

BUILDING TENNESSEE:
THE MCADAMS FAMILY TRADE AND IDENTITY IN THE SOUTHWEST
BACKCOUNTRY

by

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ABSTRACT

Cultural historians investigate issues of identity and regionalism through objects, places, and traditions. How do pieces of history both reflect and create culture? This study focuses on the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century decorative arts in the Nolichucky River Valley of East Tennessee to better understand how craftsmen expressed and created regional identity through neoclassical and agrarian symbolism. In Tennessee, the McAdams family of cabinetmakers produced a world of goods for consumption, the most conspicuous of which was the “rope and tassel” inlaid furniture group. The work of the McAdams family creates a valuable perspective on what frontier life was like in material terms. This dissertation describes the objects that these artisans made for over a generation and contextualizes them with a range of interdisciplinary primary source evidence. The multi-directional influences of democratic experiments, extensive trade networks, and familial connections along the Great Wagon Road gave rise to the “cultural palette” of the Nolichucky River Valley. The cultural palette reveals the imagery and symbolism of the backcountry that regional stereotypes have long overshadowed. Ultimately, the rope and tassel maker’s world offers museums fertile ground for renewed interpretation of the early Republic in Appalachia.

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INTRODUCTION

“Perspectives on Frontier Tennessee”

In the classic, and still in many quarters authoritative, study of the Scots-Irish in the southwest frontier, *The Scotch-Irish: A Social History*, historian James Leyburn concluded the book with this observation: “In the realm of aesthetics, however, the Scotch-Irish were, and remained, practically deaf, dumb, and blind.”¹ Leyburn may have been correct in his assessment of many aspects of the Scots-Irish in the southwest frontier, but he was wrong about the arts. Moving beyond past stereotypes that govern our perception of the Scots-Irish as a brutish, uneducated people, the history and contributions they made to the building of the southwest frontier could start with many different topics in order to add new perspectives to frontier Tennessee.

This dissertation begins with a family of craftsmen, the McAdams of Washington County, Tennessee, and uses their work and lives to explore the art tradition of Scots-Irish cabinetmaking. Based on the McAdams surname, it is likely that eighteenth-century ancestors migrated to America from Ireland.² The

¹ James Graham Leyburn, *The Scotch-Irish: A Social History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1962), 324.; Note: throughout the narrative the author employs the label “Scots-Irish,” except where other authors use “Scotch-Irish” to remain true to the preferences of other researchers.

² Mike Campbell, “McAdams: Surname History,” *Behind the Name*. <http://surnames.behindthename.com/name/mcadams> (accessed February 28, 2015).; “McAdams Census International Surname Tracker of Family History,”

McAdams cabinetmakers, like the Scots-Irish populations who moved to North Carolina, made furniture that embodied Scots-Irish cultural priorities. Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts (MESDA) director of research June Lucas identified the three foremost concerns for the Scotch-Irish in piedmont North Carolina as education, religion, and civic duty.³ Lucas analyzed extant furniture forms for function and execution, then linked Scots-Irish cabinetmakers and their customers to fully contextualize the cultural significance of the decorative arts in North Carolina.

From North Britain into the backcountry of colonial America, the material motivations of eighteenth-century Scots-Irish immigration were very different from those of religious groups that settled elsewhere in America.⁴ This dissertation does not redefine Scots-Irish, which is a historiographical debate in itself; rather, it is enough to recognize that periods of migration in search of better material worlds defined their familial histories.⁵ Thus, the nature of trade, commerce, and, what historian Richard Bushman labeled “The Age of Respectability” that

Ancestry. <http://www.ancestry.com/name-origin?surname=mcadams> (accessed February 28, 2015).

³ June Lucas, ““Sober and Respectable”: Furniture of the Scotch-Irish in the Southern Backcountry,” *The Gracia and Horatio Whitridge Distinguished Scholar Lecture* (Colonial Williamsburg’s 67th Annual Antiques Forum, Williamsburg, VA, February 22, 2015).

⁴ David Hackett Fischer, *Albion’s Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 611.

⁵ See Tyler Blethen and Curtis Wood, *Ulster and North America Transatlantic Perspectives on the Scotch-Irish* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1997).; Robert V. Remini, *Andrew Jackson* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1966).; David Hackett Fischer, *Albion’s Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

developed in frontier Tennessee from 1790 to 1820, further contextualizes the McAdams' backcountry world.⁶

This exploration of a family of craftsmen from Washington County, Tennessee, opens new avenues of understanding more than the craft traditions and decorative arts of the Appalachian South, but examines how early East Tennessee communities expressed their sense of identity and achievement in the decades before the transportation revolution of the mid-nineteenth century. The work of the McAdams family creates a valuable perspective on what frontier life was like in material terms, and this dissertation will speak in depth and precisely to the objects that these crafters made over a generation.

Characterized by the “rope and tassel” inlaid motif, the McAdams' furniture tradition was recently featured in an article by decorative arts scholar Anne McPherson, “Fans, Fish, and Tassels: Idiosyncratic Inlaid Furniture of Northeastern Tennessee,” in which she described the furniture and limited provenance histories of Washington County, Tennessee.⁷ McPherson explained the “idiosyncratic” motifs as a product of the “largely isolated” world of cabinetmakers and their patrons in northeastern Tennessee.⁸ Even within this twenty-first century publication, the myth of Appalachia's “isolation” is at the forefront of decorative arts historiography.

⁶ See Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, and Cities* (New York: Knopf, 1992).

⁷ See Anne McPherson, “Fans, Fish, and Tassels: Idiosyncratic Inlaid Furniture of Northeastern Tennessee,” *Antiques and Fine Art* (January 2015): 200-207.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 206.

Historian of Appalachia David Hsiung employed road maps and rates of population persistence, statistics calculated to determine for what period of time certain communities remained in a place, to challenge the longstanding myth of Appalachian isolation. In *Two Worlds in the Tennessee Mountains: Exploring the Origins of Appalachian Stereotypes*, Hsiung investigated layers of meaning and association of the words “isolation” and “community” as they evolved since the eighteenth century.⁹ While Hsiung investigated East Tennessee as a localized example, historian John Finger contextualized the region within three cultural settlements across the state in *Tennessee Frontiers: Three Regions in Transition*.¹⁰ Finger and Hsiung agreed that multi-directional migration and trade networks negated the chronological evolution inherent in cultural biases of Appalachian seclusion.

The building of communities west of the Appalachian Mountains in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries is a topic still ripe for exploration. For Tennessee, that study starts with the southwest frontier. The inland south was important because it was both a place and a political entity. In terms of geography, the Southwest Territory encompassed most of present-day

⁹ David C. Hsiung, *Two Worlds in the Tennessee Mountains: Exploring the Origins of Appalachian Stereotypes* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 3.

¹⁰ See Fred B. Kniffen, H. J. Walker, and Randall Detro, *Cultural Diffusion and Landscapes: Selections* (Baton Rouge: Geoscience Publications, Dept. of Geography and Anthropology, Louisiana State University, 1990).; Terry G. Jordan-Bychkov, *The Upland South: The Making of an American Folk Region and Landscape* (Santa Fe, NM: Center for American Places, 2003).

Tennessee and included over 43,000 square miles.¹¹ Politically, federal authority extended across the Southwest Territory until population and resources supported a state government. More than the Territory's defined boundaries, the southwest frontier represented a process of development through the growth of towns and trade. Contrary to stereotypes of Appalachian economic stagnation and cultural remoteness, inland waterways and far-reaching family ties united East Tennessee with communities throughout the colonies and, later, the young nation.

Stereotypes abound for this region, both in popular culture and in scholarship. This dissertation engages one of those stereotypes that remains fixed to the Appalachian South even today: that craftsmanship was primitive, rustic, and devoid of aesthetic taste. In turn, the persistence of that stereotype influences the ways scholars and the interested public view both the nature of commerce and the creation of identity and culture in the early Appalachian South.

This study began with a close look at one piece of furniture from, what a generation of scholars had only identified as, the "rope and tassel school". Through a place-based inquiry that began in 2012 at the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts (MESDA) with the Middle Tennessee State University Center for Historic Preservation (MTSU CHP), this author put forth the first

¹¹ Walter T. Durham, "Southwest Territory," *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*. C. Van West ed. <https://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entry.php?rec=1236> (accessed July 2, 2014).

artisanal attribution for this compelling furniture group.¹² Southern heritage organizations, MESDA and the MTSU CHP, document, research, and preserve the material culture of the South. Work products range from museum exhibits, to publications, and historic preservation reports. Together, these organizations fully integrate the material world of the diverse society of southern culture.

As a result of my training with the MTSU CHP and MESDA, I utilized different types of primary source evidence to introduce the first possible cabinetmaker of the rope and tassel group: Hugh McAdams. First, based on decorative arts literature and MESDA's Object Database I indexed group characteristics of décor and construction.¹³ Then, through a process of elimination, I worked through an extensive list of woodworkers active in the first decades of the nineteenth century in the Nolichucky River Valley. (More details on the attribution process follow in chapter three). Extant public documents about

¹² The Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts (MESDA) conducts field research programs, publishes the *Journal of Early Southern Decorative Arts*, maintains a research center and decorative arts library, and offers educational programs such as the Graduate Summer Institute cosponsored with the University of Virginia. MESDA is located in the Frank L. Horton Center at Old Salem Museum & Gardens in Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

The Middle Tennessee State University Center for Historic Preservation (MTSU CHP) is a specialized research center that conducts regional historic preservation fieldwork, trains graduate students through experiential learning, and contributes to academic scholarship. The MTSU CHP is located on the campus of MTSU in Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

¹³ The MESDA Object Database is a collection of approximately 20,000 records of southern-made objects, compiled over five decades. Each file includes an image, measurements, technical description, and provenance details, when available.

Hugh McAdams, his family, and community relations, indicated that the McAdams were a multi-generational family of cabinetmakers.

This group of furniture is easily identified by its signature-inlaid motif and, until recently, was best known for its most popular case form, the corner cupboard. The prominent motif of the piece in MESDA's collection (and the group as a whole) is an inlaid rope that extends across respective corner cupboard cornices and descends into tassels on both upper stiles within the uppermost light (figure 1). Associated with the neoclassical swag, the rope and tassels differ from other continental examples because they appear without the draped adornment typically linked with tassels.¹⁴ The group's inlaid symbols are first charming to viewers and, subsequently, disarming due to the surprising two-dimensional, linear nature of the embellishment.

Symbols of agriculture present a further set of distinctive motifs. Wheat, for instance, is prominently situated both centered on the cornice framed by downturned vines and in a quatrefoil centered on lower recessed panel doors (figure 1). Paint remnants indicate that the lightwood holly inlay was at one time colored shades of red and green in natural dyes. The bright colors are one striking component of the piece's overall playfulness. The maker installed blind upside down keyholes, locks that never secured, possibly to tease the viewer; what good, after all, is a lock that never kept items within secure?

¹⁴ Jack D. Holden, H. Parrott Bacot, Cybèle T. Gontar, Brian J. Costello, and Francis J. Puig, *Furnishing Louisiana: Creole and Acadian Furniture, 1735-1835* (New Orleans, LA: Historic New Orleans Collection, 2010), 216.



Figure 1: MESDA Acc. 5660, Corner Cupboard full front

Like most nineteenth-century corner cupboards, cornice and waist molding resemble architectural components of federal interiors such as chair railings and crown molding. This corner cupboard has exposed pinning and original hardware. Below the waist molding, three adjacent drawers constructed with dovetails have rectangular stringing, corner shaded quarter fans, and central escutcheon pinwheels. Two upper eight-light doors reveal three upper shelves adhered to a singular case construction; lower recessed paneled doors conceal one lower shelf (figure 2).



Figure 2: MESDA Acc. 5660, full front open

Two-thirds of the available façade is dedicated to displaying the objects encased within the cupboard. Typically porcelain and earthenware were set upright in shelf grooves to take full visual advantage of artistic patterns. The lower section can be locked, suggesting that items stored in the lower section were important to the household, but did not necessitate display. For instance, expensive table linens could be accessed for special household events, but otherwise remained secured behind the lower paneled doors.

The rope and tassel corner cupboard in MESDA's collection (figure 1) served as the lynchpin of the group's examination. Not only does it stylistically link other forms to the group, but also the whimsically interpreted inlay of the rope and tassel fully epitomizes its mystery. Why would a cabinetmaker interpret

textile décor in a wooden medium? Whatever the reason, the rope and tassel is a distinctively regional motif that endured over time.

By the turn of the nineteenth century, British design works like that of Thomas Sheraton and Thomas Chippendale circulated widely even in the American backcountry. So what emboldened the rope and tassel maker to diverge from the proscribed norm? The unexpected symbolic pairings and hand-scribed execution are probably what led cataloguers of the past to characterize the group as “primitive.”¹⁵ While this decorative arts label was a general categorization applied to non high-style furniture in the 1970s and 1980s, it relegates the motifs’ playfulness to naiveté; thereby slighting the creative inspirations the cabinetmakers drew upon from their Nolichucky community.

“Building Tennessee: The McAdams Family Trade and Identity in the Southwest Backcountry,” investigates how those who settled west of the Appalachian Mountains expressed a regional identity that reflected their place in the new American Republic. An interdisciplinary portrait of “place” in the Nolichucky River Valley suggests how such a distinctive inlay style came to be. The social and cultural connections within upper East Tennessee communities are important, because scholars today can begin to understand the result of negotiation that varies by participant(s), resources, and regions through extant furniture.

¹⁵ "Inlaid East Tennessee Table," Object File S_10340, prepared by Luke Beckerdite, 1983, Gray Research Center, Museum of Early American Decorative Arts, Old Salem, NC. [Hereinafter referred to as GRC, MESDA.]

This bloodline (a father, his sons, and at least one grandson) established the largest shop of its kind in Tennessee's Appalachia. Their shop produced a world of goods for consumption, the most conspicuous of which was part of the distinctive rope and tassel inlaid furniture group. This cross-disciplinary analysis supplements a primary source foundation of McAdams inlaid furniture with an array of Nolichucky River Valley decorative arts. The McAdams familial tradition embodies for the South the group historian David Jaffee labels, "artisan-entrepreneurs."¹⁶ In Jaffee's work, *A New Nation of Goods: The Material Culture of Early America*, he focuses primarily on rural communities in the northeast to which the McAdams case study offers a regional counterpoint.

The context of an artisan's culture and identity play a significant part of building understanding of his or her craft. By better understanding the region that made the rope and tassel group fashionable, this dissertation develops a social history of the Nolichucky River Valley (figure 3) and addresses questions of attribution. Celebrated as exemplary folk art and recognized by decorative arts scholars, the rope and tassel furniture group lacked a singular attribution until 2012.¹⁷ The general credit was simply geographical based on recollections of private collectors, family histories, and obvious design similarities – Greene County, Tennessee.

¹⁶ David Jaffee, *A New Nation of Goods: The Material Culture of Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 73.

¹⁷ See Derita Coleman Williams, Nathan Harsh, and C. Tracey Parks, *The Art and Mystery of Tennessee Furniture and Its Makers Through 1850* (Nashville, TN: Tennessee Historical Society and Tennessee State Museum Foundation, 1988).



Figure 3: Nolichucky River Valley Panoramic, 2014

The history of the first decades of Tennessee's pioneers in the Appalachian Mountains shapes this narrative and is vital to understanding the culture that popularized the rope and tassel. Even before the political intrigues of State of Franklin Governor John Sevier and, later, Territorial Governor William Blount, white explorers and merchants cultivated extensive regional trade networks between western American Indian towns and colonial suppliers east of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Land grabs by men like Jacob Brown confounded the efforts to retain western land rights of Indian leaders like Chickamaugan warrior Dragging Canoe and Cherokee mediator Nancy Ward. By 1796, formal Tennessee statehood and migration via the Great Wagon Road fueled increasingly permanent white settlements in the Nolichucky River Valley.

Overland transportation provided the physical and social mobility migrants wanted. Frontier historian Craig Friend highlighted the Great Wagon Road, a

transportation artery from Pennsylvania into Tennessee, as a symbol of freedom in *Along the Maysville Road: The Early American Republic in the Trans-Appalachian West*. According to Friend, the most successful people along the Great Wagon Road proved to be the middling commerce men who catered to diverse consumers.¹⁸ Indeed, colonial historian T. H. Breen bolstered Friend's thesis with his own that American colonists shared a primary experience of consumer choice in a ripe economy in *The Marketplace of Revolution: How Consumer Politics Shaped American Independence*.¹⁹ Ultimately, merchants and the consumer experience traveled the road with consumers and shaped trade networks throughout the South.

The experiences along the Great Wagon Road, during a period of increased consumption, created a multitude of influences that shaped artisanal creativity. Charming, alarming, or primitive – the rope and tassel motifs are definitely memorable. Ironically, however, the maker and much of his world are lost to us in the twenty-first century. Little provenance associated with the furniture group survives. Unfortunately, the obscured origins of the group stunt the story of the region's people and their material world in today's literature. Private collectors and southern heritage organizations alike stand to benefit from

18. Craig Thompson Friend, *Along the Maysville Road: The Early Republic in the Trans-Appalachian West* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2005), 5.

¹⁹ See T. H. Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution How Consumer Politics Shaped American Independence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

a well-rounded interpretation of the maker's life. How then could the maker of such a distinctive and coveted furniture group remain anonymous?

The answer may lie in academic fields divided by sources of evidence. History and material culture share some common ground, but there is a longstanding need for cross-pollination of materials and methodologies. Historical narratives, focused on documentary evidence, often suffer from a lack of the wider significance conveyed by material culture. Alternately, so too could the field of material culture, concentrated on artifact evidence, benefit from the conceptual paradigms of historians.

Increased collaboration has the potential to answer the most important question for students and museum goers: "So what?" Issues of identity and memory get to the heart of this question. Public history literature investigates issues of identity and regionalism. How do communities express their sense of identity? The case study of the "rope and tassel" group of furniture offers a prime opportunity to test this methodological cross-pollination. Public historians typically pursue these questions in contemporary settings. To take a different perspective, this study focuses on the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century decorative arts in the Nolichucky River Valley of East Tennessee, in counties where the Nolichucky River served as a vital channel for transportation and trade.

Original research in this dissertation works within and between two historiographies of early American history – frontier history and material culture – by way of decorative arts in the early Republic. Following the lead of scholars like

Anne Smart Martin and David Jaffee, this study places material evidence at the forefront of historical academic interpretation.²⁰ In *Buying into the World of Goods*, Martin developed an in-depth study of the agency of commerce, desire, and meaning in backcountry Virginia. Through an Atlantic world perspective, Martin's backcountry narrative uncovered merchant/customer relationships.

Martin's work was the first monograph to use material and historical evidence in developing a social history of consumerism in the backcountry. Taken together, Martin's historical and material culture analyses generated a "sense of place" as diverse people formed identities in communities linked to the Atlantic World through commerce. Martin argued a material culture analysis alone could not produce the integral historical context of things. She suggested, "a broader cultural analysis [that] uses texts – words, landscapes, and objects – to understand *place*, a place made by and lived through people and their relationships."²¹

The stereotype that Appalachia endured decades of self-imposed seclusion persists into the twenty-first century; like Hood's backcountry community, East Tennessee was far from isolated. The social connections of the McAdams extended well beyond Washington County, Tennessee, through business endeavors and continued migrations westward. By merging social

²⁰ See David Jaffee, *A New Nation of Goods: The Material Culture of Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).; Ann Smart Martin, *Buying into the World of Goods Early Consumers in Backcountry Virginia* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008).

²¹ Martin, 95.

history context and stylistic cultural analysis, thus meeting Martin's call for a paradigm of material culture studies, this work expands the traditional historiography of frontier decorative arts.²²

Despite documentary gaps, this author aims to create a balanced portrait of the region and its people. Documentary evidence contextualizes the rural experience for artisan-entrepreneurs. Contemporary correspondence and trade documents from the region offer valuable insight into the trade of cabinetmakers. Land records for the region between 1780 and 1800 are sometimes difficult to trace due to the nature of verbal agreements, loss of paper documents, and changing state allegiances/jurisdictions (North Carolina, Franklin, and Tennessee). Census records for Tennessee do not exist prior to 1820, due in large part to a series of nineteenth-century fires. Therefore, for the most eastern region of Tennessee the first reliable federal document is the 1820 Census of Manufactures.²³

Modern bureaucratic borders further challenge the study of the rope and tassel furniture group by dividing the region's history and, simultaneously, the group's cultural significance. McPherson's work offers one recent example of how county divisions between Greene and Washington Counties limit historical context in the study of East Tennessee decorative arts. Her forthcoming article, (as yet untitled) also in *Antiques and Fine Art*, will investigate a branch of the

²² Ibid., 102.

²³ Tennessee State Library and Archives (TSLA), "Statewide Tennessee Census Records at TSLA" <http://www.tn.gov/tsla/history/census/microcen.htm> (Updated March 5, 2013).

rope and tassel group characterized by the gamecock motif, traditionally attributed to Greene County, Tennessee.²⁴ This dissertation acknowledges the porousness of early county borders thanks to the region's nexus of waterways.

Two parties fueled interest in this furniture group: backcountry antique collectors and scholars of Tennessee cabinetry. These groups include noted collectors of East Tennessee furniture, Dick Doughty, Nathan Harsh, and Mary Jo Case, as well as researchers like Tracey Parks, Ann McPherson, and Derita Coleman Williams who first catalogued the pieces as a group. American decorative arts scholars consider the body of work intriguing because it can be identified as a "southern" group; most furniture cannot be easily classified as such due to the multitude of stylistic influences traversing the Great Wagon Road from Philadelphia into Tennessee.²⁵ Until the twenty-first century scholars did not pursue anything more definitive. Why no previous attribution? Three challenges explain the previous reluctance of decorative arts scholars to place credit with a particular cabinetmaker or cabinetmaking tradition.

First and foremost, few cabinetmakers (be they rural or urban) in the early nineteenth-century signed their finished products.²⁶ Maker's marks, when they do appear, tend to originate in large "ware houses." The Bankson and Lawson shop,

²⁴ Anne McPherson, Article Forthcoming, *Antiques and Fine Art* (Fall 2015).

²⁵ J. Roderick Moore, "Decorated Furniture," in Cynthia Elyce Rubin ed., *Southern Folk Art* (Birmingham, AL: Oxmoor House, 1985), 139.

²⁶ Philip Zimmerman "Early American Furniture Makers' Marks," in Luke Beckerdite ed., *American Furniture* (Milwaukee, WI: Chipstone Foundation, 2007), 133.

now accepted as the producer/primogenitor of the neoclassical inlay furniture group of Baltimore, offers a prime illustration of the difficulty of attribution in early America. The group is united by shared motifs, workmanship, and design – not by signatures.²⁷ Even in one of the fastest growing cities in early America, decorative arts attributions cannot always rely on signatures to establish the work's origins.

Secondly, by the turn of the twentieth century, many of Tennessee's earliest families relocated farther west; in turn, taking a good deal of their material world with them. In fact, pieces from the rope and tassel group have been located as far west as Missouri.²⁸ The popular demand for "Americana" antiques during the Arts and Crafts Revival of the 1930s further dislocated extant examples of inlaid East Tennessee furniture when dealers sold their finds along the east coast as Pennsylvania folk art.²⁹

Finally, even the physical evidence could be misleading. In more than one instance, missing or replacement feet and cornices slowed attributions.

Cabinetmakers often scaled corner cupboards during the design and production phases to fit a particular corner in the customer's residence. As descendants

²⁷ Sumpter Priddy, J. Michael Flanigan, and Gregory R. Weidman, "The Genesis of Neoclassical Style in Baltimore Furniture" (Milwaukee, WI: Chipstone Foundation, 2000).

²⁸ Anne McPherson Private Collection Nashville, Tennessee. Consulted by author 11/4/14.

²⁹ "Inlaid Profile Desk," Object File 1957.1099, prepared c. 1957, Henry Francis Du Pont Furniture Collection, Winterthur Museum, Library, and Archive, Winterthur, DE. [Hereinafter referred to as Winterthur Museum]; Sold by dealer Joe Kindig to Henry F. Du Pont in 1957 as a Virginia piece.

inherited furniture and moved it from the cupboard's earliest home, original pediments and bracket feet proved ungainly. The solution? Remove the most protruding design elements.

Notwithstanding these complications to attribution, cultural organizations displayed examples of the group in exhibits and catalogues. The Tennessee Fine Arts Center at Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art in Nashville, Tennessee, in 1971 first displayed multiple rope and tassel pieces alongside one another in "Made in Tennessee: An Exhibition of Early Arts and Crafts."³⁰

Subsequently, in the 1980s, scholars and collectors joined forces to produce the definitive work that outlined the rope and tassel group of furniture, *The Art and Mystery of Tennessee Furniture and its Makers through 1850* by Derita Coleman Williams, Nathan Harsh, and edited by Tracey Parks. The work catalogued all recognized group pieces.³¹ Further, the work included an appendix, an extensive enumeration of Tennessee cabinetmakers based on the 1820 Census of Manufactures and extant newspaper advertisements.

Beginning in the 1990s, the William King Museum of Abingdon, Virginia, spearheaded a regional fieldwork initiative. Museum Director Betsy White, with an interdisciplinary traveling staff, documented decorative arts from southwest Virginia and northeast Tennessee. Cultural ties united these mountain

³⁰ *Made in Tennessee: An Exhibition of Early Arts and Crafts* (Nashville: Tennessee Fine Arts Center at Cheekwood, 1971).

³¹ Derita Coleman Williams, Nathan Harsh, and C. Tracey Parks, *The Art and Mystery of Tennessee Furniture and Its Makers Through 1850* (Nashville: Tennessee Historical Society and Tennessee State Museum Foundation, 1988).

communities and influenced nineteenth-century decorative arts. The project ultimately culminated in a decorative arts archive (housed at the William King Museum), as well as an exhibit and book of the same title, *Great Road Style: The Decorative Arts Legacy of Southwest Virginia and Northeast Tennessee*.³² After its success, White's next project was to enumerate the documented artisans from *Great Road Style* in a new book, *Backcountry Makers: An Artisan History of Southwest Virginia and Northeast Tennessee*.³³ The McAdams family was not included in *The Art and Mystery of Tennessee Furniture and its Makers through 1850* or in either of White's twenty-first century publications.

Why then, if McAdams' lengthy estate sale survives, did the cabinetmaking shop not surface in previous decorative arts scholarship? It appears that the McAdams never advertised in print, vicinity paper publications were limited. Rather than advertise, the McAdams relied on their trademark, the rope and tassel, for promotion. Secondly, the source many decorative arts scholars rely upon, the 1820 Census of Manufactures, focused predominantly on

³² Betsy K. White, *Great Road Style: The Decorative Arts Legacy of Southwest Virginia and Northeast Tennessee* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006).; The Cultural Heritage Archive includes over 200 documented objects made in Southwest Virginia and Northwest Tennessee before 1940. The Archive is located in the William King Museum of Art in Abingdon, VA.

³³ Betsy K. White, *Backcountry Makers: An Artisan History of Southwest Virginia and Northeast Tennessee* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 2013).

craftsmen in urban and small town settings. The McAdams, while in proximity to Jonesborough, were located in a more rural setting along Big Limestone Creek.³⁴

This early community in the farthest reaches of (then) North Carolina was known as “Limestone” for the Nolichucky’s tributaries Big and Little Limestone Creeks as well as for the large masses of naturally occurring limestone. Today, the landscape is dominated by late nineteenth-century architecture. The town appears much like the small depot-stop it was over a century ago. Some examples of late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century buildings survive providing scholars and visitors a glimpse of the post-revolutionary community in Tennessee. The architecture is significant because large casework, like rope and tassel corner cupboards, were commissioned for particular homes and interiors.

Networks of family and transportation indicate that symbols of nature, agriculture, and republicanism that manifest on rope and tassel furniture did not develop in an inspirational void. Rather, white settlers who fought for their interpretation of freedom (often at the expense of minorities), enslaved men and women who toiled and faced uncertainties, and displaced American Indian families all influenced the world that popularized the rope and tassel cultural palette. Ultimately, historical and material backcountry contexts suggest that people in the first decades of the Republic shared an environment and culture

³⁴ A note on spelling: originally the town of Jonesborough, Tennessee, was spelled “Jonesboro.” I chose to use the modern spelling of “Jonesborough” (that has been in use longer than the first) throughout the dissertation to avoid confusion.

that shaped the symbolism of their world. American memory of westward migration and academic methodological divisions eclipses regional history. This dissertation seeks to renew a cultural dialogue based on multidisciplinary evidence. By disputing long-held Appalachian stereotypes, “Building Tennessee” restores agency to nineteenth-century Tennesseans by interpreting the material world they left behind.

Once merged, architecture, community ties, decorative arts, and documentary evidence reveals the cultural “palette” of the rope and tassel group. In his thesis, decorative arts scholar James MacIntire used the fine arts metaphor of a painter’s “palette” to describe the “grammar of ornament” for the “Ralph” group of corner cupboards.³⁵ Building on this metaphor, I argue that the “cultural palette” of the Nolichucky River Valley reveals the imagery and symbolism of a period shaped by democratic experiments, extensive trade networks, and familial connections.

New pieces of rope and tassel furniture have surfaced through estate auctions since the 1980s and, through inter-disciplinary investigation, the narrative of the rope and tassel furniture can move forward. Currently, furniture attributed to the rope and tassel group is in collections and on display in respected cultural institutions including MESDA, the East Tennessee History Center, Winterthur Museum, and the Speed Museum of Art. These examples of

³⁵ James MacIntire, “Creativity and Tradition: The Corner Cupboards of Southwestern Sussex County, 1790-1850” (MA thesis, University of Delaware, 1989), 21.

backcountry material culture can be better harnessed as tools of heritage education in their museum settings. (Opportunities and methods for more effective interpretation will be discussed in chapter five.)

Before turning to interpretation, the first chapters of this dissertation outline historical context and regional history. Chapter one introduces the reader to the Nolichucky River Valley. The region's geography, history, and location, along with transportation routes, all play important roles in understanding how the region was a gravitational point in the 1770s and 1780s. Chapter two describes the people who migrated to the region in the 1790s in search of new economic markets and the material worlds they created. The McAdams family of cabinetmakers, like so many others, reached Tennessee in the 1790s.

Chapter three employs the estate auction of Hugh McAdams to decipher the material world of the rope and tassel cabinetmaker and his family. Primary source documents augmented by Republican studies of decorative arts offer a glimpse of the intimate spaces inhabited by the McAdams as well as their business practices. A technical look at extant group examples follows in Chapter four, which will examine the visual and intellectual components of the Nolichucky River's "cultural palette." Provenance, where available, further elucidates group history. Finally, Chapter five addresses regional and national social transitions of the 1830s and beyond. In conclusion, this last chapter explains why the rope and tassel group matters and suggests how academics might discover creative

answers to decades-old questions of regional historical interpretation through material evidence.

Leyburn fundamentally underestimated the imagination of nineteenth-century Americans when, with one broad stroke, he charged them with an “artistic deficiency.” He further stated that “the Scotch-Irish were not the cause of it, but they were certainly representative of it.”³⁶ Quite the contrary, the McAdams tradition joined the ranks of North Carolina Scots-Irish cabinetmakers James Gheen and Alexander Shaw.³⁷ Leyburn’s limited perspective resulted from inherited nineteenth-century stereotypes and academic methodological divisions. For instance, he addressed academic historiographical literature, yet overlooked emerging fields of folklore, geography, and decorative arts. Thus, this dissertation undertakes to combat restricted visions, like those of Leyburn, by harnessing and integrating an array of historical primary evidence to reveal the interconnectedness within the region that spurred a vital period of creative production in the early Republic.

³⁶ Leyburn, 324.

³⁷ Lucas, 2015.

CHAPTER I

“The Nolichucky River Valley”

Tension between the right to self-government and the need for frontier security characterized the backcountry world of the Nolichucky River Valley for the diverse people who lived there in the final decades of the eighteenth century. According to white settlers, neither the colonial nor, later, the federal government provided the resources necessary to protect their landed interests from neighboring American Indians. Simultaneously, factions within the Cherokee community resented the presence of white settlements and complained to British allies that settlers west of the Appalachian Mountains ignored internationally determined borders. Politics of territorial expansion, like these, determined wider allegiances between political and cultural entities prior to the nineteenth century. This chapter delineates the region of study and its significance along the Great Wagon Road as a place where residents tested freedoms promised by the new Republic of 1783.

The region's topography, coupled with a description of its natural resources, offers a platform to understanding the physical world migrants encountered upon arrival. In spite of being worn down over millennia, the Blue Ridge Mountains still protect the Nolichucky River Valley, a fertile, relatively flat, area. Few scholars have investigated communities along the Nolichucky River,

like Limestone, Leesburg, and “Chuckey” (in homage to the river), although there are landmark studies of the French Broad and Tennessee Rivers.¹ Facing dangerous obstacles and potential pay-offs in the search for prosperity, white settlers risked unforeseeable consequences.² Violent conflict, constitutional grievances, and land acquisitions tied regional freedomways, “prevailing ideas of liberty and restraint”, to the mountainous landscape.³

This dissertation defines the “Nolichucky River Valley” as the larger portion of the Washington District, the easternmost division within the federal Southwest Territory defined by the North Carolina legislature in 1791.⁴ More than the Nolichucky River Watershed, the Washington District’s original four counties were Sullivan, Hawkins, Washington, and Greene. In geographical terms, the District encompassed the Watauga River, Carter’s Valley, and the Nolichucky River Valley. The map below (figure 4), from America’s first encyclopedia, defined the border between the Northwest and Southwest Territories.

¹ See Wilma Dykeman and Douglas W. Gorsline. *The French Broad*. New York: Rinehart, 1955.; Donald Davidson, *The Tennessee: The Old River Frontier to Secession*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1978.

² C. Van West, “From Backcountry to Heartland: Material Culture and the Transformation of the Southern Backcountry, 1760-1860,” *The Chipstone Lecture*. Colonial Williamsburg’s 67th Annual Antiques Forum, Williamsburg, VA, February 21, 2015.

³ David Hackett Fischer, *Albion’s Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 9.

⁴ Walter T. Durham, “Southwest Territory,” *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*, C. Van West ed. <https://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entry.php?rec=1236> (accessed July 2, 2014).



Figure 4: “Kentucky,” John Low, *The New and Complete American Encyclopedia or Universal Dictionary of Arts and Sciences*, 1800

The interconnected river system played an important role in the region’s early trade, exploration, and settlement. Extensive waterways in East Tennessee made land west of the Appalachian Mountains “remarkably healthy.”⁵ The *Western Gazetteer*, a promotional publication for migrants to the western territories, listed the navigable rivers that carried settlers and their goods deep into the upland South. Head branches of the Tennessee River, then as now, included the Holston, Nolichucky, French Broad, Clinch, and Hiwassee Rivers. During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the Tennessee River was a primary transportation artery of approximately 1,110 miles in length.

⁵ Samuel Brown, *Western Gazetteer; or Emigrant's Directory Containing a Geographical Description of the Western States and Territories, Viz: the States of Kentucky, Indiana, Louisiana, Ohio Tennessee, and Mississippi, and the Territories of Illinois, Missouri, Alabama, Michigan and Northwestern*, 1817 (Auburn, NY: H.C. Southwick, 1817), 327.

Traders and settlers traversed these waters by canoe, keelboat, flatboat, and raft. The Tennessee River fed the Ohio River as its largest tributary.⁶

This study is primarily concerned with the 115-mile-long Nolichucky River, which is situated between the Appalachian Mountains to the east and the Cumberland Plateau to the west (figure 5). South Indian Creek, Cherokee Creek, and Big Limestone Creek fed the Nolichucky River as it crossed the Blue Ridge, Unaka, and Bald Mountains. Today, the River enters the state of Tennessee via Unicoi County and joins the French Broad at Sevier County's Douglas Dam, a Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) project. It serves as a modern county divider between Washington and Greene Counties.



Figure 5: Nolichucky River Watershed by Cartographer Karl Musser, 2007

⁶ Michael Allen, "River Transportation," in *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*, Carroll Van West ed., <https://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entry.php?rec=1397> (accessed November 13, 2014).

Green pastures, once forested, lie between the extreme land formations.⁷

American Indians cleared land for agricultural fields during the first phase of human occupation, the Woodland era (200-600 A.D.). Archeological evidence indicates that such clearing began above Cherokee Creek and the Nolichucky River flood plain.⁸ The second phase of human occupation in the Nolichucky River Valley occurred during the Mississippian era (1600-1838).⁹ Tools and European trade goods categorize the archeological findings from this period. During the Mississippian era, American-Indian survivors of disease and warfare of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries banded together as the Overhill Cherokee, so named for their communities on the western side of the Appalachian Mountains.

By the 1700s when white explorers pushed west in greater numbers, the Overhill Cherokee relied on the far reaches of (then) North Carolina as a hunting ground and buffer zone.¹⁰ The region's terrain of extremes – alternating

⁷ Based on stamped ceramic sherds recovered in the Nolichucky River Valley, Archeologist Kathy Manning parallels Woodland settlements with those Archeologist Jefferson Chapman examines along the Little Tennessee River.; See Jefferson Chapman. *Archaic Period Research in the Lower Little Tennessee River Valley: Icehouse Bottom, Harrison Branch, Thirty Acre Island, Calloway Island*. Knoxville, TN: Tennessee Valley Authority, 1977.

⁸ Kathy Manning, "Archaeological Survey (Phase 1) of the Proposed Jonesborough Wastewater Effluent Outfall Line, Washington County, Tennessee," Submitted August 2011, to Community Development Partners, LLC, USDA Rural Development, and USDC Economic Development Administration. Subheading: 40WG124.

⁹ Manning, Subheading: 40WG138.

¹⁰ Craig Thompson Friend, *Along the Maysville Road: The Early Republic in the Trans-Appalachian West* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2005), 13.

floodplains and steep bluffs – served, for a time, as a migration barrier to white settlers east of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Britain hoped to appease the Indian neighbors of its colonial borders in North America with the Proclamation Line of 1763 that outlawed colonial settlement west of the Appalachian Mountains.¹¹ The Proclamation also represented Britain’s imperial attempt to better govern vast lands gained as a result of the French and Indian War of the 1760s. Well before the Proclamation’s formal edict, however, American Indians and Euro-Americans interacted in the Nolichucky River Valley.

Euro-Americans entered the region in search of economic profit. In pursuit of furs, the earliest group to cross the Appalachian Mountain range in the mid-eighteenth century was comprised of longhunters, so named for the extended duration of their absences from the east. Some crossed from North Carolina, but many arrived from Virginia or early Kentucky settlements along the Maysville Road, a critical transportation route through the Kentucky region.¹² Longhunters had little need for the pounds of meat left behind after skinning their prey. Due to considerations of time and profit, most longhunters left animal carcasses where they fell. When Overhill Cherokee hunters encountered wasted and rotting carcasses they were offended because they needed the region’s game for their livelihoods to barter for the European goods on which American Indian

¹¹ George Rex. “The Royal Proclamation, October 7, 1763. Copyright 2008 Yale Law School, Lilian Godman Law Library http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/proc1763.asp (accessed July, 2012).

¹² Friend, 13.

communities increasingly relied. The waste and trespass offended Cherokee hunters; in this view, the longhunters were little more than poachers.

Disagreements over trade in the Nolichucky River Valley were rarely strong enough to break longstanding networks of kinship shared by white longhunters and the matrilineal society of the Cherokee. For reasons ranging from economic alliance to intimate companionship, men and women in the backcountry enjoyed interethnic relationships. Nancy Ward or “One who goes about,” offers a prominent example. She took white trader Bryan Ward as her second husband.¹³ Ward’s public role as a mediator on behalf of the Cherokee town, Chota, ensured greater documentation of her life, but mixed couples were a significant feature of frontier life. Despite ongoing cultural conflict, the Overhill Cherokee and early Euro-American settlers created a shared physical and cultural space.

On the heels of the longhunters came men who constructed stores in the backcountry such as John Carter, Evan Shelby, and Jacob Brown.¹⁴ Located along Indian trading routes these merchants built log structures from which they sold European goods to scattered settlers, hunters, and Cherokee traders. Like historian Anne Smart Martin’s historical subject, Virginia backcountry merchant John Hook, buttressed by eastern mercantile ties merchants in the Nolichucky

¹³ David Ray Smith, “Nancy Ward,” *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*. C. Van West ed. <https://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entry.php?rec=1464> (accessed November 13, 2014).

¹⁴ John R. Finger, *Tennessee Frontiers: Three Regions in Transition* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2001), 53.

River Valley occupied a paradoxical world of rich farmland surrounded by mountains at the western edges of white settlement.¹⁵ Many of the early traders made the Valley their permanent residence and, as a result, were known as “Overmountain Men.”¹⁶ The earliest traders to remain in the area had two profitable aims: to serve as middlemen of the fur trade and to survey the terrain for future speculation and, eventually, settlement.

In 1770, Britain gained territory for its Virginia colony from the Cherokee as part of the Treaty of Lochaber. The land cession took place at Lochaber, South Carolina, and included western lands to the Kentucky River and the Holston River. The Treaty of Lochaber then, opened lands north of the Holston for hunting and settlement.¹⁷ For colonists looking westward, however, these acreage gains were not enough.

According to a five-year contract, subsequently known as the Watauga Purchase, white settlers (known as “Wataugans”) leased the entire Watauga River Valley, the North Carolina headwaters of the New River and the south fork of the Holston River, from the Overhill Cherokee.¹⁸ In order to circumnavigate

¹⁵ Anne Smart Martin, *Buying into the World of Goods: Early Consumers in Backcountry Virginia* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 6.

¹⁶ Terry Weeks, “Overmountain Men,” *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*, C. Van West ed., <http://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entry.php?rec=1027> (accessed April, 2014).

¹⁷ Robert T. Anderson, “Treaty of Lochaber,” *e-WV: The West Virginia Encyclopedia*, <http://www.wvencyclopedia.org/articles/773> (accessed March 5, 2015).

¹⁸ “The Watauga Purchase,” Old Book A in Tennessee’s Founding and Landmark Documents Collection, Tennessee State Library and Archives.

British restrictions, John Carter and other Euro-American families already in the area “leased” property from the Cherokee in 1772. Subsequently, Richard Henderson, of the Transylvania Company, exchanged European goods for nearly 20 million acres in (what would become) Kentucky and Tennessee.¹⁹ Inspired by Henderson’s success, the Wataugans converted their lease to a purchase in 1775 with gifts of additional goods.

Within days of the Wataugan final purchase, merchant Jacob Brown individually bargained with a select group of elder Cherokee chiefs to purchase extensive tracts in what is now recognized as “Brown’s Purchase.” The contract included land along Limestone Creek and both sides of the Nolichucky River. Brown’s Purchase, adjacent to the Watauga Purchase Tract, was comprised of a narrow band of valleys, ideal for agriculture. Over the objections of a younger cadre of Cherokee leadership guided by Dragging Canoe, noted for his aggressive opposition to Cherokee land cessions, the extensive land transfers opened increasing acreage for Euro-American settlement.²⁰ The Transylvania, Watauga, and Brown Purchases exemplified what Dragging Canoe knew to be true – Euro-American land grabs would not cease.

For many white settlers, land speculation represented the fastest way to increase one’s wealth in the backcountry; however, acquisition came with the repercussions of illegal contracts and, sometimes, at the cost of bloodshed.

<http://cdm15138.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/ref/collection/tfd/id/101> (accessed July 2, 2014).

¹⁹ Finger, 51.

²⁰ Ibid.

Fierce raids over land rights, by Indians and whites alike, forced negotiations of cessation. Nancy Ward spoke for peace at the 1781 treaty conference on Long Island along the Holston River. In an unprecedented act, Ward, a female Cherokee who fought decades earlier as a Cherokee warrior, delivered an address as a Cherokee representative to a company of mixed ethnicities. Throughout much of the rest of her adult life, Ward served her people as a “Beloved Woman,” advisor in times of war and peace.²¹

Sporadic violence and colonial reprimand did not deter settlers who continued to purchase land in the mountains. Western speculators encouraged increasing Euro-American settlement because more families in the region meant extra tillable land and added protection in terms of population and the built environment. Euro-American settlers in the eighteenth century cleared forests of chestnut, white oak, and hickory trees for planting. One of the considerable difficulties of clearing land in the Nolichucky River Valley was the outcroppings of limestone (figure 6), typically in hilly areas near clay. Limestone, a sedimentary rock formed when bodies of water leave behind debris over time, was a readily available building material and also proved useful in the making of mortar.

²¹ Smith, “Nancy Ward,” (accessed November 13, 2014).



Figure 6: Limestone Outcroppings, 2014

The primary concerns of new arrivals were shelter and defense; therefore, housing construction began as soon as possible. Typically twenty feet by eighteen feet, these single pen log houses had rock pier foundations, a singular chimney, and stood one-and-a-half, or two stories tall.²² The first floor had multiple usages for families that included working, eating, and resting. The second or half-floor was typically used for sleeping. Building materials of the earliest Euro-American homes predominantly consisted of local stone, logs, or wood framing.²³

An impressive extant example is the Mauris-Earrest Fort House (1782) located on a defensible hillside along the Nolichucky River (figure 7). The three-level v-notch log structure rests on a limestone first level with a 9-bay façade

²² Michael Gavin, "Log Construction," *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*, C. Van West ed., <http://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entry.php?rec=802> (accessed November 13, 2014).

²³ Lucy Kennerly Gump, "Possessions and Patterns of Living in Washington County: The 20 Years Before Tennessee Statehood, 1777-1796" (master's thesis, East Tennessee State University, 1989), 59.

wherein each level is symmetrically divided with two windows flanking central doors.²⁴ As the title of “fort house” suggests, the 1782 structure offered more protection than single level log houses.



Figure 7: Mauris-Earnst Fort House, 2012

While material evidence of Brown’s store has yet to be uncovered, the structure may have also served as a defensive fort. Folklorist Henry Glassie’s work, *Pattern in the Material Folk Culture of the Eastern United States*, resurrects vernacular architecture from a base-need to a form of commentary about constructed social space.²⁵ For instance, Brown lived with his second wife in a fortified structure that served as a home, mercantile shop, and defensive fort. Interior space, in structures such as these, was simultaneously public and

²⁴ Jen Stoecker, Middle Tennessee State University Center for Historic Preservation, “Earnst Farms Historic District: Section 7,” National Register of Historic Places (April 3, 2001), 1.

²⁵ Henry Glassie, *Pattern in the Material Folk Culture of the Eastern United States* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1969), 6.

private. As a mercantile space, the Brown proprietors and their diverse customers interacted through daily transactions.

Fortified homes, like the Mauris-Earnst house and, presumably Brown's homestead, housed multiple families in times of warfare and uncertainty. Glassie argued that architecture embodied "human intention" and, in this case, the need for "stations" or "forts" in the backcountry emphasized ongoing conflicts regarding landownership.²⁶ Fort Watauga at Sycamore Shoals, constructed shortly after the Transylvania Purchase, likewise took in settlers who arrived from other areas in search of asylum.

Violent altercations with American Indians represented one of the greatest concerns of Euro-American settlers. Largely based on the need for organized protection and civil order, settlers of Watauga and Nolichucky communities created the Watauga Association, a democratic compact wherein backcountry settlers established a governmental structure.²⁷ As the first white government established west of the Appalachian Mountains, the compact was not drafted as a formal break from the British monarchy; rather, its primary aim was to create and direct a community militia. From 1772 to 1776, the Association served as the executive and judicial branches of the government in a single body.²⁸

²⁶ Simon J. Bronner ed., *American Material Culture and Folklife: A Prologue and Dialogue* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Research Press, 1985), 2.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁸ Calvin W. Dickinson, "Watauga Association," *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*, C. Van West ed. <http://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entry.php?rec=1475> (accessed March 5, 2015).

Further, settlers established a new seat of government in Jonesborough, Tennessee, where, the “Jonesborough Road” was the first in the region to support wagons.²⁹ Constituted locally in 1777, settlers situated the town along Little Limestone Creek.³⁰ Settlers who lived along regional waterways went to town for commerce and court hearings; the town’s layout reflected the needs of its citizens.³¹ Historian Lisa Tolbert’s work, *Constructing Townscapes: Space and Society in Antebellum Tennessee*, provides a model for understanding how western “townscapes”, architectural and spatial orientation of small towns, developed in middle Tennessee. Jonesborough’s townscape, like its later western counterparts, changed rapidly to support the commercial and political demands of surrounding citizens.³²

Public facilities and appointments addressed the settlers’ need for civil order. In its first year, the settlers erected Tennessee’s first courthouse “built of round logs...covered in the fashion of cabins of the pioneers, with clapboards.”³³ The North Carolina Legislature formally chartered Jonesborough in 1779 naming

²⁹ Paul M. Fink, *Jonesborough, the First Century of Tennessee's First Town* (Johnson City: Tennessee State Planning Commission, 1972), 66.

³⁰ Goodspeed, “Goodspeed’s History of Washington County, Part One,” <http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~tncjones/goodspeed1.htm> (accessed June, 2012).

³¹ Fink, 69.

³² Lisa C. Tolbert, *Constructing Townscapes: Space and Society in Antebellum Tennessee* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 4.

³³ Westin A. Goodspeed, *A History of Tennessee From the Earliest Times to the Present, together with an Historical and a Biographical Sketch of Washington and Greene Counties* (Nashville: The Goodspeed Publishing Company, 1886).

five men, including James Stuart, to draft a town layout.³⁴ Once outlined, a public drawing was held to determine lot purchases at \$100 per town lot. Stuart outbid his competitors when he purchased 10 town lots in addition to plots he owned along Indian, Cherokee, and Little Limestone Creeks.³⁵ Directions for the second courthouse outlined the already extensive number of civic agents in backcountry Jonesborough. It was commissioned of John Chisolm in 1784 as,

“Twenty-four feet square, diamond corner...floors neatly laid with plank, shingles of roof to be hung with pegs, a justice’s bench, a lawyer’s and clerk’s box, also a sheriff’s box to sit in.”³⁶

Localized efforts like the Watauga Association and the Jonesborough court system did not alleviate the distance western settlers felt to North Carolina’s formal seat of power. Tensions between independence in the Nolichucky River Valley and the simultaneous demand for increased security from a distant power defined territorial political struggles. Nolichucky and Watauga settlement residents, committed to maintaining ownership of their land, wondered where they could turn for protection – the British government that did not recognize their land claims or a North Carolina colonial legislature dealing with its own struggle for independence?

³⁴ Pat Alderman, *The Overmountain Men; Early Tennessee History, 1760-1795* (Johnson City, TN: Overmountain Press, 1970), 39.

³⁵ Mary Hardin McCown, Nancy E. Jones Stickley, and Inez E. Burns, *Washington County, Tennessee Records, Miscellaneous Records in Washington County* (Johnson City, Tennessee: Mary Hardin McCown, 1964), 254. Mary Hardin McCown recovered and transcribed an undated list of Stuart’s taxable property that included eight town lots.

³⁶ Ibid.

Considering the extensive violent history settlers shared with the Overhill Cherokee, white residents of the Watauga and Nolichucky settlements viewed the Cherokee/British alliance as a very serious threat during the American Revolution. From the outset of the conflict, agents of the British Royal Government demanded the removal of settlers at Watauga and Nolichucky on the grounds that the “lease” expired and that Brown’s Purchase never was legitimate. Settlers employed tactics of delay and ambiguous correspondence against the combined demands for removal of the (then) allied British Government and Cherokee nation.³⁷ While delaying their removal, settlers employed an additional strategy of entrenchment by further fortifying their community. They planned a new fort, Fort Lee, along Cherokee Creek.

Construction came to an abrupt halt at the outbreak of the Revolution when the settlers fled a Cherokee attack led by Old Abram of Chilhowee and Dragging Canoe.³⁸ John Sevier and other families sought refuge at Fort Watauga while some left the region altogether for Virginia.³⁹ Again, those who remained in the area coordinated a united front, which took the form of a “Committee of Safety” during the Revolution.⁴⁰ Patriots west of the Appalachian Mountains petitioned regional colonies in rebellion, Virginia and North Carolina, for

³⁷ Finger, 54.

³⁸ Ibid., 62.

³⁹ Ibid., 64.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 58.

additional protection. Ultimately, North Carolina annexed the Watauga and Nolichucky settlements as “Washington County.”⁴¹

Despite strong regional Patriot allegiances, some Loyalists sought refuge from more vehement persecution in North Carolina and fled to the Nolichucky River Valley. Notwithstanding the fact that since 1776 the Watauga Association committed to the Patriot cause, some Loyalists believed that in a rural community they could avoid political oppression and build a life from the land. Local magistrates, however, forced these newcomers to take oaths of allegiance.⁴² Still other Tories, perceived as greater threats to the Wataugans, were imprisoned for the duration of the war.⁴³

By 1780 the British strategy turned to inciting backcountry Loyalists to action. Cornwallis believed that his British troops could quell Patriots in the rural South with enough localized Loyalist support.⁴⁴ In response, the Watauga militia, led by John Sevier (among others), planned to join Patriot forces in North Carolina, over the mountains, rather than risk British forces pushing deeper into the backcountry. Significantly, seven of the nine militia officers whose family origins were recorded came from Scots-Irish stock that formed a large proportion of the backcountry elite. The ancestors of these officers came from the

⁴¹ Ibid., 67.

⁴² Finger, 63.

⁴³ Goodspeed, “Goodspeed’s History of Washington County Part One,” (accessed June, 2012).

⁴⁴ Finger, 85.

borderlands of North Britain, often from prominent families that valued civic responsibility.⁴⁵

The proposed trek required a good deal of supplies as the soldiers first had to cross the Appalachian Mountain range and, second, to face battle. Families of militiamen generated supplies for the journey including food goods, textiles, and ammunition. Mary McKeehan Patton, from a Pennsylvania gunpowder family tradition, alone generated 500 pounds of ammunition specifically for the Battle of King's Mountain.⁴⁶ Although since forgotten, contributions of other individuals were no less significant.

The militia mustered at Fort Watauga, then known as Sycamore Shoals and traveled to North Carolina via Bright's Trace, an Indian trading route that connected western settlements with the Yadkin and Catawba River Valleys.⁴⁷ The map below indicates, through different colors, how militia groups traveled the region and eventually joined other Patriot militias in South Carolina (figure 8). As a united force, these backcountry militias confronted Loyalists led by Major Patrick Ferguson at King's Mountain in York County, South Carolina on October 7, 1780. Significantly, militiamen on both sides shared an American experience as colonists, but their loyalties differed.

⁴⁵ Fischer, 649.

⁴⁶ Susan Goodsell, "Mary McKeehan Patton," *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*, C. Van West ed., <https://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entry.php?rec=1043> (accessed November 13, 2014).

⁴⁷ Fink, 66.



Figure 8: Patriot Militia Routes, Courtesy National Park Service

The violent conflicts of the colonial era, preceding the Revolution, engendered differing combat techniques and conflicting understandings of obedience between the colonial militia and British regulars. Historian Douglas Leach argues in *Roots of Conflict: British Armed Forces and Colonial Americans 1677-1763*, that while British troops were “accustomed to rendering unqualified obedience to the Crown,” militiamen were accustomed to earning leadership roles based on experience and the respect of those around them.⁴⁸ Ferguson’s troops obeyed direct orders and employed traditional tactics expected of Britain’s longstanding military as they defended the high ground of King’s Mountain. In contrast, the colonists made use of their experiences fighting in the backcountry

⁴⁸ Douglas Edward Leach, *Roots of Conflict: British Armed Forces and Colonial Americans, 1677-1763* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 5.

during the French and Indian War where the landscapes and fighting traditions of American Indians thwarted more conventional formations. The Patriot militia fully encircled their enemies and took advantage of tree coverage for more effective shots.⁴⁹

Ultimately, Patriot forces claimed the victory at the Battle of King's Mountain. The Revolution continued for three more years, but the surprising British defeat lent the Patriot cause new momentum. Ultimately, American revolutionaries succeeded in implementing their principles of individual independence in an otherwise monarchical world.⁵⁰ Heralded for their commitment to democratic ideals and their military contributions to the Battle of King's Mountain, the term "The Overmountain Men" later gained new significance. National lore and twentieth-century historiography has since tied the struggle for democracy to the landscape.⁵¹

Unfortunately for the Cherokee Nation, the Revolution only complicated the struggle to keep their lands. At the Treaty of Paris in 1783, Britain hardly recognized its native allies. Quite the opposite of Britain's promises to American

⁴⁹ Finger, 88.

⁵⁰ Lynn Nelson "Historiographical Conversations about the Backcountry: Politics," *Journal of Backcountry Studies* Vol. 15 (2005), 2.

⁵¹ See John Haywood and A. S. Colyar, *The Civil and Political History of the State of Tennessee From Its Earliest Settlement Up to the Year 1796, Including the Boundaries of the State* (Nashville, Tenn: Pub. House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1915).; Lyman Copeland Draper, Anthony Allaire, and Isaac Shelby, *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: P.G. Thomson, 1881).; George Bancroft, and Russel B. Nye. *The History of the United States of America from the Discovery of the Continent* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966).

Indians, especially the Cherokee, the British granted the Americans essentially all of trans-Appalachia.⁵² Consequently, the United States legitimized Euro-American purchases west of the Appalachians, much to the chagrin of Dragging Canoe and his cadre of followers. Subsequently, the Cherokee gained rights to lands in Georgia. The Hopewell Treaty of 1785 promised acreage in Georgia to the Cherokee for “hunting grounds” and prohibited white settlement in the area.⁵³

Short on cash, the new government of the United States of America urged states to cede their western lands (that until recently belonged to American Indian groups like the Cherokee) to the young nation. Land sales of the ceded territories offered the national government a vehicle by which the treasury could rebuild.⁵⁴ Largely composed of western lands of the Carolinas, the United States Congress established the Southwest Territory and determined that it would be governed under The Ordinance of 1787 that two years prior established the Northwest Territory.⁵⁵

Two major differences between the territories would later affect issues of statehood. First, the Southwest Territory was nearly 12 times the acreage of that

⁵² D. Hartley, John Adams, B. Franklin, and John Jay, “Transcript Treaty of Paris: The Definite Treaty of Peace 1783,” *National Archives and Records Administration* (NARA) <http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?doc=6&page=transcript> (accessed January 5, 2015).

⁵³ United States of America and the Cherokee Nation, “Treaty of Hopewell, 1785,” *The Cherokee Nation* <http://www.cherokee.org/AboutTheNation/History/Facts/TreatyofHopewell,1785.aspx> (accessed March 4, 2015).

⁵⁴ North Carolina did not formally cede its western lands to the federal government until 1791.

⁵⁵ Durham, “Southwest Territory,” (accessed July 2, 2014).

of the Northwest Territory.⁵⁶ This vast area encompassed two formal regions: the Mero District of the Cumberland River and the Washington District of the Nolichucky River. Second, Congress prohibited slavery in the Northwest but allowed it in the Southwest.

By the time the federal government determined the boundaries of the Southwest Territory, most of the land was already settled; therefore, little acreage was available for sale and development. John Carter established an office to formalize previous land sales throughout the Valley. Carter took advantage of the new Territory to ensure reputable land titles for his neighbors. Nearly a decade after his first negotiations with the Cherokee, North Carolina formalized Brown's Purchase. This formalization freed Brown to sell tracts along the Nolichucky River to settlers moving west, primarily from the colonies of Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, and Carolina.

The government stood to gain little, financially, from tracts in the Southwest. This explains, in large part, the federal government's ongoing emphasis on the Northwest Territory.⁵⁷ For instance, Congress appointed military troops to the Ohio River Valley in the Northwest Territory where white populations were sparse and attacks by American Indians more persistent.⁵⁸ Settlers in both the Watauga and Nolichucky settlements felt their struggles for

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Wayne Bodle, "Soldiers in Love: Patrolling the Gendered Frontiers of the Early Republic," in *Sex and Sexuality in Early America*, Merrill D. Smith ed. (New York: New York University, 1998), 219.

permanence also warranted federal assistance. Although the legitimization of land claims in the Nolichucky River Valley increased the confidence of settlers, the eclipse of the Southwest on the national stage by the Northwest caused ongoing consternation in Jonesborough and surrounding rural communities.⁵⁹

Factionalism among the ceded western lands was not as simple as Northwest versus Southwest, because within the Southwest Territory there were jealousies between its two districts, Washington and Mero. Geographically, the Cumberland Plateau separated the sections. Demographics highlighted further distinctions by 1791 when the Washington District had a population of 28,649, the Mero District had only 7,042 mostly white adult males.⁶⁰ Prominent residents in the Washington District were jealous of the resources the North Carolina state government funneled into the Mero District of Middle Tennessee.

The Overmountain Men and their families made many sacrifices during the Revolution, but shortly after gaining their freedom from the monarchy, they were disappointed that the new bureaucracy did not produce promised liberties; they expected increased resources for security that never materialized. Prominent men from the Washington District voted to establish a new state in 1784 because of the biases they perceived of the Territory system. In honor of American ambassador and entrepreneur Benjamin Franklin, the faction proposed the new state be called Franklin. The first capital of Franklin was Jonesborough, but Franklin supporters relocated it to Greeneville. The “Franklinites,” supporters

⁵⁹ Finger, 69.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 131.

of the state of Franklin, drafted their grievances, a provisional constitution, and elected John Sevier governor.⁶¹

Amidst the struggle for Franklin, Jacob Brown of the Nolichucky settlement died in a hunting accident. As the first internment of the Brown Family Cemetery in 1785, Jacob Brown's burial represents the first lasting tie of this Euro-American community to the landscape extant today. The family buried Brown on part of his original purchase. His is the first recorded internment, and family oral histories suggest that Brown's burial marker is the first lettered headstone west of the Alleghenies.⁶² Many other family cemeteries, like Brown's, dot the landscape of the Nolichucky River Valley.

Other early land speculators lived to see statehood, but it was not in the form of Franklin. From the beginning, North Carolina opposed the state's creation. Despite four years of political maneuvers and appeals, the State of Franklin movement ended in a violent confrontation in 1788. After a brief skirmish, John Tipton, Sevier's leading opponent, arrested Sevier on charges of treason. Later freed, Sevier agreed to a peaceful dissolution of Franklin.⁶³ Speculators in the region with the goal of further legitimizing their land claims, however, did not give up on statehood. George Washington appointed William

⁶¹ Inhabitants of the Western Country, "A Petition for the State of Franklin in December 1787," *North Carolina From Statehood to 1800* http://www.carolana.com/NC/Early_Statehood/nc_statehood_1800_state_of_franklin_petition.html (accessed October, 2014).

⁶² See Amber Clawson, Ron McCall, and Rocky Swingle, "Brown Farm," *National Register of Historic Places* (Nashville: Tennessee Historical Commission, 2014).

⁶³ Finger, 123.

Blount, North Carolina businessman, as governor of the Southwest Territory.⁶⁴

Blount's primary goal over the next six years was statehood.

Perhaps due to the role the State of Franklin played in Tennessee's early history, its government seat of Greeneville eclipsed other municipal capitals, like Jonesborough, in public memory. Both were leading communities in the area: Jonesborough, the seat of Washington County, and, Greeneville, the seat of Greene County. Jonesborough was settled first and grew rapidly. By 1795 French Botanist Andre Michaux reported "150 houses, build of planks, and standing on both sides of the road" in Jonesborough.⁶⁵ That same year, Michaux stated that Greeneville did "not contain more than 40 houses, built of squared beams, arranged like the trunks of trees of the log houses."⁶⁶

While only 25 miles separated these two seats of justice, homes in Jonesborough had already progressed beyond the log structures found throughout the region. Some rural homesteads in Washington County had even progressed beyond log cabins to impressive stone structures. Colonel George Gillespie constructed his 1792 Penn plan house (central hall with a flanking room on each side), two-levels made of limestone with a three-room interior per level.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Ibid., 126.

⁶⁵ Reuben Gold Thwaites, André Michaux, François André Michaux, and Thaddeus Mason Harris, *Travels West of the Alleghanies: Made in 1793-96 by André Michaux, in 1802 by F.A. Michaux, and in 1803 by Thaddeus Mason Harris* (Cleveland: A.H. Clark Company, 1904), 91.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Jen Stoecker and Carroll Van West, Middle Tennessee State University Center for Historic Preservation, "The Transformation of the Nolichucky River

Still extant today, Gillespie's home bordered Big Limestone Creek in Washington County.

Stonemason Seth Smith built both the Gillespie House and the first Tennessee home of Thomas Embree, a Quaker abolitionist from South Carolina.⁶⁸ Pictured below (figure 9), the Embree Stone House was built around 1790. Space was at a premium and storage space, like the cupboards that flank the central fireplace below (figure 10), were built into the region's earliest structures. Concealed by a modern wall for most of the twentieth century, current owners discovered the fireplace and original flanking built-in cupboards during a renovation in the early 2000s.⁶⁹

Valley, 1776-1960," National Register of Historic Places (March 1992), Section E pg 15.

⁶⁸ Emilou McDorman, "Embree Family History" Presented at Green Plains, Ohio Friends Monthly Meeting in Selma, 8/7/1979 in Embree Family Papers Accession No. 61, East Tennessee State University Archives of Appalachia.

⁶⁹ Embree Stone House, Private Ownership, site visit 2014.



Figure 9: Embree Stone House, 2014



Figure 10: Embree Stone House Interior Built-in Cupboard

With each passing year, Jonesborough's role as upper East Tennessee's "economic, social, and political center" was further entrenched.⁷⁰ Blount worked tirelessly from Knoxville to reconcile the goals of both the Washington and Mero Districts, and by 1794 the Southwest Territory had a non-voting representative in the United States Congress.⁷¹ Franklin may have failed, but the ultimate goal of statehood was accomplished when the United State House of Representatives voted in the affirmative for Tennessee's statehood on May 6, 1796. Tennessee became the sixteenth state of America and the first state derived from a federal territory.⁷² "Washington County" was divided further into Washington, Sullivan, Greene, Carter, Hawkins, and Unicoi Counties. The process, whereby a federal territory was later formalized as a state government, was repeated many times over in subsequent decades as the young nation grew in population and geography.

The role of Tennesseans in the Battle of King's Mountain and the struggle for the State of Franklin illustrate how popular political democracy proved both concordant and divisive. United against common threats and rivalries between colonies fueled debates regarding the extent of individual freedoms. Names associated with the State of Franklin like Blount, Tipton, and Sevier, still dot the landscape as road names and celebrated historic sites. The white settlers of the

⁷⁰ David C.Hsiung, *Two Worlds in the Tennessee Mountains: Exploring the Origins of Appalachian Stereotypes* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 183.

⁷¹ Durham, "Southwest Territory," (accessed July 2, 2014).

⁷² Ibid.

Nolichucky River Valley came to view themselves as champions of democracy. To them, the valleys were incubators of self-representation and freedom to be defended from the monarchy to the east and from American Indians to the west.

An Indian fighter of legendary standing, Davy Crockett's name too is attached to the Nolichucky River Valley where he was born in 1786. Davy Crockett recounted his birthplace as, "far back in the backwoods...at the mouth of Lime Stone [Creek], on the Nola-chucky (sic) river."⁷³ The State of Tennessee has owned and operated his birthplace since 1973, although the initial impetus to preserve the site began with local Ruritan clubs after the wildly popular 1955 Disney movie, *Davy Crockett: King of the Wild Frontier*. Today the Davy Crockett Birthplace State Park, a popular tourist draw in Limestone, represents one of the nostalgic barriers that obscure East Tennessee's early community development.⁷⁴

People who arrived in East Tennessee during the 1790s did not encounter a cultural void; instead their transitions were heavily influenced by the struggles for democracy that preceded (or coincided with) their arrival. According to cultural historian David Hackett Fischer, the Scots-Irish interpretation of "freedom" in the

⁷³ David Crockett, *The Autobiography of David Crockett, With an Introduction by Hamlin Garland* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1923), 21.

⁷⁴ Both the Nolichucky River and Big Limestone Creek border the park, which is part of the original tract owned by George Gillespie, North Carolina Land Grant #98.

backcountry resulted from European folk culture of British borderlands and the American environment.⁷⁵

This chapter presented a brief overview of the territorial history of the Nolichucky River Valley. Chapter two details the transition in communities, like Jonesborough and Limestone, to a more permanent Euro-American landscape by the 1820s. Land and new markets attracted farmers, craftsmen, and entrepreneurs alike. The social and material connections of settlers and their families influenced expressions of regional culture.

⁷⁵ Fischer, 777.

CHAPTER II

“Social and Material Influences”

The multidirectional movement of people to (and within) the Nolichucky River Valley highlights vibrant social influences that manifested in the material world. Lively interiors that survive today, contradict the “simple, practical, and unadorned lifestyle,” historians H. Tyler Blethen and Curtis W. Wood Jr. attributed to Scotch-Irish migrants in *From Ulster to Carolina: The Migration of the Scotch-Irish to Southwestern North Carolina*.¹ The experiences of settlers east of the Appalachian Mountains coupled with their social aspirations in the young state of Tennessee generated a dynamic world.

In the decades after the Revolution, migration to the Nolichucky River Valley increased. Euro-Americans moved in search of economic security and forcibly brought enslaved African Americans. These diverse migrants arrived in Tennessee via the lower branch of the Great Wagon Road from Pennsylvania and Maryland or via other overland routes from the Carolinas. Artisans and consumers brought cultural traditions to the backcountry that formed, what

¹ Tyler Blethen and Curtis Wood, *Ulster and North America Transatlantic Perspectives on the Scotch-Irish* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1997), 54.

decorative arts scholar Betsy White termed, “Great Road Style.”² This created “a blend of fashion, tradition, technique, and preferred forms and goods that became the signature of local decorative arts.”³ The producers of the rope and tassel furniture group, their competitors, regional arts, and eastern design works help us understand the people of the Nolichucky River Valley.

Social connections and material ambition of immigrants to the backcountry influenced regional aesthetics and physical expressions of culture. Chapter One introduced the Nolichucky River Valley and a series of struggles to establish the republic white settlers envisioned west of the Appalachian Mountains. This chapter focuses on the people who migrated to the Nolichucky River Valley in the 1790s and the first decade of the nineteenth century. Then it goes on to investigate the economy and material culture of the Valley, before outlining the rope and tassel group attribution process.

The largest pre-statehood influx of homesteaders occurred in the 1780s when, in return for their service, the State of North Carolina granted veterans of the Revolutionary War parcels of land in the western territories. The earliest land formally granted in the Nolichucky River Valley occurred between 1782 and 1784. For instance, veterans James Stuart, David Stuart, Robert Allison, and

² Betsy K. White, *Great Road Style: The Decorative Arts Legacy of Southwest Virginia and Northeast Tennessee* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006), 7.

³ *Ibid.*

James Allison received land along Big Limestone Creek.⁴ Additionally, veterans Samuel Fain and Nicholas Fain accepted tracts along Little Limestone Creek.⁵ These same families later neighbored and conducted business with the McAdams.

Part of Brown's Purchase, the small community along both Big and Little Limestone Creeks generally known as "Limestone," was first deemed "Freedom."⁶ Proud of their contributions to the Patriot cause during the Revolution, veterans like the Stuart, Allison, and the Fain brothers celebrated their accomplishments by naming their small town in honor of their most cherished principle, liberty. Those who received allotments left behind other states like Maryland, Virginia, Pennsylvania, and the Carolinas where land was increasingly scarce.

The detailed inventory of William Fain, who arrived in the Nolichucky River Valley in the 1780s, illustrates his success as a planter.⁷ At the time of his death, Fain owned 700 total acres planted with corn, rye, oats, hay, and wheat. Fain's material wealth is evident in his personal belongings "a stile desk & book case," "1 cupboard & furniture," "1 looking glass," and "6 featherbeds & bedding."⁸ The

⁴ Revolutionary Veteran Land Grant, in the North Carolina Land Grants and Deeds, #99, #49, #171, #150, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. (Respectively)

⁵ Ibid., #728, #82, #104. (Respectively)

⁶ "History - Town of Limestone," Vertical File, Washington County, Tennessee Library, 3.

⁷ Washington County, TN. "William Fain, April 1816," *Inventories of Estates February: Volume 00, 1779-1821*, April 1816, 335.

⁸ Ibid.

presence of a “war saddle” reflects his veteran status earlier referenced regarding his North Carolina land grant. Two further assets set Fain’s inventory apart from other veterans, he left an undisclosed amount of “cash.” Nolichucky inventories rarely list coinage. Secondly, Fain owned six slaves, Daniel, Violet, Jewly, Charlot, Milley, and Fanney. Six slaves was a significant number compared with the regional average of zero to three per household.⁹

Fain’s estate intimates the work responsibilities of enslaved people, although they were not directly recorded. Granting that Fain’s estate included carpentry tools, it did not list any plank, hewn timber used for a range of carpentry work. The absence of quantities of plank, in such a detailed account, suggests the enslaved people used the carpentry tools for work on site more so than for extensive furniture production.¹⁰ A similar inference can be made about Fain’s blacksmithing tools, probably used for repairs on such an extensive plantation.

At this time, East Tennessee had the lowest concentration of slaves.¹¹ Extensive flat lands for grazing livestock and cash crops characterized plantations in Middle Tennessee; whereas the hilly and rocky eastern portion of the state had smaller farms that produced grains. Like Fain, some immigrant slave owning families were in the Nolichucky River Valley were prosperous. An

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Anita Goodstein, “Slavery,” *The Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*. C. Van West ed., <http://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entry.php?rec=1211> (accessed March 5, 2015).

integral part of early society in East Tennessee was what archeologist Sara Mascia termed the “agricultural ladder,” which offered settlers in backcountry communities of this period opportunities for social mobility.¹²

In addition to veterans, many immigrants pushed west because they were frustrated with “speculator deserts,” areas along the eastern coast where conflicting land claims prevented farmers from gaining clear title.¹³ It is no surprise then that those immigrants, after speculators like Sevier and Brown (discussed in the previous chapter) who struggled for legitimation of claims, demanded professional surveys to legitimize their holdings. Land speculation and surveying provided both a public service, and, in some cases, the means to significant wealth. Thomas Brabson, who plays a prominent role in later discussions of rope and tassel furniture in chapter four, was a prime example of a surveyor and speculator who made his fortune in property sales.

Corruption, however, was rampant in this field as ambitious men sought social visibility and wealth. By way of an example, one of the two surveyors charged with determining county boundaries, Nathaniel Taylor of Carter’s Valley, came under scrutiny for wrongful surveying. He eventually owned 1,500 acres in

¹² Sara Mascia, “The Archaeology of Agricultural Life,” in Lu Ann De Cunzo ed., *Unlocking the Past: Celebrating Historical Archaeology in North America* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005), 121.

¹³ See Alan Taylor, *Liberty Men and Great Proprietors: The Revolutionary Settlement on the Maine Frontier, 1760-1820* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990).

Carter County.¹⁴ Taylor, like so many others in the region, employed mixed agricultural pursuits to maximize returns on such extensive holdings.

Other settlers viewed East Tennessee as a blank canvas wherein young planters could transplant their wealth and social structures from the east. Backcountry communities offered such wealthy plantation owners a place to preserve both their economic viability and social life.¹⁵ With seemingly little consultation with their wives, young patriarchs uprooted their families from the east with economic interests at the forefront of their minds. Women, on the other hand, relied upon the familial connections their husbands scorned.¹⁶ Historian Joan Cashin in *A Family Venture: Men and Women on the Southern Frontier* examines the gendered dimension of migration to backcountry communities, based on personal correspondence, and reveals how women dealt with the loss of their social arteries.¹⁷ Such often-conflicting experiences of migration probably also characterized immigration for families of other classes as well.

Here, in microcosm, we can see how backcountry commercial and family networks tethered men and women to one another. As Historian Lorri Glover argues in *"All Our Relations": Blood Ties and Emotional Bonds in the Early South Carolina Gentry*, kin formed a nexus of the social world in early America. Glover's

¹⁴ Amber Clawson, Spurgeon King, Middle Tennessee State University Center for Historic Preservation, and Jessica White, "Sabine Hill Historic Structure Report," (Nashville, TN: Tennessee Historical Commission, 2012).

¹⁵ James David Miller, *South by Southwest: Planter Emigration and Identity in the Slave South* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002), 7.

¹⁶ Joan E. Cashin, *A Family Venture: Men and Women on the Southern Frontier* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 82.

¹⁷ Ibid.

primary contribution is her thesis that “sibship,” sibling relationships, defined community interdependence.¹⁸ In early America, high mortality rates forced surviving adults (siblings in particular) to rely on one another when previous generations passed. While Glover utilizes personal correspondence of Charleston gentry in South Carolina, sibship also defines many of the community building blocks and business relationships in the Nolichucky River Valley. For instance, middle-aged fathers recognized the benefits of migrating with grown sons strong enough to clear land.¹⁹ Ultimately, families hoped this younger generation of siblings (be they men or women) would start their own families and eventually inherit land, a shrinking prospect in the east.

The mountainous environments of Chuckey, Limestone, and Jonesborough prevented a large-scale plantation economy. Nolichucky “plantations” primarily produced grain crops that required less labor and, consequently, less investment in large enslaved populations. They differed in both output and size from the plantations that developed farther west and south that produced cash crops, harvests grown primarily for profit in wider markets. The open geography of western Tennessee allowed for extensive rotation of cash crops; whereas, the agriculture of the Nolichucky River Valley was

¹⁸ Jen Stoecker, C. Van West, and Middle Tennessee State University Center for Historic Preservation, “The Transformation of the Nolichucky River Valley, 1776-1960,” National Register of Historic Places (March 1992), Section E Page 15.

¹⁹ John R. Finger, *Tennessee Frontiers: Three Regions in Transition* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2001), 179.

hemmed-in by topography. Limited tillable acreage necessitated diverse crops and consistent rotation to protect the soil for future cultivation.

Traditional economic historiography of the South focused on the staples-theory, plantation dependence on exported exclusive crops. The staples-theory overestimates the simplicity of a plantation society and overlooks the diversified agriculture of mountainous regions altogether. Yet, the mobility of the diverse population in the backcountry coupled with environmental imperatives proves a more intricate model put forth by economic historians John McCusker and Russell Menard in *The Economy of British America, 1607-1789*.²⁰ McCusker and Menard jointly argue that early America's economic system better resembled a *blend* of the staples-theory and the frontier theory, an import-driven economy shaped by changing population demographics.

By 1798 in East Tennessee, the survival of crops was so important that the state government accepted as partial taxation payment up to 25 "scalps" of squirrels, crows, and, later, wolves. These animals proved such a nuisance to agricultural efforts that men like Joseph Hale and Nathan Shipley submitted 25 scalps each in 1798 in exchange for reduced taxes.²¹ Both the Hale and Shipley families enjoyed commercial and familial ties to the McAdams (discussed in chapter three). Archaeological tests demonstrate the region's centuries-long tradition of agriculture. An archaeological study conducted in 1980 by State

²⁰ See John J. McCusker, and Russell R. Menard, *The Economy of British America, 1607-1789* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985).

²¹ Tennessee State Government, "Washington County List of Taxables 1798," Captain Shipley's Company.

Archaeologist Sam Smith investigated the Davy Crockett Birthplace State Historic Park in Limestone, Tennessee (previously discussed in chapter one). Ultimately, results of preliminary tests were inconclusive; different levels of sediment, that archaeologists require to study different periods of history, were not identified due to the area's extensive history of tilling.²²

Diversified agriculture decreased the region's dependence on slave labor; however, enslaved people played a pivotal role in the region's economic and cultural history. Just as veteran migrants and their families were influenced by their eastern origins, so too were enslaved people who arrived in East Tennessee, most of whom were born in America.²³ Slave-owning families, be they white or Cherokee, in this region owned between one and three slaves. Based on extensive primary source research, historian Lester Lamon argued in *Blacks in Tennessee, 1791-1970* that the frontier nature of diversified agriculture in the mountains often translated into shared experiences between master and slave in terms of toil in the field.²⁴ The primary difference, however, rarely changed: the master benefited monetarily from such agricultural pursuits while the enslaved people remained bound by their legal status as "property."

The relationship between slave owners and the "peculiar institution" was a complicated one; tensions between slave owners and their belief in freedom

²² Sam Smith Tennessee State Archaeologist, "Historical Background and Archeological Testing of the Davy Crockett Birthplace, State Historic Area" (Nashville: Tennessee State Historical Commission, 1980), 51.

²³ Lester C. Lamon, *Blacks in Tennessee, 1791-1970* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1981), 6.

²⁴ Ibid.

were prevalent throughout the nation. In Jonesborough, the nearest town, Quaker brothers, Elihu and Elijah Embree, who migrated from South Carolina, published the first newspaper in the United States fully devoted to abolition, *The Emancipator*.²⁵ Slave-owners themselves, the Embrees represent the perplexing relationship southern mountaineers in Tennessee had with slavery; they were one of many slave-owning families in this community opposed to the “peculiar institution.” In fact, Joseph Duncan, James Duncan, Andrew Duncan, and Jacob Ellis, (discussed in chapter three for their familial and business connections to the McAdams) signed a petition (circa 1800) to abolish slavery.²⁶

The agricultural community in the Nolichucky River Valley – slave owning or not – depended on transportation routes to get their crops to wider markets. Until concerted government efforts to improve the road system, river transportation was not always easy or cost-effective.²⁷ Long-accustomed to the difficulties and limitations of river travel, better roads offered East Tennessee a way to bridge the settlement gap to Middle Tennessee and to establish a more reliable channel to strengthen their markets. After statehood, Washington County’s earliest bureaucratic efforts brought new emphasis on roadways. Men, like Alex Stuart, contributed directly to the development of the community’s infrastructure in Greene and Washington Counties. The courts appointed Stuart

²⁵ Tara Mitchel Mielnik, “The Emancipator,” *The Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*, C. Van West ed., <http://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entry.php?rec=432> (accessed June 1, 2014).

²⁶ “Petition to Abolish Slavery,” Special Collections Library University of Tennessee (Knoxville: University of Tennessee, post-1800).

²⁷ Stoecker and West, Section E Page 7.

to multiple juries and to mark off a road, which was an important task economically and socially due to the region's dependence on transportation.²⁸

Waterways were far from forgotten, however, even with renewed emphasis on roadways. The Tennessee General Assembly in 1801 chartered the Nolichucky River Company.²⁹ While little other documentary evidence of the Company exists today, the state planned to capitalize on river transportation by establishing tolls along the Nolichucky River. The network of rivers played an important role in the burgeoning markets of East Tennessee's diversified agriculture that historic preservationist Jennifer Stoecker termed "mixed farming" and "pioneer capitalism."³⁰ Pioneer capitalism, or backcountry entrepreneurship, profited from growing agricultural markets. The example of the 1797 Broylesville Inn, situated along Little Limestone Creek, represented a pivotal transition in the region as business and travel increased steadily after statehood. An early Federal style structure, the five-bay two-story vernacular Broylesville Inn, bore

²⁸ Goldene Fillers Burgner, "Report on road to be laid off from Greeneville to Purcheon Camp, 1796" *Greene County, Tennessee Minutes of the Court of Common Pleas, 1783-1795* (Easley, SC: Southern Historical Press, 1982), 456.; Goldene Fillers Burgner, "Grand Jury, 1792" *Greene County, Tennessee Minutes of the Court of Common Pleas, 1783-1795* (Easley, SC: Southern Historical Press, 1982), 243 & 301.

²⁹ US Congress, House, 75th Congress, First Session, "A History of Navigation on the Tennessee River System" (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1937), 119.

³⁰ Jennifer P. Stoecker, "Agriculture in the Nolichucky River Valley from 1774-1956: The Earnest Farms Historic District in Green County, Tennessee" (MA thesis, Middle Tennessee State University, 2001), 10.

witness to transportation's impact on the economy when it housed traveling men of commerce and families journeying farther west.³¹

Some planters also invested in nonagricultural products by mining natural resources such as lead and iron. Red ores in East Tennessee generated pig iron that, once exported for future refinement, was formed into nails, kitchenware, munitions, etc.³² Nathaniel Taylor purchased the first iron forge west of the Appalachian Mountains in 1803 from Godfrey Carriger, Jr.³³ Taylor's biggest competitor was William Chester, who built a forge in 1812.³⁴ Subsequently, Elijah Embree purchased Chester's forge in 1815 and produced iron from smelted ore along the Nolichucky River.³⁵

Enslaved men were the primary work force in mountain mines and a select few were specifically trained in forge work. The rest of the mining labor force was made up of rural slaves leased or "hired out" by contract. Planters sought additional profit from their enslaved "property" when their fields were fallow. Historians Susanne Simmons and Nancy Sorrels challenge the

³¹ Stoecker and West, Section E Page 3. Burned 2004, no longer extant.

³² Middle Tennessee State University Center for Historic Preservation, "The Historic Iron Industry of Middle Tennessee: An Introduction," *Tennessee Iron Furnace Trail*, <http://www.tnironfurnacetrail.org/Introduction.html> (accessed January, 2015).

³³ Robert Tipton Nave, "A History of the Iron Industry in Carter County to 1860" (master's thesis, East Tennessee State University, 1953), 3.

³⁴ Patricia Bernard Ezzell, "Washington Manufacturing Company," *The Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*, C. Van West ed., <https://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entry.php?rec=1474> (accessed June 1, 2014).

³⁵ Thomas Wyman, "Embreeville Mines," *The Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*, C. Van West ed., <http://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entry.php?rec=434> (accessed June 1, 2014).

historiographical assumption that enslaved populations of less than 20% of the whole population meant little involvement in slavery.³⁶ On the contrary, slave leasing involved a wider portion of the white population because even non-slaveholders leased slaves from neighbors.

Historiography suggests that “leasing” enslaved workers was an urban phenomenon. For instance, through the example of early Memphis, social historian Marcus Carriere explores the anxieties white southern elites experienced regarding urban slavery when they passed laws to prevent “hiring-out” practices with little effect.³⁷ Documentary evidence indicates that rural leasing of enslaved labor was a frequent phenomenon in East Tennessee. In this region, slave leasing was often an informal affair. Contracts were oral or recorded on scraps of paper that do not survive to today. As a result, statistics for rates of slave leasing in Appalachia are difficult if not impossible to determine. Some of the more formal contracts, however, do survive, like those recorded in the Washington County court records by Justice of the Peace, Samuel Conley, who recorded numerous incidents as “use of [name of enslaved] person.”³⁸

³⁶ Susanne Simmons and Nancy T. Sorrels, “Slave Hire and the Development of Slavery in Augusta County, VA,” in Kenneth E. Koons and Warren Hofstra ed.s, *After the Backcountry: Rural Life in the Great Valley of Virginia, 1800-1900* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2000), 169.

³⁷ Marcus Carriere, “Blacks in Pre-Civil War Memphis in *Trial and Triumph: Essays in Tennessee’s African American History*, C. Van West ed. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2002), 23.

³⁸ “Sub-Group 7: Miscellaneous Judicial Documents, 1777-1928” in Washington County Court Records (Johnson City: East Tennessee State University Archives of Appalachia), ACC-402.

While the Nolichucky River Valley was not a primary auction site, some traders purchased slaves in Tennessee and Kentucky as they traveled to larger markets in the Deep South. Slave trading produced impressive amounts of wealth in other regions that, in turn, placed traders on similar economic standing as their slave-owning counterparts. The reputation of slave traders was low in a society torn between status and egalitarianism. Historian Robert Gudmestad in *A Troublesome Commerce: The Transformation of the Interstate Slave Trade* investigates this dichotomy and the changing reputations of slave traders in the early South.³⁹ Documentary evidence indicates that the traders themselves, and later their social counterparts, focused their professional descriptions on general import/export and not the business of buying people.

The economy of the Nolichucky River Valley, in addition to agriculture and mining, depended on day-to-day commerce. Descendants of the builder of the Mauris Earnst Fort House, Henry and Peter Earnst, successfully established a number of commercial interests in Greeneville. Goodspeed's Tennessee history describes such Greeneville merchants as "quite prosperous and many acquired a large amount of wealth, hence a sort of aristocracy sprang up."⁴⁰ After the success of their inn, the Broyles family established a mercantile store that grew

³⁹ Robert H. Gudmestad, *A Troublesome Commerce: The Transformation of the Interstate Slave Trade* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003), 24.

⁴⁰ Goodspeed, "Goodspeed's History of Washington County Part One," <http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~tncjones/goodspeed1.htm> (accessed June, 2012).

to include a tan yard, sawmill, shoemaker's shop, and tin factory in Broylesville.⁴¹ Merchants, like the Earnsts and Broyles, sold material goods that reflected the socio-economic status of their customers.

Martin argues that purchase power enabled backcountry citizens to validate a set of ideas about "taste, fashion, and appropriate lifestyle."⁴² It follows then that merchants, like Virginia's John Hook and Tennessee's Earnsts, served as cultural intermediaries. Decorative Arts Scholar David Barquist investigates eighteenth-century understandings of "taste" in England and America. According to Barquist, "taste" functioned simultaneously as an "agent of exclusion" and a "normative system of mutual recognition."⁴³ Ultimately, class distinctions separated these interpretations as the young Republic struggled to balance its aristocratic inheritances with its commitment to democracy. Commerce men, then, acted as mediators of gentrification by supplying "tasteful" items to residents of the Nolichucky River Valley.

Artisans recognized the emerging class demands in the Nolichucky River Valley and took to the Great Wagon Road in pursuit of market opportunities. The ideas, imagery, and belongings the cabinetmakers encountered as they traversed major transportation arteries influenced their imaginations. The same is true for other artisans who worked with metals, textiles, and ceramics, but this

⁴¹ Stoecker and West, Section E Page 8.

⁴² Anne Smart Martin, *Buying into the World of Goods: Early Consumers in Backcountry Virginia* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 1.

⁴³ David Barquist, "The Meaning of Taste for Wealthy Philadelphians, 1750-1800" (masters thesis, University of Delaware, 1981), 14 & 15.

narrative is particularly concerned with cabinetmakers. Until 1800, household furniture in Washington County typically consisted of a minimum of furniture – tables, chairs, and bedsteads.⁴⁴ Only seven “dressers,” “a type of kitchen sideboard topped with rows of shelves on which possessions such as plates and dishes were arranged,” appear in inventories between 1783 and 1796.⁴⁵ Still less, the inventories only list two “cupboards” and “a cabinet with shelves to store tableware and foodstuffs.” Interestingly, cupboards and dressers are not repeated within the same inventory, suggesting limited accouterments that required storage in the dining space.

Inventory research indicates a dramatic shift in household furnishings around 1796 in Washington County that reflects increased domestic consumption and disposable income.⁴⁶ Cabinetmakers produced increasing numbers of furniture with specific functions such as corner cupboards, sideboards, sugar chests, and spice chests.⁴⁷ Corner cupboards were particularly popular in East Tennessee in the first decade of the nineteenth century. Due to their size and fixed nature in space, corner cupboards represent an efficient use of available surface area and contribute an added dimension to room architecture. The functionality of these sturdy display pieces appealed to multiple generations.

Most backcountry elites commissioned case furniture and specialized forms locally since transportation, via water and road, was expensive and not

⁴⁴ Gump, 65.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 200.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ John C. Burgner, *Waste Book 1820-1825*. MESDA Craftsmen Archive.

always reliable. Such local furniture commissions, used and displayed in backcountry homes, embodied the transition to a more permanent landscape. Architecture and interior décor expressed identity and communicated “civic and national” pride in the new Republic.⁴⁸ By the first two decades of the nineteenth century, Federal architecture dominated the American landscape and East Tennessee was no exception.⁴⁹ Built between 1800 and 1825, extant houses in Jonesborough typically have two stories with side gable roofs, sidelights surround a central door, symmetrical double-hung windows, and two chimneys. Later additions, such as Queen Anne style porches, are also prominent.

Cabinetmakers met the demand of entrepreneurs who erected inns that required furniture with which their urban guests felt comfortable. The impressive vernacular nature of the inns generated a more permanent landscape to serve (ironically) a transitory population. For instance, examples of Federal inns survive today in the Nolichucky River Valley, like the Snap Inn (circa. 1815-1820) that had an I-House floor plan (figure 11) and the Glaze House (circa. 1810-1820).⁵⁰ Both examples were made of brick, highlighting the growing wealth in the region as well as the landscape’s shift to a more “permanent appearance by the 1820s.”⁵¹

⁴⁸ David P. Handlin, *American Architecture* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1985), 39.

⁴⁹ Virginia McAlester and A. Lee McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses* (New York: Knopf, 1984) 156.

⁵⁰ Stoecker West, “The Transformation of the Nolichucky River Valley, 1776-1960,” Section E pg 18.

⁵¹ Ibid.

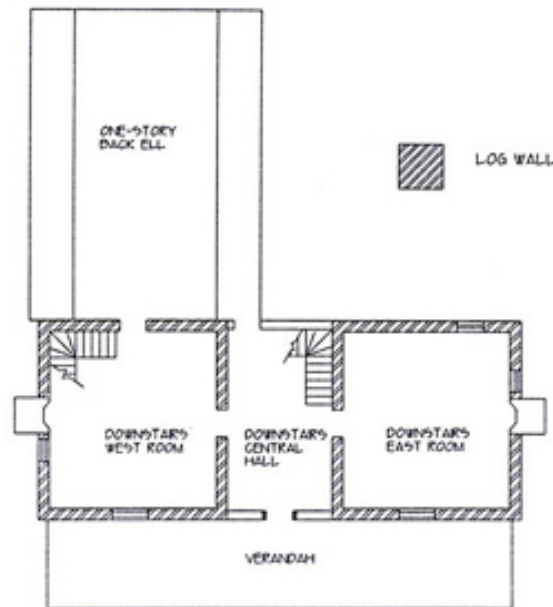


Figure 11: I-House Floor plan, Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture

The rural community closest to the McAdams' operation was Leesburg, named in honor of the carver of the State Seal of Tennessee, Leroy Taylor. Formally established in 1799, Leesburg was situated five miles west of Jonesborough and offered travelers a stop along the Great Wagon Road.⁵² The village's prominent landmark was the DeVault Home, which became much better known in the twentieth century as the DeVault Tavern (figure 12). The structure served as a private home, inn, and tavern in the nineteenth century.

⁵² Joseph Herndon and Susan McCown, "DeVault Tavern in Leesburg Washington County, Tennessee," *Historic American Building Survey* (1986), No TN-217.



Figure 12: DeVault Tavern, 2012

Built after 1819, when they first acquired the land, Valentine and Frederick DeVault situated the DeVault Tavern on the road between Jonesborough and western Tennessee.⁵³ The road was commissioned under the leadership of William Crouch in the closing session of the Tennessee Court of 1816.⁵⁴ Poised for profit, the DeVaults capitalized on stagecoach routes. By 1826, a stagecoach trip from Knoxville to Winston-Salem via Jonesborough took one week with many stops along the way.⁵⁵ The original wood screen bar is intact today where inn patrons and locals alike could enjoy beverages and camaraderie.

The L-shaped brick structure has a two-story Federal front porch with front Flemish bond and common bond side elevations. In 1827 Frederick DeVault

⁵³ Paul Kennedy, *The DeVault Tavern* (Johnson City: East Tennessee State University Center for Appalachian Studies and Services, 2014), 19.

⁵⁴ Washington County, Tennessee, "Final Session 1816," *Washington County, Tennessee Court of Pleas and Quarter, 1809-1817*, 359.

⁵⁵ *Knox Register*, January 25, 1826.

added a sloping two-story addition on the southeastern corner with a brick foundation. Four separate stairwells led to separate second-story rooms and a fifth room in the attic.⁵⁶ Partitioned stairwells rendered a greater degree of privacy that was not typical of contemporary inns. The DeVaults shared the space with their guests and this may provide another explanation for the winding interior floor plan to divide family and public sleeping areas.⁵⁷ Both brothers lived in the Tavern with their families, Frederick and “Peggy” Range DeVault and Valentine and Susan Range DeVault.⁵⁸ The family owned the original slave cabins that stood onsite until the 1970s.⁵⁹

The design choices of Frederick DeVault highlight his awareness of the popular urban vogue for “Fancy painting,” a playful style meant to mimic expensive materials such as marble and fine-grained woods.⁶⁰ Interior painting added warmth, color, and dimension to doors and mantels. Extant wainscoting, mantels (figure 13), and doors in the Tavern on the first floor still boast original graining, which makes the local poplar wood appear to have the luster of rich mahogany. Ocher graining on the Tavern’s second-floor wainscoting and doors

⁵⁶ Kennedy, 21.

⁵⁷ Herndon and McCown, “DeVault Tavern in Leesburg Washington County, Tennessee,” *Historic American Building Survey* (1986), No TN-217.

⁵⁸ Kennedy, 17. Note: DeVault brothers married the Range sisters.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁶⁰ Sumpter T. Priddy, *American Fancy: Exuberance in the Arts, 1790-1840* (Milwaukee: Chipstone Foundation, 2004), xxiii.

evokes the wavy grain of flame birch, another rare type of wood.⁶¹ Faux-graining and fancy interiors were demonstrative of economic prosperity.



Figure 13: DeVault Tavern Mantle, 2012

In addition to painted interiors, painted furniture experienced a revival in the early nineteenth century, particularly on the flat surfaces preferred for the Federal style.⁶² The relatively smooth expanses of Federal furniture (like chair top rails) and architectural details diverged from the preceding Georgian style in America characterized by carved embellishments like pilasters and lamb's

⁶¹ Amber Clawson, "Furniture and Identity at the DeVault Tavern," in Paul Kennedy ed., *The DeVault Tavern* (Johnson City: East Tennessee State University Center for Appalachian Studies and Services, 2014), 29.

⁶² Rosemary Troy Krill and Pauline K. Eversmann, *Early American Decorative Arts, 1620-1860: A Handbook for Interpreters* (Lanham, MD: Alta Mira Press, 2001), 81.

tongue stops.⁶³ Chairs from the Tavern and DeVault family still have trace remnants of blue and yellow (figure 14). Local Fancy Painter John A. Dewoody may have painted this set of chairs.⁶⁴ Travelers and backcountry settlers alike experienced quality interior furnishings.



Figure 14: Mary Jo Case Private Collection, DeVault blue chair

During the same era, when colorful decor and painted furniture characterized Nolichucky River Valley interiors, the rope and tassel (inspired by luxurious textiles) appeared in diverse mediums like fine arts and furniture. Then, as now, tassels existed for two primary functions – for adornment and to impart

⁶³ Daniel K. Ackerman, “American Georgian Interiors,” *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/geor/hd_geor.htm (accessed January, 2015).

⁶⁴ Amber Clawson, “Furniture and Identity at the DeVault Tavern,” 29.; Dewoody first appears in decorative arts literature in the craftsman catalogue of *Art & Mystery*, page 282.

power.⁶⁵ Prior to cabinetmaker Thomas Chippendale's *The Cabinet Dictionary Containing an Explanation of All the Terms Used in the Cabinet, Chair & Upholstery Branches*, design works were the arena of architects and builders. Chippendale is recognized today as the first cabinetmaker to publish a book of designs.⁶⁶ Chippendale illustrates tassels on bed hangings and window treatments.⁶⁷ The plate depicted below (figure 15), from Chippendale, clearly correlated tassels and luxury in a gothic bed canopy. Subsequent design works like that of Thomas Sheraton, *The Cabinet Dictionary Containing an Explanation of All the Terms Used in the Cabinet, Chair & Upholstery Branches*, exhibits tassels on bed hangings and dressing tables in the appendix (figure 16).⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Nancy Welch, *Tassels: The Fanciful Embellishment* (Asheville, NC: Lark Books, 1992), 25.

⁶⁶ R.W. Symonds, *Ornamental Designs of Chippendale* (London: Alec Tiranti, 1948), 1.

⁶⁷ See Thomas Chippendale, *The Gentleman & Cabinetmaker's Director: Being a Large Collection of the Most Elegant and Useful Designs of Household Furniture in the Most Fashionable Taste* (London: T. Becket and P.A. De Hondt, 1762).

⁶⁸ Thomas Sheraton, "Of the Drapery: Plate LI.," *The Cabinet Dictionary Containing an Explanation of All the Terms Used in the Cabinet, Chair & Upholstery Branches, with Directions for Varnish-Making, Polishing, and Gilding : to Which Is Added a Supplementary Treatise on Geometrical Lines, Perspective and Painting in General* (London: Printed by W. Smith and sold by W. Row, 1803), 408.

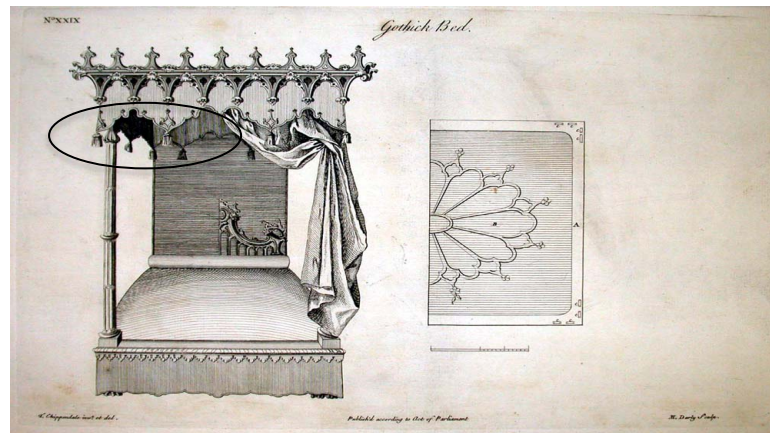


Figure 15: University of Glasgow Special Coll. S.M. 2008, Chippendale Plate 29

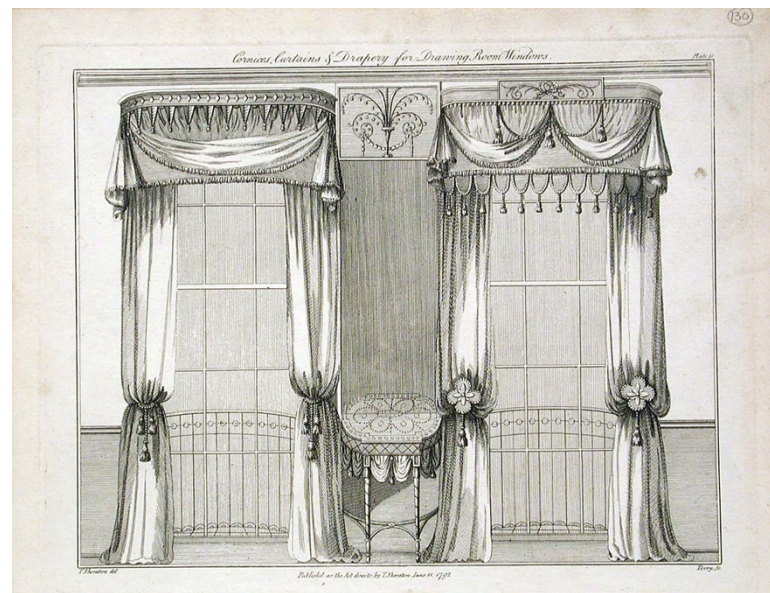


Figure 16: Sheraton Plate LI, Courtesy Winterthur Research Library

In backcountry America, artists painted tassels in portraits to highlight the sitter's wealth. Itinerant artist Charles Peale Polk, for instance, used a tassel to

frame the sitter in his oil on canvas portrait of Peter Lauck in 1799 (figure 17).⁶⁹

Born in Pennsylvania, Lauck lived in Winchester, Virginia for most of his adult life.⁷⁰ The draped cord and tassel also served as a mechanism to frame the

background view of Lauck's landholdings. Additionally, artist John Drinker painted Mrs. John Briscoe's oil on canvas portrait around 1800 (figure 18).

Before her marriage, Mrs. John Briscoe was Eleanor Magruder from Maryland.⁷¹

The tassel in Drinker's portrait frames Mrs. Briscoe's accessories and is offset by the torus base of a column obscured in the upper right hand corner by the drapery. Mrs. Briscoe's cap, like her neckerchief, appears to be made of fine bleached linen while the only jewelry is the dark choker. The tassel is a visual cue that intimates wealth through textile trimmings.

⁶⁹ Lauck Portrait, MESDA Object File S_5460, Applied Rope and Tassel Corner Cupboard," prepared by Carolyn Weekley, 1/26/76, GRC MESDA.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ MESDA Acc. 973.2, "Mrs. John Briscoe," Catalogue Entry.



Figure 17: MESDA Object Database S_5460, Portrait of Peter Lauck by Charles Peale Polk



Figure 18: MESDA Acc. 973.2, Portrait Mrs. John Briscoe by John Drinker

McAdams popularized the inlaid rope and tassel in East Tennessee, but he was not the first to decorate furniture with them. Other inspirations for the rope and tassel inlay may be traced to Baltimore, a city renowned for its inlaid furniture. A series of card tables, probably by the same urban cabinetmaking warehouse between 1775 and 1799, form a prominent group of Baltimore Federal furniture. Recognized today as representative of Baltimore inlay, each leg has three clustered tassels suspended from barber pole cords.⁷² The motif is often repeated on multiple sides of respective legs.⁷³ Veneered insets, lunette corners, four tapered square legs, and a geometric rope and tassel characterize the Baltimore “tassel” group of card tables (figure 19). The inlay patterns that characterize this group are geometric with chevron tassel heads and full tassel skirts. Within the group there are variances between how the tassels are “suspended.” As with this example (figure 20) tassels are suspended from corner stringing, but other examples “drape” the rope and tassel from inlaid “pins.”

⁷² Gregory R. Weidman, *Furniture in Maryland, 1740-1940: The Collection of the Maryland Historical Society* (Baltimore: Maryland Historical Society, 1984), 79.

⁷³ “Inlaid Rope and Tassel Baltimore Card Table,” Object File S_10050., prepared by Bradford L. Rauschenberg, Frank L. Horton, and Jane Webb Smith, c. 1980, GRC MESDA.



Figure 19: MESDA Object Database S_10050, Baltimore Tassel Card Table



Figure 20: MESDA Object Database S_10050, Tassel Close Up

Moving farther south, rope and tassel motifs also appear in Virginia furniture. During fieldwork in 1977, at the height of MESDA's regional

investigations of southern material culture, decorative arts scholar Luke Beckerdite recorded an 1810 corner cupboard (figure 21).⁷⁴ The lower recessed paneled doors of the corner cupboard feature lightwood tassel inlay suspended from astragal stringing with fleur delis corners (figure 22). Another form from Virginia, a chest of drawers, illustrates a more restrained tassel on either stile suspended from a ball (figure 23).⁷⁵ Based on provenance and shared motifs, Beckerdite labeled this group the “Rockbridge County Tassel” Group.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ “Rockbridge Tassel Corner Cupboard,” Object File S-7498, prepared by Brad L. Rauschenberg, Frank L. Horton, and Edith Culpepper Potter, c. 1977, GRC MESDA.

⁷⁵ “Rockbridge Ball and Tassel Chest of Drawers,” Object File S-9493, prepared by Frank L. Horton, Brad L. Rauschenberg, and Olivia Evans Alison, c. 1979, GRC MESDA.

⁷⁶ Ibid.



Figure 21: MESDA Object Database S_7498, Rockbridge, VA Tassel Corner Cupboard



Figure 22: MESDA Object Database S_7498, Tassel Close up



Figure 23: MESDA Object File S_9493, full front

This corner cupboard (figure 24) with the applied carved rope and tassel may be the earliest version of a cupboard adorned with a variant of the rope and tassel across its cornice (figure 25). Attributed to Greene County, Tennessee, MESDA field researchers estimated it was created between 1790 and 1800. This corner cupboard has a broken scroll pediment with central urn finial, upper arched eight-light doors, fluted quarter columns, waist molding surrounds three central drawers; and while there is no figured skirt, the cupboard rests on ogee bracket feet.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ "Applied Rope and Tassel Corner Cupboard," Object File S-13007X, prepared by Frank L. Horton, Luke Beckerdite, Derita Williams, 9/12/83, GRC MESDA.



Figure 24: MESDA Object Database S_13007X, Corner Cupboard full front



Figure 25: MESDA Object Database S-13007X, rope and tassel close up

This small sampling of how artisans interpreted rope and tassels in early America may represent inspirations for the distinctive East Tennessee group. As discussed in the first chapter, migrants originated in or passed through Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, or North Carolina on the way to the Nolichucky River Valley.

Land speculators cleared the way for farming families, merchants, and craftspeople, many of whom forcibly brought along enslaved people. Together, these men and women generated a spirited economy and a more permanent community in the Nolichucky River Valley after statehood. As early as 1809 Scottish botanist, John Bradbury, traveling through East Tennessee observed,

“In the towns, many of the trades or manufactories are already established, that are calculated to furnish articles of the first degree of necessity; and some of those which produce articles necessary in a more advanced state of refinement.”⁷⁸

Rural homes were not devoid of refinement; rather, people in the backcountry developed their own interpretations of taste through architecture, furniture, and art. Increasing social stability and prosperity influenced how craftspeople expressed regional identity in the decorative arts.

Furniture attribution is typically the purview of decorative arts scholars; however, the attribution of this body of furniture is important because

⁷⁸ John Bradbury and John Bywater, *Travels in the Interior of America, in the Years 1809, 1810, and 1811: Including a Description of Upper Louisiana, Together with the States of Ohio, Kentucky, Indiana, and Tennessee, with the Illinois and Western Territories, and Containing Remarks and Observations Useful to Persons Emigrating to Those Countries* (Liverpool: Printed for the author, by Smith and Galway, and published by Sherwood, Neely, and Jones, London, 1817), 296.

biographical details of the maker's life can contextualize the cultural expressions exemplified in the cabinetry. Chapter three details how Hugh McAdams built a life in the Nolichucky River Valley and describes the family's social connections.

CHAPTER III

“The McAdams Family and Shop”

Today, the documentary evidence of Hugh McAdams’s family exists only as it appears in public record. Social Historian Laurel Thatcher Ulrich’s paradigm-shifting work, *A Midwife’s Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812*, explores the larger social structure of a community through personal writings of the past, specifically a midwife’s diary. Ulrich identifies the importance in the “dense dailiness” of the life of her subject, Martha Ballard.¹ The cultural and social history of Ballard’s story creates a narrative for a class of people overshadowed by men’s political and religious writings of the period. Unlike Ballard’s personal diary, the McAdams only appear in documentary governmental evidence in the form of wills, estate settlements, deeds, and court proceedings.

What can we learn about people in the past who did not personally record their daily work, let alone their private thoughts? Public records highlight the transmission of personal belongings and entwined networks of social relationships. In the case of the McAdams, surviving documents highlight the porous nature of municipal boundaries, familial interdependence, and the

¹ Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812* (New York: Knopf, 1990), 34.

material world of the Nolichucky River Valley in the first decades of the nineteenth century.

The most detailed account of McAdams' life occurred after his death in 1814. Hugh died intestate and his 1815 estate auction illustrates the home he left behind in six ledger-pages with 200 individual entries (Appendix A). The possessions of Hugh and Isabella McAdams composed three principal categories: home goods, farm tools, and cabinetmaking tools. When pieced together, Hugh's estate auction and scattered documents reveal the social and material world of the maker of the rope and tassel furniture group. This chapter investigates the private spaces and public production of cabinetmaker Hugh McAdams.

Historians Tyler Blethen and Curtis Wood describe the economic and social forces that fueled Scotch-Irish migration into Southwest North Carolina, where Hugh likely was born.² It is unclear where Thomas McAdams (1750-1811), Hugh's father, lived and worked prior to 1790, but he first appeared in the 1790 census of Rutherford County, North Carolina.³ At the time of the first federal census in 1790, Rutherford County encompassed the western reaches of, then,

² See Tyler Blethen, and Curtis Wood, *Ulster and North America Transatlantic Perspectives on the Scotch-Irish* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1997).

³ United States Government, "First Federal Census 1790, North Carolina," Records of the Bureau of the Census, Group RG-29 in National Archives, Washington, DC.

North Carolina.⁴ The location of the McAdams in along the Blue Ridge Mountains suggests that the family was already familiar with life in small mountain communities even before relocating to Tennessee. Thomas and his wife, unknown, had three sons before she died: John (dates unknown), Hugh (1772-1814), and Robert (1782-1823). According to the 1790 census, Thomas' eldest son, John, lived nearby with an unnamed wife.⁵ The passing of Thomas' wife may have prompted the family's relocation farther west to the Nolichucky River Valley.

Alternatively, the Washington District and its market opportunities (as discussed in chapters one and two) held promise for healthy young men like the McAdams. Adult sons proved a reliable labor force in the agricultural society. Migration west also improved opportunities for men like Thomas who hoped their sons would inherit large tracts of land, the most valuable resource of the period. The three brothers and their father arrived sometime during the 1790s, when the contest for the State of Franklin was a recent memory and resentments still simmered. Factional disputes, however, were not enough to curtail the movement of people and the opening of markets that doubtless impacted the McAdams' decision to move west.

⁴ The McAdams family in this study should not be confused with the McAdams enclave in eastern North Carolina. Their genealogy and community ties are documented at length. See I. D. Craig, *A Historical Sketch of New Hope Church, in Orange County, N.C.* Reidsville, N.C.: New Hope Church, 1891.

⁵ Ibid.

The migration timeline of the three McAdams men is unclear due to the lost and contested deeds in the region during the last decade of the eighteenth century. Later deeds reference the first (no longer extant) documentary evidence of Thomas McAdams in the Nolichucky River Valley where he purchased land along Big Limestone Creek, the aforementioned tributary of the Nolichucky River.⁶ The tract bordered both Big Limestone and Mill Creeks, which gave the McAdams access for irrigation and travel. Evidence of Thomas McAdams' occupation does not survive. Whether farmer or cabinetmaker (like his sons) waterways, like the Nolichucky tributaries where he settled, benefitted the family economically.

The first reference to Hugh McAdams in Tennessee reflected his independent status as an adult. Hugh is listed in Washington County, Tennessee, "list of taxables" in Captain Joseph Duncan's Company (1797-1798). During his service, Hugh met men like the brothers, Elias and John Bowman, Andrew and Joseph Duncan, and David and Alex Stuart.⁷ A decade later, the men of Captain Duncan's Company shared families and business interests. For instance, the Bowman, Duncan, and McAdams, between them traded the same two enslaved people, discussed later in this chapter.

⁶ Thomas McAdams' deed does not survive but his land along Big Limestone Creek is subsequently referenced posthumously in a Robert McAdams deed. See Washington County, Tennessee, "Deed Samuel Davies to Robert McAdams *Washington County Tennessee Land Records Deeds*, 15-154 (1813).

⁷ Tennessee State Government, "Washington County List of Taxables 1797-1798," Captain Duncan's Company.

The Duncan family represents an example of a family that played an involved role in the lives of the McAdams. Early on, the Duncan brothers, who received North Carolina land grants, owned 228 and 440 acres respectively.⁸ Conversely, Hugh McAdams had no form of property attributed to his name; therefore he probably still lived with his father and older brother's family. The Duncans, having arrived shortly after the Revolution, were already more established than the McAdams.

Hugh McAdams also served alongside Samuel Bryson (?-1816) from Virginia, who played a significant role in Hugh's future family life.⁹ Samuel and his sister, Isabella or "Ibby" (1776-1855) grew up in Virginia and were the children of Judge John Bryson (?-1778) and Margaret Carson (dates unknown). Bryson passed in 1778 shortly after Isabella's birth.¹⁰ John Bryson's widow and his daughter, Isabella, probably depended upon Samuel as the head of household after the Judge's death. Records do not indicate if Isabella relocated to Tennessee with her brother or if, after meeting Hugh possibly in Virginia, she subsequently moved to Tennessee. It is likely that, based on the prominence of her father, Isabella grew up in a slaveholding household. There is no early evidence that the Brysons relocated enslaved people from Virginia. In 1797 Bryson's "taxables" in Duncan's Company were 75 acres of land and no

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Susan Clark, "52 Ancestors in 52 Weeks: Isabella Bryson McAdams Hale (1776-1855)" *Nolichucky Roots Blog* <http://nolichuckyroots.blogspot.com/2014/02/52-ancestors-in-52-weeks-isabella.html> (accessed June, 2012).

dependents or enslaved people.¹¹ It is unlikely then, that other family members or enslaved people initially migrated with Samuel to Tennessee.

In 1800, just two short years after Hugh met Samuel Bryson, McAdams married Isabella Bryson.¹² Although the couple lived in Washington County, the court of Greene County, Tennessee, granted their marriage license, which illustrates the permeable nature of administration in early Tennessee. Hugh and Isabella Bryson McAdams had five children: Mary (or Margaret, 1802-1832), Mary (1804-before 1870), Thomas Cunningham (1806-1881), Samuel Bryson (1809-1894), and Jane (1811-1871).

The children of Hugh and Robert grew up as neighbors to their closest cousins. Hugh and Robert McAdams purchased adjacent tracts of land (100 acres each) in 1803 along Big Limestone Creek in Washington County, Tennessee.¹³ Robert McAdams married Mary Slaughter (1776-1851) in 1799 and the couple had one child, William Slaughter McAdams (1809-1842).¹⁴ With the support of their siblings, Hugh and Isabella built a comfortable material life. According to historian Lorri Glover, “sibship” was not a gendered phenomenon as

¹¹ Tennessee State Government, “Washington County List of Taxables 1797-1798,” Captain Duncan’s Company.

¹² Greene County, Tennessee, “McAdams Marriage License,” *Tennessee State Marriages, 1780-2002* (June 9, 1800), 108.

¹³ Washington County, Tennessee, “Deed of Indenture,” *Washington County Tennessee Deed Book 8* (November 6, 1803), 52-54.

¹⁴ Washington County, Tennessee, “McAdams Marriage License,” *Tennessee State Marriages, 1780-2002* (June 27, 1799).

one might expect in the patriarchal South.¹⁵ In private spheres, brothers and sisters alike enjoyed economic and emotional support, plus shared in the decision-making processes for the family. Without personal documents, it may never be known how or if Isabella turned to her brother for advice after the loss of her husband.

Nonetheless, Isabella's bids at Hugh's auction featured prominently for the amount of household goods she procured. Isabella managed to secure most of the furniture from the family home that included typical forms such as five beds, two tables, 10 chairs, two cupboards, and one bureau.¹⁶ Five beds account for the McAdams and four of their five children. At Hugh's death in 1814, three-year-old Jane probably slept with an older sister. Each table may have served a different purpose, one for entertaining and another for a work surface. Ten chairs, probably a set because of the even number, accommodated the family of seven and additional guests. Cupboards stored cooking, eating, and drinking implements, although no dishware was sold at the auction. Perhaps she kept the dishes for family use?

In contrast to other artisanal households in the region, the McAdams also owned a "clock and case."¹⁷ It is highly probable, given his occupation as

¹⁵ See Lorri Glover, *All Our Relations: Blood Ties and Emotional Bonds Among the Early South Carolina Gentry* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000).

¹⁶ Washington County, Tennessee, "A list of the property of Hugh McAdams, Decd."

¹⁷ Washington County, Tennessee, "A list of the property of Hugh McAdams, Decd."

cabinetmaker that Hugh created the clock casework himself. Generally large casework was commissioned locally instead of traversing the difficult journey over the mountains to be sold in mercantile stores.¹⁸ Three purchases exceeded the \$30.25 cost of the McAdams' clock: a sideboard (\$31), an enslaved man named Moses (\$54), and a wagon (\$110).

The expense of the clock can probably be explained by its duality of utility and décor. Social historian Anne Smart Martin's argument that clocks represented a definite statement of class further contextualizes the McAdams tall clock. Until the end of the eighteenth century, clocks were only found in eastern cities.¹⁹ Decorative arts scholar David Jaffee details changing trends in northeastern shops that produced clocks; as clock making moved toward standardized production, painting and cheaper materials provided unique opportunities for design.²⁰ The mechanical nature of the McAdams' clock certainly increased its value. A trained metalworker probably produced the metalwork of the clock gears or a backcountry merchant imported them from an urban shop. Clockmakers succeeded in keeping their trade knowledge secret well into the nineteenth century.²¹

There was only a 25-cent price difference between the case clock and a \$30 watch that Isabella purchased. This may be explained in one of two ways,

¹⁸ Anne Smart Martin, *Buying into the World of Goods: Early Consumers in Backcountry Virginia* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 49.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 36.

²⁰ David Jaffee, *A New Nation of Goods: The Material Culture of Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 152.

²¹ Jaffee, 63.

first, the case clock may have been significantly older than the watch or, second, due to its small size the metalwork technology required for the watch may have increased its value. By the 1815 auction, watchmaker and silversmith brothers, William and Matthew Atkinson, were well established in Jonesborough having relocated there around 1801.²² MESDA Curator of Silver, Gary Albert, investigates why these craftsmen left Baltimore during a population boom for a more rural market. Utilizing Central Place Theory and Human Geography, Albert theorizes that a lack of competition in the Nolichucky River Valley appealed to the Atkinsons who were the first silversmiths in the community.²³

The watch's expense made it the fifth most expensive item in Hugh McAdams' estate auction. Why, then, did widowed Isabella spend her (presumably) limited resources on a watch? Was Atkinson-produced silverwork in high demand? Did women in the backcountry wear watches? If so, were watches a work tool or jewelry for women? Or both? The auction did not include any other pieces of jewelry, which may suggest that Isabella set aside her most personal items in the year after her husband's death.

Did Isabella purchase the watch to pass it along to one of their sons upon reaching adulthood? If it belonged to Hugh, then Isabella may have prized it as something he wore close to his skin and relied upon to keep furniture commissions timely; did she want to keep it as a personal memento? Or, with few watches in backcountry homes, did the watch represent the level of

²² "Atkinson, Matthew," Craftsman File 61728, GRC MESDA.

²³ Gary Albert, "Silversmiths on the Move," MESDA Silver Seminar 2012.

prosperity the McAdams reached by 1814? Such questions get to the heart of the motivations and private feelings of historical subjects.

The kitchenwares Isabella and bidders purchased provide a glimpse of her day-to-day work in the home and include goods for food preservation, cooking, baking, and beverages. The family likely used their 10 ceramic crocks and four earthen vessels for pickling and storage. The following items were probably used almost daily to keep the family of seven fed: “oven(s) and lid(s),” two pots and their mounts, one rolling pin, one “flesh” fork, one ladle, and one churn. The McAdams enjoyed a range of beverages typical of the era as indicated by the range of beverage accessories. Coffee was a family staple; they owned one coffee mill, one coffee pot, and one strainer. In addition to coffee, objects like two pitchers, one kettle, and a “cyder barrel” indicate the family had a range of drink options: hot, cold, and fermented.²⁴

A knife box, two tablecloths, and a bread tray suggest that the McAdams entertained guests. Each item has a practical use as storage space, to protect surfaces, and serve food (respectively), but they probably also conveyed the social status of the McAdams. Elaborately inlaid knife boxes were popular during the Federal era as interior space for dining became increasingly formalized.²⁵

Isabella invested in livestock that supplied the home economy, transportation and foodstuffs. To maintain her small household, she purchased

²⁴ Washington County, Tennessee, “A list of the property of Hugh McAdams, Decd.”

²⁵ See Metropolitan Museum of Art and the recently installed Kaufman Furniture Gallery at the National Gallery of Art.

one bay mare and one cow.²⁶ Travel via horse in the nineteenth century required accessories like those Isabella purchased from Hugh's estate: one saddle, one sidesaddle, one pair of saddlebags, and "one pair of horse geers (sic)".²⁷ The cow provided fresh dairy to the family. Her combined purchases of nine sheep and textile production tools indicate that she, like many women in the early Republic, created cloth in the home. Her textile items included: "loom and tacklen (sic)," three pairs of shears, three bushels of flax seed, a tallow garter loom, and weavers spools.²⁸ Perhaps she purchased these resources so she could continue home production as well as instruct her young daughters, Mary, Margaret, and Jane, in weaving. Textiles (besides tablecloths) like bed linens, napkins, and clothes, are conspicuously absent from the list of McAdams household goods. The case may be that, as with her (presumed) jewelry, Isabella kept these intimate items from sale on behalf of herself and her family.

Despite her apparent illiteracy, Isabella surprisingly purchased nine books in a box for one dollar.²⁹ In subsequent years, Isabella signed documents with only her mark, "X."³⁰ The estate auction did not list book titles or topics for her bid, but William Guinn purchased "1 book on architecture" for \$4.26 from Hugh's

²⁶ Ibid. In addition to the mare Isabella purchased, George Smith purchased a sorrel mare from Hugh's estate.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Washington County, Tennessee, "A list of the property of Hugh McAdams, Decd." 328.

³⁰ Ibid.

belongings.³¹ Just twenty years prior there were no books of architecture recorded in county estate documents. A detailed statistical analysis of Washington County inventories indicates that prior to statehood, book subjects fell into three categories: religion, education, and agriculture.³² An architectural book suggests two possible aspects of Hugh McAdams' work, that he used architectural inspirations for his cabinetry work, or that he was involved in house carpentry in addition to cabinetmaking. If the latter, McAdams not only shaped moveable property but also helped sculpt the more permanent landscape of the Nolichucky River Valley in moldings, mantles, and house exterior details.

Even without the titles or subjects of the 10 books of the McAdams' household, recent historiography argues that the significance of reading in the early Republic was that literacy offered a previously unavailable venue to knowledge. According to Jaffee, increased access to print crossed geographical and class boundaries resulting in the "erosion of a hierarchical structure of authority."³³ Print materials, imagery, and ideas traversed the arteries of transportation and generated the Village Enlightenment, an intellectual movement in rural America. Self-educated men and women celebrated the

³¹ Ibid., 329.

³² Washington County Courts and Lucy Kennerly Gump. "Lucy Gump Thesis Research Papers, 1773-1796 and 1989," East Tennessee State University Archive of Appalachia Acc. 364, Box 1 Folder 6.

³³ Jaffee, 48.

“democratization of knowledge and the commercialization of the countryside,” and the McAdams were no exception.³⁴

Family and friends divided farm wares. During the 1815 auction, James Duncan purchased: a barrel, a keg, and some minor cabinetmaking tools.³⁵ Farm tools in the sale included: a curry comb, a plow and irons, four axes, two sickles, two shovel plows and irons, one scythe, and one log chain. The combination of so many axes and a log chain suggest the family land was cleared for agriculture. Three sickles, a scythe and wheat cradle, and three plows, indicate that, like many other families in the valley, the McAdams cultivated grain.³⁶

By his death in 1814, Hugh McAdams owned two slaves, Moses and Sarah.³⁷ It is uncertain how Moses and Sarah were related, either as a couple or by blood. At \$54, Moses was sold for three and a half times more than Sarah at \$15. The price disparity may intimate that Sarah was Moses’ mother, as his gender and age probably influenced bid amounts. Records of how the McAdams acquired them do not survive either. Upon Hugh’s death, the family could not afford, or no longer required, enslaved labor. Notwithstanding the fact that Moses and Sarah lived together in a separate cabin, they still played pivotal roles in the day-to-day lives of the McAdams.

³⁴ Ibid., 4

³⁵ Washington County, Tennessee, “A list of the property of Hugh McAdams, Decd,” 331.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Washington County, Tennessee, “A list of the property of Hugh McAdams, Decd,” 330.

Slave trade between residents in the Nolichucky River Valley forced Moses and Sarah to move at least five times during seven years (1809-1815). First from Frank Allison to Joseph Duncan in 1809, two months later in the new year of 1810 to Elias Bowman, and some time prior to 1814 to the McAdams.³⁸ Hugh McAdams served with Duncan and Bowman in the militia during the first years of statehood. The continued contact between the families may indicate ties of friendship, proximity, or business affairs. The Allison family was related by marriage to the Duncans who, in turn, were related by marriage to the McAdams. In 1815, James Nelson purchased Sarah and Moses from Hugh's estate (Appendix C).³⁹

With each turnover in ownership, Moses and Sarah remained together as a family unit, even if the nature of their relationship is lost to history. Historian Deborah White describes roles within a slave marriage as "complementary" because survival within the racialized hierarchy required the sexes to play different roles.⁴⁰ The reproductive abilities of enslaved women in many ways lessened the power ascribed to enslaved males. Both partners, whether self-selected or assigned by a slave owner, had much to lose in an intimate relationship. In some cases commitment to one's partner or other relations

³⁸ Washington County, Tennessee, "Joseph Duncan Bill of Sale, 22 Jan. 1810," *Minutes of the Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions Minute Books* (Nashville, TN: U.S. Works Progress Administration), 90.; "Frank Allison Bill of Sale, 23 Nov. 1809," *Ibid.*, 93.

³⁹ Washington County, Tennessee, "A list of the property of Hugh McAdams, Decd." 329.

⁴⁰ Deborah G. White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: Norton, 1985), 22.

prevented one from running away; while in other instances, sales scattered relatives geographically resulting in heartache.⁴¹ As expressed in chapter two, some enslaved people in the Nolichucky River Valley were sold farther South and probably separated from their loved ones in Tennessee.

What were Sarah's work roles with the McAdams in Limestone?⁴² By 1814, the children of Hugh and Isabella ranged in ages from approximately 3 to 10 years old, so it is highly likely that Sarah was involved in childcare.⁴³ On the other hand, Sarah could just as easily have conducted the domestic responsibilities previously discussed with regards to Isabella like cooking, cleaning, and textile production. For instance, a young family's linens and clothes needed consistent attention and Isabella procured a "kettle, washing machine & tub" and flat iron from the estate sale.⁴⁴ These items were probably also used by Sarah during her enslavement.

Moses' responsibilities too present an ambiguous example based on extant documents. His presence provokes a prominent question: Was he involved in agricultural pursuits or with the cabinetmaking shop? As with Isabella and Sarah, the working relationship between Hugh and Moses is impossible to discern barring further evidence. Moses may have kept the McAdams farm

⁴¹ Ibid., 25.

⁴² The timing of her purchase by the McAdams, between 1810 and 1814, indicates she was not on-site when the children were born but possibly was present at Duncan or Bowman family births.

⁴³ Sally G. McMillen, *Motherhood in the Old South: Pregnancy, Childbirth, and Infant Rearing* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 67.

⁴⁴ Washington County, Tennessee, "A list of the property of Hugh McAdams, Decd." 334.

running while Hugh produced furniture. Alternatively, Moses could have been the early Thomas Day of North Carolina, an enslaved cabinetmaker who signed his work, one of the few African-American artisans in antebellum America to do so.⁴⁵

The people, design influences, and environment of Hugh McAdams' world now established, the following discussion describes the process I followed in attributing the rope and tassel furniture group to Hugh McAdams. At the beginning I identified tools that were needed for inlay creation and application like veneer saws, animal hide glue, clamps, and scribing instruments.

Then, I searched for active artisans in the region and analyzed extant primary source documents relating to their lives and work. As discussed at length in the introduction, artisanal credit for the rope and tassel group until the twenty-first century was tenuously geographical. Yet, the struggle for democracy in the Nolichucky River Valley suggested to me that it made sense to geographically expand the search for the rope and tassel cabinetmaker. Indeed, this opened a host of new possibilities in terms of possible attributions.

In search of regional makers who were working in the early nineteenth century, I turned to one of the best resources for studying these cabinetmakers, the MESDA Craftsman database. The Craftsman database houses decades of research about artisans in southern primary sources. Transcribed documents include deeds, wills, and advertisements. The database is searchable through a number of criteria such as place, time period, and surname(s). The Greene and

⁴⁵ Jonathan Prown, "The Furniture of Thomas Day: A Re-evaluation," *Winterthur Portfolio* Vol. 33, No. 4 (Winter 1998): 215.

Washington County records provided evidence as it pertained to “carpenter,” “cabinetmaker,” and “1800-1850.” In 2012, MESDA archivist Kim May used a complicated coded system to run the report as part of my Summer Institute project. Thanks to the digitization of the craftsman records, repeating the search was simplified by 2014. The results of my 2012 and 2014 searches returned similar results, but the following analysis relies more heavily on the 2014 report since in the intervening years new data input continued.⁴⁶

Why the search criteria “cabinetmaker” and “1800-1850”? First, I consciously chose to exclude joiners and turners in the Database search because, particularly in this early period, these woodworkers had skills different than those of cabinetmakers. For instance, a “turner” was generally a chair maker who “turned” wood to create rounded legs and splats. In order to fully round the profile of possible rope and tassel woodworkers, I included “carpenter” in the search. Carpenters primarily worked in the building arts, but were sometimes experienced with delicate inlays. The distinction between “carpenter” and “cabinetmaker” was crucial in the antebellum South, particularly with regards to inlaid décor. According to mid-Atlantic decorative arts scholar Betsy Davison,

⁴⁶ “Search results from the *MESDA Craftsman Database*, Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts (MESDA), Winston-Salem, NC; report generated by Kim Wilson May, Manager of the MESDA Research Center, 15 August, 2014.”

artisans self-identified as “carpenter” or “cabinetmaker” based on their training history and preferred work products.⁴⁷

Second, most of the rope and tassel furniture forms date to between 1800 and 1825. The earlier a cabinetmaker worked, the higher the likelihood that he was involved in the rope and tassel product. So why was the search criteria extended to mid-century? The long-term view of this search ultimately reveals important qualities of the cabinetmaking trade by decade.

Based on the report’s returns, I then turned to primary documentary sources. Estate inventories, advertisements, and wills enabled me to eliminate cabinetmakers that did not possess the requisite tools to complete the rope and tassel work. Shortly after investigating the names returned by the database, a geographical emphasis on town craftsmen became apparent. This can be explained in one of two ways. First, the most practical explanation is that stronger markets may have been located in town or, second, federal censuses (like the 1820 Census of Manufactures) did not venture beyond the established main streets and town squares. Remember the further complicating factor, presented briefly in the introduction, was the lack of traditional documentary sources in East Tennessee.

The use of different materials between rural and town artisans reflected distinct sensibilities as well as the economic resources of their clients. Rural

⁴⁷ Elizabeth A. Davison and John Shearer, *The Furniture of John Shearer, 1790-1820: "A True North Britain" in the Southern Backcountry* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2011), 11.

Decorative Arts scholar Derita Coleman Williams, one of the few researchers to discuss specific East Tennessee cabinetmakers, differentiates between “rural” and “town” craftsmen based on location and materials.⁴⁸ For instance, prominent cabinetmakers in Greeneville used imported mahogany more often than their more rural counterparts.⁴⁹ Without the population size of county seats, rural communities like Leesburg and Limestone were situated on waterways and stagecoach routes that influenced how they expressed their Appalachian culture.

The following discussion outlines the lives and work of cabinetmakers in the Nolichucky River Valley who I considered for rope and tassel attribution. The report revealed 247 carpenters and cabinetmakers actively working in the Nolichucky River Valley between 1800 and 1850.⁵⁰ Then I narrowed the results chronologically, which resulted in 4 Greene County cabinetmakers and 6 Washington County cabinetmakers (table 1). At length, a process of elimination narrowed the results to Hugh McAdams. Significantly, even those disqualified during the search contributed works to the physical domain of the inland South that reflected cultural sensibilities in the early Republic.

⁴⁸ Derita Coleman Williams, “Early Tennessee Furniture,” *Southern Quarterly* 25, no. 1 (Fall 1986), 86.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Search results from the *MESDA Craftsman Database*, Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts (MESDA), Winston-Salem, NC; report generated by Kim Wilson May, Manager of the MESDA Research Center, 15 August 2014.

Table 1: POSSIBLE ROPE AND TASSEL CRAFTSMEN, Antebellum Nineteenth-Century Cabinetmakers in the Nolichucky River Valley, Report per the MESDA Craftsmen Database

	Total	Carpenters 1800-1830	Cabinetmakers 1800-1830	Carpenters and Cabinetmakers 1830-1850
Greene County	128	21*	4	103
Washington County	119	9	6	104

*Includes brothers John and William Massa apprenticed to carpenter William Edmonson.

Thanks to MESDA's integrated Object and Craftsmen Databases, the first artisan to surface was Thomas K. Kinnard. He opened a shop in the "cabinet line" in 1819 in the heart of Jonesborough on Chestnut Street.⁵¹ His work represents one of the few pieces of furniture from this early period to survive with the maker's signature. It is unclear why he signed his work and others in the same business realm did not. In one of the earliest advertisements from the region, Kinnard stated he "hopes to give general satisfaction by having work executed in the neatest style and latest fashion."⁵² Kinnard's signed desk (figure 26) has a scribed inlaid open-winged eagle perched on a replacement veneer medallion, four graduated drawers with astragal rectangular stringing, and the shaped skirt is emphasized with veneered medallions. Cock beading, veneered insets, and shaped side skirts depart from known rope and tassel group furniture.

⁵¹ *East Tennessee Patriot*, Nov. 30, 1819, 4.

⁵² *Ibid.*



Figure 26: MESDA Object Database S_11036, Kinnard desk

Carpenters Thomas Murphey and Samuel Bitner symbolize the opposite of Kinnard's signed work. Both appear to have been farmers who, according to surviving documents, primarily produced coffins. Coffins were the first product in demand from woodworkers as early as the 1780s. Carpenters were essential artisans on the frontier due to the violence and the uncertainty of rural life. Their work lies buried in cemeteries, some of which predate regional church construction, and thus represent an unseen cultural landscape below the region's surface.

Thomas Murphey worked for five decades in Greene County, Tennessee, between 1800 and 1850 as a "carpenter."⁵³ Like other artisans in the Nolichucky River Valley, Murphey migrated from neighboring state, North Carolina, but only

⁵³ U.S. Census Bureau, "District 9: Greene County, Tennessee" (*Federal Census*, 1850), 188.

appears in the public record as a coffin-maker or executor.⁵⁴ Executorship indicates relationships within a community as trusted friends, and neighbors often performed the duty. Like Murphey, Samuel Bitner owned basic carpentry and farm utensils and appears repeatedly in estate records for the repayment of coffin construction.⁵⁵ Based on this evidence, it is unlikely that either carpenter executed the detailed inlay of the rope and tassel group.

The detailed inventories of cabinetmakers Anthony Kelly and John Mercer include lists of tools that may aid in the search for the rope and tassel maker. Kelly arrived as early as 1791 in what became Greene County, Tennessee, and appeared in the historical record as a Grand Juror on two separate occasions. He oversaw deed disputes and road plans, both integral affairs of community infrastructure in the (then) Washington District.⁵⁶ By his death in 1812, Kelly's inventory listed typical carpentry tools like a glue pot (presumably for animal hide adhesive), a whetstone to sharpen blades, planes to smooth plank, chisels used to carve, and gimlets used to bore holes.⁵⁷ Based on this list, it is difficult to

⁵⁴ Greene County, TN. "An account of the sale of the Estate of James H. McCord, deceased." *Inventories of Estates, 1828-1843*, 443.

⁵⁵ Washington County, Tennessee, "John Mercers Estate," *Washington County Tennessee Inventory of Estates: Volume 00, 1779-1821*, August 1815, pg 315-317.; Washington County, Tennessee, "Samuel Bitners Estate," *Washington County Tennessee Inventory of Estates: Volume 00, 1779-1821*, May 1815, pg 311.

⁵⁶ Goldene Fillers Burgner, *Greene County, Tennessee Minutes of the Court of Common Pleas, 1783-1795* (Easley, SC: Southern Historical Press, 1982), 218.

⁵⁷ John Trotwood Moore, "Anthony Kelly, April 1812," *Tennessee, Records of Greene County: Inventory and Sale 1828-1843* (Nashville, TN: Works Progress Administration, 1938), 145.

determine what sort of work Kelly conducted since these tools could be used for house carpentry *or* the production of furniture. To some extent, Kelly's estate is of limited utility due to vague terms like "a quantity" or "some," further obscuring the extent of his professional tools. Finally, the inventory did not include instruments required for advanced inlay.

John Mercer's 1815 inventory included quantities of plank and multiple compasses, used to create balanced circles and curvilinear strokes.⁵⁸ During the Federal era, furniture makers used compasses to sketch future paint patterns and to contour circular pieces of inlay. Additionally, upon his death Mercer had not completed at least three furniture forms, "a part of a Chest & table neither finished," and a "cradle frame."⁵⁹ Like Kelly, the tools listed in Mercer's inventory give only vague indications of their work.

Hugh McAdams' detailed and extensive estate auction in Washington County made him the primary contender in this region. In total, Hugh's estate included a large amount of plank, unfinished cut lumber ready for use in building homes or furniture including 11 "piles" of plank, 650 feet of one-inch plank, and other miscellaneous plank.⁶⁰ Besides numerous "piles" of plank, McAdams also had patterns (presumably for inlay motifs), one marking tool, a veneering saw used to cut thin slices from plank for inlay, and a gluepot – all-necessary for

⁵⁸ Washington County, Tennessee, "John Mercers Estate," *Washington County Tennessee Inventory of Estates: Volume 00, 1779-1821* (August 1815): 315-317.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Washington County, Tennessee, "A list of the property of Hugh McAdams, Decd." 329 & 331.

advanced inlay. His estate sale further included: approximately 45 planes, one turning lathe, five chisels (sharp blades used for cutting or shaping wood), five gouges (chisels with cylindrical blades), three hammers, seven saws (dovetail, tenon, and hand) and two workbenches. Multiple workbenches further suggest other craftsmen worked alongside McAdams and those connections will be explored further in chapter three.⁶¹

The extensive estate sale that took place in October of 1815 accounts for the specifics gleaned about his cabinetmaking work. McAdams died intestate in 1814, which forced his widow to oversee the auction the following year. Alone, this estate stands as an impressive example of tools for a rural craftsman in Tennessee; subsequent historical research into the McAdams family and their regional connections further confirms the attribution and will be explored in chapter three.

Competitors of the McAdams, explored in this chapter, created frontier necessities like coffins as well as exuberant furniture for Fancy interiors. The training of Hugh and Robert McAdams remains elusive. If their father, Thomas, was a cabinetmaker, it is possible that he trained his sons Hugh and Robert himself. If not a cabinetmaker, it is equally conceivable that Thomas' community connections arranged apprenticeships for Hugh and Robert in North Carolina or Tennessee. Edward Jenner Carpenter of Massachusetts followed this second possibility as a cabinetmaker's apprentice. Carpenter's (surname not to be

⁶¹ Washington County, Tennessee, "A list of the property of Hugh McAdams, Decd." 333.

confused with his earliest occupation) apprenticeship journal is one of the most complete accounts of cabinetmaking training from antebellum America that survives today. In the 1844-1845 journal, Carpenter detailed his work, professional frustrations, and personal time.⁶² Carpenter worked nearly two decades after the McAdams brothers' work concluded, but Carpenter's experience indicates that handwork in rural towns persisted in the North and South.

Why did the McAdams family situate their business along Big Limestone Creek? Archaeologist David Starbuck offers important insights in terms of intention for the siting of rural industry where landscape is paramount.⁶³ The McAdams' capitalized on local geography and natural resources when they located their shop along Limestone Creek. The Broyles' family saw mill was also on the banks of Little Limestone Creek and may have provided the McAdams shop with the cherry, walnut, and poplar they needed.⁶⁴ The possible business relationship with the Broyles probably provided the McAdams with their most important resource, plank. When Limestone Creek was running at full strength, it

⁶² See Edward Jenner Carpenter and Christopher Clark, *The Diary of An Apprentice Cabinetmaker: Edward Jenner Carpenter's 'Journal' 1844-1845*, Worcester, MA: American Antiquarian Society, 1989.

⁶³ David R. Starbuck, "The Archaeology of Rural Industry," in *Unlocking the Past: Celebrating Historical Archaeology in North America*, Lu Ann De Cunzo and John Jameson ed. (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2005), 146.

⁶⁴ Jen Stoecker, C. Van West, and Middle Tennessee State University Center for Historic Preservation, "The Transformation of the Nolichucky River Valley, 1776-1960" (Washington, DC: *National Register of Historic Places*, 2001), Section E Page 15.

was navigable by flatboat traffic and could transport finished products farther west.

How did Hugh and Robert McAdams promote furniture sales? There is no evidence that they ever advertised in print. Local and regional newspapers were unreliable and those cabinetmakers that did advertise as far as Knoxville were either situated in towns (like Greeneville and Jonesborough) or planned to move farther west. Presumably, by the first decades of the nineteenth century, the McAdams' distinctive style could have been popularized via word of mouth. Verbal networks may also account for why they and other woodworkers did not sign their furniture, because most community members recognized the work of different shops on sight.

Robert's role in the cabinet shop further emphasizes the significance of sibship in the Nolichucky River Valley society. Robert, Hugh's younger brother, purchased some typical cabinetmaking items like nearly 700 feet of one-inch plank, one sash saw (used to cut frameworks for glass panes in windows or doors), one tenon saw (fine-toothed saw that produced joints to be mortised), and a dovetail saw from Hugh's estate auction. He also purchased more technical tools including one veneering saw, clamps used to hold glued inlay in place, and a conk shell that was probably a pattern for inlay.⁶⁵ Most significantly to the attribution process, Robert also purchased a "profile machine," used to

⁶⁵ Ibid.

outline portrait profiles or busts, from his brother's estate.⁶⁶ The Winterthur desk boasts an inlaid profile on its interior prospect door (more on that in chapter four).

Community ties and tools further increase the likelihood that the McAdams' shop executed the rope and tassel motifs. Samuel Bruen and Joshua Greene are linked to the McAdams through the estate sale and geographic proximity. Bruen purchased the greatest volume of carpentry tools from Hugh's estate sale including:

- 13 planes (corner, grove, jack, and B),
- 1 hand saw,
- 1 saw set,
- 1 rule,
- 4 gimblets,
- 7 files,
- 6 gouges,
- 5 locks,
- miscellaneous plank,
- 1 workbench,
- 1 glue pot,
- miscellaneous tools,
- 5 chisels,
- 1 turning lathe,
- 1 whetstone,
- 2 stone hammers,
- patterns,
- and 2 mallets.

Bruen died in 1816, less than a year after Hugh's estate sale. His brief inventory included joiner's tools, some plank, livestock, and farming equipment.⁶⁷

Hugh McAdams' wife, Isabella, served as "Administratrix" further cementing the

⁶⁶ Washington County, Tennessee, "A list of the property of Hugh McAdams, Decd." 333.

⁶⁷ Washington County Estate Records, "Samuel Bruen's Estate" (October 22, 1816), 342.

relationship. Bruen may have been an itinerant cabinetmaker that lived and worked with the McAdams because Bruen had no family or property at the time of his death.⁶⁸

Joshua Greene was one of the earliest woodworkers in Washington County who may have also worked with the McAdams. Greene lived along Little Limestone Creek, placing the craftsman in proximity of the McAdams.⁶⁹ Greene's 1807 inventory details extensive carpentry tools and, like many by the first decade of the nineteenth century, included a "corner cupboard."⁷⁰

Isabella, once again, purchased an unanticipated group of items. Specifically, she bought a limited amount of cabinetry tools: "1 pile plank," and "iron wedge & drawing knife."⁷¹ Did Isabella buy the plank to make additions or alterations to the family home? The iron wedge's use is initially ambiguous; it was used for adjusting metal in the planes or as a sort of kitchen pestle. Since the entry pairs the "wedge" with a "drawing knife," a knife with two handles used to smooth wooden surfaces, this purchase was certainly one of cabinetry tools.⁷² Did Isabella believe her young children would follow their father's footsteps into the cabinetmaking trade?

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ "Joshua Greene, II 1811 Deed," *Minutes of the Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions, 1798-1842* (Nashville, TN: U.S. Works Progress Administration, 1937), 63.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 187.

⁷¹ Washington County, Tennessee, "A list of the property of Hugh McAdams, Decd."

⁷² Joseph Moxon, *Mechanick Exercises, or, The Doctrine of Handy-Works, Applied to the Art of Joinery* (London: Printed for and sold by J. Moxon, 1701), Joiner's Plates.

Or, did she require the tools for her own work? Although unlikely, this is not a circumstance that can be quickly dismissed. Scribed lines require attention to detail and creativity, skills not determined by gender. As French Historian Geraldine Sheridan suggests, historical records can be “decoded” to reveal the reality of women’s work.⁷³ Although Sheridan examines idealized popular print to investigate women’s roles in the work force, her methodology can lend further significance to Isabella’s role in the backcountry economy. Isabella’s purchase of cabinetry basics may indicate her understanding of the cabinetmaking business.

While estate records show that both Hugh and Robert were cabinetmakers, what little we know of their eldest brother, John, comes to us through land records and wills. In 1811 Thomas bequeathed eldest son, John, “the plantation whereon I now live containing one hundred and thirty acres which land is situated on both sides of mill creek.”⁷⁴ Hugh and Robert each received \$50 in cash or livestock from Thomas’ “legacy.”⁷⁵ Presumably, John lived on Thomas’ land along Big Limestone Creek until he inherited it. A bit of an enigma, the future movements of this eldest McAdams brother are theorized in chapter five.

⁷³ Geraldine Sheridan, *Louder Than Words: Ways of Seeing Women Workers in Eighteenth-Century France* (Lubbock, TX: Texas Tech University Press, 2009), 19.

⁷⁴ Tennessee Historical Records Survey, “Thomas McAdams Will, 3 Dec. 1811,” *Washington County Will Books, 1779-1860; Estate Records, 1779-1860* (Salt Lake City, UT: Genealogical Society of Utah, 1940), 94.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

Leading politicians in the United States associated national expansion with economic growth. By 1812, Britain still tenuously clung to its holdings in North America; yet, boundary disagreements and enforced impressments on the seas led to America's Declaration of War in June, 1812. Both Hugh, and his brother, Robert, served in the War of 1812. Hugh was commissioned a Sergeant in Captain John Porter's unit.⁷⁶ This unit made up only part of the 5th Regiment of the East Tennessee Militia lead by Colonel Edwin Booth. The regiment marched from Knoxville in 1814 and spent the duration of the campaign in Mobile, Alabama.⁷⁷ Andrew Jackson feared that if the British arrived at Mobile, the Chickasaw and Cherokee would join them.⁷⁸ Therefore, it was critical to leave a reliable force at Mobile, as Jackson had no way of knowing where the British would land.

Private Robert McAdams served in Captain William Lauderdale's unit lead by Colonel Edward Bradley's 1st Regiment of Tennessee Volunteer Infantry.⁷⁹ Tennessee militia, including Bradley's regiment, participated in the Battle of Talladega in 1813. American troops confronted the Red Stick Creek faction who had besieged United States-allied Creeks at Fort Leslie near Talladega,

⁷⁶ Byron Sistler, and Samuel Sistler, *Tennesseans in the War of 1812* (Nashville, TN: B. Sistler & Associates, 1992), 333.

⁷⁷ Tom Kanon, "Regimental Histories of Tennessee Units During the War of 1812," Tennessee State Library and Archives <http://www.tennessee.gov/tsla/history/military/1812reg.htm> (accessed April, 2014).

⁷⁸ Frank Lawrence Owsley, *Struggle for the Gulf Borderlands: The Creek War and the Battle of New Orleans, 1812-1815* (Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1981), 101.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

Alabama.⁸⁰ Robert was fortunate to survive the battle, since companies of Captain Abraham Bledsoe and Brice Smith suffered heavy casualties.⁸¹ Pictured below (figure 27), Andrew Jackson accepts the surrender of Weatherstick, a leader of the Creeks defeated at Fort Leslie.



Figure 27: Tennessee State Library and Archives "Interview between General Jackson and Weatherstick" by W. Ridgeway, Courtesy Library Photograph Collection

Hugh McAdams' cause of death was not recorded in 1814. Many companies encountered widespread illness in camp, especially in New Orleans; it is quite possible that Hugh died of a disease contracted while on campaign. Indeed, the leading cause of death during the War of 1812 was infectious disease. Often worsened by severe weather and poor camp conditions, diseases

⁸⁰ Herbert J Lewis, "Battle of Talladega," *Encyclopedia of Alabama*, Alabama Humanities Foundation, <http://www.encyclopediaofalabama.org/face/Article.jsp?id=h-2620> (accessed July 2, 2014).

⁸¹ Ibid.

like dysentery, typhoid, pneumonia, and malaria (among others) ran rampant.⁸² Combined, violence and disease left many women on the home front like Isabella, widowed.

Isabella did not record the emotional impact of her financial and material insecurity that resulted from her widowhood. Besides familial support from her brother, confirmed bachelor Samuel, and the extended McAdams family, Isabella probably turned to religion for comfort. Hugh McAdams' religious beliefs may never be discovered, but his final resting place and that of other family members is Fairview Cemetery.⁸³ In the early nineteenth century it was the largest cemetery in Washington County. It was located just four miles north of Jonesborough. Since 1790, Fairview Cemetery was the resting place of diverse congregations including Presbyterian, Methodist, and Quaker.⁸⁴

Evidence of Scots-Irish Presbyterian churches in the Nolichucky River Valley as early as 1814 does not survive today, although congregants may have met in domestic homes.⁸⁵ By 1830, Isabella and her daughter, Jane, were

⁸² Public Broadcasting System, "Military Medicine in the War of 1812," <http://www.pbs.org/wned/war-of-1812/essays/military-medicine/> (accessed July, 2014).

⁸³ Susan Clark, "McAdams Graves – Tombstone Tuesday," *Nolichucky Roots* posted August 30, 2011 <http://nolichuckyroots.blogspot.com/2011/08/mcadams-graves-tombstone-tuesday.html> (accessed November 1, 2012).

⁸⁴ "Fairview Cemetery," *Washington County TNGenWeb*, <http://www.tngenweb.org/washington/cemetery/cemFairviewIntro.htm> (accessed November 1, 2012).

⁸⁵ Lucas, 2015.

members of the Presbyterian Church in Limestone.⁸⁶ Family, spirituality, and friendship intersected in this Presbyterian community where the Duncans, too, were members.⁸⁷

During the first years of statehood, settlers like the McAdams prospered thanks to networks of kinship, trade, and transportation. Moses and Sarah spent a brief period with the McAdams, but still impacted their daily lives. James Duncan, son of Revolutionary War veteran Joseph Duncan, became a neighbor of the McAdams in 1812 when he purchased land along Big Limestone Creek from Robert McAdams.⁸⁸ James Duncan's cousin, Anne, later married Hugh's son, Samuel Bryson McAdams in 1831.⁸⁹

Prior to his death, Hugh's family, slaves, and wider acquaintances influenced his experiences and, ultimately, his creativity. Folklorist Michael Owen Jones describes the non-linear evolution of style in his book, *Craftsman of the Cumberland: Tradition and Creativity*. Jones convincingly demonstrates, through the Kentucky example of Chester Cornett's chair making that traditional artistry is

⁸⁶ Susan Clark, "McAdams Graves – Tombstone Tuesday," (accessed November 1, 2012).

⁸⁷ Jeannette Tillotson Acklen, *Tombstone Inscriptions & Historical Manuscripts* (Nashville, TN: Cullon & Ghertner, 1933), 201. Most of the Duncans are entombed in New Providence Presbyterian Church cemetery.

⁸⁸ Washington County, Tennessee, "Deed of Indenture," *Washington County Tennessee Deed Book 13* (September 29, 1812), 178.

⁸⁹ Washington County, Tennessee, "Samuel B. McAdams to Ann Duncan 3 Feb. 1831," *Tennessee State Marriages, 1780-2002* (Nashville, TN: Tennessee State Library and Archives, 1978), 239.

not devoid of creativity.⁹⁰ Cornett's work and recorded words show that imagination cannot be traced, but is a product of utilitarian need, dreams, and experimentation.

From 1797 onward, the McAdams family in Tennessee sought to dominate the regional market on the heels of those who sought to tame the "wilderness." The material comforts achieved by Hugh and Isabella indicate that the cabinetmaking family enjoyed a gentrified status. Warfare, negotiation, and infrastructure, produced a rural Republican world whose architecture and material goods could be recognized by diverse people as cultural expressions of the Nolichucky River Valley.

Like MacIntire's "Ralph Group" of corner cupboards from Pennsylvania, McAdams' East Tennessee rope and tassel furniture produced a regional "palette" of ornament that spoke directly to the Nolichucky River Valley's geography and democratic origins.⁹¹ Looking back, the long-standing mystery that began this endeavor was little more than the project's impetus. In terms of historiography of the rope and tassel group, the first question is largely solved *who is the group's maker?* Extant documentary sources clearly indicate that Hugh McAdams, and those affiliated with his shop, represent the preeminent contending tradition in the region's early furniture market. Chapter four takes a technical look at the rope and tassel furniture produced in the McAdams' shop.

⁹⁰ Michael Owen Jones, *Craftsman of the Cumberlands: Tradition and Creativity* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1989), 115.

⁹¹ MacIntire, 21.

CHAPTER IV

“The Art and Mystery of Rope and Tassel Furniture”

In the preceding chapters, we examined how local, regional, and national social connections influenced freedomways in the Nolichucky River Valley. Imaginative decorative arts further gave life to cultural expressions in Appalachia. By the turn of the nineteenth century, for Tennesseans the federal era meant increased security from Indian neighbors, representation in federal government, and burgeoning opportunities for entrepreneurs.

The “cultural palette” of the rope and tassel furniture group, featured in this chapter, indicates that cabinetmakers associated with the McAdams shop selected motifs per their own aesthetic, experiences, and training. The “palette” metaphor is particularly appropriate since, as with a fine art paint palette, proscribed colors (or in this case inlaid symbols) can be mixed and/or adapted per commission. Like the rope and tassel group, Decorative Arts Scholar James MacIntire defined a rural cabinetmaking tradition the “Ralph group.” In contrast to extant forms in the Nolichucky River Valley, MacIntire had an abundance of material examples in 80 extant corner cupboards. With such a large sampling, MacIntire concluded, “Each new cupboard referred to others that had gone before,” and that by means of furniture, “different families of craftsmen

communicated ideas to one another, and shared rival palettes.”¹ This dissertation broadens MacIntire’s “palette” metaphor to encompass cultural influences outside of the cabinetmaking community in East Tennessee as well as within it.

On the heels of neoclassicism, federal era arts did not immediately shed symbols associated with the Revolution and classicism; rather, American artisans created playful interpretations of traditional designs. Decorative arts scholar Sumpter Priddy defined these expressions as “Fancy,” meant to “manipulate the viewer’s perceptions and activate the sense of wit and whimsy.”² After the American Revolution, interior décor in urban as well as rural spaces embraced Fancy’s richness of color and “visual excesses.”³ Fancy infused the rope and tassel’s cultural palette.

This chapter first introduces the cultural palette of the rope and tassel group, followed by a technical description, per form.⁴ In past decorative arts historiography, scholars interpreted differences in execution as representative of two different Tennessee rope and tassel groups: one, from Washington County and, a second, from Greene County distinguished by the inlaid “gamecock” motif.

¹ James MacIntire, “Creativity and Tradition: The Corner Cupboards of Southwestern Sussex County, 1790-1850” (Winterthur: University of Delaware Master’s Thesis, 1989), 21.

² Sumpter T. Priddy, *American Fancy: Exuberance in the Arts, 1790-1840* (Milwaukee: Chipstone Foundation, 2004), 32.

³ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁴ The author hasn’t examined all of the pieces described in this chapter in person. Additional construction details culled from D4A database, private collector notes, the MESDA Object Database, and the William King Object Archive.

In conclusion, I argue that the cultural palette unites the rope and tassel groups as expressive of the particular circumstances that fostered it.

Rope and tassel group inlaid motifs fall into three categories: namely, neoclassical (rope and tassel), patriotic, and agricultural. Inlaid symbols consist of diamonds, quarter fans, compass stars, vines, birds, and bellflowers; however the signature motif is the rope and tassel. While hearkening to its neoclassical inspirations, the ropes and tassels of this East Tennessee group are recognizable for the absence of swag or drapery; however, tassels remain true to the anatomy of the textile trimming.

An understanding of passementerie, the art of textile trimmings, helps us to better understand the execution of inlaid rope and tassels. Textile tassels have four primary components: a cord for suspension, “head” or loop, “waist” or knot that holds the fringe in place, and “skirt” or fringe.⁵ Tassels, typically associated with textiles, are a surprising choice for two-dimensional wooden inlay. Textile specialist Nancy Welch eloquently lauds tassels because they “provide a glimpse of the range of human creativity unburdened by the need for function.”⁶ The same can be said for inlay, because its primary purpose is adornment, not function.

Like the inlaid tassels, their rope counterparts resemble passementerie antecedents. The predominant “rope” is an inlaid barber pole pattern, alternating

⁵ Nancy Welch, *Tassels: The Fanciful Embellishment* (Asheville, N.C.: Lark Books, 1992), 7.

⁶ *Ibid.*

parallelograms of light and dark shades. In some cases, the scribed lightwood inlay still retains original natural dyes. The looped barber pole ropes on the Trace sideboard and MESDA's corner cupboard resemble one another and characterize the group's most distinguishing feature (figure 28). Two corner cupboard cornice examples are scribed with a square patterned rope (figure 29).⁷ Further, the "flared" tassel skirts (figure 29) that appear on corner cupboards with gamecocks offer viewers a more playful interpretation of the group's iconic motifs.

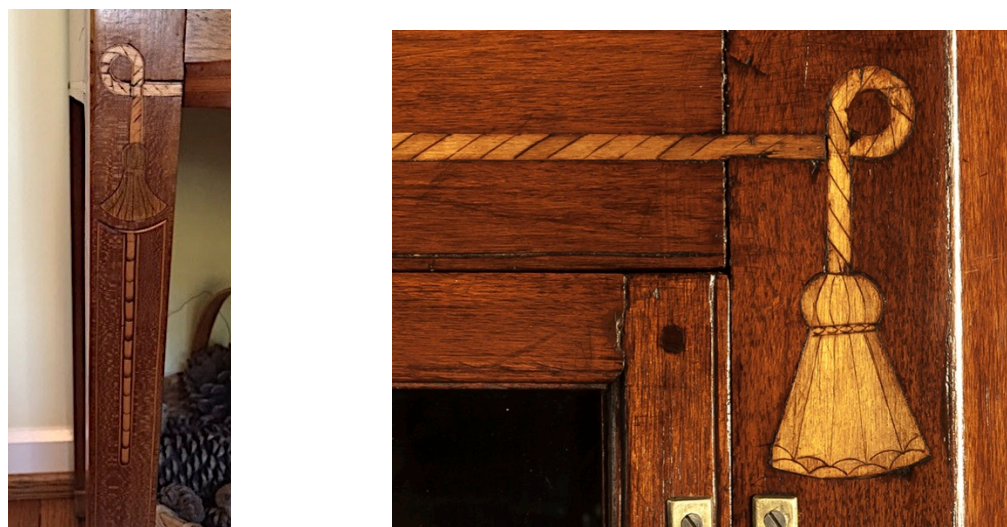


Figure 28: Private Collection "Trace" Sideboard (L) inlaid looped tassel detail, Image Courtesy Anne McPherson and MESDA Acc. 5660 (R), inlaid looped tassel detail

⁷ MESDA Object files S_4382 and S_7380.



Figure 29: MESDA Object Files S_4382 (L) and S_7380 (R)

Arguably, agricultural symbols also represented patriotism. As primary author of the Declaration for Independence, Thomas Jefferson envisioned an agrarian republic in America where white freeholders earned prosperity from successful agriculture. Wheat stalks, wheat stalk heads, and vines (figure 30) bedeck the MESDA corner cupboard cornice and the interior drawers of the Noe desk (figure 31). Additionally, the lower recessed panel doors of the MESDA corner cupboard have inlaid, scribed, wheat stalk heads arranged in a quatrefoil that the inlaid pointed oval of the Trace corner cupboard referenced (figure 32).

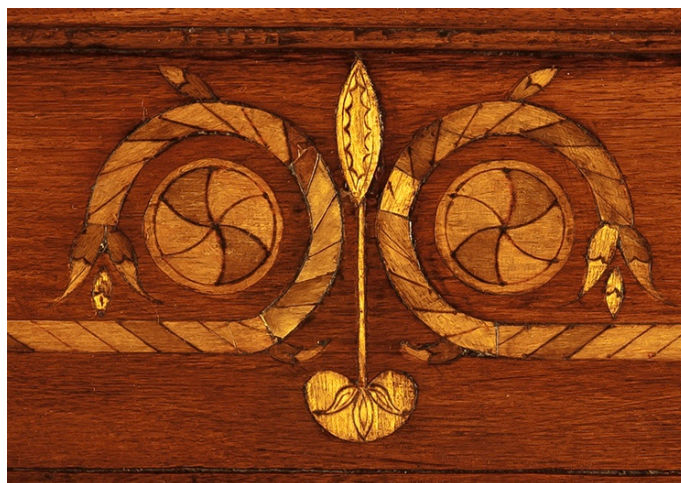


Figure 30: MESDA Acc. 5660, Cornice Wheat close up



Figure 31: The Speed Museum of Art Acc. 2011.9.66, Interior Wheat Detail

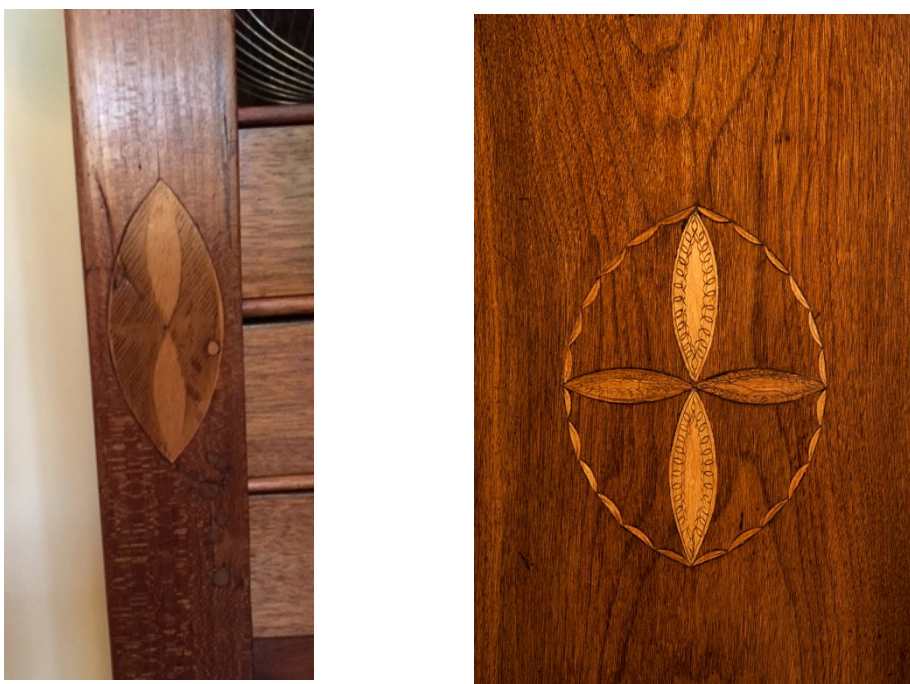


Figure 32: Private Collection "Trace" Sideboard (L) quatrefoil detail and MESDA Acc. 5660 (R) wheat quatrefoil detail

Another prominent agricultural motif is the “gamecock,” or rooster. Of the five cupboards with birds, four are gamecocks (figure 33, L & 34) and one is more ambiguous, categorized at different times as a “bird of prey” (figures 33, R).⁸ The birds are often applied to the recessed paneled doors at a skewed angle. In the case of the gamecocks (typically skewed backwards) this serves to emphasize their claws, perhaps even suggesting an imminent strike. In the case of the “bird of prey” (skewed forward), its angle suggests it is soon to take flight, although its wings remain closed.

⁸ P4a Antiques Reference Database Item: D9942267.; Also in Derita Coleman Williams, Nathan Harsh, and C. Tracey Parks, *The Art and Mystery of Tennessee Furniture and Its Makers Through 1850* (Nashville: Tennessee Historical Society and Tennessee State Museum Foundation, 1988), 106.



Figure 33: MESDA Object Files S_2648 gamecock (L) and S_13028 bird of prey (R)

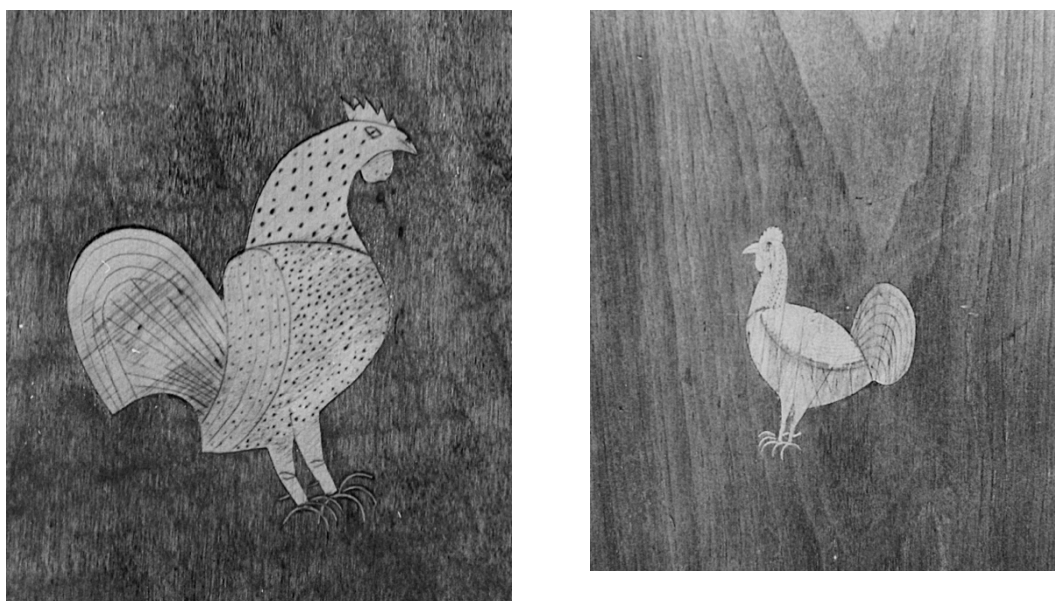


Figure 34: MESDA Object Files S_2383 incised gamecock (L) and S_4382 scribed rooster (R)

In the first decade of the nineteenth century, patriotic themes permeated American material culture. It is logical, then, that militiamen like Hugh, and veterans of the War of 1812, who were raised in the new Republic celebrated America via their craft. The most obviously patriotic motif is that of the open-winged eagle on the slant board of the Winterthur “profile” desk (figure 35).



Figure 35: Winterthur Acc. 1957.1099, slant-board inlay detail

Other motifs share obvious similarities as well. Upturned, delicate bellflowers on the Winterthur desk and private chest are nearly identical in that two petals cradle a protruding pistil (figure 36). A popular pattern in East Tennessee, astragal banding appears on both the “Trace” (figure 37) sideboard and Winterthur “profile” desk (figure 38). Lunette and astragal stringing also

characterize two pieces that frame a central motif like a bird or stylized diamond recessed panel lower doors.⁹ Four pieces across three different forms have similar fluted, dyed quarter fans that share proportions and placement (figures 39, 40, & 41). Finally, one of the smallest inlay details, young buds are particularly apt for the burgeoning communities of the Nolichucky River Valley (figure 42).



Figure 36: Anne McPherson Private Collection (L) and Winterthur Museum Acc. 1957.1099 (R) upturned bellflower details

⁹ MESDA Object files S_2383 and S_2684.



Figure 37: Private Collection "Trace Sideboard" applied astragal banding, Image courtesy Anne McPherson



Figure 38: Winterthur Museum Acc. 1957.1099, interior applied astragal banding



Figure 39: MESDA Acc. 5660, Quarter fan detail, Color Reimagined by Jessica White



Figure 40: The Speed Museum of Art "Noe Desk" Acc. 2011.9.66, quarter fans



Figure 41: Winterthur Museum Acc. 57.1099, quarter fans

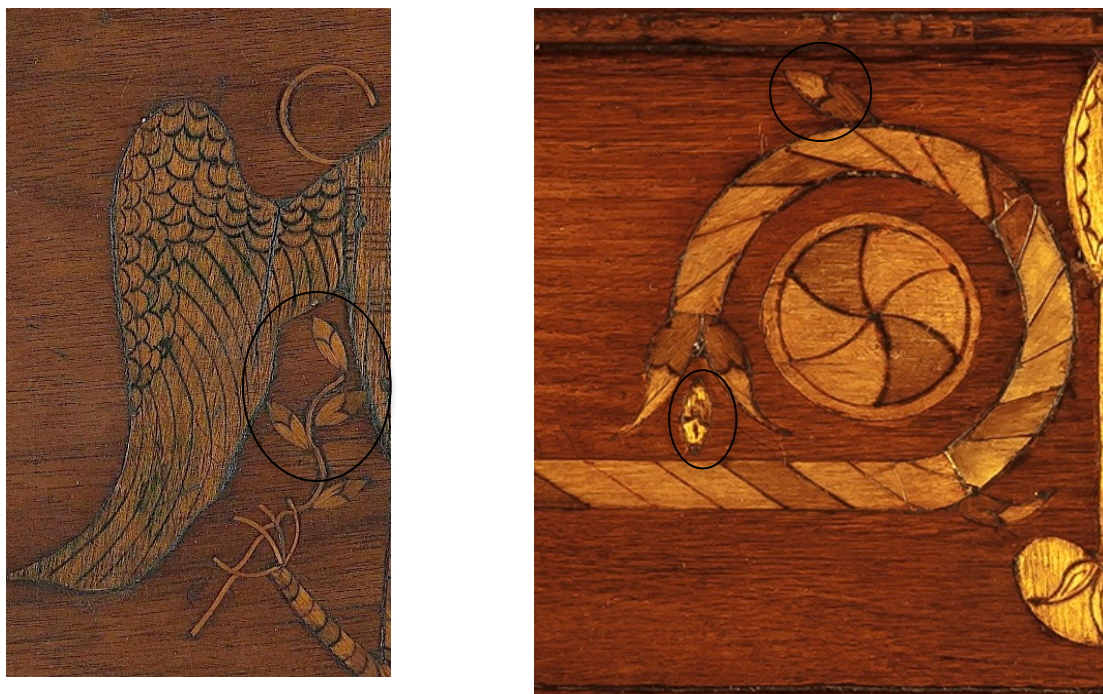


Figure 42: Winterthur Museum Acc. 1957.1099 (L) and MESDA Acc. 5660 (R), bud details

Often neoclassical by origin, the individual motifs in this group speak to the clean lines, restrained embellishments, and regular proportions in early furniture along the Great Wagon Road.¹⁰ The irregular motif combinations result in the region's distinctive cultural palette. The abundance of applied decoration of the rope and tassel group sets it apart from rural Tennessee furniture, generally recognized for its "simplicity" of decoration.¹¹ Despite this difference in ornament, the rope and tassel group shares case forms already out of style in urban centers

¹⁰ Betsy K. White, *Backcountry Makers: An Artisan History of Southwest Virginia and Northeast Tennessee* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 2013), 8.

¹¹ Ellen Beasley, "Tennessee Furniture and its Makers," *Antiques in Tennessee* reprinted from *The Magazine Antiques* (New York, NY: Straight Enterprises, 1971): 427.

by the nineteenth century. It is this coalescence, of traditional form and “fashionable ornament,” that Glassie hails as cultural vernacular expressions.¹²

Although Thomas Sheraton argued, in his last appendix published in 1803, inlay was no longer in style, McAdams and the craftsmen in his shop found a way around the very things Sheraton lamented: expense and decay.¹³ First, McAdams achieved this by using more durable, natural resources like poplar and holly, while Sheraton specifically referenced mahogany, which was expensive and less durable.¹⁴ Secondly, part of the expense associated with inlay was the time consuming application of many especially small pieces to make up a larger design. For example, a checkerboard pattern could require up to 32 individually dyed and applied pieces. Like other rural artisans, McAdams chose to scribe the checkerboard pattern into one larger piece of inlay that appeared to be 32 smaller pieces; thereby he saved significant time.

While scribing produced inlaid pieces faster than cutting and dying multiple, smaller insets, inlay still required many different steps. Take for instance, a fluted quarter fan that appears on most McAdams furniture. McAdams’ inlay process probably resembled the following actions:

1. Plane space in primary wood of drawer front

¹² Henry Glassie, *Pattern in the Material Folk Culture of the Eastern United States* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1969), 5.

¹³ Thomas Sheraton, *The Cabinet Dictionary Containing an Explanation of All the Terms Used in the Cabinet, Chair & Upholstery Branches, with Directions for Varnish-Making, Polishing, and Gilding : to Which Is Added a Supplementary Treatise on Geometrical Lines, Perspective and Painting in General* (London: Printed by W. Smith and sold by W. Row, 1803), 257.

¹⁴ Ibid.

2. Plane lightwood in corresponding shape and depth
3. Scribe, or free-hand carve, quarter fan flute
4. Dye scribed quarter fan, reds and greens
5. Apply scribed piece with animal hide glue to planed space (step 1)
6. Apply clamp to hold piece in place until glue dries
7. Remove clamp once dry
8. Repeat steps 1-7 per inlay piece.

The scribing between pieces differs significantly. For instance, incised holes within the tassel (figure 29, R) and the gamecock (figure 34, L) add texture; yet, they are a far cry from the more precise lines of the MESDA tassel example (figure 28, R).¹⁵ The scribing differences do not necessitate a separate cabinetmaking tradition. The difference could be explained by consumer preference, cabinetmaker efficiency, or artistic spontaneity.

Painted furniture experienced a revival in the early nineteenth century, particularly the flat surface preferred for the federal style.¹⁶ Natural dyes too, experienced a revival in the backcountry. The rope and tassel group is further characterized by red and green dyes on lightwood inlay. Today, the appearance of color varies since some pieces like MESDA corner cupboard (figure 1) were refinished at some point during its lifetime while others, like the color on the chest

¹⁵ An incised fish on a chest of drawers from DeVault Tavern, now in the Mary Jo Case Private Collection, closely resembles this scribing technique.

¹⁶ Rosemary Troy Krill and Pauline K. Eversmann, *Early American Decorative Arts, 1620-1860: A Handbook for Interpreters* (Lanham, MD: Alta Mira Press, 2001), 81.

of drawers in Anne McPherson's private collection seems to have retained its color (figure 36, L). During this time, furniture needed to complement Fancy-painted interiors or be lost amid the vibrant backgrounds. Strategically applied colors emphasized textures, patterns, and craftsmanship of furniture.

Rope and tassel group forms share utility as storage space as well as display. Identified forms include corner cupboards, desks, chests of drawers, and a sideboard.¹⁷ The amount of corner cupboards produced within this group, at least seven, urges the question: why did the McAdams create so many? Desks and corner cupboards in the nineteenth century represented repositories of knowledge and family keepsakes. English journalist, Robert Kemp Philp explains why he named his household reader after the popular furniture form,

“In a word, “The Corner Cupboard” (sic) will be found to contain treasures of knowledge upon every conceivable subject...and it will become a household phrase, when a member of a family needs the aid of knowledge upon any subject – “You will find it in THE CORNER CUPBOARD.””¹⁸

Today, the form has not been integrated in our American lexicon as Philp hoped; his interpretation of the form's significance, however, speaks to how corner cupboards in the nineteenth century captured people's imaginations. Like the objects Laurel Thatcher Ulrich discusses in her

¹⁷ *The Art and Mystery of Tennessee Furniture and Its Makers Through 1850* also catalogs desks and bookcase with rope and tassel, however, lack of further documentation in other archives restricted meaningful analysis; therefore they are not included in this narrative.

¹⁸ Robert Kemp Philp, *The Corner Cupboard, Or, Facts for Everybody: A Complete Encyclopedia of Useful Knowledge* (New York: Dick & Fitzgerald Publishers, 1859), iv.

work, the objects in this narrative reveal the “unseen technologies, interconnections, and contradictions” of nineteenth-century life.¹⁹ Further, like Ulrich’s needlework, the furniture of the Nolichucky River Valley is both “a site of cultural construction and a field for personal expression.”²⁰ The casework form served as a canvas to the rope and tassel makers.

Corner cupboards, particularly those with glass doors, function dually as spaces for storage and display. Upper doors with glazed lights enable viewers to see an array of dinnerware. This furniture indicates class emergence of a group of people who owned items for display that were expensive enough to be locked away. Rosemary Krill, Winterthur academic also attributes this shift in possessions to rising consumption throughout the young nation.²¹ Economists and historians, however, debate the cause of expanding consumption of goods.

Fashionable among twenty-first century collectors, corner cupboards earned a prominent place in popular memory during the nineteenth century. Period fiction and memoirs concerning corner cupboards emphasize the persistence of the form’s significance within a domestic context as well as their function as storage of mundane and special family items. The functionality of these sturdy display pieces appealed to multiple generations. Domestic literature of the nineteenth century praised corner cupboards for their function as a storage space of both mundane and special family items,

¹⁹ Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *The Age of Homespun: Objects and Stories in the Creation of an American Myth* (New York: Knopf, 2001), 25.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 40.

²¹ Krill and Eversmann, 81.

“Old people have kept the keys of the Corner Cupboard with a degree of pride, and have felt themselves to be the conservators of the domestic weal by holding sacred the contents of the family treasury.”²²

As you will see from the following objects in the rope and tassel group, traditional furniture forms afforded the maker a blank canvas. Cornices, stiles, doors, and drawers all offered a vehicle of expression. In backcountry Tennessee, where new residents needed material goods to fill newly constructed interiors, the McAdams’ cabinetmakers answered the market’s call.



Figure 43: MESDA Acc. 5660, full front

²² Philp, iv.; For a modern sociological study of “special” household objects see Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, and Eugene Rochberg-Halton, *The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981).



Figure 44: MESDA Object File S_13033, full front



Figure 45: MESDA Object File S_7380, full front



Figure 46: MESDA Object File S_2648, full front



Figure 47: MESDA Object File S_4382, full front



Figure 48: MESDA Object File S_10328, full front



Figure 49: MESDA Object File S_2383, full front



Figure 50: Winterthur Museum Acc. 1957.1099, full front open



Figure 51: The Speed Museum of Art "Noe Desk" Acc. 2011.9.66, full front closed



Figure 52: Private Collection "Trace Sidebaord," full front



Figure 53: Anne McPherson Private Collection Chest 1, full front



Figure 54: Anne McPherson Private Collection Chest 2, full front

MESDA's corner cupboard serves as the lynchpin that unites the rope and tassel group of furniture (figure 43). The MESDA corner cupboard (1800-1810) was a gift of Tennessee collector Mary Jo Case who purchased the corner cupboard from the estate of Mrs. Stephenson Murray in the twentieth century, who was a descendant of original owner Ephraim Murray. Murray probably purchased this rope and tassel corner cupboard from McAdams not long after relocating to Jonesboro from Baltimore, Maryland. No receipt has been located, yet Murray's earliest Tennessee papers were recovered from the cupboard drawers. The piece remained in the Murray family until the 1990s and was probably in the home pictured below (figure 55) for the majority, if not the entirety, of its existence.



Figure 55: Murray Family Home Jonesborough, TN, 2012

Murray was a slave owner and a successful farmer involved in the cultivation of corn, rye, and wheat. At his death, his inventory included “100 bushels of wheat more or less – to 40 bushels of Rye – to 250 Bushels of corn, more or less unhusked.”²³ In addition, a great deal of wheat and rye were planted already.²⁴ Wheat’s annual growth and replenishment meant sustenance for the family and wealth for their upper class lifestyle. Agricultural crops, therefore, represented their mountain plantation.

A wheat stalk is the featured cornice inlay of the corner cupboard, the scribed head resembles true-to-life wheat form, and wheat provided the primary household income for the Murrays. The MESDA corner cupboard is the only

²³ Washington County, Tennessee, “A list of the property of Ephraim Murray, Decd.” *Court Records Tennessee Washington County. Inventories for Jonesboro 1778-1837*, April 21, 1835.

²⁴ Ibid.

piece in this East Tennessee category where the rope motif extinguishes at one end with a tassel and in a vine and flower at the other (figure 56). The agricultural source of the Murray family's wealth, therefore, is inextricably entangled with a period symbol of wealth – the rope and tassel.

A familial connection between the McAdams and the Murrays may explain the cupboard's commission (See Appendix B). After losing her first husband, Hugh McAdams' youngest daughter, Jane (1811-1871), married Rowland "Robb" Perry Murray (1805-before 1870).²⁵ Together, they had three children Thomas Harvey Murray (1834-91), Mary Murray (1839-1925), and Hannah E. Murray (1846-1905). The cupboard was plausibly inherited through this McAdams/Murray connection.



Figure 56: MESDA Acc. 5660, Photoshop Transparency of the rope and tassel

²⁵ Washington County, Tennessee, "Murray Marriage License, December 20, 1848," *Tennessee State Marriages, 1780-2002* (Nashville, TN, USA: Tennessee State Library and Archives), 310.



Figure 57: MESDA Acc. 5660, rear full view



Figure 58: MESDA Acc. 5660, left drawer construction

The corner cupboard is one case piece (figure 57) and its primary wood is walnut; the secondary wood is poplar; and the inlay wood is probably holly. The cupboard has a cove cornice the upper eight-light doors are paneled and thin with mortise framing. Downward curved tulips wrap around pinwheels and frame a central wheat stalk. Flowers stem from a vine extension of the rope inlay that

terminates in a tassel on each stile adjoining the uppermost light, or pane of glass.

Both upper and lower doors have locks. Hardware is an amalgamation of replacement pieces such as H hinges and original cut nails on vertical backboards. Waist drawers, below beveled molding, boast dovetailed construction in the following configuration: a central rectangular drawer flanked by two drawers each with one diagonal back panel designed to fit in the cornered shape of the casework (figure 58). Drawers have rectangular stringing, dyed fluted quarter fans, and central escutcheon pinwheel. Lower paneled doors too are thin with mortise framing. Lower doors have quatrefoils of incised wheat stalk heads encircled by half-oval inlaid pieces. Rectangular stringing frames lower doors with scribed checkered inlaid quarter fans. Feet and aprons are not original, but were probably bracket shaped.

Another prominent rope and tassel corner cupboard is currently in a private collection (figure 44), but the inlay on its lower doors (figure 60) is easily recognizable because it is featured as the book cover of *The Art and Mystery of Tennessee Furniture and its Makers Through 1850*. This corner cupboard descended in the Brabson family of East Tennessee and was purchased by a private collector at an auction near Bowmantown in Washington County, Tennessee.²⁶ A few miles northeast of Limestone, Bowmantown, Tennessee, was named for McAdams' acquaintance Elias Bowman the Revolutionary

²⁶ Williams, Harsh, and Parks, et al., 176.

veteran who settled in the area. The Brabson family, for a time, lived along Big Limestone Creek on land Thomas Brabson purchased from Hugh McAdams (more on that in chapter five).

The corner cupboard's (1805-1820) primary wood is walnut; secondary is poplar. It has a cove cornice with upper eight-light doors, waist molding, lower paneled doors, and original scrolled skirt with bracket feet.²⁷ Like other rope and tassel corner cupboards in the McAdams group, barber pole inlaid ropes loop at the cornice; however, a major distinction between this piece and others is the floral tassel (figure 59).



Figure 59: MESDA Object Database S_13033, floral tassel

²⁷ "Corner Cupboard," MESDA Object File S_13033, prepared by Frank L. Horton, Luke Beckerdite, and Derita Williams 9/14/1983, GRC MESDA.

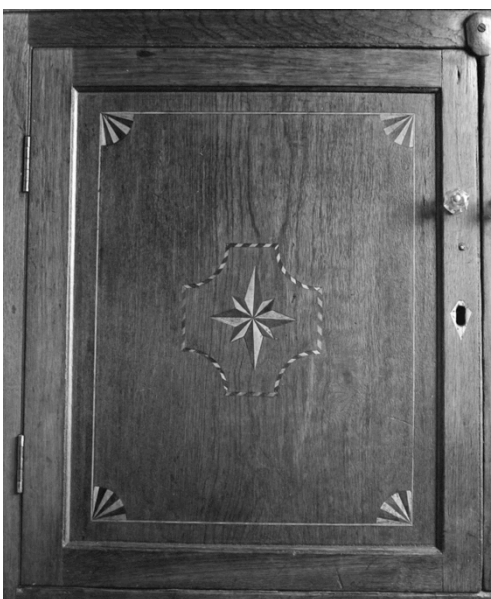


Figure 60: MESDA Object Database S_13033, lower door inlay

Lower doors have inlaid quarter fans (not fluted like the rest of the group), and rectangular stringing that frames a compass star. The star's dual colors give it a three-dimensional appearance. The maker may have made an intentional decision to dull the quarter fans by not fluting them in order to highlight the central barber-pole/compass star motif. Another distinctive inlay pattern, one that helped make the rope and tassel group famous, is the inlaid barber-pole octagonal form that encloses the compass star.

The next five corner cupboards²⁸ primarily make up “gamecock” examples of the rope and tassel group. Some scholars consider these corner cupboards wholly separate from those I attribute to McAdams in Washington County. The following analysis suggests that the differences between the “two” groups are

²⁸ MESDA Object Database Files S_7380, S_2648, S_4382, S_10328, and S_2383.

relatively inconsequential. The technical descriptions that follow suggest that Hugh McAdams, his family members, or men that worked in his shop (like Samuel Bruen and Joshua Greene) could easily have completed the work.

Produced between 1815 and 1825, gamecock corner cupboards have Cove cornices, upper recessed panel doors, waist beveled molding, and lower paneled doors (figures 46, 47, & 48). Like the McAdams group, doors are thin and mortise-framed. Still, other gamecock cupboards have upper eight-light doors, broken pediments, and three waist drawers, two of which are faux drawers (figure 48). Feet and aprons are often replacements.

Scribe-lines on the lightwood inlay were executed *after* the pieces were adhered to the larger case (figure 59).²⁹ In terms of craftsmanship, this does not immediately denote a cabinetmaker from outside the McAdams shop tradition; rather, it could signify a mistake, later design choice, or rushed work. Upper paneled doors have central inlaid bird framed by oval stringing (figure 60). Lower paneled doors have central inlaid diamond or bird framed by astragal or oval stringing (figure 61).

²⁹ “East Tennessee Gamecock Corner Cupboard,” Object File S-4382, prepared by Frank L. Horton, Mary Clay McClinton, and Brad L. Rauschenberg, c. 1975, GRC MESDA.; Furniture examiners noted post-installation scribe lines.

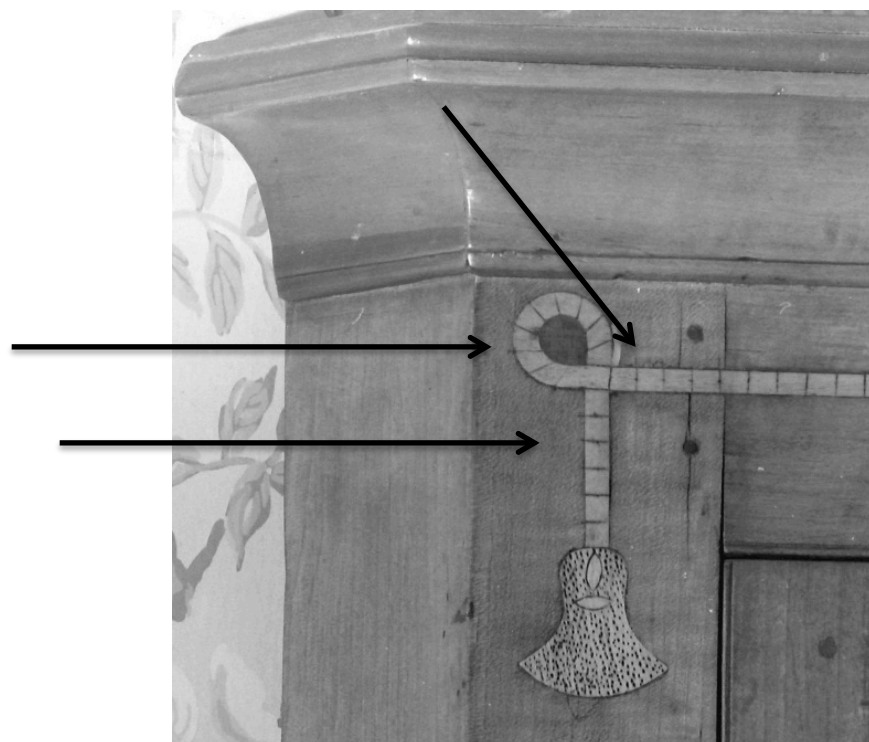


Figure 61: MESDA Object File S_4382, overcut scribe lines



Figure 62: MESDA Object File S_7380, upper door stringing and gamecock



Figure 63: MESDA Object File S_2648 lower door stringing and diamond

One corner cupboard has the upper eight light doors and waist drawers of the Washington County group and, simultaneously, the gamecock motif on lower paneled doors framed by astragal stringing (figure 64). The placement of the vine and berry across the cornice is the same as other rope and tassel motifs (figure 65); however, the “rope” in this case is vine and berry that frames the upper eight-light doors with floral “tassels.” Decorative Arts Scholars Wendy Cooper and Lisa Minardi trace the origins of over 125 examples of line and berry inlay, created by compass and on multiple forms that pre-date the American

Revolution.³⁰ These authors agree that Welsh Quakers probably brought the tradition to America.

Decorative Arts Scholars Wendy Cooper and Lisa Minardi trace the origins of over 125 examples of line and berry inlay, created by compass, on multiple forms that pre-date the American Revolution.³¹ These authors agree that Welsh Quakers probably brought the tradition to America. “Three tightly clustered berries” distinguish the Pennsylvania line and berry group.³² In Tennessee, single or double “berries” are dispersed along the line (figure 65), but Pennsylvania examples boast “three tightly clustered berries.”³³ The floral tassel, gamecock motif, and vine and berry inlay illustrate how many different regional inspirations were applied to Nolichucky River Valley Decorative Arts.

³⁰ Wendy A. Cooper and Lisa Minardi, *Paint, Pattern & People: Furniture of Southeastern Pennsylvania, 1725-1850* (Winterthur, DE: Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, 2011), 70.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., 71.

³³ Ibid.



Figure 64: MESDA Object File S_2383, full front



Figure 65: MESDA Object File S_2383, cornice line and berry

A final, highly embellished corner cupboard descended in the Dykes family of Hawkins County, Tennessee (figure 48). The form has a broken scroll pediment, upper eight-light doors, double waist molding frames three waist

drawers (central working drawer flanked by two faux drawers), with lower recessed panel doors, and the original molded base. Previous owners made changes to the case form, sawed the piece in half, and lowered the cornice.

Inlaid motifs include three sets of rope and tassels: one chevron pattern rope across the cornice terminates on the stile in the uppermost light with scribed tassels; and, the other two barber pole ropes are inlaid directly onto the door rails while the scribed tassels descend into the second-light (figure 66). The chevron rope is made of two barber pole ropes inverted against one another to create the chevron pattern. The drawer fronts have four quarter fans each and the lower recessed panel doors have central inlaid “bird of prey” framed by tricolor squared “rope.”



Figure 66: MESDA Object File S_13028, triple rope detail

Corner cupboards embody the most iconic form for the rope and tassel, but other forms also boast the polychromatic inlay. Like corner cupboards, desks also served as repositories of items important to families. Neither of the two desk examples within the group, have ropes or tassels. Instead, inlay motifs link the two desks to the wider rope and tassel group.

The “profile” desk (1808), named for its prominent inlaid bust on its interior, is on display at The Winterthur Museum, Gardens, and Library (figure 50). Attributed variously to Virginia, Pennsylvania, and, most recently, Tennessee, this desk represents the shared stylistic and construction influences of the Great Wagon Road. While the exuberant inlay could suggest Winchester, Virginia, origins, a leading specialist again describes the case construction as “primitive.”³⁴ Joe Kindig, Senior, who was a nationally recognized collector purchased the profile desk in Wytheville, Virginia, and later sold it to Du Pont for his growing collection at Winterthur.³⁵

In terms of construction, this desk is made of American walnut and tulip poplar. It is slant-front with five graduated drawers, chamfered corners, and exposed dovetails. Slant-front doors open to reveal three-bay interior with four valanced pigeon holes over four drawers on either side of the prospect door. Secret document drawers are hidden above and below the prospect

³⁴ Wallace Gusler, “The Furniture of Winchester, Virginia,” *American Furniture*, Luke Beckerdite ed., (Milwaukee, WI: Chipstone Foundation, 1997), 262.

³⁵ Ron Fuchs, “Winterthur Object Report, 12/05/88,” “Inlaid Profile Desk,” Object File 1957.1099, prepared c. 1957, Winterthur Museum Collection.

compartment (figure 67 & 68). The interior arrangement of the desk – a valance made of one piece of wood scribed to resemble an astragal frame per pigeonhole, rests above two small drawers above one larger document drawer. Only one original foot survives.³⁶ All brass pulls on the three large graduated drawers are three different replacement sets of pulls (figure 69).



Figure 67: Winterthur Museum Acc. 1957.1099, prospect door detail

³⁶ Left Front Foot, "Wallace Gusler reports desk condition: Memo from Nancy Evans to Nancy Richards 3/2/73," Object File 1957.1099, Winterthur Museum Collection.



Figure 68: Winterthur Museum Acc. 1957.1099, lower hidden drawer

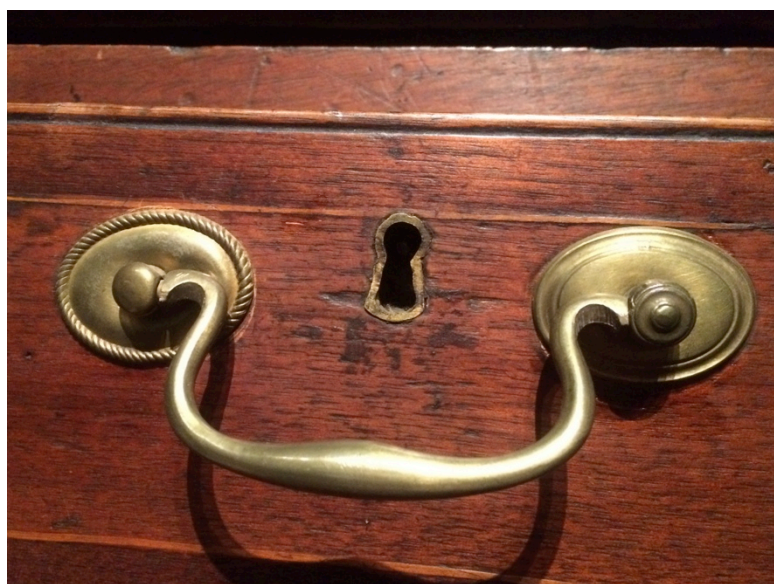


Figure 69: Winterthur Museum Acc. 1957.1099, replacement mismatched hardware

An inlaid eagle on the exterior Winterthur slant-front is particularly significant in the early decades of the Republic (figure 35). National pride surged after the American Revolution and, again, when the United States defeated

Britain in the War of 1812. The eagle represented the majestic native bird heralded as the national symbol of America. Stars surrounding the eagle correspond to the (then) 17 states in the American union and on the flag. Remnants of natural dyes are still vibrant all over the piece, including the eagle.

The interior prospect door boasts a focal inlaid motif (figure 70), a silhouette of a man, framed by dyed inlay, stars, and the words: Liberty 1808. Thanks to the 17 stars on the fallboard, it has been suggested that the silhouette is that of James Madison. Madison was a framer of the Constitution and fourth president of the United States during which time there were, significantly, 17 states in the union.

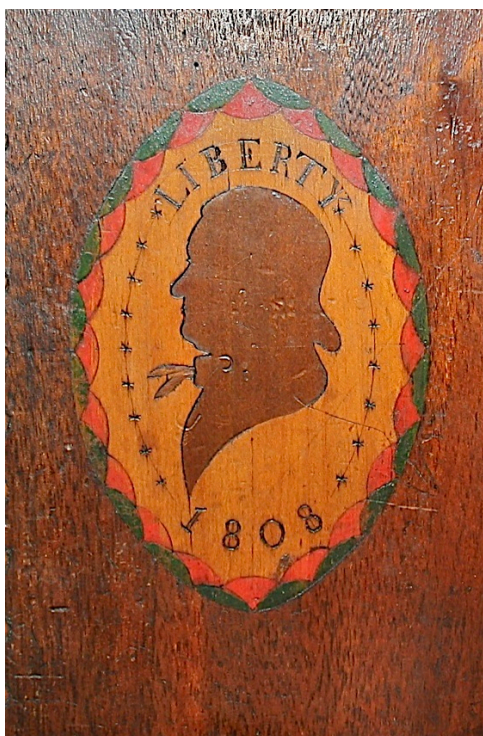


Figure 70: Winterthur Museum Acc. 1957.1099, inlaid profile

During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, when accomplishment and individualism were hallmarks of the new Republic, silhouettes were a popular art form. Silhouettes were fashionable for their durability and affordability. Joseph Sansom, for instance, traveled Britain and North America between 1790 and 1800 recording profiles of both illustrious and less well-known individuals.³⁷ Pictured below, (figure 71) is Sansom's silhouette of James Madison. When compared against the inlaid profile there are visible consistencies in dress; however, the only other defining feature, the nose, slopes upward in Sansom's work versus the downward slope of the inlaid version. Differences of material (paper and ink versus wood and lightwood inlay) may account for the disparities.

³⁷ Joseph Sansom, *Silhouette Album Collection, 1790-1800*, Document 52, Vol. 1, The Winterthur Library Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera.

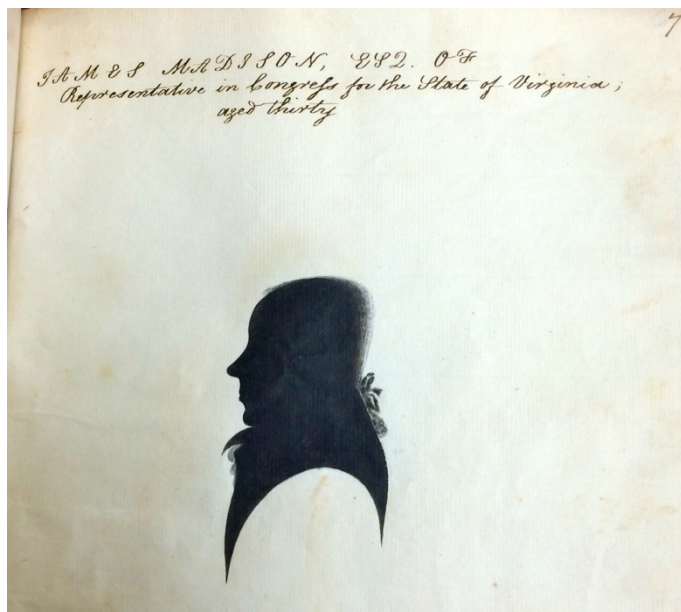


Figure 71: Winterthur Library Joseph Sansom Silhouette Album Collection, "James Madison Silhouette" by Joseph Samson

Another possibility arose from the documented fact that Robert McAdams purchased, from Hugh's estate, a profile machine. Such a machine was used to trace the silhouette of a sitter and it is a possibility that the inlaid profile represents the original owner of the desk. In all likelihood the "profile" desk originated from the McAdams cabinetmaking shop. The varied stylistic influences illustrate how the "cultural palette" of the rope and tassel group communicated ideas within and beyond Nolichucky River Valley.

The "Noe" desk is part of the Noe Collection, a gift of Bob and Norma Noe of Lancaster, Kentucky and is currently housed at The Speed Art Museum in Louisville, Kentucky (figure 72). The journey of the "Noe" desk from Tennessee into Noe ownership remains a mystery. The primary provenance link is an interior

signature (figure 73), “Josiah Thompson.” Thompson was probably an early owner of the Noe desk. By 1870, Thompson lived along the same tributary of the Nolichucky, Big Limestone Creek, as Hugh McAdams.³⁸

It is slant-front with five graduated drawers and chamfered corners. The desk’s slant-board is devoid of inlay; however, the drawers have inlaid fluted quarter fans with rectangular stringing. Canted lamb’s tongue stiles boast s-curve ribbon that extend approximately a third of the stile’s length. The upper third of the stile has two insets, enclosed diamonds that reference quatrefoils on other pieces (figure 74). The interior composition includes three pigeonholes over three drawers on either side of the prospect door. Document boxes frame the central inlaid prospect door(s) on either side. Additionally, secret document drawers are hidden below the prospect compartment. While not uncommon, such hidden chambers offered owners space to stow important files. Documents of the original owners have not been found inside the furniture; however, the spaces may have contained, at one time, deeds or receipts.

³⁸ United States Bureau of the Census entry “Josiah Thompson,” *1870 Population Census*.; See also references to Thompson property line along Big Limestone Creek in Washington County, Tennessee (February 1883) Deed Book 49 page 318.



Figure 72: The Speed Museum of Art "Noe Desk" Acc. 2011.9.66, full front open



Figure 73: The Speed Museum of Art "Noe Desk" Acc. 2011.9.66, signature

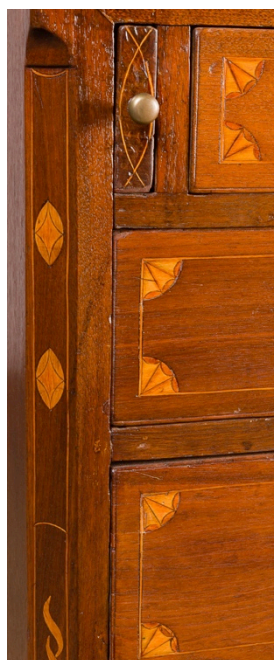


Figure 74: The Speed Museum of Art "Noe Desk" Acc. 2011.9.66, stile

Sideboards appear as interior space usage became increasingly prescribed. Once the dining room no longer also serves primarily as the family workspace, sideboards offer both display and storage space for prized dining wares. Having only been invented in the 1770s, the sideboard quickly became a pronouncement of class for wealthy owners and appears in the backcountry by 1800.³⁹ The sideboard (figure 52) was sold at auction in the 1980s from Trace Tavern Antiques in Nashville, Tennessee.⁴⁰

Recently rediscovered in Winterthur's Decorative Arts Photograph Collection (DAPC) is a singular form (to-date) within the group, the "Trace"

³⁹ David Jaffee, *A New Nation of Goods: The Material Culture of Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 115.

⁴⁰ Trace Sideboard, "Unknown Tennessee Makers Folder," Item 81.1482 *Winterthur Decorative Arts Photographic Collection* (DAPC).

sideboard (1800-1825). Until 2015, the current owner of the sideboard remained anonymous, thus it was referred to by the name of the auction house that sold it. Subsequently, the piece has been located in a private Nashville collection.⁴¹ The sideboard has a shaped top and three-bays rest on six tapered legs. The central bay has a thin drawer over a deeper drawer. Each of the side bays has an open space over three stacked drawers, all of the same size. The side bays may have, at one time, had doors that closed to cover the stacked drawers; yet, there is no evidence of the various compartments ever having locks.⁴²

Each of the six legs has ankle inlaid banding. Placement of inlay on the front four legs indicates that the sideboard was designed to be located against the wall. The front four legs have scribed inlaid rope suspended from the curved end to the stiles banding. The curved banding serves to frame the flared tassel ends that appear on front elevations, and side elevations resulting in 8 separate tassels suspended from looped scribed parallelogram rope. So too are the pinwheels and abstract quatrefoils repeated on multiple sides of the legs to be viewed from multiple perspectives (figure 75). A length of rope connects the two most forward legs and terminates on each end with looped rope suspending tassels.

⁴¹ Private dealer and collector, Anne McPherson, to Amber Clawson, "Trace Sideboard," February 6, 2015.

⁴² Trace Sideboard, "Unknown Tennessee Makers Folder," Item 81.1482 *Winterthur Decorative Arts Photographic Collection* (DAPC).

Above the tassels, a variant of the group's quatrefoil presents itself with two points in an enclosed pinched oval that is shaded with scribed diagonal lines. Similarly, above the abstract quatrefoils scribed pinwheels resemble those on the MESDA piece in terms of six scribed portions, but differ in that shaded portions are scribed in a crisscross manner rather than dyed. This abundance of motifs is further set off by the lightwood astragal banding of the top drawer. Although the darker center wood is cracked today, the two colors offset one another dramatically. The current owner states that green dye was present, before the piece was refinished in the last decades of the twentieth century; however, no trace of color survives today.⁴³

⁴³ Private dealer and collector, Anne McPherson, to Amber Clawson, "Trace" Sideboard," February 6, 2015.



Figure 75: Private Collection "Trace Sideboard" left compartment, Image Courtesy Anne McPherson

Private collector, Anne McPherson, recovered chests of drawers, or bureaus, associated with the rope and tassel in the 1980s. Inlaid motifs tie the two chests to the group.⁴⁴ Like Winterthur's "profile desk," Chest 1 (figure 53) came out of a picker's shop in Virginia. McPherson purchased Chest 2 (figure 54) from a dealer who had discovered it in Missouri. Like their neighbors, generations of McAdams moved west after 1830 and may have carried the rope and tassel tradition with them. (More on westward migration of the McAdams in the next chapter.)

⁴⁴ "Correspondence and Images from Anne McPherson, 1988," Object File, 1957.1099, Winterthur Museum Collection.



Figure 76: Anne McPherson Private Collection Chest of Drawers 1, full front

Chest 1 (figure 76) has two half-size drawers over three full-breadth drawers, which lock. Inlay on the front of Chest 1 includes four quarter fans per drawer. Canted, lamb's tongue stiles have floating vine inlay above what could be either an abstract pinwheel or an abstract quatrefoil, above a rope (figure 77). The barber pole rope is situated at the bottom of each stile, as if it is climbing the side of the chest (figure 78).



Figure 77: Anne McPherson Collection Chest 1, upper stile detail



Figure 78: Anne McPherson Private Collection Chest 2, lower stile detail

Like Chest 1, Chest 2 (figure 54) has two half-size drawers over three full-breadth drawers, which lock. Paint remnants on Chest 2, however, are incredibly

vibrant. Each drawer boasts four quarter fans, one for each corner. The canted, lamb's tongue stiles have abstract quatrefoils, scribed fish, above urns with vines that appear to climb the stile (figure 79, R). The fish face upward and look as if they are "swimming" upstream (figure 79, L). This is a particularly imaginative interpretation for a land so dependent on waterways like the tributaries of the Nolichucky River.



Figure 79: Anne McPherson Collection Chest 2, upper stile (L) and lower stile (R)

This in-depth analysis of rope and tassel furniture suggests that re-conceptualizing research questions can help historians, decorative arts scholars, museum professionals, and public historians to more fully realize the significance of our past. In McAdams' case, decorative arts scholars in the twentieth century focused on *what makes the rope and tassel pieces different from one another?* This perspective emphasizes the minutia of inlay execution and craftsmen signatures (or their absence). Wider themes and the consequence of period

symbolism can better be discerned by *what do the rope and tassel pieces have in common?* The people who commissioned, produced, and lived with rope and tassel furniture shared social and political histories in an environment that superseded municipal boundaries.

From Baltimore to the Nolichucky River Valley and on to the Deep South in Alabama, agrarian and neoclassical motifs appealed to Americans in the early Republic. The rope and tassel corner cupboard on display at the East Tennessee History Center descended through the Chambers and Phillips families of Sevier County, Tennessee (figure 80). Probably produced during the 1850s, this piece is attributed to John Catlett (1783-1862) by family members.⁴⁵ It has a broken swan's neck pediment with central finial, upper eight light arched doors framed by a barber pole pattern right angle rope that descends to the second light with a tassel. Compass stars are the only other inlays on the cupboard (figure 81). The cupboard has waist molding, lower recessed panel doors, and replacement ogee bracket feet.

⁴⁵ Anonymous Collector of East Tennessee History Center 2008.28.1 to Amber Clawson, "Rope and Tassel Furniture at ETHS," June 27, 2014.



Figure 80: East Tennessee History Center 2008.28.1, full front, Image Courtesy the Middle Tennessee State University Center for Historic Preservation

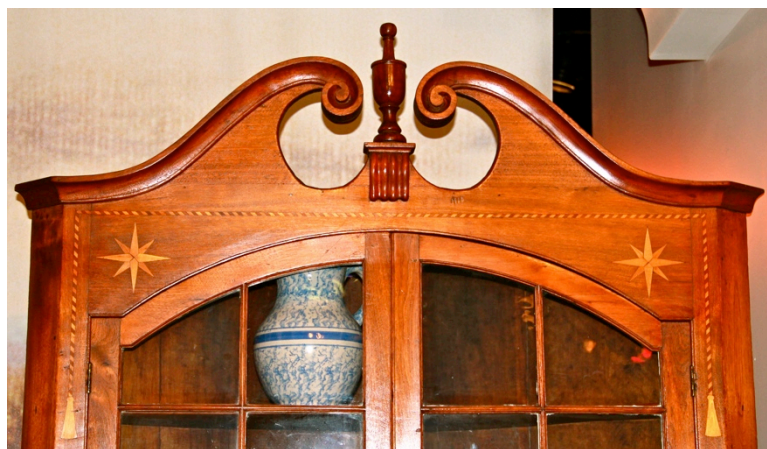


Figure 81: East Tennessee History Center 2008.28.1, full front, Image Courtesy the Middle Tennessee State University Center for Historic Preservation

The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation (CWF) acquired a chest of drawers in 2013, the first rope and tassel diminutive chest recognized by the decorative

arts field (figure 82). This chest came out of a South Carolina family in the twentieth century. Evidence of overcut marks and misalignments suggest the cabinetmaker was not as familiar with scribing techniques as were the McAdams. Further, CWF dated this chest in the 1830s, five to ten years later than the Washington County rope and tassel pieces already discussed. Colonial Williamsburg Furniture Curator Tara Chicirda states that the diminutive dimensions of the chest probably suggest it was a specific commission and, “given that, the inlay may have been a request of a patron who was familiar with the rope and tassel motif on the earlier cupboards.”⁴⁶

The CWF example has three graduated drawers and an intact gracefully S-curved skirt. The chest has a barber pole pattern rope made of individual pieces. Additionally, the barber pole pattern is continued as banding just above the skirt. The tassel appears to be a single inlay piece scribed with vertical lines to suggest the tassel’s fringe (figure 83). Although the piece was refinished at some point, there is no evidence of dyes.

A primary difference between this chest and the other McAdams pieces is the materials; rather than cherry/walnut and poplar/pine, this diminutive chest is made of basswood. Decorative arts traditions suggest basswood is the exclusive material of furniture in northern states like Vermont; yet, dendrology sources suggest that basswood was present in southern states and native to

⁴⁶ CWF Curator of Furniture Tara Chicirda to Amber Clawson, “Re: 2013-60, Inlaid Diminutive Chest,” November 4, 2013.

Appalachian Tennessee (figure 84).⁴⁷ Therefore, it could have been made anywhere from Tennessee to Vermont. The CWF chest offers an example of work inspired by McAdams' work, but probably created by a different shop tradition.



Figure 82: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Acc. 2013-60, full front

⁴⁷ Guy Nelson, and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Tree Guide "American Basswood," *Plant Guide* http://www.plants.usda.gov/plantguide/pdf/cs_tiama.pdf (accessed 12/1/13).



Figure 83: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation 2013-60, stile detail

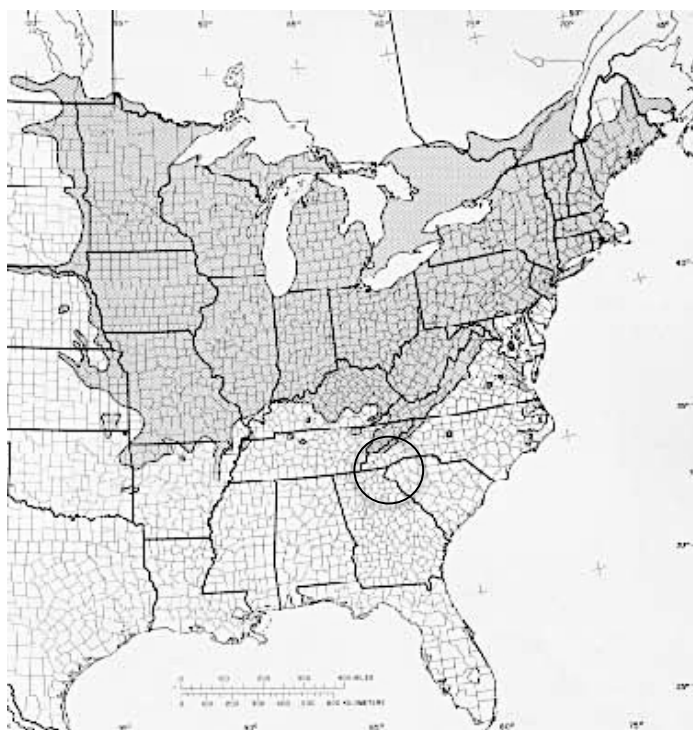


Figure 84: American Basswood Native Range, Image Courtesy United States Forest Service

Other interpretations of the rope and tassel appear in the Deep South. The maker of this corner cupboard documented by the Classical Institute of the South (figure 85), for instance, married Kinnard's medallions (figure 26), with draped cords, and vines that descend from the cornice as tassels (figure 86).⁴⁸ Provenance and chronology eliminate this piece from the primary rope and tassel group with which this study is concerned. The corner cupboard was made for Thomas McCrary and remained in his family for four generations.⁴⁹ The piece is of note to this study, however, because it boasts clear design inspirations from East Tennessee.

⁴⁸ The Classical Institute of the South (CIS) conducts field work each summer to gather and share information about the material culture history of the Gulf South.

⁴⁹ Lynn Jones, "The McCrary-Thomas House," *Historic Huntsville Quarterly of Local Architecture and Preservation* Vol. 32 (Spring/Summer 2006), 57).



Figure 85: Classical Institute of the South 2013_1051, full front



Figure 86: Classical Institute of the South 2013_1051, cornice detail

The last corner cupboard discussed in this chapter (figure 87), part of the collection of Tennessee State Museum, represents how popular “Americana”

antiques were especially during the craftsman revival of the early twentieth century. While the square rope and tassel appears to be original (figure 88), the inlaid pateraes (figure 89) and mass produced inlay pieces on the lower recessed doors, were likely added later in hopes of increasing its worth on the market.⁵⁰ More than other extant rope and tassel corner cupboards, this piece has been reworked extensively. Museum curator and restorer Mike Bell found evidence of electric joiner marks, up to three types of replacement secondary woods, and lower doors that do not match the casework.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Tennessee State Museum Curator of Furniture Mike Bell to Amber Clawson, "Regarding Rope and Tassel Corner Cupboard Acc. A14.G2.S3," February 10, 2015.

⁵¹ Tennessee State Museum Acc. A14.G2.S3, Catalogue Entry by Curator of Furniture Mike Bell, 5/22/97.



Figure 87: Tennessee State Museum Acc. A14.G2.S3, full front



Figure 88: Tennessee State Museum Acc. A14.G2.S3, cornice detail



Figure 89: Tennessee State Museum Acc. A14.G2.S3, lower door inlay paterae (L) and quarter fan (R)

Material evidence suggests that the phenomenon of the rope and tassel reflected the region’s ever-evolving cultural identity. Therefore, the question “which rope and tassel group – gamecock or Washington County?” is not relevant and even less useful. Scholars sometimes underestimate backcountry arts and artisans by focusing on the limitations of cabinetmakers, but McAdams’ example highlights an efficient and imaginative craft tradition. Unlike neoclassical swags, within this furniture group inlaid drapery is completely absent in all known examples.

Ultimately, names and brief biographies of makers and consumers are not enough to convey why the rope and tassel became such a popular motif. A question that better serves a diverse constituency is, *what was the maker’s world like?* Through the wider context of place, we begin to understand how lasting

repercussions of the American Revolution generated a radical period of community restructuring and emerging markets. The McAdams, first spurred by utility, later enjoyed prosperity garnered as a result of their willingness to experiment with inlaid motifs. Just as the McAdams were not the first to inlay rope and tassels onto furniture, neither were Hugh and Robert the last to do so. The craft tradition of the rope and tassel is one of many examples of backcountry entrepreneurship that formed a more permanent landscape in the Republic.

CHAPTER V

“The Rope and Tassel in Museum Exhibits”

Between 1790 and 1814, the frontiers of America changed dramatically. During that time, Hugh and Isabella McAdams witnessed the emergence of an American identity. In search of security, diverse individuals navigated changing social norms in Euro America defined by the tension between individual autonomy and central authority. Largely, this tension resulted from a reordered monarchical world; for without a monarch, where did rights derive? Thomas Paine answered,

“And as this frequent interchange will establish a common interest with every part of the community, they will mutually and naturally support each other, and on this (not on the unmeaning name of king) depends the *strength of government, and the happiness of the governed.*”¹

According to intellectual historian Peter Wood, ideas like those of Paine, that people were capable of ordering their own reality were the nexus of the American Revolution’s radicalism.² Cultural historian David Hackett Fischer, too,

¹ Thomas Paine, and Robert Bell, *Common sense addressed to the inhabitants of America, on the following interesting subjects. I. Of the origin and design of government in general, with concise remarks on the English Constitution. II. Of monarchy and hereditary succession. III. Thoughts on the present state of American affairs. IV. Of the present ability of America, with some miscellaneous reflections. Written by an Englishman* (Philadelphia: R. Bell, 1776), 5.

² Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1992), 169.

enumerated post-Revolutionary governmental “discoveries” that without British structure there existed the capacity of human beings for order and, secondly, that people could organize a society based on liberty.³

Progressive revelations concerning self-determination in the wake of the American Revolution were further shaped in the inland south by political and economic struggles for autonomy. Decades of negotiation and violent confrontation over land ownership tied regional freedomways to the mountainous landscape. Ideas, designs, and goods moved amongst people within and beyond the Nolichucky River Valley. The nineteenth-century world of Hugh and Isabella McAdams, as evidenced by Hugh McAdams’ estate sale, impart the work and material lives of artisanal families in the backcountry. The McAdams family of cabinetmakers made conscious stylistic selections that expressed their identities as free men of the “backcountry,” veterans, and family men through the rope and tassel cultural palette. They lived in the Nolichucky River Valley of Tennessee, a world of cultural fusion exemplified in their finest work.

Building on the last four chapters, this final chapter addresses how multidisciplinary thinking can create more effective museum interpretation. Social history paired with decorative arts analysis offers multiple audiences’ greater context. The lives of Hugh McAdams’ extended family in the decades following his death reveal further possible craftsmen who continued cabinetmaking farther west and well into the nineteenth century.

³ David Hackett Fischer, *Washington’s Crossing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 5.

After the 1814 death of Hugh McAdams, the family moved forward with their own lives. As a woman of the frontier, Isabella had few illusions about widowhood. In fact, when she purchased furniture from Hugh's estate in 1815 she may have already had a new home in mind; less than two months later Isabella married Joseph Hale on Christmas Eve.⁴ Isabella's four children (all under the age of 10) joined Hale's and the couple subsequently had Louisa Hale (1817-1850).⁵

Isabella's in-laws, Robert and John McAdams, pursued different paths. Robert remained in the Nolichucky River Valley and continued his work until at least 1822, indicated by coffin sales.⁶ He died a year later in 1823. Ultimately, John outlived his two younger siblings and moved west. He could be the same John McAdams recorded in Middle Tennessee's Monroe County 1840 Census.⁷ Although final inheritance issues were not settled for twenty more years, John McAdams figured prominently in the arbitrations. Delayed in part until the

⁴ Washington County, Tennessee, "Joseph Hale to Isabella (Bryson) McAdams Marriage License," *Tennessee State Marriages, 1780-2002* (Dec 24, 1815).

⁵ Susan Clark, "52 Ancestors in 52 Weeks: Isabella Bryson McAdams Hale (1776-1855)" *Nolichucky Roots Blog* <http://nolichuckyroots.blogspot.com/2014/02/52-ancestors-in-52-weeks-isabella.html> (accessed June 2014).

⁶ Vera E. Shell, "Richard Roberts Funeral Expenses," *Washington County, Tennessee Settlements of Estates, 1790-1841* Vol. 00 (Nashville, TN: Byron Sistler & Associates, 1999), 29.

⁷ U.S. Census Bureau, "Monroe County, Tennessee, Population Schedule: John McAdams" (*Federal Census, 1840*), 27.

McAdams children came of age, suits and countersuits further suggest Joseph Hale (their stepfather) was reluctant to part with the landed inheritance.⁸

It is unclear who used the land or the McAdams family home between Hugh's death in 1814 and the inheritors' 1832 suit against Hale. Thomas Brabson, early owner of the floral rope and tassel corner cupboard (figure 43), may have occupied part of the McAdams family tract. Court records reveal that, prior to his death, Hugh McAdams entered negotiations to sell a parcel of land along Big Limestone Creek to Brabson. The suit argued that the said purchase progressed beyond initial negotiations and that Brabson paid McAdams before he died.⁹ Until 1822, Brabson, secure in his purchase, was unaware that Hugh did not fully own the land he sold. In fact, the title never transferred from John McAdams to his brother, Hugh. According to the courts, John McAdams sold 63.5 acres to his younger brother Hugh in 1813, but shortly thereafter, "departed to parts unknown before the execution of title."¹⁰

When Hugh's children reached their majority in 1832, they recognized the fruitful real estate on Big Limestone Creek and took issues of inheritance to the courts. Their uncle, John, a "nonresident" of Washington County, Tennessee, returned to the region and instigated proceedings on behalf of Hugh's (then

⁸ "John McAdams v Joseph Hale" 1832, Washington County, Tennessee.

⁹ Washington County Court, "Brabson Land Certificate," Deed Book 17 Page 321 June 20, 1822.

¹⁰ Washington County Court, Thomas Brabson vs. John McAdams and the heirs of Hugh McAdams by their Guardian Joseph Hail (sic) Senior. (September Term, 1822).

grown) children against their mother and stepfather.¹¹ Subsequently, Hale turned over Hugh's property to his four stepchildren. Samuel Bryson McAdams then bought out his siblings – Margaret; his married sisters, Mary and Jane, and his brother, successful businessman, Thomas Cunningham.¹²

The children of Hugh and Isabella McAdams came of age when consumers increasingly went to urban centers or ordered large casework by mail.¹³ Local furniture commissions in rural areas decreased as a result. Later evidence of McAdams and their in-laws demonstrates that regional cabinetmaking did not come to a complete halt. In her will, Hugh's daughter, Margaret McAdams, requested that her brother Thomas Cunningham, "when it may Suit his convenience he make two good bureaus and give one to Cynthea and Mary Stephenson."¹⁴ Cynthea Stephenson McAdams was Thomas Cunningham McAdams' wife, Margaret's sister-in-law. "When it may suit his convenience," suggests that cabinetmaking and carpentry for Thomas was a secondary endeavor. Thomas Cunningham McAdams, eldest son of Hugh, lived at Locust Mount in Washington County, Tennessee. He served as the

¹¹ "John McAdams v Joseph Hale" 1832, Washington County, Tennessee.

¹² Washington County Court, "Deed" (November 11, 1833), Deed book 19 Page 499.

¹³ See Barry Kessler "Of Workshops and Warerooms: The Economic and Geographic Transformation of Furniture Making in Chester County, PA 1780-1850," (master's thesis, University of Delaware, 1987).; Wherein he describes the transition in the first four decades of the nineteenth century to centralized furniture shopping.

¹⁴ Washington County, Tennessee, "Margaret McAdams Will," *Washington County Tennessee Will Book: Volume One, 1779-1858*, June 19, 1832, 207.

community's postmaster and worked as a farmer.¹⁵ On the eve of Civil War, Thomas C. McAdams and his wife, Cynthea Stephenson, owned at least two slaves.¹⁶

Thomas lived in the house pictured below by 1835 and possibly earlier (figure 90).¹⁷ Clearly architectural details are difficult to discern from the image; however, the centered gable suggests this house is also a Federal style home. Greater clarity regarding the columns and exterior crowning may demonstrate the home's place in evolving styles of the period. Thomas and Cynthea raised their 11 children here (see Appendix B for a complete list).



Figure 90: Nolichucky Roots Blog, home of Thomas Cunningham McAdams

¹⁵ United States Bureau of the Census entry "Thomas C. McAdams," 1870 *Population Census* Washington County, Tennessee.

¹⁶ U.S. Census Bureau. "Slave Schedule: Washington County, Tennessee." *Federal Census*, 1860.

¹⁷ Susan Clark, "Wordless Wednesday: The Old Homeplace," *Nolichucky Roots Blog* March 24, 2010

<http://nolichuckyroots.blogspot.com/search?q=thomas+mcadams> (accessed August 31, 2012).

Thomas was only eight years old when his father passed. Does his sister's bureau request (one of her last appeals in life) suggest that he continued the rope and tassel tradition? Thomas was heavily engaged in agricultural pursuits and public life as a postmaster and clerk of court. It is probable that, as Jaffee suggests, increased manufacturing coupled with higher rates of cabinetmaking itinerancy put shops like that of Hugh and Robert McAdams, had they lived into the 1830s, out of competitive business. Therefore, Thomas' carpentry skills were plausibly gained more for household uses and farm repairs. Family oral history also suggests that one of Hugh's grandsons, Samuel Bryson McAdams (1845-1900), son of Thomas Cunningham, was also a cabinetmaker in the latter half of the nineteenth century.¹⁸

Samuel Bryson McAdams, Hugh's other son (not to be confused with Hugh's grandson discussed above), also remained in Washington County as an adult. Bryson married Anne Duncan and the couple had two children, Hugh S. McAdams (1832-unknown) and Joseph Duncan McAdams (1835-after 1870). Samuel Bryson's brother-in-law, Samuel C. Duncan (elder brother of Samuel B. McAdams wife, Anne), was also a carpenter.¹⁹ In 1840, the census listed his occupation as one of "manufacture" and he owned two enslaved people.²⁰ By

¹⁸ McAdams descendant Rob Johnson to Amber Clawson, "McAdams Genealogy: Descendants of Thomas McAdams of Washington County (Big Limestone) TN," July 10, 2014.

¹⁹ MESDA Craftsman Database File 80970, "Samuel Dunkin in Greene County, Tennessee."

²⁰ U.S. Census Bureau. "Washington County, Tennessee." *Federal Census*, 1840.

1850, the census listed his occupation as “merchant.”²¹ Does the transition from an occupation of production to one of mercantilism mean that Samuel continued cabinetmaking until mechanized furniture production generated more competition?

The most conclusive familial cabinetmaking link of the McAdams tradition is William Slaughter McAdams (1809-1842), son of Robert McAdams. A later history of western migrants in the late nineteenth century detailed the life of William’s son, Robert Thompson McAdams. The work briefly describes Robert’s childhood in Washington County, Tennessee, where William worked as a cabinetmaker and maintained a small farm.²²

For a time, did Samuel Bryson McAdams work with his two nephews (Samuel Bryson McAdams and William Slaughter McAdams) in addition to his brother-in-law (another Samuel) Duncan? If so, did they work together on Big Limestone Creek? After all, of Hugh and Isabella’s five children, Samuel Bryson acquired the familial parcel in 1832 (as previously mentioned).

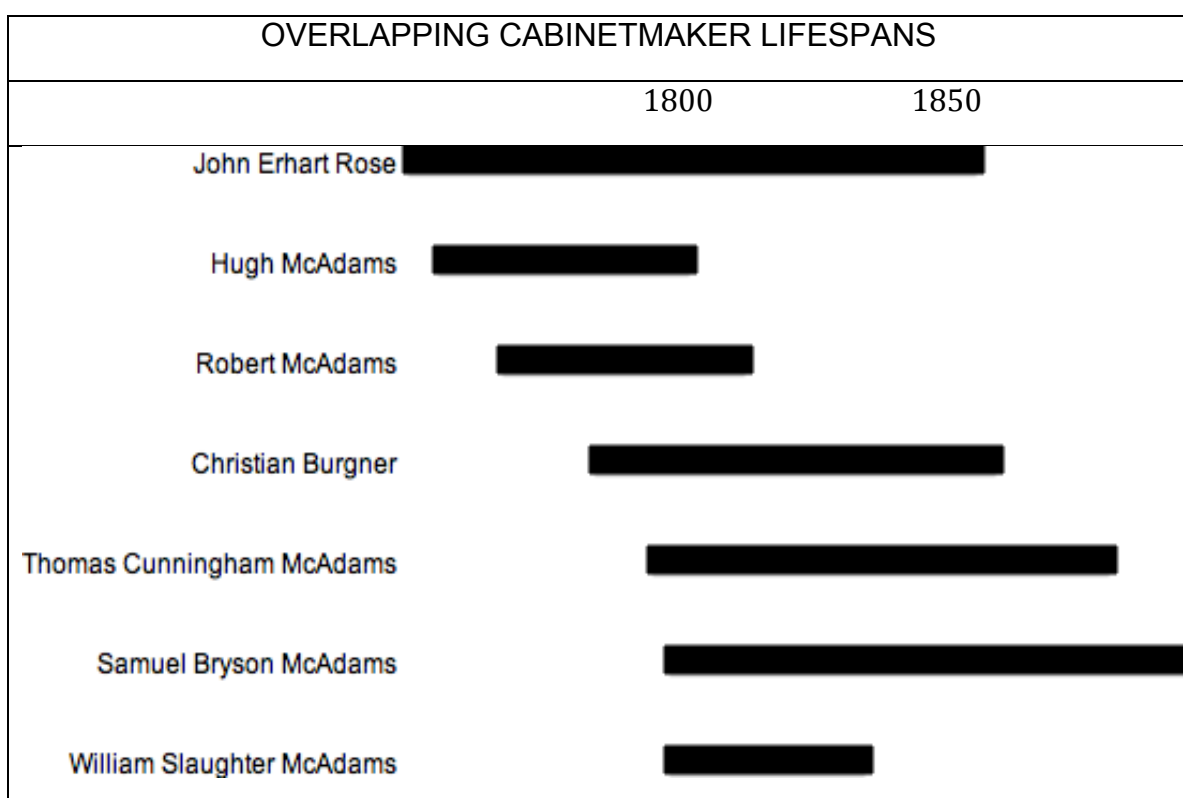
While extant furniture and documents do not disclose the existence of a shop run by the second and third generations of McAdams, it is clear that the nature of backcountry cabinetmaking changed in the 1830s and 1840s. These subsequent McAdams woodworkers shared the world of recognized backcountry cabinetmakers John Earhart Rose and John Christian Burgner. Decorative Arts

²¹ U.S. Census Bureau. “Washington County, Tennessee.” *Federal Census*, 1850.

²² Lewis Publishing Company. *A Biographical and Genealogical History of Southeastern Nebraska*. Chicago: Lewis Pub. Co, 1904.

Scholar Michael Ettema argues that historians in the early twentieth century overestimated the impact of technological inventions on the antebellum furniture making industry.²³ While new technologies were widely available, handcrafts like those of McAdams, Rose, and Burgner persisted.

Table 2: NOLICHUCKY RIVER VALLEY CABINETMAKER LIFESPANS



Subsequent McAdams shared markets and societies with Burgner and Rose more than with their Tennessee predecessors, Hugh and Robert McAdams who lived relatively short lives, 42 and 43 years respectively. Table 2 illustrates

²³ Michael John Ettema, "Technological Innovation and Design Economics in American Furniture Manufacture of the Nineteenth Century" (master's thesis, University of Delaware, 1981), 2.

the overlapping lifespans of known McAdams cabinetmakers and the well-documented lives of Rose and Burgner. Neither the family traditions of Rose nor Burgner were discussed during the rope and tassel attribution explanation because the lives and works of each have been documented extensively.²⁴

Rose (1767-1860) was most noted for his carving skills, particularly the carved classical urns that bedeck his most elaborate furniture forms. Decades of research and regional collaboration revealed Rose's backcountry itinerancy. Throughout his life, he moved from state to state in search of commissions. One signed piece, made in Tennessee's native cherry, survives; however, most of his work is imported mahogany.²⁵ Nevertheless, his documented furniture was produced much later than the McAdams and well into the 1850s, a second Rococo period.

John Christian Burgner (1797-1863) moved to Greene County, Tennessee, from Burke County, North Carolina, some time between 1830 and 1840.²⁶ John is one of three brothers who perpetuated a carpentry tradition in

²⁴ See Michael W. Bell and Betsy K. White, "First Rate & Fashionable: The Furniture of John Erhart Rose," *Magazine Antiques*, May 2008.; White, Betsy. *A Century of Furniture: The Rose Cabinet Shops*. Abingdon, VA: William King Regional Arts Center, 2008-2009.; John Burgner, transcribed by Daniel Ackerman, "Burgner, John C. Waste Book 1820-1825," MESDA GRC.

²⁵ Bell, et. al., 104.

²⁶ See United States Bureau of the Census entry "John C. Burgner," *1830 Population Census* Burke County, North Carolina.; United States Bureau of the Census entry "John C. Burgner," *1840 Population Census* Greene County, Tennessee.

Greene County, Tennessee.²⁷ Burgner preferred local materials, typically highly figured wood, to create original backsplashes. Historian Bernard Hermann describes the sideboard (figure 91) as “wild,” because of the exaggerated backsplash, its primary feature, on such a “polite” form (sideboard).²⁸ Burgner manipulated the wood to create a dramatic back splash to display in his home for potential customers.



Figure 91: MESDA Acc. 5660.4, full front

Improved communication and transportation channels between 1820 and 1850 changed the nature of many business endeavors nationwide.

Entrepreneurs in East Tennessee rallied for a railroad system to modernize the

²⁷ Daniel Ackerman, “On Wagon Roads, Wilderness Trails, and Mighty Rivers: Crafting an American Identity in the Backcountry South.” MESDA Conference, Knoxville, TN, October 27, 2012.

²⁸ Bernard Hermann, “Toolbox for the Study of Material Culture,” Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts Summer Institute, June 27, 2012.

region's transportation system. Construction of the East Tennessee, Virginia, and Georgia Railway began in 1850 and the Earnst family (introduced in Chapter 1) played a vital role in establishing the Nolichucky River Bridge of 1856.²⁹ Historian of Appalachia David Hsiung explains how centers of power in East Tennessee shifted as a result of the railroad from Jonesborough to Johnson City after the Civil War.³⁰

Anti-slavery sentiments persisted in the Nolichucky River Valley. Possibly the same enslaved man, Moses, who lived briefly with the McAdams was emancipated in 1833.³¹ Subsequently he may have moved westward as a freeman as he disappears from later documentation in East Tennessee. That same year in Washington County, individual owners formally emancipated two other enslaved people, Bet and China.³² The later life of Sarah, discussed in chapter three along with Moses, does not surface in records. By the 1830s, vast changes in American society occurred across the continent.

Visions of Manifest Destiny replaced Jefferson's Republican "empire of liberty," a democratic society defined by political volunteerism and

²⁹ Stoecker and West, "Earnst Farms Historic District: Patterns of Settlement and Agriculture, 1777-1950," Section E Page 11.

³⁰ David C. Hsiung, *Two Worlds in the Tennessee Mountains: Exploring the Origins of Appalachian Stereotypes* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 183.

³¹ Tennessee State Government, Serial 39 Chapter 151, "Washington County Act of Private Emancipation," *Acts of Tennessee, 1796-1850 Regarding Slaves and People of Color*, <http://www.tn.gov/tsla/history/misc/acts33.htm> (accessed February 1, 2015).

³² Ibid.

individualism.³³ Andrew Jackson's vision of a transcontinental America required the acquisition of thousands of western acres. Jackson, the hero of the War of 1812, was a Tennessean. The Indian Removal Act of 1830 ordered the relocation of thousands of Cherokee people west of the Mississippi River.³⁴ Each of the three regions in Tennessee witnessed the relocation as the Cherokee passed through rural and urban communities alike; aboveground remnants of that material world survive today.³⁵ Between 1838 and 1839 thousands died en route to western reservations along what became known as, the Trail of Tears.

With the removal of their Cherokee neighbors, McAdams' friends, family, and customers looked farther west in the 1830s. Ephraim Murray, (original owner of MESDA Acc. 5660) for example, financially backed young explorer G.W. Simpson as early as 1833 to report on lands beyond Tennessee. Upon returning Simpson reported to Murray,

“I have seen all the west from Lake Erie to New Orleans and also from Old VA to the western backcountry of the MS on big Red river. I beleave(sic) I should prefer between the Mississippi rivers [since] the first rate land can be had at government price but it will not be

³³ Alan Taylor, *Liberty Men and Great Proprietors: The Revolutionary Settlement on the Maine Frontier, 1760-1820* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 212.

³⁴ Ben Harris McClary, “Trail of Tears, or Nunna-da-ul-tsun-yi,” *The Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*. C. Van West ed., <https://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entry.php?rec=1394> (accessed October, 2014).

³⁵ This endeavor was co-sponsored by the Middle Tennessee State University Center for Historic Preservation (MTSU CHP) and the National Park Service. Fieldwork conducted by MTSU CHP director C. Van West and historic preservationist Amy Kostine in collaboration with Cherokee nations.

the case long for [illegible] planters from the other states are emigrating to that state very fast.”³⁶

Murray doubtlessly found the report favorable because his son, merchant Ephraim D. Murray II, moved west to the Missouri territory between 1838 and 1839. Murray II wrote his brother Isaac, who remained in Jonesborough, “You acted very wrong by going back to Washington from Monroe, you ought to have come to MO.”³⁷ He further stated that although “E. Tennesseans think MO. is almost out of the world,” he assured Isaac, “we have much better society here than E. T. [East Tennessee] ever afforded.” Finally, Murray II described his fellow migrants as “generally independent industrious and intelligent.”³⁸

Additionally, Robert Thompson McAdams (grandson of brother Robert McAdams), migrated to Nebraska after the death of his father, William Slaughter McAdams. Indeed, Robert Thompson (1834-1911) and his wife, Elenor McNeal McAdams (1810-after 1850) moved west with their five children in 1853 and settled in northwestern Missouri. Although no first-hand account of the migration survives, it is possible that this branch of the family took furniture made by other McAdams’ makers in Tennessee outlined above. Robert Thompson McAdams remained in the small community of Peru, Nebraska, where he became a banker and village councilor after his early financial success as a farmer. His siblings

³⁶ G. W. Simpson to E. D. Murray, July 2, 1833, 5660.2 MESDA Object File.

³⁷ E. D. Murray to Isaac Murray January, 1839, 5660.2 MESDA Object File.

³⁸ Ibid. Note: emphasis in the original document.

scattered farther west to Colorado, Montana, and Iowa as indicated by the following family tree.³⁹

³⁹ Lewis Publishing Company. *A Biographical and Genealogical History of Southeastern Nebraska*. Chicago: Lewis Pub. Co, 1904.

ROBERT MCADAMS FAMILY TREE



Genealogy, local history, and material culture evidence provide researchers glimpses of how people viewed themselves and their world in the past. Issues of identity and competing views of society present clues to better understanding the historical experience. Most public histories, however, explore the implications of these issues for contemporary meanings.⁴⁰ Interdisciplinary scholars also contribute to the public history dialogue concerning identity. For instance, cultural historian Michael Kammen describes the impact of public history on today's national identity in America.⁴¹ In Kammen's article, "Public History and National Identity," he describes the integral role public historians play in mediating modern identity politics and a multicultural national identity. Although not a public historian himself, Kammen was a protégé of historian Bernard Bailyn who sought to define the origins of the American character.⁴²

Professionals in both the fields of public history and decorative arts uncover the histories of people from the past excluded in traditional historiographies. Archeologist John H. Jameson's argument, however, that archaeology is "unique" among scholarly fields for inspiring the public to learn more about history, discounts the potential of objects never buried in the

⁴⁰ See Ann Denkler, *Sustaining Identity, Recapturing Heritage: Exploring Issues of Public History, Tourism, and Race in a Southern Town* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2007).

⁴¹ Michael Kammen, "Public History and National Identity in the United States," *Amerikastudien/American Studies* Vol. 44 No. 4 (1999): 459.

⁴² See Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967).

ground.⁴³ Decorative arts are not only more accessible for many public audiences because of their familiar forms, but also offer increased possibilities for historical interpretation. The McAdams united European designs, a developing American aesthetic, and a “sense of place” in Tennessee to produce the celebrated cultural synthesis that museums now interpret as an integral part of the story of American material culture.⁴⁴

Audiences, be they readers or museum visitors, yearn to understand the historical American experience. Better comprehending historical affairs contextualizes our cultural inheritances, positive and negative as they may be. A leader in museum literature, Graham Black, states museum visitors are motivated by the promise of enjoyment, involvement, *and* understanding.⁴⁵ The tension between public history theory and practice as it relates to the decorative arts, highlights obstacles museums and historic sites face to produce authentic experiences, which challenge myths of the past through object-based and activity-based historical narratives.⁴⁶ Folklorist Henry Glassie’s landscape interpretations reconcile public history practice and theory through artifactual

⁴³ Jameson H. Jameson, Jr., “Epilogue: Archeology as Inspiration” in De Cunzo, Lu Ann and John Jameson eds., *Unlocking the Past: Celebrating Historical Archaeology in North America* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2005), 4.

⁴⁴ Ackerman, 2012.

⁴⁵ See Graham Black, *The Engaging Museum: Developing Museums for Visitor Involvement* (London: Routledge, 2005).

⁴⁶ Meghan O’Brien Backhouse, “Re-enacting the Wars of the Roses: history and identity” in P. Ashton and H. Kean eds., *People and their Pasts: Public History Today* (Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

context that reconstructs the symbolism inherent in the historical subject's world.⁴⁷

Material culture and history scholars alike underutilize rural southern furniture as evidence in analyses of early American landscapes and history. This is due, in part, to the connoisseurship origins of the field of decorative arts and historical works that emphasized myths of American exceptionalism. By the 1970s, scholars of both fields more fully integrated a diverse range of subjects. Only recently, in the last decade of the twentieth century and the first decades of the twenty-first century, backcountry objects (and furniture in particular) appear as legitimate evidence in contextualized museum collections and historical monographs.

Unfortunately, decorative arts heritage organizations in practice often still eschew contextualized display for more traditional art history interpretations.⁴⁸ The roots of this tension may be traced to the earliest form of interpretation in period rooms as well as the ongoing influence of the priorities of antique collectors.⁴⁹ Subsequently, a fear persists among material culture scholars and

⁴⁷ Henry Glassie, *Folk Housing in Middle Virginia: A Structural Analysis of Historic Artifacts* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1975), 17.

⁴⁸ See Metropolitan Museum of Art and the recently installed Kaufman Furniture Gallery at the National Gallery of Art.

⁴⁹ Gary Kulick, "Designing the Past: History-Museum Exhibitions from Peale to the Present" in *History Museums in the United States: A Critical Assessment*, Warren Leon and Roy Rosenzweig eds., (University of Illinois: Chicago, 1989).; Michael Wallace, "Visiting the Past: History Museums in the United States," in *Presenting the Past: Essays on History and the Public*, Susan Porter Benson, Stephen Brier, Roy Rosenzweig eds., (Temple University: Philadelphia, 1986).

academics alike that exclusionary narratives and emphases on a high-style aesthetic, divorce cultural institutions from their public audiences.⁵⁰

Institutions, like MESDA, have made significant interpretive changes since 2007. For instance, the research of Burgner's story, by MESDA Curator Daniel Ackerman, is the result of expanding museum interpretive boundaries. For most of its fifty years as a southern cultural institution, MESDA's collection ranged chronologically from the colonial era to 1820 and focused on urban "coastal style centers."⁵¹ After the staff and board defined new interpretive goals, the thirty galleries were updated to reflect the most recent research, paint analysis, and visitor accessibility. The greatest change, according to decorative arts scholar Laura Beach, is that MESDA now treats architectural woodwork as the largest objects in these displays, rather than as backdrops for domestic vignettes."⁵² The "vignettes" of period rooms in past museum interpretation obscured the diversity of objects and people in the early American South.

Largely since 2012, administration and curators have expanded MESDA's regional focus to include regions of Kentucky, Tennessee, and Georgia. The rope and tassel corner cupboard (figure 1) that began this quest is currently displayed

⁵⁰ Cary Carson, "Doing History with Material Culture" in *Material Culture and the Study of American Life* Ed. Ian Quimby (New York: Norton, 1978).; Marjorie Schwarzer, "Introduction" to *Riches, Rivals, & Radicals: 100 Years of Museums in America* (Washington, D.C.: American Association of Museums: 2006), 24.

⁵¹ Laura Beach, "Beyond Moonlight and Magnolias: The Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts Moves Forward and Looks Westward," *The Magazine Antiques* (September/October 2012), 2.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 4.

prominently in the “Tennessee Room” (Figures 92 & 93). Thanks to the generosity of collectors and researchers who believe in the new interpretive priorities, the room includes wall stenciling, Tennessee silver, a Burgner sideboard (figure 92, far right), and many other forms of material culture representative of the antebellum backcountry.



Figure 92: MESDA Tennessee Gallery, 2015



Figure 93: MESDA Acc. 5660, full front conserved and installed in new gallery

Interpretations of other pieces of furniture from the rope and tassel group reflect the individual missions of the respective museums. The “Noe” desk (figure 72) Gift of Bob and Norma Noe will not be part of The Speed Museum of Art’s 2015 installation and re-opening. The new exhibit will focus exclusively on Kentucky furniture and fine arts.⁵³ The East Tennessee History Center’s rope and tassel corner cupboard is displayed in their permanent exhibit, *Voices of the Land: The People of East Tennessee* (figure 80). Much of Tennessee’s early material life is on display, but its significance as a cultural expression may be lost to visitors as the piece is situated amongst outdoor agricultural instruments. Finally, the “profile” desk at Winterthur is positioned in the “Pennsylvania Room”

⁵³ The Speed Museum of Art Decorative Arts Curator Scott Erbes to Amber Clawson, “Noe Desk Installation,” March 9, 2015.

among other forms that share its vibrant hues and patriotic colors. Nevertheless, inlay execution and motif pairings set it apart from the other objects in the room.

This dissertation, “Building Tennessee,” acknowledges the aesthetic accomplishments of the period but, more significantly, returns artistic agency to artisans and consumers who imagined and created the material culture we study today. Future interpretive possibilities for the rope and tassel group can emphasize how the typical backcountry experience of multiple generations of McAdams; while their physical world, as recovered in extant furniture and historical record, set this particular family apart thanks to a depth of resources. The different peoples who lived, worked, and traveled through the Nolichucky River Valley confirm that experiences in the backcountry were not those of xenophobia. Scholars and public audiences alike stand to benefit from an ongoing dialogue that challenges stereotypes and offers balanced interpretation through new lenses on historical questions.

The rope and tassel motif of East Tennessee matters because it reflected a particular time and place in America. Religion, ethnic diversity, and the physical environment all played a role in the changing discourse of material life in the first decades of Tennessee statehood. Not only did woodworkers construct the built environment of East Tennessee, but they also created larger pieces of furniture that denoted cultural norms and class in a community that sought to put down roots. That is, until the next generation looked westward.

The rope and tassel group is only one of many Scots-Irish arts traditions in America that challenge historian James Leyburn's comments that "not only were there no Scotch-Irish artists; there was little even that could be called folk art."⁵⁴ The cultural palette generated by the McAdams and their competitors spoke to the social and material aspirations of Nolichucky River Valley residents as expressed through Republican and agricultural symbolism. Vibrant colors emphasized delicate inlay and morphed traditional furniture forms into artistic interpretations of period style.

⁵⁴ James Graham Leyburn, *The Scotch-Irish: A Social History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1962), 315.

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Classical Institute of the South (CIS) Object Files

2013_1051, Alabama Tassel Corner Cupboard

Colonial Williamsburg Foundation (CWF) Collection

Acc. 2013-60, Rope and Tassel Diminutive Chest of Drawers

East Tennessee History Center Collection

Acc. 2008.28.1 Tennessee Rope and Tassel Corner Cupboard

Leland Little Auction & Estate Sales

Lot 138 2012 Auction, Tennessee Rope and Tassel Corner Cupboard

Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts Collection

Acc. 5660 Tennessee Rope and Tassel Corner Cupboard

Acc. 973.2 “Mrs. Briscoe” by John Drinker

Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts Object Files

S_2383 East Tennessee Gamecock Line and Berry Corner Cupboard

S_2444 Baltimore, MD Rope and Tassel Card Table

S_2648 East Tennessee Gamecock Rope and Tassel Corner Cupboard

S_4382 East Tennessee Gamecock Rope and Tassel Corner Cupboard

S_5460 "Peter Lauck" by Charles Peale Polk

S_7380 East Tennessee Gamecock Rope and Tassel Corner Cupboard

S_7498 Rockbridge, VA Tassel Corner Cupboard

S_9493 Rockbridge, VA Ball and Tassel Chest of Drawers

S_10340 East Tennessee Inlaid Rope Table

S_10050 Baltimore Tassel Card Table

S_11859 East Tennessee Line and Berry Corner Cupboard

S_11927 East Tennessee Rope and Tassel Corner Cupboard

S_13028 East Tennessee Triple Rope and Tassel Corner Cupboard

S_13033 East Tennessee Rope and Floral Tassel Corner Cupboard

S_13035 East Tennessee Rope and Tassel Scalloped Corner Cupboard

S_27457 Rockbridge, VA Ball and Tassel Chest of Drawers

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D9745466 Northeast Auctions,
"Portrait of Young Girl in Pink Dress & White Apron"

D9767710 Skinner Inc., Portrait of Charlotte Eliza Raub in Red Shoes

D9942267 Brunk Auctions, Federal Slant-Lid Inlaid Desk

D9984199 Northeast Auctions, Portrait of Girl Beneath Drapery

Private Decorative Arts Collections

Anne McPherson, Inlaid Chest of Drawers 1, Rope

Anne McPherson, Inlaid Chest of Drawers 2, Fish

Mary Jo Case, DeVault Blue Chair

Mary Jo Case, DeVault Chest of Drawers

Mary Jo Case, Cherry Corner Cupboard
Tennessee State Museum Collection

Acc. A14.G2.S3 Rope and Tassel Corner Cupboard

Winterthur Library Decorative Arts Photographic Collection (DAPC)

81.1482 East Tennessee Inlaid Sideboard

77.631 Pennsylvania Chevron Inlaid Corner Cupboard

Winterthur Museum Collection Object Files

Acc. 1955.0080.003 Shield-back Tassel Side Chair

Acc. 1957.1099 Winterthur "Profile" Desk

Acc. 1960.0349 Shield-back Side Inlaid Chair

Acc. 1980.0130 Central Tassel Ruffled-Ribbon Carved Chair

William King Library and Cultural Heritage Archive

GR-87-01 Virginia Rope Inlaid Corner Cupboard

WT-1035-01 Tennessee Floral Tassel Corner Cupboard

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

“Transcribed Estate Sale of Hugh McAdams”

Bidder	Item	Price	Page
Isabella McAdams	3 beds bedsteads & furniture	\$10.00	328
Isabella McAdams	1 cupboard and furniture	\$5.00	328
Isabella McAdams	2 pots 1 oven & lid 1 kettle & spade	\$5.00	328
Isabella McAdams	1 bureau	\$5.00	328
Isabella McAdams	2 small wheels 1 large ditto 1 reel	\$5.00	328
Isabella McAdams	2 pair fire irons	\$1.60	328
Isabella McAdams	10 crocks	\$1.34	328
Isabella McAdams	1 pair dog irons	\$1.01	328
Isabella McAdams	1 cullinary (sic)1 coffee pot 1 straner (sic) 1 tin cap	\$1.00	328
Isabella McAdams	1 coffee mill	\$1.00	328
Isabella McAdams	1 table	\$1.00	328

Isabella McAdams	10 chairs	\$1.00	328
Isabella McAdams	9 books & box	\$1.00	328
Isabella McAdams	2 bedsteads	\$1.00	328
Isabella McAdams	1 table	\$1.00	328
Isabella McAdams	1 rolling pin	\$0.60	328
Isabella McAdams	1 grid iron	\$0.54	328
Isabella McAdams	2 pot racks	\$0.51	328
Isabella McAdams	1 flat iron	\$0.35	328
Isabella McAdams	1 churn	\$0.25	328
Isabella McAdams	1 knife box 16 knives & forks	\$0.25	328
Isabella McAdams	1 bread tray & meal tub	\$0.25	328
Isabella McAdams	flesh fork & ladle	\$0.25	328
Isabella McAdams	1 umbrella	\$0.25	328
Isabella McAdams	1 sive (sic)	\$0.10	328
Isabella McAdams	2 pitchers	\$0.10	328
Isabella McAdams	1/2 gallon & 2 funnels	\$0.10	328
Isabella McAdams	1 pail	\$0.10	328
Isabella McAdams	1 half bushell & bucket	\$0.10	328

Isabella McAdams	3 baskets	\$0.10	328
Archa Frame	1 big wheel	\$2.40	329
Elijaha Cahell	1 book	\$0.50	329
Elisha Cahill	1 rifle gunn (sic)	\$16.50	329
George White	1 saddle	\$11.51	329
Isabella McAdams	1 plow & irons 2 clevises & double trees	\$3.01	329
Isabella McAdams	1 ax	\$0.51	329
Isabella McAdams	1 pile plank	\$0.27	329
Isabella McAdams	1 shovel plow & irons	\$0.25	329
James Bacon	1 waggon (sic) & back bands	\$110.00	329
James Nelson	1 slave named Moses	\$54.00	329
James Nelson	1 slave named Sarah	\$15.00	329
James Robinson	1 ax	\$2.12	329
John Ferguson	1 crow bar	\$2.90	329
John Ferguson	1 sledge	\$0.77	329
Samuel Bacon	1 log chain	\$4.50	329

Samuel Bacon	1 ax	\$1.25	329
Samuel Bacon	1 shovel plow	\$0.57	329
Samuel Bruin	1 pile plank	\$0.55	329
Samuel Bruin	1 pile plank	\$0.28	329
Samuel Lane	1 cupboard	\$21.00	329
William Carmicle	1 side board	\$31.00	329
William Guinn	1 pile plank	\$5.00	329
William Guinn	1 book on architecture	\$4.26	329
William Guinn	1 pile plank	\$3.01	329
William Guinn	1 pile plank	\$2.35	329
William Guinn	1 pile plank	\$2.00	329
William Guinn	1 pile plank	\$2.00	329
William Guinn	1 pile plank	\$1.85	329
William Guinn	plank on negroe house loft	\$1.13	329
William Guinn	1 pile plank	\$0.68	329
Zacha Hale	1 big wheel	\$0.76	329
Abraham Britten	1 curry comb	\$0.40	330
George Smith	1 sorrel mare	\$20.52	330
Isabella McAdams	1 cow	\$6.26	330

Isabella McAdams	loom & tacklen	\$5.00	330
Isabella McAdams	1 cutting box & knife	\$2.01	330
Isabella McAdams	some pieces of cast iron	\$1.80	330
Isabella McAdams	1 side saddle	\$1.03	330
Isabella McAdams	1 saddle	\$1.03	330
Isabella McAdams	Table clothes	\$1.01	330
Isabella McAdams	1 pair horse geers	\$1.01	330
Isabella McAdams	1 hackle 3 pairs shears candlestick snuffers	\$1.00	330
Isabella McAdams	1 bell & strap	\$0.52	330
Isabella McAdams	tallow	\$0.51	330
Isabella McAdams	1 meat vessel	\$0.28	330
Isabella McAdams	1 cyder barrel	\$0.25	330
Isabella McAdams	soap & fat	\$0.25	330
Isabella McAdams	pieces of cart iron	\$0.25	330
Isabella McAdams	iron wedge & drawing knife	\$0.25	330
Isabella McAdams	4 earthen vessels	\$0.10	330

Isabella McAdams	tallow garter loom	\$0.10	330
Isabella McAdams	cly (sic) tub	\$0.10	330
Isabella McAdams	weavers spools	\$0.10	330
Isabella McAdams	1 paving machine	\$0.10	330
Isabella McAdams	1 pair saddle bags	\$0.10	330
Isabella McAdams	3 bags	\$0.10	330
Isabella McAdams	1 box	\$0.05	330
Isabella McAdams	1 old riddle	\$0.01	330
John Ralston	1 watch	\$8.50	330
Maybury Cox	2 calves	\$3.61	330
Samuel Blair	2 open barrels	\$1.62	330
Thomas Guinn	1 cow	\$11.60	330
Wm B Adenale	1 cow	\$10.00	330
Andrew Grayham	2 sash planes	\$1.45	331
Isabella McAdams	1 clock & case	\$30.25	331
Isabella McAdams	1 bay mare	\$5.00	331
Isabella McAdams	3 bushels flax seed	\$0.53	331
Isabella McAdams	1 fire shovel	\$0.29	331
Isabella McAdams	1 sickle	\$0.27	331

Isabella McAdams	2 pitchers	\$0.26	331
Isabella McAdams	1 open barrel	\$0.25	331
James Cunningham	some small tools	\$0.32	331
James Duncan	1 single barrel	\$0.50	331
James Duncan	1 keg	\$0.50	331
James Duncan	1 Jack plane	\$0.30	331
John Robston	1 sickle	\$0.75	331
John Robston	some small tools	\$0.15	331
John Robston	3 squares	\$0.15	331
Nathan Shipley	1 scythe & cradle	\$1.75	331
Nathan Shipley	1 jack plane	\$0.25	331
Nathaniel Jones	1 sickle	\$0.70	331
Robert McAdams	375 feet inch plank	\$3.61	331
Robert McAdams	1 oven & lid	\$3.01	331
Robert McAdams	clamps	\$2.00	331
Robert McAdams	cabbage machine	\$1.51	331
Robert McAdams	275.5 feet inch plank	\$1.50	331
Robert McAdams	1 conk shell	\$1.31	331
Robert McAdams	1 pair cart boxes	\$0.77	331

Robert McAdams	1 pair upper leathers	\$0.64	331
Samuel Brien	1 hand ax	\$1.26	331
Samuel Bruen	some plank in cabin	\$1.93	331
Samuel Bruen	1 turning lathe 2 gouges 1 chesell (sic)	\$1.15	331
Samuel Bruen	1 grove 1 jack plane stock 1 plane B	\$1.03	331
Samuel Bruen	1 stone hammer	\$0.53	331
Samuel Bruen	1 square	\$0.16	331
Andrew Grayham	2 planes	\$1.75	332
Andrew Grayham	2 planes	\$1.50	332
Andrew Grayham	some small tools	\$1.25	332
Andrew Grayham	2 planes	\$1.14	332
Andrew Grayham	2 planes	\$1.13	332
Andrew Grayham	2 planes	\$1.01	332
Andrew Grayham	1 plane	\$1.00	332
Andrew Grayham	2 planes	\$0.81	332
Andrew Grayham	1 plane	\$0.80	332

Andrew Grayham	2 planes	\$0.70	332
Andrew Grayham	2 planes	\$0.48	332
Enoch Keen	4 planes	\$4.00	332
Nathan Nelson	1 plane	\$1.15	332
Nathan Nelson	2 planes	\$0.50	332
Nathaniel Jones	1 saw	\$1.07	332
Nathaniel Jones	1 plane	\$0.25	332
Robert McAdams	1 vinearing (sic) saw	\$0.75	332
Samuel Bruen	4 planes	\$4.62	332
Samuel Bruen	2 planes	\$2.25	332
Samuel Bruen	1 corner plane	\$1.51	332
Samuel Bruen	small tools	\$1.31	332
Samuel Bruen	1 corner plane	\$1.30	332
Samuel Bruen	4 gouges	\$1.27	332
Samuel Bruen	files	\$1.25	332
Samuel Bruen	4 chissells	\$1.00	332
Samuel Bruen	2 planes	\$0.66	332
Samuel Bruen	some small tools	\$0.51	332
Samuel Bruen	small tools	\$0.51	332

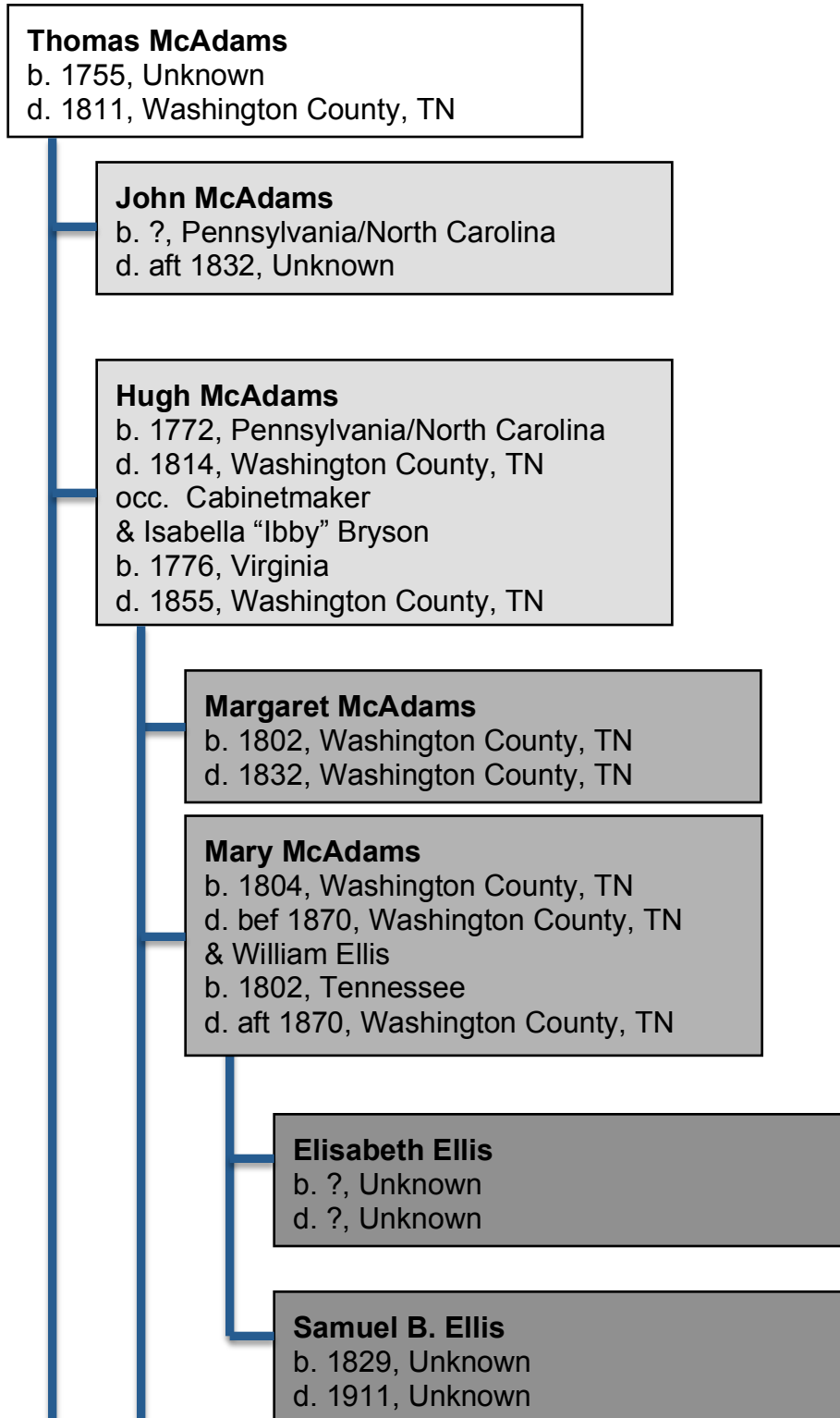
Samuel Bruen	1 hammer	\$0.30	332
Samuel Bruen	small tools	\$0.12	332
William Guinn	small tools	\$1.36	332
Gregory Glasscoke	1 claw hammer	\$0.38	333
Hugh Martin	1 saw	\$0.95	333
James Duncan	1 hand saw	\$3.01	333
James Duncan	3 boxes containing small articles	\$0.51	333
John Robston	1 hand saw file	\$0.15	333
John Robston	marking tools	\$0.15	333
John Stephenson	1 mallet	\$0.07	333
Nathan Nelson	1 work bench	\$1.25	333
Robert McAdams	1 sash saw	\$3.00	333
Robert McAdams	1 tenon saw	\$2.87	333
Robert McAdams	1 tenon saw	\$2.87	333
Robert McAdams	1 dovetail saw	\$2.32	333
Robert McAdams	1 profile machine	\$0.02	333
Samuel Bruen	1 hand saw	\$3.80	333
Samuel Bruen	7 files	\$2.25	333

Samuel Bruen	2 small boxes & contents	\$2.02	333
Samuel Bruen	5 locks	\$2.00	333
Samuel Bruen	1 work bench	\$1.79	333
Samuel Bruen	glue pot	\$1.43	333
Samuel Bruen	2 boxes with their contents	\$1.30	333
Samuel Bruen	1 whetstone	\$0.75	333
Samuel Bruen	small articles	\$0.71	333
Samuel Bruen	3 boxes with their contents	\$0.55	333
Samuel Bruen	1 saw set	\$0.41	333
Samuel Bruen	3 gimblets	\$0.31	333
Samuel Bruen	patterns	\$0.19	333
Samuel Bruen	2 mallet	\$0.13	333
Samuel Bruen	1 gimblet	\$0.12	333
Samuel Bruen	boxes & pieces of wood	\$0.12	333
Samuel Bruen	1 whetstone	\$0.07	333
William Guinn	1 plane	\$1.25	333
Wm B Odenale	1 shaving horse & grindstone	\$1.02	333

Abednego Hale	3 sheep	\$4.15	334
Gregory Glasscoke	1 razor & box	\$0.25	334
Isaac Horton	3 sheep	\$5.00	334
Isabella McAdams	remainder	N/A	334
Isabella McAdams	1 watch	\$30.00	334
Isabella McAdams	9 sheep	\$11.01	334
Isabella McAdams	1 kettle washing machine & tub	\$2.00	334
John Robston	1 key for watch	\$0.52	334
Robert McAdams	1 rule	\$0.50	334
Samuel Bruen	1 rule	\$0.41	334
Uriah Hunt Jr	3 sheep	\$3.25	334

APPENDIX B

"McAdams Family Tree"



Thomas Cunningham McAdams

b. 1806, Washington County, TN
d. 1881, Washington County, TN
occ. Cabinetmaker
& Cynthea Stephenson
b. 1817, Washington County, TN
d. 1874, Washington County, TN

Matthew Judson McAdams

b. 1835, Washington County, TN
d. 1863, Davidson County, TN
& Sarah Sevanev
b. 1838, Washington County, TN
d. ?, Unknown

John Cloyd McAdams

b. 1836, Washington County, TN
d. 1891, Atchison County, MO
& Sarah Mahoney
b. 1838, Unknown
d. 1876, Washington County, TN

Hugh Morrison McAdams

b. 1838, Washington County, TN
d. 1840, Washington County, TN

David Brainard McAdams

b. 1841, Washington County, TN
d. 1871, Newton County, MO
& Margaret Gibson
b. 1839, Unknown
d. 1872, Washington County, TN

William Plummer McAdams

b. 1843, Washington County, TN
d. 1844, Washington County, TN

Samuel Bryson McAdams

b. 1845, Washington County, TN
d. 1900, Washington County, TN
occ. Cabinetmaker
& Rachel Mulkey
b. 1839, Washington County, TN
d. 1906, Washington County, TN

Robert Newton McAdams

b. 1847, Washington County, TN
d. 1921, Greene County, TN
& Maggie M. Good
b. 1854, Unknown
d. 1946, Greene County, TN

James Houston McAdams

b. 1850, Washington County, TN
d. 1927, Custer County, NE
& Ida Guthrie
b. 1862, Iowa
d. 1929, Nebraska

Chalmers Stephenson McAdams

b. 1853, Washington County, TN
d. 1873, Washington County, TN

Thomas Cunningham McAdams, Jr.

b. 1855, Washington County, TN
d. 1920, Greene County, TN

Charles Alexander McAdams

b. 1858, Washington County, TN
d. 1928, Whitman County, WA
& Alice Nave
b. 1859, Tennessee
d. 1930, Whitman County, WA

Samuel Bryson McAdams

b. 1809, Washington County, TN
d. 1894, Washington County, TN
& Ann Duncan
b. 1813, Unknown
d. 1861, Washington County, TN

Hugh S. McAdams

b. 1832, Washington County, TN
d. ?, Unknown
& Mary Roberts
b. ?, Unknown
d. ?, Unknown

Joseph Duncan McAdams

b. 1835, Washington County, TN
d. aft 1870, Unknown
& Louise Wattenberger
b. 1841, Washington County, TN
d. aft 1870, Unknown



Jane McAdams

b. 1811, Washington County, TN
d. 1871, Washington County, TN
& Roland "Robb" Murray
b. 1805, Unknown
d. bef 1870, Washington County, TN

Thomas Harvey Murray

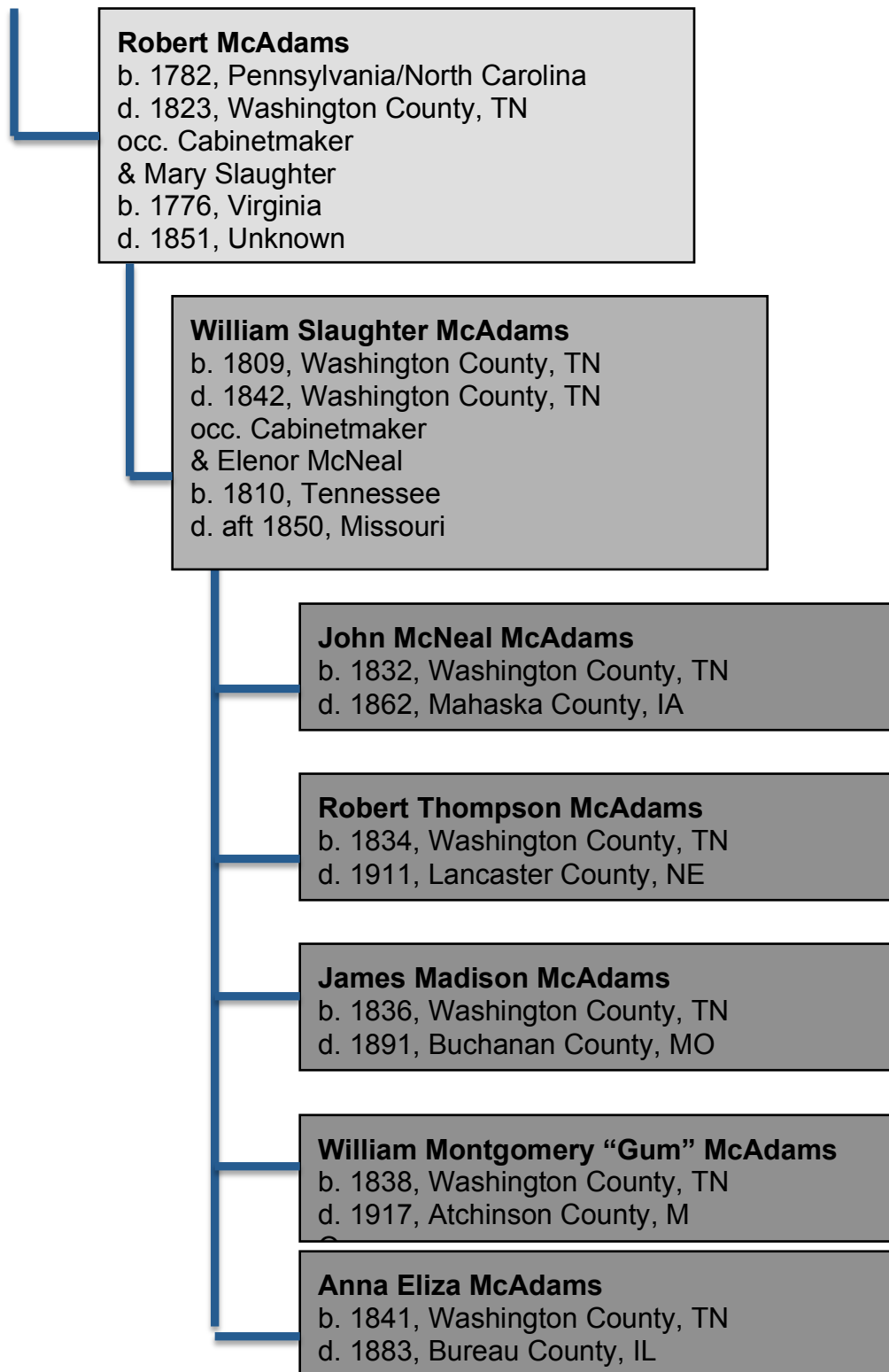
b. 1834, Unknown
d. 1891, Unknown

Mary Murray

b. 1839, Washington County, TN
d. 1925, Sullivan County, TN
& William Owens
b. ?, Unknown
d. ?, Unknown

Hannah E. Murray

b. 1846, Unknown
d. 1905, Unknown



APPENDIX C

"McAdams Family Index"

Last Name	First & Middle Name	Birth Date-Death Date	Birth Place - Death Place	Spouse
Bryson	Isabella "Ibby"	1776 - 1855	VA - Washington Co., TN	Hugh McAdams
Duncan	Ann	1813 - 1861	Unknown - Washington Co., TN	Samuel Bryson McAdams
Ellis	Elisabeth	? - ?	Unknown - Unknown	
Ellis	Elijah	1805 - aft 1840	Unknown - Washington Co., TN	Jane McAdams
Ellis	William	1802 - aft 1870	TN - Washington Co., TN	Mary McAdams
Ellis	James Riley	1835 - 1904	Unknown - Unknown	
Ellis	Margaret	1833 - 1906	Washington Co., TN - Davidson Co., TN	
Ellis	Samuel B.	1829 - 1911	Unknown - Unknown	
Ellis	William Alexander	1832 - 1913	Unknown Unknown	
Ellis	Cintha	1840 - 1913	Washington Co., TN - Sullivan Co., TN	

Gibson	Margaret	1839 - 1872	Unknown - Washington Co., TN	David Brainard McAdams
Good	Maggie M.	1854 - 1946	Unknown - Greene Co., TN	Robert Newton McAdams
Guthrie	Ida	1862 - 1929	IA - NE	James Houston McAdams
Hale	Joseph	1775 - 1843	MD - Washington Co., TN	Isabella "Ibby" Bryson
Hale	Louisa	1817- 1850	Washington Co., TN - Washington Co., TN	
Mahoney	Sarah	1838 - 1876	Unknown - Washington Co., TN	John Cloyd McAdams
McAdams	Hugh S.	1832 - ?	Washington Co., TN - Unknown	Mary Roberts
McAdams	Thomas	1755 - 1811	Unknown - Washington Co., TN	
McAdams	Hugh	1772 - 1814	PA/NC - Washington Co., TN	Isabella "Ibby" Bryson
McAdams	Robert	1782 - 1823	PA/NC - Washington Co., TN	Mary Slaughter
McAdams	Margaret	1802 - 1832	Washington Co., TN - Washington Co., TN	
McAdams	John	? - aft 1832	PA/NC - Unknown	

McAdams	Hugh Morrison	1838 - 1840	Washington Co., TN - Washington Co., TN	
McAdams	William Slaughter	1809 - 1842	Washington Co., TN - Washington Co., TN	Elenor McNeal
McAdams	William Plummer	1843 - 1844	Washington Co., TN - Washington Co., TN	
McAdams	John McNeal	1832 - 1862	Washington Co., TN - Mahaska Co., IA	
McAdams	Matthew Judson	1835 - 1863	Washington Co., TN - Davidson Co., TN	Sarah Sevaney
McAdams	Mary	1804 - bef 1870	Washington Co., TN - Washington Co., TN	William Ellis
McAdams	Jane	1811 - 1871	Washington Co., TN - Washington Co., TN	Elijah Ellis
McAdams	David Brainard	1841 - 1871	Washington Co., TN - Newton Co., MO	Margaret Gibson
McAdams	Joseph Duncan	1835 - aft 1870	Washington Co., TN - Unknown	Louisa Wattenberger
McAdams	Chalmers Stephenson	1853 - 1873	Washington Co., TN - Washington Co., TN	

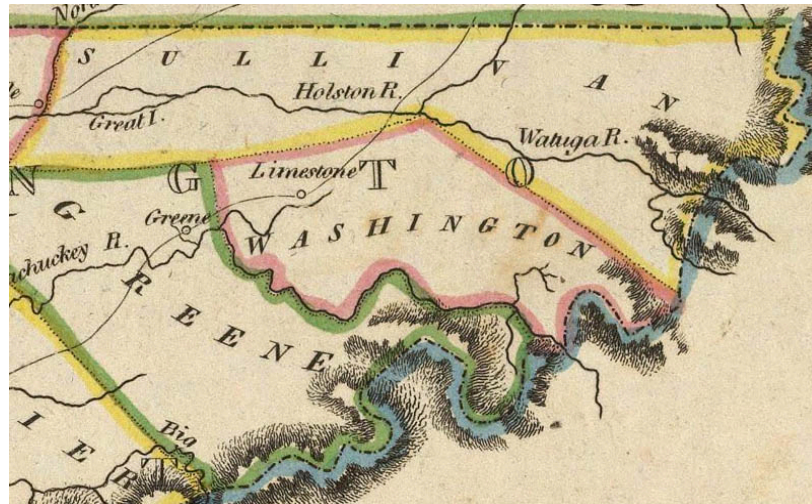
McAdams	Thomas Cunningham	1806 - 1881	Washington Co., TN - Washington Co., TN	Cynthea Stephenson
McAdams	Anna Eliza	1841 - 1883	Washington Co., TN - Bureau Co., IL	
McAdams	John Cloyd	1836 - 1891	Washington Co., TN - Atchison Co., MO	Sarah Mahoney
McAdams	James Madison	1836 - 1891	Washington Co., TN - Buchanan Co., MO	
McAdams	Samuel Bryson	1809 - 1894	Washington Co., TN - Washington Co., TN	Ann Duncan
McAdams	Samuel Bryson	1845 - 1900	Washington Co., TN - Washington Co., TN	Rachel Mulkey
McAdams	Robert Thompson	183 - 19114	Washington Co., TN - Lancaster Co., NE	
McAdams	William "Gurn" Montgomery	1838 - 1917	Washington Co., TN - Atchinson Co., MO	
McAdams	James Houston	1850 - 1917	Washington Co., TN - Custer Co., NE	Ida Guthrie
McAdams	Thomas Cunningham	1855 - 1920	Washington Co., TN - Greene Co., TN	

McAdams	Robert Newton	1847 - 1921	Washington Co., TN - Greene Co., TN	Maggie M. Good
McAdams	Charles Alexander	1858 - 1928	Washington Co., TN - Whitman Co., WA	Alice Nave
McLain	Lavin	? - ?	Unknown - Unknown	
McNeal	Elenor	1810 - aft 1850	TN - MO	William Slaughter McAdams
Mulkey	Rachel	1839 - 1906	Washington Co., TN - Washington Co., TN	Samuel Bryson McAdms
Murray	Roland "Robb"	1805 - bef 1870	Unknown - Washington Co., TN	Jane McAdams
Murray	Thomas Harvey	1834 - 1925	Unknown - Unknown	
Murray	Hannah E.	1846 - 1905	Unknown - Unknown	
Murray	Mary	1839 - 1925	Washington Co., TN - Sullivan Co., TN	William Owens
Nave	Alice	1859 - 1930	TN - Whitman Co., WA	Charles Alexander McAdams
Owens	William	? - ?	Unknown - Unknown	Mary Murray
Roberts	Mary	? - ?	Unknown - Unknown	Hugh S. McAdams
Sevaney	Sarah	1838 - ?	Washington Co., TN - Unknown	Matthew Judson McAdams
Slaughter	Mary	1776 - 1851	VA - Unknown	Robert McAdams

Stephenson	Cynthea	1817 - 1874	Washington Co., TN - Washington Co., TN	Thomas Cunningham McAdams
Wattenberger	Louisa	1841 - aft 1870	Washington Co., TN - Unknown	Joseph Duncan McAdams

APPENDIX D

“Nolichucky River Valley Reference Map”



Carey's General Atlas, Improved And Enlarged; Being A Collection Of Maps Of The World And Quarters, Their Principal Empires, Kingdoms, &c. ... Philadelphia.