

FOCUS ON KENTUCKY GENEALOGY
WILLIAM CUMMINS AND HIS FAMILY

Daniel S. Rush

William Cummins was born in 1739. Nothing more is known about his parents, birthplace, or early life. In 1780 he and his wife Mary and their large family came to Kentucky from either Pennsylvania or Virginia and probably settled at the Dutch Station on Beargrass Creek near the Falls of the Ohio.¹ The winter of 1779-1780 had been especially hard in Louisville; no settlers or supplies could come down the frozen river. The spring of 1780, however, brought many new families into the area, and it seems likely that the Cummins family arrived during this period.² These were still dangerous and difficult times on the Kentucky frontier. Indian raids

DANIEL S. RUSH, M.D., is a professor of surgery at the James H. Quillen College of Medicine at East Tennessee State University in Johnson City, Tennessee.

1 Jefferson County Minute Book 4, p. 67, reprinted in *Jefferson County, Kentucky Records* (5 vols.; Evansville, Indiana: Cook Publications, 1987), 2: 30-33. The evidence that the Cummins family settled at the Dutch Station is indirect. A number of stations, or forts, were located along the middle fork of Beargrass Creek, which Bishop Francis Asbury called "the garden of the state." See Bishop Asbury's journal quoted in *The Filson Club History Quarterly* 31 (1957): 344-45. The Low Dutch (or New Holland) Station was settled by Pennsylvania Germans and was located near where Brown's Lane today crosses Beargrass Creek. William Cummins was a signer of the Low Dutch Petition in 1784. See A.C. Quisenberry, "Five Hundred Kentucky Pioneers," *Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* 10 (1912): 44. Under questioning by David Cummins, recorded in Minute Book 4 in 1804, James Welsh implies that a number of the men in question, including William Cummins, lived at or near the Dutch Station. See *Jefferson County, Kentucky Records*, 2: 31.

2 Quoted in George H. Yater, *Two Hundred Years at the Falls of the Ohio: A History of Louisville and Jefferson County* (Louisville: Heritage Corporation, 1979), 15. On 5 May 1780 John Floyd wrote that "near three-hundred large boats have arrived at the Falls this spring with families. We have six stations on B. grass with not less than 600 men." See Neal O. Hammon, "Early Louisville and the Beargrass Stations," *Quarterly* 52 (1978): 156. The Cummins family probably arrived during the spring of 1780 and settled at one of the Beargrass stations. No earlier references to William Cummins have been found. He was not listed in George Rogers Clark's Illinois Regiment in 1778 and 1779 or in Bowman's state troops which arrived in Louisville in 1779. Also, the Cummins family is not known to have been among those left at Corn Island in 1778.

against the Kentucky settlements were frequent between 1774 and 1786, and raids continued into the early 1790s. Every able-bodied man had to be ready to defend his home and family from Indian attack.

William Cummins was first listed on the payroll of the Jefferson County militia under Captain John Vantreese on 24 April 1782.³ He was later assigned a tour of duty working on the construction of Fort Nelson at the Falls of the Ohio under Captain Richard Chenoweth from 20 April to 12 May 1782 and was again listed on the militia payroll on 26 January 1783.⁴ These militia rosters contain the names of other early settlers in the Louisville area, many of whom were neighbors of the Cummins family.

Although the Revolutionary War in the east ended with the surrender of the British army at Yorktown on 17 October 1781, fierce fighting continued in Kentucky with Shawnee Indians from across the Ohio River. Following the siege of Bryan's Station near Lexington, the pursuing Kentuckians were badly ambushed and defeated at the Battle of Blue Licks on 19 August 1782 by three hundred Indians and fifty British rangers. George Rogers Clark, recently promoted to brigadier general, called out the Kentucky militia to retaliate, and by 1 November he had 1050 mounted riflemen assembled at the mouth of the Licking River to attack the Indian villages north of the Ohio River. The campaign was well organized and coordinated. Although the Indians refused to fight and withdrew into the Indiana territory, the militia burned a number of their villages and trading posts. William Cummins was a member of this militia force and lost his horse during the campaign. He was mentioned in General Clark's papers and received "40 pounds for a mare lost in service to the state" on 1 July 1783.⁵

3 Illinois Papers, quoted in Margery H. Harding, *George Rogers Clark and His Men* (Frankfort: Kentucky Historical Society, 1981), 116.

4 Harding, *George Rogers Clark*, 120.

5 James Alton James, ed., *George Rogers Clark Papers, 1771-1781* (Collections of the Illinois State Historical Society, Virginia Series, volume 4; Springfield, Illinois, 1912), 334.

William Cummins was involved in community affairs and was on the early poll lists for Jefferson County.⁶ He was also a signer of the Low Dutch Petition seeking aid from the General Assembly of Virginia in 1784.⁷ On 20 April 1785 William Cummins received grant #9288 from Virginia for four hundred acres on Patton's Creek in Jefferson (now Trimble) County. This land was given "by virtue of a certificate granted by the Court of Jefferson [County] agreeable to an act of assembly." It is unknown if any of the family ever resided on this land, but it is doubtful. William Cummins later listed this property in his will dated 7 September 1795.⁸

On 7 February 1787, Cummins purchased four hundred acres from James Welsh.⁹ This property was located on a tributary of Floyd's Fork, a creek which became known as Pennsylvania Run because most of the settlers in the area came from Pennsylvania.¹⁰ These four hundred acres had been part of the land that James Welsh surveyed in 1780 for his father John Welsh who had treasury

6 "Minute book A, Jefferson County, 1781-1783," *Quarterly* 3 (1928-1929): 55-83, 121-54, 171-94, reprinted in *Early Kentucky Settlers, The Records of Jefferson County, Kentucky* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1988), 42.

7 Low Dutch Reformed Church, historical files, library, The Filson Club Historical Society.

8 "Calendar of Early Jefferson County Wills," reprinted in *Early Kentucky Settlers*, 20.

9 Jefferson County Deed Book 1, p. 281 (abstract). James Welsh to W. Cummins, 1 tract of 400 acres in Jefferson County on waters of Floyd's fork, Ky. part of a tract of 600 acres surveyed and patented for John Welsh, father of said James Welsh, Dated Feb'y 6, 1787. Original taken out of office by William Cummins.

10 Jefferson County Minute Book 4, reprinted in *Jefferson County, Kentucky Records*, v. 2, p. 9. Deposition(s) of Hardy Hill and James Welsh taken on September 15, 1796 at a certain spring and old improvement on the "Pencilvany" [sic] Run, a branch of Cedar Creek waters of Floyd's Fork. Stated that in the spring of '79 that they in company with James Guthrie, Alexander Barr, John Thompson, Robert Dicky, Hardy Hill, purchased of Capt. James Patten the above improvement, and reimproved the same further, making 12 improvements of which he understood 10 improvements to be on the waters of Floyd's Fork and that Capt. James Patten said it should be called "Pennsylvania Run" as the purchasers were all from Pennsylvania, and that it has been known by that name ever since, as best he "reckerleked" [sic].

Hardy Hill

James Welsh

Witnessed by P. Sanders, James Sandiford, and James Quertermous.

warrants for twelve hundred acres.¹¹ Many of the early claims were later disputed because of confused and overlapping surveys. Welsh's claim to this property was later disputed by John Larue's heirs, and so the Cummins family had to defend their ownership in court against this conflicting claim. In February 1804 David Cummins, the eldest son of William, advertised in *The Farmer's Library* for witnesses to come forth and give testimony concerning the original cabin and improvements on this tract of land.¹²

The court proceedings, recorded in Jefferson County Minute Book 4, provide a valuable glimpse into the Cummins family's frontier life during this period. The record states that the men met at a "large Spanish Oak tree in the Cummins' meadow, near a large boiling spring running into the creek, now called Pennsylvania Run, about two hundred yards southwardly from the Cummins' stone dwelling house." James Guthrie testified that in April or May 1779 in company with James Welsh, Alexander Barr, Hardy Hill, Robert Dicky, James Patten, and John Thompson he set out from the Falls of the Ohio to make improvements. They built a cabin about ten or twelve yards from the tree and spring. The original cabin was about fourteen feet square and about six logs high with ribs for covering, but it was not covered. The men made eleven other improvements during the tour, which were divided among the company, and this improvement fell to James Welsh. The cabin could be seen for several hundred yards in any direction.

James Welsh concurred with James Guthrie and testified that he made the entry for these improvements on 27 May 1780. He further stated that a subsequent locator could have been informed of this entry at Dutch Station or at any of the other stations on Beargrass or at the Falls of the Ohio. He also stated that the cabin and improvements "were found by Anthony Junkins, William Cummins, and John Shaw by my directions late in the year 1780."¹³

11 Willard Rouse Jillson, *Old Kentucky Entries and Deeds* (first publication series, no. 34; Louisville: Filson Club Historical Society, 1926), 305.

12 *The Farmer's Library* [Louisville], 11 February 1804.

13 Jefferson County Minute Book 4, in *Jefferson County Kentucky Records*, v. 2, p. 33.

James Quertermous testified that the claim was marked and well known as "Welch's improvement." He also stated that he was with John Floyd when he made the conflicting Preston survey. Floyd ignored warnings that he was including Welch's improvement in the Preston survey and finished his line anyway. This error evidently caused the dispute which William Cummins's heirs were trying to resolve when they advertised for witnesses. Needless to say, the Welsh and Cummins claim was upheld in court.¹⁴

The Cummins farm or station was located then, and today, on Manslick Road which leads to Man's Lick, an old salt well about six miles to the southwest near present-day Fairdale. James Guthrie was one of the nearest neighbors and lived three miles away at the intersection of Manslick and Bardstown roads in present-day Fern Creek. The Guthrie stone house is no longer standing. It was most likely similar in construction to the Cummins' stone house, which was considered a local stronghold where the neighbors gathered whenever there was an Indian threat. Once the Guthries heard that Indians were around and, since their cattle had gone off to the salt lick, they left the pasture bars down and went to the Cummins' house. They arrived about 4:00 p.m. when they heard a crackling noise in the thicket. They all seized their guns expecting to find Indians, but to their surprise discovered the Guthrie cattle returning from the salt lick. A newspaper advertisement from Man's Lick on 2 September 1797 suggests that the Cummins family sold salt at their place.¹⁵

William and his family were Presbyterians who were active in the organization of the Pennsylvania Run Presbyterian Church, one of the oldest churches in Louisville and Jefferson County. The church is first mentioned in the minutes of the Transylvania Presbytery in 1787. Mr. McConnell was ordered to supply the churches at Hopewell and Pennsylvania Run, one Sabbath at each place. In 1790 William Cummins, representing Pennsylvania Run, was designated to receive a letter that was sent "to certain gentlemen requesting them to use their influence to raise collections for the support of missionaries."

14 *Ibid.*

15 *Kentucky Gazette* [Lexington], 2 September 1797.

He gave the ground for the church and cemetery from a corner of his farm, and his grave is the oldest marked grave located there.¹⁶

During the troubled Civil War period, the southern sympathizers in the congregation split away and formed Beulah Presbyterian Church in nearby Fern Creek. After over one hundred years, these two churches reunited; services are held in the new church at the corner of Bardstown Road and Beulah Church Road. There is no longer a Presbyterian congregation meeting in the old church, but the Pennsylvania Run Cemetery is still open for burials.

William Cummins died on 2 December 1795 in the "56 year of his age." His will was written on 7 September 1795 and probated on 6 December 1796.¹⁷

Mary Cummins was born around 1744 and died 19 June 1820 at the age of seventy-six. She is buried in Pennsylvania Run Cemetery next to William, along with many of their descendants and neighbors. William and his wife Mary were the parents of eight children who are named in his will. They were Mary Anne, David, William, John, Henry, Moses, Jeany, and Ebenezer.

Mary Anne Cummins, daughter of William and Mary, married [?] Dunkin.

David Cummins, son of William and Mary, was born in 1769, died on 28 December 1840, and is buried at Pennsylvania Run Cemetery.

William Cummins, son of William and Mary, was born in 1769. He died on 1 October 1823 and is buried at Pennsylvania Run Cemetery. He married Elizabeth Capatrick on 27 July 1797;¹⁸ although she is probably buried there, her grave is unmarked. The 1850 census shows Elizabeth living with her son Moses and her age as seventy which indicates that she was born around 1780. Six children were named when the estate of William was divided in January

16 Alice E Trabue, "Kentucky Tombstone Inscriptions from the Grave-yard of Pennsylvania Run Presbyterian Church of Jefferson County, Kentucky," *Register* 30 (1932): 393.

17 Calendar of Early Jefferson County Wills: Will Books 1 and 2. *Quarterly* 6 (1932): 14, reprinted in *Early Kentucky Settlers*, 227.

18 *Jefferson County, Virginia—Kentucky Marriages Book 1 1781—July 1826* (Owensboro: Cook & McDowell, 1980), 29.

1833—Polly, Elizabeth, Mary Ann, Joseph, Moses, and David.¹⁹ Many of their descendants are still living in Jefferson County; descendants of their youngest son David continue to live on part of the original four hundred acres.

John Cummins, son of William and Mary, was born in 1771 and died on 9 May 1831. He married Jemima Davis on 26 July 1799.²⁰ Jemima Davis Cummins died on 10 February 1850. They are both buried at Pennsylvania Run Cemetery. They were the parents of eleven children—William, Elmira, Nancy, Mary M., John R., Emerine, George W., Franklin, Ebenezer, James M., and David. Although some of their children moved west and are not buried at Pennsylvania Run, they are listed on a large stone at the cemetery along with John and Jemima.²¹

Henry Cummins, son of William and Mary, was born around 1778 and died on 16 December 1839. He is also buried at Pennsylvania Run Cemetery.²²

Moses Cummins, son of William and Mary, was born around 1784. He married Ruth Griffith on 23 October 1810 in Ohio County. Ruth was born on 18 January 1797 and died in 1825. Moses and Ruth lived in Daviess County. After Ruth died, Moses and some of his children went to Texas with Austin's second colony.²³ Moses was a lawyer and surveyor; his name appears many times in the records of the Robertson Colony.²⁴

Jane (Jeany) Cummins, daughter of William and Mary, was born on 25 September 1785 and died on 7 February 1861. She married William McCoy on 28 June 1804.²⁵ William was born on 20 April 1781 and died on 13 July 1849. They are both buried at Pennsylvania

19 Jefferson County Division book 1, part. 3, p. 123 (library, The Filson Club Historical Society).

20 *Jefferson County, Virginia—Kentucky Marriages Book*, 35.

21 Trabue, "Kentucky Tombstone Inscriptions," 393.

22 *Ibid.*

23 Stephen F. Austin, *Stephen F. Austin's Register of Families from the Originals in the General Land Office* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1984), 35.

24 See volume 12 of Malcolm Dallas McLean, *Papers Concerning Robertson's Colony in Texas* (Fort Worth, Texas: Texas Christian University Press, 1974-1993).

25 *Jefferson County, Virginia—Kentucky Marriages*, 51.

Run Cemetery. They were the parents of thirteen children—Ebenezer, Sally, Mary, John, William H., Ann, Henry C., Ann E., Ruth I., David M., Rhoda, Amanda Melvina, and Harvey L.²⁶ They left numerous descendants, many of whom are still living in the Okolona area.

Ebenezer Cummins, the youngest son of William and Mary, died sometime after the death of his father in 1795 and before the division of the Pattons Creek property in 1817.

26 Bible records in private possession.