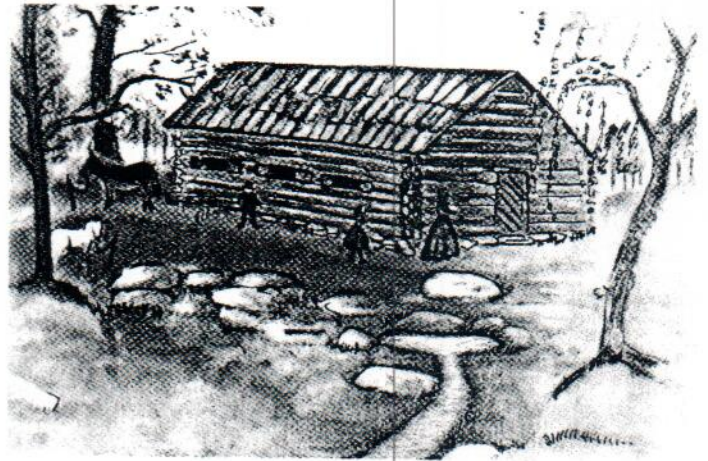


The Virginia Frontier Builder James Patton

By FREEMAN H. HART



Colonel Patton was a leading spirit in establishment of the Tinkling Spring Presbyterian Church in Augusta County and served the congregation as an elder.

NOT too many years ago, Frederick Jackson Turner of the University of Wisconsin and later of Harvard was regarded as one of the outstanding professors of American history because of a theory he had put forth as to the importance of the frontier in the development of the United States. His school of historical thought for a time was by far the most popular one among graduate students in American history, and a host of historians who either had been students of his at Wisconsin or Harvard had enthusiastically accepted his thesis as to the part played by the frontier. To state it simply, this thesis was that frontier life, and frontier thinking, had constantly affected the life and thinking of the earlier, but by then established, settlements behind the frontier. As Professor Turner presented it, the older areas were inclined to be conservative and voted and acted accordingly. On the other hand, frontiersmen, because of their conflict with nature and with the wild Indians, developed an aggressiveness, a freedom of action, and a philosophy of life that caused them to be liberal in their thinking, acting, and voting. Professor Turner believed the interplay of these two forces had had a beneficial effect on both the frontier and the older settlements and that this interplay of forces crystallized American democracy toward national greatness.

The Virginia frontier was in many ways

This account of Colonel James Patton's adventurous career is the first of several articles in which Dr. Hart will relate the accomplishments of leaders on the Virginia frontier before the Revolution. Other articles will appear in subsequent issues. For a word as to the author, see page 14.

the most influential of the various colonial frontiers of the original thirteen colonies that were to become the core of the present United States. Because of liberal grants to the early settlers of the Virginia colony, the Old Dominion extended indefinitely west to the Pacific and spread out fan-shaped over the West. The colonial governors and the people of Virginia accepted responsibility for and were granted control of most of that part of the West that lay east of the Mississippi River. To be sure, other colonies had claims but Virginia insisted that hers were older and more valid. Therefore, the Virginia frontier in the eighteenth century presented at once a challenge and an opportunity for those who had the hardihood to undertake leadership in that area.

Earlier, in the seventeenth century of the Virginia settlement, the people of the colony of an English background had established themselves with a large degree

of strength and effective control in the Tidewater and to the fall lines of the tidal rivers, with fingers of settlements reaching westward into what we know as the Piedmont.

This was the situation in the Virginia colony when a new wave of settlement developed as a result of the realignment of Protestant groups in the old world. The German Calvinists of the Rhine River area were looking to the new world with longing eyes. The Presbyterian, or Calvinistic, Scots had been forced out of their homeland of Scotland by the Stuarts and had been transported in great numbers to that part of North Ireland usually known as Ulster. These Ulstermen clashed almost at once with the native Irish population, with whom they disagreed in religious creed and in various other ways. The Ulster Scots multiplied rapidly, which gave them another incentive to seek out new homes. From their point of view, fighting wild Indians in the new world might not be as trying as fighting "wild" Irishmen in Ulster. So the Ulster Scots joined the German Protestants in moving toward America in ship after ship.

Since Pennsylvania was a colony noted for its tolerance, both the German and Scottish settlers made this colony their first place of abode in America. But they then began to look with longing toward the West, and they learned from their own experiences and from the growing number

Colonel Patton's sword, now owned by Miss Ann Mason Lee of Richmond. Surprised by Indians at Draper's Meadow, he killed two with a sword before he was felled by bullets.



of frontier explorers that there were quantities of free land to be had for the taking, up and down the mountain valleys that made up the frontier. The most promising of those valleys was the Valley of Virginia. Land there could be had for the taking, but this meant taking it from aggressive Indian tribes who prized it highly as a hunting ground and as a passageway between hunting grounds.

It was not long, then, until the wagons of German and Scottish frontiersmen were carrying settlers into all parts of the Valley of Virginia. This frontier area threw out a challenge to the kind of leadership that could develop it, and there was no shortage of such leadership. Strong-hearted men like Colonel James Patton, John Lewis and his sons, Dr. Thomas Walker, Lord Fairfax and the Washingtons, Colonel William Preston, Alexander White, and Zachariah Johnson, came forward with a caliber of leadership that has seldom been matched in any one area in the United States.

Not long after William and Mary had ascended the throne of England, a Scottish boy was born to a family that had joined in the forced migration from Scotland to North Ireland. (This migration seemed to James Stuart, after he became king of England and Scotland, to be one good way to handle his Scottish subjects, who were noted for rebellious tendencies.) This boy, James Patton, developed a typical Scottish physique that was to be of value later in the stress and strife of frontier life. He grew to the height of six feet, six inches, with a well-proportioned body that made him look like the leader that he was. During the sojourn of the Patton family in North Ireland or Ulster, its members intermarried with the family of John Lewis, who had three able-bodied sons named Andrew, Thomas, and Charles.

Like many ambitious youths of his time, James Patton began his career as an officer of the Royal Navy. Later he became a shipmaster in his own right and commanded his own ship, or ships, in the transatlantic trade. His favorite route was from London to Tappahannock on the Rappahannock River. His cargoes on the eastward runs usually consisted of tobacco from Virginia, and on return trips he brought settlers to Virginia from England, Scotland, and Ireland. (On one passage to the Virginia colony he brought Bull Rocke, a famous Arabian race horse that was to win quite a following in Virginia.)

Patton's activity in bringing settlers to the new world naturally developed into an interest in the Virginia frontier. One

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A native of the Old Dominion, he took his A.B. and M.A. degrees at Washington and Lee University and his Ph.D. at Harvard before launching upon a teaching career that included fifteen years service at Hampden-Sydney College as professor of history, government and economics. He is a member of Phi Beta Kappa Society and is a former national president of Pi Kappa Alpha social fraternity. He is now or has been a member of a number of commissions and councils dealing with athletic and student affairs at the University of Florida.

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the American Revolution, and he has contributed to *The Dictionary of American Biography* and to historical magazines of Indiana, New York, Virginia, and Wisconsin. He has collaborated with Edward Channing and Marquis James on books of which they were authors. His wife is a daughter of a former president of Mary Baldwin College at Staunton.

of his contemporaries and friends, William Beverly, had been granted 118,000 acres in the Valley of Virginia around 1740. Soon afterward Beverly asked Patton and Patton's close kinsman, John Lewis, to become his partners in the settlement of his grant that was to be known as Beverly Manor.

Patton and Lewis began to bring settlers from Pennsylvania and Ireland (Ulster) to the new grant. That they did this rather effectively is shown by the minutes of the Council of Virginia, which related that, through the efforts of Patton and Lewis, "many families are being Seated on the Beverly land." Both Patton and Lewis took up their abodes in the area and helped to stabilize its settlement.

Patton's interest did not end with the Beverly lands. He soon took up on his own a patent for 100,000 acres on the waters of the Roanoke and New rivers, an area around the present town of Blacksburg in southwestern Virginia. Associates joined him with several grants of 50,000 acres each. Patton thus soon became a chief architect in extending the Virginia frontier.

He kept busy with exploration of other new areas, working with such other leaders as his son-in-law, Colonel John Buchanan, and Dr. Thomas Walker. These explorers discovered and named the Cumberland Mountains and Cumberland Gap and joined with the Loyal Land Company in its grant of 800,000 acres.

During these years, Colonel Patton also

found time enough to organize good governments on the frontier. He was successively president of the county court of Augusta, coroner, sheriff, county lieutenant, a member of the House of Burgesses of the colony, and commander of the militia on the frontier. He was the moving spirit in establishing the Tinkling Spring Presbyterian Church (in Augusta County) and was its first elder. But in keeping with the procedure of the times, he legalized his office-holding by becoming a vestryman of the Church of England. In the various attempts at keeping peace with the Indians, he was a colonial peace commissioner and played a leading role in the Treaty of Lancaster, a colonial attempt at peace with the red men.

The sailing in the Valley of Virginia was not always pleasant for the old sea dog. Not too long after he arrived on the frontier, he fell heir to the continuing conflict with the Indians in the area. It became his duty to organize the defense of the frontier for the protection of settlers. There were settlers who did not like his handling of the assignment, and they brought charges against him, even suggesting cowardice. However, the Council, after investigation, rejected the charge as "frivolous and groundless." As one of the early historians of Virginia stated, "Colonel James Patton could give and take hard knocks."

He was helped by family connections. A sister had married John Preston and was the mother of another frontier leader, Wil-

liam Preston. A daughter of John Preston married the Reverend John Brown, who established the classical school known as Augusta Academy in 1749, which developed into Liberty Hall Academy, which became Washington College and eventually Washington and Lee University. A daughter of James Patton married Colonel John Buchanan, for whom a Virginia town and a county were named.

Through these and other family connections, Colonel James Patton was a direct or patriarchal ancestor of many of the present families of the Valley and Southwest Virginia. One of these descendants, probably, was the late General George Smith Patton, famed tank commander and leader of the Third Army in its drive through France in World War II.

Among other early settlers of the Valley frontier were the ancestors of John C. Calhoun of South Carolina. A long-drawn-out suit for slander arose between the Calhouns and Patton from the Calhoun charge that Patton had made over his lands to his children to defraud his creditors. As far as can be ascertained, this quarrel began with the requirement of the colonial government of a fee known as the "pistolet" for all land transactions. This fee was something like the stamp tax on present-day legal documents. A "pistolet" was worth about four dollars by present-day values. There probably had been bad feeling between the two families for other reasons, and the fee that was required aggravated the trouble. In keeping with good Scottish philosophy the whole thing was a matter of principle rather than finances! Not long afterwards one of the leading Calhouns, Patrick, the grandfather of John C., moved to South Carolina.

Colonel James Patton was variously appraised by his contemporaries as "the nabob of the settlement," "the foremost man on the frontier," and as "the outstanding man on the whole frontier in the middle of the eighteenth century. . . ."

Strife continued to plague the Virginia frontier through the areas of the Patton leadership as the French and Indian War broke out. This strife was intensified all up and down the frontier as wandering bands of Indians, sometimes accompanied by the French, struck at and laid waste the settlements. By a strange coincidence, at almost the same time that Braddock's army was being cut to pieces by the French and Indians, near the present Pittsburgh in July of 1755, another band of Indians struck the Patton settlements in southwestern Virginia.

Colonel Patton was visiting in a home

of friends at Draper's Meadows, from which most of the men were absent, when a band of Shawnees struck the settlement. The powerful colonel seized his sword and killed two Indians before the bullets of others brought him down.

It is of more than passing interest that one of the prisoners captured by the Indians at the same home was Mrs. William Ingles, née Mary Draper. Her daring escape from the Indian captors in Kentucky and her heroic journey back to Virginia through mountain wilds is one of the most thrilling stories of the Virginia frontier.

Colonel Patton's will, in keeping with his Scottish philosophy and theology, contained the following: "I commit my soul to God who gave it, hoping, through his mercy and the merits and intercession of my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, to be eternally happy."

Along with the killing of this outstand-

*one more way
to My Lord with the leadment
around feet my hand & seal this
with the sign seven hundred & fifty*

James Patton
his seals

The signature on Colonel Patton's will, which is recorded in Augusta County.

ing leader, there is the tragic story of the massacre of hundreds of the settlers whom he had encouraged to take over the frontier. The early records list them by name, the same family names we still find in those areas. As we view the beautiful countrysides and the present prosperity of both the Valley and the Southwest Virginia, we cannot but pause to remember that these areas were bought at a significant blood price by Colonel James Patton and the brave men and women who followed him in building the Virginia frontier.