The Wataugans

In the spring of 1770 a grimy traveler, weary from his long and difficult journey across the mountains, found rest and friendship in John Honeycut's crude cabin on the banks of the Watauga River in present eastern Tennessee. The stranger had come to "spy out" good land on which he hoped to settle with his family and some friends. He was a fair-complexioned man of twenty-eight with light blue eyes and dark hair. In demeanor he was taciturn, but his face, though somber, showed a strength that was impressive. From his native home in Brunswick County, Virginia, he had recently moved to Orange County, North Carolina, where he is said to have sympathized with the Regulators, though he took no active part in their dissatisfaction with the government. He had no formal education; just before his departure his wife had been teaching him his letters and how to spell. The stranger's name was James Robertson.

He had crossed the mountains alone with a rifle in his hands and a good horse under him. Honeycut welcomed him with frontier hospitality and helped him build a hut and plant Indian corn. Early in August Robertson started back to his home in Orange County. Like most hunters of the early frontier, he lived on game and the small amount of parched Indian corn he carried in his saddlebag. He soon lost his way. Finding himself among impassable cliffs, he abandoned his horse. Rain fell repeatedly on his powder, rendering most of it useless. When his strength permitted he struggled up a summit and climbed a tree to observe the mountain ranges with the intention of blazing as direct a path as the rhododendron and laurel thickets would permit. Descending, he began to cut the thickets with his knife only to
discover that he had recrossed his path. In a moment of despair he threw himself on the ground, hoping that he would never rise; but the next hour he stumbled on with renewed courage. His food supply exhausted, he sustained himself for fourteen days more on what few berries and roots he could find. Yet he would have starved to death had not two hunters fed him and reluctantly permitted him to ride one of their horses.

At last Robertson arrived at home. Enchanted by his colorful accounts of the Watauga country, sixteen persons, including his brother Charles, agreed to accompany him to that region. They started out in the early fall to give Robertson time to gather and store the corn he had planted and to lay in a winter’s supply of deer and bear meat. They moved westward in the usual pioneer manner—the men walking with their rifles on their shoulders, the
The Wataugans

oldest children driving the milch cows, and the women and young children riding on horses already burdened with household goods and farming implements. Arriving in the Watauga country, the group separated. Each family cleared a piece of ground and built a cabin around Sycamore Shoals where Elizabethton, Tennessee, now stands. This became the center of the Watauga settlements.

Robertson's steadfastness, restless energy and unusual common sense soon won him the admiration of the settlers in the region. His dour determination transcended all obstacles. His personality was embodied in the house he built on an island in the Watauga River. It was sturdy, roughhewn and more spacious than the other dwellings. The log veranda which ran the full front length of the house suggested his quiet dignity, while the huge stone-and-clay fireplace with its logs blazing in the winter time symbolized his ardent faith and dauntless courage in the face of adversity. His furniture was as simple as his needs.

One of Robertson's neighbors was Evan Shelby, a Marylander of Welsh stock, who had shown himself a gallant soldier under Braddock, under Washington at Great Meadows and Fort Necessity and under Forbes in his march to Pittsburgh. After the close of the French and Indian War Shelby had married and become an Indian trader. During his travels he heard about a trader and farmer from western Virginia named William Bean, who in 1768 had raised his cabin on the Watauga and who, after spending several months in the wilderness, had returned like a Marco Polo to his old surroundings, regaling everyone he met with tales of the golden land he had visited. Shelby had forthwith packed his horse, bidden his family farewell and ridden into the twilight zone. On reaching the Holston he had settled on an estate which he called Sapling Grove—the present site of Bristol, Tennessee—where he engaged in merchandising, farming and cattle raising.

In January 1771 he announced his arrival in a letter to his sons, Isaac and John, who had just returned home from military service: "This is Too Litt you know that wee are all saffe arrived at our habitation on Holston after a Jurney of three weeks and three days upon the Road wher wee found all things in Good orders and wee Seem well satisfyed with the Cuntry...." He had
nothing of importance to report, he said, save "... that certain officers is to have their quatto [quota] of Lands upon these waters which will I hope be a means of setting of this Country with a much Better sort of People than it would a been settled with but I always thought if the officers had their choice they wood Sooner Chews ut hear than on the Ohio for without any Dout the advantages hear must be more than ever Can be Expected Their. . . ." Shelby then urged his sons to purchase "... all officers and Soldiers Right you Can Possible Git So that Git them to go with you to the Collonels of the Redgments and to git a proper Sartifycatt that the warrants may be obtained. . . ."

Shelby predicted that the country would be settled, that the settlers would be men of property and that the region would soon become a county. Impelled by these convictions, he returned to Maryland, sold his lands there and moved with his family to the banks of the Holston.

Another leading settler of the region, John Sevier, symbolized the heroic life of the frontier. The son of a Huguenot gentleman who had settled in the Shenandoah Valley, his proclivities were a blend of all those found in genuine pioneers: he was at once settler, speculator, adventurer, trader, Indian fighter and lawmaker. His personal qualities were no less admirable. He was a gentleman from sole to crown—elegant in manners, handsome of face and figure and dignified in carriage. He was gay and pleasure-loving. Mediocre men became jealous of his gifts, only to be charmed by his fascinating demeanor. His influence over his fellow Wataugans was almost boundless. His tact, his courtesy, his generosity had quickly captured their esteem, and he was soon to win their admiration by his skill and blind daring in Indian fighting.

So subtle were Sevier's persuasive powers that he could convert the most recalcitrant pioneer to his views by making him believe that these had originated with himself. His great knowledge of human nature was not derived from books—for which he cared little—but from keen observation of men and events, yet he was far from unlettered. His correspondence with Madison,
Franklin and other influential contemporaries shows a practiced
and sometimes even a graceful style.

Early in the 1760's John Sevier settled in Long Meadows where
he devoted his time to farming. Eager to improve his fortune,
however, he established the town of New Market where he be­
came a tavern keeper, farmer and merchant. In 1770 he deserted
New Market for Millerstown—now Woodstock in Shenandoah
County. John—always searching for land on which to build a
better home for his family—and his brother, Valentine, visited
the Watauga country several times during the next two years.
Soon John's father and other brothers, catching the infection of
his enthusiasm for the frontier, settled with him on the north side
of the Holston in the Keywood settlement. Later John moved
with his family to the Watauga.

By this time several groups of cabins dotted the wilderness in
eastern Tennessee. The first settlement consisted of about a
dozen cabins on Long Island in the Holston River. The second
lay south of the Holston at Sycamore Shoals on the Watauga.
The third, lying on the present site of Rogersville, was named
Carter's Valley in honor of its first settler, John Carter, a Vir­
ginian who built a store and traded with Indians, white settlers
and frontiersmen who were on their way down the Holston,
Tennessee, Ohio and Mississippi rivers to settle in the Natchez
region.

What circumstances had started this new great tide of migra­
tion? Many of the Wataugans were Regulators who had fled
westward across the mountains after the Battle of the Alamance.
Other settlers came as the result of the treaties concerning the
western boundary of white settlement which North Carolina
and Virginia and the British government concluded with the
Cherokee. By the Treaty of Hard Labour John Stuart, Super­
intendent of Indian Affairs for the Southern Department, and
the Cherokee in 1768 drew a boundary line back of the Carolinas
and Virginia beyond which white men were forbidden to settle.
But the appearance of settlers in the upper Holston Valley to the
west of the line soon necessitated another agreement.

Accordingly, on October 18, 1770, by the Treaty of Lochaber,
South Carolina, the line was extended to leave no white settler on Cherokee lands. The Indian boundary now began from the intersection of the North Carolina and Cherokee lines some seventy-odd miles east of Long Island, ran westward to a point six miles east of Long Island and then northward to the junction of the Great Kanawha and Ohio rivers. When John Donelson and Alexander Cameron surveyed this line late in the following year, they discovered that the Wataugans had settled, not within the bounds of Virginia as they believed, but within those of North Carolina. By the King’s orders and by the Treaty of Lochaber, this land had been reserved for the Indians.

Cameron ordered the Wataugans to leave, but since their crops were then in the ground they persuaded him to allow them to remain until the following spring. When that season arrived, “some of them went away, but others and more people came in their room” and brought their goods with them. Feeling that their tenures were insecure, however, they decided to purchase the land from the Cherokee. With American self-reliance they met for deliberation and counsel and deputed James Robertson and John Been “to treat with their landlords, and agree upon articles of accomodation and friendship.” The negotiations succeeded. For about six thousand dollars in merchandise and some muskets and household articles, the Cherokee leased to the Wataugans for a period of ten years all the country on the river.

The whites and Indians decided to celebrate their new understanding with athletic games. At Watauga on the chosen day they held a race, wrestling matches and other sports in which they mixed in very friendly fashion. But toward evening some ruffians from Wolf Hills, who had been lurking in the surrounding forest, killed one of the Indians, whereupon his comrades left the spot in great anger. The settlers immediately saw in the disgraceful deed the possibility of Indian revenge. Robertson calmed their fears by volunteering to go to the Cherokee villages and settle the matter. While John Sevier made preparations to build a palisaded fort, Robertson set off alone through the wilderness for his destination, over a hundred and fifty miles away.

The mission was, of course, very dangerous, but the Cherokees,
learning that Robertson was coming to see them, decided to let him alone. His knowledge of Indian psychology and his ready tact saved the situation. At his request the chiefs called a council in which he assured them of the anger and sorrow of the Wataugans and of his determination to try to arrest the criminals and punish them severely. The Indians were so pleased with his sincerity that they agreed to forget the matter and take no vengeance on their innocent white brothers. Robertson then quietly returned home.

Among the Wataugans were a few criminals who had put the mountain wall between themselves and justice. The rest were "honest, industrious, enterprising men" bent on earning a livelihood. Realizing that neither North Carolina nor Virginia would recognize their right to live within Indian country, they felt "apprehensive" that they "might become a shelter for such as endeavored to defraud their creditors"; moreover, they wanted to record deeds, wills, and "do their public business."

They resolved, therefore, to form a government of their own. This move was doubtlessly inspired by Robertson, who was acquainted with the principles of the Regulators in North Carolina. The Wataugans decided to adopt written articles of agreement known as the Watauga Association, the first free and independent government, democratic in spirit and representative in form, ever to be organized on the American continent.

Lord Dunmore, governor of Virginia, referred to the Wataugans as "actually a set of People in the back country of the Colony bordering on the Cherokee Country, who finding they could not obtain titles to the Land they fancied . . . have appointed Magistrates and framed Laws for their present occasions and to all intents and purposes erected themselves into though inconsiderable yet a Separate State." Dunmore thought the Wataugans had set a bad example "to the people of America of forming governments distinct from and independent of His Majesty's Authority."

Indeed, the Watauga settlers were expressing that inherent American characteristic for political independence and local
government which ultimately resulted in the establishment of our states. This trait persisted in every region until the entire Union was formed. Unfortunately, the original articles of the Watauga Association are lost. All we know of them is derived from historians who lived many years later; knowledge of them would have disclosed the particular psychological needs of the men who fashioned them.

The framers of the Watauga Association established a court of five members in which was vested executive, legislative and judicial powers. James Robertson, Charles Robertson, John Sevier, John Carter and Zachariah Isbell had responsible and mature legal judgment, though they lacked legal training. Charles Robertson was a man of probity and sound reasoning, Carter was the oldest settler in Watauga and Isbell was a former magistrate with broad legal knowledge. The historian of early Tennessee, Samuel Cole Williams, mindful that Sevier did not settle permanently in the Watauga country until the end of 1773, concluded that he was not one of the original members of the court. With this opinion Sevier's best biographer, John Driver, does not agree, pointing out that Sevier "had already obtained possession of the land to which he later moved and that he had remained there for a time during the year in which the Association was formed."

The name of the sheriff who executed the mandates of the court is unknown. The court's decisions were final, for it was at once a common pleas court, an appellate court and a supreme court. In addition it was department of interior and department of state. It not only controlled internal affairs but also had the power to secure lands by making treaties with the Indians. In short, it enjoyed sovereign power.

Needless to say, its functions were numerous. These included the recording of deeds and wills, the settling of disputes, the issuing of marriage licenses and the conducting of vigorous warfare against lawbreakers. For six years the court acted as a censor of morals and interfered, with straightforward effectiveness, to right wrongs for which a more refined and elaborate system of jurisprudence would have provided only cumbersome and inadequate remedies.
In April 1775 Lexington initiated the American Revolution. Soon afterward the revolutionary Provincial Congress of North Carolina established a committee of safety in each of its six districts. The Wataugans, immediately identifying themselves with the revolutionary cause, instituted similar action. Uncertain whether their settlements lay within the jurisdiction of Virginia or within that of North Carolina, and fearing that neither colony would grant them protection because they had violated the Proclamation of 1763, they organized themselves into an independent district which they named Washington in honor of the commander of the Continental Army.

The Watauga committee of safety contained thirteen members, including James Robertson, Charles Robertson, John Sevier, Jacob Brown, William Bean, Robert Lucas and John Carter, chairman. It resolved to “adhere strictly to the rules and orders of the Continental Congress, and in open committee acknowledged themselves indebted to the united colonies for their full proportion of the Continental expense.” It established a militia with Carter as colonel.

As the revolution spread southwestward John Stuart, acting on the orders of General Thomas Gage, took steps to induce the Cherokee to give their support to the British cause. Complying with this request, Stuart sent his brother Henry to the over hill Cherokee towns. In April 1776 Henry arrived at his destination with thirty loads of ammunition to learn from Alexander Cameron that the chief difficulty would not be in securing Cherokee promises of aid, but would be in restraining the young warriors from making an immediate attack on men, women and children—whether Tories or Revolutionists—who had settled in the Watauga region which the Cherokee claimed as their rightful hunting grounds.

The orator and resolute chief, Dragging Canoe, had always hated the Americans and had vehemently opposed the selling or leasing of ground to them. He now declared that his young men complained constantly that Virginians and North Carolinians had settled on their lands without their consent and that they “were almost surrounded by white people.” Stuart replied that the encroachments “were made contrary to the Kings Orders,
that affairs were in such a situation at this time that they seemed to trample on his Authority and that we could not do anything with them but that we hoped things would not continue long so.” He also reminded Dragging Canoe that the Indians, in leasing land to the Wataugans, had acted contrary to the advice of their superintendent. To which Dragging Canoe replied that the Wataugans had negotiated only with a few old men who, unable to hunt, had been reduced by poverty to leasing their land. Most of his young men, the chief asserted, would support him in recovering the Cherokee hunting grounds.

The more the Cherokee talked of attacking the white settlements, the more Stuart tried to dissuade them. The ignorant settlers, he told them, believed that they had legally purchased the land and that, therefore, no Cherokee should object to their settling it. He promised to try to induce the settlers to move. Stuart was as good as his word. In May 1776 he sent a trader named Isaac Thomas with a letter to the Wataugans who, though alarmed, resolved to stay where they were. If they could not prevent an attack, they reasoned, they could at least delay it. Accordingly, they sent Thomas back to the Cherokee with conciliatory messages. The Indians generously allowed them twenty days more.

But circumstances made war inevitable. One night in May a mounted stranger delivered a letter at Charles Robertson’s gate and sped away. The letter, addressed to the Wataugans and bearing Henry Stuart’s signature, said that the King of England had no desire “to set his friends and allies, the Indians, on his liege subjects,” that those who should agree to become his soldiers would “find protection for themselves and their friends,” and that a British army would land on the coast of West Florida, advance into Cherokee, Creek and Chickamauga country and crush the rebellious colonists with innumerable Indian allies. The original letter soon disappeared, but copies of it were circulated widely among the settlers, filling them with hatred for its purported author, his brother, Alexander Cameron and the Cherokee.

Amid this consternation Henry Stuart vehemently denied
authorship of the letter. Isaac Thomas, he declared, had disclosed to him that it was written by Jesse Benton, who, together with other Wataugans, desired “to involve the Settlements of Virginia and North Carolina in an unjust War with the Indians” in defense of the lands they had taken unlawfully. Stuart doubtless spoke truth. Nothing in his report of the Cherokee controversy can be construed as evidence of chicanery. Indeed, many of its details corroborate the testimonies of several independent witnesses.

The Wataugans, on the contrary, had everything to gain by involving themselves in a war with the Cherokee. They had settled the region in violation of the Proclamation of 1763; they could hope to retain their lands and assuage their guilty feelings only by pretending that the Indians, incited by British agents, planned to attack them. They, therefore, were happy to pledge their full support to the American Revolution.

They hastened to convince the revolutionaries of Virginia that the Indians intended to attack only the supporters of the revolutionary cause. When Anthony Bledsoe, a member of the Committee of Safety of Fincastle County, advised the Wataugans to remove themselves from Cherokee lands, their spokesman, William Cocke, replied that they and the Holston settlers would stand by “the glorious Cause in which the americans have Successfully begun the war in defense of Liberty & property.” And he prayed that the Virginia assembly, “Esteemed throughout america for Equity & humanity will no longer look upon us as a Separate people but will willingly afford us such assistance as may Inable us to defend Our Selves from an Enemy that only wish to destroy their unalterable friends.” They sent a similar appeal to North Carolina.

Meanwhile the Cherokee prepared for war. During the early summer they mended guns, made arrows and moccasins and beat large quantities of corn into flour. Henry Stuart and Cameron attempted to restrain them by warning them that “an indiscriminate attack” without British approval and assistance “would be the means of drawing on them the King’s displeasure and of uniting all parties against them.” The old chiefs agreed, but Drag-
ging Canoe and his young men were determined on war; they accused Stuart and Cameron of warning the white men of an impending attack. Stuart then saw the futility of attempting to dissuade them from their purpose and prepared to return to his brother in Mobile. Before he departed he urged Dragging Canoe to refrain from killing Loyalists and women and children and to end hostilities at his brother’s command.

Word of Cherokee intentions reached Little Carpenter’s niece, Nancy Ward, beloved priestess in the annual ceremony of the Pretty Woman. Because her daughter loved a settler, Joseph Martin, she resolved to send warning to the white men. Summoning Isaac Thomas, who was living among the Cherokee, she informed him that 700 warriors planned to fall on the Watauga and Holston villages. Thomas took this information to the settlers who quickly sought protection in their small stockaded forts.

The men, assembling to the number of 170, marched to the fort at Eaton’s Station and sent out scouts to ascertain the enemy’s whereabouts. The scouts soon returned with word that the Indians were approaching the fort. What should they do? Should they stay cooped up like turkeys in a pen? Or should they attack the redskins? William Cocke convinced them that the Indians would not storm the fort but would, with small parties, massacre the women and children in the settlements.

Hesitating no longer, they advanced on July 20 to a place known as Island Flats, a large tract of level and wooded land lying near Long Island on the Holston, where they discovered a small party of Indians, fired on them and sent them into headlong flight. Unable to overtake the Indians, they turned at dusk toward the fort. Suddenly they found themselves attacked in their rear and in grave danger of being surrounded. To meet the savage onslaught, they extended their line under Captain James Shelby.

The Indians mistook this for a movement of retreat. “The white men are running away!” they yelled. “Scalp them!” A huge brave bumped into a Lieutenant Alex Moore, who shot him in the knee. The brave, still standing, hurled his tomahawk; it missed. Moore sprang at him with a large butcher knife. The
The Wataugans

Indian grabbed the blade; it cut deep into his hand. He gripped it like a vise. A pool of blood rose in the palm of his hand and spattered both men as it trickled to the ground. The two men clinched, each with his free hand. Moore threw the brave to the ground, pulled his tomahawk from his belt and sank it into the Indian's skull. Just then Dragging Canoe fell with a serious wound. His braves, becoming demoralized, hurriedly picked up their dead and wounded and fled, marking the retreat to their villages with streams of blood. Thirteen scalped Indians lay on the field. Four white men were seriously wounded, but all of them recovered.

At dawn on the following day a formidable force of Indians under Old Abraham attacked the Watauga fort. The women had just gone out to milk the cows when in the gray light they saw the Indians galloping toward them. All of them ran screaming to the safety of the fort save pretty Kate Sherill, who found that its nervous defenders had inadvertently locked her out. Sevier, seeing her plight, leaped to the top of the stockade, shot her foremost pursuer, and, leaning over, seized her by the hands and lifted her to safety. Some months later her gallant rescuer, who had been a widower for several years, became her husband.

The men, about forty in number, placing themselves under James Robertson with Sevier as second in command, leveled their rifles through the loopholed stockade and picked off a goodly number of redskins. In less than an hour the attack was beaten back. Nevertheless, the Indians besieged the fort for several weeks, during which time several settlers were killed or captured.

One day James Cooper and Samuel Moore, a boy in his teens, went out to find boards to cover a hut. When they saw Indians approaching, Cooper jumped into a creek to escape their arrows and bullets, but the water was shallow and he was killed and scalped. Moore was taken to an Indian village where he was tortured and burned. Cooper's cries reached the fort, and Sevier prepared to hasten to his rescue; but Robertson, suspecting a feint and needing all the men he commanded to protect the women and children from possible massacre, persuaded him to remain.
Another prisoner of the siege was the wife of the settler William Bean. She, too, would have been burned had not Nancy Ward, exercising a prerogative as the Pretty Woman, pronounced her pardon.

The revolutionary authorities of Virginia, the Carolinas and Georgia were now prepared to conduct separate campaigns against the Cherokee. The delegates of North Carolina in the Continental Congress determined "to carry fire and Sword into the very bowels of their country and sink them so low that they may never be able to again rise and disturb the peace of their neighbors."

Late in July a party of Georgians under Major Samuel Jack burned two Cherokee towns. In August General Andrew Williamson led an army from South Carolina against the Hiwassee villages, which they found evacuated. Nevertheless, he destroyed all the buildings, corn and cattle. In September General Griffith Rutherford marched with a North Carolina army into the middle towns and valley settlements. He and Williamson joined their forces and carried fire and sword to every village of the region, compelling the Indians to flee to the overhill towns.

Virginia ordered Colonel William Christian to raise an army and march against the Indians. Forthwith Christian addressed a circular to the militiamen of the surrounding region, requesting them to gather at Long Island in the Holston River. Within a few weeks he realized 1,800 men, including pack horse men and cattle drivers. All of them save a company of horse-riflemen were infantry, armed with flintlocks, tomahawks and butcher knives. Leading his troops across the Holston to near-by Double Springs, Colonel Christian halted for several days to enable some Wataugans to join him. When these men arrived Christian led his force toward the French Broad River, which the Cherokee vowed they would permit no white man to cross.

That night when Christian encamped a trader appeared and informed him that 3,000 Cherokee awaited his arrival at the river and would dispute his passage over it. Christian then took every precaution against a surprise. And in the morning he sent the trader back to the Cherokee with word that he would never stop
until he crossed not only the French Broad but also the Tennessee. He resumed his advance. Guided by Isaac Thomas, the army marched on a narrow path along several creeks until it approached a ford of the French Broad.

The hearts of the Cherokee became as water when they learned that the white men were as thick as the trees. They sent Christian a trader waving a white flag attached to his rifle. The colonel gave orders to pay no heed to the man. And the trader disappeared to tell his friends that the white tide was about to engulf them. To give the Cherokee the impression that he intended to stay on the place for several days, Christian, on arriving at the French Broad, had his men set up tents and build many fires. That night he forded the river with a strong detachment and came up with the intention of surprising the encamped Cherokee from behind. But the colonel found the wigwams empty. The Indians had retreated to Long Island, the key that opened the gate to their country, where they had resolved to make a stand.

A trader who lived among them, however, dissuaded the Indians from their purpose. The Great Spirit, he said, had made the one race from white clay and the other from red. The former was destined to conquer; it could not be stopped from invading the Cherokee country. Better to retreat to their villages beyond the mountains. The Cherokee accepted his advice, abandoned all their defensive measures and scattered to their homes.

Meanwhile Christian pressed his advance. Two villages—Tamotlee and Great Island Town—fell to him without offering resistance. The surrounding fields provided him with ample corn and potatoes, while the deserted huts made comfortable bivouacs for his men. Not a Cherokee could they find, so they put the torch to fields and villages. Then Christian sent out three or four of his men with white flags and requested Chief Raven of Chota, Little Carpenter and Dragging Canoe to make peace on such terms of submission as he should demand. If they refused he would destroy their towns and pursue the fugitives as far as the Creek nation.

Dragging Canoe, who was recovering from his wound, refused to surrender; but Raven and Little Carpenter, having opposed war from the beginning, were happy to comply with whatever
terms Christian might offer them. They met him in Chota, where they made peace. They promised to surrender all prisoners, return the horses, cattle and goods they had stolen, give up all Tories residing or hiding out in their villages and send delegates representing the entire tribe to sign a formal treaty at a designated place and time. Christian then destroyed two villages that were loyal to Dragging Canoe and the one that had burned the boy, Samuel Moore.

Returning to Long Island, Christian broke camp and disbanded most of his men. The remainder were sent to garrison Fort Patrick Henry, opposite Long Island, against the possibility of an attack by Dragging Canoe and his followers. Virginia and North Carolina kept 400 rangers in the woods between the Watauga settlements and the Cherokee villages. But for the present Dragging Canoe planned no trouble. Accompanied by his followers and some white traders and adventurers, he withdrew to the Tennessee River where they founded new villages and formed themselves into an independent tribe known as the Chickamauga.

In April 1777 nearly a hundred Cherokee, including Oconostota and Little Carpenter, came to Fort Patrick Henry. From there Colonel Christian conducted the chiefs and their attendants to Williamsburg, Virginia, for a conference with Governor Patrick Henry and the Virginia assembly. The chiefs asked for protection from further encroachments in return for their neutrality during the Revolution. The Virginians agreed to protect and guarantee their lands and requested them to meet in July at Long Island to sign the formal treaty.

At this place on July 20 Oconostota, Little Carpenter and other chiefs signed two treaties, one with the commissioners of North Carolina and the other with those of Virginia. The Indian representatives hoped that the whites would be requested to move from the Watauga country. Instead they learned that they must surrender more land to them. To the Indians’ angry protests Waightstill Avery, head of the North Carolina commission, replied as follows: “We are now about to fix a line that is to remain through all generations, and be kept by our Childrens children; and we hope that both Nations will hereafter never have any more disputes.”
The Wataugans

Colonel Christian, one of the Virginia commissioners, added this assurance: "We agree with you that the line shall be like a wall, high and strong that none can pass over or break down." With this understanding the Indians surrendered the region as far south as the Watauga settlements extended. Both Virginia and North Carolina maintained agents in the Cherokee country until the terms of the treaty were discharged in every detail. The agent for North Carolina was James Robertson, who went to reside in Chota.

By now the Wataugans enjoyed the protection of North Carolina. In November 1776 that state had annexed the Washington District and had authorized it to send its four representatives, one of whom was John Sevier, to the Provincial Congress at Halifax. In the spring of 1777 this body passed laws which provided the district with courts of common pleas and quarter sessions, justices of the peace, a sheriff and a militia with John Carter as colonel. On December 18, 1777, North Carolina established Washington County, whose boundaries were those of the present state of Tennessee. The Wataugans thus completed a new chapter in the westward advance of American nationality.