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GENERAL JOSEPH MARTIN, OF VIRGINIA AN UNSUNG HERO OF THE VIRGINIA FRONTIER

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"In the evolution and development of American character, the difficulties incident to colonial life, the struggle with the wilderness and with the savage, produced a type of men whose best examples are to be found in the Indian fighter and backwoodsman of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. He is no longer with us, for economic changes and industrial advances have given the pioneer of today many and vast advantages over his predecessor of the last century; but to him and to the difficulties which he mastered is due no small part of the pluck and energy of the American people."

This quotation from Professor Stephen B. Weeks¹ calls attention to a type that is good to contemplate, and I am proposing in this sketch as best I may to recall a fine illustration of it. Joseph Martin is remembered by those familiar with the Wilderness Road because of the association of his name with his famous station in Powell Valley. But beyond this he is a shadowy figure whose very important career in the movement to Kentucky and on the Virginia-Carolina frontier has been forgotten. Although this is a common trick of historical fate, it is hard to understand its occurrence in Martin's case.

He was the sort of figure out of which border heroes are made. In youth he was a daring adventurer. He went into a cave alone to bring out an armed and desperate Indian—a much more dangerous exploit than Israel Putnam's famous capture of the wolf; he nearly lost his life to save his drowning companion in the

¹Stephen B. Weeks, "General Joseph Martin and the Revolution in the West." Pages 401-477 in *The Miscellaneous Documents of the Senate of the United States* for the Second Session of the Fifty-Third Congress 1893-94, in twelve volumes, Vol. 4, No. 104, Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1893.

swollen French Broad; he risked his life repeatedly for his friends; he hunted and trapped far into the Indian country, lived with the Indians, was regarded by them as their friend, and constantly strove for peace with them. Twice an organized effort was made to murder him, once by the Indians instigated by the British, and once by hostile whites (Weeks, 457, 458); both were frustrated by his quick wit, courage, and his reputation for prowess.

He furnished all of the material to make a border hero, and yet no one used him for that purpose. The trick of fate that left him unremembered was that he had no Filson, as Boone had, to spread his fame, and his activities did not come into the historical limelight to make them conspicuous, as did those of John Sevier and Isaac Shelby and John Campbell. Perhaps the romance of his career as an Indian fighter was lost sight of because it was overshadowed by the less dramatic but more important career as a public servant, particularly as Indian Agent for Virginia and North Carolina, which put upon his shoulders the heavy duty of the management of Indian affairs upon the Southwestern frontier for the fifteen years while the Revolutionary War was being waged and the white men were wresting that territory from the Indians. Whatever the reason, Martin has been undeservingly forgotten, and as an act of historical justice I am impelled to write this sketch of him to re-emphasize the importance of his career on the Virginia-Carolina border and in the early emigration to Kentucky.

Martin had no contemporary biographer. His career was written only in the scattered records of the border—in orders, in requisitions, in records of appointments and commissions, in letters, in incidental references and documents of all sorts which are not directly concerned with him. From these the facts of his life could have been partially assembled only after unending research. The existence of a connected account of him and of his career we owe to Dr. Lyman C. Draper, who, with his unending zeal in collecting memorabilia of pioneer history of the Mississippi Valley, got satisfactory sketches of Martin from two of his intimates; one from Major John Redd, an associate of Martin's in many of his border and civil activities, and the other from his son Colonel William Martin.

Finally Professor Stephen B. Weeks, the historian of North Carolina, after an exhaustive study of all of the material, wrote a

carefully documented sketch of Martin, which he read at the Ninth Annual Meeting of the American Historical Association in 1893.¹ It was the work of an accurate and industrious historical scholar. While Weeks' account has been criticized as over-generous to Martin, and there may be differences of opinion about his opinion of the great significance of some of Martin's acts, he has accurately recorded the facts of Martin's life. But, by another trick of fate, Weeks' article, along with the other transactions of the American Historical Association for 1893, was published in a document of the United States Senate, and is not easily accessible.

The source material concerning Martin deserves some consideration. The most important of it is found in the Draper Collection at the Wisconsin State Historical Society, and the manuscripts show that it was mostly written in response to the request of Dr. Draper. The two documents which give the most information about Martin are the extensive Redd Reminiscences,² and the long letter from his son, Colonel William Martin, from Dixon Springs, Tennessee, dated June 1, 1842.³ Both of these documents have been published.

William Martin's letter of June 1, 1842, was followed by other very long letters to Draper which give much supplementary information concerning General Martin: three letters from William Martin at Dixon Springs, Tennessee (one of July 7, 1842, one of September 6, 1842, and the other of December 1, 1842), and a letter from Colonel Joseph Martin, Jr., another son of General Martin, from Greenwood, Virginia, dated February 17, 1842. These letters have not been published. They are interesting not only as historical records, but as evidence of the superior intelligence and character of their authors. They are all written by old men, but they present internal evidence of meticulous accuracy of statement. Weeks says justly that "Few of the charges to which 'reminiscences' are so frequently liable, can be

¹Stephen B. Weeks, "General Joseph Martin and the Revolution in the West." Pages 401-477 in *The Miscellaneous Documents of the Senate of the United States for the Second Session of the Fifty-Third Congress 1893-94*, in twelve volumes, Vol. 4, No. 104, Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1893.

²John Reed, "Reminiscences of Western Virginia, 1770-1790" (and of Joseph Martin), in *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, Vols. 6 and 7, 1899, 1900. Also *Publications of the Southern Historical Association*, Vol. 7, 1903.

³William Martin, "A Biographical Sketch of General Joseph Martin" (father of William Martin), published in the *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 8, 1901.

brought against William Martin's narrative. It is remarkably accurate. I have frequently doubted some of his statements, but on tracing them back to undoubted authority found that they were correct." Redd's account impresses one equally as favorably.

All of these letters are from men who not only have a sense of historical responsibility but who have more than ordinary education and are able to appraise the relative importance of various events. All of them are remarkable in the freedom with which they acknowledge ignorance and with which they correct inaccurate statements that have been made by others, even when they are favorable to their subjects. These letters are long documents, written (in the case of the Martins) in good English and in excellent style. They constitute an interesting history of most of the events and leaders of the Southwestern border. All of them deserve publication. Incidentally, they are a sad commentary on the way handwriting has degenerated. Colonel William Martin's letters are written in a literally beautiful copperplate script. He says in one of his letters that they were transcribed by his son. The letter of Colonel Joseph Martin, Jr., is written by himself in a bold, legible hand, very similar to that of his brother William. I have not seen more satisfactory manuscripts.

In William Martin's letter of September 6, 1842, he mentions that his brother Joseph has written him from his home in Henry County, Virginia, of his finding in an old desk of his father's a surprising number of documents relating to his father's career and the history of the border. He regrets that they are too bulky to send to Draper, but invites Draper to come and visit him and choose for himself. That offers the explanation of the presence of so much Martin material at Madison. We can imagine the alacrity of Draper's acceptance of the invitation as soon as he had the time and the wherewithal to make the trip.

General Joseph Martin came of a good breed. His grandfather, William Martin, was an important merchant of Bristol, England, engaged in American trade, a man of large estate. Some time in the early part of the Eighteenth Century, in order to prevent an undesirable English marriage of his son Joseph, he sent him out to Virginia in commercial charge of a cargo. This son in turn illustrated the fact that in such affairs foresight may be vain by promptly marrying in Virginia a Miss Susannah Childs

(or Chiles). This, although she was a member of a highly respected family, one of the old families in the State, further outraged the father's sensitive feelings. The anxiety and the futile efforts of his father to prevent, in two instances, what he thought was an inferior alliance for his son would indicate that the family thought pretty well of itself.

This Joseph Martin, the first in America, was disinherited by his father, but, after his father's death, his brother and sister in England showed the quality of the stock by offering to divide the paternal estate with him. The distance separating them, however, and accidents of the sea, prevented his participation in the family fortune, but he settled in Albemarle County, Virginia, and acquired a good estate on his own account. This Joseph Martin seems also to have been somewhat of an Englishman of his father's type, for Colonel William Martin described him as "He, my grandfather, was a perfect Englishman. Large and athletic—bold, daring—self-willed and supercilious, with the highest sense of honor."⁴ Judging from the career of his son, many of these characteristics were probably carried down in our Joseph Martin.

Our Joseph Martin, the second Joseph in America, was born on the family estate near Charlottesville, in 1740, the third son of the family. His father tried to educate and rear him to the life of a Virginia planter, but he was a poor subject for academic education. He proved thoroughly intractable, and in youth began a life of adventure on the western border. In 1756, when he was sixteen, he ran away and joined the army at Fort Pitt,⁵ and after that his youth was spent with kindred spirits, among whom was the future General Thomas Sumter, in the hazardous life of the frontier.

As a hunter, fur-trader and adventurer, he went far into the Indian country 100 miles from his home, spent many months at a time there, and began to acquire that knowledge of the Indians and association with them that stood him in such good stead through all his later years. He seems to have been in Powell Valley as early as 1761, in a party of hunters under Wallen, whose name is preserved in the fine monument of Wallen's Ridge. In 1760, when he was twenty, his father died and he was left a small property.

⁴William Martin, *Virginia Magazine of History*, Vol. 8, p. 349.

⁵William Martin, letter June 1, 1842, Draper Manuscripts, 8ZZ2.

He married a superior woman, and undertook to settle down as a farmer; but he actually continued his life of adventure. Weeks speaks of his "debauchery" at this period, but in almost the same sentence says that he never took more than a social glass, was never drunk, and never profane. He was moreover punctilious in meeting his responsibilities, even old gambling debts. His "debauchery" consisted in a love of the life of the wilds and of gambling, in which he showed high proficiency. Roistering pleasures and youthful brawling among young men of high spirits in the wild life of the frontier are hardly to be regarded as stigmas upon character. The history of his whole life indicates that his character commanded the esteem and confidence of whites and Indians alike.⁶

By the time he was twenty-nine, he had become a border leader of sufficient standing and responsibility to be chosen by Dr. Thomas Walker as leader of a party for the task of establishing a settlement in Powell Valley. Walker had discovered Powell Valley in 1748, and in 1768 he acquired a large tract of land there on which he proposed to place settlers. At the same time he gave Martin his commission, he commissioned another party, in competition with Martin's, but Martin led the successful party. Martin has left his own description of this adventure in the Valley in a letter of May 9, 1769. He says:

"... Perhaps it may not be disagreeable to you to hear of our former travels, as well as our present Station. . . . The weather proving tolerably good, I got to Stanton in four days—completed my business there—got to Capt. Englishes on New River, 14th of the month, being March, where I laid in a sufficient stock of provisions, for our journey, (viz:) seed corn and ammunition etc. I then sent the boys on under the care of my brother, and waited for Doct. Walker, and my companion Capt. Hood, who came up 16th at night. Next morning we started. Nothing material happened til we got to Holston River, where we were informed,

⁶I first wrote that sentence "All the evidence shows him to have been of high character in youth as he unquestionably was in later life." But that statement might be challenged by some on the ground that he maintained a half-breed Indian wife by whom he had two children during all of his residence at Long Island. Incidentally he carried out fully his responsibilities as the father of these children. This wife, Betsey Ward, was a member of a powerful family in the most distinguished clan of the Cherokees, and upon the marriage the clan adopted him as a member of the clan, and thereafter regarded him as one of them. This was an important factor in his early influence with the Cherokees, and probably always remained so. On this ground Martin justified the marriage.—William Martin Letter of July 7, 1842, unpublished.

the day we left New River the Kirtleys, with Capt. Rucker and several others, came there and gave a man five pounds to pilot them a road [—?] days journey nearer than the road we then going, which confused us very much. For the case stood thus. If they got there first, they were all to have 1,000 acres of land each, where they thought proper to take it. If we got there first, we were to have 21,000 acres, where we chose, and they were not to interfere with us. We immediately hired a pilot—took two of our best horses, about one quart of flour, and pushed on as hard as interest and desire could lead us, leaving the boys to follow after. The third day to our great mortification, we found we were lost—and after three days travel more, over mountains—creeks, laurel—canebreaks, etc., our days being spent with hunger, gave out—ourselves and horses, very little better. We were under the disagreeable necessity of resting part of two days. The second day I found the Hunters track about 5 miles from our camp. I hastened back as fast as possible to tell the welcome news to my companions. The next day being the 24th, we set out, full of hopes once more. With much difficulty I prevented my companions from discharging our pilot with heavy blows. 26th, we got to our long desired place.

“April 1st the boys got to our camp, which was on Saturday. Monday being the 3d. we then began to work, and from then till now, there has been little else but eating and confusion. As to our health, I need not mention it, you may be assured of that yourself, after I tell you, we have eat and destroyed 23 deer—15 bears—2 buffaloes—and a great number of turkeys. The 15th April the Kirtleys got to the Valley, very well pleased with the land, till we gave them a letter from Doct. Walker, that informed them if we got to the valley first, we were to have 21,000 acres of land, and they were not to interfere with us. They endeavored to prevail on us for a part of our land, which we would not consent to. They then pushed home without making any further search for land.

“The place we are now settled on, is the waters of Beargrass, called by the Hunters Powels River, about a mile from the foot of a long ledge of mountains, called Cumberland, much resembling our Blue Ridge, only considerably longer, and much steeper, running the same course, by the account, three hundred miles, and from Powels Mountain about 7 miles. Powels Mountain is

near the course of the South-West mountain, running the same course. From where we crossed it, for nearly 6 miles, is broken land. Then commences our rich Valley, which is in length (by the hunters account) equal to the Mountains above mentioned. We have marked off in length about 10 miles—in width, some places a mile—some places more, some less—all very rich, and lies very well, with Vast quantities of black Walnut and wild cherries. Great signs of old Indian Lands. It lies out of all danger from water being near 5 miles from Powels River. Very good springs—Bold creeks, big enough for Mills,—great quantities of corn, sufficient to support great stocks for many years. I think considerably warmer here than with you. (Vast numbers of ticks and gnats). We had abundance of snow fall the 20th of April, tho, very little lay. We had frost 4th May, April 24th. came several gentlemen from Culpeper, with negroes to Settle. Likewise several gentlemen from Bedford, 3 gentlemen from Maryland, to get land to settle 100 families.”

This expedition of Martin's led at the beginning of April, 1769, to the first attempt at settlement of Martin's famous station in Powell Valley. The actual building of the station was made easier by its location on the “old Indian lands” which Redd refers to again in 1775 as “an old Indian field.” They planted corn and doubtless built the necessary improvements in order to make it a “settlement” to comply with legal requirements. The number in Martin's party is uncertain. Redd says there were only five or six, while Colonel William Martin thought that there were twenty or thirty in the party. From the amount of game they had eaten the latter figure seems likely. The party apparently did not take their farming responsibilities very heavily, for they quickly left to explore Kentucky. Redd says that Martin left the station in 1769, only one day after his arrival there.⁸ According to the above letter of Joseph Martin himself the party was there at least from April 20 to May 4.

Because of Indian depredations the station was abandoned in the fall of 1769, and Martin did not return to it until six years later.

The abandonment of the station stopped efforts at settlement for a time, but Dr. Walker showed his faith in Martin by return-

⁷This letter, found among his father's letters by his brother, is copied in William Martin's letter of September 6, 1842. Draper Manuscripts, 3XX7, pp. 4-5.

⁸John Redd, *Virginia Magazine of History*, Vol. 6, p. 342.

ing to the subject, as shown by a letter in September, 1771. (Weeks, p. 415.) Martin, however, made no further effort at establishing his station until the beginning of 1775. He returned to farming, first as an overseer for one of his relatives, but within three years he had progressed in material success to the point where he was able to purchase a tract of good land for himself. This was on Smith River, at that time in Pittsylvania County, in a part of the County from which Henry County was made in 1776. He gradually developed into a man of substance, and his family lived upon this estate until 1803, when he removed to a farm in the southern part of Henry County and built himself a large residence on Leatherwood Creek. This estate on Leatherwood, called Belmont and containing 1,210 acres, was purchased in 1796 from Benj. Harrison, Jr., of Berkley.⁹ These residences were for him but the sign of his substance and position, and the homes of his family; actually for many years his activities compelled him to spend most of his time elsewhere. In 1789 he returned to spend his last years at his home at Belmont.¹⁰

During the six years before 1775, when he was theoretically leading the life of a farmer, he was active in frontier affairs. In the Shawnee War of 1774, Lord Dunmore commissioned Martin as captain in the Pittsylvania militia, and the esteem in which he was held is shown by his quick appointment to the command of the Virginia scouts. On October 12, 1774, Colonel Preston wrote to Martin, "I know you have made several long fatiguing scouts with your men, for which I am much obliged." (Weeks, p. 415.) The defeat of the Indians at Point Pleasant, October 10, 1774, ended the Shawnee War, and the opportune lull in hostilities opened the way for the movement to Kentucky.

Early in January, 1775, Martin was back at Martin's Station to reestablish his claim in Powell Valley. According to Redd, who accompanied him, the party, consisting of sixteen or eighteen men, set out on December 28, 1774, from Henry County. Early in January they arrived at the Valley and halted in a large old Indian field.¹¹ Redd says: "We immediately set to work and built several strong cabins and Stockaded them, which made it a good fort for defense. We then fenced in with brush and rails a large portion of the old field in which we made a large crop of corn.

⁹William Martin, *Virginia Magazine of History*, Vol. 8, p. 347.

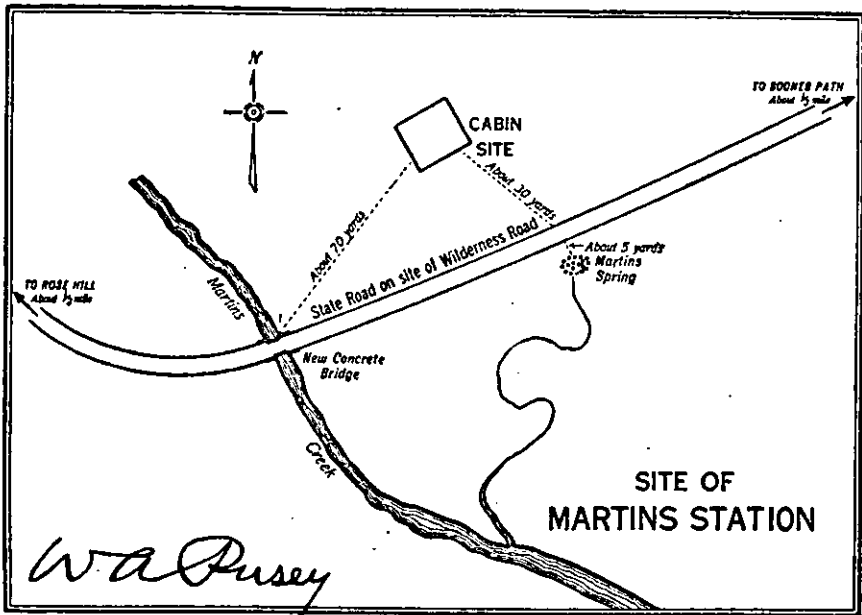
¹⁰William Martin, *Virginia Magazine of History*, Vol. 8, pp. 358, 359.

¹¹John Redd, *Publications of the Southern Historical Association*, Vol. 7, p. 5.

The Valley abounded in almost every Species of game, and the time we had to spare from cultivating our corn was employed in killing game, we soon had a large supply of meat."¹³

"Martin's fort was on Martin's Creek, north side, several fine springs near it. It consisted of five or six cabins, they were built some 30 feet apart with strong stockades between them; in the stockades were port holes, and the station covered about $\frac{1}{2}$ mile, in shape a parallelogram, woods came near it on north."¹⁴

The strategic advantages of Martin's Station showed Martin's grasp of the problems of this frontier. It was in the middle of Powell Valley, twenty miles from Cumberland Gap, and com-



Map showing location of Joseph Martin's Station, on the Wilderness Road, in what is now Lee County, Virginia. Martin's Station or Cabin, was, in the early days, the only station on the Wilderness Road between Blockhouse, the road's beginning in Virginia, and Crab Orchard, on the edge of the settlement in Kentucky, a total of almost 200 miles.

manded the upper part of the Valley and the Gap; it was half way between the Holston settlements and the Kentucky country; it was situated exactly on the Wilderness Road, where it crosses a creek which still bears his name.¹⁴

¹³John Redd, *Publications of the Southern Historical Association*, Vol. 7, p. 6.

¹⁴John Redd, *Publications of the Southern Historical Association*, Vol. 7, p. 257.

¹⁴William Allen Pusey, "The Location of Martin's Station," in *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, Vol. 16, December, 1928, p. 3.

In passing I wish to voice surprise and regret, that should be common, that the site is unmarked. Half a mile away, at a spot that has no historical significance and that later was the site of a now abandoned postoffice called Boone's Path, there is a marker of the Wilderness Road. At Martin's Station, with all the historical markers that are scattered over Virginia, there is none.

Weeks thinks that Martin's return to Powell Valley at this time was independent of Richard Henderson and his Company, or "at any rate in anticipation of them." (Weeks, p. 418.) A consideration of the collateral facts would seem to leave no doubt that Martin went to Powell Valley at this time as an agent of the Transylvania Company, on prearrangement with Henderson. His previous experience in Powell Valley would have suggested him as an outstanding man for this service. The Transylvania Company was evidently anxious to secure Martin, for, on January 20, 1775—almost before Martin reached the Valley—the Transylvania Company confirmed Martin's title to all the lands he had claim to under the Dr. Walker deed of 1769. This was even two months before the land had been granted to the Company at the treaty of Sycamore Shoals.

A leader like Martin and a fort like Martin's Station were essential for the success of the Transylvania Company's party that went out under Boone and for the contemplated settlement in Kentucky. The Transylvania Company depended upon Martin's Station. Boone and his party arrived at Martin's Station about March 16, and made their final arrangements for the journey, and when Henderson arrived there, ten days later, he made most important use of the station, as if by prearrangement. It was the outpost, fifty miles from the nearest settlement on the Clinch, where they rested, made their repairs, left their wagons, and gathered their party together for the final 100-mile dash to Kentucky.

It was essential to Boone and Henderson on their expedition in order to protect their rear from the Indians. It was the outpost necessary not only to the first parties, but to the settlement they established in order to keep open their line of communication with the Holston.

Henderson at once made Martin his man of affairs. He relied upon Martin to perform the essential function of restraining the Indians in Powell Valley and of keeping open the road to

Kentucky through this long stretch. A letter of his to Martin of July 20, 1775, shows this. Henderson says:

"Keep your men in heart if possible, now is our time, the Indians must not drive us—depend upon it that the Chief men and Warriors of the Cherokees will not countenance what their men attempted and will punish them—pray my Dear Sir don't let any person settle lower down the valley I am afraid they are now too low and must come away I did not want any person to settle yet below Cumberland Gap."

Another evidence of close understanding between the Transylvania Company and Martin comes up in this same letter, when Henderson speaks of the matter of laws for the Kentucky settlement. He says:

"We did not forget you at the time of making laws, your part of the country is too remote from ours to attend our Convention you must have Laws made by an Assembly of your own, I have prepared a plan which I hope you'll approve but more of that when we meet which I hope will be soon."

Martin was appointed by the Transylvania Company attorney for the transaction of its business and entry-taker for the Powell Valley portion of its territory,¹⁶ and was given explicit instructions for the sale of the lands.

All of these facts constituted the delegation of important responsibilities to Martin. It made him and Boone the most important agents for the successful carrying out of the attempt at colonization in Kentucky. It is hardly conceivable that the far-sighted Henderson and his partners in the Transylvania Company should have made no arrangements ahead for so essential a part of the project. It is even less so that they should have left to the chance of the journey the establishment of this essential station upon the way, or should have accepted Martin for the responsibilities they put on him simply because they happened to find him on the ground. It seems evident that Martin's selection for his important participation in the enterprise was the result of thoughtful prearrangement.

The importance of Martin's Station to Henderson was only the beginning of the important role it played in the early migration to Kentucky, and it remained an outpost of the greatest importance to travelers over the Wilderness Road until the road fell into disuse after 1794.

¹⁶William Martin, *Virginia Magazine of History*, Vol. 8, p. 353.

Martin's Station fulfilled its functions for the Transylvania Company through the important year of 1775, but, through Indian depredations and lack of provisions, in the winter of 1775-76 it did so with great difficulty. In the spring of 1776 Martin was in the Virginia settlements trying to get support, but, before he could get it, the Cherokee Indian war began in May. This, added to its other difficulties, led to the abandonment of the station in June, 1776.

The third attempt at settlement in Powell Valley was not made by Martin until 1783, and the fort was not regularly occupied in the meantime, but even unoccupied the station remained the important human landmark on the road through the Wilderness. Even unoccupied it was a place of refuge and a symbol of Martin's influence and the white man's presence. Thus George Rogers Clark records that when, on his trip to Virginia to get aid of the Legislature for the Kentucky settlers, he and his companion became incapacitated through chafing of their feet, and as he states suffered "more torment than I ever experienced before or since," they made their way to Martin's Station, which, although abandoned, gave them safe refuge for several days, until they were again able to travel.¹⁶

Martin's activities as a man of affairs and guardian of the road between Kentucky and the Holston settlement for Henderson, were second in importance only to Boone's actual leadership of the party to Boonesboro. The two supplemented each other perfectly and either was essential to the success of the enterprise. This service entitled Martin to a place in the history of early settlements in Kentucky as high as that of any of its pioneer worthies.

That was the first of Martin's important achievements. The second and more important came through the ability and success with which he conducted Indian affairs on the whole Southwestern border. Martin's capacity may have been as high as an Indian fighter and leader in the Wilderness as it was as an Indian conciliator, but his great usefulness came from his rare ability as a mediator. During the whole period of the Revolution, and in the uncertain times later before the establishment of Federal authority, he was the outstanding influence for peace with the Indians in this territory. His greatest achievement was the pacification of the Indians during the time Cornwallis was

¹⁶Mann Butler's *History of Kentucky*, 1834, pp. 38, 39.

overrunning Georgia and South Carolina, which finally enabled the frontiersmen to give the British General a blow at Kings Mountain from which he never recovered. That was a critical event in the Revolution. In Weeks' opinion it entitled Martin to be enrolled among "the heroes of '76."

During his activities in connection with the first year of the settlement of Kentucky, Martin was appointed by the Virginia Committee of Safety, on October 9, 1775, captain of the Pittsylvania Militia, with the duty of opposing the threatening Cherokees. His reputation grew rapidly. It was through his influence with the Indians—by his Indian wife or her clansmen—that the whites in the territory were warned of the plans of the Cherokees in 1774 to attack the settlements on the Holston in the northeast corner of Tennessee and then to invade Virginia. For the war with the Cherokees in 1776 he raised a company, of which he was captain and Redd was a sergeant, and marched to Long Island on the Holston to join Colonel William Christian. After erecting a fort and storehouse on the Holston, they marched in October against the Cherokees, laid waste their settlements, and returned to the fort in November.¹⁷ After this campaign most of the troops were disbanded, but Martin and his company were retained. He spent the winter of 1776–77 with his men at Rye Cove, Virginia,¹⁸ and continued in active service in the district until after the savages' strength had been broken. He was present at the treaty of Long Island in July, 1777, and after the treaty, July 20th, was appointed to the very important position of Indian Agent to the Cherokees. As Redd comments, "During the period he served as agent you will recollect that peace existed between the Cherokees and the whites."¹⁹

November 3, 1777, he was commissioned, by Governor Patrick Henry, Agent and Superintendent of Indian Affairs for the State of Virginia, a position which he continued to occupy until 1789. In his commission Governor Patrick Henry outlined the duties of his position as follows:

"You are hereby appointed Agent and Superintendent of Cherokees Indian Affairs for the State of Virginia, and you are to reside at some place in that Nation in order to negotiate and

¹⁷John Redd, *Publications of the Southern Historical Association*, Vol. 7, pp. 2, 3. William Martin, *Virginia Magazine of History*, Vol. 8, pp. 355, 356.

¹⁸John Redd, *Virginia Magazine of History*, Vol. 7, p. 115.

¹⁹William Martin, *Virginia Magazine of History*, Vol. 8, p. 356. John Redd, *Ibid*, Vol. 7, p. 7.

direct all things relating to the Commonwealth and which concern the Interest thereof, using your best endeavours from time to time to preserve peace with that Nation and to cultivate their present good Disposition. You are also to give Intelligence to the Governor for the time being of all occurrences that happen in your Department which shall concern Government to know, and to counteract the evil Desires of the Enemy and their intrigues to debauch these Indians from their friendship and in all things to promote the interest of the Commonwealth according to the utmost of your skill and Judgment, and all the subjects of this State are required to be aiding and assisting you herein. Given under my hand and the seal of the Commonwealth at Wmsburgh on this 3d day of November, 1777. P. Henry."²⁰

This was a large order, but Martin faithfully met it. As superintendent he took up his residence at the famous rendezvous of this territory, Long Island on the Holston, and "built a large storehouse in the Iseland for the purpose of deposing such goods as the government might send out for the Indians."²¹ He maintained his position there for twelve years until 1789. His situation there was difficult and dangerous, for in his position as mediator between the whites and Indians he had to see that each respected the rights of the other under the treaty of Long Island, and to deal fairly with both; also to counteract the influence of the British agents who hung around the Indians and incited them against the whites. In these duties he made alone many long, dangerous visits to the Cherokees.

Martin met his responsibilities on the whole with great success. He was relied upon by Governor Henry, Governor Harrison, Governor Alexander Martin, Governor Caswell, General Greene, along with others in responsibility, for advising them about the state of mind of the Indians, the activities of British agents and all other significant facts on the border. It is hard to estimate the amount of suffering and loss which the frontiersmen escaped through Martin's efficiency in discharging these duties.

It is equally impossible to estimate the aid that this influence of Martin's among the Indians gave in the successful conclusion of the Revolutionary War. In 1779, hoping to end the war by completing the conquest of the Southern States, Sir Henry Clinton and Lord Cornwallis, late in December, sailed from New York

²⁰John Redd, *Publications of the Southern Historical Association*, Vol. 7, p. 261.

²¹John Redd, *Virginia Magazine of History*, Vol. 7, p. 116.

with 7,600 men to capture Charleston. They, with the other British forces there, quickly had Georgia and South Carolina apparently conquered. On August 16, 1780, Cornwallis annihilated Gates at Camden, and made his plans to advance into North Carolina for its conquest. In England it was thought that the war was over. It was then that the battle of King's Mountain changed the whole complexion of the situation. The frontiersmen had been aroused to strong resentment by activity of the British agents among the Indians and raids of the British in the back districts. At this opportune time the Indians were at peace, thanks to Martin, and the frontiersmen were free to join in repelling the British. The decisive engagement took place at King's Mountain. Colonel Ferguson with 1,000 Tories and regulars had been sent into the western country to subdue the settlers and get Tory recruits; instead, the backwoodsmen swarmed after him. Let Redd describe their part. He says:

"Col. Cambell, Isaack Shelby, Col. Benj. Cleaveland and some other prominent leaders determined that they would arrest his course, accordingly men were dispatched in every direction informing the Whigs of Ferguson's movement and that an effort was about to be made to raise a number of men to meet him and give him battle. In a very short time an army of something like one thousand men met and placed themselves under the command of Cambell, Shelby, Cleveland and others. This army was raised without any authority from the government, the men had their own muskets, rifles and shot guns and such other weapons as they could raise, the patriots met with the British and Torays encamped on top of King's Mountain."²²

King's Mountain, where Ferguson was compelled to take refuge, is an isolated peak which, as I remember, is about two or three hundred feet high. There Ferguson thought himself safe, and defied "all of the rebels outside of hell" to take him.²³ The rebels' reply was a devastating fight on October 7, 1780, in which they killed Ferguson and three hundred men and took the other seven hundred prisoners. As Weeks says, "To Gen. Joseph Martin, their leader and representative, is due in no small measure the check given the Cherokees in the Revolution. It was largely his diplomatic work that kept them quiet during the British invasion of 1780 and 81. . . . This enabled the men . . . to strike

²²John Redd, *Virginia Magazine of History*, Vol. 7, p. 121.

²³C. H. Van Tyne, *The American Revolution, 1776-1783*, p. 302.

a heavy blow for liberty at King's Mountain, which proved to be the beginning of the end." Ferguson's command was a body of picked men, the loss of which hopelessly crippled Cornwallis, and made it possible for Gen. Greene successfully to harass him.

The battles of the Cowpens and of Guilford Court House which followed, were indecisive, but Cornwallis was in a hostile country and he had to have a decision. In desperation he first retired to Wilmington, hoping for the relief of the British fleet. Disappointed in this he began the retreat to the north which ended in his being penned up at Yorktown, and his surrendering on October 7, 1781, almost exactly a year after King's Mountain.

But the Cherokees could not be long restrained with all of Martin's efforts. He presented their chiefs with medals from Congress. But they had made a treaty with the British to make war on Carolina and Virginia, to murder the traders, to make prisoners and to steal horses; and hostilities began. A company was organized in Washington County, Virginia, under the command of Colonel Arthur Campbell, and Major Martin joined with an independent command in Sullivan County. They met Sevier and the Watauga men on the French Broad and advanced against the Indians on the Tennessee. The Indians, although they were commanded by the British agent, retreated, abandoning their homes, and the frontiersmen, by destroying their abandoned houses and settlements, and their crops and provisions, attained their objective of putting them in position where they were compelled to sue for peace.

Campbell, Sevier and Martin warned the Indians that if they wanted peace they must come to Long Island. On February 26, 1781, General Greene appointed "William Christian, William Preston, Arthur Campbell, and Joseph Martin, of Virginia, and Robert Sevier, Evan Shelby, Joseph Williams, and John Sevier, of North Carolina, commissioners to meet commissioners from the Cherokees to treat on the question of boundaries, to arrange for an exchange of prisoners and terms of peace, and to invite the Indians to appoint a commissioner to visit Congress."

In March, 1781, Martin was made a lieutenant colonel of the Washington Militia. The British agents tried to prevent peace, and Martin wrote to Colonel Campbell on September 20, 1781, "Scott, the present English agent, is very industrious in stirring

up the Indians to war." (Weeks, p. 433.) On December 29, 1781, he wrote to Shelby, "Could it be done with convenience, I think it would be well done for you to march immediately against Scott; I think one hundred men, well mounted, would do the business. I should think myself happy to be one of the number."

Martin's activities in pacifying the Cherokees continued through 1782. January 13, 1783, he and Isaac Shelby and John Donelson, father-in-law of Andrew Jackson, were appointed commissioners in behalf of Virginia to hold a treaty at French Lick, now Nashville, with the Cherokees, Creeks and Chickasaws.⁴⁴ On the previous September 18, 1782, he had written Colonel Campbell, "I believe that never were people more desirous of peace than the Cherokees." (Weeks, p. 435.)

On May 17, 1783, he was commissioned Indian Agent of North Carolina among the Cherokees and Chickamaugas; with instructions to visit them once in six months in their own country, deliver them messages from the governor, and record their talks.

Martin for North Carolina and Virginia, and Donelson for Virginia, held a treaty with the Chickamaugas at Long Island, on July 9, 1783.

While these negotiations of Martin as Indian Agent were going on, Martin was called on to make his third, and finally successful, endeavor to establish his station in Powell Valley. The conviction had grown among those interested in conducting the affairs of the frontier that a strong station should be developed in Powell's Valley, perhaps at Cumberland Gap. The reasons for it were stated in a letter from Colonel Christian—"than whom," says Weeks, "no braver pioneer graces the annals of our early history"—to Colonel Sampson Mathews, December 30, 1782:

" . . . The Island is in North Carolina about 10 miles; . . . The only way the Indians can come to the Island in safety is up the river, and even on that route they have suffered. . . . These inconveniences oblige Col. Martin to go all the way to the Nation with the goods the Executive furnishes him with, which adds considerable to the expense attending the trade. And if business is to be done it is a great risk to bring them to the island.

"What I mean then, to submit to your consideration, is the removing of the store and agency to Cumberland Gap. . . . The Gap is near half way betwixt our settlements on Holston and Kentucky, and a post there would be a resting place for our poor

⁴⁴William Martin, *Virginia Magazine of History*, Vol. 8, p. 357.

citizens going back and forward; and it would be a great means of saving the lives of hundreds of them. For it very seldom happens that Indians will kill people near where they trade; and it is thereabouts that most of the mischief on the road has been done. . . .

"Col. Martin could easily procure a number of families to join him and erect a Station next spring in Powell's Valley, and would willingly do it, if directed to do so by the Government. . . . Indeed I always thought our State ought to have kept a post at the Gap. There is a noted place called Martin's, 20 miles above the post at the Gap, where there was a station some years ago, that might answer. . . . I know of no views but the public good that Martin or myself could have in this change. I have, therefore, to stipulate with you, Sir, that if the proposition is disliked that the blame may fall on me alone.

"I wish to mention to you that I have been well acquainted with Col. Martin's public transactions and management for more than six years past, and have always observed him to be a faithful, trusty servant to the public, acting at all times fairly and openly without respect to the censure or applause of the lawless or licentious. I have always found him a man of the greatest candor and integrity in all his dealings, public and private, and I verily believe the back country does not afford a man so fit in all respects, as he is for your agent. I am sure he has been within an inch of losing his life in the service, when a man of less zeal for his country's welfare would have shuned the danger: In short, Sir, he is an undesigning, plain, honest, brave man, and understands the manners and dispositions of the Indians better than (any) body I know; besides, he is held in great esteem by all ranks of them. It is for fear Col. Martin has been, or may be traduced by men unacquainted with his merits, that I trouble you upon this head, and I am satisfied it will give you pleasure to know that those in trust under the direction of your Board are honest men. . . ."

When the matter was presented to Governor Harrison, he urged Martin to undertake it, and Martin accepting, proceeded vigorously. There was some delay due to Indian attacks on the settlements on the Clinch, but on August 30, 1783, Martin wrote Governor Harrison that he had sent men there to begin the station. Even then it was the only settlement between Kentucky and the Clinch.²⁵ In May, 1784, more than 100 men, women

²⁵William Martin, Draper Manuscripts, 3XX4, p. 1.

and children were there, and Martin was still anxious about their danger from Indians as late as the summer of 1786; but the settlement was never again dislodged. In 1788 General Martin finally severed his connection with the Powell Valley settlement by selling his interest in it.

In 1783 he was not only establishing the Powell Valley settlement but was at the same time Indian Agent for North Carolina and Virginia, Virginia Commissioner to the Chickasaws, and a participant in an extensive land project in the big bend of the Tennessee. Others in this last enterprise were William Blount, John Sevier, Griffith Rutherford, John Donelson and Governor Caswell. Martin was made agent and superintendent of Indian affairs of the company, but the settlement was unsuccessful. Charges were brought against Martin for his participation in this land speculation, but he was fully cleared.

Martin's career to 1789 is a constant succession of this sort of activity—always on the forefront of affairs on this frontier, conferring with the Indians, trying to protect them from the aggressions of the whites, acting as agent to settle disputes between the whites and the Indians, and in so doing incurring the hostility of many of the pioneers. As Weeks says, "We can but admire the determination of the agent who insisted on having the rights of the red man respected although it brought down on his head the wrath of the men whose interests were thus thrown into jeopardy."

The State of Franklin particularly embodied the inevitable conflict of interests between the frontiersmen and the Indians on the headwaters of the Tennessee. The settlers beyond the Blue Ridge felt that they were detached from Virginia and North Carolina. They also felt that their States neglected them and overtaxed them, and not only did not give them protection against the Indians but that in endeavoring to make them live up to their treaty obligations with the Indians, they actually favored the Indians. Martin was a member of the convention to establish the State of Franklin, and a member of the committee of the State of Public Affairs, including the question of secession from North Carolina. But he opposed the establishment of a separate state. As William Martin said, "my father was in the negative, with his usual decisiveness on all public matters."²⁶ He was not a member of the second convention of

²⁶William Martin, *Virginia Magazine of History*, Vol. 8, p. 358.

the State of Franklin. Throughout the life of this State he represented the opposition to the establishment of the State—as John Sevier typified its proponents—and as Indian Agent was zealous in upholding the rights of the Indians; thereby he incurred much hostility.

But in spite of this hostility his position and influence were little affected. From 1784 to 1787 he was a member from Sullivan County of the North Carolina legislature. On December 15, 1787, he was appointed by Governor Caswell, brigadier general of Militia of North Carolina in the Washington (Western) district.²⁷ This made him the head of the military organization in Tennessee, and in that capacity it was his duty to call upon Sevier and his followers to lay down their arms. There could hardly have been a more difficult task to carry through without armed conflict. His correspondence (Weeks, pp. 454, 455) indicates that he handled it with the utmost tact, with the greatest consideration for Sevier, his old friend and co-worker in the West and the hero of the movement. Ramsey says of the way in which Martin handled this difficult situation that "Its tone, its moderation, its wisdom, its sympathy for a soldier and a patriot constitute the highest eulogy upon his own good sense, his patriotism, and his good feelings."

As a result Martin brought the difficulty to a successful conclusion, and on April 17, 1788, was able to write to Governor Randolph, "I am happy to inform your excellency that the late unhappy dispute between the State of North Carolina and the pretended State of Franklin is subsided."

In 1786 the Federal Government appointed a Superintendent of Indian Affairs for the Southern Department. Martin was either a candidate or was proposed for this position, and Governor Martin of North Carolina, and Governor Henry of Virginia supported him for it. But he was not selected, probably through the influence of the supporters of the State of Franklin, and Dr. James White was appointed. With this appointment the position of Indian Agent for Virginia ended. Martin was informed of this in a letter from Governor Randolph dated January 31, 1787, in which he expressed his regrets and his appreciation of Martin's valuable services. This ended a term of Agent for Virginia of almost ten years. North Carolina continued him as Indian Agent until 1789.

²⁷Joseph Martin, Jr., Draper Manuscripts, 3XX13, p. 1.

Relations with the Indians under Dr. White and his successor Richard Winn (Weeks, p. 460) did not improve, and it was still found necessary to utilize Martin's services. In June, 1788, in an emergency, he was appointed by Congress Agent to the Cherokee Nation, and in August Agent to the Chickasaws, without complete authority in either case, and later was compelled to act as leader in difficult border hostilities.

The Chickasaws and Creeks, and the Cherokees to a less extent, were committing depredations along the border. Martin was able to placate the Cherokees to a very great degree, and, what was equally difficult, to mollify the whites. But reprisals against the others became necessary, and Martin undertook a campaign against them with a force of probably eight hundred to one thousand men. (Weeks, p. 463.) The Indians retreated to the mountains and Martin's force followed and was surprised and badly damaged at Lookout Mountain. Martin was able to withdraw his troops and retreat without demoralization. In spite of the failure of the expedition, it is rather remarkable that Martin was not blamed; next year the troops were paid by the state and discharged from service. The following year Martin was engaged in overcoming the machinations of the Spaniards, counteracting hostilities and treating with the Indians on the Georgia border.

In 1789 North Carolina ceded the territory west of the mountains to the United States Government, and the legislature repealed the law providing an Indian Agent for that district. General Martin's commission as Indian Agent for North Carolina lapsed with the cession of that district to the Federal Government. Martin's commission as Indian Agent for the United States expired also in 1789, and for the first time in fifteen years, since 1774, he was a private citizen.

Martin was now in his fiftieth year, after more than thirty years of incessant activity on the southwestern border. He was evidently too old in service to retire quietly to his Henry County estate and give up his frontier life. In 1789 he established a fort and took up his residence in Georgia, was engaged in Indian hostilities, and elected to the Georgia legislature.²³ He was active in preventing Indian depredations not only in Georgia but also in Virginia. Thus he continued until 1793. On December

²³Joseph Martin, Jr., Draper Manuscripts, 3XX13, pp. 1-3.

11, 1793, he was commissioned, by Governor Henry Lee of Virginia, brigadier general of the Virginia Militia.

Martin was in the Hillsboro convention in 1788, when North Carolina discussed the adoption of the Federal Constitution, and he was for immediate ratification.²⁹ He was also a member of the Fayetteville convention when North Carolina adopted the Constitution in 1789. Following his service with the North Carolina legislature from 1784 to 1789, he was in the Virginia legislature from 1791 to 1799, when he refused further election on account of age. Redd, who was in the Virginia legislature with him three times, said, "Capt. Martin was elected several years afterwards and in fact he was elected whenever he offered his services."³⁰ He was "Mr. Madison's right arm" in the famous Virginia resolutions of 1798 and 1799.³¹

During Martin's late years in public life he was called to act upon various commissions which had to do with the difficult business of establishing state boundaries. Kentucky and Virginia were in disagreement about their boundary and in 1795 commissions were appointed for its determination. On this commission for Kentucky were John Coburn, Robert Johnson and Buckner Thruston, and for Virginia Archibald Stuart, Creek Taylor and Joseph Martin.³²

The Tennessee and Virginia boundary was also uncertain. North Carolina and Virginia had not been able to settle it while Tennessee was part of North Carolina. In 1790 Martin got the Virginia Assembly to refer it to a committee, but he could never get the committee to meet, and nothing came of it. In 1802 a commission was appointed consisting of Joseph Martin, Creed Taylor and Peter Johnston for Virginia, and John Sevier, Moses Fish and George Rutledge for Tennessee. They succeeded in getting perfected an agreement between the rival claims which ran the line westward to the top of Cumberland Mountain. As Redd says, "The line the commission ran commenced in the old Cumberland Gap on a tree which Kentucky cornered, which tree was the corner tree of Kentucky, North Carolina and Virginia."³³ The states accepted this in 1803, and it has since been the boundary.

²⁹William Martin, *Virginia Magazine of History*, Vol. 8, p. 359.

³⁰John Redd, *Virginia Magazine of History*, Vol. 7, p. 117.

³¹William Martin, *Virginia Magazine of History*, Vol. 8, p. 359.

³²Joseph Martin, Jr., *Draper Manuscripts*, 3XX13, pp. 1-3.

³³John Redd, *Virginia Magazine of History*, Vol. 7, p. 117.

Martin's service on the commission to settle the boundary between Virginia and Tennessee, from which he retired in 1803, was his last official position. After the conclusion of this service he removed his residence from Smith River to Leatherwood Creek, in Henry County, and devoted himself to his private affairs. He had accumulated a considerable estate in Virginia and Tennessee, and had reared a large family, and here he lived the life of a prosperous Virginia land-owner. In the summer of 1808 he made a long journey to the West upon private business, during which he returned to many of the scenes of his early activities and visited his Cherokee friends. He no longer had his old endurance, and he returned home greatly fatigued by the journey. Whether as a result of it, as his son William intimates, or not, he died of paralysis on his estate in Henry County on December 18, 1808, at the age of 68.⁴⁴

This incomplete account of Martin's activities shows the extent and significance of his services on the Western border. His career was one of remarkable activity and great importance.

As Gibbon said of Belisarius, Martin "attracted and satisfied the eyes of the people." In his early years he must have been a fine figure of a frontiersman, tall, lean, quiet, athletic, vigorous and powerful. He was six feet tall and weighed 200 pounds in his maturity. His son gives a picture of him on his return with the troops from the Chickasaw war, when he was forty-one years old, "My father's appearance on their return, although more than sixty years ago, is now vividly before my eyes, his fine manly form—his hunting shirt and leather leggins—his large [*illegible*] sword and pistols, and mounted on one of the finest geldings for the occasion I ever saw . . . His corps did most of the killing."⁴⁵ His manners were easy, and he was sociable and affable, or dignified, reserved and commanding, as circumstances affected him. His son says, "although many years of his afterlife associated him with men of fashion and refinement, and although he was fond of fine clothes and dressed neatly, yet he never changed the fashion of his dress, but tenaciously adhered to the small clothes, pants short and knee buckles, wide-backed straight-breasted coat, skirted vest and neck-stock with the buckle." His son continues, "Indeed he had in his composition a good deal of the

⁴⁴Joseph Martin, Jr., Draper Manuscripts, 3XX13, p. 1.

⁴⁵Draper Manuscripts, 3XX4, pp. 4, 5.

old English aristocracy which would occasionally leak out and prided himself much on being a Saxon."

Martin's standing on the Southwestern border was indicated by the commanding position which he held there for thirty years, by the important responsibilities which he was continually called upon to assume; by the confidence that was given him by such men as Governor Patrick Henry, Governor Benjamin Harrison, Governor Henry Lee and Governor Edmund Randolph of Virginia, Governor Richard Caswell and Governor Alexander Martin of North Carolina; by his association in responsibility with all of the leaders of his time, with such men as Richard Henderson, William Preston, John and Robert Sevier, John Donelson, James Robertson, Isaac and Evan Shelby, William Christian and Arthur and William Campbell. But the greatest tribute to Martin is shown in the high esteem in which he was held throughout his long career by those justly skeptical and sorely tried critics, the Cherokee Indians.

Indian fighter and Indian friend, warrior and peace-maker, border leader and Virginia planter, statesman and man of affairs, advocate and arbitrator, he was a remarkable and admirable combination. Martin was the most important influence in maintaining peaceful relations with the Indians from the beginning to the completion of the early settlements of the Southwestern border. From 1775 to 1790 he, of all men, held the Indians there in restraint. It was the greatest service that could be performed for the people of that territory, and gives him valid claim to be regarded as one of the most important, if not the most important, figure in its history. General Joseph Martin deserves to be remembered.