

*A  
History  
of  
Hardin County, Tennessee*

*“Bits of Hardin County History”*

*by*

*Judge A.A. Watson*

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ISBN 1-59196-808-9

Library of Congress catalog number: pending

Printed in the United States of America

First Edition

Published by  
InstantPublisher.com  
PO Box 985  
Collierville TN 38027

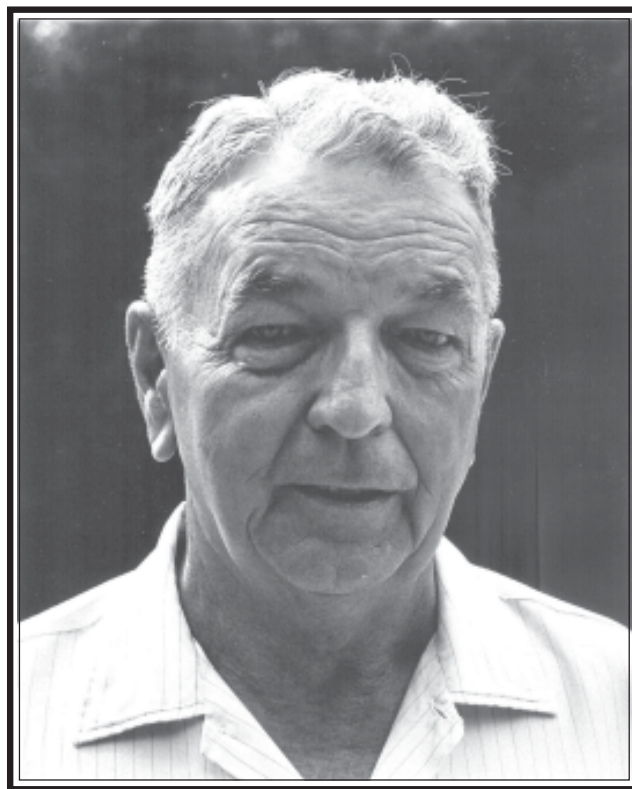


Dedicated  
to the  
Memory  
of

Judge A.A. Watson

and

Monty Watson



Jahu Montague (Monty) Watson  
December 28, 1905 - March 17, 1999

# History of Hardin County, Tennessee by Judge A.A. Watson

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## History of Hardin County, Tennessee

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### Introduction

When Judge A.A. Watson wrote his “Bits of Hardin County History” in the 1930s, he evidently intended it eventually to be a companion piece to Andrew P. Hitt’s Short Life Sketches of Some Prominent Hardin Countians. Neither Andrew Hitt or Judge Watson ever lived to see their manuscripts in print. Most of Judge Watson’s “Bits of Hardin County History” was printed in the *Savannah Courier* between 1932 and 1936 as weekly articles. Between 1982 and 1997 some of this material was reprinted in the Hardin County Historical Society’s publications, *The Hardin County Historical Quarterly* and the *Hardin County Historian*, with some additional material being supplied by the judge’s son, Monty Watson. This book compiles almost all of the Watson material in one place. Unfortunately, a few *Savannah Courier* issues are missing for the inclusive years.

Almost all histories have errors in them. Historians write from information and research that they have at the time of the writing. As more information surfaces, then a clearer or different picture is drawn on particular events or people. Judge Watson had some errors in his writings and some of these have been corrected as far as known at this time by those most knowledgeable of the facts. Future historians and researchers will probably discover more and alter some of what is written in this book. A historian must stop at some point and say, “I’ve done as much as I can” and record their version of history. A lot of historians will not publish their work for fear that they will be criticized for any errors they put in “black and white.” The Hardin County Historical Society is grateful for Judge Watson’s writing this history of the county by his use of weekly articles in the *Savannah Courier*. Historians and genealogists are so much richer for his effort, and reference to this work will be made for many years.

The society would like to thank the Watson family for allowing this organization to publish this history of Hardin County, Tennessee. We greatly appreciate the effort it must have taken Judge Watson to do the research for his newspaper articles, “Bits of Hardin County History” and his foresight to write down these historical happenings. His position in time was unique as he was born early enough to personally talk to some of the early settlers of the county or to their children. We also greatly appreciate Monty Watson and his love of history and the support he gave in his lifetime to the Hardin County Historical Society.

Ronney R. Brewington, Editor  
November 1, 2004



### Judge A.A. Watson

Arthur Allen Watson was born July 20, 1858 and died on May 15, 1937. He is buried in the Savannah City Cemetery.

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Obituary - *Savannah Courier*, Friday, May 21, 1937  
Vol. 53 No. 21 - Savannah, Tennessee

Judge A.A. Watson passed away at his home on Waynesboro Street Saturday night at the age of 78 years. The end came after several months of irregular declining health, part of which time was spent at the hospital in Nashville, where he underwent a major operation last year.

Arthur Allen Watson was born in Alabama, the son of Nimrod Wm. and Mary Randolph Watson, July 20, 1858. In the late sixties the Watson family moved to Hardin County, Tenn.

As a young man Judge Watson taught school for a number of years. Later he became interested in county affairs and served as deputy county court clerk, county court clerk, county surveyor, magistrate, and county judge, making a public service records of half a century. His was always progressive and constructive service. For twenty years he served on the town school board and worked in the interest of better education advantages for the community.

Judge Watson was also a leader in civic, charitable and religious affairs. He was officially connected with the Sunday school and church work for sixty years or more.



He was noted through this section for his remarked detail memory on events, dates and individuals with which he had to do during his eventful life. He was always among the first to advocate improvements for the benefit of the public, and used his time, means and energy to make better highways, waterways, and public buildings. He was loved and respected by citizens in every walk and circumstance of life.

The deceased is survived by his widow, Mrs. Jessie Ross Watson, by a daughter, Mrs. W.E. Mitchell of Nashville, by a son, J. Montague Watson of Savannah, by a brother, Mr. Thos. T. Watson, by a sister, Miss Xie Watson and by two grandchildren, Ann and Billie Mitchell of Nashville.

Funeral services were held at the Presbyterian church Sunday afternoon. Rev. T.G. Henry of Corinth, assisted by Rev. J.M. Robertson of Selmer and Rev. Grandville Cullum of Nashville, officiated at the services. Interment was made in the family plot at the local cemetery, with Shackelford funeral directors in charge. Rev. Henry paid Judge Watson the high tribute to say that he was kind, liberal, helpful in his relations to his fellowman.

Among those out-of-town attending the funeral were: Mr. and Mrs. Manly Watson, Mr. and Mrs. M.S. Ross, Mr. and Mrs. G.L. Cullum, Mrs. R.H. Knight of Nashville, Tenn.; Mr. and Mrs. Clark Kelly and Miss Bertha Watson, Chattanooga, Tenn.; Mrs. Robert Hall and Miss Irma Hinkle, Oklahoma City, Okla.; Miss Ida Ross, Mr. C.A. Ross, Mr. and Mrs. C.C. Ross, Mr. Dentis Walker, Jackson, Tenn.; Mr. and Mrs. J.W. Watson, Mr. Jas Watson, Mr. and Mrs. A.L. Hughes, Miss Theo Hughes, Mr. J.H. Allen, Mrs. Blanche Kent, Mr. and Mrs. J.E. Holland, Misses Nina and Eva Holland, Mr. T.J. White, M. J.E. Bingham, Mr. W.C. Bingham of Saltillo, Tenn.; Mr. A.P. Hitt, Cerro Gordo; Mr. and Mrs. Will Hughes, Mrs. T.S. Hughes, Mrs. Will Fariss, Mrs. Sam Lancaster, Mrs. Hattie Speers, Clifton; Dr. and Mrs. F.C. Williams and Mr. J.M. Paisley, Corinth; Judge H.P. Wood and Judge J.M. Houston of Selmer; Mr. Harbour Hardin, Mr. Wheeler Qualls, Mr. H.O. Smith, Mr. and Mrs. T.T. Dickson. Mr. Lee Hardin, Olive Hill; Mr. H. Clay Smith, of Crump; Mr. Clyde Dickson of Pickwick; Mr. W.B. Miller, Mr. and Mrs. W.B. Miller, Jr., Mrs. Harry Floyd, Mrs. May Hartswell of Clifton; Mrs. Alice Young of Sheffield, Ala.; Mr. Geo. Morris of Morristown, Mr. and Mrs. J.O. Copeland of Memphis, Mr. W.E. Morris, Mr. and Mrs. J.A. Lacefield of Florence, Ala., Mr. and Mrs. J.P. Bain of Oakland, Mr. A.R. Dickson, Olive Hill.

Acknowledgements:

Editor

Ronney R. Brewington

Proofing & Editing:

Ken & Sharon Hansgen

Historical Reviewers:

Ronney R. Brewington, 3195 Roby Road, Enville, TN 38332

David B. Cagle, 65 Court St., Savannah, TN 38372

Ken & Sharon Hansgen, 200 N. Church St., Savannah, TN 38372

Tony Hays, 951 Airways Blvd, Savannah, TN 38372

Mary Elizabeth Hitchcock, 20100 Hwy 69 South, Savannah, TN 38372

Herbert H. Perry, 371 Vine Street, Savannah, TN 38372

John J. Ross, Jr., P. O. Box 398, Savannah, TN 38372

Greg Williams, 212 Sutton St., Savannah, TN 38372

Henry E. Williams, 465 Riverside, Savannah, TN 38372

Corrections & Additional Information:

Katherine Thacker Griffin, 1405 Tabard Dr., Murray, KY 42071

W.K. Thacker, 473 Big Oak Dr., Manchester, TN 37355

Jim Parris, 820 Delaney Loop, Adamsville, TN 38310

John Gillis, 42095 Mayberry Ave., Hemet, CA 92544

Billy Qualls, 635 Riverside Drive, Savannah, TN 38372





*CHAPTER ONE*EARLY SETTLEMENT

The first records of the white man owning the land of Hardin County is in English history and tells of King Charles II, granting to Lord Clarendon all the territory belonging to the state of North Carolina, the western boundary of which was the Mississippi River, and this was done in 1661.

There was no attempt on the part of Lord Clarendon to improve the grant west of the mountains, but just one hundred years later a company of brave people settled in the eastern part of Tennessee at Watauga, and as these people began to produce material other than that which was necessary for their subsistence, they had to find a market. The Tennessee River was found to be the only practical way to market with their products. Hence, they built boats, loaded them with things they had to sell and floated down the river. They found in the state of Alabama trading posts where they could exchange with the Indians their goods, consisting of cloth, blankets, thread, etc. for furs and other things the Indian had for exchange. One of these trading posts was eight miles above Riverton<sup>1</sup> on the south side of the river and one was about one mile above the Saltillo ferry near the mouth of White Oak creek, but just below it. The first trader went to near New Orleans to sell their goods to the French who had built up a great fur trade. Learning of this settlement had sent missionaries to this eastern territory to solicit trade, but this trade, or commerce, did not last long as pirates roamed the Mississippi River and would rob the men of their goods.

On December 22, 1779 the Donelson Party left the western part of the state of Virginia with many boats and more than one hundred people to float down the Holston River then down the Tennessee River to its mouth. After many privations they arrived at the foot of Muscle Shoals the fourteenth day of March 1780. Leaving there the same day, they floated until nightfall coming to the mouth of a creek on the south side of the river just above the head of an island. This must have been Diamond Island.

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<sup>1</sup> This seems inaccurate - 8 miles above Riverton there is no good place for a trading post or any sign of old roads. About 11 miles above Riverton, the present day Natchez Trace crosses the Tennessee River. Just below Riverton, directly across Bear Creek entrance into the Tennessee River was Eastport (the area is still called that) and it is known there was a trading post there. Could he have meant the area on the north side of the river called Wright? Otherwise, it would have been at the mouth of Colbert Creek. Colbert Creek is about 10 1/2 miles from Riverton. (Herb Perry).

They camped for the night but becoming alarmed at the continual barking of their dogs, the party left camp hastily going to their boats, went down the river to the north side some two miles below and camped for the night. The next morning some of the party returned to the camp they had left and gathered up the utensils they had hastily left the night before. They had left this camp without waking a Negro man they had with them. When they went back the next day he was there still asleep.

In this party on the journey were many women and children and quite a number of slaves belonging to the families. These were the first white women and children perhaps ever on the soil of Hardin County and they are certainly the first I can find in history. This history is taken from Trotwood Moore, Pheland and Palmer. This party was en-route to Nashville, Clarksville, Cairo and other points reached by water from the eastern country.

In 1783 Nashville had gotten to be of such importance that the people of the eastern settlement, being part of them, naturally changed the trading from New Orleans to Nashville. This still brought the traders through Hardin County and by the year 1806 this territory along the Tennessee River was of

Hardin  
County in  
Chickasaw  
Indian  
Territory



such importance that a treaty was made by the white people at and near Nashville and Clarksville with the Chickasaw and Cherokee Indians for all the territory south of the Cumberland River and as far east as Fayetteville and to the Tennessee River on the south and west. Of course, that territory included most of Hardin County.<sup>2</sup>

These traders found well-beaten paths across the country, which had been used by the Indian and his predecessors for ages. The large creeks had foot logs across them. These paths or trails were of different widths, the wider of which was five or six feet.

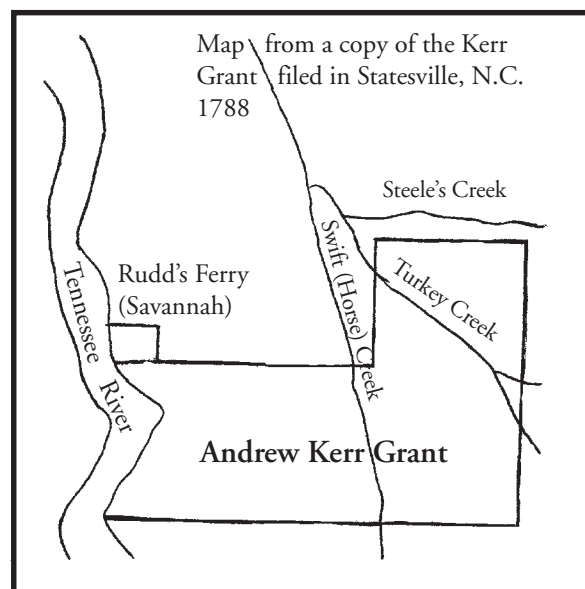
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<sup>2</sup> Hardin County was not included in the 1806 Treaty. (David Cagle)

The records of Hardin County show that in 1784 James Lack or Lock entered 500 acres of land. Just across a creek from him Robert Lack entered 500 acres, and near them Alex Lack entered 500 acres. They having had the same surveyed and applied to Raleigh, North Carolina for grants to the same. This land was, about thirty years later, taken up by John Walker and Collin Camble and proved to be on Camp Creek now known as Hardins Creek. W.C. Farrar<sup>3</sup> in 1787 came to Hardin County and had surveyed one hundred acres of land two miles from the Tennessee River on a large creek. This grant was never developed and no doubt was part of the Andrew Falls land. Several other men made entries here but none were ever developed.

In 1787 General Robertson went out from Nashville south to the Tennessee River near Florence with one hundred and twenty men. They crossed the river a few hundred yards below the present day Wilson dam, routed the Indians there and finally came to battle with the Indians at the mouth of Cold Water Creek, a few miles above Riverton. They crossed the river at Colbert Shoals and traveled down the river one day's journey and camped with friendly Indians. This camp must have been near Walnut Grove.

The long-sought beginning of the white man's appearance in that part of Tennessee now known as Hardin County has been established. At Raleigh, N.C. (and also at Nashville) there are records which show that Andrew Kerr (spelled Karr in one place in the entry) entered five thousand acres of land in North Carolina near the Tennessee River, a part of which lies in Tennessee River bottom, and the records recite that this tract of land lies by the land of Joseph Hardin. This entry bears date March 1786 and one W.A. Farrar<sup>3</sup> was the surveyor. This man Farrar entered one hundred acres of land two miles east of a bluff on the Tennessee River on a large creek, but in the bottomlands of said creek. These surveyors must have been here from December



<sup>3</sup> Joseph Hardin Entry No. 1619, April 5, 1784 - 3000 acres. cc: Milton Moore, John Bay I. Taylor, D.S. (Deputy Surveyor). March 11, 1786.  
Isaac Taylor, Entry No. 2223, May 21, 1784. I. Taylor, D.S. March 10, 1786  
Andrew Kerr, Entry No. 2222 Walt Moore, Fountain Moore (chain bearer). I. Taylor, Mar, 10, 1786. (Surveyor appears to be Isaac Taylor - notes from David Cagle).

1785 until the early fall of 1786, as other lands were entered on the east side of the river. They must have waited for low water, as they returned to the old home up the river. Andrew Kerr returned here in about 1817 and had his land surveyed and built his home on the land and sold homes to others off his tract. The first mention of Swift River that I have been able to find is in the entry papers of this tract of land and I conclude that these surveyors named this little river later known as Horse Creek, for the entry papers four months older than these was no doubt part of the Judge Patterson lands. There was no mention of Swift River.<sup>4</sup> I find that Colonel Joseph Hardin was in Washington County, Tennessee at that time part of North Carolina, in the years 1785 and 1786 and taking part in trying to establish the Lost State of Franklin, but history also states that he had a large tract of land entered on the Tennessee River in the Western Territory, then part of North Carolina. He perhaps was not here at all. He lived until 1801. The transactions I have here recited all were thirty years before the white man came here to stay permanently.

In 1790 the U.S. Government had surveys made of several states and the southern boundary of Tennessee was surveyed, and that brought the white man to Hardin County. When running the Alabama-Tennessee line, some years later, the surveyors came to the river just above Walnut Grove. They surveyed up the river to an island which they understood to be located the north east corner of the state of Mississippi. This survey brought much litigation. Thirty years later General James Winchester was detailed to make a survey and locate the line between Mississippi and Tennessee. This survey created what is now the noted Winchester line across part of the southern part of this county. Winchester runs west from where the first survey came to the river (see map on page 35).

The territory comprising the present boundaries of Hardin County was cut out of the Western Reserve set apart by the United States for the Indian Nations. There were three tribes of Indians living here when the white man came but they were not numerous. The Chickasaws had an organized body of peoples and were friendly to the white people. The United States had made a treaty with the Cherokees in 1806<sup>5</sup> and this great tribe came about as near living up to this treaty as did the people of the State of Tennessee. This treaty took in all the territory south of the Cumberland and north and east of the Tennessee River, which included Hardin County. As early as 1792, the U.S. Government sent Commissioners here to treaty with the Chickasaw Indians. General Andrew Jackson was at the head of this Commission and held counsel with the Indians at Walnut Grove. History recites that the Commissioners went over the mountain from the regular Indian town and were entertained at the cave.

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<sup>4</sup> This is probably Swift Creek (Cagle).

<sup>5</sup> The 1806 Treaty did not include most of Hardin County (Cagle).



This must have been the cave at J.T. Qualls on Dry Creek. Judge John Haywood, the historian was one of these Commissioners. This Commission did much to civilize the Indians. James and William Colbert, who had been prominent Indian leaders, (James having kept a tavern at the Natchez Trace below Riverton, Alabama) were brothers and rich savages, but they turned about and saw the future of the Indian to be home makers. They went to near the mouth of the Cumberland River and bought six hundred and forty acres of land and built Indian homes on it. William had been reared at Walnut Grove. These men had taken Christian names after becoming acquainted with the white man. Happy Jim Allen, the Indian Agent at Riverton, married James Colbert's oldest daughter. Another Indian tribe lived at Pickwick. Strawhorn Monk<sup>6</sup> seems to have been at the head of this settlement of half civilized people. There were as many as six families by the name of Monk who possessed property and slaves and stayed there until the late 1830's. Monk owned lands that he laid claim to after the white people came here and he was allowed to perfect his claim. Later he sold to the white people. A Mr. Winn also owned land and lived farther up the river. The Winn Spring is well known in that section and is now owned (1930s) by Arch Walker of Savannah.

When the white man came to Hardin County he discovered that in some former time there had been people here who had been at war with other peoples. The proof of this was shown by the old forts that were found. Some of them are yet to be seen. One on the Porter farm on Horse Creek is perhaps a quarter of a mile in length. One on the Cal Warren place on Shoats Creek is plainly visible. It is not long or deep but can be seen plainly.

John Haywood, who wrote a history of Tennessee in 1822, claims that his history is not intended to come further than the forming of the State in 1796, but he tells something about the newly settled parts of the state as late as his writing.

Walnut Grove had an interesting Indian settlement that became civilized as soon as they understood the white people. One chief who lived there was a very rich man and his daughter married a white man by the name of Milligan about 1808. He was an assistant Commissioner of the Indians at Walnut Grove. The main office was at or near Riverton, Alabama. Mr. Milligan was a kinsman of the noted engineer, M.G. Milligan, who assisted in laying off Hardin County before it was formed. This chief was named Valentine, and the marriage of his daughter Valentine (who spoke good English) to a white man made the Indians friendlier to the white people.

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<sup>6</sup> Strawhorn Monk was not Native American Indian. "Will the Real Strawhorn Monk Please Stand up?" by William D. Lindsey, Ph.D., in *Hardin County Historical Quarterly*, Vol. VIII No. 4, October - December 1991, pp. 3-18, discusses at length why Strawhorn Monk was not an American Indian.

The Indians had their own rules and laws as to marriage and especially the ceremonies. The groom had to apply to the chief for permission to marry any young lady of his tribe under his jurisdiction, and had to prove that he had a wigwam of his own and could use a gun. After all this proof had been made, the chief then gave his consent and he and the groom fixed the time and place for the nuptials to be had. A day was published for the wedding guests and all who were invited must attend but no others. When the day arrived for the eating and dancing and other amusements incident to the great occasion, the groom went into his wigwam and stayed until everything was over and then his bride was accompanied to his house by her attendants. About noon the festivities began at a place near the groom's house with singing, dancing and other forms of amusement were indulged in. The bride took part, being the center of attention. Before sundown a feast was laid for the guests, and the bride was again the object of marked attention. After the meal was over, the bride and the preacher went to the house of the groom. The bride took a seat. The ceremony was said. Then the preacher left; this ended the ceremonies. The next morning the newlywed couple appeared to the public. When Milligan was married, the chief and other Indians of authority traveled some distance to be there. Mrs. James Colbert of Colbert Shoals, who was an aunt of the bride, was there dressed in her silks and fine headgear. She had very much neglected her feet for she was barefooted. Her headdress was made of the costliest material.

James Colbert was a full-blooded Indian, as well as his wife. Colbert Shoals was named after this family. In a book entitled, The Outlaw Years, there is a story which connects with the early history of Hardin County. A story of James Colbert and his interesting wife and family is told. Chief Colbert did not live on Hardin County soil but lived at Colbert Shoals and owned an inn and a ferry boat, both of which were crude imitations of those of later date. While Chief Colbert pretended to run an inn, he would not allow a white person to sleep in his hotel. They could get lodging near his hotel. He lived on the Natchez Trace. The memoirs of Jno. L. Swaney who was mail carrier and would stay all night at Colbert's is an interesting story. He carried the mail on horseback from Nashville to Natchez for 15 years, a distance of more than 500 miles. At Colbert's the United States Government had an agency conducted by Jim Allen, a lawyer from Nashville, and it seems that the Chickasaw Indians were under his dominion at Walnut Grove as well as Colbert Shoals.

Allen had a helper by the name of Milligan, who also was popular with Chief Colbert and his followers. Allen courted Colbert's daughter and she consented to be his wife. To accomplish such a trade, the groom had to go to the chief and make his wishes known and the chief decided the question and not the two parties to the contract. But in this case, it was agreeable and all things were made ready for the wedding on June 5, 1801. The groom was not allowed any part in the festivities previous to the marriage. But he had his best man, and in this case, young Mr. Milligan was his best man. Allen was

required to go into his wigwam before noon on the day of the marriage festivities, shut himself up and not be seen at all until all the eating, dancing and singing was over. Then the bride went alone to his wigwam. She opened the door, entered, and sat down by the groom. That closed the ceremonies and the happy couple remained for the night. Afterward, they were allowed to appear in public as others did.

Mr. Milligan won the hand of a damsel at Walnut Grove the same year and married there. They had a great wedding and many came from some distance. Mrs. Colbert was there in her silks and fashionable headgear, but barefooted. She was an aunt of the bride on this occasion.

Many people of Hardin County are related to these couples of whom I have written. I find this story in an account of a trip of one Mr. Martin, an appointee of President Jefferson, who was an Indian Commissioner. His wife was with him and tells about these people. Mr. Milligan was married to a Valentine, a lady kin to Joe Godwin.

The Milligan family has been here all the while, and our well-known Enoch Milligan is a descendant of the man who married the Indian girl spoken of above and other families are kin to this family. Joe Godwin is a great grandson of Valentine Hargrove, who is kin to this noted Indian family and had taken the name of Valentine. The better families of the Indians were farmers and men of good repute. Most of them were hunters who did not farm, or have any other livelihood to accumulate property.

Another Indian town was near Pine Grove on the Dick Hardin farm on Indian Creek. Indians also lived below the mouth of that creek. They stayed there until about 1830 when they moved west. I do not find their names on records here or any of them that owned lands further than their tribal possessions, I fail to find it. Across Indian Creek from this Indian town was a small settlement of Indians on Esquire Ed DeFord's farm. Judge John Haywood, in his history, says there was an orchard of apple trees on Rains Creek as early as 1792. These trees must have been planted many years before he visited that part of this country. In telling about a trip he took in West Tennessee he says, "After we passed the Wayne Court which was being held at a private residence, we traveled about eight miles to the headwaters of Camp Creek and found that the Indians were farming and had been for many years, also in the new county of Hardin we found some few large apple orchards." He goes on with his narrative and says that there was an old field on Rain's creek where there had been Indian settlements in a few miles of the river. This must have been the Brooks place. There was an orchard there when the white man came here. The land was partly cleared and apple trees were scattered about the clear spots.

Camp Creek became Hardin's Creek. No doubt Indian Creek, first called Rains Creek, was named for these two settlements of Indians. His description of this orchard places it on the J.E. DeFord farm, some six miles below Olive Hill. East of this county the Indians farmed quite extensively. There had been a law forbidding white men to clear land west of a line running north and south across Giles County, but that had been changed and hunters came as far west as the Tennessee River. Mr. Len Surratt tells me that the Indians occupied the land near Crump for a long time after the white people came to that part. White Oak Creek Valley was especially fitted for wild game. Many years after the white people had settled there, a company from Ohio came there, built houses and came each year to hunt. The beaver was one of the most plentiful furbearing animals that abounded there in great numbers, and fifty years ago they were plentiful. The beaver dams were to be seen in and about all ponds in the river bottom.

These Indians farmed some for it is said by more than one historian that they made corn whiskey. When the white man insisted that the treaty of 1806 must be carried out by the Indians, they insisted that the white man must furnish them with one machine that took the lint off the seed of cotton. So the Indian must have been raising cotton. While the Indian was not here in large numbers when the white man came to possess the lands, they had been here in great numbers, which is proved by the graveyards and mounds they built, and also forts for their protection. Some of these graves are deep but others very shallow. Most of the burying places are near a bluff and most of the graves have rock vaults. There is an old excavation on the east side of Horse Creek on the J.R. Porter farm that runs around the hillside for several hundred feet. This resembles a fort or ditch built for protection. The west side of the river was a hunting ground which abounded in game of all kinds, and the Indian was at home there in his original happy hunting ground.

The first white men I find to be here were those with the Donelson Party in 1780. They perhaps were some days passing down the river through the county, but I find but one place where they could have camped and that was at the mouth of Snake Creek. Col. Joseph Hardin came here in 1785<sup>7</sup>, as did A.T. Kerr and W.C. Farrar<sup>8</sup> and entered lands. These lands were entered on Military Warrants given these men by the U.S. Government for service rendered in the revolution. A road, afterward known as the Natchez Trace, was built to near Walnut Grove in 1808, and that road gave the people a way to get

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<sup>8</sup> W.C. Farrar was a surveyor (David Cagle).

<sup>7</sup> Judge Watson was uncertain whether Colonel Joseph Hardin ever was in Hardin County prior to his death in 1801. In places he tells of the colonel being here while the surveying of his land grant was taking place, but other times says that Colonel Hardin never set foot in the county. Today most local historians do not believe that Colonel Joseph Hardin ever was in Hardin County (R.Brewington).