

## **JAMES SEVIER'S PET DUCK**

This hidden voice hides in plain sight in the archives. For there are more documents written and signed by James Sevier in the records of Washington County than that of any other person. This is due to the fact that for nearly fifty years he served as County Court Clerk.

The second child of Tennessee's first governor John Sevier and Sevier's first wife Sarah Hawkins, James Sevier lived here before Washington County existed, his life straddling from when King George III ruled the land until when fellow Tennessean James K. Polk was president. During his lifetime, Sevier was as involved in the history of his county as much as anyone has been. He was not yet turned sixteen when he marched with the Overmountain Men to the Battle of King's Mountain, one of the two youngest men in the battle. There his beloved uncle Robert Sevier was mortally wounded, and it was left to James to try and bring him safely home. However, Robert died before reaching Tennessee. The young nephew had to dig a woodland grave and bury his uncle under a great yellow poplar tree. James accompanied his father on every Indian campaign except one. He and his older brother were taken prisoners and threatened with hanging by John Tipton during the Battle of the State of Franklin in 1788. During the state of Franklin period, he served as County Clerk for Washington County. He would also serve from 1790-1823 and 1824-1836.

He was even involved in a few court cases himself. One is historically significant. The other quietly interesting. In the first case titled James Sevier vs. John Tipton in 1789, Sevier sued for the return of his gun and shot pouch kept by Tipton when he held the two Sevier brothers prisoner the previous year. The capture and threat of hanging led to the end of the siege of Tipton's farm and the end of the state of Franklin. Sevier lost his case and his items. In the second case titled State vs. John Lasbrook in 1808, Sevier charged Lasbrook with stealing his "tame duck, of gray colour." Whatever the real story, the grand jury did not return a true bill against Lasbrook for the theft of Sevier's pet duck. Interestingly, most of the documents surviving in this case are written in the hand of the County Clerk, James Sevier, the plaintiff!

James Sevier married Nancy Conway in 1789, and they had eleven children (9 girls and 2 boys). Curiously, one daughter born in 1794 was named Maria Antoinette. This was around the time her namesake lost her head on the guillotine of the French Revolution in Paris. An interesting sidelight is the fact that James Sevier and David Crockett were first cousins, their mothers (Sarah and Rebecca Hawkins) being sisters.

James died on January 21<sup>st</sup>, 1847 and was buried on his farm outside Jonesborough. The cemetery still exists in a field behind the house at 224 Charlie Carson Road off Highway 107.

What an autobiography he might have written.

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