

# The Morris Clan of Kanawha Valley: An American Family By Accident

Judith Cobbs, the daughter of Fleming and Sarah Morris Cobbs, married John Meredith Burgess in 1812. Their great granddaughter, Margaret Adelia Burgess, my great grandmother, married John Harrison Draper on 4 October 1877. John, was the son of William Franklin Draper.

According to the West Virginia Historical Magazine Quarterly (1901-1905), William Morris, born in 1722, was wandering among the ships docked along the Thames near the Scotch-yards of London. It was 1734, and the 12 year old boy boarded a ship out of curiosity. Before he returned to the dock the ship left for America.

Since the ship, owned by a merchant, would not return to England for months, the merchant brought the boy to his Philadelphia home and wrote William's father to ask if he could keep the boy in America. As an adult, William moved to Orange County, Virginia, where he married Elizabeth Stapps, and began raising a large family.

In 1774 William settled his family in the Kanawha River Valley at the mouth of Kelly Creek. William and his family were the first Virginians to permanently settle the Kanawha Valley. Walter Kelley had been killed by Indians that year. This was part of the sacred hunting grounds for the Shawnee and Cherokee nations, where no person was allowed to settle.

These tribes feared the loss of their hunting grounds and the eventual invasion of their homes on the other side of the Ohio River, and raided settlers constantly. The governor of the Virginia colony raised an army and fought the Shawnee at what is now Point Pleasant, West Virginia. When Dunmore's War broke out 3 May 1774, six of William's sons are supposed to have served in the army of General Andrew Lewis and fought in the battle of Point Pleasant on 10 October 1774: William Jr., Henry, Leonard, Joshua, Levi and John.

Morris and his family stood alone against Indians raiders who continued to attack for years. No pioneers joined them in this wilderness until the Clendinens settled at the mouth of the Elk River in 1788. Kanawha County was formed the following year, and by 1792 the county boasted of 119 residents.

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In January 1793, the will of William Morris Sr. was the first to be probated in Kanawha County [Deed Book A; page 30]. It listed his wife and ten children: William Jr., Henry, Leonard, Joshua, John, Carrol, Levi, Benjamin, Elizabeth, and Franky. The will listed six slaves: Dudley, Jim, Deriah, Sally and an unnamed girl. His sons Leonard and John were named as executors, and it was witnessed by Jacob Stiles, John Cammel, William Morris, Jr., John Jones and Franky Jones.

John Cammel, John Moss and Jacob Casdorff appraised William's property as totaling three hundred and sixty pounds, and the executors' bond listed John Jones and Levi Morris as owing one thousand pounds each.

The will stated that if William's widow, Elizabeth, remarried then she would forfeit her portion of the willed property. According to court records, Elizabeth "came into Court and broke the said will." Instead of taking her portion of the property, Elizabeth took only her lawful dower. She soon married an Irishman named Thompson, but did not live long.

Leonard was one of the first Justices of Kanawha County, and sheriff in 1789. He owned property at the mouth of Slaughters Creek, adjacent to John Flynn, who was killed by Indians on Cabin Creek. Flynn's son, according to Dr. Hale, was caught, taken to Ohio and burned at the stake. According to the West Virginia Historical Magazine Quarterly (1901-1905), Leonard testified that in 1775 he witnessed surveyors mapping property at Burning Spring. The 250 acre tract was patented by George Washington and John Lewis.

Leonard's daughter Sarah was born in 1775 at Donnally's Fort in Greenbriar County., Virginia. On 10 January 1796 Sarah married Fleming Cobbs, Sr., in Kanawha County. Fleming Cobbs served in the Indian Wars in 1793, but did not have a Revolutionary War record. He served under Captain William Clendinen, Captain Moses Mann, and Colonel George Clendinen in the Indian Wars, and served with General Wayne.

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