

THE POPULATION OF EAST TENNESSEE

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In the year 1761 a number of Virginians, with some others, formed themselves into a company and went into the western part of Virginia to hunt. They came into what is now called Carter's Valley, in East Tennessee. About the same time Daniel Boone came into the same section at the head of another company. Impressed by the beautiful and fertile valleys of this section, as well as by the unusual opportunities afforded for profitable hunting, a number of people from Virginia and North Carolina decided to settle here permanently.

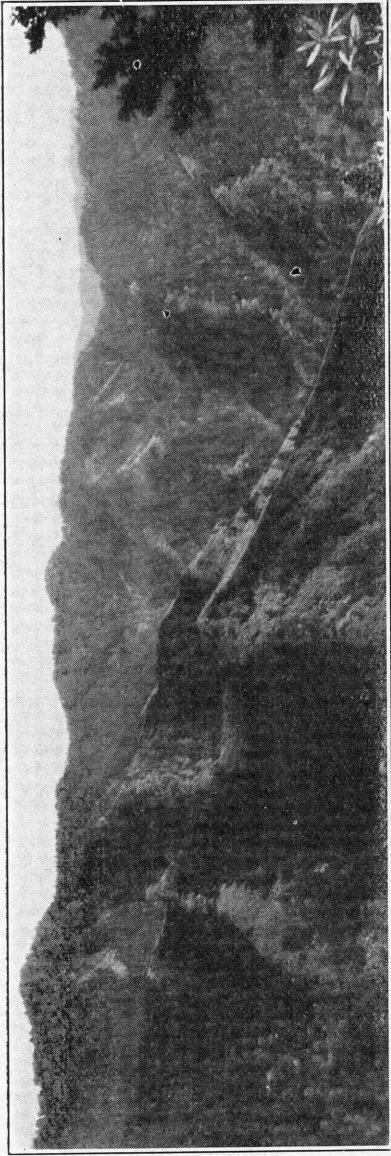
In 1770 the first settlers began to gather on the banks of the Watauga; and here was made the first settlement in Tennessee. Others came in and formed two other settlements near Watauga. The two additional settlements were Holston and Carter's Valley.

It is preëminently characteristic of American historians to explain all differences between localities by heredity. They have given small place to natural environment and to general economic conditions as factors in shaping the life of communities. Such explanations give a wide range to the imagination, and are always interesting to the superficial reader. Heredity is undoubtedly a powerful force in history, but to trace it with any degree of accuracy except in a very general way is exceedingly difficult.

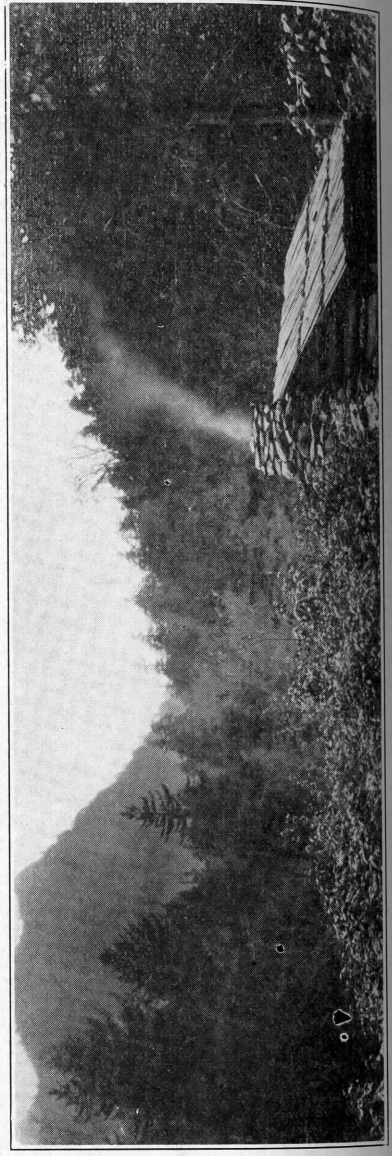
Practically all admit that the East Tennesseans came originally from Virginia and North Carolina, almost exclusively. But it would seem that all who have written on the origin of these people within recent years have taken the position that the early East Tennesseans were not representative of the population of Virginia and North Carolina. It is interesting that no one seems to have discovered that East Tennesseans had an origin different from that of other Southern communities till after the Civil War.

There has been a wide difference of opinion as to the real character of these people. Those who have taken the "moonshiners" as representative of East Tennessee have pointed to the criminal redemptioner as the progenitors of "these lawless people." Those who have taken certain prominent men as representative of this section have pointed to the Scotch Presbyterians—the Covenanters as the founders and makers of East Tennessee. Great ingenuity has been shown by those who have traced the Scotch from Pennsylvania through the valleys, over the hills and across the mountains into East Tennessee. But when we get out of the mist of the imagination and look for the facts that form the basis of this theory we find them strangely wanting.

These theories with reference to the origin of the early East Tennesseans have been given greater weight on account of the



HUGGINS' HELL. FROM ALUM CAVE TRAIL TO MT. LeCONTE.



CABIN IN BEAR PEN HOLLOW NEAR MT. LeCONTE.
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generally accepted theory of the character of the Virginia population. In history one "quack" theory leads to another "quack" theory. Since it is believed that the early Virginia and Carolina populations were composed of aristocratic cavaliers and "poor white trash" exclusively, it has been necessary to trace the East Tennesseans to one or the other of these classes, or to bring them from some other section. Hence some trace them to the "poor white trash," and others bring them from another section of the country, or make them more representative of the populations whence they came.

As a result of a careful, intensive study of the early population of Virginia the following conclusions have been reached:

1. Virginia, on account of unusual precautions and on account of her peculiar economic conditions, in all probability, received a smaller number of redemptioners who had been convicted of crime in proportion to her population than almost any of the other American colonies.

2. The theory that a large number of rich, aristocratic, extreme Cavaliers came over in 1649 and monopolized all industrial and political powers, first in Virginia and later in other Southern colonies is totally without foundation. There is no evidence that any such people, in numbers worth considering, came to Virginia at all; and the character of the life in the colony after they are said to have come, contradicts such a theory at every point.

3. There was no leisure class in Virginia. The ownership of slaves did not create opportunity for leisure different in nature from opportunities for leisure created by the ownership of other kinds of property of equal value.

4. Class distinctions counted for little or nothing in the public life of the colony.

5. Life was very simple and very democratic, and as a rule merit alone counted in the struggle for preferment.

6. If there were ever a tyrannical oligarchy in Virginia we can find no evidence of it in the Seventeenth Century.

If these conclusions are supported by adequate data, and it is believed that they are, the theory of the "criminal redemptioner origin" has no foundation in fact and the necessity no longer exists of bringing Scotch Presbyterians by a circuitous route over hills and valleys from the North to account for certain types of citizenship found in this section.

The position here taken is that the early population of East Tennessee was representative of the populations of Virginia and North Carolina and that whatever differences were found between the people who crossed the mountains and those who did not were due to environment and not to heredity.

EARLY EAST TENNESSEE AND THE SCOTCH-IRISH

The Scotch Presbyterians, perhaps, had no greater influence on the early political life of East Tennessee than they had on

Virginia and other Southern states. The "Covenanter" theory advocated by those who try to show that the early East Tennesseans were superior in moral tone and love of liberty, to the populations of Virginia and North Carolina, has no foundation in fact. That there were a number of Scotch Presbyterians among these people is not denied. But this was not peculiar to East Tennessee in the South; it was true of the population of almost every Southern state. The South was settled almost exclusively by English, Scotch, Scotch-Irish and Irish. From the beginning there were many Presbyterians all over the South. In 1850, eastern Virginia had 106 Presbyterian churches and 127 Episcopal churches. Ten counties in this section had no Episcopal church, and twelve counties had more Presbyterian churches than Episcopal, and eight counties had the same number of each. Eight counties had neither Presbyterian nor Episcopal churches. One of the oldest Presbyterian colleges in this country, and one of the most prominent in the early days was "Hampden-Sydney," and this was located in Prince Edward County, eastern Virginia.

No distinction can be drawn between the Scotch Presbyterians and others in the South with reference to political ideals. In the South the church was never a factor in political life. Whatever the ideals of the people may have been when they landed here, practically all were transformed into American citizens in a very short while with one common ideal and one common purpose. Patrick Henry, one of the plain people, from eastern Virginia, set the country on fire with his eloquence. The author of the Declaration of Independence was the son of a commoner and was the adherent of no church. Washington was a very broad-minded Episcopalian. Madison was a strict Presbyterian. Governor Campbell, of Virginia, was a Scotch Presbyterian. Governor McDowell was also a Scotch Presbyterian of the strictest type. A study of the real life of the Virginians will reveal the fact that Scotch Presbyterians were prominent in the political, social, industrial and educational life of Virginia from early colonial days as they were in other sections of the South. It is also very clear that one will look in vain for any appreciable differences in the conceptions of political life as a result of differences of nationality, church, or political affiliations in Great Britain.

There was no difference in the relative strength of Presbyterians and Episcopalians in Tennessee and in other Southern states. In 1850, Mississippi had a third more Presbyterian churches in proportion to population than Tennessee. Kentucky, Alabama and Florida also had more. Arkansas and Texas had about the same and North Carolina had almost as many.

In 1850, ten out of the thirty counties of East Tennessee had no Presbyterian churches and five other counties had only one each. At the same time there were only two counties in East Tennessee without Baptist churches and none without Methodist churches. There were only two out of the forty-nine counties of Middle and West Tennessee, in 1850, without Presbyterian

churches. The Presbyterians do not seem to have been as numerous in East Tennessee, in 1850, in proportion as they were in Middle and West Tennessee.

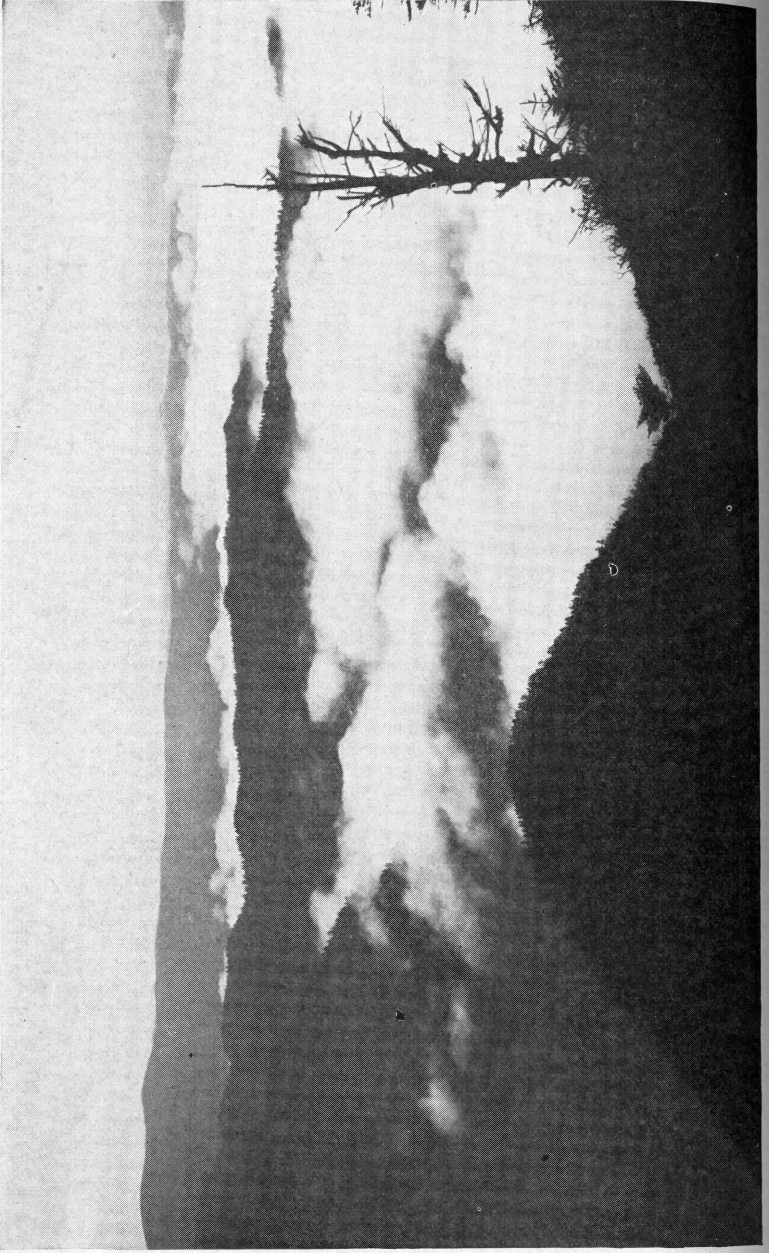
The fact that each of the three colleges founded in the early days had as its president a Presbyterian minister is, perhaps, in large measure responsible for the East Tennessee Scotch Presbyterian myth. The fact that each of these colleges had a Presbyterian minister for president does not signify that any considerable number of the patrons of these schools were Presbyterians. The charters of two of these colleges indicate that they were non-sectarian. Greenville College, it seems, was a Presbyterian school, but John Sevier and, perhaps, a number of other members of the board of trust were not Presbyterians. If this school were sectarian at all, it would seem that it was so only in a limited sense.

In that day religion and education were more vitally connected than they are today. From their point of view the functions of the college was to mold the characters of the students as well as to train their intellect. Hence an educated minister, other things being equal, was preferred as president of a college. Since Presbyterian preachers were almost universally educated men, it is not strange that Presbyterian ministers were placed at the head of these non-sectarian schools.

Wm. Cocke and John Sevier were preëminently the leaders in directing the affairs in the State of Franklin, as they were with William Blount the leaders in the formation of the State of Tennessee. Cocke was one of the leaders in founding Blount College. This school is said to be the first purely non-sectarian college founded in this county. Sevier, who was not a member of any church, and Cocke were two of the four men who were members of the boards of trust of all three colleges. The other two were Archibald Roane and Joseph Hamilton, Sevier, Cocke and Hamilton were all born and educated in Virginia.

By the above it is not meant that the Scotch Presbyterians were not prominent factors in the making of this new state of the southwest. Certainly they have figured conspicuously in the life of Tennessee from the very early days. But there is nothing to show that they were any more prominent in Tennessee than they were in Virginia and in other sections of the South. The men who directed the life of early East Tennessee were Virginians of conspicuous ability. They had a high appreciation of education, as shown by the fact that they began to plan for a state university before 1790, and in 1794-5 they established three colleges in this little settlement. These colleges were not competitive institutions since at least four men of prominence were members of the boards of trust of all three of the institutions.

The rank and file of the population of this section seems to have been representative of the rank and file of the populations of Virginia and North Carolina at this time. Differences between East Tennessee and the parent stock that developed later may be easily explained by environmental influence.



CLOUDLAND—LOOKING SOUTHWEST FROM MT. LÉCONTE OVER THE PROPERTY OF THE LITTLE RIVER LUMBER COMPANY.