

The Shaping of the Nation and Expansion of the Western Frontier by John and Elizabeth Cummins Jackson and their Descendants

**Speech Given by Nancy A. Jackson Ph.D.
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During the declared Jackson Heritage Days, August 15th and 16th, 1998, the Jackson Brigade, Inc. is celebrating the 250th Anniversary of the immigration to America of John and Elizabeth (Cummins) Jackson. I feel certain as they crossed the ocean with trepidation of the new world they never dreamt of the legacy they would leave in shaping this nation and forging of the Western Frontier. Nor could they have known the heights of achievement some of their descendants would realize as they took part in the growth and expansion of our nation. . It matters not whether John and Elizabeth were transported to the colonies as felons or came of their own free will. Their influence and the achievements of some of their descendants played a prominent role in the molding of this country and the expansion of our west and the formation of the State of West Virginia.

After leaving Cecil Co., MD where legend has it they were married, John and Elizabeth settled for a short period on Goose Creek, Loudoun Co, VA. They then migrated to the South Branch of the Potomac in present day Hardy Co, WV. In 1768, John along with his sons George and Edward went with the Pringle brothers and a few other early pioneer families to the present day Upshur Co., area. John made a tomahawk claim to the land on which the sycamore tree stood, which had been a home for the historical Pringle brothers during their desertion from the Army. As one of the pioneer families in Western Virginia, the Jackson family was destined to go down in history. In the move of the family to the Pringle Tree area, the window of western expansion was opened.

I am sure there were many times they wondered if they would survive the Indian raids on the South Branch of the Potomac and in the Buckhannon and Hacker's Creek settlements. But survive they did, as did their eight children.

All four of their sons, George, Edward, John Jr., Samuel and Henry were surveyors with Henry being the most famous surveyor. As surveyors they were in a position to obtain large land holdings. Henry and John Jr. primarily acquired their largest land holdings in what is now Upshur Co., WV. George moved to the Clarksburg, Harrison Co., WV area while Edward settled in what is now the Lewis Co. area. Some of Henry's descendants went to Ritchie and Wood County, (W)V with some later traveling over the Oregon trail to settle the Far West. Samuel, with his wife Barbara Reger, settled in Indiana near Terre Haute. All of these Jacksons acquired large land holdings. Indeed, I would consider them land barons. And, they were millers. John Sr., George, Edward and John Jr. built and operated grist mills as did some of Henry's descendants out in Oregon. In the early days, the grist mills were the places where men gathered and discussed politics among other things. George, Edward and John Jr. were among these men, and

are all known to have played important roles in the local governments and militia and their sons were a prominent influence in the development of the Western Frontier.

George Jackson and his descendants probably were the most prominent figures in the political arena. The Harrison County Court Minutes reveal that Colonel George Jackson was a scout on the Lewis and Clark Expedition. He worked with other men to form Harrison County, this meeting being held at his house at Bush's Old Fort near Buckhannon. In his move to Clarksburg, George built an economic and political power base that his son, John George, would expand for many years to come. George attended the Virginia State Convention debating the ratification of the United States Constitution. In 1785, he won a seat in the Virginia Assembly as a member of the House of Delegates from Harrison County. In 1793, George was elected to the US House of Representatives and in 1795 he was elected to Congress. George served in Congress from 1795-1797 and 1799-1803.

John George Jackson, son of George, in 1798, took a seat in the House of Delegates in the Virginia General Assembly. In 1803, he took a seat in Congress that his father had held.

John George, through his marriages, made powerful political alliances. He first married Mary Payne, who was a sister to Dolly Madison. Through this relationship he developed and maintained a strong friendship with President James Madison as well as President Jefferson. After Mary's death, he married Sophia Meigs, daughter of the powerful Governor Return Meigs of Ohio.

So, John George was a frontier industrialist besides being a lawyer, judge and legislator. He erected a salt works near Clarksburg. In the opposite direction, he erected an iron furnace, carding mill and tanneries about one mile from his home in Clarksburg. He also undertook construction of locks and dams on the West Fork of the Monongahela River. He has been worthy of having a book published on his life by Dorothy Davis and a doctoral dissertation by Stephen Brown which also resulted in a book about John George's life.

Prior to his marriage to Mary Payne, John George fathered a child with Francis Triplett from Parkersburg, with whom it was claimed he was betrothed. It is from this line that the famous Parkersburg, West Virginia Jackson branch descends. This illegitimate son became known as General John Jay Jackson. He married Emma Beeson, daughter of Jacob Beeson. It was the story of this son that started me on the road to thinking about the large Jackson land holdings and their political base or what I would term the Jackson dynasty. General John Jay Jackson was a powerful and influential man. He displayed this power while speaking against succession in the Virginia Assembly. During his speech, some members were booing him and shouting for him to sit down. John Jay stood tall, pounded the table and shouted: "I am a Jackson. No one tells a Jackson to sit down." His line produced many lawyers, judges and even a state governor.

General John Jay Jackson's son, John Jay Jr., became known as the "Iron Judge" and devoted his life to political activity. Both John Jay Sr. and John Jay Jr. served in the Virginia House of Delegates. Stephen Bass' doctoral dissertation is on the political life of John Jay Jackson Jr. Another son of General John Jay, Jacob Beeson Jackson, became Governor of West Virginia. So,

it was John George Jackson, grandson of John and Elizabeth who first brought the Jackson family to national prominence.

Edward, son of John and Elizabeth, was a member of the first Randolph Co. court held 1787. He was appointed High Sheriff of Randolph Co. In 1803, he represented Harrison Co. for one term in the Virginia Legislature. He shared a partnership of the Clarksburg saltworks with his nephew, John George. He was married twice and was the father of fifteen children. At Jackson's Mill, in Lewis County, he established a small town, with a grist mill, a saw mill and post office. However, Edward is probably best known for laying out the town of Weston, (West) Virginia and as the grandfather of General Stonewall Jackson.

George Edward, oldest son of Edward migrated to Ste. Genevieve, Mo. where he became a minor industrialist and demonstrated leadership in the development of a sawmill, a skill no doubt learned from his father at Jackson's Mill. He also made small improvements in lead mining. He was the first Jackson descendant of John and Elizabeth Jackson to take part in the fur trade but it was his brother David who earned national recognition for his participation in the fur trading business.

David Jackson was amongst the famous fur traders of our country, one being Jediah Smith. In 1828, he entered into a fur trading partnership with Smith and Sublette, and based his operation in the Grand Tetons in Wyoming. His popularity in the area would lead to the naming of Jackson Hole and Jackson Lake, Wyoming. David also helped to open the Santa Fe Trail. The life of David Jackson is well documented in John C. Jackson's book titled *Shadows on the Tetons, David E. Jackson and the Claiming of the American West*. The author of this book is a descendant of Henry, son of John and Elizabeth Cummins Jackson.

Little needs to be said about Edward's grandson, Stonewall Jackson. Much has been and continues to be written about him. A recent book by James Robertson has sold over 50,000 copies and is in the process of a fifth printing. In the end of careful study of the Civil War, one has to come to the conclusion that Stonewall was an outstanding military strategist whose techniques are still taught today.

Much more could be told about the descendants of Col. Edward Jackson but a definitive book by myself and Linda Meyers on this line can be gleaned for more information. Of special interest in the book is the rarely known story of his grandson, George E. White, The Cattle King of Calif. Also, the confirmed report of Cummins Jackson as a counterfeiter. Perhaps, his trip to the west was more a means of escaping the "Feds". Cummins Jackson primarily raised Stonewall.

John Jackson Jr., son of John and Elizabeth, operated a grist mill in Buckhannon where he was the first postmaster. In 1821, he died along the Mississippi river while trading slaves for his nephew John George Jackson. His son, Jacob Jay Jackson, was active in local politics in Lewis Co. John Jr's granddaughter, Mary Jane Ireland, married D.D.T. Farnsworth who was the second Governor of West Virginia for just six days.

Some of the children and descendants of Henry, son of John and Elizabeth, traveled the Oregon Trail as the Western Frontier was expanding. His son, Edward, was killed by the Indians on the trail.

Information of the descendants of Samuel, son of John and Elizabeth, can be found in the Vigo Co., IN history books. Much is still to be learned about this line, although I know of three descendants who have done considerable research.

I have concentrated on the sons and their descendants. However John and Elizabeth had three daughters: Elizabeth who married Abraham Brake whom I know little about. Sophia Jackson who married Josiah\Joseph Davis resided at the mouth of Turkey Run where the Pringle Tree home of John and Elizabeth was located. Another daughter, Mary Sarah, married Philip Reger, first sheriff of Lewis Co. Mary Sarah died shortly after the birth of a daughter.

The powerful influence of this Jackson family in the settling of Western Virginia and forging of the Western Frontier needs much more research. The rise and fall of the Jackson dynasty is a story waiting to be told.

I am sure, as John and Elizabeth Jackson crossed the ocean in 1748 or 1749, they never visualized the impact they and their descendants would on our great nation. Wouldn't it be wonderful to compile a Who's Who of the descendants of John and Elizabeth Jackson?

References

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