"Wild Roe"

John S. Stephenson

402 acres of land situated on a Virginia Certificate, dated June 24, 1780.

by David H. Gourley June 1995

Courtesy of Fort Vance Historical Society

July well

"Wild Roe" 1780-1995

David H. Gourley

"The living in old times was hard. Women and children cried a great deal and the men and boys cussed a lot. And everybody prayed enough, in church, in the fields, in the woods, wherever and whenever they had the feeling for it. But mostly we all just laughed, about nuthing much to eat, I mean, and the Indians sneaking around. Poor half-naked fellows. And we abided, and it was wonderful -- hard-working men and women and hard-loving, too. And that's what it takes to make the mare go -- hard working and hard-loving. We was lonesome a lot. Everybody was lonesome, I guess, in the old times. the woods caused it. the woods was gloomy, but of morning and evening they were kind of grand, too. We put up with a lot of trouble, but we stayed brave, and God was by us every minute, you know..."

> Keziah Batton Shearer (1776-1872) (from: "Now and Long Ago," by Glenn D. Lough)

Wild Roe 1780-1995

Boyd Crumrine's "History of Washington County" devotes one full paragraph to John Stephenson. Crumrine writes "John S. Stephenson came into possession of four hundred two acres of land situated on a Virginia Certificate, dated June 24, 1780."

As a result of the Irish pioneer's perseverance, our Washington County's Wild Roe had its beginning 215 years ago. This short history with book references, maps and photos will highlight the progression and development of Stephenson's Wild Roe from past to present. Through personal interviews, colorful Wild Roe stories and history depicting some of the events and characters claiming title to Wild Roe were preserved by early Eldersville natives, Bill Truax and Paul Stewart. We can also thank Gaylord Martin (the elder statesmen of Eldersville) for helping to preserve Wild Roe area lore as Gaylord's great-aunt, Isobel Martin, was married to Andrew Stephenson, a son of John Stephenson. Andrew Stephenson was the post master at Burgettstown at one time. A.D. White was most helpful to this writer in gathering information regarding Wild Roe's history in the year 1972. We must thank Albert Miller who has guided and taught us land and building preservation, and for all the wonderful early pioneer history lessons. We are grateful to Bessie Gladden and to her son President Judge Tom Gladden, both direct descendants of John Stephenson, for passing on the most accurate and complete record of the Stephenson's genealogy and history. The Stephenson history, along with a recent continuation, is attached here in its entirety. Mary Stephenson Linn wrote the early history, dated July 7, 1937. The continuation was written by James W. Stephenson, Jr. and dated March 1, 1992. We will make reference to some of the highlights in these histories from time to time throughout this paper.

Although John Stephenson's grant of land was surveyed out as "Stephenson's Choice," it was named "Wild Roe." The name Wild Roe can be traced to England/Europe as "Roe" in Europe is the name for wild deer.

John Stevenson and Margaret Huston Stephenson are buried in the historic old section of the Cross Creek Cemetery. John Stephenson's modest sandstone marker indicates his date of death as December 14, 1821. He was 75. The grave site stands approximately thirty feet off of Vance Road with a flag marking his patriotic service in the Revolutionary War. Margaret Huston Stephenson died on November 15, 1839. She was 84. Both were members of the Cross Creek Presbyterian Church. John and Margaret had nine children, seven boys and two girls. Mary L. Stephenson's history notes that Margaret was blind for 20 years prior to her death. The Stephensons were noted for giving a home to the orphan children whose parents had died from the war or from Indian raids on settlers.

For his military service in the Revolutionary War, John Stephenson received his original tract of land comprised of 402 acres and 109 perches, strict measure (a perch measures 16.5 feet). The survey copy description reads as follows: "A draught of a survey called the Wild Roe situated on the waters of Cross Creek, Washington County, containing 402 acres, 109 perches, strict measures, executed Feb 25 _____ (obliterated)...in pursuance of a certificate for 400 acres granted to John Stephenson by the Commissioners appointed by Virginia to adjust the claims to unpatented lands in the Counties of Monongalia, Yohogania, and Ohio are duly entered with the County Surveyor as appears from the list of entries transmitted from the Surveyor

General's office -- entered 24 June 1780, returned 5 July 1786, etc." This survey draught describes the metes and bounds (i.e., bearings and lengths of sides) and is the earliest proof of Stephenson's settlement in Washington Co. that we can document by date. A copy of this draught survey is attached to this paper. This area, at the time of Stephenson's survey, was know as the District of West Augusta -- belonging to Virginia. However, this Southwestern Pennsylvania area was on its way to being turned over to Pennsylvania. Washington County had already been identified, although, it did not officially become a county until 1781. There were many arguments and delays during this change over period from Virginia to Pennsylvania regarding land titles. Virginia titles did not come under Pennsylvania jurisdiction until the year 1784. Many of the new landowners requested (and received) a warrant/patent from each state (Pa. & Va.) for assurance that they held clear titles to their new section of land. (Note "Virginia Court Records in S.W. Pa" -- 1775-1780 --Boyd Crumrine). The "Horn Papers" also picture Wild Roe and show its relationship with contiguous tracts of land. It should be noted that Stephenson's Wild Roe was part of a total of over four million acres situated in the Ohio River area, and south, given to the Continental Troops to satisfy bounty obligations. These lands were known as the "Virginia Military Lands." Sergeant John Stephenson's military record in the Revolutionary War is well documented in Mary L. Stephenson's history, attached.

Early land acquisition, and land surveying is presented in quite some detail in Helen Vogt's book titled "Westward of Ye Laurall Hills."

In addition to receiving land for military service, as in the case of John Stephenson, Helen Vogt writes of four additional methods of early land acquisition. They are:

1. "Squatters Right" -- simply live on the land in a cave or shelter.

"Tomahawk Right" -- select a section which had personal value and blaze a 2. property line on trees with an axe or tomahawk. A.D. White documents a Tomahawk claim in his book "History of the Cross Creek Presbyterian Church." It was taken up by James Stephenson in the year 1781. James was a brother of John Stephenson. This Tomahawk claim was comprised of 500 acres and located four miles south of Burgettstown in the vicinity of present day Sturgeon Farm and old Cooke Schoolhouse. It's also worthy to note here a reference made by A.D. White in one of the Cross Creek Presbyterian Church profiles. It reads "James Stephenson was a half-brother of the brave Colonel William Crawford who was so inhumanly burned by the Indians on the plains of Sandusky in 1782." Please note the reference and relationship regarding the Stephenson brothers and Colonel William Crawford in the Stephenson history attached to this paper. James Stephenson's Tomahawk Claim was a ten minute crow's flight from his brother's Wild Roe. James Stephenson is buried in the Cross Creek Cemetery.

3. "Improvement Right" - A frontiersmen could acquire land provided he made an improvement to the land in the value of at least 24 dollars.

4. "Corn Right" - Clear a section of land and raise one crop of corn.

For orientation, present day Eldersville now borders Stephenson land on the west and the Burgettstown to Eldersville road makes up the northern boundary line. The north branch of Cross Creek originates here from many excellent surface springs and flows from north to south through the center of Wild Roe, paralleling Karch road which also splits the tract down its middle. Due to a large underground fault, all the coal seams remain intact beneath the original tract resulting in unpolluted and free flowing springs. Undoubtedly, the many natural springs influenced John Stephenson's decision to pick this tract for his start in the wilderness.

We can state with accuracy that one trappers cabin, one two room log cabin, and three two-story log homes were built on Stephenson land. The trapper's cabin is documented in Mary Linn Stephenson's history. She notes: "Sometime before John Stephenson came with his family to live on his grant of land -- in fact, before the land was surveyed by the government, two or three trappers built a log cabin in a deeply wooded section of it, near what was later the Burgettstown road. These trappers were murdered by the Indians and their cabin burned to the ground. Later, what remained of these men was gathered up and buried on the site of the burned cabin. For many years field stones marked their graves while the Stephensons owned the land. This small field which was joined on two sides by Boles and Stewart's property, was never cleared or cultivated." Both, Bill Truax and Paul Stewart, who lived on the farms adjoining Wild Roe to the west revealed to this writer their recollection of the Indian attack as it had been passed down to them through the years. It's believed by checking early map records that this attack took place near the present Karch Pond area. This site lies along the north end of Wild Roe just off the Burgettstown road.

Historically, since we have learned that John Stephenson settled here in the early 1780's, the Stephenson's pioneer home is one of the oldest structures that still exists in Jefferson Township. Mary Linn Stephenson notes that "the first house built on John Stephenson's land was a two-roomed structure made of logs, which is still standing today (1937) in a fairly good state of preservation, considering it was built about 150 years ago." The remains sit today on a gentle slope of land in the northern most section of Wild Roe near the intersection of where Karch road meets the Burgettstown road. Only the bottom section stands -- a one-room sandstone foundation measuring 26 feet by 27 feet, with an 8 foot ceiling. The two foot thick cut sandstone walls were built with three sides dug into the sides of a small hillside which afforded protection and kept the strong fort-like structure warm in winter and cool in summer. One small window and one door are situated in a wall facing the east. The original hand-hewed and un-hewed logs still support the flat roof ceiling over the foundation. The small upper room of this pioneer home was made of logs, but removed many years ago.

One of the most prominent features of this home was the spring of flowing water located inside one corner of the cabin. This spring flows through a stone trough in the floor area located next to the inside southwest wall and exits the structure near the door. Mary L. Stephenson's history notes "the spring of water near the door of the house was so sheltered that in case of prolonged attack by the Indians the family would not be without drinking water." The present owner and occupant of this site, Randy Chicovic, is using the old Stephenson's pioneer spring for his family's everyday water supply. It still flows today a cool, generous, pure quality of water as it did for the Stephensons so many years ago.

The second most striking feature of the Stephenson's pioneer home was the massive fireplace. It was located along the north wall in the stone foundation room directly across from the flowing spring. It was of sufficient size to allow for heating, cooking and light for reading. This was a very self-sufficient room for their daily living needs in all kinds of weather or if attacked. Thanks to both Doctor Ted and Trudy McCauley, this fireplace has been completely restored. It was purchased, removed and now graces their own newly restored log home. It is located approximately one mile from Wild Roe on the McCauley farm just off the Burgettstown/Eldersville road. The support lintel is made of solid oak and measures 10 feet 7 inches in length, 27 inches in width and 15 inches in depth. It should be noted that this fireplace

was moved and restored by local restoration expert, Jeff Gump, so it remains very historically accurate and correct just as it was when it was built by John Stephenson inside his pioneer home.

Mary L. Stephenson notes that "between the years 1800-1804 a larger and more comfortable home was built by John Stephenson." This second log home was built approximately 1500 feet in an easterly direction from the first log cabin -- just above the present day Karch pond. It was a two-story log structure. In 1976 this writer was able to recover eight of the hand-hewed logs before it was destroyed by time and development. This second Stephenson home was known in more recent times as the Pete Davidson place. An excellent spring of water is located near its site. Photos taken in 1976 will describe in better detail the remains of John Stephenson's second pioneer log home.

A third log home, now gone, was built by the Stephensons near the second home. Caldwell's Atlas notes the name S. Stephenson as the occupant in 1876. It was located approximately 1500 feet in a westerly direction from the Stephenson's second homestead. More recently it was located on the Karch tract, and presently, James Thompson owns the land where this third Stephenson log home once stood. Again, an excellent spring of water still flows near this third site. All three sites remained under the Stephenson family name in the year 1876 as indicated by "Caldwell's 1876 Atlas." In the business directory of this same Atlas, year 1825, the grandsons of the John Stephenson are credited as raising 385 sheep on 396 acres of Wild Roe. Caldwell notes the Stephensons as being farmers, stock raisers, and breeders of good sheep. Mary L. Stephenson notes Cyrus M. Stephenson, a grandson, as "being known in every state of the union as a successful important farming gentleman." Cyrus and his wife, Mary are buried in the Eldersville Methodist Church graveyard. David Stephenson and his wife, Rachel, are buried nearby.

For approximately 17 years, from 1780 to 1797, John Stephenson's Wild Roe remained one tract -- 402 acres, 109 perches. By deed dated March 25, 1797, John Stephenson sold off 100 acres of his southern section of Wild Roe to Andrew Huston. This consideration was in the sum of forty pounds. We will refer to this section of land as the "southern section"/tract of Wild Roe.

This southern most section that John Stephenson sold off to Andrew Huston has a most interesting history. Again, we can thank Bill Truax for preserving the Dagon, Anderson and Smith stories while they owned and occupied this tract. As we begin at the fourth log home built on Wild Roe and without being able to authenticate the exact date of construction, it was probably built in 1797 by Andrew Huston. Their deed is dated March 25, 1797. Andrew and his wife lived here for six years. Andrew Huston was from Shippensburg, Pa. and likely related to John Stephenson's wife Margaret, whose maiden name was Huston. We have not researched the Huston genealogy or history.

This fourth log house remains in only a fair state of preservation, considering it's approximately 198 years old. It stands about 30 feet off Karch road, and about 3/4 of a mile from the intersection of Karch road and Burgettstown/Eldersville road. It is a 1-1/2 story structure consisting of four rooms with 7 foot ceilings. An addition was added on in later years which enclosed an outside wall cooking fireplace and one upstairs room. The original home measured 21'x28' -- all hand-hewed oak logs. A small cellar is enclosed in the stone foundation area. Un-hewed white oak logs support the main floor above the cellar. The most interesting features are the huge, double, back to back sandstone fireplaces located in the center of the home. The fireplace foundation begins in the cellar area, where it measures 9 feet in width and sits on a slab of natural limestone. On the first floor it measures 7-1/2 feet in length and 5 feet in width with large back-to-back openings used for cooking, heating, candle-making and light for reading. It continues its taper until it emerges from the slate roof on top into one common opening or flue. Roland Cadle, local log home restoration specialist, noted the fireplace's unique and definite "Germanic" influence, i.e... built in the center of the home, and that he remembered having seen only three such fireplaces in several hundred early log homes built in Western Pennsylvania. A slate roof has replaced an earlier split wooden shingle roof.

By deed, dated March 18, 1803, Andrew Huston conveyed this tract to Jacob Dagon. Jacob's wife's name was Elizabeth and together they raised 10 children, 9 girls and 1 boy in the small four-roomed log home. Jacob Dagon's will is a reflection of his family's meager possessions and pioneer life. Provided that his wife, Elizabeth, did not remarry, she was to receive the following items upon his death: 1 mare, 4 sheep, 1 cow and pasture privileges, use of the new stable, 1 side saddle, 1 bridle, 2 kettles, 1 of 5 gallons and 1 of copper 28 gallons, 1 cupboard, 1 table, and use of loom house and kitchen for her entire use and sufficient room in the spring house for her milk and dairy articles -- the list continues with items left to his 10 children and grandchildren. The probate date for his will reads May 31, 1848.

In the Pennsylvania section of the "Census Book for the United States," for the year 1790, there is only one Jacob Dagon listed as "head of a family of two." He lived in Heidelberg Township of Berks County, Pa. He was of German descent. The "Washington Observer Reporter," dated June 26, 1976, lists Jacob Dagon as having served in the Revolutionary War. His name appeared on a list compiled by our local D.A.R. Chapter. A further check of the military record located in the genealogy room at the Citizen's Library in Washington, Pa. reveals that a Jacob Dagon held a rank of 7th Class in Samuel Cochran's Company, 10th Battalion. (Pa. Archives, 5th Series, Vol. 7, dated 1782).

Jacob Dagon's military life continued from the Revolutionary War to the Pennsylvania Whiskey Rebellion. Jacob marched against the Western Pennsylvania insurgents in Colonel Thomas Forester's Regiment. His rank was 1st class, and he is listed as having been paid and mustered out of the militia in the County of Dauphin, Pa. in 1794. (See Pa. Archives, 6th Series, Vol. 5).

To continue this history, we can only speculate, that our Washington County's Jacob Dagon, while on duty here during the Whiskey Rebellion, met Andrew Huston, and decided to purchase his farm, the former Andrew Huston tract in 1803, where he lived and died after about 45 years. A check of the early Cross Creek and Eldersville graveyard rolls plus an on site search have not turned up the grave sites of Jacob and Elizabeth Dagon. Per Paul Stewart and Gaylord Martin, there was a burial (burials) on the farm in the vicinity of the log house. Perhaps the Dagons are interred on the old farm as was the custom in the early days. More research is needed for this old German pioneer family.

Per Bill Truax, Jacob Dagon dug the existing water well, by hand, that is located in the front yard of the old log home. It measures four feet in diameter and was dug through limestone, slate and clay for a depth of twenty-four feet. It's still in use today, 192 years later, marked by a hand pump and wooden watering trough.

Jacob Dagon's wife, Elizabeth, died on January 1, 1854, and the executors, by indenture dated April 27, 1854, sold the Dagon tract back into Stephenson hands: James, David and Cyrus. All three were the grandsons of John Stephenson. David Stephenson, the great, great, grandfather of Judge Tom Gladden, lived on the farm for 31 years. David's nickname was "Dagon" according to Bill Truax. David Stephenson in turn sold the farm to John Walker. In the chain of title without deed references and dates, the farm was then sold to W.A. "Gen" Anderson, Lee V. Smith, Ray Boso, Mason Foster and, last to this writer.

David and his wife, Rachel, also lived in one of the oldest log homes built in Eldersville. It was built by Christopher Bable, who served as a soldier in General St. Clair's army in 1791. This old log home still stands in Eldersville, and in more recent times, was the home of Merle Thorley.

Of all the old outbuildings, the 100 year old barn located just off Karch road is a distinct reminder of early American farm life. It measures 34 feet in width and 54 feet in length. It's constructed into the side of the slope or bank of land. It can be identified as a true "Bank" barn as one can enter the top floor hay and grain storage area through the wide barn door opening from the top of the bank or slope. The barn was built by a local carpenter, John Love, in the early 1890's.

Bill Truax stated that John Love was an excellent carpenter and built a lot of barns in our area. John Love's barn is a standing memorial to his carpentry skills and ability. Bill noted, "all he used was a square and his eye to make the timbers align true and correct." The foundation is of large cut sandstone. The structure is supported by hand-hewed oak timbers, all wooden pegged at the joints. White pine board cover the sides and the roof is of dark slate. The stone slate weighed over 6,200 pounds and was transported from the Hanlin Station rail yard station to the site via a team of horses.

Bill Truax noted that it was an awful hard pull coming up the Hanlin Station hill hauling over three tons of slate on a wagon. Bill Truax told of the early barn dances in the new barn and how a sermon was preached by James McCormick in our local Eldersville Methodist Church regarding one of these early dances. The title of the sermon was "Dancing over the Bull's Back." Bill noted that many of the congregation got up and walked out and that "he really gave them heck!"

As a review of this event, Jay Sterling, the present minister of the Eldersville Methodist Church, revealed that this time period occurred during the Holiness or Temperance movement and that any form of dancing, drinking or card playing was certainly frowned upon. In March of 1994, U.S.A. Today did their cover story featuring the demise of the American Barn. The title read "The Vanishing Barn -- Preserving a Symbol of Rural America." It referenced the barn as "a sign of heartland, hard work and harvest."

Bill Truax noted that "General Anderson was the best farmer of the lot." He raised dairy cattle and had a blacksmith shop and a spring house built for his needs. The Smiths were known for their fine fruit orchard, especially apples. Lee Smith developed leather chaps for his horses legs to prevent the field thistles from annoying them.

Paul Stewart recalled that there were two people accidentally killed on this southern section of Wild Roe. A young boy was killed when a stone boat overturned on him and when the gas wells were drilled in the early 1900's a man was killed in a well drilling accident. Their names have been lost.

Today this southern tract has an active Soil and Water Conservation Plan in effect developed by the Washington County Conservation District. Approximately 50 acres are under cultivation in conjunction with this plan. The remainder of the land is in pasture and wood lots. More recently, a registered early American artifact site has been discovered near the creek area below the old barn. The registered site number reads 36 (Pa.) -- WH (Washington County) -- #391 (site no). Although many early period arrowheads have been discovered, the site has never been professionally investigated. And as in the Northern section of Wild Roe this tract has no less than four free-flowing all weather springs.

In the year 1805, John Stephenson decided to add to his Wild Roe tract again and by patent/warrant, dated December 28, 1805, he picked up "Dry Knob." It was comprised of 107 acres, 30 perches. This second tract, adjoining Wild Roe on the norhtwest, bordered the tract of Thomas Ward of Eldersville. This tract took in the former R. C. Kidd farm just north of the old Bill Truax farm. Today, George Delich owns the tract just west of "Dry Knob."

In conclusion, we wish to salute John and Margaret Stephenson and their courageous and strong pioneer family for being such faithful stewards of their land named "Wild Roe." It's a peaceful tract of land. We hope to meet Andrew Huston, Jacob Dagon and the Anderson and Smith families, too -- someday, and tell them how much we appreciated their care of our southern "Wild Roe" tract. They all have rewarded us with so many memories, and in addition to our faith, that's all the we really have to take with us in the end -- just fond memories.

Attachments: Maps Wills

Wills Photographs Stephenson History David H. Gourley June 1995 John Stephenson, Sr. died on December 14, 1821. His will was probated on December 20, 1821 and is recorded in Will Book 3, page 463 in the Washington County Court House.

In this will he mentions:

- To his wife, Margaret, he gives the house in which we live and other bequests.
- To sons: James John William had left home at an early age, had learned a trade, and I helped him all I could. Andrew lived with me as a farmer and I leave him part of the farm. Joseph
- To sons: Thomas and Robert, I leave the plantation on which I live, bounded by lands of Samuel Robison, Thomas Ward and others.

To daughter: Jane, 100.00

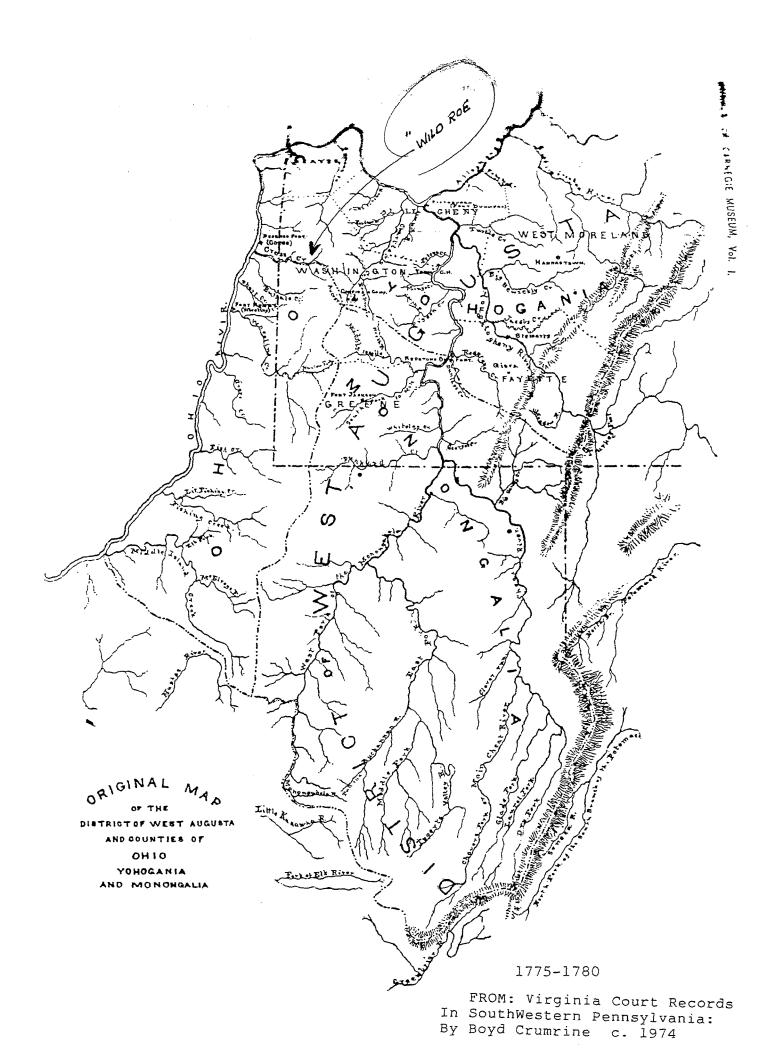
To grandchildren: John and Sarah Givin, children of my daughter, Isabella (deceased)

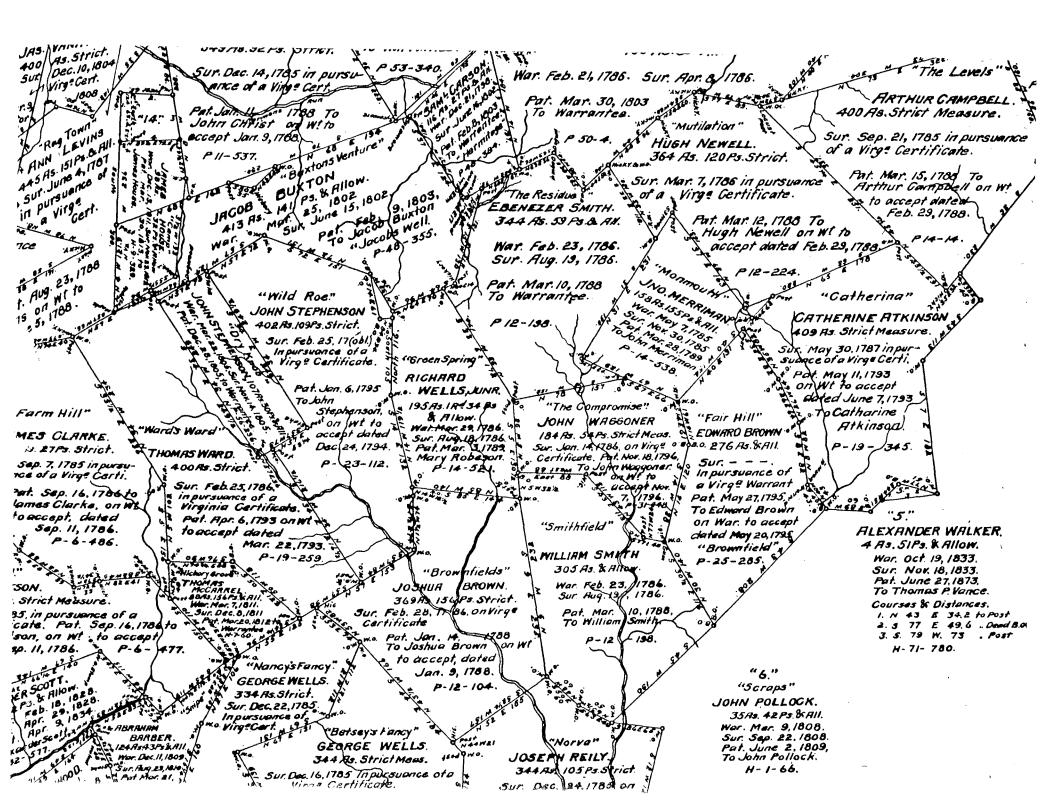
To grandson: David Sutherland, son of daughter Sarah.

To Sarah Huston: evidently a foster daughter.

Gave Bibles to grandchildren.

Witnesses: William Robison, John Gourley and James Givin (son-in-law).





WASH. Co. Survey Book 237 (#2/pg:237 Josh & Brown Dant Robin -5148 182 SIL 6 74 4 9145 bi 1102 20 109 10 1-20-5-2-1 1 1918 AV , V A Draught of a Survey calles the Mild Roc. fituate on the Waters of brojo ch. Marting ton bounty cont 9 402 ac 109 perture. Measure exceeded Fily ye 25 - in pressuome of a contificate for 400 ac granted to John Stephenson by the Commits: appointed by Drig a to adjust the claims to un. patiented lands in the Counties Mong. yong and the and duly interest with the County Surv. as appears from the list of Entires transmitted from the Surv. Ben to list Ent. 24 June 1980 , Act the 5 July 1786 John Sections to S.G Brasty Nevel C) Math Tuche Diff Alt 45 30 Deve 1994 on Mariant to accept to for Aliphuns de 24. Inst.

The Roe- John S. Stephenson