



Georgia Genealogy Trails

"Where your Journey Begins"

Wilkes County, Georgia

WILKES COUNTY, ITS PLACE IN GEORGIA HISTORY.
BY OTIS ASHMORE.

No county in the state of Georgia is richer in natural resources and in the achievements of her citizens than Wilkes. Her contributions of material wealth and of distinguished men and women in the upbuilding of the state is remarkable. She has furnished eleven Governors of Georgia, who were either born in Wilkes, or who were at some times residents of that county, and seventeen counties in the state have been named in honor of her eminent sons.

Wilkes county originally embraced a very large territory, including Lincoln, Elbert, Oglethorpe, and in part Hart, Warren, McDuffie, Talliaferro, Madison and Greene counties. This territory was acquired from the Indians in payment of debts due the early traders, and in 1773 it was opened to settlement. In 1777 it was created into a county by the State Constitution of that year. It was named in honor of John Wilkes, a distinguished member of the British Parliament, who strenuously opposed those harsh and unjust measures towards America which finally led to the Revolution.

TOWNS, HAMLETS AND VILLAGES

Fishing Creek is a small stream which rises in the central part of Wilkes county, flows northeast through Lincoln, and empties into the Savannah river about five miles below the mouth of Broad river.

On Aug. 18, 1780, the American forces under General Sumter were surprised and defeated on the banks of this creek by a combined force of British and Tories. The Tories living in the locality had for some time lost no opportunity to prosecute the patriots and this defeat made them more insolent and brutal than before.

[Source: Georgia: Sketches, Counties, Towns, Events, Institutions & People, Vol. 2, Publ. 1906
Transcribed By: Maggie Coleman]

Floralhill, a post-settlement in the eastern part of Wilkes county, is a little east of Fishing Creek. Washington, on the Georgia railroad is the nearest station.

[Source: Georgia: Sketches, Counties, Towns, Events, Institutions & People, Vol. 2, Publ. 1906
Transcribed By: Maggie Coleman]

Hornet's Nest, -- In that part of Wilkes county now constituting the county of Elbert there were a number of Whigs who were both enthusiastic and vindictive in their hatred of the Tories. When a Tory was caught the general usage was to find a rope and a suitable tree, where the life of the unfortunate captive was summarily ended. This locality became known as the "Hornet's Nest," because of these conditions. It was in this section that Nancy Hart lived. (q.v.)
(Source: Georgia Sketches of Counties, Towns, Events, Institutions, and Persons, VOL II, by Candler & Evans, Publ. 1906. Transcribed by Kim Mohler)

Loudberg, a post-hamlet in the southern part of Wilkes county, is about five miles east of Ficklin, which is the nearest railroad station.
(Source: Georgia Sketches of Counties, Towns, Events, Institutions, and Persons, VOL II, by Candler & Evans, Publ. 1906. Transcribed by Joanne Morgan)

Metasville, a post-village of Wilkes county, is on one of the branches of Fishing creek, about ten miles northeast of Washington, which is the nearest railroad station. The population in 1900 was 75. It is the principal trading point in that part of the county. Metcalf, a town in Thomas county, was incorporated by act of the legislature on Oct. 29, 1889. It is located on the Atlantic Coast Line railway, not far from the Florida state line, has a money order postoffice, express and telegraph offices, important commercial and shipping interests, and in 1900 reported a population of 259.
[Source: Georgia Comprising Sketches of Counties, Towns, Events, Institutions, and Persons, Vol 2, Publ 1906. Transcribed by Tracy McAllister]

Ophelia, a post-hamlet of Wilkes county, is about twelve miles northwest of Washington, which is the most convenient railroad station.
[Source: Georgia Comprising Sketches of Counties, Towns, Events, Institutions, and Persons, Vol 2, Publ 1906. Transcribed by Kristen Bisanz]

Pistol, a post-village in Wilkes county, is about fifteen miles northeast of Washington, on a little stream that flows into the Savannah river. Mt. Carmel, S.C., is the nearest railroad station.
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Americus is the county seat. Plains, Desoto, Andersonville and Leslie are the principal towns. The population in 1900 was 26,212, an increase of 4,105 during the decade.
Comprising Sketches of Counties, Towns, Events, Institutions, and Persons, Arranged in Cyclopedic Form Transcribed by Kristen Bisanz

Rayle, a post-village in the western part of Wilkes county, reported a population of 62 in 1900. It is about ten miles northwest of Washington, and is a trading center for that section.
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Savoy, a post-hamlet of Wilkes county, is on the Little river, ten miles southeast of Washington. Ficklin is the nearest railroad station.
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Sisson, a post hamlet of Wilkes county, is nine miles west of Washington, which is the most convenient railroad station.
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Cyclopedic Form Transcribed by Kristen Bisanz

Thaxton, a post-hamlet of Wilkes county, is about twelve miles northwest of Washington, which is the nearest railroad station.

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Tignall, a village of Wilkes county, with a population of 67, is about twelve miles due north of Washington, which is the nearest railroad station. It has a money order postoffice, with several free delivery routes radiating from it, and is the chief trading center for that section of the county. Comprising Sketches of Counties, Towns, Events, Institutions, and Persons, Arranged in Cyclopedic Form Transcribed by Kristen Bisanz

Washington, the county seat of Wilkes county, was incorporated by act of the legislature in 1804, but was founded several years previous to that date and claims the honor of being the first place in the United States to bear the name of the immortal Washington. It is a terminus of a branch of the Georgia railroad. Its incorporation as a city dates from 1899. It had in 1900 a population of 3,300 in the corporate limits and 4,436 in the entire district. It has a court house valued at \$40,000, three banks, between thirty and forty prosperous mercantile establishments, a postoffice with rural free delivery, express and telegraph offices, a water works plant, a cotton seed oil mill, a knitting mill, a wagon and carriage factory, a public cotton gin, and good schools and churches. At Washington was held the last cabinet meeting of the government of the Confederate States of America.

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EARLY SETTLERS.

The earliest settlers of Wilkes county were from North Carolina, but these were soon followed by a large number of Virginia families of greater wealth, education and influence. The differences of feeling and social status between these two groups gave rise to political antagonisms which were at times state-wide. The political strife between Crawford and Clark is an instance. William H. Crawford was a Virginian, while John Clark was a North Carolinian, and for many years Georgia politics was divided into two great factions, whose members espoused the cause of one or the other of these two great leaders.

It is worthy of note that the early settlers of Wilkes county were a totally different group from that which was planted in Savannah by Oglethorpe in 1733. The Wilkes county settlers came in a steady migratory stream from Virginia, North Carolina, and Maryland, and they were of the best English and Scotch-Irish stock. Behind these people in ancestral lines lay habits of thrift and industry, hardihood and courage, and honor and high purpose. It is therefore not strange that from such ancestral stock so many men of mark should be produced. Among these early settlers were the following:

Gen. Elijah Clarke and his son John Clark, who afterwards became Governor, Colonel John Dooly, Colonel Thomas Dooly, Stephen Heard, Barnard Heard, Jesse Heard, George Mathews (Governor), Colonel Benjamin Taliaferro, Francis Meriwether, Thomas Meriwether, David Meriwether, John Heard, Benjamin Wilkinson, John Talbot and his son Matthew Talbot (Governor), Colonel Micah Williamson, William Barnett, John Gilmer, Thomas M. Gilmer, the

father of Governor George R. Gilmer, John Marks, John Callaway, Nathaniel Edge, Wiley Hill, John Myrick, Colonel John Freeman, Colonel Holman Freeman, Dr. W. W. Bibb, General Samuel Blackburn, Nathaniel Barnett, Micajah McGehee, Daniel Harvie, Reuben Jordan, John Davenport, John Bradley, James Bradley, George Lumpkin, John Rutherford, John Hill, Thomas Ansley, Nathaniel Howell, Thomas Wooten, Burwell Pope, John Lindsey, Frederick Sims, William Pollard, Benjamin Jackson, Walter Jackson, William Morgan, Thomas Branham, John Wingfield, John Nail, Nathaniel Christmas, Job Callaway, Jacob Early, Henry Mounger, William Glenn, Walker Richardson, Benjamin Joyney, Reuben Saffold, James Findley, Curtace Wellborn, Samuel Cresswell, James Anthony, William Terrell, Joel Terrell, Daniel Grant, Thomas Grant, William Bowen, John Armstrong, Sanders Walker, Colonel Nicholas Long, Thomas Wellborn, Thomas Carter, Spencer Crane, Mr. Pharr, James Jack, Garland Wingfield, Mr. Cuthbert, Thomas Napier, William Moss, Captain Lipham, Horatio Marbury, John Barksdale, Henry Pope, Charles Tate, Henry Gibson, John Pope, David Lowery, Thomas Wingfield, William Stokes, William Gilbert, Daniel Mills, Edward Butler, David Hillhouse, Micajah Anthony, John Candler, John Cain, Elijah Darden, Gabriel Toombs, William Toombs, John Stephens, Williamson Bird, George Willis, Humphrey Burdett, Joel Hurt, Pressly Rucker, William Sanson, James Sanson, William Head, Alexander Cummins, John Collier, Joseph Wilson, Sampson Harris, Anthony Poullain, John Colley, Philip Combs, Jacob Shorter, William Ogletree, Joseph Callaway, William Rabun, Henry Colquitt, James Shepard, Colonel John Graves, Captain Abram Simons, Rev. Silas Mercer, Rev. T. J. Beck, Henry Jossey, and Matthew Sikes.

In 1773 Stephen Heard of Virginia planted a colony upon the present site of the town of Washington, and there he built a stockade fort. His two brothers, Barnard and Jesse, and probably his father John Heard, came with him. During the Revolution Heard's Fort became the temporary seat of the state government after Augusta fell into the hands of the British, and Stephen Heard acted as Governor. The traditional site of the old fort is that upon which the new court house now stands, where also stood the old Heard House in which the last meeting of the Confederate Cabinet was held.

The first court held north of Augusta was at Heard's Fort on April 25, 1779, where Absalom Bedell, Benjamin Catchings, and William Down were the Justices. Zachariah Lamar and James Gorman were added later. Colonel John Dooly was the attorney for the state. At this court nine persons were sentenced to be hanged, principally for treason, "under indictments," says Judge Andrews in the Bench and Bar of Georgia, "about as long as your finger."

The name of Heard's Fort was changed in 1780 to Washington in honor of "The Father of his Country," it being the first town in the United States so named.

BATTLE OF KETTLE CREEK.

During the Revolution, Wilkes county, which then included Lincoln and the other parts cut off since, was called by the Tories "the Hornet's Nest," on account of the patriotic activity and bravery of her people. About eight miles west of Washington was fought on February 14, 1779, the battle of Kettle Creek, where the American forces under Pickens, Clarke and Dooly almost annihilated the British troops under Colonel Boyd. The British leader with about eight hundred men had crossed the Savannah near its junction with Broad River, and was shaping his course westward to a point on Little River, where he had agreed upon a union with the notorious McGirth. The Americans with about four hundred men closely followed them, and on the morning of the 14th of February they came upon the enemy who had halted for breakfast upon the north side of Kettle Creek. The British had taken no precaution against a surprise attack, and the Americans suddenly fell upon them in a desperate battle which lasted one hour and forty-five minutes. The

result was a complete victory for the patriots. The British loss was seventy killed, and seventy-five wounded and captured. The American loss was nine killed and twenty-three wounded. The brave Colonel Boyd fell mortally wounded, three musket balls having pierced his body. Colonel Pickens waited upon him and tendered him every relief in his power. The British leader fully realized his hopeless condition, and he gave Colonel Pickens certain articles of value to be forwarded to his wife with a letter explaining the manner of his death. This request was faithfully complied with. Two men were detailed to wait upon him and to bury his body after death. He died the following night.

Those of the enemy who escaped scattered in every di-rection. This battle was a decisive one, for it completely foiled the British plans of invasion, and it greatly heartened the patriots throughout the state. A partial list of names of the American patriots who took part in this memorable struggle has been recently prepared after much investigation and research by Mrs. T. M. Green of Washington.

This list, taken from Knight's Landmarks, Memorials, and Legends of Georgia is as follows:

Elijah Clarke	John Dooly	Thomas Dooly	Micajah Williamson
Hugh McCall	George Dooly	John Freeman	Daniel Freeman
Coldrop Freeman	Holman Freeman	James Freeman	William Freeman
Stephen Heard	Barnard Heard	John Heard	Jesse Heard
Austin Dabney	James Williams	Samuel Whatley	Benjamin Wilkinson
Benjamin Hart	Morgan Hart	Nancy Hart	Nancy Darker
Elisha Wilkinson	John Nelson	___Staples	Joe Phillips
Zachariah Phillips	James Little	Andrew Pickens	Dionysius Oliver
Daniel Coleman	John Coleman	Thomas Stroud	James McLean
Jacob Ferrington	William Bailey	John Glass	Thomas Glass
Charles Beddingfield	William Harper	Robert Harper	John Crutchfield
Francis Triplett	James Alexander	John Candler	___Cade
___Bridges	Captain Anderson	Absalom Bedell	Benjamin Catchings
William Downs	Henry Manadne	Scott Redden	Joseph Scott

Elisha Wilkinson in battle with William Morgan - brother to Orman Morgan.

			Redden
George Redden	Jacob McLendon	George Walton	Jesse Walton
John Walton	Nathaniel Walton	Robert Walton	Daniel Burnett
Ichabod Burnett	John Burnett	Richard Aycock	Robert Day
Joseph Day	John Gorham	Zachariah Lamar	Basil Lamar
L. Williamson	__Saffold	__Finley	__John Hill
John Lindsey	William Morgan	William Terrell	John Colley
Nathan Smith	Marbury	Ambrose Beasley	Peter Stubblefield
John Lamar	James Lamar	Joseph Pickens	John Clark
Owen Fluker	Will Fluker	R. Sutton	Wiley Pope
William Pope	Henry Pope	Burwell Pope	Richard Tyner
___ Walker	___ Combs	Stephen Evans	William Evans
___ Cosby	___ Foster	Montgomery	James White
___ Arnold	___ Truitt	___ S now	John Candler
John Evans			

WHITNEY'S COTTON GIN.

It is an interesting fact that one of the first, if not the very first, cotton gins ever operated in Georgia, or in the world, was the one operated by Eli Whitney, the famous inventor, in Wilkes county near Smyrna church. The original building, though removed a short distance from the site upon which it was erected, is still standing on the Burdett place near Smyrna. One of the first cotton gins constructed by Whitney was for many years in the possession of Judge Garnett Andrews of Washington, to whom it was given by Governor Matthew Talbot, on whose plantation the first gin house was located. This old relic was lost many years ago at an agricultural fair in Augusta. Much credit is due to Miss Fannie Andrews, a daughter of Judge Garnett Andrews, and one of Georgia's most accomplished women, for preserving the history of the first cotton gin and its operations.

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