

## Dry Fork

At a local hearing held by the Virginia Corporation Commission in answer to a proposed 765 kV power line by American Electric Power Company, Pete Ferguson, a black resident of Dry Fork Creek, showed his anger about the line encroaching over his land. He held up a cane made from a tree found on land his grandfather Mack (McHenry) Ferguson, a freed slave, had settled over 100 years prior on Dry Fork Creek in Bland County Virginia.

He waved the cane in the courtroom and said the cane had a lot more life in it for anyone who would try to destroy his grandfather's land. Pete's display that day best describes the connection to the past and for the future of many of those who have managed to remain or have family ties in the Dry Fork Creek Community 120 years after their ancestors settled there.



As a historical researcher, and infant historian of history in my home county of Bland, I was moved by Pete's testimony that day. I found myself wanting to know more about his ancestors. I wanted to learn about the entire history of our county that included the history of the black residents of Dry Fork Creek. I wanted to put to work what I had learned to do, historical research, and teach myself a historical lesson you in my experience you can't really obtain in a history book. The research of actual people teaches more than I could ever gain from any book. Though my work is not perfect and never can be complete I hope to take what I have learned to help to tell the remarkable story of Dry Fork Creek and keep the memory alive for generations to come.

### Begin with the Land

Since land and who has control over its use was the beginning of all of this, I decided to tell the story of the land. But first one has to understand why land in United States history is so important. The land of North American is so paramount in acting as a catalyst for creating our history you cannot write the history of Dry Fork Creek without understanding the meaning of some of the basic beliefs behind land ownership.

Many a historian of United States history will tell you that westward expansion was fueled by an idealism that was based on an agrarian social theory. The idea of land ownership became a thing to aspire to, to rise to in the New World. The theory as described by Henry Nash Smith, was coined the "freehold concept" by historian Chester E. Eisinger. This "freehold concept" is used to "designate a complex of general notions arising from the effort of many writers to interpret the new society that was coming into being under the influence of an abundance of land awaiting settlement."<sup>1</sup> This doctrine held specific beliefs:

1. Agriculture is the only source of real wealth.
2. Every man has a natural right to land.
3. That labor spent in cultivating the earth confers a valid title to it.

4. That ownership of land makes people independent and gives them social status and dignity.
5. That constant contact with nature makes a person virtuous and happy.
6. That America offered a unique example of a society embodying these traits.
7. That as a general inference of all these propositions, government should be dedicated to the interests of the freehold landowner.<sup>2</sup>

Benjamin Franklin's writings from the 1750's onward supported this theory. Franklin according to Nash, "when he surveyed the society of the new nation, the aging statesman consoled himself for the idleness and extravagance of the seaboard cities with the reflection that the bulk of the population was composed of laborious and frugal inland farmers."<sup>3</sup> Franklin thought that since hundreds of millions of acres of land still covered by the great forest of the interior would every year attract more and more settlers, the luxury of a few merchants on the coast would not be the ruin of America.<sup>4</sup> Selling that idealism with westward expansion was the rule of new United States and what became Bland County.

Many of those who live in Bland County have always presented characteristics of the basics of these beliefs to some extent even to the present modern day landowners. These beliefs rooted in our history have clashed from time to time with those who would speculate to use the land for profit at the benefit solely for the expansion of business over those who live on the land to take care of it. Volumes of American history are written concerning wars, economics, control, etc. When all these events are narrowed down, the concern is over LAND, who owns it, uses the resources of it and controls or has the benefit of it.

Land in Bland County its usage and control, is as important today as it was in the days of the earliest records found. The story of Dry Fork is a history of the people who want to own and/or live on the land. Dry Fork's history becomes a smaller version of our nation's history and an important piece of the history of Southwest Virginia. Dry Fork was a community of free men and women that resembled some of the same experiences of their eastern counterparts in such communities like Holy Neck in Nansemond County. Except Dry Fork is unique in that; 1. It is in the Appalachian Mountains of Southwest Virginia and 2. There are descendents still living on the original tracts of land and they still have a very real sense of the community ties that bind them together.

Still Holy Neck has similarities. Israel Cross was a leader, preacher and farmer in this Holy Neck. It is said Holy Neck under his guidance, prospered for forty years and they built homes, a church and a school. Every Sunday after toiling all week in the fields, Cross would preach at the church and would at the end of every sermon admonish and advise "Buy some land, build a home, and get some education."

So I will begin with the history of the land of Dry Fork Creek to tell the story of those today who wish to preserve and control what they hold very close to their hearts.

## Early Owners of Dry Fork Lands

We begin this history of Dry Fork in the late 1700s. The United States is just an infant, George Washington is President and Tennessee is not yet a state. The boundary of Virginia extends to the Mississippi River. The red, black and white peoples of America have already laid a pattern of interaction with each other that still today reverberates with inequality. The red native peoples fought and failed at maintaining control over lands they controlled for thousands of years (including Dry Fork Creek) by failing to stop the progression of white emigration that pushed them ever westward.

Most black people began life in America as slaves to the white and though some would achieve "free" status, that status was always precarious at best prior to the Civil War, and never really on equal terms with whites who controlled any form of government afterward.

With the Proclamation Treaty of 1763 under British rule, using the crest of the Appalachians as a dividing line between the Indian and settlers a long faded memory, land speculation became part of the movement westward. Land grants were issued to those who have served as patriots in the Revolutionary War. Those who had laid claim to lands prior to the treaty of 1763, beyond its boundaries began the process of having those claims recognized.<sup>5</sup> Sometimes scandalous land speculation became the rule. Patriots of the Revolutionary war such as Patrick Henry took advantage of the westward movement and its idealism by becoming involved in investing in large tracts of land for profit.

Henry's land speculation gives a good example of the use of title to land. As the president of the Virginia Yazoo Company, Henry invested and sold land in Georgia among other places. The problem was Henry's company like others of that time sold and claimed more land than actually existed, actually netting him profits for selling worthless deeds. This led one modern day historian to refer to Henry as "Patrick, if you can't give me liberty or death at least give me a big chunk of graft, Henry."<sup>6</sup>

It has taken years to sort these early boundaries of grants out in the courts, congress and state legislatures with even modern day landowners still dealing with 200 year old boundary issues.

Under this movement in 1794, "the Dry Fork of Laurel Fork of Wolf Creek, a branch of the New River" was part of the survey and land grant to Samuel and Levi Hollingsworth. This grant was known as "Angel's Rest". By 1814, this tract was owned by the Bank of Delaware, in Wilmington Delaware and contained 73,031 acres (more or less) and was reported situated in Wythe and Giles Counties.<sup>7</sup> Kegley's *Adventures on the Western Waters* mentions the land grants of the Loyal company and others having clashes over these claims but does not mention in some cases who the participants were. This area claimed by the Bank of Delaware would certainly have crossed some of the lands the Loyal Company claimed.<sup>8</sup>

In 1814, the banks appointed representative, Rev. Joseph Willard, to manage the land for the Bank of Delaware. The bank gave Rev. Willard the power to collect rents, sell land, convey deeds, and pay the taxes due. In 1828 upon the death of Joseph Willard the Bank of Delaware appointed a successor, James Hector, an attorney from Giles County, to the same position. Hector's management was given the authority to manage the bank's investments in not only the Angel's Rest property but also another 27,000 acres the bank had acquired known as "Spring Brook" that reached deeper into Wythe County. The bank was specifically interested in "disposing of the properties" listed for a profit.<sup>9</sup> Probably in part due to the mountainous region the grant was in, partly due to the economy at the time, it took almost 25 years for the Bank of Delaware to dispose of the lands of Dry Fork Creek. They sold a portion of it to Thomas Walker of Monroe County.

### **Thomas Walker of Monroe County**

Thomas Walker of Monroe County was a wealthy, slave owning, plantation owner, in Appalachia. According to his will, his vested holdings extended through Monroe, Mercer, Giles and Tazewell Counties. He was married to Eleanor Stuart of Rockingham Co. VA. Daughter of Alexander Stuart. Thomas Walker served in the Revolutionary War and made an application for a pension in 1832. He stated he was a native of Orange Co. VA born 8 Dec 1763 and that during the War he lived in Rockingham Co. VA. (Record No. S6339). Thomas was on the Monroe Co. a tax roll in 1814 as owning 1,230 acres "as a non-resident from Rockbridge Co. VA.

Thomas and Eleanor Walker had four children, Thomas S. Walker who settled in Tazewell County on lands he inherited from his father; Elizabeth who married James Pomeroy; Polly Walker who never married; and Benjamin Walker who died in 1830 and left two children: Louisa and Benjamin Alexander Stuart Walker.<sup>1011</sup>

In 1837 the United States experienced an economic "panic" that would blossom into one of the most severe depressions in American history. There were several factors that contributed to this depression but between 1829 and 1837 the number of state banks more than doubled, their note issues tripled, and their loans quadrupled. There were reckless and speculative business practices and the economy lacked even the modest control of a central banking system. This coupled with foreign investment that pulled out when the times got tough in their own countries had many investors, banks and the government trying to raise capital by selling land for which in 1840 there was an over abundant supply of.<sup>12</sup>

Senator Henry Clay had even introduced legislation in 1841 to distribute proceeds from the sale of public lands among the states to finance internal improvements that had suffered by the lack of capital caused by the economic depression. Clay proposed selling public lands for \$1.25 an acre and if tariff schedules were increased this practice would stop. In the same year 1841, Thomas Walker of Monroe County purchased 4000 acres of Dry Fork Creek for \$500, for \$8 an acre from James Hector, the Bank of Delaware representative, as an investment. Considering he could have purchased land for a much cheaper price shows Dry Fork Creek land was

valuable to him for other reasons.

In a Giles County deed written in 1841, James Hector, representing Joseph Bailey, the president and director of the Bank of Delaware; David Lewis of Philadelphia; and the executors of Isaac Wharton, deceased; conveyed to Thomas Walker of Monroe County (then VA), 4000 acres of the 73,031 acre Angel's Rest property. James Hector had the parcel surveyed and created the lines known as the Hector lines found in many deeds that exist today in Bland and the surrounding counties. The original lines of 1841 followed somewhat the division lines between Giles and Tazewell Counties and the "old division line between Wythe and Montgomery Counties."<sup>13</sup>

After the purchase, the bulk of Dry Fork lands remained in the estate of Thomas Walker of Monroe County until 1877 after the Civil War and reconstruction. In his will written in 1845, Thomas Walker of Monroe County left his heirs various pieces of property and slaves. Polly Walker received the bulk of his lands and slaves in Monroe and Mercer County. Thomas S. Walker, his son, received various parcels of lands located on the Clear Fork of Wolf Creek in then Tazewell County Virginia totaling around 880 acres but no slaves.<sup>14</sup> Of the 4000 acre Hector survey, Thomas Walker of Monroe County gave to his granddaughter Louisa Walker and to his grandson Benjamin Walker, children of his deceased son Benjamin, 500 acres each of the 4000 acres. Walker also bequeathed to Louisa and Benjamin each half of 690 acres that was supposedly included in this 4000 acre survey which was a former land grant to Eleanor Stuart Walker from her father, Alexander Stuart. He also gave Louisa and Benjamin several slaves.

Walker then devised that the residue of all his lands not bequeathed to his heirs to be sold for the purpose of paying his debts and to be divided if any funds remain among his children. This included the lands remaining of the Hector survey on Dry Fork.

Thomas Walker of Monroe County died in 1853 at the age of 90. The administrators of his estate held the 3000 acres of land on Dry Fork and paid taxes in Giles County until 1865. The debts obviously did not need the sale of the Dry Fork land. In April of 1877 in Bland County, a deed was issued between Robert Hall, executor of the last will and testament of Thomas Walker of Monroe County, Polly Walker of Summers County and Thomas S. Walker of Tazewell County to Thomas F. Walker. (Son of Thomas S. and Grandson of Thomas Walker of Monroe.) Thomas F. Walker bought the remaining 3000 acres of Dry Fork for \$400 or \$7.50 an acre. The proceeds were split between his Aunt Polly and his father Thomas S. Walker.<sup>15</sup>

## **The Children of Thomas Walker of Monroe County**

Thomas S. Walker married Christine Anne Waggoner 17 June 1823 in Tazewell County Virginia. In contrast to his father Thomas Walker of Monroe who signed his name with an X, Thomas S. Walker was said to be well educated having been tutored by a Mr. McDaniel of Oxford University. His occupations were as a teacher, surveyor, and farmer and it's said he had a hand in building Nebo Methodist Church now located in Bland County. I found three children of Thomas S. Walker; Daniel A. Walker, Thomas F.

Walker and Mary E. Walker in the records so far. He may have either raised his brother Benjamin's son (Benjamin A. S.) or had a son named Benjamin.

The legacy of slave ownership of Thomas Walker of Monroe did not carry over to Thomas S. Walker his son or Thomas F. Walker his grandson. Thomas Walker of Monroe left no slaves to Thomas S. Walker nor were any deeds found in Monroe County or Tazewell County of Thomas S. receiving slaves. In 1860 Thomas S. Walker is not listed as a slave owner in Tazewell County census. This is worth mentioning because Thomas S. Walker came from a slave holding family in which all the other members did inherit slaves from their father. Thomas S. Walker may have subscribed to the anti-slavery movement that had been initiated across the country off and on since its beginnings.

William Sanders in his *A New River Heritage Volume 4* states that Polly Walker, (Thomas F. Walker's aunt) who was the last owner of the New River estates of Thomas Walker of Monroe Co. never married. She is reported to have given land to slave families and willed it to nieces who lived far away upon her death. The estate was managed after a fashion by a local relative, Ida Spangler, who couldn't keep the taxes paid and the homesite and land were eventually sold for back taxes.

No further research has been done on what happened to Elizabeth Walker Pomeroy or the grandchildren Louisa or Benjamin A.S. Walker.

### **Thomas F. Walker of Bland County**

Thomas F. Walker, was born 21 February 1834, the son of Thomas S. Walker and Christine Anne Waggoner Walker. He married Julia Anne Steel. His children were: Isabelle V. born c. 1856; Angelina A. born c. 1860; (Tazewell County Virginia 1860 census) Edna E. born c. 1861; Howard F. born c. 1863; Jasper Newton born 7 September, 1866(History of Bland County); Melissa M born c. 1868; William H. born c. 1870; Ella A. born c. 1875; and James P. born c. 1879. (1880 Bland County Census)

Thomas F. Walker was commissioned as a lieutenant in Company G, 36<sup>th</sup> Virginia Infantry, CSA Smith's Brigade on May 3, 1862 in Bland County. He served under the command of Captain Henry C. Groseclose. (History of Bland County pages 273-275.) This company was organized and enlisted on May 3, 1862 for the duration of the war. Thomas F. Walker was at various battles such as Giles County Court House, Winchester, the Battle of Cloyd's Mountain, Battle of New Market and Cedar Creek. Etc. (See Steve Teeft web site on the 36<sup>th</sup> Virginia Infantry at [http://www.hometown.aol.com/SteveCSA/36th\\_VA.html](http://www.hometown.aol.com/SteveCSA/36th_VA.html))

Steve Teeft wrote to me that his full name from the roster was Thomas Fowler Walker. Thomas F. was present until wounded in the right knee at Winchester, Virginia on September 19, 1864. He was captured at Harrisonburg, Virginia on September 25, 1864. Walker was a POW at Point Lookout Maryland then transferred to the prison at Fort Delaware. He was released June 17, 1865 after the war was over. The roster records him as being 6'2, tall, dark eyes and dark hair. He died from fever on

2 Dec 1885.

Thomas F. Walker is not listed on the 1860 slave schedule of Tazewell county as owning slaves, and I have found no record that he owned slaves as did his grandfather Thomas Walker of Monroe County in any of the counties surrounding Tazewell County.

Thomas F. Walker, in 1877, after purchasing the 3000 acres of his grandfather's land, began to sell it off in parcels. Between 1879 and 1883, Walker had sold and/or contracted with 9 colored families to settle and purchase the land on Dry Fork Creek.<sup>16</sup> It is not known in this stage of the research how Thomas F. Walker came into contact with these families a few of which hailed originally from the tobacco belt county of Franklin. McH Ferguson, Pete Ferguson's great-grandfather, was one of the earliest recorded. There may have been more contracts, but these nine were eventually issued deeds and recognized in Chancery Court papers.

The nine heads of the families were:

A. "Jack" Tynes - 247 3/4 acres, 1879.

Thomas Showalter, 120 acres, 1879

Richard Shields, 247 3/4 acres 1879

Robert Harman, 247 3/4 acres 1879

Jacob Sea, 247 3/4 acres 1879

Wesley Waggoner, 198 acres, 1879

Lewis Holmes, 100 acres 1883 (This property became the land of L. P. Saunders)

James Woods, 115 acres, 1883 (This property identified in Chancery Papers as formerly under contract to Henry Gray.)

Mc H. Ferguson, 201 acres, 1879

The year 1877 for people of color in this country is considered to be a turning back of some of the gains freedmen had acquired after the Civil War ended. Historians consider the year of 1877 the end of the reconstruction era and the beginning of the "New South". President Grant and President Hayes instituted in 1876 and 1877 policies that initiated the return to "home rule" in Southern states. Grant had ordered no more federal troop intervention in local matters, which gave local governments control again over the people of color in their communities. In a society that considered blacks as inferior to whites prior to the Civil War, this helped reinstituted actions on those beliefs through local public policies to foster rules such as the infamous Jim Crow laws. Along with Custer's last stand in 1876, the governments (state and federal) began new policies for dealing with the native Americans as well as blacks making it a turning point for all people of color in American history.<sup>17</sup>

In the midst of these national policy changes, these nine families began a life on Dry Fork Creek purchasing their land from a former Confederate soldier. The question remains unanswered as to how Thomas F. Walker came into contact with these nine families to sell them property. Where did the families originate from and what were the forces that brought them specifically together on Dry Fork Creek?

What is known about where the families originated from: Ferguson and Woods were

former servants of the Booth family in Franklin County VA.<sup>18</sup> Henry Gray and his wife Octavia Saunders Gray were living in the same township as Mc H Ferguson in 1870 in Franklin County. Jacob Sea and Thomas Showalter had children born in Pulaski County and may have been connected with James A. Walker of Pulaski Co. who married Elizabeth Booth of Franklin County. Elizabeth was the sister of Moses Booth of the same Booth family that Ferguson and Woods were servants of after the Civil War. In the 1850 Franklin County Slave Census, James A. Walker is listed owning slaves but is reported to be from Pulaski County. The author to date has found no connection yet of James A. Walker to Thomas F. Walker but the research is continuing.

Richard Shields was born in Maryland and is the only person in this group actually living in Bland County in 1870 census with a Kegley family.<sup>19</sup> Jacob Sea was living in Pulaski County when his son James was born in 1850.<sup>20</sup> Robert Harman was living in Mercer Co. WV in 1868.<sup>21</sup> A. "Jack" Tynes and Robert Harman were listed on the 1870 Mercer Co. WV census living in Princeton and working in the iron works there. The rest of the families are still under research.

Following their settlement on Dry Fork, Thomas F. Walker died in December 1885.<sup>22</sup> His heirs in May of 1886 through their representative T. E. Gregory brought suit in Chancery Court of Bland County against the black landowners of Dry Fork. The suit claimed that the lands under contract to Thomas F. Walker had not been paid for and any contract with Thomas F. Walker was due them.

It is not known what the agreements were with Thomas Walker for the property. The Chancery Records that belong to the case are missing or incomplete in the Library of Virginia repository. What can be assessed from the Chancery Books are that those who could prove the payments made to Thomas F. Walker were not ordered to pay anything or issued credit towards the remainder owed and were issued a deed. Those who could not such as James Woods lost their property when they could not pay for what was due.

Mc Henry (Mack) Ferguson purchased his land again on the courthouse steps for \$214.04. Taking out two bonds of \$107.01 each payable once a year dating from 1887.<sup>23</sup> Ferguson was finally issued a deed Feb 4, 1891. What is curious about the Ferguson lands is a copy of his father's will recorded in the Bland County Court house from Franklin Co. Reuben Ferguson, father of "Mack" left his interest in the Bland County property to his three sons, Mack, Eldredge and Dewitt in his 1893 will.<sup>24</sup> Exactly what interest Reuben Ferguson had in his son's property on Dry Fork has not come to light. Perhaps he help to fund the original land or pay the debt owed in 1897. But the story of the families can begin with Reuben Ferguson and sheds some light of the former slave Mack Ferguson from Franklin Co. VA.

## **Reuben Ferguson of Franklin County**

Reuben Ferguson of Franklin County Virginia does not show up as a free black man in 1850 or 1860 Franklin County Census. He is listed on the 1870 census as being a farm laborer, 45 years of age, mulatto living in Bonbrook TWP, in Franklin County, VA. <sup>25</sup> The family members listed in his household are, Margaret, age 33 keeping house; Roberta



age 17, at school; Carter age 16, farm laborer; Mack age 15, farm laborer; Alice age 12, farm laborer; Felix age 10; Archer age 7; Dewitt age 6; Edmond age 4 and Katherine age 7 months. Later in 1889 an entry in the death records states his wife's name is Catherine, born in 1827 in Charlotte County Virginia. She died Jan 15 1889 in Franklin County of consumption and her husband Reuben reported her death.<sup>26</sup> Reuben in his will lists his heirs as Eldridge, Felix, Mack, Rubin Archer, Mary, Dewitt, Edmond, Henryette Woods, and a grand daughter Annie Winston.<sup>27</sup>

Reuben in a 1874 will is listed as a servant of a wealthy landowner by the name of Moses Greer Booth. Moses, who had no children or wife, left his large estate to nieces and nephews and 3 colored servants. In his will it states, " to each one of the following colored servants to wit, Edmund Clarkson, Reuben Ferguson and Betsy Woods, for their faithful devotion and services to me, the sum of one thousand dollars."<sup>28</sup>

Reuben used part of his funds to purchase jointly with Betsy Lewis a tract of land that divided between them gave them each 180 acres. It was land that belonged to their former (owner?) employer Moses G. Booth. Betsy Woods was called Betsy Lewis in Ferguson's deed and Reuben was called Reuben Booth in Betsy's deed.<sup>29</sup>

In the Franklin County 1870 census, Edmund Clarkston (whose official name is James E. Clarkston) Betsy Lewis, and Reuben Ferguson are neighbors. Henry and Octavia Saunders Gray are also living in the same township. Reuben Ferguson's son Mack (McHenry) married the daughter of Edmund Clarkston (Mary Fannie). By 1879, Betsy Woods' son James, Mack and Mary Fannie Clarkston Ferguson; and Henry Gray who married Octavia Saunders would moved to Bland County as a group.

It is not exactly proven yet if Reuben was a former slave of Moses Booth. There were close ties to the Booth family. Reuben Ferguson's sons had the same names as his benefactor's nephews; i.e. the name Dewitt. Moses' brother John D. Booth; his middle name was Dewitt. There is also another nephew of Moses Booth named Dewitt Booth and another by the name of McHenry. Reuben felt close enough to the Booth family to purchase his employers former lands in Franklin County and name his children after white family members.

But was he a former slave specifically of Moses Booth or the Booth family? If he was why is his last name Ferguson? To try to answer these questions requires the re-search of the Booth family and determine who Moses G. Booth was.

## **The Booth Family**

The Booth family of Franklin County was wealthy. They were descendants of merchants and large plantation owners in what is known as Virginia's tobacco belt. Their family connections spanned over many Virginia counties and several southern states.<sup>30</sup>

Moses G. Booth was a planter and a businessman with multiple enterprises. He enjoyed the prosperity of a Southern country gentleman in the antebellum days prior to the Civil War and after the Civil War appears to have still faired well at retaining

his fortune. It is said that he had six nephews who served in the Confederacy and at the end of the Civil War, Moses gave all six \$200 in gold and a good horse as gratitude and a new start in life.<sup>31</sup>



Moses Greer Booth was born in 1803 and was named after an officer in the Revolutionary War. He was known as a civic leader of early Franklin County. He also served as a justice on the county court. By 1860 he had 700 acres under cultivation and owned up to thirty slaves. He built the house known as the Booth-Lovelace house in 1858 which is a Greek Revival structure with Italian details - one of the finest houses of its day. It is located in Red Valley, across from Windy Gap Mountain from present day Roanoke and is operated as a bed and breakfast, called Over Home by Jim and Becky Ellis.

It is said he built the house for his bride to be. Some accounts say the marriage never took place, while others say there was a marriage but his wife died shortly thereafter. Moses never remarried or had children.

Moses got his money partly the old fashioned way, he inherited a good portion of it. He and his brother John Dewitt Booth were partners in most of their enterprises. Through their father Benjamin, Moses and his brother obtained land and a store to run as merchants.<sup>32</sup> They both at one time were listed as postmasters of a place called Taylor's store. They owned and ran an ordinary or tavern, and a tobacco factory. Moses Booth was also a distiller of brandy and wine. In the inventory of his property in 1875 it listed he owned 4 stills and among the inventory were 526 gallons of brandy, 35 gals of wine and another 42 gals of something not exactly listed as wine<sup>33</sup>. According to Becky Ellis the current co owner of the Booth-Lovelace house, she has a copy of a story in a newspaper where Moses had won a blue ribbon at the county fair for his brandy.

By 1860, Franklin County had seventeen tobacco factories. That number declined after the Civil War. John D. Booth in the 1850 census was listed as a tobacco manufacturer. Moses as a merchant. The family was connected to the Ferguson, Saunders, Walkers and Burroughs families through the marriages of the sisters of John Dewitt and Moses G. Booth. Catherine Booth married Thomas Burroughs, the brother of James Burroughs who at one time owned a slave listed as Bowker T. (Booker T. Washington) Sarah Booth married Josiah Ferguson and it may be this connection to where Reubin took his last name. Elizabeth married James A. Walker whom in tax lists is listed from Pulaski County. Emily married James W. Joplin. Their sister Mahala married a Webb. A niece Anne had married John Saunders and it was her son John Saunders who was the executor of Moses G. Booths estate. The families of Booth, Ferguson, Saunders and Burroughs were in the same area of the county. Their plantations adjoined each other and they inter-married within their class and group.

## **Researching Slave History**

No account has been found of specific names of the slaves owned in the Booth household

other than a few mentioned in the will of Moses Booth's father Benjamin. Only the number on the census, nor has any account been found to date as to the treatment of the slaves under the Booth family. Daniel Blake Smith in his book *Inside the Great House*, says of this:

... the daily experience and impact of slaves in white planter households is particularly hard to assess. Slavery, which stands as perhaps the most visible, distinctive institution of southern family and social life, remains almost impervious to study - at least in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries simply because of the paucity of surviving sources. Barely a handful of reliable documents (a fragment of a letter or diary here and there) exists to help shed light on the personal relationship between slaves and their masters inside the great house. The silence of the documents on the slave experience in planter households is overwhelming and is one of the biggest disappointments for historians of the family in the colonial south.<sup>34</sup>

I have had my own experiences of researching for the last 10 years, but in researching the history of people of African American descent held in bondage to slavery it takes double the research. First of all, most recorded history in Virginia is about the white race. Records are geared toward recording the actions of white folk and their property. Census records prior to 1870 have no names of slaves' only ages. Slaves are not usually listed by their names in any index only under some document under their master's family name. So you have to research virtually every shred of evidence of the plantation owner's histories prior to 1860. The history of a slave family has to be found by what you can glean through the records of every member of the white plantation owner's family that exist or can be found plus through their social, political, economic and kinship connections.

I believe it is appropriate here to mention that in researching African American or black history things are changing for the better to aid (however slowly) in the research. The Internet is helping to find and close the gap on all historical research by aiding in locating records and resources that normally would have taken years to find. Repositories, archives and libraries are combing files, letters, and primary sources formerly only geared to pulling out information about white history to create databases to bring out any mention of blacks, slavery etc.

This project funded in part the first year by the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities African American Trail across Virginia shows the need for such programs to help locate what is left of the lost history Daniel Blake describes. Though still in its infancy I am finding more hope than despair that the formerly unknown history of such an important era of our country is being rediscovered as those who are descendents of free blacks and slaves are pulling together their own family histories. The demand to know and to learn where they came from has created a need to look over the old records with a different search perspective and discover new sources long thought lost.

For example, in the inventory and accounting of the estate of Moses Booth we learn some of what Reubin Ferguson, Edmund Clarkston, (spelled Clarkson and Clarkston both in the records) Betsy and James Woods did in his household. The estate paid for their

labor for various jobs and upkeep of the property. The executor's account listed Reubin as plasterer, repairing wood in tobacco house, for hauling wheat, and for general labor. Edmund Clarkson was paid for hauling tobacco, cleaning wheat, and general labor. Betsy Woods was paid for boarding the surveyor, carrying the surveyor's chains. And her son was paid for assisting.<sup>35</sup>

## **Reuben Ferguson Slave Origins**

When trying to determine if Reuben Ferguson was a slave of Moses G. Booth, I turned to primary sources. I researched the Ferguson Wills and Deeds in Franklin County VA. One of interest is the Will and Inventory of George Ferguson who died in April or May of 1836.<sup>36</sup> In his inventory of slaves is listed a Reuben age 12, and a Diana age 12. The Ferguson plantation was in the same neighborhood as the Booth Plantation and right across the road from the Burroughs plantation of Booker T. Washington fame. There was also a slave owned by George Ferguson named Washington and I believe this could be proven with further research to be Booker T. Washington's step father. Moses Booth's sister Sarah married a Josiah Ferguson, but I have not found out who Josiah parents were at this time. He is thought to be a brother to George, but I have no proof of that.

Henry Gray who moved with Reuben's son Mc Henry to Bland County lists his mother on his marriage license to Octavia Saunders in Franklin County VA as Diana Ferguson and his father as unknown. Henry Gray may have had family connections to McH Ferguson before he came to Bland County if later there is a connection between the two slaves of George Ferguson. George Ferguson in the division of the slaves left his slaves Reuben and Diana to his son Charles Ferguson. Charles had 3 daughters that George Ferguson recognized in his will but no other sons. In a future visit, I hope to follow Charles Ferguson to see what became of his slaves.

## **Georgia Connection?**

I also turned to the Internet to gain a perspective on the Booth family through sites such as the Genealogy Forum. What I have found is that most plantation owners have been researched by descendents and there is a wealth of information out there on these families. Through the genealogy forum I came in contact with Timothy Booth and Jeanette Hull who are working on a history of the Booth Family to be published at a later date. Their history covers many branches of the Booth family through many of the southern states. Jeanette also gave me a contact of Peery Booth a descendent of one of the Booth slaves living in California. Peery gave me a listing of the slaves of a Robert Booth, of Elbert County Georgia from a family Bible located in a repository.

Robert Booth recorded in his Bible a number of slaves born to a slave woman named Charity. Charity or Chats as she is also called gave birth to a slave named Rubin born in the same year as our Reuben Ferguson. I wouldn't have said this is a possible connection but through Timothy Booth and Jeanette Hull's work on the Booth family

I determined this Robert Booth is actually a third cousin of Moses G. Booth. I am in the process of trying to locate deeds, wills, or a bill of sale that could prove a connection to the Franklin County Reuben Ferguson. A glance at the census of Elbert County Georgia in 1830 also shows there are also Ferguson living in that county. But once sold to Georgia, I imagine it is not impossible to be sold or given back to a family in Virginia. But this needs much further research.

## **Surname dilemma**

As to Reuben's last name I am not sure why he has the name Ferguson. I have read many theories and discussed this with other historians. I have met some whose ancestors chose a completely different name from their owners to distant themselves from that way of life as well as others whose ancestors kept the name of their former owners. One theory who have kept the last name is they were actual children of the former plantation owner's family and many former slaves felt it was their right to carry the surname (which it was). Another theory exists that some slaves chose their mistress maiden name in order to gain favor with her while enslaved and kept it after the war because that is what they identified with. Another theory is that if a slave were sold away from their family, one connection they could keep (if the new master did not protest) was to keep the surname of their former master. The name was kept in hopes that later one can locate or identify family and kin. I have not found an in-depth study on this subject to date, but have hopes to see one in the future.

Reuben Ferguson's original deed for the acreage he purchased from Moses Booth his former employer, names him as Reuben Booth. This could be taken to mean the clerk who wrote it knew of some connection of Reuben to Moses G. Booth or he was in a hurry and just made a mistake. If one finds more than one record with the same mistake I would go with the prior theory. To date, I have only found the one mistake.

## **Reuben Ferguson Descendents**

By the time Reuben died in 1893, he was a man of property with 160 acres of his former employer's land and with almost \$200 dollars in the bank. McH Ferguson, had moved to Bland County married Mary Fannie Clarkson, 29 June 1876 in Franklin County and according to the Chancery Records of Bland County contracted for the land on Dry Fork Creek sometime in 1879. By 1893, he finally had a legal deed (1891) to his property on Dry Fork Creek.

The children of Mc H and Mary Fannie Ferguson are:

Alice Ferguson born 18 Oct 1878 Franklin Co. VA married James M. Patterson 24 Dec 1897 in Bland County. Had 4 children.

Fannie Ferguson born 27 Aug 1888 Bland Co. VA married Roach Shields (son of Rich-

ard Shields) 29 March 1909 Bland Co. VA. (Fannie is said to have married a Holmes first.) Had 1 child.

Gamaliel Ferguson born 16 Dec 1889.

Ruben E. Ferguson born 18 March 1883. (Wife's name Minnie Ardella. Had 11 children)

Ulysess Ferguson born 24 April 1891 (had 3 children)

McDaniel Ferguson born 12 July 1881 married Cornelia E. Hogan, 30 Jan 1906 in Bland County (had 11 children) Mc Daniel was educated at the Christiansburg Institute.

Seywood S. Ferguson born 13 Sept. 1885

Henry Ann Ferguson born 28 April 1887 (Married John Penn) 10 Children

Frederick Ferguson born 13 July 1884 died 02 Oct 1884

Emma Jane Ferguson born 12 Oct 1896 died 10 Aug 1977 (Married John Waller)

Thomas G. Ferguson died Feb. 1898

Zacharias Ferguson died 15 April 1899

John William (or also reported as William John) died 9 Oct 1892

Andrew Ferguson died 16 May 1894

To determine why the children of Edmund Clarkson, Reuben Ferguson and Betsy Woods, (the servants of Moses G. Booth) Henry Gray, A. Jack Tynes, Lewis Holmes, Thomas Showalter, Jacob Sea, moved to Dry Fork Creek and their family and community connections requires further study. As a group they were seeking a better life for themselves and their families. Whether they found that better life is possible since 120 years later many of their descendants still remain on Dry Fork Creek.

About this Project

This project is in two parts. First is the history research and reporting of the original settlers of Dry Fork Creek. Specifically identifying where they originated from in the state of Virginia and how they came to Dry Fork Creek. At present the research is geared towards Reuben Ferguson, Henry and Octavia Saunders Gray, A. Jack Tynes, Richard Shields, Jacob Sea and Thomas Showalter. I have information on the origins of each of these but it is incomplete.

The second is an ongoing genealogy project to gather as much information on the

descendents of Reuben Ferguson and the other original settlers of Dry Fork. Their social and kinship connection as a community after arriving on Dry Fork Creek is a story itself. Where those descendants are and what they have accomplished to date is another wonderful story. (One great grandson of Henry and Mary Saunders Gray served with the Tuskegee Airmen)

We have many family group sheets gathered through research and donations of present family members as well as a wealth of pictures. We are searching for genealogy material, photographs and people to interview with their memories of Dry Fork Creek. We hope to have the material gathered from this entire project and genealogy on line in a database in 2001-2002. Hard copy of the material will be placed in the archives of the Bland County Historical Society for researchers and family historians. If you have any questions, comments, corrections, additions, suggestions of people you feel should be interviewed, or donations of copies of photographs, please feel free to contact me Denise A. Smith at [dsrdmt@netscope.net](mailto:dsrdmt@netscope.net) or John Dodson at [jdodson@inetone.net](mailto:jdodson@inetone.net)

<sup>1</sup> Smith, Henry Nash. *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth*. (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, reprinted 1978) pg. 125-126.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* 126.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* 125.

<sup>4</sup> *The Writings of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Albert H. Smyth, IX, 245-248 (from a letter to Benjamin Vaughan, Passy, July 26, 1784.

<sup>5</sup> Kegley, F.B. and Mary B. *Early Adventures on the Western Waters: Vol.1: The New River of Virginia in Pioneer Days 1745-1800*. (Orange, VA: Green Publishers, Inc. 1980 by Mary Kegley) For a discussion on early land grants on the New River and the process see pages 1 - 42.

<sup>6</sup> Irby, Richard E. Jr. Article on Land in Georgia, on the website [www.ngeorgia.com/history/land.html](http://www.ngeorgia.com/history/land.html)

<sup>7</sup> Monroe County WV Deed Book E, p. 135, dated June 28, 1833.

<sup>8</sup> Kegley, *ibid.* 1-41.

<sup>9</sup> Monroe County WV Deed Book C, p. 466 dated October 1, 1828.

<sup>10</sup> Monroe County WV Will Book 6 pg. 76. Last will and Testament of Thomas Walker.

<sup>11</sup> Monroe County WV Will Book 3 pg. 246. Appraisement of Benjamin Walker by his father and administrator of his estate, Thomas Walker.

<sup>12</sup> *The National Experience: A History of the United States 6<sup>th</sup> Edition*, John M. Blum et al ed. Harcourt Brace Javanovich, Publishers, 1985. Pg.240-245.

<sup>13</sup> Giles County VA Deed Book f, p.52, dated January 15, 1841,

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.* Last will and Testament of Thomas Walker of Monroe County Will Book 6 pg. 76. Tazewell County VA Deed Book 6 p. 334.

<sup>15</sup> Bland County Deed Book 4 p. 489, April 17, 1877. For proof of Thomas F. Walker's parentage see Bland County Deed Book 6 p. 599-605 and Tazewell Co. Deed Book 13 p. 97 April 11, 1860.

<sup>16</sup> Bland County VA, Chancery Records Order books 3 & 4. Cases of T.E. Gregory representing the heirs of Thomas F. Walker dec'd Vs Thomas Showalter et als, Mc H. Ferguson, A. J. Tynes, Lewis W. Holmes, J. W. Woods, Jacob Sea et al, Robert W. Harman et als.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* *The National Experience*. Pg. 414-415.

<sup>18</sup> Franklin County VA Will Book, 16 pages, 599-601, Marriage Records of Franklin County VA. 1876-1898, by Beverly Merritt, 1998 Number 1215 marriage of Mack Ferguson to (Mary) Fannie Clarkston. 6 29-1876.

<sup>19</sup> Bland County 1870 Census on microfilm at Wytheville Community College, Seddon Township, Taken

by A.W. Shewey, 12 July 1870, Post Office Bland Court House. Page 3 written page, Printed page # 408. Dwelling # 18 Family # 18. Richard Shields age 33, black male farm laborer, born in Maryland, States cannot read or write, able to vote. Under the house hold of Gordon H. Kegley.

<sup>20</sup> Bland County Marriage Register 1 pg. 41 line 16. Marriage of Jacob Sea's son James to Susan B. Charlton daughter of Noah and Sarah Charlton. States he is 50 years old and born in Pulaski County.

<sup>21</sup> Bland County Marriage Register 1 pg. 26 line 39 Marriage of Robert 's daughter Sarah A. to Sam'l Burks son of Victoria Burks. Lists her born in Mercer Co in 1868.

<sup>22</sup> Journal of John H. Hoge: Private Collection of Bob Hetherington of Key West FL. Email: [HOG777@aol.com](mailto:HOG777@aol.com). "Dec 1885 F (Friday) 4 "Fair, warm, went to see J.P. Roach, Henderson Bruce here all night, Thomas F. Walker died." Bland County History gives the date as 2 Dec. 1885.

<sup>23</sup> Bland County Chancery Order Book 3 pg. 117. Bland County VA Deed Book 6 pg. 121, original deed for 121 acres Feb. 4, 1891.

<sup>24</sup> Bland County Will Book 1 pag. 548-549. Last will and testament of Reuben Ferguson of Franklin Co. ordered recorded in Bland County.

<sup>25</sup> Franklin County VA Census Series, M593, Roll # 1647, pg. 311. Library of Virginia microfilm collection.

<sup>26</sup> Franklin Co. Va. Death Records, 1853-1896, Beverly Merritt 1998, pg. 62.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. Last will and testament of Reuben Ferguson of Franklin Co.

<sup>28</sup> Franklin County Will Book 16 pg. 599-601, Last will and testament of Moses G. Booth

<sup>29</sup> Franklin County Deed Book 33 pg. 368-370

<sup>30</sup> Personal Interview and papers of Timothy Peery Booth and Jeanette Hull, who most graciously sent me their Booth family history by e-mail All 192 pages of it, in progress to be published.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. Hull Booth private paper. No index no page numbers.

<sup>32</sup> Franklin County will book pg. 228-234. Last will and testament of Benjamin Booth.

<sup>33</sup> Franklin County Will Book 16 pg. 620-623, List of property belonging to M.G. Booth Dec'd

<sup>34</sup> Smith, Daniel Blake. *Inside the Great House: Planter Family Life in Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake Society*. (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1986) pg. 19.

<sup>35</sup> Franklin County Will Book, Executor's account and inventories, Will book 16 pg. 618, 620-623, Will Book 17, pages 141-147, 429-431, Will Book 18 pages 70, 390-391, Will Book 19 pg. 386-390, Will Book 20 pages 301-302.

<sup>36</sup> Franklin County Will Book, Executors' account and inventories, Will Book 4 pg. 380-382, pg. 426-429, Will Book 5 pg. 171-172.

## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> Smith, Henry Nash. *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth*. (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, reprinted 1978) pg. 125-126.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. 126.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 125.

<sup>4</sup> *The Writings of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Albert H. Smyth, IX, 245-248 (from a letter to Benjamin Vaughan, Passy, July 26, 1784.

<sup>5</sup> Kegley, F.B. and Mary B. *Early Adventures on the Western Waters: Vol. 1: The New River of Virginia in Pioneer Days 1745-1800*. (Orange, VA: Green Publishers, Inc. 1980 by Mary Kegley) For a discussion on early land grants on the New River and the process see pages 1 – 42.

<sup>6</sup> Irby, Richard E. Jr. Article on Land in Georgia, on the website [www.ngeorgia.com/history/land.html](http://www.ngeorgia.com/history/land.html)

<sup>7</sup> Monroe County WV Deed Book E, p. 135, dated June 28, 1833.

<sup>8</sup> Kegley, *ibid.* 1-41.

<sup>9</sup> Monroe County WV Deed Book C, p. 466 dated October 1, 1828.

<sup>10</sup> Monroe County WV Will Book 6 pg. 76. Last will and Testament of Thomas Walker.



- <sup>11</sup> Monroe County WV Will Book 3 pg. 246. Appraisement of Benjamin Walker by his father and administrator of his estate, Thomas Walker.
- <sup>12</sup> *The National Experience: A History of the United States* 6<sup>th</sup> Edition, John M. Blum et al ed. Harcourt Brace Javanovich, Publishers, 1985. Pg.240-245.
- <sup>13</sup> Giles County VA Deed Book f, p.52, dated January 15, 1841,
- <sup>14</sup> *ibid.* Last will and Testament of Thomas Walker of Monroe County Will Book 6 pg. 76. Tazewell County VA Deed Book 6 p. 334.
- <sup>15</sup> Bland County Deed Book 4 p. 489, April 17,1877. For proof of Thomas F. Walker's parentage see Bland County Deed Book 6 p. 599-605 and Tazewell Co. Deed Book 13 p. 97 April 11, 1860.
- <sup>16</sup> Bland County VA, Chancery Records Order books 3 & 4. Cases of T.E. Gregory representing the heirs of Thomas F. Walker dec'd Vs Thomas Showalter et als, Mc H. Ferguson, A. J. Tynes, Lewis W. Holmes, J. W. Woods, Jacob Sea et al, Robert W. Harman et als.
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* The National Experience. Pg. 414-415.
- <sup>18</sup> Franklin County VA Will Book, 16 pages, 599-601, Marriage Records of Franklin County VA. 1876-1898, by Beverly Merritt, 1998 Number 1215 marriage of Mack Ferguson to (Mary) Fannie Clarkston. 6 29-1876.
- <sup>19</sup> Bland County 1870 Census on microfilm at Wytheville Community College, Seddon Township, Taken by A.W. Shewey, 12 July 1870, Post Office Bland Court House. Page 3 written page, Printed page # 408. Dwelling # 18 Family # 18. Richard Shields age 33, black male farm laborer, born in Maryland, States cannot read or write, able to vote. Under the house hold of Gordon H. Kegley.
- <sup>20</sup> Bland County Marriage Register 1 pg. 41 line 16. Marriage of Jacob Sea's son James to Susan B. Charlton daughter of Noah and Sarah Charlton. States he is 50 years old and born in Pulaski County.
- <sup>21</sup> Bland County Marriage Register 1 pg. 26 line 39 Marriage of Robert 's daughter Sarah A. to Sam'l Burks son of Victoria Burks. Lists her born in Mercer Co in 1868.
- <sup>22</sup> Journal of John H. Hoge: Private Collection of Bob Hetherington of Key West FL. Email: [HOG777@aol.com](mailto:HOG777@aol.com). "Dec 1885 F (Friday) 4 "Fair, warm, went to see J.P. Roach, Henderson Bruce here all night, Thomas F. Walker died." Bland County History gives the date as 2 Dec. 1885.
- <sup>23</sup> Bland County Chancery Order Book 3 pg. 117. Bland County VA Deed Book 6 pg. 121, original deed for 121 acres Feb. 4, 1891.
- <sup>24</sup> Bland County Will Book 1 pag. 548-549. Last will and testament of Reuben Ferguson of Franklin Co. ordered recorded in Bland County.
- <sup>25</sup> Franklin County VA Census Series, M593, Roll # 1647, pg. 311. Library of Virginia microfilm collection.
- <sup>26</sup> Franklin Co. Va. Death Records, 1853-1896, Beverly Merritt 1998, pg. 62.
- <sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* Last will and testament of Reuben Ferguson of Franklin Co.
- <sup>28</sup> Franklin County Will Book 16 pg. 599-601, Last will and testament of Moses G. Booth
- <sup>29</sup> Franklin County Deed Book 33 pg. 368-370
- <sup>30</sup> Personal Interview and papers of Timothy Peery Booth and Jeanette Hull, who most graciously sent me their Booth family history by e-mail All 192 pages of it, in progress to be published.
- <sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* Hull Booth private paper. No index no page numbers.
- <sup>32</sup> Franklin County will book pg. 228-234. Last will and testament of Benjamin Booth.
- <sup>33</sup> Franklin County Will Book 16 pg. 620-623, List of property belonging to M.G. Booth Dec'd
- <sup>34</sup> Smith, Daniel Blake. *Inside the Great House: Planter Family Life in Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake Society.* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1986) pg. 19.
- <sup>35</sup> Franklin County Will Book, Executor's account and inventories, Will book 16 pg. 618, 620-623, Will Book 17, pages 141-147, 429-431, Will Book 18 pages 70, 390-391, Will Book 19 pg. 386-390, Will Book 20 pages 301-302.
- <sup>36</sup> Franklin County Will Book, Executors' account and inventories, Will Book 4 pg. 380-382, pg. 426-429, Will Book 5 pg. 171-172.