

“THE REBELLION’S REBELLIOUS LITTLE BROTHER”: THE MARTIAL,
DIPLOMATIC, POLITICAL, AND PERSONAL STRUGGLES OF JOHN SEVIER,
FIRST GOVERNOR OF TENNESSEE

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ABSTRACT

“THE REBELLION’S REBELLIOUS LITTLE BROTHER”: THE MARTIAL,
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In a special edition of the *Knoxville Gazette*, commemorating the memory of Tennessee’s first governor, a state historian stated that although John Sevier had faults, we should find them insignificant to his heroism. Since his reinterment, in 1889, historians have overwhelmingly favored Sevier’s military and political accomplishments and downplayed potentially disgraceful episodes of his life. They placed him on a pedestal with the founding generation. Moreover, Sevier’s biographical works reveal more about the eras in which biographers wrote than about Sevier’s lifetime.

This study showcases the less favorable incidents in Sevier’s life, and examines them through a gendered lens. What I hope to reveal are aspects of Sevier’s life which have gone unnoticed by generations of historians. At times Sevier acted in ways which were self-serving and self-deprecating. His actions reveal his wants and desires, as well as those of his compatriots. Eighteenth-century men struggled to identify their role as men within the new nation. This gendered approach leads to a more holistic and complicated portrait of Tennessee’s founding father and a generation of men on the frontier.

INTRODUCTION: JOHN SEVIER, THE FOUNDING FATHER OF TENNESSEE, AND GREAT PATRIARCH OF THE FRONTIER

This study discusses manhood and honor in the “Southwest Territory” of East Tennessee, Western North Carolina, and Southwestern Virginian border settlements, through the lens of General John Sevier. John Sevier provides an excellent vehicle



Portrait of John Sevier, painted
by Charles Wilson Peale, 1792,
*Tennessee State Library and
Archives*

through which to investigate meanings of manhood specific to the colonial frontier.¹ Sevier is most often associated with the revolutionary era Battle of King’s Mountain and the short-lived State of Franklin. The Battle of King’s Mountain propelled Sevier to political prominence, while his governorship in the State of Franklin (and later Tennessee) cemented his legacy as the “Founding Father of Tennessee.”²

John Sevier was born on September 23, 1745 in Virginia. Sevier served in the military during his youth, first serving in Lord Dunmore’s War against Native Americans in 1774. Sometime within the following twelve months he settled on the Holston and

¹ For a list of works important to the construction of manhood please see the “gender” sub-section of the historiography for this study.

² Lyman C. Draper’s *King’s Mountain and Its Heroes: History of the Battle of King’s Mountain, October 7th, 1780, and the Events Which Led to It* (Cincinnati: Peter G. Thomson, 1881) is the first and most comprehensive work on King’s Mountain. Draper’s work is responsible for all the literature written on this battle. Moreover, Draper is the first to directly connect Sevier’s rise to political power to the success of this battle.

For a history of the State of Franklin see: Kevin T. Barksdale *The Lost State of Franklin: America’s First Secession* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2009); Dale Reed’s *John Tipton, John Sevier, and the State of Franklin* (U.S.: Tipton Family of America Association, 1998); Samuel Cole Williams, *History of the Lost State of Franklin* (New York: The Press of the Pioneers, revised edition, 1933); Noel B. Gerson, *Franklin: America’s “Lost State”* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1968)

Nolichucky Rivers in North Carolina (present-day Tennessee). For the next two years Sevier led expeditions against the Cherokee Indians, and in September 1780 he and Colonel Isaac Shelby organized a militia to fight Major Patrick Ferguson at King's Mountain. Five years later he was named governor of the State of Franklin, and served in that role for three years. Sevier was then elected as a Democrat from North Carolina to the first Congress. He served in this role from 1789 till 1791, when he was appointed brigadier general of the Washington District of the Territory South of the Ohio. In 1796, Tennessee was admitted into the Union, and Sevier elected its first governor. He served in this capacity until 1801, when he became ineligible for reelection.³ After sitting out for two years, Sevier was elected governor again in 1803. In 1798, while serving as governor, Sevier was appointed Brigadier General of the Provincial Army. Tennessee elected him to the Twelfth, Thirteenth, and Fourteenth Congresses, and he served from 1811 until his death in 1815. Sevier died serving as one of the commissioners to determine the boundary between Georgia and the Creek Territory in Alabama. He died near Fort Decatur, Alabama, a day after his seventieth birthday. He was elected to the Fifteenth Congress before Tennesseans received notice of his death. Sevier's grave went unnoticed until seventy-four years later, when a group of Tennesseans sought for his reinterment in Knoxville, Tennessee.⁴

Despite numerous biographies, published from the late nineteenth-century to the mid-twentieth century, Sevier's historical significance outside of the State of Franklin and Battle of King's Mountain is often overlooked. To reestablish Sevier's importance to

³ The State constitution limited the number of times an individual could be reelection to the governorship.

⁴ Cora Bales Sevier and Nancy S. Madden, *Sevier Family History: With the Collected Letters of Gen. John Sevier, First Governor of Tennessee, and 28 Collateral Family Lineages* (Washington, D.C.: Nancy S. Madden, 1961), 17.

Tennessee and American history, this study reexamines his life as well as his political and military careers through the lens of manhood. What biographies of Sevier exist fail to apply gender as an interpretive framework.⁵ By correcting the historiography and tackling the image of Sevier as a dueling, feuding, Indian killing, patriotic colonel, slave-owning, white southern frontier gentleman, this study attempts to uncover a more meaningful history of Tennessee's founder.

Attention to gender and manhood on the early national frontier is an important topic because it provides a point of entry into questions about national identity and citizenship during the early republic. By analyzing the transformation of manhood from the colonial to the early national periods, we come closer to understanding how the first generation of American men conceived the early republic and their role within it. Framed as a biography of Sevier, this project illustrates how frontiersmen understood their roles as men in a rapidly changing post-revolutionary frontier society. My goal is to study the life of Sevier thematically from the revolutionary battle of King's Mountain, in 1780, to

⁵ Works which explore this framework include: Ryan Dearing, "Violence, Masculinity, Image, and Reality on the Antebellum Frontier," *Indiana Magazine of History*, 100:1 (March 2004), 26-55; Nichole Etcheson, "Manliness and the Political Culture of the Old Northwest, 1790-1860," *Journal of the Early Republic* 15:1 (Spring 1995), 59-77; Thomas Foster, *Sex and the Eighteenth-Century Man: Massachusetts and the History of Sexuality in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006); Thomas Foster, Ed., *New Men: Manliness in Early America* (New York: New York University Press, 2001); Joanne Freeman, *Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001); Craig Thompson Friend and Lorri Glover, Eds., *Southern Manhood: Perspectives on Masculinity in the Old South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004); Lorri Glover, *Southern Sons: Becoming Men in the New Nation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007); Richard Godbeer, *The Overflowing Friendship: Love Between Men and the Creation of the American Republic* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009) and *Sexual Revolution in Early America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002); Elliot Gorn, "'Gouge and Bite, Pull Hair and Scratch': The Social Significance of Fighting in the Southern Backcountry," *American Historical Review*, 90:1 (February 1985), 18-43; Anne Lombard, *Making Manhood: Growing Up Male in Colonial New England* (London: Harvard University Press, 2003); Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1993); Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982).

his personal and political feud with Andrew Jackson, in 1803. What this study reveals are the changing understandings of manhood and politics from the late eighteenth to early nineteenth century.⁶

A gender framework avoids the sanctification so often associated with the revolutionary generation. Historian Gordon Wood argued, in *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*, that in the aftermath of the American Revolution, the founders became unrelatable demigods.⁷ As a frontier founder himself and a member of this revolutionary genteel class of men, Sevier shares a pedestal with other founding giants like Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, and Patrick Henry. The current biographic work has only continued this image, but Sevier's personal story reveals a more complicated chronicle. It is interesting that Sevier did not gain access to the genteel class until after the Revolution was well underway. Sevier became a significant political figure in the years that followed the Revolution; a period of time when Americans were overwhelmed with internal conflict over the meanings of manhood. In fact, most primary sources do not mention John Sevier as a political or military leader until the Battle of King's Mountain, in 1780, or the secession attempt of the State of Franklin, in 1784. It is clear that in the 1780s Sevier became the military and political leader in the Southwest Territory. His path to leadership illuminates the ways that political ideas behind the American Revolution launched a new class of men. In fact, Sevier offers a unique case-study into the transformation of American manhood and honor precisely because he fills the

⁶ William Bean made the first permanent settlement along the Watauga River in 1769, and with the 1770 Treaty of Lochaber (1770) "an almost unrelenting stream of pioneers ventured forth" into the Tennessee backcountry from Virginia and North Carolina [Paul H. Bergeron, *Paths of the Past: Tennessee, 1770-1970* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1979), 7].

⁷ Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), 368.

generational gap between Thomas Jefferson and Andrew Jackson. Sevier belonged to the founding generation, and like Thomas Jefferson, lived long enough to witness the collapse of the genteel-led political hierarchy.⁸ By the conclusion of the War of 1812, a new generation of politicians led the government. This group of men ushered in the Age of Jackson, and with it, a profoundly new interpretation of manhood and national citizenship.

Many historiographical influences shape my investigation of John Sevier. First, biographies of John Sevier and the methodologies which shape historical biography are critical to understanding Sevier's life and its broader significance. Second, this project engages scholarship on gender and manhood in early America. Third, the vast historiography on the revolutionary and early national trans-Appalachian frontiers frames my approach to Sevier.

Biographies enable historians to craft case studies representative of a particular group of people. While focusing on an individual, biographies highlight common characteristics and broad themes. Rhys Isaac's biography of Landon Carter and John Mack Faragher's biography of Daniel Boone are important models for this thesis. Faragher's *Daniel Boone: The Life and Legend of an American Pioneer* attempts to remove Daniel Boone from the folklore and provide a historically accurate portrait of the pioneer.⁹ Faragher states, in the introduction, that the materials he used for the biography document the life of Boone and "reveal the thoughts and feelings of the diverse peoples of the frontier....the things people choose to say about Boone provide clues to their own

⁸ For a history of this transition and its implications please see: Wood, *Radicalism of the American Revolution*, and Freeman, *Affairs of Honor*

⁹ Also useful in seeing the utility of biography is Kantrowitz's *Ben Tillman & the Reconstruction of White Supremacy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

concerns.”¹⁰ Approaching sources with attention to selective memory enables the biographer to reach beyond its subject and address the concerns of those living along the frontier. How the community viewed Sevier’s reputation is just as important, if not more important, than how Sevier thought about himself and his role in the new nation.

Similarly, Rhys Isaac’s *Landon Carter’s Uneasy Kingdom: Revolution and Rebellion on a Virginia Plantation* uses the diary of Landon Carter to reveal two things. First, Isaac strives to illustrate the world in which Carter lived in, “how he knew it...and as he saw it [unravel].”¹¹ Second, he presents the subject’s stories to expose “how they unfold a history far, far greater than themselves.”¹² This biography of Sevier will attempt to do the same. Like Farragher and Isaac’s studies, I will use Sevier’s diary and works written about him to reveal how frontier settlers understood their role in society. In the same way that Laurel Ulrich examined the diary of Martha Ballard in *A Midwife’s Tale*, I hope to use Sevier’s diary as a way to produce a rich story of an individual from faint and cryptic sources. Similar to Ballard’s diary, Sevier often used his diary to note his daily transactions and the weather. Few entries are particularly rich in detail or emotion.¹³

Existing biographical works do not paint an accurate portrait of the life of John Sevier. Rather, these biographies tell us more about the eras in which biographers wrote than about Sevier himself. The most recent biographical works on Sevier were published in the 1950s at the height of the communist red scare in America. This red scare brought unease to American citizens, and the biographies published during this era reflect this

¹⁰ John Mack Faragher, *Daniel Boone: The Legend and Life of an American Pioneer* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1992), xvi.

¹¹ Rhys Isaac, *Landon Carter’s Uneasy Kingdom: Revolution and Rebellion on a Virginia Plantation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), xiii.

¹² Isaac, *Landon Carter’s Uneasy Kingdom*, xiii.

¹³ Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife’s Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990).

uneasiness by highlighting Sevier's heroic military exploits at King's Mountain. In his work on the State of Franklin, Kevin Barksdale offers one explanation for this mid-century historiography of frontier history. He states that stories about Americans conquering foreign powers (the British) and Native Americans (the Cherokees) brought some comfort to the nation during the height of the Cold War. Americans were nostalgic for a familiar story of national origins. Even the best historic biography of Sevier, published by Vanderbilt historian Carl S. Driver in 1932, presents an idealistic image of John Sevier.¹⁴

By examining the language used in the works of Sevier and his contemporaries, this study will reconstruct the motivations of men from 1780-1815 from a more contemporary perspective. Bolstered by new scholarship on gender and manhood, I hope to paint a more complex portrait of Sevier than past biographers have achieved. Following the methodology of Faragher and Isaac, I plan to remove Sevier from folklore and use historiography of masculinity/manhood and the early national political culture to illustrate gender constructs in the Tennessee frontier.

¹⁴ Biographical works of Sevier include: Barksdale, *The Lost State of Franklin*; Carl S. Driver, *John Sevier, Pioneer of the Old Southwest* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1932); William H. Dyer, *Chucky Jack's A-Comin': The Thrilling Life & Times of John Sevier, Founder of Tennessee* (Gatlinburg: Great Smoky Mountains Historical Association, Inc., 1956); James R. Gilmore, *John Sevier as a Commonwealth Builder: A Sequel to the Rearguard of the Revolution* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1887) and *The Rear-Guard of the Revolution* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1886); Gordon Belt, *John Sevier: Tennessee's First Hero* (Charleston: The History Press, 2014); Helen Topping Miller, *The Sound of Chariots: A Novel of John Sevier and the State of Franklin* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1947); Dale Reed, *John Tipton, John Sevier, and the State of Franklin* (US: Tipton Family of America Association, 1998); Cora B. Sevier and Nancy S. Madden, *Sevier Family History: With the Collected Letters of Gen. John Sevier, First Governor of Tennessee, and 28 Collateral Family Lineages* (Washington, D. C.: Nancy S. Madden, 1961); William O Steele, *John Sevier, Pioneer Boy* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1953); Oliver Perry Temple, *John Sevier: Citizen, Soldier, Legislator, Governor, Statesman, 1744-1815* (Knoxville: The Zi-Po Press, 1910); Francis M. Turner, *Life of General John Sevier* (New York: The Neal Publishing Company, 1910); Katharine Elliot Wilkie, *John Sevier, Son of Tennessee: Born September 25, 1745, Died September 24, 1815* (Englewood Cliffs: Responsive Environments Corporation, 1958)

One of the primary goals in this study is to position frontier masculinity within current historiography on manhood. As such, it will integrate studies of southern honor, colonial manhood, and masculinity in early national political culture. Such scholarship brings new perspectives to the actions of Sevier and settlers of the Southwest Territory. In their 2004 collection, *Southern Manhood*, historians Craig Thompson Friend and Lorri Glover explain how “race, class, age, and locale allowed and sometimes forced communities and individuals to alter their perceptions of and requirements for manhood.”¹⁵ As such, this study considers how the special conditions of the frontier required alterations to previous constructs of manhood. In addition, Lorri Glover’s book, *Southern Sons* (2007) discusses the process in which boys become men in the South during the early national era. *Southern Sons* argues that stories of a generation of men reveal the hopes and fears of the new republic, including anxieties over the unraveling of colonial notions of gender and hierarchy. An analysis of Sevier’s life points to similar anxieties and explains the man’s actions.¹⁶

Equally crucial to this study is the scholarship on manhood and honor culture. Bertram Wyatt-Brown’s fundamental work, *Southern Honor*, argues that a man’s honor was his reputation. The defense of honor – the defense of a man’s reputation – explains dueling in the early republic. A man’s honor determined whether he was qualified to hold political office. The protection of a politician’s honor was essential to the maintenance of his genteel manhood. Joanne B. Freeman’s *Affairs of Honor* discusses the link between honor and politics during the context of the 1790s. Freeman argues that the fate of

¹⁵ Craig Thompson Friend and Lorri Glover, “Rethinking Southern Masculinity: An Introduction,” In *Southern Manhood: Perspectives on Masculinity in the Old South*, Craig Thompson Friend and Lorri Glover, eds. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004), x.

¹⁶ Friend and Glover, eds., *Southern Manhood*, and Glover, *Southern Sons*

America's politicians relied on, "the whims of the democratic many," and it was this "state of affairs that contributed to the volatility of early national politics and the defensive spirit of political leadership."¹⁷ Finally, the different constructions of manhood between the genteel and the common planter class are detailed in Rhys Isaac's *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790*. Isaac argues that through an analysis of Virginians' beliefs, values, and aspiration, during the revolutionary period, historians obtain a greater understanding of the genteel and common planter classes, and the world they knew.¹⁸

The explosion of new scholarship on manhood and masculinity in early America provides the critical historiographic framework through which to investigate Sevier.¹⁹ Anthony Rotundo's *American Manhood* argues that society's beliefs of manhood have played an influential part in creating the "kind of life and society" which exists today.²⁰ Anne Lombard's *Making Manhood*, like Rotundo's work, examines the construction of manhood in New England. Lombard argues that claims to manhood were based more on one's ability to attain "rationality, self-control, and mastery over whatever was passionate, sensual, and natural in the male self," than on having a male body.²¹ Important studies focusing on the sexuality of the eighteenth-century man by Thomas A. Foster and Richard Godbeer demonstrate sexuality's importance to the colonial man's

¹⁷ Freeman, *Affairs of Honor*, xv.

¹⁸ Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*; Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1982); Joanne Freeman, *Affairs of Honor*.

¹⁹ For current scholarship on sexuality and emotion during the eighteenth-century see the following works: Richard Godbeer's *Sexual Revolution in Early America* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2002); Thomas A. Foster, ed. *New Men: Manliness in Early America* (New York: New York University Press, 2011); Nicole Eustace, *Passion is the Gale: Emotion, Power, and the Coming of the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

²⁰ Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 6.

²¹ Lombard, *Making Manhood*, 8-9.

identity.²² The recent focus on gender in eighteenth-century America, by historians Foster and Godbeer, speaks to the importance of this thesis topic and its relevance to the current historiography.

Finally, this thesis explores the region of the early American backcountry. In the historiography of early America, the Appalachian Mountains often geographically define the frontier. The term “Appalachia” refers to a mountainous region most often associated with the South. However, the Appalachian Mountains span from Maine to Georgia. The region at the heart of this study, The Southwest Territory, belongs to what John Alexander Williams refers to as “Blue Ridge,” a portion of Appalachia’s regional core.²³ This thesis follows Williams’s argument, in *Appalachia: A History*, that Appalachia is a region which is at times distinct from, as well as in tune with, the south and the nation. Moreover, Williams argues against other scholars who suggest Appalachia is an imagined place, “a territory only of the mind...a place that has been invented, not discovered...projected onto the mountains and mountain people by reformers whose real purpose is to critique or change things in the nation at large.”²⁴ Still others argue that we should understand Appalachia as a microcosm for the nation, and that the actions of Appalachian settlers preceded every major American historical watershed.²⁵

²² See: Thomas A. Foster, *Sex and the Eighteenth-Century Man: Massachusetts and the History of Sexuality in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006); Thomas A. Foster, ed. *New Men: Manliness in Early America* (New York: New York University, 2011); Richard Godbeer, *The Overflowing of Friendship: Love Between Men and the Creation of the American Republic* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009); Richard Godbeer, *Sexual Revolution in Early America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002).

²³ John Alexander Williams, *Appalachia: A History* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 13.

²⁴ Williams, *Appalachia*, 9.

²⁵ These works include: Jeff Biggers, *The United States of Appalachia: How Southern Mountaineers Brought Independence, Culture, and Enlightenment to America* (New York: Shoemaker and Hoard, 2006); John Anthony Caruso, *The Appalachian Frontier: America’s First Surge Westward* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1959); Henry Shapiro,

Geographic areas in which conflict between native and colonial societies occurs are most often referred to as frontiers.²⁶ There is no single frontier; however, frontiers exists when there is interaction between Euro- and Native Americans (most often in the form of violence). Scholarship on violence along the Anglo-Native frontier is critical to this project, because important chapters of Sevier's life involve war with Indians. For example, Seth Mallios's *The Deadly Politics of Giving: Exchange and Violence at Ajacan, Roanoke, and Jamestown* argues that violence between Euro-Americans and Native Americans in the earliest settlements can be explained by examining the political expectations behind gift exchange. Mallios's work provides answers to why Cherokee raided the Southwest Territory. Works that conceptualize the frontier through Euro-Native interaction are particularly valuable. For instance, *Contact Points: American Frontiers from the Mohawk Valley to the Mississippi, 1750-1830*, proposes that there were many frontiers in early America rather than a singular frontier suggested by Fredrick Jackson Turner's *The Frontier in American History*.²⁷ This is a useful analytical

Appalachia on Our Mind: The southern Mountains and Mountaineers in the American Consciousness, 1870-1920 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978); Constance Lindsay Skinner, *Pioneers of the Old Southwest: A Chronicle of the Dark and Bloody Ground* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1920); Allen Batteau, *The Invention of Appalachia* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1990)

²⁶ For significant debates over the identity of the frontier and its relationship to the Native American see: Andrew Cayton and Fredrika Teute, eds., *Contact Points: American Frontiers from the Mohawk Valley to the Mississippi, 1750-1830* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Patrick Griffin, *American Leviathan: Empire, Nation, and Revolutionary Frontier* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007); Elizabeth Perkins, *Border Life: Experience and Memory in the Revolutionary Ohio Valley* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Peter Silver, *Our Savage Neighbors: How Indian War Transformed Early America* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008); Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1920); Franklin D. Roosevelt, *Winning of the West*, volumes 1-4; John Alexander Williams, *Appalachia: A History* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, Press, 2002)

²⁷ See also, François Furstenberg's "The Significance of the Trans-Appalachian Frontier in Atlantic History," *American Historical Review* 113:3 (June 2008): 647-677. Also used here will be Elizabeth A. Perkins's *Border Life: Experience and Memory in the Revolutionary Ohio Valley*

perspective because it shows the mobility of ‘the frontier’ and supports the argument that the frontier is an idea rather than a place. This study will consider how frontier exchange and violence shaped Sevier’s understanding of manhood and gentility against an Indian enemy.²⁸

Scholarship on eighteenth-century Tennessee and the Southwest Territory is also essential to the historiography of the southern frontier.²⁹ James G. M. Ramsey’s *Annals of Tennessee* periodizes the settlement of the Southwest Territory into distinct phases: the Watauga Association (1769-1777), Washington County, North Carolina (1777-1784), the State of Franklin (1784-1788), part of North Carolina (1788-1790), the Southern Ohio United States Territory (1790-1796), and the State of Tennessee (1796-1800). This periodization is necessary because it defines the Southwest Territory’s ownership. Samuel Cole Williams published the best historical work on Tennessee’s role in the Revolutionary War, in 1944, entitled *Tennessee During the Revolutionary War*. This work details the Cherokee wars in the 1770s and 1780s as well as the famous Battle of

(Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998). Perkins seeks to reconstruct how ordinary people (both Native and white) made sense of the borderlands they inhabited.

²⁸ Useful studies include: Peter Silver, *Our Savage Neighbors: How Indian War Transformed Early America* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008); Fred Anderson, *Crucible of War: The Seven Years’ War and the Fate of Empire in British North America, 1754-1766* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000).

²⁹ An extensive amount of research on Tennessee’s frontier has been published: Constance L. Skinner’s *Pioneers of the Old Southwest: A Chronicle of the Dark and Bloody Ground* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1920); Thomas P. Abernethy’s *From Frontier to Plantation in Tennessee: A Study in Frontier Democracy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1932); John A. Caruso’s *The Appalachian Frontier: America’s First Surge Westward* (Indianapolis and New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1959); John Haywood’s *The Natural and Aboriginal History of Tennessee: Up to the First Settlements therein by the white people in the Year 1768* (Kingsport: F. M. Hill-Books, 1973); Mary F. Caldwell’s *Tennessee: The Dangerous Example, Watauga to 1849* (Nashville: Aurora Publishers, Inc., 1974); Brenda C. Calloway’s *America’s First Western Frontier: East Tennessee, A story of the early settlers and Indians of East Tennessee*, edited by Jay R. Reese (Johnson City: The Overmountain Press, 1989); John R. Finger’s *Tennessee Frontiers: Three Regions in Transition* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001)

King's Mountain. Also useful to this study is Williams's first chapter in which he discusses the characteristics of settlers in the Southwest Territory. Paul H. Bergeron employs both Ramsey's *Annals* and Williams's *Tennessee During the Revolutionary War* in his synthesis, *Paths of the Past: Tennessee, 1770-1970*, published in 1979. Although many great articles have been written on the State of Franklin, only Kevin T. Barksdale's book, *The Lost State of Franklin: America's First Secession*, accurately portrays the complicated series of events which led to secession.³⁰ Prior to Barksdale, only three major works had been published on the State of Franklin. Those works include Ramsey's *Annals*, John Haywood's *The Civil and Political History of Tennessee* (1891), and Samuel William's *History of the Lost State of Franklin* (1933). Barksdale says that these works are important to the historiography because they inspired historians to research the State of Franklin, but their greatest downfall is that they relied too heavily on oral histories.

Sevier is most often memorialized for his military participation, but he participated in a number of other "battles" which were political, diplomatic, and personal. Using Sevier as a case study enables us to examine the generational gap between Thomas Jefferson and Andrew Jackson. From 1780 to 1815 men of political importance struggled with their identity within the fledgling nation. Men framed their political and personal battles as affairs of honor to justify their actions. Not only did Sevier justify his diplomatic and personal battles as affairs of honor, he belittled his enemies to rationalize violence. His military legacy is important, and historians should not overlook it.

³⁰ See also: Noel B. Gerson's *Franklin: America's "Lost State"* (New York: Crowell-Collier Press, 1968)

The sections of this study move thematically with a loose chronology. The first chapter discusses the revolutionary battle of King's Mountain as well as number of Native American wars during the 1780s and 1790s. Sevier led all of these campaigns and his leadership in these battles cemented his honor and reputation as a valiant military commander. This first chapter considers how eighteenth century men used language as a means of justifying their brutal acts. Europeans, Cherokee, and Americans utilized gendered language to simultaneously bolster their own society and belittle their enemy. While this chapter discusses the most popular episode of Sevier's life, it takes a different and more meaningful approach to it.

The second chapter discusses the diplomatic battles of Sevier and their significance. The Battle of Franklin and the Spanish Intrigue both occurred in 1788 during the short-lived State of Franklin. These events reveal that eighteenth-century men did not always resort to violence when their honor was threatened. Diplomacy allowed men to negotiate peacefully. When diplomacy failed, violence ensued. Sevier's biographers have mentioned his participation in both events, but fail to analyze these events as affairs of honor.

The final section analyzes the personal battles of Sevier. Politics plays a central role in Sevier's personal disputes with shopkeeper David Deaderick and Andrew Jackson. These two episodes occurred fifteen years apart and although they both began as verbal disputes, their outcomes were very different. Sevier's quarrel with Deaderick did not damage his personal or public honor. His disagreement with Jackson severely injured Sevier's honor and political reputation. It is such a significant dispute, that many

historians mark it as the beginning of Jackson's rise to and Sevier's fall from political preeminence. Thus, this chapter marks an appropriate conclusion to the study.

CHAPTER ONE
A “MASCULINE DISCOURSE”: VIOLENCE AND MASCULINITY IN TENNESSEE’S
BACKCOUNTRY WARS, 1780-1793

John Sevier is perhaps best known for his service in Lord Dunmore’s War of 1774, the Battle of King’s Mountain in 1780, and the numerous Cherokee and Creek Indian wars in the 1780s and 1790s. In the eighteenth century, Europeans, Americans, and Native Americans used language to rationalize violence and belittle their opponents. By analyzing Sevier’s correspondence and that of his rivals, we can better understand how ideas of masculinity and “otherness” served as justifications for war and shaped Sevier’s sense of self.

A number of studies examine how eighteenth-century societies used language as a mechanism to belittle their opponents and thereby justify their brutality and violence. Scholars have examined the relationship between revolutions and filial dissension, namely Jay Fliegelman and Lynn Hunt. These historians argue that eighteenth century revolutions, in France and America, were revolts against patriarchal authority.¹ The language which men used during the American Revolution to describe separation demonstrates Hunt and Fliegelman’s claims. Men used this type of language to justify their violent revolts against colonial rule. Similarly, Sevier and other frontiersmen used language as a means of justifying native brutality. Richard White explains that “Indian hating” was a type of “othering” which emerged out of the middle ground.² Backcountry settlers deeply distrusted Native Americans because of their previous alliances with

¹ Works which analyze the power of language during the revolution see: Wayne Lee, *Crowds and Soldiers in Revolutionary North Carolina* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2001), especially part II “Virtuous War”; Jay Fliegelman, *Prodigals and Pilgrims: The American Revolution against Patriarchal Authority, 1750-1800* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982)

² See Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), especially “the consent of villagers.” Also useful when looking at native “othering” are: Patrick Griffin, *American Leviathan: Empire, Nation, and Revolutionary Frontier* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007); Peter Silver, *Our Savage Neighbors: How Indian War Transformed Early America* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008); Fred Anderson, *Crucible of War: The Seven Years’ War and the Fate of Empire in British North America, 1754-1766* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000).

European empires.³ Men created an “other” through language. Creating an “other” justified one’s violent and often brutal acts against an enemy.⁴

Two military episodes, in Sevier’s life, demonstrate the power of rhetoric and shed light on what men considered proper and immoral behavior. The first conflict, the Battle of King’s Mountain, was responsible for elevating Sevier to political offices. The second conflict involved a series of raids into Cherokee territory between 1788 and 1793. These Indian raids helped Sevier define his status as a military leader.

The Battle of King’s Mountain is often described as a crucial turning point in the American Revolution. This watershed battle occurred on October 7, 1780, though “under the blaze of the crowning triumph at Yorktown, its splendor was obscured.”⁵ The patriot forces consisted of troops from Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and present-day Tennessee.⁶ Members of British Major Patrick Ferguson’s army outmatched, but did not outnumber the patriot force. The battle itself was an important part of England’s “southern strategy.” Hoping to secure the southern theater and terminate the war, Ferguson sent an ultimatum to the American officers of Watauga, Nolichucky, and Holston. He warned that if these “backwater” men did not discontinue sheltering war refugees and opposing the British crown, he would “march his army over the mountains, hang their leaders, and lay their country waste with fire and sword.”⁷ In response to Ferguson’s threat, western military leaders, Colonel Isaac Shelby and Sevier planned

³ For a discussion of Native-European alliances in North America see Brett Rushforth, *Bonds of Alliance: Indigenous & Atlantic Slavery in New France* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012)

⁴ Edward W. Said’s *Orientalism* discusses the process, benefits, and downfalls of colonial powers creating an “other.” For a discussion of “othering” see Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, 1978).

⁵ Oliver Perry Temple, *John Sevier: Citizen, Soldier, Legislator, Governor, Statesman, 1744-1815* (Knoxville: The Zi-Po Press, 1910), 11.

⁶ By adding up the total of each wing listed in the official report of the battle we get a total of 1,590. Assuming the commanding officers are not included in this count, the total is raised to 1,596. Therefore I have rounded up to 1,600. (“Extract of another letter, dated Portsmouth, November 16, 1780,” *The Virginia Gazette*, November 18, 1780, 89, page 3, Williamsburg, VA)

⁷ Lyman C. Draper, *King’s Mountain and Its Heroes: History of the Battle of King’s Mountain, October 7th, 1780, and the Events Which Led to It* (Cincinnati: Peter G. Thomson, 1881), 169.

a surprise attack on Ferguson's army. With a frontier militia assembled, Shelby wrote to Colonel William Campbell of Virginia, believing his men strong but not numerous enough to defeat Ferguson's forces. Campbell first declined to join because he was planning an attack of his own, but eventually agreed to combine forces.⁸ Having no one man of superior rank to command the patriots in battle, Shelby requested General Gates to send a general officer for this purpose.⁹ Shelby reasoned that because Campbell travelled the furthest, was the only colonel from Virginia, and brought the largest regiment to battle, that he should serve as commander-in-chief.¹⁰ Having no money to outfit a militia, John Adair, the State Officer for the State of North Carolina Lands, donated \$12,735 to the patriot's cause.¹¹ With a militia outfitted, campaign funded, and commander to lead them, the Overmountain Men were ready to fight Ferguson and his army.

Upon hearing about the assembled backcountry forces, Ferguson issued a proclamation to the inhabitants of North Carolina. In this general proclamation, he used gendered language to challenge men still loyal to the English Crown to fight the approaching patriots.

Gentlemen: Unless you wish to be eat up by an inundation of barbarians, who have begun by murdering an unarmed son before the aged father and afterwards lopped off his arms, and who by their shocking cruelties and irregularities, give the best proof of their cowardice and want of discipline; I say, if you wish to be pinioned, robbed and murdered, and see your wives and daughters, in four days, abused by the dregs of mankind – in short if you wish or deserve to live, and bear the name of men grasp your arms in a moment and run to camp.

The Back Water men have crossed the mountains; McDowell, Hampton, Shelby and Cleveland are at their head, so that you know what you have to depend upon. If you choose to be p-d upon by a set of mongrels so say so at once, and let your women turn their backs upon you and look out for real men to protect them.

⁸ Helen Chandler, *The Battle of King's Mountain: "The Turning Point of the American Revolution," October 7, 1780* (Gastonia: Publicity Committee of the Sesqui-Centennial Celebration Committee, 1930), 20.

⁹ Samuel Cole Williams, *Tennessee During the Revolutionary War* (Nashville: Tennessee Historical Commission, 1944), 148.

¹⁰ Williams, *Tennessee During the Revolutionary War*, 149; Chandler, *The Battle of King's Mountain*, 22. For decisions leading up to battle see William's chapter on the Battle of King's Mountain.

¹¹ Edmund Kirke, "Knoxville in Olden Times," *Harper's Magazine*, LXXI (June 1885), 70, quoted in Cora B. Sevier and Nancy S. Madden *Sevier Family History*, 37.

Pat Ferguson, Major 71st Regiment¹²

The purpose of Ferguson's letter is clear: to gather more troops. In order to appeal to men not already bearing arms, he included, what historian Wayne Lee explains as, "a particularly unobvious appeal to masculine values of protecting women....[it was] hardly the kind of rhetoric to inspire restraint."¹³

Ferguson appealed to North Carolina gentlemen's commitment to patriarchal allegiance and masculinity to entice them to fight. Englishmen on both sides of the Atlantic in the eighteenth century used, "the language of paternalism and filial obligation...to describe their hierarchical experiences."¹⁴ Colonists in defending separation from the crown called the King of England a "tyrannical father" and "bad father."¹⁵ Similarly, Ferguson's proclamation used the language of patriarchy to describe the frontiersmen. The letter opens with a description of these back water

¹² Major Pat Ferguson to the Inhabitants of North Carolina, October 1, 1780, In Williams, *Tennessee During the Revolutionary War*, 151.

¹³ Lee, *Crowds and Soldiers in Revolutionary North Carolina*, 204.

For a information on honor, masculinity, and manhood see: Ryan Dearing, "Violence, Masculinity, Image, and Reality on the Antebellum Frontier," *Indiana Magazine of History*, 100:1 (March 2004), 26-55; Nichole Etcheson, "Manliness and the Political Culture of the Old Northwest, 1790-1860," *Journal of the Early Republic* 15:1 (Spring 1995), 59-77; Thomas Foster, *Sex and the Eighteenth-Century Man: Massachusetts and the History of Sexuality in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006); Thomas Foster, Ed., *New Men: Manliness in Early America* (New York: New York University Press, 2001); Joanne Freeman, *Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001); Craig Thompson Friend and Lorri Glover, Eds., *Southern Manhood: Perspectives on Masculinity in the Old South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004); Lorri Glover, *Southern Sons: Becoming Men in the New Nation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007); Richard Godbeer, *The Overflowing Friendship: Love Between Men and the Creation of the American Republic* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009) and *Sexual Revolution in Early America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002); Elliot Gorn, "'Gouge and Bite, Pull Hair and Scratch': The Social Significance of Fighting in the Southern Backcountry," *American Historical Review*, 90:1 (February 1985), 18-43; Anne Lombard, *Making Manhood: Growing Up Male in Colonial New England* (London: Harvard University Press, 2003); Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1993); Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982).

¹⁴ Gordon Wood, *Radicalism of the American Revolution*, 43.

¹⁵ For a discussion on the relationship between filial obligation and revolutionary rhetoric see: Fliegelman, *Prodigals and Pilgrims*, and Lynn Hunt, *Family Romance of the French Revolution* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

men as barbarians who killed an “unarmed son” in front of his “aged father.” Such language was deeply coded. The unarmed son was Tories and Loyalists (British subjects living in the colonies) and the “aged father” was the King of England. The “irregular” barbarian fell outside the language of patriarchy. Ferguson did not view the frontiersmen as Englishmen. The letter also suggested that these men removed the hands of justice (“lopped of his arm”) and, like dependents, needed discipline. Ferguson concluded the first portion of the proclamation by suggesting that if these gentlemen did not wish “the dregs of mankind” to rob them of their manhood, then they should meet at British camp within four days to fight.¹⁶

The second half of Ferguson’s proclamation abandoned the language of patriarchy and adopted the language of manhood. Ferguson’s proclamation concluded with the intelligence he received of the patriot forces, including who led them. He listed four colonels he believed at the head of the party and suggested that they were incapable commanders. These accusations were not unfounded, at least in the case of Colonel Charles McDowell who, after an earlier campaign in South Carolina, received criticism for sending his men to fight in the front lines while he stayed behind.¹⁷

The final line of Ferguson’s general decree exploited the language of manhood. It gave the gentlemen of North Carolina two choices eternal disgrace and the loss of their manhood or the defense of their honor from a group of lawless barbarians.¹⁸ The censored word (p-d) most likely means “pissed.” Being urinated on, or having urine thrown on you, was considered one of the

¹⁶ For a discussion on the relationship between filial obligation and revolutionary rhetoric see: Fliegelman, *Prodigals and Pilgrims*, and Hunt, *Family Romance of the French Revolution*.

¹⁷ “He lacked an essential element of a military leader, having shown lack of initiative, slowness and a disposition to send rather than lead into battle those under him.” Williams, *Tennessee During the Revolutionary War*, 148.

¹⁸ For information on manhood see: Dearinger, “Violence, Masculinity, Image, and Reality on the Antebellum Frontier”; Etcheson, “Manliness and the Political Culture of the Old Northwest, 1790-1860”; Foster, *Sex and the Eighteenth-Century Man*; Foster, Ed., *New Men*; Freeman, *Affairs of Honor*; Friend and Glover, Eds., *Southern Manhood*; Glover, *Southern Sons*; Godbeer, *The Overflowing Friendship and Sexual Revolution in Early America*; Gorn, “Gouge and Bite, Pull Hair and Scratch”; Lombard, *Making Manhood*; Rotundo, *American Manhood*; Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*.

greatest insults.¹⁹ It demonstrated that the public did not recognize a man's honor and therefore could insult his reputation without the threat of retaliation. A presentation of Ferguson's letter appeared during the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the battle of King's Mountain. The explicative "pissed" was replaced with "degraded forever and ever."²⁰ This supported the idea that being urinated upon remained one of the most degrading forms of public expression.

Ferguson did not stop there, he continued by suggesting that these gentlemen's wives would leave them for "real men" if they did not fight. Ferguson's suggestion that these men's wives would leave them was methodological and deliberate. He knew that challenging this relationship would have inspired them to fight.²¹ The battle commenced six days later, and after an hour of fighting, and the death of Maj. Ferguson, the British surrendered defeat.²²

Ferguson's message to the gentlemen of North Carolina demonstrates the potential power of language in the eighteenth century. Ferguson sought to inspire these loyalists to fight by threatening their masculinity. His use of masculine language was both methodological and deliberate. He understood that the suggestion that one's wife and children would suffer at the hands of another man required a response, and used this to his advantage. Additionally, Ferguson justified the impending violence against the "backwater" men by making them an "other." He dehumanizes these men by calling them human waste.

¹⁹ In *Southern Honor*, Wyatt-Brown tells a story of women emptying their urine bowls on the heads of men returning home, defeated, from battle. Returning home defeated was almost as dishonorable as avoiding battle.

²⁰ Francis Marion Turner, *Life of General John Sevier* (New York: The Neal Publishing Co., 1910), 117.

²¹ For a discussion on the relationship between filial obligation and revolutionary rhetoric see: Fliegelman, *Prodigals and Pilgrims*, and Hunt, *Family Romance of the French Revolution*. Also see Lee, "Part II: The Virtuous War," in *Crowds and Soldiers in Revolutionary North Carolina*, 99-211.

²² William Davidson claimed it took only 47 minutes of fighting before British surrender (William Davidson to Brig. Gen. Jethro Sumner, October 10, 1780, NCSR, XIV, 685 Quoted in Cora Bales Sevier and Nancy S. Madden, *Sevier Family History*, 38). The official report claims only 65 minutes ("Extract of another letter, dated Portsmouth, November 16, 1780," *The Virginia Gazette*, November 18, 1780, 89, page 3, Williamsburg, VA). Shelby's letter to his father says it only took an hour ("Extract of a letter from Col. Isaac Shelby to his Father upon Holston, Dated October 12, 1780," *The Virginia Gazette*, November 4, 1780, 87, page 2, Williamsburg, VA).

* * *

Similar to Ferguson's rhetoric surrounding the Battle of King's Mountain, frontier settlers used language to dehumanize their native neighbors.²³ Patrick Griffin's *American Leviathan* explains that, during the American Revolution, westerners began embracing the idea that "race, not class, should represent the most salient marker of identity."²⁴ News of racially charged violence and anecdotes supporting this violence appeared in newspapers across the southern frontier. In September of 1792 the *Knoxville Gazette* published an "Anecdote" about a Cherokee who drank himself to death with whiskey. The white man from Indian country, who submitted the story, stated that this was a "good Indian," meaning that a dead Indian is a good one.²⁵ White settlers favored extinguishing the Indian race over sharing land and extending sovereignty to them.²⁶

John Sevier's experience in Lord Dunmore's War and subsequent Indian Wars along the Tennessee frontier informed his hatred for Native Americans. According to *American Leviathan*, John Sevier's experience was not exceptional. Griffin states that violence between natives and whites during the American Revolution resulted in fading class and political identities. In turn, race became the unifying characteristic against foreign enemies. Scholars have described this process of racializing the Indian enemy in a variety of contexts from the seventeenth century onward. Peter Silver's and Fred Anderson's studies place the beginning of native-white violence in the Seven Years' War.²⁷ Other scholars place this racialized violence in an earlier time period. For example, Jill Lepore traces it to King Philip's War in the 1670s. Lepore argues that during

²³ For background on the "othering" see Said, *Orientalism* (1978)

²⁴ Patrick Griffin, *American Leviathan*, 14.

²⁵ "Anecdote," *Knoxville Gazette* I:24, 24 September 1792 (microfiche)

²⁶ For information on "indian hating" see White, *Middle Ground*.

²⁷ Peter Silver, *Our Savage Neighbors: How Indian War Transformed Early America* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2008); Fred Anderson, *Crucible of War: The Seven Years' War and the Fate of Empire in British North America, 1754-1766* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 2000).

and after King Philip's War, white colonists racialized violence. She explains that colonists made similar distinctions between themselves and the British during the Revolution.²⁸

The rhetoric Sevier and white settlers used to describe Cherokee and Creek hostilities in the 1790s is a legacy of earlier wars. Cherokee warriors killed Sevier's brother's family during the Seven Years' War.²⁹ Sevier inherited deep traditions of "othering" the Indian enemy as savage.³⁰ Throughout the Revolutionary War, the frontier settlers fought two enemies simultaneously. Not only did they send troops to King's Mountain to face Ferguson and loyalists, they had to defend themselves against the Cherokee, who allied with the British during the American Revolutionary War. From 1775 to 1782 the Chickamauga and Cherokees enacted a series of violent raids on white settlers. Southern newspapers document a number of lives lost from these attacks throughout this period. The settler's inherited their hatred for Cherokees and Creeks during the 1790s from earlier wars with Europeans and Native Americans.³¹

When Sevier and his military comrades reported news of Cherokee and Creek hostilities, they most often associated them with the Spanish and English governments. For example, the *Knoxville Gazette* published information regarding a Cherokee attack on Buchannan's Station on October 20, 1792. The article stated that the sudden change of Cherokee conduct towards white settlers should be "justly...charged upon the Spanish government."³² In other words, Sevier believed that the Spanish government conceived the idea to attack Buchannan's Station, and that

²⁸ Jill Lepore, *The Name of War: King Philip's War and the Origins of American Identity* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998).

Peter Silver, Tyler Boulware, and Patrick Griffin agree that in some point prior to the eighteenth century, colonists began distinguishing natives from themselves and racializing their violence as a justification.

²⁹ James Sevier to Lyman C. Draper, 19 August 1839, James Sevier Letters, MS-1565

³⁰ "othering": Said, *Orientalism*.

³¹ Works detailing the Cherokee's participation in the American Revolutionary War include: Colin G. Calloway, *The American Revolution in Indian Country: Crisis and Diversity in Native American Communities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); James K. Swisher, *The Revolutionary War in the Southern Back Country* (Gretna: Pelican Publishing Company, 2008)

³² "Intelligence from the Cherokee nation respecting the Attack on Buchannan's station," *Knoxville Gazette* 1:26, 20 Oct. 1792 (microfiche).

the Cherokee were allies with a common purpose. Although probable, whether or not the Spanish were behind these hostilities is unclear. The Cherokee and Creek Indians had enough contempt for white settlers to form an attack on their own agenda.³³

The October attack on Buchanan's Station was not an isolated event. Cherokee and Creek Indians flooded the frontier settlements with violent raids from 1791 to 1795. In response, John Sevier led a number of Indian campaigns from 1791-1793. Again in December of 1792, the *Knoxville Gazette* published an account of Cherokee and Creek hostilities. The article credits the Spanish with enticing and supplying the Indians. It reads: "every account from the Creeks and Cherokees, affords additional proofs, that the Spaniards have supplied them with guns, swords, and ammunition, and excited them to go to war against the United States."³⁴ In his private writings, it is clear that Sevier thought the Spanish were at fault, as well:

This Country is wholly involved in a war with the Creek and Cherokee Indians, I am not able to suggest the occasion or the previous cause of their actions....The Spaniards is making use of all their art to levee over the Southern Tribes and I fear have stimulated them to commence hostilities. Governor [William] Blount has indefatigably labored to keep those people in a pacific humour but...all in vain. War is unavoidable....[and] would in my opinion become almost insupportable.³⁵

Alliances were extremely important to Native Americans. Natives distrusted American settlers, so much so, that they sided with European empires in failed attempts to push American settlers off their lands. Settlers of southern Appalachia fought with natives almost non-stop during the eighteenth century, and as Sevier noted, at the turn of the century, they could no longer support this violent opposition.

³³ A combination of white expansion, illegal land acquisition, violence, and military expeditions into their towns fostered hostility between natives and whites. In many treaty negotiations, native representatives highlighted these atrocities as reasons for their distrust.

³⁴ *Knoxville Gazette* 2:3, 1 Dec. 1792 (microfiche).

³⁵ John Sevier Letter, 30 Oct. 1792, MS 3231.

Sevier went to great length to justify American barbarity as different from that of Indian violence. This reflects a long history of creating the Indian “other” that was inhuman and cruel as a way to excuse white brutality. Historian Peter Silver argues that in killing ninety-six unarmed Delaware Christians, the Pennsylvania militia became the savages they sought to eradicate in the 1782 Gnadenhütten Massacre.³⁶ Historian Tyler Boulware asserts that “attacking civilians may have been acceptable to Indians...but it was considered dishonorable and, more important, undisciplined in eighteenth-century European warfare.”³⁷ Because Sevier belonged to the Euro-American aristocracy, he inherited these ideas of warfare.³⁸ Although Euro-Americans and Europeans routinely attacked Native people, they rationalized their actions as justified behind a rhetoric that created narratives of Indian savagery.

Two examples, specific to the Tennessee frontier, demonstrate what Euro-American men might have considered unacceptable killing. In a letter to Lyman C. Draper, James Sevier, John Sevier’s son, detailed the 1782 Indian raid in which “one Ralston...came upon [an aged squaw] and shot her and took her scalp.” James added that the company of men “tormented Ralston unmercifully,” by yelling “Who scalped granny?” and shouting in reply “Ralston.” James concluded that Ralston “found no peace the rest of the campaign, but kept at a distance of a hundred yards from the army.”³⁹ From this example it is clear that there was no honor in killing an old Cherokee woman. Moreover, this instance suggests that killing Cherokee warriors was acceptable behavior, while killing Cherokee civilians, women, and children was not.

In his communications with fellow gentlemen, Sevier used language that emphasized the masculine protection of women and children. In a letter to William Blount, he stated that “many

³⁶ For more information see chapter nine in: Silver, *Our Savage Neighbors*, 261-292. Also see Griffin’s *American Leviathan*.

³⁷ Boulware, “‘We are Men’,” in *New Men*, 58.

³⁸ Lee, *Crowds and Soldiers in Revolutionary North Carolina*

³⁹ Draper MSS-32 S cited in E. Raymond Evans, “Was the Last Battle of the American Revolution Fought on Lookout Mountain?” *Journal of Cherokee Studies* 5:1 (Spring 1980), 33.

women and children might have been taken,” during his 1793 campaign, but that he “did not encourage it to be done.” Although backcountry armies routinely attacked women and children, as a matter of war, Sevier tried to distance himself from this in language. In addition, he states that Blount knew the “disposition” of the many men on the expedition, and could “readily account for this conduct.” He knew and accepted that he could not control the temptations of every man, and distanced himself from the situation.⁴⁰

Similarly, in a letter to John Watts, Colonel Arthur Campbell stated that since the Revolution, settlers have desired peace between whites and Indians, but “inconsiderate young men of the Cherokee nation interrupted these bright prospects, by killing innocent [people]. – And to our shame, some white men have been bad also.”⁴¹ Silver suggests that because eighteenth-century militiamen lost their wives and children during early Native American raids, they enacted revenge upon Indians because they shared the same physical features as those who murdered their neighbors and family members.⁴²

While Sevier openly admitted that not all his men were of the most honorable character in his letter to Blount, he applauded the character of his brigade in the *Knoxville Gazette*.

The orderly and regular behavior of these troops, since their arrival in this town, has gained them the highest honor; and we have every reason to hope, that from the activity, bravery, and good conduct of this army, our bleeding country will be well supported and defended, and perhaps entirely relieved, from the bloody barbarous, and unrelenting bands of merciless savages.⁴³

Sevier communicated a different judgment of his regiment to the citizens of Knoxville than he did to Blount, because he realized that they desired a heroic portrait of their militia. Moreover,

⁴⁰ John Sevier to Gov. William Blount, 25 Oct. 1793, cited in *Sevier Family History*, 114-115.

⁴¹ “Copy of a letter from Colonel Arthur Campbell too Captain John Watts,” *Knoxville Gazette* 1:7, 28 Jan. 1792 (microfiche)

⁴² Silver, *Our Savage Neighbors*, 273.

⁴³ *Knoxville Gazette* 2:1, 3 Nov. 1792 (microfiche). Note that the Indians, and not the Spanish are responsible for the bloodshed.

publically acknowledging that the men under his command were not honorable soldiers might have stained the campaign. Such rhetoric illustrates the great lengths Sevier went to in recasting the actions of backcountry militias in a favorable light.

While cultural differences between natives and whites prevented them from understanding each other's actions in battle, they often used gendered language to communicate with each other. Boulware terms this type of communication "masculine discourse."⁴⁴ Whites and Indians used different modes of correspondence. Whites sent letters directly to their enemies, while the Cherokee published speeches in newspapers. In October 1792, Hanging Maw published a letter addressed to William Cocks which directly challenged his masculinity. It read, "You are not a man and a warrior – but to make people believe you are, you talk of having killed Keanna," because killing men in peaceful times "are not the actions of men and warriors."⁴⁵ In a letter to Hanging Maw, Red Bird declared that white men who sought council with Cherokee are only "pretended warriors." The *Knoxville Gazette* published this letter in November of 1792. From these two letters, it is clear that the Cherokee warriors did not think highly of the white frontiersmen – especially Hanging Maw.

In his correspondence with Cherokee leaders, Sevier also used this "masculine discourse." In 1793, after raiding the Cherokee country for almost a year, John Sevier wrote a letter to the "Cherokee and their warriors, if they have Any":

Your murders and savage Barbarities have caused me to come into your Country
 Expecting you would fight like men, but you are like the [Bears] and Wolves.
 The face of a white man makes you run fast into the woods and hide, you see
 what we have done and it is nothing to what we shall do in a short time. I pity
 your women and children for I am sure they must suffer and live like dogs but
 you are the cause of it. You will make war, and then [are] afraid to fight, - our

⁴⁴ Boulware, "'We are Men,'" in *New Men*, 55.

⁴⁵ *Knoxville Gazette* 1:26, 20 Oct. 1792 (microfiche)

people [whipped] yours mightily two nights ago Crossing the river and [making] your people run very fast.⁴⁶

Such commentary reflects Cherokee ways of war as interpreted through American standards of manhood. According to Boulware, Cherokee warriors valued the preservation of life and therefore often ran from a fight when they were disadvantaged. As well, he argues that Cherokee often evacuated their towns when white forces invaded rather than standing their ground and defending their homes. Both of these acts followed appropriate gender norms for men within Cherokee society, because “protecting village populations was...more important to Cherokee manhood than safeguarding village infrastructures.”⁴⁷ In turn, “colonial soldiers could feel secure in their manhood because they not only decimated Cherokee towns but also drove warriors from the field.”⁴⁸ This was not the first encounter Sevier had with the Cherokee, and it was probably not the first time that Cherokee warriors ran from Sevier and his forces. Considering this, Sevier, most likely, intentionally recasted the Cherokee men’s actions and interpreted their flight as cowardly evasion. In recasting the intentions of the Cherokee warriors, Sevier justified the violence of his military campaign. He claimed that Cherokee men were unwilling to fight for their families, and therefore deserved defeat. It is through rhetoric like this that Sevier established himself as a military hero.

Violence played an important role in the lives of white and Indian men during the eighteenth-century Tennessee frontier. Violence was an essential component to the creation and maintenance of Cherokee and white manhood. The use of “masculine discourse” provided whites and Indians with a common language.⁴⁹ Cherokee and Tennessee frontiersmen used gendered language throughout the late eighteenth century. Society played an important role in determining

⁴⁶ John Sevier Diary, 20 Oct. 1793, MS-1782

⁴⁷ Boulware, “‘We are Men’,” in *New Men*, 64.

⁴⁸ Boulware, “‘We are Men’,” in *New Men*, 61.

⁴⁹ Boulware, “‘We are Men’,” in *New Men*, 55.

what types of violence were acceptable or immoral. Sevier and Ferguson justified their violence by “othering” their enemy through gendered language. Understanding these early episodes of Sevier’s life is important to his memory because these wars made him a legitimate leader and public icon in Tennessee. They are responsible for elevating his status and providing the honor necessary to hold political office.

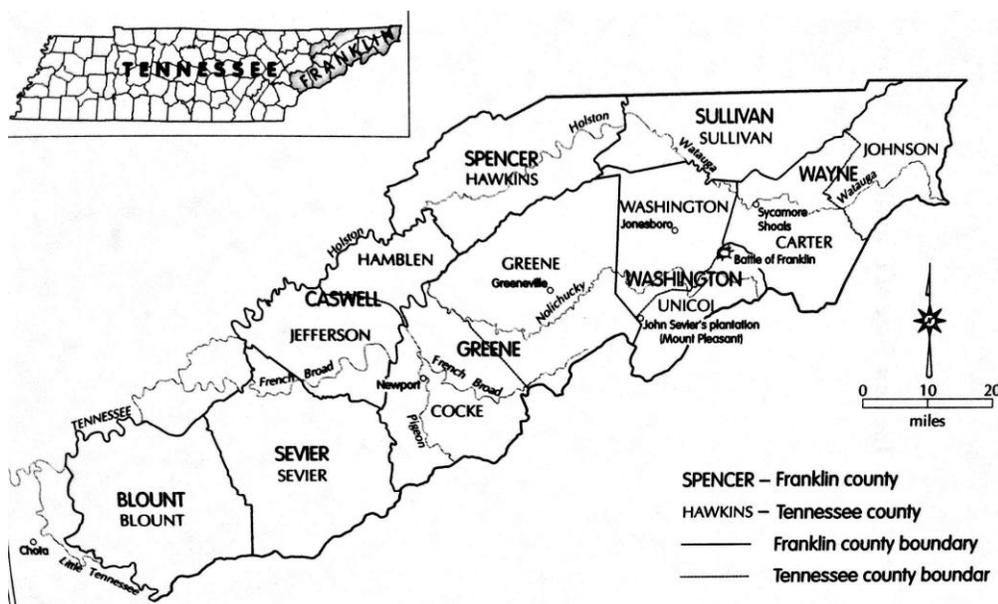
CHAPTER TWO
BEYOND THE BATTLEFIELD: RETHINKING THE STATE OF FRANKLIN AND
DIPLOMATIC CONFLICTS OF JOHN SEVIER

John Sevier's memorial and gravestone outside the historic Knoxville Courthouse reads "thirty-five battles, thirty-five victories." Such a claim refers to formal military engagements in which Sevier emerged victorious. They evoke the memories of well-known battles such as the Battle of King's Mountain, the Cherokee War of 1776, and Lord Dunmore's War. These military engagements helped enshrine Sevier's reputation and memory as a great hero. Such military accomplishments point to Sevier's prowess as a soldier and a military leader, equating his historic reputation with a particular kind of masculine triumph on the battlefield. As a result of such associations, Sevier is often remembered as the "Founding Father of Tennessee," as a great patriarch to the frontier, and as a man of great strength and character.

While such memories preserve a particular vision of Sevier's life and legacy, they limit his memory to victories in war. These victories were no doubt important, but this limited view of Sevier's military legacy eclipses our ability to understand the other "battles" that characterized his life. Sevier engaged in disputes that were both personal and diplomatic, and he did not always emerge victorious. By expanding our understanding of what constitutes a "battle" to include diplomatic struggles, we arrive at a more holistic and complex understanding of Sevier's life.

Two episodes of conflict surrounding the short-lived, the State of Franklin movement, illustrate how John Sevier's life was shaped by diplomatic struggles that were as central to his memory as his actions as a soldier. The first conflict involved rights to property, and was one that Sevier ultimately lost. The second involved Sevier's

treasonous activities during the Spanish Intrigue, a struggle of covert and highly suspect acts of national betrayal in the interest of personal aggrandizement. These two episodes help us understand political conflict and provide a more complex portrait of Sevier.¹



Dick Gilbreath, Boundaries and counties of historic Franklin and present-day Tennessee, in Kevin T. Barksdale's *The Lost State of Franklin: America's First Secession*, 2.

In the years immediately following the revolution, settlers in the western region of North Carolina sought to create their own sovereign state, the State of Franklin. The primary catalyst for the movement was the settlers' belief that they had little political influence over their property. The newly created United States assumed a large war debt

¹ For a history of the State of Franklin see: Thomas Perkins Abernethy, *From Frontier to Plantation in Tennessee: A Study in Frontier Democracy*. Southern Historical Publications No. 12. New author's preface (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1967); Kevin Barksdale, *The Lost State of Franklin: America's First Secession* (Lexington, The University Press of Kentucky, 2009); Mary French Caldwell, *Tennessee: The Dangerous Example, Watauga to 1849* (Nashville: Aurora Publishers, Inc., 1974); Noel B. Gerson, *Franklin: America's "Lost State"* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1968); James Gilmore, *John Sevier as a Commonwealth Builder: A Sequel to the Rearguard of the Revolution* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1887); Dale Reed, *John Tipton, John Sevier, and the State of Franklin*, (United States: Tipton Family of America Association, 1998); Oliver Perry, *John Sevier: Citizen, Soldier, Legislator, Governor, Statesman, 1744-1815* (Knoxville: The Zi-Po Press, 1910. In *American Revolution: Pamphlets*. Georgia: Emory University Press, 1948); Samuel Cole Williams, *History of the Lost State of Franklin* (New York: The Press of the Pioneers, revised edition, 1933)

at the end of the American Revolution. As early as 1780, states with large western territories, like North Carolina, sent proposals to Continental Congress asking that they be allowed to cede western lands to the federal government to pay their war debts. Following these land cessions, the federal government would have formed new states out of the territory. Such land cessions were problematic to the frontier residents of North Carolina, who believed that such actions would have left them without the protection of a local government. In 1784, the settlers living on the western boundary of North Carolina sought to establish their own state – The State of Franklin – and nominated Sevier as governor. Franklinites nominated Sevier over John Tipton, who also wanted the governorship. This began a bitter political rivalry between the two characters. Five months later, North Carolina “decided its actions were premature” and rescinded the Cession Act of 1784.² The rescission proved to be “unpopular in the western country.”³ Settlers disregarded the state’s actions, and continued in their statehood movement, applying to Congress for admission as a new state.⁴ Under the Articles of Confederation, admission to the union required a two-thirds majority vote. The State of Franklin, in a test vote, missed admission by one vote. The vote resulted in seven states for admission, two against (Maryland and Virginia), South Carolina split, North Carolina abstaining, and two state representatives absent.⁵

² Cora B. Sevier and Nancy Madden, *Sevier Family History: With the Collected Letters of Gen. John Sevier, First Governor of Tennessee, and 28 Collateral Family Lineages* (Washington D. C.: Nancy S. Madden, 1961), 22

³ Sevier and Madden, *Sevier Family History*, 22.

⁴ For an excellent discussion of the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation, with regards to the separatist movement, see: Jason Farr, “A Glorious Failure: The State of Franklin and American Independence,” *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 70:4 (Winter 2011): 276-287.

⁵ Williams, *History of the Lost State of Franklin*, 82-84.

Sevier and the movement's supporters had several motivations for separating from the State of North Carolina. First, the geography of trans-Appalachia formed a large divide between greater North Carolina and its western territory. This geographic barrier created major political and military obstacles for the western settlers. Because the Appalachian Mountains made travel difficult and time consuming, and Native American hostilities prevented prominent men from leaving the territory, western settlers rarely sent representatives to the state government. Because western settlers could not adequately advocate for themselves, state governments' were unable to tackle issues like threats from Native Americans and the Spanish government. Throughout the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, Chickamauga Cherokees raided white settlements along present-day East Tennessee in an effort to regain their homeland and push back white settlers' encroachment into Middle Tennessee. The Spanish supported the Cherokee and Creek attacks on frontier settlements by providing weapons and food to the Native Americans.

Second, western settlers were isolated from markets, because of Spanish and Indian hostilities to their West. The seclusion of the settlers was daunting. In a letter to Sevier, Benjamin Franklin referred to the western settlers as "so remote a people."⁶ Not only were the mountain towns secluded from their government's protection, they were isolated from the marketplace.⁷ The Spanish government possessed a monopoly on trade along the Mississippi River. Because the Appalachian Mountains prevented goods from

⁶ Ben Franklin to John Sevier, 30 June 1787, in *Sevier Family History*, edited by Sevier and Madden, 79.

⁷ For a discussion of the characteristics of Appalachian settlements see John Alexander Williams's *Appalachia: A History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); for a discussion of Tennessee's topography see Eastin Morris' *Tennessee Gazetteer*, edited by Robert M. McBride (Nashville: The Gazetteer Press, 1971, reprint).

getting to and from the North Carolina backcountry, the Mississippi River provided the best trade route for settlers of this region. Despite these advantages, Spain's monopoly on trade and Chickamauga Indian hostilities alienated western settlers from Mississippi markets.⁸

The separatist movement garnered widespread local support initially, but political divisions over the fate of Franklin soon formed within the fledgling state. Historian Kevin Barksdale argues that the movement ultimately failed for two reasons. First, it failed because it did not gain support from the federal or North Carolina governments. The North Carolina government's unwillingness to support the Franklin Movement stems from its war debt. According to Samuel Cole Williams's *History of the Lost State of Franklin*, North Carolina rescinded the 1784 Cession Act because it needed the money to pay the soldiers who fought in the Revolutionary War.⁹ Had North Carolina followed through with this act, they would have lost the property taxes of Washington County land owners.¹⁰ According to Barksdale, nearly every free man in western North Carolina owned a portion of land. Therefore it was in North Carolina's best interest to withdraw the Cession Act, because they profited from the property taxes.

Second, the movement faltered because of the backcountry settlers' division over the State of Franklin created civil unrest. Many abandoned the Franklin Movement when North Carolina began rewarding those who left the separatists with political

⁸ For information on motivations for separation see: David Britton, "Desperate Enterprizes and Men of Broken Fortunes: Loyalty and Identity on the Tennessee Frontier, 1793-1794," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 40:4 (Winter, 2011), 288-299.

⁹ Williams, *History of the Lost State of Franklin*, 82-84.

¹⁰ Land owners in Washington County, NC – name of the western territory which later made up the State of Franklin – owned a great deal of land and therefore paid a large sum of property taxes to the state. Losing this income meant that North Carolina had to wait that much longer to pay off their war debts.

appointments.¹¹ For example, after losing his bid at the governorship of Franklin, Tipton received a political appointment from North Carolina for switching his loyalties. Others remained dedicated to separatism, particularly land speculators and land owners, like Sevier.¹² It was in their best interests to support the State of Franklin, because they were the political leaders of the state, and controlled property tax rates. In order to gain the support of western settlers North Carolina offered political appointments to men who opposed the statehood movement. Men like John Tipton gained advantages from North Carolina for opposing the Franklinites. These appointments created political divisions within the territory and ultimately led to Franklin's downfall in 1789. In his letter to Sevier, Evan Shelby expressed his disgust with North Carolina's decisions to give political appointments to those who will oppose the State of Franklin. Shelby stated that "it would be more honorable to die and hang on the gallows than to submit" to North Carolina's "ill treatment" and that Sevier's steadfastness in the statehood movement granted him "immortal honor."¹³

Although North Carolina considered the Franklin Movement treasonous, they sought to regain the territory by forgiving Franklinites' back taxes.¹⁴ Despite this gesture, Franklinites continued in their separation from the state. From 1784 to 1788 the

¹¹ Washington Co. was comprised of the counties which ceded from North Carolina in 1784 (State of Franklin). Barksdale, *The Lost State of Franklin*

¹² John Sevier owned an estimated 84,000 acres of land in the western districts of North Carolina. Barksdale, *The Lost State of Franklin: America's First Secession*, 50-51.

¹³ Evan Shelby to John Sevier, 11 Feb. 1787, in *Sevier Family History*, edited by Sevier and Madden, 71.

¹⁴ Franklinites are State of Franklin and John Sevier supporters. Tiptonites are North Carolina and John Tipton supporters.

For works which discuss the separatist politics of the Franklin Movement and State of Tennessee see: Abernethy, *From Frontier to Plantation in Tennessee*; Barksdale, *The Lost State of Franklin*; Caldwell, *Tennessee*; Gerson, *Franklin*; Gilmore, *John Sevier as a Commonwealth Builder*; Reed, *John Tipton, John Sevier, and the State of Franklin*; Perry, *John Sevier*; Williams, *History of the Lost State of Franklin*

Franklinites did not pay taxes to the State of North Carolina. In a letter to Sevier, North Carolina Governor, Richard Caswell, explained that if the Franklinites rejoined the State of North Carolina and then petitioned for separation, it was likely that the state would consider accepting their request.¹⁵ Otherwise, the state deemed their method of separation undemocratic. Moreover, he said that since the Franklinites “have received no benefit from Government for the two years last past, they [NC Government] are willing to exempt them from the payment of public taxes.”¹⁶ It is unclear whether North Carolina would have awarded the western settlements separation if they had taken Caswell’s advice. However, Caswell’s statement and the fact that Sevier and the Franklinites remained steadfast in their separation until 1788, demonstrates that the landholders had no intention of paying property taxes to North Carolina. Turning back on the movement would have been admitting defeat, and the Franklinites would have owed North Carolina back taxes on their land.

By 1788 it became clear that Sevier had invested too much of his time, money, and political reputation to reverse his course. He was in too deep. When authorities came to collect his back taxes, Sevier tried to salvage his political reputation by turning the issue into an affair of honor.¹⁷ In early 1788, John Tipton issued a *fieri facias* to Sheriff

¹⁵ Caswell was the Governor of North Carolina at the time of the Franklin Movement.

¹⁶ R. Caswell to John Sevier, 23 Feb. 1787 in *Sevier Family History*, edited by Sevier and Madden, 71-72.

¹⁷ See Joanne B. Freeman, *Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

Works which discuss honor and violence include: : Gordon Wood’s *Radicalism of the American Revolution* (1992); Freeman, *Affairs of Honor*, and “Dueling as Politics: Reinterpreting the Burr-Hamilton Duel,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, 53:2 (April 1996), 289-318; Edward Ayers, *Vengeance and Justice: Crime and Punishment in the 19th-Century American South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984); Dickson Bruce, Jr., *Violence and Culture in the Antebellum South* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979); Elliot Gorn, “Gouge and Bite, Pull Hair and Scratch: The Social Significance of Fighting in the Southern Backcountry,” *American Historical Review*, 90 (1985), 18-43; Kenneth Greenberg, *Masters and Statesmen: The*

Jonathan Pugh of Washington County. This writ provided the legal means for Tipton to seize the property of Sevier and, thus, satisfy unpaid taxes to North Carolina. According to Barksdale, revenge was the true motivation behind Tipton's actions; the collection of back-taxes offered the legal excuse necessary to confiscate Sevier's property.¹⁸ Sheriff Pugh proceeded to Plum Grove – the Sevier family farm – and “confiscated several of [Sevier's] slaves and livestock as payment for delinquent tax contributions.”¹⁹ He then took the property – as ordered – to Tipton's family farm on Sinking Creek.²⁰ Hearing of the loss of his slaves and livestock, Sevier sent the Franklin troops to Tipton's house to retrieve his property.²¹

In late February of 1788, these conflicts of property exploded in a miniature civil war, pitting supporters of Tipton and North Carolina against allies of Sevier and Franklin. On the surface Franklinites were defending their governor's property. They embraced Sevier's logic that a threat to property was a threat to personal honor and their rights as American citizens.²² A Maryland newspaper account, dated November sixth, justifies the

Political Culture of American Slavery (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985); Kenneth Greenberg, “The Nose, the Lie, and the Duel in the Antebellum South,” *American Historical Review*, 95 (1990), 57-74; Steven Stowe, *Intimacy and Power in the Old South: Ritual in the Lives of the Planters* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987); Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York Oxford University Press, 1982); Bertram Wyatt-Brown, “Honour and American Republicanism: A Neglected Corollary,” *Ideology and the Historians*, edited by Ciaran Brady (Dublin, 1991): 49-65; Dearing, Ryan L. “Violence, Masculinity, Image, and Reality on the Antebellum Frontier,” *Indiana Magazine of History*, 100:1 (March 2004), 26-55.

¹⁸ Barksdale, *The Lost State of Franklin*, 132.

¹⁹ Barksdale, *The Lost State of Franklin*, 132.

²⁰ Barksdale, *The Lost State of Franklin*, 133.

²¹ Barksdale, *The Lost State of Franklin*, 133.

²² For a discussion of the relationship between honor and masculinity/manhood see: Ryan Dearing, “Violence, Masculinity, Image, and Reality on the Antebellum Frontier,” *Indiana Magazine of History*, 100:1 (March 2004), 26-55; Nichole Etcheson, “Manliness and the Political Culture of the Old Northwest, 1790-1860,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 15:1 (Spring 1995), 59-77; Thomas Foster, *Sex and the Eighteenth-Century Man: Massachusetts and the History of Sexuality in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006); Thomas Foster, Ed., *New Men: Manliness in*

separation of Franklin from North Carolina. It states that the recent Indian hostilities threatened the “lives, liberties, and property” of the western settlers.²³ Sevier’s supporters took their complaints to Tipton directly. Tipton later explained how “John Sevier Marched within the sight” of the Tipton house “With a party of men to the amount of One Hundred or upwards with a drum beating colours flying In Military Parade and in a Hostile manner.”²⁴

The act of flying colors and advancing on Tipton’s home in military parade was symbolic because it demonstrated that these men considered themselves separate from North Carolina. They flew the colors of Franklin rather than those of North Carolina. This act and the following negotiations were meant to be purely symbolic. Sevier and his compatriots did not intend to start a battle with North Carolina. At the onset of their separation Sevier wrote to governor Caswell expressing the sentiments of the Franklinites. He stated that “though [we] want to be separated in government, [we] wish to be united in friendship,” and that should it even be necessary the Franklinites are ready

Early America (New York: New York University Press, 2001); Joanne Freeman, *Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001); Craig Thompson Friend and Lorri Glover, Eds., *Southern Manhood: Perspectives on Masculinity in the Old South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004); Lorri Glover, *Southern Sons: Becoming Men in the New Nation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007); Richard Godbeer, *The Overflowing Friendship: Love Between Men and the Creation of the American Republic* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009) and *Sexual Revolution in Early America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002); Elliot Gorn, “‘Gouge and Bite, Pull Hair and Scratch’: The Social Significance of Fighting in the Southern Backcountry,” *American Historical Review*, 90:1 (February 1985), 18-43; Anne Lombard, *Making Manhood: Growing Up Male in Colonial New England* (London: Harvard University Press, 2003); Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1993); Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982).

²³ Newspaper Account, *Maryland Journal*, 6 November 1787, in *Sevier Family History*, edited by Sevier and Madden, 87.

²⁴ Deposition from John Tipton and others, 20 Aug 1788, Miscellaneous Folder, North Carolina State Archives, cited in Barksdale, *The Lost State of Franklin*, 133.

to fight for North Carolina.²⁵ Sevier and the Franklinites considered themselves citizens of the State of Franklin, neighbors of North Carolina, and American patriots.

Sevier and his men surrounded the Tipton home and prepared to arrest him for theft of property.²⁶ Sevier sent Colonel Henry Conway with a flag of truce, demanding that Tipton surrender within thirty minutes, and “submit to the laws of Franklin.” Tipton sent no reply to the “daring insult.”²⁷ Tipton’s surrender to Sevier would have been an admission to the legitimacy of the State of Franklin.²⁸ The Battle of Franklin “commenced” shortly thereafter when Sevier’s company unleashed fire on “Captain Parkison’s company.”²⁹ As Parkison’s company approached the Tipton farm to presumably return fire, Sevier’s entire company “opened fire” upon them and managed to take prisoner several Tiptonites.³⁰ Once the internal conflict in Western North Carolina became a personal struggle between Sevier and Tipton, the Franklin governor turned to violence in a desperate attempt to salvage his personal reputation and honor.³¹

²⁵ John Sevier to Gov. Richard Caswell, 28 October 1786, in *Sevier Family History*, edited by Sevier and Madden, 69-70.

²⁶ J. G. M. Ramsey, *The Annals of Tennessee to the End of the Eighteenth Century* (Charleston: J. Russell, 1853. Reprint, Baltimore: Clearfield Company, 2003), 406-407.

²⁷ Barksdale, *The Lost State of Franklin*, 133; John Tipton to General Joseph Martin, 21 March 1788, *The State Records of North Carolina*, edited by Clark, vol. 22, 692 (quote).

²⁸ In submitting to the laws of the State of Franklin, Tipton would have admitted North Carolina and the State of Franklin were separate entities. More importantly, he would have been admitting defeat. Since he was an official of North Carolina, he would not admit that he and his state were equals with Sevier and Franklin.

²⁹ John Tipton to General Joseph Martin, 21 March 1788, *The State Records of North Carolina*, edited by Clark, vol. 22, 692.

³⁰ Deposition from John Tipton and others, 20 Aug 1788, Miscellaneous Folder, North Carolina State Archives, cited in Barksdale, *The Lost State of Franklin*, edited by Sevier and Madden, 134.

³¹ For works which discuss the relationship between political reputation and personal honor see: Wood, *Radicalism of the American Revolution*; Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790*; Etcheson, “Manliness and the Political Culture of the Old Northwest, 1790-1860”; Freeman, *Affairs of Honor*; Friend and Glover, Eds., *Southern Manhood*; Glover, *Southern Sons*; Lombard, *Making Manhood*; Rotundo, *American Manhood*; Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*.

Although the Franklinites and Tiptonites exchanged fire, the following day Sevier's men sent a second flag to the Tiptonites as a gesture to resume diplomatic negotiations.³² Tipton recalled this flag was of "a more mild nature," but again he refused to back down and responded by saying that all he wanted was "a submission to the laws of North Carolina, and if they would acquiesce with this proposal [he] would disband [his] troops...and countermand the march of the troops from Sullivan."³³ He directed his flag to Sevier.³⁴ Had John Sevier and the Franklinites accepted Tipton's proposal, they would have admitted their state's illegitimacy. Since neither side wanted to admit defeat, the fighting resumed.

On the final day of the Battle of Franklin, Sevier admitted political and personal defeat to save the lives of his sons and nephew. The North Carolina troops under Colonel Maxwell and Colonel Sullivan's companies gathered six miles outside of Tipton's home. Before sunrise, on February twenty-ninth, Sevier's sons, James and John, Jr., marched a small company toward the advancing militia. Sullivan's men replied to the advance by opening fire on the Franklinites, "[taking] a number of prisoners, arms, saddles, and [dispersing] the whole of the Franklinites." Simultaneously, Tipton and his company pushed the Franklin militia to a halt "without much resistance."³⁵ Together, the Tiptonites surrounded the Franklinites, and forced their surrender. Barksdale explains that "in a stunning reversal of fortune," the Tiptonites proved victorious, "and captured the sons

³² The "flags" referred to by Tipton were letters of diplomatic nature. Not all flags were "flags of truce." Some were meant for negotiation.

³³ John Tipton to General Joseph Martin, 21 March 1788, *The State Records of North Carolina*, edited by Clark, vol. 22, 692.

³⁴ John Tipton to General Joseph Martin, 21 March 1788, *The State Records of North Carolina*, edited by Clark, vol. 22, 692. Sevier's whereabouts are not known but it is possible that he had business in Jonesboro that required his immediate attention.

³⁵ John Tipton to General Joseph Martin, 21 March 1788, *The State Records of North Carolina*, edited by Clark, vol. 22, 692.

and nephew” of Sevier.³⁶ Tipton desired to hang the Sevier boys for their treasonous participation.³⁷ Upon hearing of his kin’s misfortunes, Sevier sent a final flag to Tipton stating that he would “submit to the laws of North Carolina.”³⁸ With the governor’s surrender, Tipton released the prisoners, and the Battle of Franklin officially ended.³⁹

This battle between Tipton and Sevier demonstrates how personal the struggle over the State of Franklin had become. Hearing that the Tiptonites had captured his sons, Sevier admitted defeat. The protection of his family was paramount to his honor and political reputation. While he chose not to submit to the laws of North Carolina and admit defeat in return for his slaves and papers, and instead turned to violence, when Tipton took his sons and nephew hostage, he surrendered.

After the Franklinites’ defeat, North Carolina nominated a staunch anti-Franklinite, Samuel Johnston, to be the state’s next governor. Five months after the battle, Governor Johnston issued an order to Brigadier General Joseph Martin to “order a sufficient number of the Militia of the District of Washington to aid and assist” in the execution of any warrant(s) for the apprehension of any person deemed “guilty of Treasonable practices against the State.”⁴⁰ Since neither North Carolina nor the federal government supported the statehood movement, every Franklinite could have been convicted of treason. In response to this order, John Sevier went into hiding during the year of 1788. Shortly after Johnston sent his statement to Martin, he issued “a warrant for

³⁶ Barksdale, *The Lost State of Franklin*, 136.

³⁷ Barksdale, *The Lost State of Franklin*, 136.

³⁸ John Tipton to General Joseph Martin, 21 March 1788, *The State Records of North Carolina*, edited by Clark, vol. 22, 692-693.

³⁹ Barksdale, *The Lost State of Franklin*, 136.

Several men died during the battle and afterwards due to injuries they received during the conflict.

⁴⁰ Governor Samuel Johnston to General Martin, 29 July 1788, *The State Records of North Carolina*, edited by Clark, vol. 22, 697.

the arrest of Sevier for treason.”⁴¹ This warrant stated that “John Sevier... has been guilty of High Treason in levying troops to oppose the Laws and Government of this State, and has with an armed force put to death several good Citizens.”⁴²

Despite their defeat at the Battle of Franklin, the Franklinites continued their separatist movement for another year. Outside the movement itself, the State of Franklin received no support. Internal and external opposition to the movement, according to Barksdale, contributed significantly to its failure.⁴³ John Sevier wrote to Benjamin Franklin and the President of the Continental Congress, attempting to gain support for the separatist state. He asked that if Franklin thought the separatists’ cause praiseworthy, he would write back with “any advice, instruction, or encouragement.”⁴⁴ Franklin responded to Sevier with the advice that the State of Franklin “amicab[ly] settle [its] differences with North Carolina.”⁴⁵ Franklin did not support the separation of these western settlers from North Carolina, and advised that Sevier and his compatriots resume their citizenship as North Carolinians. Sevier however, was too invested in the outcome of the State of Franklin. His political future relied on the success of the fledgling state. Furthermore, Franklin decried their involvement in the Indian wars currently plaguing the southeastern frontier. He believed that Sevier and his fellow men were violently attacking Native Americans for the sole purpose of acquiring more land. He explained that he hoped westerners would avoid another Indian war by “preventing encroachments on their

⁴¹ Barksdale, *The Lost State of Franklin*, 139.

⁴² Governor Johnston to Judge Campbell, 29 June 1788, *The State Records of North Carolina*, edited by Clark, vol. 21, 484.

⁴³ For a discussion of these factors see: Barksdale, “Agreeable to a Republican Government: The Rise of Backcountry Partisanship, 1784-1785,” *The Lost State of Franklin*, 53-71

⁴⁴ John Sevier to Ben Franklin, 9 April 1787, in *Sevier Family History*, edited by Sevier and Madden, 75.

⁴⁵ Ben Franklin to John Sevier, 30 June 1787, in *Sevier Family History*, edited by Sevier and Madden, 79.

lands,” because he believed that “such encroachments... [were] unjustifiable.”⁴⁶ It is ironic that the person these westerners named their state after disapproved of their secession and land acquisitions.

Sevier responded to Franklin by explaining the State of Franklin’s efforts to ensure peace with neighboring Indians. In both letters he attached peace talks with the State of Georgia and the Chickasaw, Cherokee, and Creek nations. These talks did not create permanent peace, as Native Americans and white settlers continued to inflict violence upon each other. There is no evidence that Franklin responded to Sevier’s letters, but it is clear that Sevier purposefully discussed Indian hostilities on the western frontier in order to demonstrate that the hostilities were not one-sided.⁴⁷ He and his contemporaries believed that the Spanish were providing Native Americans with the weapons to attack the frontier settlements.⁴⁸ That Franklin thought that Sevier’s raids into Indian country were unfounded clearly bothered him.

In the same year, Sevier wrote to the President presiding over Continental Congress. In this letter, he reassured the United States that the State of Franklin’s citizenry were patriots of the nation. However, he warned that “it may become a subject of much regret, should they be any length of time unnoticed by Congress.” He added that there “[appeared] to be a general uneasiness prevailing among a large number of the

⁴⁶ Ben Franklin to John Sevier, 30 June 1787, in *Sevier Family History*, edited by Sevier and Madden, 78.

⁴⁷ John Sevier to Ben Franklin, 12 Sept 1787, in *Sevier Family History*, edited by Sevier and Madden, 81; John Sevier to Ben Franklin, 2 Nov 1787, in *Sevier Family History*, edited by Sevier and Madden, 85-86.

⁴⁸ “Intelligence from the Cherokee nation respecting the Attack on Buchanan’s station,” *Knoxville Gazette* 1:26, 20 Oct. 1792 (microfiche).

This newspaper article blames the Spanish for enticing the Indians to attack Buchanan’s Station and states that this was a common theme.

Western Americans...through an idea that their interest is neglected.”⁴⁹ The Franklinites were willing to commit treason by negotiating with European nations to protect their property and control taxes. Sevier hinted to Congress that the settlers were willing to go to such lengths. This was a clear threat intended to excite Congress and persuade them to favor the separatist interests of the Franklinites. Sevier’s warning fell on deaf ears.

Lack of support from his state’s namesake and from the federal government led Sevier to engage in even more serious acts of treason and court protection from Spain.⁵⁰ Barksdale argues that many Franklinites were convinced that the federal government did not have the interests of their people in mind. In an attempt to gain their government’s attention, prominent backcountry leaders participated in their own private negotiations with Spain. Such western leaders included James White, William Blount, and John Sevier. In their correspondence with Spain, these men promised to become a territory of Spain in exchange for state recognition and the Spanish government’s protection. To these men, negotiations with Spain stood as the “opportunity to preserve their political and economic hegemony, to pressure North Carolina and the U.S. government into acceding to Franklin’s admittance into the union, to eliminate the ongoing Native American threat, and to advance their collective fiscal and political interests.”⁵¹ Sevier,

⁴⁹ John Sevier to the His Excellency the President of Congress, 2 Nov 1787, in *Sevier Family History*, edited by Sevier and Madden, 85.

⁵⁰ It is important to remember that the Spanish Intrigue occurred in the same year as the Battle of Franklin – only a couple months later.

For works which discuss the Spanish Intrigue see: Thomas Abernethy, *From Frontier to Plantation in Tennessee: A Study in Frontier Democracy*, Southern Historical Publications No. 12, New author’s preface (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1967); Kevin T. Barksdale, *The Lost State of Franklin: America’s First Secession* (Lexington, The University Press of Kentucky, 2009) and “The Spanish Conspiracy on the Trans-Appalachian Borderlands, 1786-1789,” *Journal of Appalachian Studies*, 13:1-2 (Spring 2007), 96-123; Caldwell, Mary French. *Tennessee: The Dangerous Example, Watauga to 1849*. Nashville: Aurora Publishers, Inc., 1974.

⁵¹ Barksdale, *The Lost State of Franklin*, 145-146 (quote on 145).

White, and Blount never intended on aligning with Spain.⁵² If they had, these men might not have kept their correspondence private, and might have announced their intentions to their fellow Franklinites. The United States government considered these “flirtations” treason, but never convicted any of the participants. Minister of Spain, Don Diego de Gardoqui desired that the entire western territory would secede from the United States, and communicated with White and Sevier throughout the Spring of 1788.⁵³

The Spanish Intrigue’s participants committed treason by negotiating with Spain, but got away with it for two reasons. First, Sevier and his cohorts kept their correspondence private. In fact, Sevier relied on his son, James, to deliver his letters to the Minister of Spain, de Gardoqui, in New York.⁵⁴ This is important because it shows how careful Sevier was with his correspondence. His journal shows that Sevier normally sent letters with his slave Tobe or a neighbor. Rarely did he send his sons with letters. He kept his correspondence private, but representatives from the frontier did not make their intentions to communicate with the Minister of Spain a secret. It would have been odd for

⁵² See: William’s *History of the Lost State of Franklin* and Barksdale’s *The Lost State of Franklin*

⁵³ Sevier and Madden, *Sevier Family History*, 94 (under “Negotiations with the Spanish”). Only two correspondences between Gardoqui and Sevier remain. The first of which discusses the economic benefits of joining the Spanish government.⁵³ The second discusses the Indian hostilities toward western settlers and why the Spanish government should overlook these diplomatic issues. (John Sevier to Don Diego de Gardoqui, 12 Sept 1788, *Sevier Family History*, edited by Sevier and Madden, 96-97).

It is interesting to note that Gardoqui sent a copy of Sevier’s letter to Louisiana’s Governor Miro. The western settler’s favorable relationship with Spain during the State of Franklin negotiations left its mark on the state’s geography. The current state capital, Nashville, is seated in the Mero District, named after Governor Miro of Louisiana.

Although only these two letters remain, they make mention of earlier correspondence.

⁵⁴ At the time New York served as the Nation’s capitol. It would have been obvious that frontier representatives were meeting with the Minister of Spain. It is significant that Sevier and White chose to communicate with the Minister of Spain in New York rather than going to Louisiana or another Spanish territory. It is as if they wanted Congress to see that they were meeting with Spanish officials. They “flirted” with Spain, because it was never their intent to become a colony of a European power again. These men simply wanted to test the federal government and challenge them to accept their statehood.

these frontiersmen to visit the Minister of Spain, because they believed that the Spanish government was actively paying and providing weapons for Native Americans to attack frontier settlements.⁵⁵ Second, Sevier served a greater use to the territory and government free, than behind bars. Not only was he a skilled military commander, but he owned a great deal of land and slaves, and was a central figure in the local economy. He was one of few men with wealth and influence in the region. White and Sevier were the political elite of their region and it is possible that for this reason, the United States never convicted them of treason.

In November of 1788, North Carolina debated issuing a blanket pardon for those who participated in the statehood movement.⁵⁶ The subsequent act easily passed both the state House of Representatives and Senate. However, a group of Sevier's political rivals, bent on his political demise, sought for a bill to rescind part of the act "in order to exclude" Franklin's governor from the pardon.⁵⁷ Ultimately the bill failed to pass. Although the legislature recognized that Sevier's "conduct was in many particulars highly reprehensible," they argued that he "ought to be placed in the same situation" as the rest of the Franklinites.⁵⁸ Therefore, to the dismay of Tipton and the anti-Franklinites, "the state of North Carolina pardoned John Sevier."⁵⁹ Not only did North Carolina pardon John Sevier, they issued a resolution twenty-two days later, demanding that Sevier's position and authority as the Brigadier General of the District of Washington "be

⁵⁵ For a discussion on this see: Britton, "Desperate Enterprizes and Men of Broken Fortunes: Loyalty and Identity on the Tennessee Frontier, 1793-1794"; for primary source evidence see: Newspaper Account, *Maryland Journal*, 6 November 1787, in *Sevier Family History*, edited by Sevier and Madden, 87-88.

⁵⁶ Barksdale, *The Lost State of Franklin*, 142.

⁵⁷ Barksdale, *The Lost State of Franklin*, 143.

⁵⁸ North Carolina House of Commons's Report on the Pardon Granted John Sevier, 30 Nov 1789, *The State Records of North Carolina*, edited by Clark, vol. 22, 728-729.

⁵⁹ Barksdale, *The Lost State of Franklin*, 143.

obeyed,” and that the “Governor issue his proclamation requiring all the good people of that district to pay due regard thereto and govern themselves accordingly.”⁶⁰ This resolution, in sum, demanded that the men of Washington County, including John Tipton, respect the authority of Sevier as Brigadier General.

Sevier’s military battles are often accentuated over his diplomatic trials. While traditional battles, like the Revolutionary Battle of King’s Mountain provided Sevier a gateway to gain honor and political legitimacy, diplomacy provided men with non-violent avenues of solving issues. Diplomatic battles, however, do not always end peacefully. While the Spanish Intrigue did not result in violence, the Battle of Franklin was a direct result of Tipton and Sevier’s political standoff. Tipton sought Sevier’s resignation/surrender from the Franklin movement, but because his actions threatened Sevier’s honor, property, and governorship, Sevier responded by sending an army to Tipton’s farm. The correspondence between the Tiptonites and Franklinites on the battlefield represents diplomatic battles as well. These conflicts demonstrate the lengths Sevier was willing to go to protect his political reputation, honor, and property.

Those who contributed to the Spanish Conspiracy and the State of Franklin defended their participation with the ideals of the American Revolution. In September of 2010, on the anniversary of John Sevier’s 265th birthday, a number of Revolutionary War descendants gathered to celebrate Tennessee’s founding father. Remarking on the event, journalist Jack Neely concluded that John Sevier and William Blount “weren’t Sons of the Revolution. Nor were they Founding Fathers. They were the Rebellion’s rebellious

⁶⁰ In Senate Resolved, 22 Dec 1789, *The State Records of North Carolina*, edited by Clark, vol. 22, 729.

little brothers.”⁶¹ While the events of 1788 might be “unmentionable footnotes” to modern-day Tennesseans, and seen as stains upon the character of their Revolutionary heroes, it is important to remember that Sevier and his compatriots framed their cause in terms of protection of property, liberty, and independence. In a 1787 letter to the Governor of Georgia, John Sevier stated that violent acts by the Tiptonites could not scare the Franklinites away from their cause. Moreover, he stated that when the Franklinites reflect on the “great number of internal and external enemies to American Independence, [they] shudder at the very idea of such an incurable evil, not knowing where disorder might lead, or what part of the body politic the ulcer might at last infect.”⁶² The fear is evident in the many letters that Sevier wrote to prominent men in Virginia, North Carolina, and Georgia. He believed that the fate of his neighbors and his home was in immediate danger. To the Franklinites, their cause was noble and just, and they viewed threats to their state as preludes to civil war.

⁶¹ Jack Neely, “Little Brothers: John Sevier, William Blount, and their unmentionable footnotes,” *Metro Pulse*, September 23, 2010, Genealogical Collection, Biography Collection: Sevier I Folder, East Tennessee Historical Society, Knoxville, TN.

⁶² John Sevier to Gov. George Mathews of Georgia, June 24, 1787, Sevier and Madden, *Sevier Family History*, edited by Sevier and Madden, 77.

CHAPTER THREE PISTOLS AND POLITICS: THE PERSONAL BATTLES OF JOHN SEVIER

John Sevier is often remembered as a soldier and statesman. These roles are important to his legacy, but his personal battles also hold equal significance. Victories in war were “inciting and inspiring” to men because they “offered so many more opportunities for achieving honor and fame than other endeavors.”¹ Alongside military prowess, however, private and personal battles also weighed significantly on a man’s reputation. John Sevier participated in affairs of honor that were personal and political, and he did not always emerge victorious. Although these episodes might tarnish his historical memory, they reveal the fragility of masculinity and politics in the early nation.

In the early republic, dueling presented gentlemen with a civilized method of resolving political and personal disputes.² Joanne Freeman shows how honor customs became rules for men in early American politics to combat with other politicians. Using examples such as, print warfare, gossip, political combat, and dueling, she demonstrates how the founders competed for

¹ Gordon S. Wood, *Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), 40.

² For a discussion of honor and dueling see: Wood’s *Radicalism of the American Revolution*; Joanne B. Freeman’s *Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001) and “Dueling as Politics: Reinterpreting the Burr-Hamilton Duel,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, 53:2 (April 1996), 289-318; Edward Ayers, *Vengeance and Justice: Crime and Punishment in the 19th-Century American South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984); Dickson Bruce, Jr., *Violence and Culture in the Antebellum South* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979); Elliot Gorn, “Gouge and Bite, Pull Hair and Scratch: The Social Significance of Fighting in the Southern Backcountry,” *American Historical Review*, 90 (1985), 18-43; Kenneth Greenberg, *Masters and Statesmen: The Political Culture of American Slavery* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985); Kenneth Greenberg, “The Nose, the Lie, and the Duel in the Antebellum South,” *American Historical Review*, 95 (1990), 57-74; Steven Stowe, *Intimacy and Power in the Old South: Ritual in the Lives of the Planters* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987); Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York Oxford University Press, 1982); Bertram Wyatt-Brown, “Honour and American Republicanism: A Neglected Corollary,” *Ideology and the Historians*, edited by Ciaran Brady (Dublin, 1991): 49-65; Dearing, Ryan L. “Violence, Masculinity, Image, and Reality on the Antebellum Frontier,” *Indiana Magazine of History*, 100:1 (March 2004), 26-55.

political power in the early republic.³ Freeman argues that dueling was political, and that as such, the point of a duel was not to maim or kill your opponent, but instead to injure their reputation.⁴ Other historians firmly place dueling within antebellum southern culture.⁵ Historian Elliot Gorn argues that brawling in the Midwest was actually a legacy of the southeastern frontier, specifically Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee. The history of dueling and violence reveals that politics were often a factor in these violent episodes.

This chapter examines Sevier's personal and political disputes with other gentlemen. Two episodes of personal conflict illustrate the various types of violence between men of distinction on the early frontier. The first involved what began as a verbal dispute between Sevier and a shopkeeper over whiskey, and ended in a shootout between the two individuals. The second conflict began as a formal duel, between Sevier and Andrew Jackson, and ended with a heated exchange of words on the road to South West Point in 1803. Like other elite eighteenth century men, questions of personal honor shaped Sevier's life. By looking at these two specific examples as case studies, we gain a better understanding of the ways that Sevier navigated and shaped his manhood and honor in personal and private disputes.

The first incident of personal violence occurred in 1788, after Sevier returned from an expedition into Indian Country. The details of this conflict are explained in an affidavit in the *North Carolina State Papers*. As in the Battle of Franklin, described in chapter two, of the brawl between David Deadrick and Sevier there exists only a single account that provides one side of the story. But this evidence suggests that political rivalries from the Franklin struggle shaped this personal conflict. Deadrick belonged to the anti-Franklin movement and was a close friend of John Tipton. Therefore, his affidavit might have been an attempt to stain Sevier's image as

³ See Freeman, *Affairs of Honor*

⁴ See Freeman, "Dueling as Politics," 289-318.

⁵ Dickson Bruce, Jr., in particular, places great emphasis on the connection between southern culture and dueling in his work *Violence and Culture of American Slavery* (1979); Elliot Gorn draws a similar conclusion, though he discusses brawling rather than dueling on the southern frontier ("Gouge and Bite, Pull Hair and Scratch: The Social Significance of Fighting in the Southern Backcountry")

payback.⁶ At the very least, the account reveals a personal and political dispute between Sevier and the shopkeeper.⁷

In his oath to Judge William Cox, Deaderick explained the day's events. He claimed that around seven o'clock at night on October ninth he was informed that John Sevier and a company of men were at his shop's front door. Deaderick was "whistling while opening the door," and Sevier responded "we want no whistling, we want Whisky or Rum." Deaderick replied that "as to the whistling, he hoped he might do as he pleased, but whiskey or Rum he had none."⁸ Sevier appeared unamused by Deaderick's response. He continued his protest, saying that somebody told him that the shopkeeper had liquor, and that "he wanted it & would pay the money for it." Deaderick told his guests they were misinformed.⁹

Sevier requested to speak with Andrew Caldwell, a Franklinite, who happened to be at the shop that evening.¹⁰ Because Caldwell sided with the Franklin Movement, and because Sevier believed political rivalries were at play, the governor sought Caldwell's assistance at the shop that evening.¹¹ Sevier asked Caldwell the same question, to which he received the same response that

⁶ Sevier shot a bystander in his shootout with Deaderick

⁷ For a history of the State of Franklin see: Thomas Perkins Abernethy, *From Frontier to Plantation in Tennessee: A Study in Frontier Democracy*, Southern Historical Publications No. 12, New author's preface (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1967); Kevin Barksdale, *The Lost State of Franklin: America's First Secession* (Lexington, The University Press of Kentucky, 2009); Mary French Caldwell, *Tennessee: The Dangerous Example, Watauga to 1849* (Nashville: Aurora Publishers, Inc., 1974); Noel B. Gerson, *Franklin: America's "Lost State"* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1968); James Gilmore, *John Sevier as a Commonwealth Builder: A Sequel to the Rearguard of the Revolution* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1887); Dale Reed, *John Tipton, John Sevier, and the State of Franklin*, (United States: Tipton Family of America Association, 1998); Oliver Perry, *John Sevier: Citizen, Soldier, Legislator, Governor, Statesman, 1744-1815* (Knoxville: The Zi-Po Press, 1910); Samuel Cole Williams, *History of the Lost State of Franklin* (New York: The Press of the Pioneers, revised edition, 1933)

⁸ "Oath of David Deaderick," 25 October 1788, *The State Records of North Carolina*, edited by Walter Clark, volume 22, 699.

⁹ "Oath of David Deaderick," *The State Records of North Carolina*, edited by Clark, vol. 22, 699.

¹⁰ Caldwell was a Franklin supporter and friend of Sevier.

¹¹ For an explanation of the Franklin Movement's political divisions see: Abernethy, *From Frontier to Plantation in Tennessee*; Barksdale, *The Lost State of Franklin*; Caldwell, *Tennessee*; Gerson, *Franklin*; Gilmore, *John Sevier as a Commonwealth Builder*; Reed, *John Tipton, John Sevier, and the State of Franklin*; Oliver Perry, *John Sevier*; Williams, *History of the Lost State of Franklin*

Deaderick provided. Clearly unsatisfied that he received the cold shoulder due to political rivalries Sevier reportedly began to abuse the store, “then its inhabitants without distinction.” Deaderick inquired as to whether Sevier “aimed that discourse of abuse at him,” to which he proclaimed, “Yes at you or anybody else.” After exchanging heated words, Sevier called Deaderick a “son of a B-ch.” The shopkeeper quickly retorted that Sevier was a “d-d son of B-ch.” The two men measured each other, and Sevier drew his pistol. To this act, Deaderick quickly returned to his shop to retrieve his pistols. Caldwell barricaded the shop owner, in an attempt to terminate the violence. When Caldwell released Deaderick the quarrel resumed, resulting in an exchange of fire and the injury of bystander, Richard Collier.¹²

The conflict between Deaderick and Sevier represents an act of what historians refer to as honor culture.¹³ According to Bertram Wyatt-Brown, men responded to verbal assault with violence.¹⁴ Since Deaderick and Sevier both verbally insulted one another, in the presence of other men, drawing pistols at one another was acceptable behavior. According to Gordon Wood, “no accusation was too coarse or outrageous to be made by one gentleman against another... for the purpose of such accusations was to destroy the gentlemanly reputation of one’s opponents and thereby bring into question both their social authority and the legitimacy of their arguments.”¹⁵ The violent language both men used to insult one another prompted the shootout.

News of this incident reached John Tipton, head of the opposition party to the Franklin movement, and he immediately filed a bench warrant for Sevier’s arrest. Tipton was desperate to take down his political rival, and the shootout with Deaderick served as the perfect excuse to

¹² “Oath of David Deaderick,” *The State Records of North Carolina*, edited by Clark, vol. 22, 700.

¹³ For a discussion of honor and dueling see: Wood’s *Radicalism of the American Revolution*; Freeman’s *Affairs of Honor* and “Duelling as Politics”; Ayers, *Vengeance and Justice*; Bruce, Jr., *Violence and Culture in the Antebellum South*; Gorn, “Gouge and Bite, Pull Hair and Scratch”; Greenberg, *Masters and Statesmen* and “The Nose, the Lie, and the Duel in the Antebellum South”; Stowe, *Intimacy and Power in the Old South*; Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor* and “Honour and American Republicanism”; Dearinger “Violence, Masculinity, Image, and Reality on the Antebellum Frontier.”

¹⁴ Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 43.

¹⁵ Wood, *Radicalism of the American Revolution*, 39.

arrest Franklin's governor. According to historian Kevin Barksdale, Sevier attempted to escape arrest by "hiding at the home of Jacob Brown's widow."¹⁶ Two hours after midnight the next morning Tipton apprehended Sevier and imprisoned him in Morganton, North Carolina.¹⁷ Tipton reportedly wanted to hang Sevier, but the "Sevier family's friendship with Colonel Robert Love," a Washington County resident, saved him from this fate.¹⁸ Despite the popular myth, Sevier did not escape his Morganton jail cell. Instead, the sheriff of Burke County allowed Sevier to go free. Barksdale states that a group of "rescuers found Sevier in a local tavern enjoying a drink." They implored him to leave immediately, before Tipton found he had "escaped." Ignoring the pleas of his rescuers, Sevier remained at the tavern for several more hours before departing.¹⁹

While Sevier's outburst at Deaderick's shop appears like a childish response to lack of whiskey, there are several possible explanations. First, Deaderick was a Tiptonite and this encounter was personal. Caldwell, on the other hand, was a Franklinite and it is significant that he never filed a complaint against Sevier.²⁰ Deaderick's statement makes him appear to be an innocent man abused by Sevier over lack of whiskey. Second, Deaderick was sarcastic in his response to Sevier's initial inquiry. Sevier could have taken this as an insult and therefore responded defensively. Clearly politics played an important role in this episode of violence. Because of Deaderick's loyalties, Sevier immediately assumed the shopkeeper was lying about his inventory and asked to speak to Caldwell. Moreover, Tipton was most likely informed of the incident because he served as the leader of the anti-Franklinite movement. The governor of Franklin injured an innocent bystander during a shootout with a Tiptonite. This dispute served Tipton's needs. It was as an excuse to arrest the governor. Unfortunately for Tipton, the sheriff

¹⁶ Barksdale, *The Lost State of Franklin*, 141.

¹⁷ "Oath of David Deaderick," *The State Records of North Carolina*, edited by Clark, vol. 22, 700.

¹⁸ Washington County, NC. Barksdale, *The Lost State of Franklin*, 141.

¹⁹ Barksdale, *The Lost State of Franklin*, 141.

²⁰ Caldwell, however, did confirm Deaderick's story (See: "Oath of Andrew Caldwell," 25 October 1788, *The State Records of North Carolina*, edited by Clark, vol. 22, 701).

served alongside Sevier in King's Mountain, and set him free before trial.²¹ Political and personal loyalties saved Sevier from political and personal demise.

What this episode suggests is that Sevier faced the daunting task of explaining his actions in defense of his public honor. Central to honor is the "evaluation of the public."²² According to Wyatt-Brown, honor had three basic components. The first was the realization of one's own "self-worth." The second was one's representation of honor before the public. The third, and most important, was the "assessment of [that] claim by the public...based upon the behavior of the claimant."²³ Other scholars explain how "honor was externally presented for public consumption."²⁴ Historian Anne Lombard explains that "even when there was no particular reason to do so, men often tried to frame their threats or acts of violence as disciplinary act."²⁵ Since the public played an important role in determining a man's honor, it was critical that Sevier explained his actions to his neighbors and the state government.²⁶

Approximately five days after his prison-break, Sevier wrote to the General Assembly of North Carolina defending his participation in the whiskey brawl and subsequent prison break. He claims that he was imprisoned for the sole purpose of gratifying "the ambition & malice of an

²¹ Barksdale, *The Lost State of Franklin*, 141.

²² Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 14.

²³ Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 14.

²⁴ Craig Thompson Friend and Lorri Glover, "Rethinking Southern Masculinity: An Introduction," *Southern Manhood: Perspectives on Masculinity in the Old South*, edited by Craig Thompson Friend and Lorri Glover (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004), x.

²⁵ Anne S. Lombard, *Making Manhood: Growing Up Male in Colonial New England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 129.

²⁶ For works on honor, manhood, and political reputation see: Anthony E. Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1993); Lombard, *Making Manhood*; Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1982); Richard Godbeer, *The Overflowing of Friendship: Love Between Men and the Creation of the American Republic* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009); Richard Godbeer, *Sexual Revolution in Early America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002); Friend and Glover, Eds., *Southern Manhood: Perspectives on Masculinity in the Old South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004); Freeman, *Affairs of Honor* (2001) and "Dueling as Politics" (1996); Thomas A. Foster, *New Men: Manliness in Early America* (New York: NY University Press, 2011) and *Sex and the Eighteenth-Century Man: Massachusetts and the History of Sexuality in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006); Ryan L. Dearinger, "Violence, Masculinity, Image, and Reality on the Antebellum Frontier," *Indiana Magazine of History*, 100:1 (March 2004), 26-55.

obscure and worthless individual [meaning Tipton],” rather than the appeasement of the “Justice of the State.” He then chastised the General Assembly for forgetting his service to the state and the cause of the nation during the American Revolution.²⁷ He concluded that North Carolina should consider that he only “wished her prosperity” and that he “fought and suffered in her Cause [referring to the Battle of King’s Mountain].” Moreover, he stated that it was “consistent with [his] honor, secret pride and satisfaction, that she, as well as the whole of the Union, may always flourish and become great.”²⁸ Sevier made no mention of injuring an innocent man over whisky. Instead he highlighted his revolutionary military service. Men with Sevier’s military background “demonstrated their manhood” and earned public recognition of their honor through “the crucible of war.”²⁹ Wood explains that a man’s reputation was “another name for honor.”³⁰ Sevier framed his defense of the episode through larger political narratives of service and virtue. He believed that reminding Tennesseans of his military service was all that was needed to retain public recognition of his honor.

* * *

Political hostilities only worsened during the 1803 campaign.³¹ Sevier sought reelection to the governor’s office. Tennessee historian Mary Caldwell argues that the 1803 campaign “was

²⁷ John Sevier to the General Assembly, 30 October 1788, *The State Records of North Carolina*, edited by Clark, vol. 22, 698.

²⁸ John Sevier to the General Assembly, 30 October 1788, *The State Records of North Carolina*, edited by Clark, vol. 22, 699.

²⁹ Harry S. Laver, “Refuge of Manhood: Masculinity and the Militia Experience in Kentucky,” in *Southern Manhood: Perspectives on Masculinity in the Old South*, edited by Craig Thompson Friend and Lorri Glover (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004), 3.

³⁰ Wood, *Radicalism of the American Revolution*, 39

³¹ For a discussion of the 1803 campaign in Tennessee see: Abernethy, *From Frontier to Plantation in Tennessee: A Study in Frontier Democracy*, Southern Historical Publications No. 12, new author’s preface (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1967); Barksdale, *The Lost State of Franklin* (2009); Caldwell, *Tennessee: The Dangerous Example, Watauga to 1849* (Nashville: Aurora Publishers, Inc, 1974); John Finger, *Tennessee Frontiers: Three Regions in Transition* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001); Gilmore, *John Sevier as a Commonwealth Builder*, (1887); J. G. M. Ramsey, *The Annals of Tennessee* (Charleston: J. Russell, 1853, reprint Baltimore: Clearfield Co., 2003); Temple, *John Sevier* (1910, 1948); Turner, *Life of General John Sevier* (1910).

so bitter and so ruthless...that many long lasting enemies resulted from it.”³² In 1802, in an effort to bar Sevier from participating in the upcoming election, Jackson published an article in the *Knoxville Gazette* claiming Sevier participated in land fraud.³³ In a letter to the editor of the *Tennessee Gazette*, Sevier argued that his political enemies manufactured the evidence against him for the purposes of “injur[ing his] character, and induc[ing his] fellow citizens to withhold [him] from their suffrage at the approaching election.”³⁴ Tennessee’s Superior Court, headed by Judge Andrew Jackson, tried Sevier for land fraud. Sevier denied any involvement in fraudulent land deals and continued in his campaign for the governorship. Had the court found Sevier guilty, it would have ended Sevier’s political life and “put him in prison.”³⁵

On the first of October, “with the question of land frauds appearing before the legislature,” Jackson and Sevier met in front of the Knox County courthouse and exchanged insults with each other.³⁶ With Jackson’s political faction already attacking Sevier’s reputation, the heated exchange of words only added insult to injury, and turned a tense situation into a personal battle. After his hearing, in the courthouse lawn, Sevier reportedly “made an abusive attack” on Colonel William Martin, a member of the committee reviewing the legitimacy of Sevier’s land.³⁷ Seeing this “abuse,” Jackson, who was presiding over Sevier’s case, stepped in and “ask[ed] for an explanation.”³⁸ Sevier’s son, James, warned Jackson to “stand off” and John

For a full history of the Jackson-Sevier political feud see: H. W. Brands, *Andrew Jackson: His Life and Times* (New York: Random House, 2005); Robert Remini, *Andrew Jackson: The Course of American Empire, 1767-1821* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998, reprint)

³² Mary French Caldwell, *Tennessee: The Dangerous Example, Watauga to 1849* (Nashville: Aurora Publishers, Inc., 1974), 224.

³³ Abernethy, *From Frontier to Plantation in Tennessee*, 176.

³⁴ John Sevier to the Editor, *Tennessee Gazette*, in Cora B. Sevier and Nancy Madden, *Sevier Family History: With the Collected Letters of Gen. John Sevier, First Governor of Tennessee, and 28 Collateral Family Lineages* (Washington D. C.: Nancy S. Madden, 1961), 150.

³⁵ Caldwell, *Tennessee*, 224.

³⁶ Abernethy, *From Frontier to Plantation in Tennessee*, 177.

³⁷ Affidavits of Jesse Wharton, William Hall, and John K. Wynne, 21 December 1803, in *The Papers of Andrew Jackson: Volume I, 1770-1803*, edited by Sam B. Smith and Harriet C. Owsley (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1980), 503.

³⁸ At the time of the altercation Jackson was serving as Judge of Tennessee’s Superior Court.

Sevier turned his attention from Martin to Jackson.³⁹ Jackson accused Sevier of corruption, and in exchange, Sevier questioned the purity of Jackson's wife and challenged him to fight.⁴⁰ This exchange of "abusive language" occurred in front of court members and Knoxville citizens, and marks the beginning of the Jackson-Sevier duel.⁴¹

Outside the county courthouse, Sevier and Jackson used political combat to measure each other in front of other men. It was a public affair of honor which threatened the reputation of both men, and required resolution.⁴² The following day Andrew Jackson wrote a letter calling upon Sevier for an interview.⁴³ In his letter, Jackson asked Sevier to explain his, "ungentlemanly Expressions and gasconading conduct."⁴⁴ Sevier promptly replied to the Judge saying, "I shall wait on you with pleasure at any time and place not within the State of Tennessee... Georgia, Virginia, and North Carolina are all in our vicinity and we can easily repair to either of those places."⁴⁵ He concluded that he would be "attended by [his] friend with pistols presuming

Affidavits of Wharton, Hall, and Wynne, 21 Dec 1803, in *The Papers of Andrew Jackson: Volume I*, edited by Smith and Owsley, 503.

³⁹ Affidavits of Wharton, Hall, and Wynne, 21 Dec 1803, in *The Papers of Andrew Jackson: Volume I*, edited by Smith and Owsley, 503.

⁴⁰ John Sevier most likely commented on the shady marriage between Rachel and Andrew Jackson. At the time of their marriage, Rachel was legally still married to another man. This became the topic of gossip, and is probably what Jackson referred to as "taking the honor of a lady on your polluted lips"

Affidavits of Wharton, Hall, and Wynne, 21 Dec 1803, in *The Papers of Andrew Jackson: Volume I*, edited by Smith and Owsley, 503; Andrew Jackson to John Sevier, 9 October 1803, in *The Papers of Andrew Jackson: Volume I*, edited by Smith and Owsley, 376.

⁴¹ Affidavits of Wharton, Hall, and Wynne, 21 Dec 1803, in *The Papers of Andrew Jackson: Volume I*, edited by Smith and Owsley, 503.

⁴² For a discussion of honor and dueling see: Wood's *Radicalism of the American Revolution*; Freeman's *Affairs of Honor* and "Duelling as Politics: Reinterpreting the Burr-Hamilton Duel"; Ayers, *Vengeance and Justice*; Bruce, Jr., *Violence and Culture in the Antebellum South*; Gorn, "Gouge and Bite, Pull Hair and Scratch"; Greenberg, *Masters and Statesmen* and "The Nose, the Lie, and the Duel in the Antebellum South"; Stowe, *Intimacy and Power in the Old South*; Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor* and "Honour and American Republicanism"; Dearing "Violence, Masculinity, Image, and Reality on the Antebellum Frontier."

⁴³ For the rules of dueling see Freeman, "Duelling as Politics" and *Affairs of Honor*

⁴⁴ Andrew Jackson to John Sevier, 2 October 1803, in *The Papers of Andrew Jackson: Volume I*, edited by Smith and Owsley, 367.

⁴⁵ John Sevier to Andrew Jackson, 2 October 1803, in *The Papers of Andrew Jackson: Volume I*, edited by Smith and Owsley, 368.

[Jackson knew] nothing About the use of Any other Arms.”⁴⁶ In their October second correspondence, both men stated that they only had respect for each other’s offices, and this was the only reason they were “worthy” of each other’s notice.⁴⁷ With Sevier’s response to Jackson’s letter, he challenged him to a duel.

Sevier specifically requested an interview outside of Tennessee, because the state recently created a law to prohibit the practice of dueling. Tennessee’s legislature passed “an act to prevent the evil practice of duelling” in November 1801.⁴⁸ Sevier was well aware, as was Jackson, that if they were to consent to a duel within the State he would have been stripped of his office, “fined, imprisoned sixty days without bail or mainprize, and deprived of citizenship for twelve months.”⁴⁹ Moreover, the law stated that accepting a duel “shall forfeit and pay the sum of fifty dollars,” in addition to forfeiting his citizenship for a full year.⁵⁰ Thus, Sevier requested that Jackson meet him outside the borders of Tennessee. Instead of agreeing to a location outside the state lines, however, Jackson demanded that since Sevier’s “attack was in the Town of Knoxville...in the Neighbourhood of Knoxville [he] shall attone for it.” He stated that he would meet Sevier on the Indian Boundary or in Knoxville and that if Sevier did not agree to these terms, he would publish Sevier a “coward and poltroon” in the local newspapers.⁵¹ Sevier responded immediately that he was “happy to find [Jackson] so Accommodating.”⁵² With this, Sevier accepted the duel within Knoxville or the Indian Boundary.

⁴⁶ John Sevier to Andrew Jackson, 2 October 1803, in *The Papers of Andrew Jackson: Volume I*, edited by Smith and Owsley, 368.

⁴⁷ John Sevier to Andrew Jackson, 2 October 1803, in *The Papers of Andrew Jackson: Volume I*, edited by Smith and Owsley, 368; Andrew Jackson to John Sevier, 2 October 1803, in *The Papers of Andrew Jackson: Volume I*, edited by Smith and Owsley, 367.

⁴⁸ “Veritas” to the *Tennessee Gazette* Printer, 14 December 1803, in *The Papers of Andrew Jackson: Volume I*, edited by Smith and Owsley, 499; *Tennessee Acts*, 1801, Chapter XXXII (Knoxville: George Raulstone, 1801), 102-103.

⁴⁹ Smith and Owsley, eds. *Jackson Papers: Volume I*, 493.

⁵⁰ *Tenn. Acts*, 1801, Chapter XXXII, 102

⁵¹ Andrew Jackson to John Sevier, 3 October 1803, in *The Papers of Andrew Jackson: Volume I*, edited by Smith and Owsley, 369.

⁵² John Sevier to Andrew Jackson, 3 October 1803, in *The Papers of Andrew Jackson: Volume I*, edited by Smith and Owsley, 369.

Jackson's publication threat had the potential of ruining Sevier's image and political career.⁵³ Jackson sought to de-escalate the violence with Sevier by turning to paper first.⁵⁴ After waiting almost a week for Sevier to choose a time and place to duel, Jackson's patience ran out, and he informed Sevier of the pending publication.⁵⁵ Sevier immediately returned Jackson's letter, saying that he could not "neglect the public business... nor [his] own private concerns now before the House, that you And several other poltroons are aiming at to my prejudice."⁵⁶ By ignoring Jackson's threat and stalling the duel, Sevier was also trying to de-escalate the violence. Jackson out-maneuvered Sevier. On October tenth, in the *Knoxville Gazette*, Jackson publically challenged the honor of Governor Sevier:

Those of the Honourable members of the Legislature and other Citizens who were present on the first day of this Instant in the Town of Knoxville will recollect, the ungentlemanly and unprovoked attack, made by his Excellency John Sevier Governor of the State of Tennessee on me. How he panted for a combat – when armed with a Cutlass and I with a cain. His Excellency in Perfect Health, I Just recovering from a Sevier⁵⁷ Illness. They will also recollect his Gasgonading Expressions, and his repeated darings for me to invite him to the field of Honour.

To all whom Shall See these presents Greeting – Know yea that I Andrew Jackson, do pronounce, Publish, and declare to the world, that his Excellency John Sevier Esqr. Governor, Captain General and commander in chief, of the land and Naval forces of the

⁵³ For the link between personal identity and public office see: Jan Lewis, "The Blessings of Domestic Society: Thomas Jefferson's Family and the Transformation of American Politics," *Jeffersonian Legacies*, edited by Peter S. Onuf (Charlottesville, 1993), 109-146; Alan Taylor, "'The Art of Hook and Snivey': Political Culture in Upstate New York during the 1790s," *Journal of American History*, 79 (1993), 1371-96; Robert H. Wiebe, *The Opening of American Society: From the Adoption of the Constitution to the Eve of Disunion* (New York, 1984), 98-104; David Hackett Fischer, *The Revolution of American Conservatism: The Federalist Party in the Era of Jeffersonian Democracy* (New York, 1965).

⁵⁴ For more information on the political impact of publications see Joanne Freeman's chapter "Art of Paper War" in *Affairs of Honor* and Gordon Wood's *Radicalism of the American Revolution*.

⁵⁵ Andrew Jackson to John Sevier, 9 October 1803, in *The Papers of Andrew Jackson: Volume I*, edited by Smith and Owsley, 375-377.

⁵⁶ Referencing the accusation of land fraud before the House, i.e. "private concerns" John Sevier to Andrew Jackson, 9 October 1803, in *The Papers of Andrew Jackson: Volume I*, edited by Smith and Owsley, 377.

⁵⁷ "Whether intentional or accidental, Jackson's pun was lost when the newspaper corrected the spelling to 'severe'" (footnote 1) Smith and Owsley, *The Papers of Andrew Jackson: Volume I*, 379.

State of Tennessee – is a base coward and poltroon. he will basely insult, but has not courage to repair the wound.⁵⁸

In making public Sevier's agreement to an interview, Jackson prevented Sevier from continuing correspondence. According to the "act against the evil practice of duelling," if an invitation is accepted both parties were liable to the fine and imprisonment.⁵⁹ Jackson's position as Judge of the Superior Court, and his overwhelming popularity in the state's House of Representatives, offered him some leeway with the law.⁶⁰ Sevier realized he would be less fortunate, and therefore refused to receive any more letters from Jackson.⁶¹

Newspapers were central to the political feud between Jackson and Sevier. On October sixteenth, Sevier and Jackson met on the road to South West Point in Kingston and the event played out in the Tennessee newspapers months after. Six days after he was published a coward and poltroon Sevier noted in his diary that he arrived in Kingston after having "a violent dispute" with Jackson.⁶² According to Jackson's letter to Thomas Jefferson, he sent Doctor Vandyke to deliver a letter to Sevier. Andrew Greer, however, claimed that Vandyke and Jackson rode up with pistols in hand.⁶³ Sevier's supporters believed that Jackson came to assassinate the governor.⁶⁴ Most likely, Jackson heard that Sevier was travelling to Kingston, and wanted to resume planning his interview. According to Jackson, Sevier recognized his handwriting and

⁵⁸ Andrew Jackson *To the Public*, 10 October 1803, in *The Papers of Andrew Jackson: Volume I*, edited by Smith and Owsley, 378-379.

⁵⁹ *Tenn. Acts*, 1801, Chapter XXXII, 102

⁶⁰ Caldwell, *Tennessee*, 225.

⁶¹ The state constitution limited the power of the Governor so much so that it was more of a position of honor than a position of power. On the other hand, as Judge of the Superior Court, Jackson possessed a great amount of political sway and power. Simply, Jackson's position provided him greater political power than Sevier's.

⁶² John Sevier Diary, October 16, 1803, Diary of Gov. John Sevier 1790-1815, University of Tennessee Library, Knoxville, TN.

⁶³ Affidavit of Andrew Greer, 23 October 1803, in *The Papers of Andrew Jackson: Volume I*, edited by Smith and Owsley, 489.

⁶⁴ Knox County Citizen to *Knoxville Gazette* Printer, 10 November 1803, in *The Papers of Andrew Jackson: Volume I*, edited by Smith and Owsley, 494.

refused to accept the letter.⁶⁵ Sevier dismounted his horse and approached Jackson with his pistols ready. Jackson and Sevier were within twenty feet of each other when Jackson presented his cocked rifle and “swore he would kill [Sevier].”⁶⁶ Sevier then dared Jackson to “fire away.”⁶⁷ They continued to argue and then returned their weapons to their holsters. Andrew Greer stated that the Jackson then swore he would cane Sevier, prompting the governor to draw his sword for defense. This, Greer believed, scared Sevier horse, who ran away with his pistols.⁶⁸ Dr. Vandyke’s account differs. He claims that Sevier let his horse loose.⁶⁹ Seeing an opportunity, Jackson drew his pistol and advanced on Sevier, prompting the governor to take shelter behind a tree.⁷⁰ Sevier’s son, James, came to his father’s defense, and pulled his pistol on Jackson. Defending his friend, Dr. Vandyke also drew his pistol.⁷¹ After his horse returned, Sevier and Jackson “parlayed” once more before parting ways. In their final dispute, Sevier reminded Jackson of the 1801 act which outlawed dueling, and explained that Jackson forced him to discontinue correspondence on the subject after Jackson published the affair in the *Gazette*.⁷²

Jackson won the paper war, successfully emasculating Sevier in print, and then threatened him personally. Emasculating Sevier publically was not enough. Jackson desired an attack on Sevier’s personal honor. During the two months following Sevier and Jackson’s dispute at South West Point, Tennessee newspapers continued to print accounts of the encounter. In early

⁶⁵ Andrew Jackson to Thomas Jefferson, 17 October 1803, in *The Papers of Andrew Jackson: Volume I*, edited by Smith and Owsley, 389.

⁶⁶ Knox County Citizen to *Knoxville Gazette* Printer, 10 November 1803, in *The Papers of Andrew Jackson: Volume I*, edited by Smith and Owsley, 494.

⁶⁷ Affidavit of Andrew Greer, 23 October 1803, in *The Papers of Andrew Jackson: Volume I*, edited by Smith and Owsley, 489.

⁶⁸ Affidavit of Andrew Greer, 23 October 1803, in *The Papers of Andrew Jackson: Volume I*, edited by Smith and Owsley, 489.

⁶⁹ Affidavit of Thomas J. Vandyke, 16 October 1803, in *The Papers of Andrew Jackson: Volume I*, edited by Smith and Owsley, 505.

⁷⁰ Affidavit of Andrew Greer, 23 October 1803, in *The Papers of Andrew Jackson: Volume I*, edited by Smith and Owsley, 489.

⁷¹ Affidavit of Andrew Greer, 23 October 1803, in *The Papers of Andrew Jackson: Volume I*, edited by Smith and Owsley, 489-490.

⁷² Affidavit of Andrew Greer, 23 October 1803, in *The Papers of Andrew Jackson: Volume I*, edited by Smith and Owsley, 490.

December, Sevier dreamt of a conversation between him and his father on the topic of his conflict with Jackson, which he documented in his diary the following morning:

I asked him if there was any news where he had been? He answered that nothing existed there but the utmost peace and friendship, that he had heard much conversation respecting the quarrel between Judge Jackson and myself. I then asked him if it was possible that the affair had reached so far? He then replied that long before he had arrived the news was there and also every other transaction that had taken place in Tennessee. I then asked him what was said? He told me that Jackson was by all viewed as a very wicked base man and a very improper person for a Judge.⁷³

Sevier struggled with the publications against his honor. When what the public thought about Sevier's reputation entered his subconscious, it became clear that the continuous publications, correspondence, and public political combat, were threatening his "inner conviction of self-worth."⁷⁴ Jackson succeeded in totally emasculating Sevier.

The *Knoxville Gazette*, *Nashville Gazette*, and *Tennessee Gazette* continued to publish the feud as well as public opinion. The publications which followed Jackson's came from both factions of the state's Republican Party. The paper contest of 1803 threatened Sevier's honor. Joanne Freeman explains that paper wars, "grounded on personal reputation and character...struck at the core of a politician's career and identity, inflicting an almost palpable wound."⁷⁵ A month after Jackson published Sevier and "coward and poltroon" an unknown person wrote to the *Nashville Gazette* and *Knoxville Gazette* in defense of Sevier's honor. A "Knox County Citizen" defended the honor of Governor Sevier by recalling his courage in battle, saying that it is "strange indeed, that after so many battles and engagements the governor has encountered, that such a thing as cowardice should ever be imputed to him!!!"⁷⁶ The citizen called into question the honor of Jackson. He stated that Sevier had led a number of military

⁷³ John Sevier Journal, December 10, 1803, J. F. H. Claiborne Collection, Book D, Microfiche Roll 36005, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, MS.

⁷⁴ The first component of honor according to Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 14.

⁷⁵ Freeman, *Affairs of Honor*, 131.

⁷⁶ Knox County Citizen to *Knoxville Gazette* Printer, 10 November 1803, in *The Papers of Andrew Jackson: Volume I*, edited by Smith and Owsley, 493.

expeditions and that Jackson's faction could not say the same about their leader.⁷⁷ This publication was one of very few which defended Sevier, and its authenticity came into question by Jackson and his allies who believe that none other than John Sevier himself wrote the article.⁷⁸

So enraged by the *Nashville Gazette* publication and its author's unknown identity, Jackson violently confronted the Secretary State, William Maclin, about the publication. Jackson asked Howell Tatum to witness the conversation with Maclin. The Secretary "acknowledged the delivery of the piece to the printer by request of Governor Sevier, but denied any knowledge of the author."⁷⁹ This agitated Jackson, because the Knox County Citizen called into question the Judge's courage.⁸⁰ Jackson said that since Maclin "brought the piece to the printer" that he should be considered its author, and that if he "did not wish to be so considered, [then] it was improper for him to bring the piece to the printer without being able to name who was the author."⁸¹ Maclin, "in exoneration of himself" reassured Jackson that he did not know the author's identity. Jackson then called the Secretary "a rascal or a damned rascal" to which Maclin replied that he was "no more a rascal than the judge." This insult enraged Jackson, and according to Tatum, he canned the Secretary.⁸² Following this assault, Maclin searched for a weapon to defend himself, and Jackson prepared to fight by drawing the sword from his cane. Tatum recalled that because the Judge did not advance on Maclin, that he drew his sword "as a defensive preparation against

⁷⁷ Knox County Citizen to *Knoxville Gazette* Printer, 10 November 1803, in *The Papers of Andrew Jackson: Volume I*, edited by Smith and Owsley, 494-5.

⁷⁸ "Veritas" to *Tennessee Gazette* Printer, 14 December 1803, in *The Papers of Andrew Jackson: Volume I*, edited by Smith and Owsley, 502.

⁷⁹ Affidavit of Howell Tatum, 8 November 1803, in *The Papers of Andrew Jackson: Volume I*, edited by Smith and Owsley, 491.

⁸⁰ For the text of the publication reference: Knox County Citizen to *Knoxville Gazette* Printer, 10 November 1803, in *The Papers of Andrew Jackson: Volume I*, edited by Smith and Owsley, 492-496.

⁸¹ Affidavit of Howell Tatum, 8 November 1803, in *The Papers of Andrew Jackson: Volume I*, edited by Smith and Owsley, 491.

⁸² Affidavit of Howell Tatum, 8 November 1803, in *The Papers of Andrew Jackson: Volume I*, edited by Smith and Owsley, 491.

any weapon which Mr. Maclin should procure to return the assault with.”⁸³ Maclin returned with a “brick-bat” and threw it at the judge “with such violence,” Tatum recalled, “that I believe any other person would have done in a similar case.”⁸⁴ This episode is important because it demonstrates the lengths gentlemen went through to defend their honor, and Jackson’s desire to protect his honor against men he believed too cowardly to publish their name.⁸⁵

Failing to locate the identity of the Knox County Citizen, Jackson’s political faction sent their own testimony of the dueling arrangements and conflict at South West Point, entitled “Veritas,” to the printers of the *Tennessee Gazette* in early December.⁸⁶ The “Veritas” defended the actions of Jackson against the accusations of the Knox County Citizen. The author of this publication never came forward, but many believed that it was Jackson himself or a close friend, since the author possessed his private correspondence. Freeman explains that some private letters were intended to be shared with a small circle of “elite readers.”⁸⁷ The author of “Veritas” closed his publication with the message, “The name of the author is left with the printer to be given to the Governor, or any person who will give his true name, and say he is the Citizen of Knox county.”⁸⁸

Unfortunately for Sevier, the lack of public support combined with the continuous publications questioning his honor served as a serious blow to his reputation. While the whiskey brawl with Deaderick was as politically driven as the Jackson-Sevier Feud, it did not impact

⁸³ Affidavit of Howell Tatum, 8 November 1803, in *The Papers of Andrew Jackson: Volume I*, edited by Smith and Owsley, 491-492.

⁸⁴ Affidavit of Howell Tatum, 8 November 1803, in *The Papers of Andrew Jackson: Volume I*, edited by Smith and Owsley, 492.

⁸⁵ In fact, this was not the only attempt Jackson made to discover the author’s identity. In March 1804, Jackson wrote to John Coffee that he still had not found the author of the publication in the *Knoxville Gazette*. The *Knoxville Gazette* reprinted the piece originally printed in the *Nashville Gazette*. According to Jackson’s letter to Coffee, Sevier handed the piece for publication to printer of the *Gazette*, John Roulstone. (Andrew Jackson to John Coffee, 7 March 1804, THi-Dyas Collection, Coffee Papers, cited in footnote on page 502 of volume one of the *Papers of Andrew Jackson*).

⁸⁶ “Vertias” is a latin term for “Truth”

⁸⁷ Freeman, *Affairs of Honor*, 114.

⁸⁸ “Veritas” to *Tennessee Gazette* Printer, 14 December 1803, in *The Papers of Andrew Jackson: Volume I*, edited by Smith and Owsley, 502.

Sevier's "inner self-worth." Even though Sevier injured an innocent man in the shootout with Deaderick, he was able to retain his public honor. In his political feud with Jackson, neither Jackson nor Sevier fired their pistols, yet political gossip proved detrimental to Sevier's reputation. What these conflicts have in common is that they began as personal disputes and developed into violent outbursts. They differ in their magnitude. The conflict with Jackson reached a much wider audience, and this audience favored Jackson more than Sevier. Had the State of Tennessee arrested Sevier for arranging an interview with Jackson, it is unlikely that he would have been able to "escape" persecution like he had in Morganton, North Carolina fifteen years prior.

These conflicts are characteristic of the type of political violence which prevailed in the early republic. Sevier's personal disputes were always political. The factionalism and intrastate sectionalism which arose out of the Franklin Movement persisted into Tennessee's early campaigns and developed into personal and political conflicts. The public's opinion of the individuals involved in such disputes often dictated the outcome. While Sevier carried enough political clout in 1788 to prevent public persecution for injuring Collier, in the shootout with Deaderick, this was not the case in 1803. Jackson was able to publically emasculate Sevier to the point that Sevier began to question his own honor. In examining these two episodes of personal battles, we have uncovered disputes that were as important to Sevier's identity as his military campaigns.

EPILOGUE: THE REINTERMENT OF JOHN SEVIER AND RESURRECTION OF HIS HISTORICAL MEMORY

In 1815, the federal government appointed John Sevier a commissioner to map the boundary between Georgia and the Creek territory in Alabama. He served in this role until his death near Fort Decatur, Alabama, on September twenty fourth. Sevier was seventy years old when he died of a fever.¹ His comrades interned Sevier and placed a simple marker on his grave. His remains stayed in Alabama for seventy-four years until a group of Tennesseans sought his reinterment in Knoxville. This occasion presented the opportunity for Tennesseans, still healing from the wounds of the Civil War, to recall an early American patriot and frontier hero. The reinterment celebration and memorial underscored Sevier's military victories and overlooked his diplomatic and personal struggles.²

¹ Most evidence points to the yellow fever. Accounts state that a fever swept through his camp.

² The relationship between the Civil War, Reconstruction, and memorials of Revolutionary heroes and battles see: Matthew Barbee, *Race and Masculinity in Southern Memory: History of Richmond, Virginia's Monument Avenue, 1948-1996* (Maryland: Lexington Books, 2014); Charles Wilson *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009); Michael Kammen *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991); Thomas Brown, *The Public Art of Civil War Commemoration: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2004); Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in 19th Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); and David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001)

For scholarship on re-internment and death culture in the New South/Reconstruction Eras see: Michael Kammen *Digging Up the Dead: A History of Notable American Reburials* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010); Donald Collins *The Death and Resurrection of Jefferson Davis* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005); Mark Schantz, *Awaiting the Heavenly Country: The Civil War and America's Culture of Death* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008); and Peter Metcalf and Richard Huntington, *Celebrations of Death: The Anthropology of Mortuary Ritual*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991)

For a history of Sevier's reinterment see Gordon Belt, *John Sevier: Tennessee's First Hero* (Charleston: The History Press, 2014).

Sevier's reinterment reveals that Tennesseans believed their first governor's most important legacy was his leadership in early state and frontier politics, participation in the revolutionary battle at King's Mountain, and suppression of the Native American threat. Beginning in the 1870s, members of the Tennessee Historical Society and Sevier's descendants began rallying the state for Sevier's reinterment. The president of the society, J.G.M. Ramsey, stated that although Sevier did not need a memorial, Tennesseans deserved a memorial of their first governor to "recognize as [their] Mecca."³ A member of the society, Arthur Colyar, was a key component of the campaign to reinter Sevier in Tennessee. Colyar's father fought alongside Sevier at King's Mountain, and his mother was the niece of Sevier's second wife, Catherine "Bonny Kate" Sherrill Sevier.⁴ Colyar was not only a member of the society, he was a descendant of Sevier. Therefore, he felt a familial obligation to honor his family and state's patriarch.

In the summer of 1889 Tennessee returned its founding father to his home from its "cotton patch" gravesite in Decatur.⁵ The celebration which surrounded the reinterment was one a grand pageantry, highlighting Sevier's military accomplishments. The *Knoxville Journal* called for the city to be "ablaze with flags and bunting" and sprinkled with of "black and white" crepe paper.⁶ The journal reminded its readers that the reinterment was a time of celebration rather than mourning. The pageantry surrounding the occasion echoed this message. The state ordered an ornate casket crafted for their founder's ashes. Crane and Breed Manufacturing company, in Cincinnati,

³ Ramsey to Carret, 24 December 1874, quoted in Samuel Gordon Heiskell, *Andrew Jackson and Early Tennessee History* (Nashville: Ambrose Printing Company, 1918), cited in Belt, *John Sevier*, 154-155.

⁴ Belt, *John Sevier*, 154.

⁵ "Unearthed: The Remains of John Sevier," *Knoxville Journal*, 18 June 1889 (microfiche)

⁶ "Decorate! Decorate!" *Knoxville Journal*, 19 June 1889 (microfiche)

crafted the casket. The *Knoxville Journal* described it as “one of the most costly in the market” with its “metallic, rosewood imitation...trimmings.”⁷ Knoxville invited the entire state to converge on the courthouse lawn on June nineteenth. The processional march included the state militia, federal and ex-confederate soldiers, civil servants, members of Tennessee Historical Society, Tennessee citizens, and relatives of Sevier.⁸



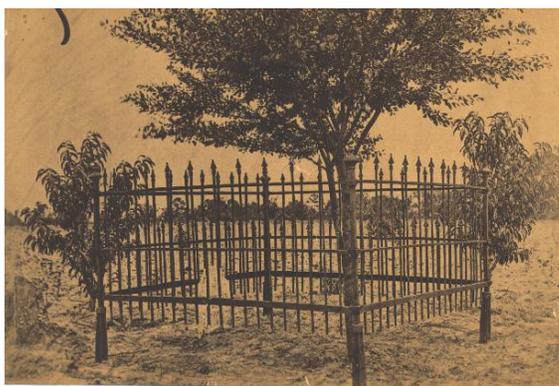
Ceremonies at Knoxville, citizens converging on Sevier’s grave site at the courthouse lawn, 1889, *Tennessee State Library and Archives*

A number of biographical sketches filled the pages of local newspapers. The *Knoxville Journal* published a special issue on June nineteenth, the day of Sevier’s

⁷ “Sevier’s Casket,” *Knoxville Journal*, 13 June 1889 (microfiche)

⁸ “The Regular Program,” *Knoxville Journal*, 19 June 1889 (microfiche)

reinterment.⁹ In this special edition issue, a number of the state’s historians, including J.G.M. Ramsey, submitted pieces on the history of Tennessee and Sevier’s civil and military service. These sketches discussed Sevier’s involvement in the Battle of King’s Mountain, the numerous Indian expeditions, and his governorship for both the State of Franklin and Tennessee. The majority of the biographical columns highlighted Sevier’s leadership in the revolution. Only one of the columns mentioned that Sevier had faults,



Sevier’s simple Decatur gravesite, date unknown, *Tennessee State Library and Archives*.



Sevier’s ornate gravesite in Knoxville, 2013, *author’s personal collection*.

saying, “no doubt he had his faults, for who that is human, has not? but if they were now known, we should probably think them venial.”¹⁰ With this, the author not only overlooked Sevier’s faults, but deemed them irrelevant to his memory. He crafted an indelible heroic legacy which persists to the present-day.

The pageantry of Sevier’s reinterment and memorial painted a stark contrast to the Alabama “cotton patch” in which he was originally interned. Similarly, by examining the

⁹ Articles featuring the history of Sevier and his military and civil services (notice that they all feature King’s Mountain or the State of Franklin): “John Sevier! The First Governor of Tennessee! The Patriotic Soldier and Statesman We Honor To-Day!” *Knoxville Journal*, 19 June 1889 (microfiche); “John Sevier and his Compatriots: The Great Deeds of the East Tennessee Pioneer in the War of the American Revolution,” *Knoxville Journal*, 19 June 1889 (microfiche); “Historical Extracts: The Mountain Men and Their Victory in the Light of History,” *Knoxville Journal*, 19 June 1889 (microfiche); “The State of Franklin: A Commonwealth that Never Materialized,” *Knoxville Journal*, 19 June 1889 (microfiche)

¹⁰ “John Sevier: The Man,” *Knoxville Journal*, 19 June 1889 (microfiche)

diplomatic and personal struggles which plagued Sevier's life, we uncover a more nuanced, complex, and humble image of Tennessee's founding father. What this study reveals are episodes of Sevier's life which paint him not as an American hero, but as a man concerned with his honor, personal image, and political legitimacy.

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