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COLONEL JOHN HARDIN AND HIS LETTERS TO HIS WIFE — 1792

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Many brave men who had fought gallantly in the American Revolution came to Kentucky soon after hostilities ceased. Among these pioneer soldiers was John Hardin (1753-1792).

The Hardin family is an old one in America. Mark Hardin (1660-1735) and his wife Mary Hogue acquired land in Northumberland County, Virginia, in 1707. Mark Hardin made his will March 16, 1734, which was probated May 21, 1735. To his four sons and six daughters he left more than 1000 acres of land.

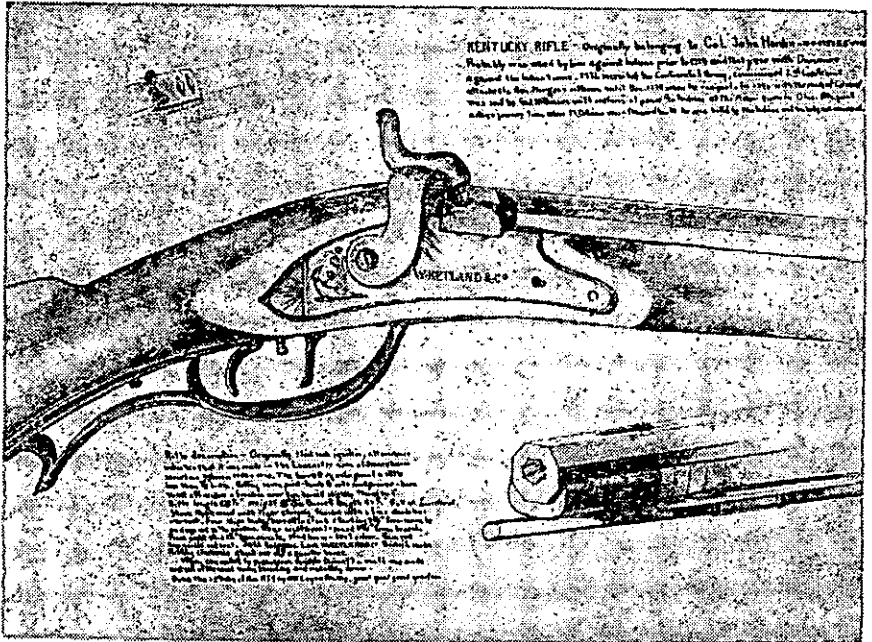
One of the sons of Mark and Mary was Martin Hardin who was born in 1716. He married Lydia Waters, a descendant of Edward Waters who came to Jamestown, Virginia, in 1608.

Martin Hardin was called "Ruffled shirt" because of his distinguished bearing. Like his father, he was a large land owner. Late in life, he removed from Fauquier County, Virginia, to Monongahela County, in Pennsylvania. He served in the Pennsylvania militia in the Revolutionary War, and died in 1789.

Martin and Lydia Hardin were the parents of three sons and four daughters. Through these seven children, they became the ancestors of some of the most distinguished Kentucky families, such as the Wickliffe, McHenry, Field, Helm, Beckham, McChord, Harwood, and many others.

The first son and fifth child of Martin and Lydia Hardin was John who was born in Fauquier County, Virginia, October 1, 1753. When John was twelve years old, he moved to Pennsylvania with his parents. Educational opportunities were scant so the boy spent much of his time in hunting wild game with which he supplied three families. He became very skilled in the use of the rifle. This rifle was later to play an important part in the Revolution when John became a mem-

ber of General Daniel Morgan's Rifle Corps as a Second Lieutenant. In 1774, Governor Dunmore led his troops against the Indians. John Hardin served as an ensign under the command of Captain Zack Morgan and while in the act of firing at an Indian he received a bullet in the groin which was never extracted.



Hardin joined General Daniel Morgan's Rifle Corps which enacted such an important part on Bemis' Heights on September 19 and October 7, 1779, commonly known as the battles of Saratoga. The uniform of the Riflemen was "an elegant loose dress, reaching to the middle of the thigh, ornamented with fringes in various parts, and meeting the pantaloons of the same material and colors, fringed and ornamented in a corresponding style. The officers wore the usual crimson sash over this, and around the waist — the straps, belt, &c., were black." ¹

Practically all of these Riflemen were sharpshooters, being able to hit a mark at a great distance.

Several interesting stories have come down to us concerning John Hardin and his performance in the battle of Saratoga. Here, one might say, had it not been for Morgan's Rifle Corps and Benedict Arnold's superb leadership at the second battle on Bemis' Hill, Burgoyne and not Gates would have been the victor at Saratoga.

Colonel John Hardin's son, Mark Hardin, who lived at Shelbyville, Kentucky, stated:

"I recollect well my father's saying that at the taking of Burgoyne, his gun became so hot he had to cool her in water three times; and that unless some of his balls dropped out of his shot-pouch, he had fired about forty-nine times, as there were that many balls missing; that each time he took deliberate aim, and was so protected himself that he felt no fear of danger; and that his enemy, in each case, was in full view and wholly unprotected, and as near as he wished an object to be, to be sure of hitting it."²

Colonel James Knox, who served with Hardin in Morgan's Rifle Corps, described Hardin the Scout. He would discover the enemy approaching and conceal himself until the enemy came in the reach of his gun — and there, under the cover of the smoke of his own gun, would conceal himself. Colonel Knox stated that he had seen more than one hundred guns fired at him by the enemy.³

Mansfield Tracy Walworth, in his sketch of Colonel John Hardin,⁴ says:

"It appears that some of Morgan's Rifle-corps were armed with the tomahawk. This was a weapon used at least in the following affair, which is given accurately, and for the first time in full to the public. While the British occupied Philadelphia, Washington was desirous to detain them within as narrow limits as possible. Lieutenant Hardin was on the lines with his command; and, on a particular occasion, he was officer of a guard to prevent supplies being sent in to the enemy. Three wagons, loaded with flour, forced the guard, and at a rapid rate, were pushing on. Hardin sprang on a horse, and alone pursued, rifle in hand. He passed the first and second wagon, and on reaching the head horses of the third wagon, he drew his tomahawk, and struck it into the head of one of them. The horse fell, and, of course, halted the teams. At this moment, the owner of the wagon presented his gun from the inside of the hindmost, or third, wagon; but, before he could fire, he received the contents of Hardin's rifle. This partisan officer was quick as the lightning. Thus, alone, and a mile away from his men, he captured three teams and their drivers, and forced them to drive back into the American Camp. The Pennsylvania Tory whom he thus killed was a very wealthy farmer, whose name is withheld in this place for certain adequate reasons. The commanding officer in consideration of this exploit, offered the three wagons and teams to Hardin; but he refused to receive the present. He never was known to accept or appropriate Tory property, so thoroughly did his American heart despise those traitors to the soil."

General Charles Scott, who commanded the forces sent to the Wabash, states that Hardin captured one of the Indian towns on the Wabash and killed six warriors and captured fifty-two prisoners.⁵

In a letter written to the Secretary of War, General Scott wrote:

"I consider it my duty to mention Colonel John Hardin, who had command of my advance party and the direction of my guides, for the discernment, courage, and activity with which he fulfilled the trust I reposed in him."⁶

General Daniel Morgan considered Hardin the most reliable scout in his rifle corps and usually selected him to go on some hazardous mission.⁷ When he heard of Hardin's tragic death, he said:

"A braver soldier never lived; a better man has rarely died."⁸

Near Hardin's monument at Saratoga is one to Benedict Arnold, showing Arnold's leg, to recall the leg that Arnold lost in his courageous charge at Saratoga. On the reverse side of the stone is a beautiful tribute to his gallantry in that battle, but his name is omitted, reminding one of the empty niche at West Point where his name is also omitted among the distinguished graduates.

John Hardin's monument at Saratoga bears this inscription:

SARATOGA

1777

BRITISH REDOUBT

TO COMMEMORATE THE SERVICES OF
LIEUTENANT JOHN HARDIN OF MORGAN'S
RIFLE CORPS WHO LED A SUCCESSFUL
RECONNAISSANCE SEPTEMBER 19, 1777,
WHO ALSO DISTINGUISHED HIMSELF IN
THE BATTLES FOUGHT ON THIS GROUND
SEPT: 19, AND ON OCT. 7 AND OF
WHOM HIS COMMANDING OFFICER WROTE
A BRAVER SOLDIER NEVER LIVED — A
BETTER MAN HAS RARELY DIED.

ERECTED BY HIS GREAT GRANDSON
MARTIN D. HARDIN
U. S. ARMY

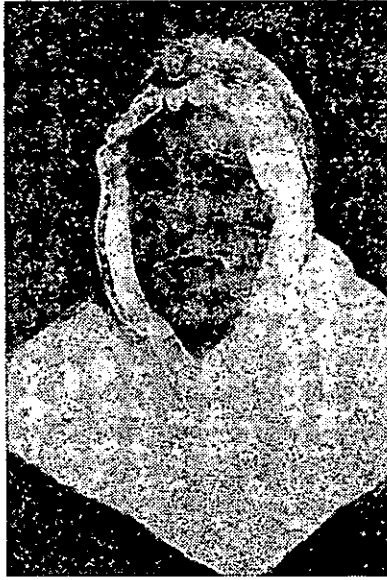
Colonel Hardin moved to Kentucky in 1786 and settled in Nelson County. The part of the county in which he lived was later formed into Washington County. Here, he became a successful stock raiser and farmer and prospered financially. He left each one of his children several hundred acres of land.

It is said that he was in every engagement led by the Kentuckians against the Indians except the one led by Arthur St. Clair. An accident was the cause of his not being in this excursion.

He was elected a justice of the first court of Washington County, his name being the first on the list and would have been the first president of the County Court but he was unable to attend the first meeting so this honor passed to Matthew Walton in his stead.

In 1787, Colonel Hardin joined the Methodist Church at Sandusky Station, about three miles from the town of Springfield, and ever after

lived a very consistent Christian life. He refused to have his portrait painted because he thought it violated the Second Commandment. He was as active in his church obligation as he had been in the military service. His wife, who had been a Presbyterian in Pennsylvania, joined the Methodist Church with him.



JANE DAVIESS HARDIN

John Hardin married Jane Daviess, daughter of Nathaniel Daviess, of Western Pennsylvania. Her grandparents were from Wales. The following children were born to this union:

1. Sarah, married Rev. Barnabus McHenry.
2. Martin D., married Elizabeth Logan, daughter of General Ben Logan.
3. Mark, married Mary Adair, daughter of Governor John Adair.
4. Daviess, married Elizabeth William Simpson.
5. Mary, married ——— Estill, a farmer in Madison County.
6. Lydia Ann, died young.
7. Rosanna, married Curtis Field.

In the spring of 1792, John Hardin was sent on a peace mission to the Indians in Ohio where the Indians murdered him.

After John Hardin's death, Jane married on May 21, 1799, Colonel Christopher Irvine, of Madison County. There was no issue to this marriage. Mrs. Irvine died May 31, 1829.

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Like many soldiers who have had an important part in winning battles, Colonel John Hardin did not like to refer to his work as a sharpshooter. He told his wife it seemed too much like murder. He seldom mentioned his war experiences to his children. Our knowledge is derived from what he told his wife and from his brother Mark who, also, was a very brave and patriotic soldier.

The letters which follow were written to his wife, Jane Daviess Hardin, shortly before his massacre.

Fort Washington, April 28, 1792

My Very Dear Love;

This is to inform you that I arrived safe at this place yesterday at eleven o'clock. I am in good health through mercy, and I hope these will find you and my dear little ones in good health and in good spirits, looking to God through Jesus for protection and favor.

I am not certain what time I shall set out for the Indian towns, as the dispatches that the General sent forward have not yet returned, and he awaits their return before I set off. Neither has the General and I come on certain terms, but he is very anxious that I should go. The Indians have killed several persons in that quarter lately and leave behind them war clubs, which denotes their intentions of war. But not let this give you any uneasiness, as I have not a doubt but what I shall meet with good treatment, as the speech and belt I shall take (if I go) is from the President of the United States.

I have thought of sending my horse home. If a good opportunity offers, as I shall have but a very poor way of keeping him at this place, nothing but corn to feed with. But if I do I will write to brother Martin concerning him. Give my compliments to Mr. Benjamin Wilkinson and tell him to use every exertion to complete both mills this season.

What time I shall return is Uncertain, but be that sooner or later, (if I'm spared) I do expect to be well paid. No more at present, but remain with great love and respect.

J. Hardin

Mrs. Jane Hardin.

P.S. I shall write you again before I leave here.

Fort Washington, May 10, 1792

My Dear Love;

I gladly embrace this opportunity, by Mr. Kimberlin, to inform you that I am still waiting at this place for the return of the messenger that have been sent to the Indian towns about thirty days ago, and as they are detained, I have no doubt but the Indians are holding council, and if that is the case, some Indians are expected in with them, but perhaps may not be this ten days. Gen. Wilkinson has promised me a guinea a day from the time I left home until I return. But this is not an object with me, that would cause me to detain or keep at a distance from you. I am sincerely anxious to be with you, my dear, and my little ones (oh, give my love to them all) and tell them I will return as soon as I can, and

I hope Providence will prove kind, and restore me once more to you and them. I shall enclose you forty dollars in this letter, in paper money which you may exchange for gold or silver, and I wish you not to want for anything that it will buy. I want my mills to go as if I were present and that money may answer until I can send you more, which I shall, by Mr. Robert Elliott, if he expects, starts for the falls in a few days, by whom I intend to send Mr. Robert Tobin his money. I would have sent it now but I think I have sent as much as I can risk. I shall write a few lines to brother Martin and Mr. Tobin. May God Almighty bless you, and make us mindfull of His love and kindness, find you in health and happy in His love for which I pray.

J. Hardin

Fort Washington, May 19, 1792

My Dearest Love:—

I once more have the pleasure to inform you that I still enjoy a very good state of health, for which I praise the God of all Mercy, in hopes these will find you and my dear family in the same good state, and looking to God Almighty for further protection.

This is also to inform you that I expect to start out on Monday next for the Sandusky towns; Major Trueman for the Miami towns, and to try to form a junction, at the mouth of the Miami River, which is called Rosebede, where we expect to hold a treaty with all the indians that we can collect at that place. The length of time it will take me is uncertain, but I am in hopes, if I am spared, to have the infinite pleasure and happiness of seeing you in two or three months at the most. But if that should not be the case I would not have you to be uneasy, as I must wait the pleasure of the Indians. Should any opportunity offer after I leave this I shall write, but if not, I wish you, my dear, to make yourself as happy as your circumstances will admit of. I have sent you a further sum of money to enable you to pay Mr. Robert Tobin for his horse and defray all other necessary expenses you may probably be at till I return, should the sum prove not sufficient you will write to Gen. James Wilkinson, who has promised to furnish you with what money you may stand in need of till I return; and should I fall a sacrifice in this important attempt, the Gen. has promised me to be your steady friend and that your yearly supply from the Government shall not be less than two hundred dollars during your natural life. But oh, my dear love, as I meditate on myself to think I have left a peaceable home and so dear a family, and throw my life into the hands of a cruel and savage enemy. I cannot prevent the tears flowing from my eyes at present; and I do my love, implore your prayers daily at the throne of Grace for my protection from both spiritual and temporal enemies. My soul, at present, is fixed in God and my earnest prayer is for you and my dear little ones. Oh, that Heavens smiles may rest upon you all, which I pray in and through the merits of Jesus Christ that through his blood alone, we be made meet for the Kingdom of Glory.

I send you forty dollars by Mr. Jacob Kimberlin and I shall send you a list of the money I sent by Mr. Clark, who has promised me to call and deliver you this. The quantity I cannot yet ascertain, as I have not yet received the money I sold a tract of land for, and I have some doubts I

shall not be able to get it at present, though it will be sure money in a short time. You will also give my compliments to Benjamin Wilkinson and tell him I shall depend altogether on him to inform you what is wanting and to carry on the mills in as speedy and good manner as he possibly can for which, if he should want any small money for his own use, you will supply him, not exceeding twenty dollars, and when I return I will amply reward him for all his extra services. Also my friend Clemens, who I promised the mills to until he is satisfied for his labor and then the refusal of them afterwards. I shall write to brother Martin, and I will also write to Mr. Wilkinson and Tobin.

Therefore I conclude your affectionate, loving husband till death,,,and my kindest love and affection to my dear children.

J. Hardin

N.B. May 20th— I have sent you only \$200 as I have not received a farthing for my land, and I have directed Mr. Clarke to pay off and take up my note that I gave Mr. Alexander Parker, Lexington, which he will pay out of the sum sent you. You will give my love to sister Robertson, brother Martin L. Thomas and their families and believe me as ever, your loving husband.

It is interesting to note that Colonel John Hardin's descendants have been prominent in military life.

His son Martin D. served in the War of 1812. He was a general in the United States Army — the youngest Brigadier-General in the Union Army — and was the fifth generation of Hardin soldiers.

General Martin D. Hardin's son John served in the Mexican War as a Colonel. This Colonel John Hardin was killed at Buena Vista in that war. He was the father of Ellen Hardin Walworth, one of the founders of the Daughters of the American Revolution.

Hon. Mark Hardin of Shelbyville, Kentucky, son of Colonel John Hardin, I, erected a very handsome cenotaph to his father's memory in Grove Hill Cemetery in Shelbyville. Hardin County, Kentucky, is named for Colonel John, and a town in Ohio, near the spot where he was murdered, is named Hardin.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: My father, Dr. Thomas Sanders, was reared by his grandfather Mark Hardin, son of Colonel John Hardin. It was from my father that I derived most of the data in this sketch.

FOOTNOTES

- ¹ Headley, J. T., *Washington and His Generals*, Vol. 1, p. 271.
- ² Walworth, Mansfield Tracy, "Colonel John Hardin," *The Historical Magazine*, Vol. 15 (April, 1869). p. 233.
- ³ *Ibid.* p. 235.
- ⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 235-236.
- ⁵ *Ibid.* p. 236.
- ⁶ *Ibid.* p. 236.
- ⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 233, 235.
- ⁸ Inscription on John Hardin's monument at Saratoga, N. Y.