

# Sproul's of Virginia, Kentucky and Missouri

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**B**orn in the 1750s in Augusta County, Virginia, Alexander Sproul grew up on his family's farm. During his childhood his father, William Sproul, likely complained of the taxes levied against the colonies by King George III of England. Those living in the colonies were frustrated. They gave up a large portion of their livelihood to others, and suffered from laws which had little relevance to everyday New England life.

When the conflict turned to outright rebellion against the throne, Alexander's community in Augusta County took up arms.

Shortly before his marriage, Alexander joined the American continental army toward the end of the Revolutionary War.<sup>1</sup> He and his fellow soldiers were called Rebels by the English government and Patriots by the newly declared United States government. The consequence of his willingness to take up arms would be either victory and freedom, or imprisonment and death.

He began his first tour as a volunteer in Captain Samuel McCutchen's campaign, enlisting before April 1<sup>st</sup>, 1780 and returning when the weather was cold in October of the same year.

After he returned to Augusta County, he visited the house of William Beard, a friend of the family who lived close by. During the visit he described his tour as long and severe; he recalled that on some occasion the soldiers were compelled to eat the skins of animals to sustain life.<sup>2</sup> William Beard's daughter, Jane, listened intently to the stories that Alexander told. She was born in 1753, had known Alexander for as long as she could remember,<sup>3</sup> and the two fell in love.

John Brown, a Presbyterian preacher, married Alexander and Jane on May 15, 1781.<sup>4</sup> Jane, born in 1753,<sup>5</sup> and her new husband obtained a small farm about a mile away from the home of Jane's father, William Beard.<sup>6</sup>

Three weeks after their marriage, they moved into their own house. Three weeks after that, he was again called to serve his country. This time he was drafted. He entered into Captain Cunningham's campaign and left the first week of July, 1781.<sup>7</sup>

While he was away, his wife, Jane, would be forced to plant a crop in the springtime by herself, plowing the ground and dropping the seed, and then seeing that all was watered and kept. When time came for the harvest, Jane appealed to Captain Cunningham, asking that her husband be granted leave for a short time to harvest the crop. The captain took pity on her and allowed it to be so. Once her husband returned to

the campaign, she was again left to tend to the property alone.<sup>8</sup>

The nights again grew cooler. Back home, Jane was visited on at least one occasion by British soldiers who, while they spared her life, abused her and damaged her homestead.<sup>9</sup>

Finally, in October of 1781, the war drew to a close. Alexander found himself in a dramatic final conflict. General Washington's troops, along with French allies under the command of the Marquis LaFayette met outside of Yorktown, Virginia and planned a surprise attack of Colonel Lord Cornwallis's British troops.

Lord Cornwallis was waiting for British reinforcements and was in the process of building a naval port on the York river. He thought that General Washington and the French were going to attempt a siege of New York. This was, in fact, General Washington's plan before LaFayette convinced him to head south for Virginia to engage Cornwallis' weary army.

Washington left 1500 men outside of New York to keep up the appearance of an imminent siege. The trap was sprung in Yorktown on October 6<sup>th</sup>.



*The Battle of Yorktown.*

The French navy blockaded the river's outlet to the sea, preventing British reinforcements from arriving for Cornwallis. The Americans attacked from the south, cornering the British against the river. Cornwallis stalled the Americans by sending black slaves infected with smallpox into the American lines in the hopes of infecting them. This was not successful. He then began evacuating the British troops in small boats across the large river, but shortly was met with a fierce storm that blew against the fleeing troops, rendering escape impossible. Out of supplies, and faced with imminent defeat, Cornwallis finally surrendered on October 19<sup>th</sup>.



*The surrender of Cornwallis.*

Alexander stated to his family and friends that he had witnessed the surrender of Lord Cornwallis<sup>10</sup>, a fact supported historically by the presence of the Virginia company close to the place of surrender (see figure below from first hand account by Colonel Carrington.).



*Col. Carrington's sketch of the surrender. Note the Virginia line close to the place of surrender.*

Alexander became ill and was stranded in Yorktown, unable to make the trip home because of his fatigue. His wife asked her brother-in-law, James, to take a wagon to Yorktown to retrieve Alexander home, which he obliged.<sup>11</sup>

Alexander returned to his wife the first of November 1781, lay sick for some period of time, and eventually recovered. Life began anew for the couple. They conceived and bore many children, among them Jane (born April 15, 1782), William (born January 22, 1784), Alexander, Jr. (born March 22, 1786), Polly (born March 23, 1788), Samuel (born May 12, 1790), James (born September 25, 1792), Joseph (born January, 1795), John (born August, 1797), and Nancy (born January 31, 1800).<sup>12</sup>

With the increase in the size of the family, the small farm was unable to support them all.

Many of their friends and family felt a similar pressure, and moved into Kentucky, where land was available for the taking.

Alexander's brother, James, was the first to move. He headed west on the Appalachian trail, into the Kentucky wilderness, finally settling down in Cumberland County. James obtained two land grants in Cumberland County, both along Indian Creek. The first was for 200 acres, surveyed on July 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1799, and the second for 200 more on October 20<sup>th</sup> the same year.<sup>13</sup>

Then Alexander followed him to the same place, and settled along the same creek in Cumberland. His first land grant was surveyed on August 18<sup>th</sup>, 1805<sup>14</sup>, and last on March 19<sup>th</sup>, 1806. He obtained a total of 396\_ acres, 280 of which contained the Indian Creek watercourse.<sup>15</sup> Alexander's son, William Sproul, then aged 23 years, obtained an additional 43 acres along Indian Creek.<sup>16</sup>

The British continued to insult and torment the people of the United States after the Revolutionary War was ended. Britain refused to withdraw from the territory around the Great Lakes and provided arms and encouragement to the Shawnee and other Indians inhabiting those lands. This subterfuge was uncovered slowly when the settlers found British weapons and supplies in the hands of hostile Indians.

In the late 1790s, Britain and France found themselves in a bitter rivalry. Both attempted to blockade the continent of Europe. The conflict between these countries had two effects on the United States. First, neutral American vessels which ignored the blockade were seized by the British and their cargo confiscated. Second, the British made a practice of searching American ships for British sailors, whom they would arrest for abandonment and place into the British navy in forced service. Unfortunately, many times they would also take Americans who couldn't prove their identity, a process called "impressment".

In 1807, the British ship Leopard fired on the American frigate Chesapeake. President Thomas Jefferson urged the Congress to pass the Embargo Act, which banned all American ships from trade with Britain and France. The embargo failed to change British and French policies but served to throw the Eastern Seaboard into a severe economic depression. American tempers flared.

Failing in peaceful efforts and facing an economic depression, some Americans began to argue for a declaration of war. The Congress elected in 1810 included a group known as the War Hawks who demanded war against Great Britain. These men were all affiliated with the Democratic-

Republican Party and were mostly elected from the West and South. Among their leaders was Henry Clay of Kentucky, who represented the Sproul's home state. He argued that American honor could be saved and British policies changed by an invasion of the British in Canada. The Federalist Party opposed war; for the most part they represented New England shippers who foresaw the ruination of their trade.

On June 18, 1812, President James Madison signed a declaration of war that Congress passed at his request.

Back in Kentucky, Cumberland (later Clinton) County volunteers were enlisted to fight for the cause. Alexander and his 17 year old son, Joseph, joined the Kentucky Mounted Volunteer Militia.<sup>17</sup> They mustered as privates in Newport on August 31, 1813, into Captain William Wood's company.<sup>18</sup> Alexander's brother, James Sproul, mustered on August 23, 1813 into Captain Samuel Tate's company. Both companies, commanded by Colonel Michael Taul (Taul's Regiment),<sup>19</sup> headed north to fight Indians who were allied with the British.<sup>20</sup>

At the Battle of the Thames, Alexander, now aged 50–60, took the scalp of an Indian whom he killed during the engagement.<sup>21</sup> During that same battle, the American troops pursued a retreating British. The great Shawnee leader, Tecumseh, was present at the battle and refused to flee with the British. He led the Indian nations in the bloody battle which ended in his own death and victory for the American forces.



*Scene from the Battle of the Thames.*

On the way home, in the Pickaway Plains of Ohio, Alexander Sproul became seriously ill. At that time, malaria was a threat in the plains, and possibly this is what afflicted him. Major Wood saw that Alexander would not be able to make the journey, so he left him there and detailed Joseph to remain and care for him. Realizing that he would not recover, Alexander sent the scalp home to his family by the hand of James Williams, a friend of

his who had also fought in the Revolutionary War. He died shortly thereafter, in 1814.<sup>22,23</sup>

Wood's men returned to Clinton County upon expiration of their enlistment, and were discharged at Robert Pogue's house on November 13<sup>th</sup>.<sup>24</sup>

**J**oseph Sproul, Alexander's son, returned to the family in late fall. At 19 years of age, he helped his 61 year old mother take care of the family farm. Joseph eventually married and had at least four children before his wife's death; Elizabeth (born November 06, 1822), James (born in 1829) William (born about 1835)<sup>25</sup> and Cary (birthdate unknown).<sup>26</sup>

Jane Sproul's large farm along Indian Creek was sold at public auction to Cornelius Maguire Connor on July 23, 1822 by William Frogge, deputy sheriff to William Cole. It was sold to settle a suit between William, Thomas, Rebecca and Rhoda Flowers and the estate of Jane Sproul, William Sproul, Joseph Sproul and Charles Sproul, Jane Campbell, Shadrack Claywell, Asa Harper and William H. Talbott.



*Signature of Joseph Sproul.<sup>27</sup>*

Many of the Clinton County records were destroyed by a series of courthouse fires through the years, so records of this time are scarce.

Joseph Sproul's daughter, Elizabeth, married Samuel Barrier in 1837.<sup>28</sup> He was a waggoner by trade,<sup>29</sup> who lived in Clinton County near the Sprouls. Two of Samuel's brothers, John and Mark, lived with Joseph Sproul during the 1840 Kentucky census, and along with Samuel, remained dear to Joseph after they later moved to Carroll county, Missouri.<sup>30</sup>

Samuel Barrier and Elizabeth (Sproul) left Kentucky between 1841 and 1843 for new land available in Missouri.<sup>31</sup> Samuel's sister, Mary, apparently also traveled with them to Carroll County.<sup>32</sup>

Samuel continued there as a waggoner.<sup>33</sup> After his death, his estate listed the tools of his trade, among which are found:<sup>34</sup>

- 1 cow*
- 1 kit tools*
- 1 grindstone*
- 1 workbench*
- 1 set buggy feloes (rim), spokes, and hubs*

*1 lot refused spokes*  
*2 set waggon spokes*  
*1 turning lathe (aka., machinists lathe)*  
*1 set buggy wheels per Mathew*  
*1 set buggy wheels per Kinshaw*  
*1 set waggon feloes (rims)*  
*187 ft lumber*  
*120 ft lumber*  
*9 waggon tongues (the pole of a waggon)*  
*1 wagon works*  
*3 gun stacks*  
*1 lot old irons*  
*1/2 keg white lead (lead powder for paint)*  
*1 set buggy felows (rims)*  
*1 vise*

Samuel and Elizabeth had six children:

Grazilda Jane (born November 29, 1839 in KY), Mary Alice "Charity" (born in 1841 in KY), Anne E. (born in 1843 in MO) and Alvis Rim (born November 22, 1848 in MO)<sup>35</sup>, as well as Sarah F. (born February 12, 1855 in MO) and William Samuel (born June 03, 1859 in MO).

Back in Kentucky, Joseph Sproul's mother, Jane, died on June 10, 1847.<sup>36</sup> After her death, Joseph travelled with his two sons, James and William, to join his children in Carroll County. In 1850, Joseph and his two sons lived in the same household as Samuel and Elizabeth,<sup>37</sup> suggesting that they had recently arrived.

During the Civil War, there is no record of any of the aforementioned people having directly participated in the conflict. Samuel Barrier also made spinning wheels. In an excerpt from *The History of Carroll County, Missouri*<sup>38</sup> ...

*"In 1862...flax and cotton had been raised, and were being used in the preparation of fabrics. Mr. Barrier, of Carrollton, in the early spring, was kept busy manufacturing flax spinning wheels. Mrs. Shirley, north of Big Creek, and other ladies raised, carded, and spun considerable quantities of cotton."*

In addition to his occupation, Samuel Barrier was also a trustee of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church of Carrollton.<sup>39</sup>

References:

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- <sup>1</sup> Jane Sproul's application for widow's pension; Notarized testimony of Jane Sproul.
- <sup>2</sup> Ibid
- <sup>3</sup> Jane Sproul's application for widow's pension; Notarized testimony of Jane Sproul.
- <sup>4</sup> Ibid
- <sup>5</sup> Early Times in Clinton County, Jack Ferguson. Vol 2, p.29
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid
- <sup>12</sup> Early Times in Clinton County, Jack Ferguson. Vol 2, p.29
- <sup>13</sup> Jillson, Willard Rouse. The Kentucky Land Grants. Volume I, part 1, Chapter IV; Grants South of Green River (1797-1866). P.416; Louisville Kentucky: Filson Club Publications, 1925.
- <sup>14</sup> Early Times in Clinton County, Jack Ferguson. Vol 2, p.29
- <sup>15</sup> Jillson, Willard Rouse. The Kentucky Land Grants. Volume I, part 1, Chapter IV; Grants South of Green River (1797-1866). P.416; Louisville Kentucky: Filson Club Publications, 1925.
- <sup>16</sup> Ibid
- <sup>17</sup> Pension Application for War of 1812: Harriet Sproul, Widow of Joseph Sproul, WC-34789.
- <sup>18</sup> Index to War of 1812 Pension Files Vol3 N-Z National Historical Publishing Company Waynesboro, Tenn 1989.
- <sup>19</sup> Ibid
- <sup>20</sup> Early Times in Clinton County, Jack Ferguson. Vol 2, p.29
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid
- <sup>23</sup> Pension Application for War of 1812: Harriet Sproul, Widow of Joseph Sproul, WC-34789.
- <sup>24</sup> Early Times in Clinton County, Jack Ferguson. Vol 2, p.29
- <sup>25</sup> Federal Census, Carroll County, Missouri, 1850.
- <sup>26</sup> Note- referred to as "your sister Cary" in a letter from Joseph Sproul to his children in Missouri dated December 11, 1842.
- <sup>27</sup> Letter from Joseph Sproul to his children in Missouri dated December 11, 1842.
- <sup>28</sup> Excerpt taken from Charles B Berrier family history written in 1941 and sent to Rev Franklin Barrier. In possession of Stephanie Harrison.
- <sup>29</sup> Ibid
- <sup>30</sup> Letter from Joseph Sproul to his children in Missouri dated December 11, 1842.
- <sup>31</sup> Federal Census, Carroll County, Missouri, 1850.

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- <sup>32</sup> ... where she married Richard S. Downy on June 26, 1842... Carroll County Marriage Index 1833-1914, P.8
- <sup>33</sup> Carroll County Probate Records- estate inventory, Samuel Barrier, deceased, 1865.
- <sup>34</sup> Ibid
- <sup>35</sup> Federal Census, Carroll County, Missouri, 1850.
- <sup>36</sup> Early Times in Clinton County, Jack Ferguson. Vol 2, p.29
- <sup>37</sup> Federal Census, Carroll County, Missouri, 1850.
- <sup>38</sup> History of Carroll County, Missouri. Published in St. Louis, Missouri State Historical Company, 1881. Copy in the reference section of the Missouri State Historical Society, Columbia, MO.
- <sup>39</sup> His name was published in the Carrollton Daily Democrat as a trustee of the church. This clipping from the Carrollton Democrat dated January 15, 1864 announced the sale of the church house and property. A later clipping from the Carrollton Democrat dated March 25, 1864 states, "Cumberland Presbyterian Church and Lot public auction - Saturday, April 2nd, 1864".