

The Secrets Held Below Cherokee Lake

Practically all of the early Tennessee pioneer history is under Cherokee Lake in Granger County, TN at the site of historic Bean Station. A historical monument on Clinch Mountain marks the site where William Bean and his descendants established Bean Station below.



William Bean is recognized as the first European white settler in Tennessee when he moved his family outside of modern day Johnson City, TN in 1769. This area eventually became the Watauga settlement in 1772. Watauga would soon be home to other pioneer families including Bean allied families Burleson and Russell.

Watauga was the site where William Bean's wife, Lydia Russell Bean, would be captured by Indians and ultimately saved through the efforts of the peaceful Cherokee leader Nancy Ward. It was one of the sites where the Overmountain Men mustered on their way to battle the Red Coats at King's Mountain and claim a decisive victory. Also, the long hunters traveled through this area on their way to hunting expeditions in Kentucky and other wilderness destinations.



BFRG's Jimmy Don Russell descends from John Russell and Henrietta "Dolly" Burleson



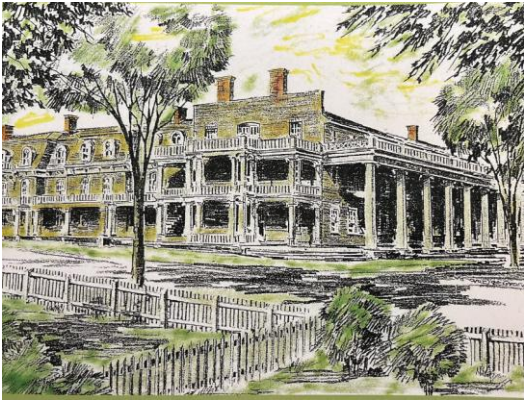
In 1940, before the Holston River was dammed and Cherokee Lake created, the historic Bean Station tavern was destroyed by fire before it could be relocated to higher ground. Today, **the tavern site and battlefield still lie beneath the lake.**

Jimmy is also a descendant of the John Russell, William Russell and Jesse Bean that served with Colonials at Kings Mountain.

It was on a long hunt with close friend Daniel Boone in 1775, that William Bean and Boone went through the gap in the Clinch Mountains and surveyed for the first time the area that would be Bean Station. Bean went on to serve in the Revolutionary War and later was awarded 3,000 acres in the area that he once surveyed with Boone.

Bean built a 4 room cabin that served as a home for his family and also an inn and a tavern for passing long hunters and trappers. The inn was called many names including Bean's Cabin, Bean's Crossroads and Bean's Station.

The sons of Bean built the area into a frontier outpost in the 1780's. The settlement was situated on the newly built Wilderness Road, which follows roughly US 25 East, and the Great Warrior's Path, which follows roughly US Highway 11. The strategic location of Bean Station made it an important site for frontier traffic. The famous Bean Station Tavern was built at the crossroads of the town in 1814. It had 40 rooms, a ballroom and a wine cellar.



It was said to be the largest tavern between Washington DC and New Orleans. The tavern hosted many famous guests which included John Sevier, Henry Clay, William Blount and Presidents Andrew Jackson, Andrew Johnson and James Knox Polk, and the notorious James Gang to name a few.

Tales of the Tavern include:

President Andrew Jackson: Jackson was passing through Bean Station as he had a lunch date with the owner of the tavern, Captain Bell. Upon arriving at the tavern, he saw one of his political opponents standing on the porch of the inn. Jackson sent for Captain Bell and told him to give Mrs. Bell his regrets for he was not going to be able to keep their lunch date. He remarked, "It would be a shame for the President of the United States to be killed or to kill someone." So he went his way.

David (Davy) Crockett: In his youth, Crockett travelled through Bean Station to find work and to court his future wife, Polly Finley. As a young man, he began to distinguish himself as a hunter and needing a good gun, he looked to Jesse Bean, a famous gunsmith to provide such a rifle. In 1812, Crockett would move his family

and follow Jesse Bean to Franklin County where he was mustered for service in the Creek War.

Nancy Hanks Lincoln: A young family was passing through Bean Station on their way to Kentucky. Needing food and shelter, Nancy, the wife, agreed to cook for the inn for 3 months while her husband and young son assisted in other chores. About 10 months later being settled in Kentucky, Nancy gives birth to a boy they name Abraham.

Jesse and Frank James: A group of exhausted riders on the run arrive at Bean Station Tavern. Two of the desperados go inside and demand a room. They ignore the inhospitable innkeeper and snatch the key to the only room available leaving the rest of the their men to sleep on the floor. The next morning after a hearty breakfast, they gallop off to Rogersville leaving the remaining apprehensive guests shaking in their boots. Years pass and it is revealed that the riders that night were members of the James Gang and they had stopped in Bean Station to throw the Virginia lawmen off their trail into thinking they were headed to Kentucky and on home to Missouri.

In 1886 a fire on Christmas night destroyed most of the Bean Station Tavern but part of the historic structure was saved. In 1941, the Tennessee Valley Authority claimed the land which held practically all of the early Tennessee pioneer history.

Where as the early buffalo found the land suitable for grazing and blazed a trail through the gap. Where as the Native Indians found the land suitable for game hunting and developed the trail. Where as the early pioneers found the land suitable for settlements and perfected the trail. Where as Civil War generals found the land a strategic venue for battle. The TVA found the land suitable for a land reservoir. Today, if you wished to explore Bean Station, you would need a snorkel or scuba gear for all the early pioneer historical sites are at the bottom of Cherokee Lake.

Location of Bean Station in Grainger and Hawkins counties in Tennessee



Sources: Wikipedia, Grainger County History....

Stories That Need To Be Told by Ken Coffey
William Bean Pioneer of Tennessee and His Descendants
By Jamie Ault Grady



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