence suggests that the commissioners discussed that very question while they considered his claim. That was only fourteen years after his settlement was made, and there were men present from all the settlements. They were there as witnesses for themselves or for others. They were well posted on the settlements of the neighborhood, and if there had been an earlier one than Nicholas Decker's, and almost on the same ground, some one would have known of it, and the commissioners would not have written the statement that his was "prior to any settlement made near the same." Nicholas Decker sold his claim to John Madison, who was Monongalia's first county surveyor, and who was subsequently murdered by Indians.

THE TIDE EBBED AND FLOWED.

It might be supposed that immigration into the upper Monongahela Valley and the adjacent region was steady, after it had once commenced. But such was not the case. The table which follows will show this.

The number of settlers who took up homesteads, year by year, may be seen at a glance.

| YEAR. | |
|-----------------------------------|-------|
| 1766..... | 7 |
| 1767..... | 2 |
| 1768..... | 4 |
| 1769..... | 22 |
| 1770..... | 91 |
| 1771..... | 66 |
| 1772..... | 143 |
| 1773..... | 247 |
| 1774..... | 168 |
| 1775..... | 227 |
| 1776..... | 139 |
| 1777..... | 22 |
| 1778..... | 7 |
| 1779..... | 5 |
| 1780..... | 2 |
| 1781..... | 3 |
| 1782..... | 1 |
| Year of settlement uncertain..... | 59 |
| Total..... | 1,215 |

Not until 1769 do we observe anything like a general movement of homeseekers toward the transallegheny region of northern West Virginia, and only twenty-two came that year. This number was increased four-fold the next year; and, for some cause unknown, it fell to only sixty-six in 1771. The next year the number rose to one hundred and forty-three, and for the year following it rose still higher—the highest of all the years of homesteading in Monongalia county. That was a prosperous and auspicious time (1773). It was a time of speculation and adventure in western lands. A strong colony located that year on Salt Creek, in the present county of Braxton, and others pushed further down the Little Kanawha to its mouth, and the homesteader's cabin began to be found in the intermediate country, particularly on Hughes River and its tributaries. The bank of the Ohio was occupied at different places from Jackson county northward. Surveyors were everywhere at work. It was a movement to take possession of the country. It had become generally known by that time that the West Virginia lands did not belong to the Indians, and there was, apparently, little fear of an uprising of the savages beyond the Ohio.

The next year, 1774, the Dunmore war came, and its result was to check immigration into country beyond the Alleghenies, in West Virginia. Only one hundred and sixty-eight homesteads were commenced that year, not as many by seventy-nine as were begun the year before. Peace was restored in the fall, and the next spring the immigrants arrived again in larger numbers. The total for 1775, which was a year of

peace, was two hundred and twenty-seven. In 1776 the Revolution was under full headway, and trouble began again with Indians on the western frontier. The number of homesteaders fell off again, the total reaching one hundred and thirty-nine. The year 1777 was a terrible one on the border. War with the Indians was at its height. It was the "bloody year" in the annals of the border. Few persons would care to leave secure homes in the East and take up dangerous abodes on the western frontiers. Accordingly, it is seen that only twenty-two homesteaders located that year in Monongalia county. For several years after that the savage war continued with unabated fury, and immigration into Monongalia county practically ceased, if the homestead claims may be taken as a criterion on which to base a conclusion.

SETTLERS OTHER THAN HOMESTEADERS.

All persons who came into the county to make a home did not take up homesteads; and there was a not inconsiderable number of persons who became permanent residents who were not landholders at all. It was easy to become a squatter on public land, or on private land, and many chose that method rather than take the trouble of acquiring real estate of their own. For this reason, a list of homesteaders for any year, or series of years, would not be a complete list of the people who entered the country and became residents during that period. After the year 1779 it was easier and cheaper to buy public land than to acquire it by the homestead process, and I think this accounts for the practical disappearance of the homesteader after that time. A man could buy for a few dollars the right to locate a large acreage of public land wherever he might find it in Virginia. He could choose part of it in one place and part elsewhere. He could live on it if he liked, or he could sell it or let it lie vacant. It became so easy to own land by that method that the homestead passed out of use.

The homestead process served as a guide to the historian who should undertake, in after years, to trace the settlement of the country. The man who took up a homestead left a record of his name, the date of his settlement, the place he settled, and often left a record of who his neighbors were. Data of that kind render it possible to compile lists of settlers from year to year; and from such lists it is possible to make fairly accurate estimates of the population of any given region for any year or number of years. When the homestead system was superseded by the method of buying the land, such data was no longer within reach. A speculator frequently bought twenty thousand acres, and sold in small tracts to others. Some settled upon their tracts, others did not. There is no sure way of determining now who bought the land for homes, or who for speculation only. Consequently, when we undertake to compile lists, from the records of settlers, of those who located at certain places and at certain times, we are brought to a standstill at reaching the period when the taking up of land by the homestead method passed out of use.

There is room for error in making up lists of settlers from homesteads. A man might make an improvement himself, or a tenant might make it for him. The law made no distinction. The certificate of homestead seldom stated whether the claimant lived on the land himself, or whether he was represented by some other person. There is no way to determine this matter now, unless (in rare cases) information outside of the records is to be had.

ESTIMATED EARLY POPULATION.

The earliest census of Monongalia, that may be regarded as official, was taken in 1790. The county had been reduced by subdivision to form other counties until it was, at that time, not more than one-fourth of its original size. Its population was 4768, as shown by the Federal census. Harrison and Randolph counties had been taken away at that time, and all north of the Pennsylvania line was gone. It would be interesting to know the population of Monongalia for the earlier years of its existence, and for the region (later covered by the original county) for the years before the county was formed. The settlement of the region had been in progress ten years before the Act of the Virginia Assembly was passed creating Monongalia County. It is possible to arrive at a fair approximate of the population for any of these years. It is done by taking the number of homesteads and estimating the probable number of people represented by each homestead. As already remarked, all the people did not live on homesteads, nor had every homesteader a family. But it is assumed, for the sake of the estimate, that the number of persons who did not live on homesteads would make up for the absence of families on some of the homesteads. Taking this view of the matter, let the following represent the population of the region covered by the original Monongalia County for the years named:

| YEAR. | ESTIMATED POPULATION. |
|------------|--------------------------|
| 1766 | 35 |
| 1767 | 45 |
| 1768 | 65 |
| 1769 | 175 |
| 1770 | 630 |
| 1771 | 960 |
| 1772 | 1675 |
| 1773 | 2910 |
| 1774 | 3750 |
| 1775 | 4885 |
| 1776 | 5580 |
| 1777 | 5690 |
| 1778 | 5725 |
| 1779 | 5750 |
| 1780 | 5765 |

From 1776 to 1780 the table shows the population almost at a standstill. The whole frontier was drenched in blood during those years, and the war for independence was raging in the east, south and north, and few recruits could come to the border. Consequently, the frontier county of Monongalia did well to hold its own. If the table contains error in either direction it probably consists in giving too large, rather than too small, increase in population for those years.

WHENCE CAME THE PIONEERS?

There were 1215 homesteads in Monongalia County. Occasionally one man would have two homesteads, the law apparently allowing him that privilege, the condition being that he should make a separate and distinct settlement for each homestead. I have gone over the entire list several times, checking the names in an endeavor to determine how many persons there were. The result has not been entirely satisfactory to myself, because I could not always decide whether a particular name found twice was that of one person, or whether there were two persons of the same name. After all my checking off and elimination I had a list of 1117 names which I believed represented that many persons. Yet my list may still contain duplicates. I then set for myself the task of ascertaining, with as much accuracy as possible, the nationality of each name on the list. I approached the work with a full appreciation of the fact that nothing better than a portion of the truth could be expected. I had to rely more upon the origin of the name than upon any knowledge I had of the history of the individual. But I took advantage of all information of the latter kind within my reach. In my work in the field of county histories I have written brief biographies of several thousand persons whose ancestors lived in the original Monongalia County, and this store of information regarding families frequently assisted me in determining whether a name was English, Scotch, Irish or German. I at least had at hand what the living representatives of the old families think of the matter. Often, however, they know very little about the nationality of their ancestors. My conclusions are as follows:

NATIONALITY OF 1117 PERSONS WHO TOOK UP HOMESTEADS IN MONONGALIA COUNTY FROM 1766 TO 1782, BOTH INCLUSIVE.

| | |
|--|-------------|
| Scotch-Irish or Scotch | 687 |
| English | 204 |
| German | 97 |
| Irish | 44 |
| Unclassified | 85 |
| Total | 1117 |
| Percentage of Scotch-Irish or Scotch | 61 |
| Percentage of English | 18 |
| German | 8 |
| Irish | 4 |
| Unclassified | 7 |

The "unclassified" were those concerning whom I was uncertain. They might, with little room for error, be distributed, pro rata, among the four nationalities named, except that a few of the names are strongly suggestive of Spanish or Portuguese origin, and a considerable number are Welsh.

I put no name down as Scotch or Scotch-Irish which did not stand the test of being found in good standing in Mr. Charles A. Hanna's new and most excellent work, *The Scotch-Irish*. The name Harding I rejected as of Scotch origin because it was not found in his books, although I had always considered it a Scotch name. The mere fact that a name is of Scotch origin is not proof positive that the bearer of the name was Scotch, because people of different nationality might have the same name. A man in Monongalia County with the name Smith might be Scotch, or Irish, or English, or German, or French, or any one of several other nationalities. But, usually, the name is a fairly good indication of the man's nationality.

I endeavored to identify the Germans by the aid of Mr. Herrmann Schuricht's books, *The German Element in Virginia*; but I soon found that the author's zeal outran his judgment, and that he claims entirely too much. The Germans were numerous, but he makes them too numerous; they did much to develop the region, but he gives them more credit than the facts justify. He classes as German some names which were English and Scotch. If a name can be translated into the German, it is enough to warrant him in calling it German. He considers as German persons with the name Carpenter, because that name in German is Zimmerman, and he concludes that some native of the Fatherland came to America with the name Zimmerman, and subsequently translated it into English and called himself Carpenter. The name Bowman he classes as German because the name Bauman is found in that language. Yet, the name Bowman is so old in the British Isles that some antiquarians trace it clear beyond the English language, back to the Latin word *bos* (ox). The name would thus mean "cattle-keeper," or, if expressed in the vernacular of our western plains, "cowboy." The name might have an equivalent in nearly any language, if such is its origin. It would, however, be more reasonable to suppose that the name is derived from another occupation—bow man, a soldier who, in early times, was expert with the bow. Be it as it may, the men of that name who first pushed into West Virginia were not German, or English, or Scotch, but came from Holland. So, in this instance, it is found unsafe to determine a man's nationality solely upon the sound or meaning of his name. There is nothing else quite so good as a fact in an investigation of any kind.

It was a matter of surprise to me to find that the method of investigation which I followed showed so small percentage of Germans among the original homesteaders of Monongalia County. I had supposed that nearly one-third of them were Germans; but I based that supposition upon no careful analysis—simply took the word of others for it. But when I

took up name after name from the list of the actual homesteaders, and traced each name as far as possible to determine where it came from, it was seen that the supposed German turned out to be something else in the majority of cases. All that came from Pennsylvania across our northern border in the early years were not Germans, although some persons have, apparently, taken it for granted that they were. I suppose that the strongest German element in early times, in the present territory of West Virginia, was in Pendleton, Grant and Hardy counties. A considerable number of those Germans crossed the Alleghenies to the upper tributaries of the Monongahela. But they lacked much of being the predominating class west of the mountains.

Lest these conclusions may be misunderstood, let it be stated again that I am dealing only with the settlers in Monongalia County who took up and perfected titles to homesteads—not with those who bought land, or who never owned land, or who came into the country after the year 1782. At the most, I have considered only a portion of the early settlers. How many came prior to 1782 and did not take up homesteads, I have no means of knowing. How many came subsequent to that year, I know only in a general way, and have no details. The homesteader made a record of his coming, and left dates and details, and we can deal with him; but the other came unannounced, and went as he liked, and left so little of his history among the records that we can take little account of him.

By far the most valuable record concerning the early settlers and settlements in northwestern West Virginia is *The Border Warfare*, by Withers. An examination shows that a majority of the men mentioned in that book, if residents of the original Monongalia County, were homesteaders. He was frequently wrong in dates, sometimes in error as to locality, but he was remarkably accurate as to names. He depended too much on the memory of the living, and made too little use of the records which he might have examined. For that reason his book is frequently defective. For example, the lists he gave of the settlers on the upper tributaries of the Monongahela in 1769 and 1770, and which he says were all the settlements made in those years, really left two-thirds of them unmentioned.

There are old records and documents in existence which, if properly abstracted and published, would throw light on the early history of our whole state. But the examination of them, and the sorting out of the important from the unimportant, is a task from which the private individual shrinks, because it is a great labor, involves considerable expense, and there is no prospect of pecuniary reward. He who does it, must be content to labor for the good of his country, without even the pay that the soldier receives who fights for it. Few persons feel able to do this duty. The state of West Virginia ought to do it. The expense, from the standpoint of a public work, would be very small. Much of it could be accomplished by one industrious worker in one year; but not all.