

The Lost State of Franklin - Historical Timeline

- 1772 The Watauga Association is established in the valley of the Watauga and Nolichucky rivers in what was then believed to be western Virginia.
- 1774 Capt. Evan Shelby leads 50 Watauga volunteers in the Battle of Point Pleasant of Lord Dunmore's War.
- 1776 In the spring, a Watauga platoon crosses the mountains to support the Carolinians in saving Charleston from the British siege of that city.
July 4th – The Declaration of Independence
July 5th – The Watauga settlers, now aware they are in North Carolina territory rather than Virginia, petition the NC Assembly requesting to be allowed to come under their protection.
- 1779-80 Col. James Robertson leads a group of settlers from Watauga to French Lick (Nashville) and establishes the first settlement in the Cumberland Valley. Although far removed from NC government, Robertson and his supporters remained loyal to North Carolina and did not participate in the State of Franklin.
- 1780 Isaac Shelby and John Sevier (pronounced *severe*) lead the colonial victory over the British at the Battle of King's Mountain. The Continental Congress requires states to cede their western territories as a condition of joining the new country. Virginia, North Carolina and Georgia are the three states with the most territory to give up.
- 1782 John Tipton moves to the Watauga area.
John Sevier is appointed Clerk of Washington Co., North Carolina
Col. Arthur Campbell attempts to gather support for the creation of a new State in western Virginia, to be named Kentucky. Petitions to Congress are unsuccessful.
General Cornwallis surrenders to General Washington at Yorktown.
- 1783 Greene Co., North Carolina is formed by dividing Washington County.
- 1784 April 19th – North Carolina General Assembly votes to cede western lands to the Federal government and submits the Cession Act to the Continental Congress for acceptance. They immediately close the Land Office in the ceded territory and nullified all land claims made after May 25, 1784. In the 7 months preceding, they sold almost 4 million acres of western lands.
August 23rd – Delegates from Washington, Sullivan, and Greene counties meet in convention at Jonesborough and unanimously declare the three western counties to be independent of North Carolina.
October – The North Carolina Assembly votes to repeal the Cession Act passed in April and reclaims jurisdiction over western lands. A committee of the Continental Congress later finds the act irrevocable without the consent of Congress.
December 14th – Western counties meet again in convention and on the motion of Wm. Cocke, declare themselves a "separate and distinct State, independent of North Carolina" by a vote of 28 – 15. Many of the same grievances of the Declaration of Independence appear in the resolution. Delegates adopt a temporary Constitution patterned after NC and name the new State Franklin, after Benjamin Franklin. The opposition is led by John Tipton.
- 1785 March – The Assembly meets and organizes their government; appointing John Sevier as Governor, Landon Carter as Speaker of the Senate, Thomas Talbot as Senate Clerk, William Cage as Speaker of the House of Commons, Thomas Chapman as House Clerk, and David Campbell as Judge of the Superior Court. Greeneville is named the Capitol. A petition for inclusion in the United States is drafted for submission to the Continental Congress.
Franklin's petition is defeated on a 7-2 vote in the Continental Congress; North Carolina's abstention and South Carolina's split delegation counting as votes against, since two-thirds of the colonies were required to adopt the report of committee.
The Federal Treaty of Hopewell gives southern Franklin lands to the Cherokees. This is the first treaty negotiated by the Federal government; before, treaties had been up to local authorities. This will lead to violence between the settlers & Indians. Blount County is formed.
- 1786 North Carolina Governor offers pardons to any Franklinites who recant and pay NC taxes.
Spence County is formed by Franklin; known as Hawkins County in NC and that name continues today.
An election is conducted in the western counties on the issue of separation with 95 percent supporting separation. Opposition claims fraud, but by all accounts the balloting was valid.
The North Carolina General Assembly refuses to separate the western counties even with renewed pressure from Congress to cede their western lands.
- 1787 In a conciliatory move, the North Carolina General Assembly forms the western counties into the Washington District and Gov. Caswell appoints Evan Shelby as Militia Commander of the District, but he serves less than a year.
The State of Franklin opens a Land Office to assist the influx of new settlers.
Represented by John Jay the Federal government's treaty with Spain negotiates the closure of the Mississippi River to navigation of western commerce; a knee-jerk reaction to eastern fears of eventually being outnumbered by western settlers.
General Shelby and Governor Sevier meet in an effort to avoid bloodshed and an all-out war; while the two come to an agreement, the citizens refuse to recognize it. When Sevier's term of governor ends, Shelby is offered the position, but refuses. Shortly thereafter, he resigns as NC brigadier and recommends Sevier, but NC appoints Joseph Martin.

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- December – A new petition for separation is submitted to the North Carolina Assembly, including new signers Andrew Jackson, Archibald Roane, and Joseph McMinn (later U.S. President and two governors of Tennessee).
The U.S. Constitutional Convention adjourns and on Dec. 5th the North Carolina General Assembly fails to ratify it, but calls for a convention in July 1788.
- 1788 August 1st – The North Carolina Assembly again fails to ratify the U.S. Constitution or cede its western lands.
October 15th – The final meeting of the Franklin General Assembly is held.
November Session – The North Carolina Assembly fails to ratify U.S. Constitution for the third time. A Bill is reported to the NC Senate to pardon the offenses of “certain persons of the Franklin counties.” An amendment to exclude John Sevier, by name, is introduced with John Tipton the only western delegate supporting it. During debate, Tipton jumps from his seat in a rage and begins choking a Senator speaking against the amendment, which fails on a 24-19 vote.
A motion to cede its western lands is made and an amendment offered by Tipton supporters to move the boundary “west of the Cumberland Mountains” rather than the Alleghany Mountains, which would have left Franklin under North Carolina jurisdiction. The amendment is defeated 15-30, with Tipton again the only westerner voting in favor.
Tipton is further isolated, when he is the only western Senator voting against a second convention to consider ratification of the Federal Constitution. When the Assembly elects officers for the western territory, all those elected are supporters of John Sevier. Sevier is pardoned but is barred from holding “any office of profit or trade in the State.”
Indian attacks increase throughout the western territory, particularly in the south. North Carolina’s General Martin requests additional troops but the governor denies his request and he is unable to act. All sides realized they must put aside their differences in order to survive and Gov. Sevier with 100 mounted riflemen mount an offensive against the Indians, later joined by Gen. Martin and the North Carolina militia.
Sevier, requests a meeting with Old Tassel, the main Cherokee chief west of the mountains, and leaves Maj. James Hubbard in charge. When the chiefs arrive, Hubbard assists John Kirk to murder the assembled chiefs in cold blood. Tipton charges Sevier with complicity in the murders and even though he is not held responsible, Sevier loses respect in the eyes of many, including President Washington, who calls him an Indian murderer.
Stung by the earlier rejections of the North Carolina Assembly, Col. Tipton orders the Carolina Court of Washington County to recover a court docket supposedly in the possession of John Sevier. Raids are made on Franklinites throughout the county, who withdraw to Greeneville for safety.
A North Carolina court, under pressure from Tipton, orders the seizure of Sevier’s livestock and slaves for back taxes. After executing the warrant, the sheriff quarters them at Tipton’s farm. The seizures occur while Sevier is campaigning against the Cherokee who are attacking the Franklinites settlers living south of the French Broad River.
When Sevier returns home and discovers what he considers the theft of his property, he gathers the Franklin militia and marches on Tipton’s farm where they surround the property and set siege to it for 3 days, demanding the return of the property and the surrender of Tipton. Reinforcements called by Tipton arrive, and in the ensuing battle, several are killed and several dozen wounded. Sevier’s troops are routed and his sons are captured and Tipton threatens to hang them until Col. Love intervenes. Sevier surrenders when Tipton guarantees his safety; all prisoners are paroled within a few days.
- 1789 Sevier is arrested on North Carolina charges of Treason and hauled, in irons and under heavy guard, over the mountains to Morganton. Here he is arraigned, released on bond, and is found by a “rescue party” in a tavern, drinking with the Sheriff where they remained for several hours before calmly riding out of town in plain view of all. He never faces trial.
The North Carolina General Assembly finally ratifies the U.S. Constitution and cedes its western lands, acknowledging grants previously made under various acts and treaties of North Carolina, Franklin and the Federal government.
On a vote of 28-7, the Assembly removes Joseph Martin from the office of brigadier-general of western forces and replaces him with John Sevier, back-dating his commission to November 1784.
During the February Term of the Greene County Court, John Sevier, Joseph Hardin, Henry Conway, and Hugh Wear take the Oath of Allegiance required by the act of the NC Assembly, and the State of Franklin officially comes to an end.
- 1790 February – The western lands become a new Congressional District and John Sevier is elected as representative to the 1st United States Congress for the State of North Carolina.
Congress accepts the cession of western lands and establishes the “Territory of the United States of America, south of the River Ohio,” otherwise known as the Southwest Territory. William Blount is appointed governor even though the people’s choice is clearly for Sevier; John Sevier is appointed brigadier-general. Tipton’s supporters receive lesser recognition; and while Tipton receives no appointment, he is later elected to the House of Representatives in 1794 and 1795.
- 1796 June 1st – Tennessee is admitted as the 16th State by Congress. John Sevier is elected governor without opposition and goes on to serve six two-year terms in that office; serving in public office until his death in 1815.
- 1801 After Statehood, many issues remained undecided due to the conflict of records between North Carolina and Franklin. The Tennessee Legislature finally settles most disputes in 1801.

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Political and Historical Background

The American Revolution has just ended, and the government is in debt. The Continental Congress spreads the national debt between the thirteen colonies based upon their land holdings. They in turn are searching for means to remain solvent, and selling the western lands is one way to increase revenue. Land speculation is rampant, with speculators buying millions of acres of veteran's warrants for pennies.

The first Constitution of North Carolina makes provisions for a future State in the lands west of the Alleghany Mountains, but pleading poverty the General Assembly steadfastly refuses to establish courts, provide officers, or other services to citizens of the western counties. Many become dissatisfied with the North Carolina government, feeling they have been disenfranchised, and rightly so. North Carolina has acted shamefully; taking every opportunity to take advantage of the western settlers at their expense. Congress, whose attention is diverted to the adoption of the Constitution, is of little help since they do not want to upset any state during deliberations. Acting on the premise of the Declaration, that those citizens who are not properly represented or governed, have the right to govern themselves, the State of Franklin is formed.

In studying the history of the Franklin, it should be remembered that all of the principles involved in the struggle of Franklin, whether pro or con, were involved in land speculation. Pressured by the Continental Congress to cede their western lands, North Carolina delayed as long as possible, during which time they opened the western lands to settlement, and providing land warrants for their war veterans. Many, including Gov. Alexander Martin, wrongly believed the Federal government would make concessions at a later date. In the seven months preceding the Cession Act of 1784, North Carolina sold nearly 4 million acres at about fifty cents per hundred acres.

By then, the North Carolina government had received numerous claims for compensation for services rendered in the western country during the campaigns against the Indians, including military assistance, supplies, etc. It is clear today that these claims were reasonable and justified, but many Carolinians in the east, believed that they were being made to pay for the exploits of the western frontier. This became one of the major factors in North Carolina's decision to cede their western lands; absolving the State from further financial burden of the western lands. The passage of the Cession Act also stopped the delivery of trade goods to the Cherokees, which had been promised by treaty negotiated by North Carolina. The abrogation of the treaty caused unrest among the Indians, which led to hostilities, the brunt of which was directed at the western settlers.

Some of the Principle Players

John Sevier (1745 – 1815)

His family, originating in France, comes to America in 1740 and settles in Virginia, where John is born 23 Sept. 1745 in the Long Meadows District of Augusta (now Rockingham) County. In 1761, at the age of 16, he marries Sarah Hawkins and farms until about 1765 when he purchases a tract of land and establishes the village of New Market, where he owns a store and inn. He is commissioned a captain in the Virginia militia by Gov. Dunmore, serving under Washington in Lord Dunmore's War.

Searching for cheap land, he removes to the east bank of the Watauga River, and by the time of the Revolution he is a member of the Committee of Safety for the Salisbury District of North Carolina. In 1776, he is a captain of a company of mounted militia, active against the Cherokees and serves as a representative to the Provisional Congress of North Carolina where he is elected lieutenant-colonel of the Washington District; also serving as a delegate to that State's first constitutional convention.

He removes to Washington County in 1778. He serves under Col. Evan Shelby in 1779, against the Chickamauga; later commanding an expedition against the Cherokee at the siege of Fort Caswell (or Fort Watauga). Afterwards, he is promoted to Colonel. In October 1780, he leads his "Overmountain Men" across the Appalachians and defeats the British at the Battle of King's Mountain. He becomes one of the best known heroes of the time. About this time, his first wife dies, and he marries Catherine Sherrill. Sevier is engaged in thirty-five skirmishes or battles with Indians without defeat and is considered by many to be the greatest Indian fighter of the west. His fame and popularity was unsurpassed until Andrew Jackson's victory at New Orleans during the War of 1812. Both are represented as Tennessee's choice in Statuary Hall at the Nation's Capitol; an interesting situation considering their bitter enmity toward each other, which some say is the reason their statues face away from each other.

John Sevier serves from June 16, 1790 until March 3, 1791 in the 1st U.S. Congress, representing North Carolina. In 1796 he is elected without opposition as the first governor of Tennessee, going on to serve twelve years as governor of that State. With his four years as governor of Franklin, his sixteen years as a chief executive is believed to be the longest ever served by an American. Afterward, Sevier is elected to the Tennessee State Senate in 1809 and to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1811, holding that office until his death in 1815, two days past his seventieth birthday. (*Governor John Sevier Papers, 1796-1801*. Tennessee State Library and Archives: Nashville, 1988. Online Inventory <www.state.tn.us/tsla/history/govpapers/findingaids/gp2.pdf>).

John Tipton (1730 – 1813)

A prominent and respected political leader, Tipton is best known for his opposition to the Franklin movement. Born in Baltimore County, Maryland, in 1730, he serves in Lord Dunmore's War, and is a recruiting officer for the Continental Army during the American Revolution. He is appointed colonel of the Washington County militia; serves as a member of the Virginia House of Burgesses in 1774, and the Virginia Constitutional Convention of 1776, the North Carolina Convention to ratify the Federal Constitution in 1788, and the Tennessee Constitutional Convention of 1796. Tipton holds colonial office in the Virginia House of Delegates in 1776-77 and 1778-81, as well as in the Franklin Conventions of 1784 and 1785, the North Carolina Senate in 1786 and 1788.

John Tipton at first supports Franklin, but later claims the State should be given the opportunity to correct the inequities. The protection of his own land claims and those of his speculator friends soon becomes his overriding goal, and he firmly believes North Carolina can better protect his land holdings in the west. Tipton and Sevier remained bitter enemies the rest of their lives; their bitterness overcoming the dignity and rationale of both men at various times during their careers.

Tipton remains loyal to North Carolina, serving as colonel of the militia, and representing Washington County in the Assembly. His reports to the Assembly and the governor down-play the support of the Franklin movement in the west and exaggerate the strength of his own anti-

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separatist movement. For three years, John Tipton nearly single-handedly, stands between Franklin and Statehood, but by 1787 North Carolina begins making conciliatory moves toward Franklin and the cause for Statehood slowly erodes.

Tipton continues his rampages against Franklin and Sevier, but by 1788, finds himself increasingly on the losing side in the North Carolina Assembly. He votes against a bill to pardon the people of Franklin; supporting instead an amendment to exclude John Sevier. During its debate, Sen. Tipton jumps from his seat and in a rage begins choking a Senator speaking against the amendment, which fails. He supports an amendment moving the boundary of ceded lands "west of the Cumberland Mountains" rather than the Alleghany Mountains, and when the amendment fails with Tipton the only western supporter, he votes against a motion to cede the lands. He votes against a second convention to consider ratification of the Federal Constitution, further isolating himself from his constituents and colleagues. When the Assembly elects officers for the western territory, all positions go to supporters of John Sevier. Much of his credibility is lost, when his extreme hatred of Sevier becomes public.

The Tipton-Sevier feud continues into the early years of statehood; Sevier serving as governor and Tipton helping to write the new state's constitution. His last public office is as a Tennessee state senator from 1796-99. He dies at home in 1813.

William Cocke (1748 – 1828)

A supporter and officer of the State of Franklin, William Cocke is considered second only to John Sevier in influence, and becomes known as one of the great orators of the period. Born in 1748 in Amelia County, Virginia, he marries Sarah Maclin in 1773 and removes to the west. He helps to found the Transylvania government with Col. Richard Henderson and serves in the House of Delegates (1775). He serves honorably during the Revolutionary War, but is charged with cowardice during the Battle of Eaton's Fort (1776) and although vindicated of the charges, they continue to embarrass him throughout his career. Captain Cocke serves on the 1780 campaign to relieve the South Carolinians, but is not on the King's Mountain campaign. He runs unsuccessfully against John Sevier for the clerkship of the Washington County Court in 1778.

In addition to his services to Franklin, Cocke serves in the NC General Assembly, is State's Attorney for Washington District, trustee of Blount College, and is a delegate at the constitutional convention of 1796. He represents Tennessee in the U.S. Senate (1796-1805). In 1797 Cocke County is formed and named after him. He announces for governor of Tennessee in 1807, but shortly withdraws in favor of John Sevier.

He is appointed Judge of the First Circuit in 1809, a position for which he is not suited, and is impeached in 1812 and found guilty on charges that under today's rules would be considered unjust. He is sent back to the legislature by the people of his county in 1813. At the age of sixty-five, he volunteers to serve as a private in the campaign against the Seminole Indians, and the following year serves in the Creek War. He is appointed agent to the Chickasaw Indians by President Madison in 1814, serves a term in the Mississippi legislature and dies in Columbus, Mississippi, August 22, 1828.

Evan Shelby (1720 – 1794)

Born in Wales 1720, his parents bring him to America in 1732, settling in Maryland. Evan Shelby serves under Gen. Bradbury; later commanding a company under Gen. Forbes (1758). He is with Washington at Meadows and Fort Necessity and after the French and Indian War establishes trade with the Indians. He and his son, Isaac (later the first governor of Kentucky) distinguish themselves at Point Pleasant in 1774. Commissioned colonel of Washington County, Virginia by Patrick Henry (1777) he serves in the west during the Revolution. He is commissioned brigadier-general, the first of that rank in the west. When found to be residing in North Carolina, Shelby is elected to the NC Senate in 1781. The Assembly elects him brigadier-general of the Washington District in 1786, but he serves less than a year before retiring from public life. He was considered to be honorable in all acts. A friend of John Sevier, he remains loyal, but divided to North Carolina. He dies December 4, 1794.

Judge David Campbell (1750 – 1812)

Born in Virginia in 1750, David Campbell joins the Continental Army in 1776, rising to the rank of major. He is elected clerk of the Washington County Court (Virginia) in 1777, serving until 1780; resigns to go into the private practice of law. He shortly afterwards moves south to Greene County, where he is elected assistant judge of the Washington District, but declines to qualify due to his interest in Franklin. He joins the movement for Franklin's Statehood and is made the chief judge of the State.

Judge Campbell is elected and serves as representative from Greene County to the North Carolina Assembly of 1787, raising the ire of some of his former associates. He is appointed as one of the judges of the Southwest Territory and in 1792 is on the commission to draw the boundary line between the Cherokee and white lands.

He is nominated for senator in the first Tennessee legislature but is defeated by William Cocke and continues to serve as judge of the Superior Court. He is nominated to a federal judgeship in 1811, but dies in 1812 without serving.

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