

Bethel Presbyterian Church, WCVA and the Family of John and Esther Houston Montgomery

**John Russell Montgomery
April 21, 2016**

I have been searching for where John Montgomery and his wife Esther Houston lived and died after they disposed of their Augusta County, VA property in 1779. They were both living on that occasion as evidenced by each of their signatures on the deed in which they transferred ownership of their Augusta Co. VA property to their son James Montgomery. Then in 1780, almost a year later, James sells the property to brothers William and Alexander Seawright. After disposing of their property, no further record of John and Esther has been found in Augusta County VA which appears to indicate that they moved from the area.

On February 2, 1782 a John Montgomery went to the Virginia Land Office and purchased Treasury Warrants # 8187 and # 8188 for 800 and 1283 acres respectively (attached). Robert Montgomery (wife Sarah Colville), a son of John and Esther Houston Montgomery, used Treasury Warrant # 8187 to acquire 2 tracts of land in Washington County VA (1st - 80 acres "adjoining the land he now lives" in WCVA along the South Fork of the Holston River, and 2nd - 520 acres in WCVA (today this property falls into Lee County, VA). Robert Montgomery's use of treasury warrant #8187 suggests that the John Montgomery who purchased the VA Treasury Warrants in 1782 *might* be his father.

Next, there is the 1782 Washington County Tax list (attached) which shows a Robert Montgomery (wife Sarah Colville) and a John Montgomery, Senior listed together in Alexander Montgomery's tax precinct along with several other known children of John and Esther, i.e., Mary [Montgomery] Edmondson (widow of Lt. Robert Edmondson), Capt. John Lowry (wife Dorcas Montgomery), and John McCroskey (wife Ann Montgomery). Alexander Montgomery (wife Sarah Alexander), the precinct Captain, was also a son of John and Esther. This collection of Montgomery siblings seems to add weight to the belief that the John Montgomery, Senior, shown on the tax list in the same precinct could be their father. Also, the names Alexander McNutt, Moses Edmiston (Edmondson), and John Montgomery all appear on the VA Treasury Warrant ledger page dated 2 Feb. 1782 and on the 1782 WCVA Tax List in Alexander Montgomery's Precinct which also adds weight that the John Montgomery who purchased the Treasury Warrants was the same one in Washington County, TN.

Finally, there is the statement (attached) that Rev. John Montgomery, another son of John and Esther, received a call from the Bethel congregation in Washington Co. VA on Oct. 23, 1781. However, the information that I had been able to find on the Bethel Church of WCVA indicated that this church was not established until 1881 and, if correct, how could this be the same Bethel Church that issued a call to Rev. John Montgomery in 1781, a hundred years before it was reported to have been founded?

That question took me again to Washington Co. VA and to the Historical Society. It was there that two Historical Society volunteers began searching their files in an attempt to come up with an answer. The volunteers produced several old newspaper articles about the history of the Bethel Church that were

written in 1972 and which provided some early history. In fact, one article from the Abingdon Presbytery News was titled ***Bethel Church started with an 'altar unto God'*** (Attached) answered my question. The article traced the Bethel church's early beginning back to the 18th century when there was only an altar unto God and no house of public worship in the vicinity. It says that Thomas McSpadden built what is known as the old Glen House as his home and set apart a large upper room where people gathered for preaching and worship. [my note: Thomas McSpadden is also among those listed in Alexander Montgomery's precinct on the 1782 Tax List for WCVA. His name can be found 1/3 of the way down in the 3rd column over from the left]. The article goes on to say "The congregation grew until 1820, when a combination church and schoolhouse was built to serve the Bethel Community. The land for the structure was given by Robert Edmondson and Matthew Brown, McSpadden's brother-in-law."

I don't know precisely the location of this first Bethel church, but today the Bethel Church and School appears to be situated on or near what would have been [Lt.] Robert Edmondson's original 1763 settlement [Lt.] Robert Edmondson (wife Mary Montgomery) was killed at the 1780 Rev. War battle of Kings Mountain and in his 1779 will, he left all of his land to his nephew and namesake, Robert Edmondson, the son of his brother [Maj.] William Edmiston. Therefore, it was this younger Robert Edmondson, who along with Matthew Brown, that deeded the property on which the combination Bethel Church and school was built in 1820.

It is now clear that Rev. John Montgomery, a son of John and Esther Houston Montgomery, did receive a call from the Bethel Presbyterian congregation of WCVA back on Oct. 23, 1781 as reported. In 1781, there would have been 5 Montgomery siblings residing in the Bethel community accompanied by their parents, John and Esther. Though Rev. John Montgomery chose another church, the fact that he received a call from Bethel suggests that his family was active in the Bethel congregation and had something to do with initiating the ministerial call from this particular church. If he had accepted, he likely would have become the first regular minister of the new Bethel Church which would have served most of the pioneering Presbyterian families that resided in Alexander Montgomery's 1782 tax precinct of WCVA. This area is known today as the Bethel community and is located just a few miles southeast of the present-day city of Abingdon near the South Fork of the Holston River.

In 1783, Alexander Montgomery left WCVA and moved down to Washington County, North Carolina Territory (today Washington Co. TN) where he acquired land in Capt. John Millikin's [Milliken] tax precinct, the same tax precinct as his brother James Montgomery (wife Margaret Weir) and their brother-in-law, Rev. Samuel Doak (wife Esther Montgomery). About 1785, Alexander Montgomery sold this property and acquired new property just to the southwest of the present-day City of Maryville in Blount County, TN. Capt. John Lowry (wife Dorcas Montgomery) continued to live in Washington Co. Virginia where many of their descendants still reside to this day. The 1972 article by Mrs. Irby Arnett records the names of 59 members who signed a petition in 1881 asking Abingdon Presbytery to be organized into Bethel Church. The petition included the following Charter Members: Reed, Grant, Duff, Caldwell, Keller, Roe, Brown, Sharp, Salmon, Edmondson, Rambo, Rhea, Gammon, McCracken, Campbell, Lowry, Barlow, Larimer, Dennison, Slaughter, Findlay, Davenport, Keys, and Carson.

This research adds significant weight to my belief that John and Esther Houston Montgomery left Augusta County VA after selling their property and went to Washington County VA with most of their children where he (John Montgomery, Senior) was recorded as a taxable in Alexander Montgomery's

precinct in 1782. John Montgomery, Senior is listed on the 1782 tax list, but he is not listed on the 1783 or any tax list in subsequent years and neither is Alexander Montgomery. This leads me to conclude that John Montgomery, Senior either died sometime after the 1782 tax list or that he (and perhaps his wife Esther) accompanied his son Alexander down to Washington Co. NC Territory (TN). Even though this latest research does not pinpoint where John or Esther died, it does provide a chronology of events that helps to pinpoint his location up until 1782. It also clears up a mystery about the 1781 call that Rev. John Montgomery received from the Bethel church in WCVA and the possible involvement of his Montgomery siblings and parents.

6 Attachments:

32d. **JOHN MONTGOMERY**, the thirty-second minister, was received as candidate October 31st, 1777, Mr. Graham representing him — “a young gentleman of the County of Augusta, who had finished his education in the College of New Jersey, 1775.” He was licensed at Mountain Plains, with Mr Erwin, October 28th, 1778; and on April 26th, 1780, at Tinkling Spring — “Presbytery agree to ordain Mr. **John Montgomery** to the sacred work of the gospel ministry, that he may be more extensively useful.” Next day he was ordained. Three calls were put in for him, October 23d, 1781, at Concord; — one from Bethel, Washington County, — one from Concord and Providence, and one from Winchester, Cedar Creek and Opecquon. He accepted the last. After spending a few years with these congregations, he, to their great regret, removed in 1789, and made his residence in the Pastures, Augusta, where he inherited property. Here he passed the remainder of his life. Previous to his ordination he was associated with Mr. Graham in the instruction of Liberty Hall. He was a very popular preacher, a good scholar, an esteemed relative, and an amiable man. In the division of the Presbytery he was assigned to Lexington. In the latter part of his life, his ministry was interrupted by bodily infirmities.

1782 Washington Tax List

Alexander Montgomery Precinct

Andrew Duncan 1 Tithable 3 horses 7 Nett Cattle	Capt John Lowry 1 Tithable 6 horses 7 Nett Cattle	John McCroskey 1 Tithable 2 horses 5 Nett Cattle	Robert Hall 1 Tithable 2 2 Nett Cattle
William Long 1 Tithable 4 horses 9 Nett Cattle	Jonathan Smith 1 Tithable 4 horses 12 Nett Cattle	Jacob Wright 9 horses 2 Nett Cattle	Andrew Buchanan 2 Tithables 8 horses 23 Nett Cattle
Joseph Redshaw 1 Tithable 2 horses 3 Nett Cattle	Samuel McCutchan 1 Tithable 6 horses 1 Tithable 3 horses 9 Nett Cattle	Robert Montgomery 1 Tithable 3 horses 9 Nett Cattle	Thomas Montgomery 1 Slave Luce 1 Tithable 8 horses 15 Nett Cattle
Wesley Edmondston 2 Tithables 4 horses 15 Nett Cattle	James McCutchan 1 Tithable 8 horses 1 John Frey 1 Tithable 2 horses 1 Slave Sam 7 horses 16 Nett Cattle	David Carson 1 Tithable 8 horses 10 Nett Cattle	James Kennedy 2 Tithables 12 horses 8 Nett Cattle
Thomas Edmondston 1 Tithable 2 horses	James Berry 1 Tithable 7 horses 18 Nett Cattle	James Berry 1 Tithable 7 horses 18 Nett Cattle	James Berry 1 Tithable 4 horses 5 Nett Cattle
Thomas Brown 1 Tithable 1 horse	Robert Ramsey 2 Tithables 3 horses 3 Nett Cattle	John McCutchan 1 Tithable 7 horses 13 Nett Cattle	James Berry 1 Tithable 4 horses 5 Nett Cattle
Samuel Huston 1 Tithable 3 horses 6 Nett Cattle	Robert Buchanan 1 Tithable 1 Slave 9 horses 20 Nett Cattle	Samuel Frey 1 Tithable 8 horses 16 Nett Cattle	Francis Wright 1 Tithable 7 horses
Jacob Horstentine 1 Tithable 1 horse Nett Cattle	Andrew Henderson 1 Tithable 3 horses 4 Nett Cattle	Patrick McCutchan 1 Tithable 4 horses 10 Nett Cattle	Jacob Campbell 2 Slaves Hannah 2 Daniel 3 horses 4 Nett Cattle
Nathaniel McClure 1 Tithable 3 horses Nett Cattle	Nancy Edmondson 2 Slaves Robert & Sam 4 horses 15 Nett Cattle	Robert Davis 1 Tithable 8 horses 11 Nett Cattle	Agnes new the wife 1 Tithable 3 horses 10 Nett Cattle
Riffen Thomas 1 Tithable 3 horses Nett Cattle	John Greeley 1 Tithable 3 horses 9 Nett Cattle	Daniel Holthorn 1 Tithable 1 horse 5 Nett Cattle	Robert Stephens 1 Tithable 8 horses 11 Nett Cattle
Nathan Thomas 1 Tithable 2 horses	Callen Greeley 2 Nett Cattle	John Stephenson 1 Tithable 1 horse 1 Benjamin McCord 1 Tithable 3 horses 2 Nett Cattle	John Fried 1 Tithable 3 horses 2 Nett Cattle
Trick Watson Junr 1 Tithable 1 horse 1 cow	Nancy Henderson 3 horses 12 Nett Cattle	James Campbell 1 Tithable 2 Slaves 1 Sam & Susan 5 horses 11 Nett Cattle	James Porterfield 1 Tithable 7 horses 5 Nett Cattle
Abraham Doyce 1 Tithable 2 horses 4 Nett Cattle	John Trimble 1 Tithable 3 horses 8 Nett Cattle	Thomas McCutchan 1 Tithable 2 horses 5 Nett Cattle	
John Hopkins 2 horses 5 Nett Cattle	James Weir 1 Tithable 3 horses 2 Nett Cattle	Alex. H. Mutt 1 Tithable 3 horses 14 Nett Cattle	
George Duncan 1 Tithable 2 Slaves Isaac & Ned 4 horses	Dominick Almon 3 horses 11 Nett Cattle	William Cook 1 Tithable 2 horses 1 cow	
John Duncan 1 Tithable 1 horse	Joseph Frey 1 Tithable 3 horses 7 Nett Cattle	John Montgomery 1 horse 1 Tithable	
A. Cahoy	William Russell 1 Tithable 3 horses 4 Nett Cattle	Nancy Berry 7 horses 15 Nett Cattle	
John Campbell 1 Tithable 4 horses 9 Nett Cattle	Erasmus Davis 1 Tithable 4 horses 9 Nett Cattle	James Trimble 1 Tithable 5 horses 7 Nett Cattle	A. G. J.

Abingdon Presbytery News

Presbytery honors Hollenhead on eve of retirement from ministry

ABINGDON — A service honoring the Rev. James B. Hollenhead, who is retiring after 31 years as pastor of Richlands Church, was one of the highlights of the 51st stated meeting of Abingdon Presbytery, June 20 at Bethel Church.

The Rev. Tom Sproule of Nytheville led the service honoring Hollenhead, who was in-

stalled Oct. 22, 1961, as pastor of the Richlands Church.

The meeting was opened with prayer by former moderator, the Rev. Jeff Lowrance, pastor of Tazewell Church. May Joe Craig, an elder from Sinking Spring Church, was elected moderator.

In other business, a commissioning service was held for Phyllis Canter, who has com-

pleted her work toward commissioning lay preacher status.

Canter, who also serves the presbytery as hunger action enabler, pastors at the Mary Martin Memorial Church. In September, she will also be commissioned as a lay preacher in Holston Presbytery.

Presbytery approved the

ordination of Polly Deppen, candidate for the gospel ministry and member of Central Church in Bristol.

The Columbia Theological Seminary graduate was given permission to labor outside the bounds of presbytery. She does CPE work in Alabama.

Rick Hutton, an inquirer from Glade Spring Church, was enrolled as a candidate for the

ministry.

The request of the Rev. Paul Henschen to dissolve his pastoral relationship with Norton Church was approved effective Aug. 24.

He was also granted permission to labor outside the bounds of presbytery as he continues his education in CPE in Birmingham, Ala.

Bethel Church started with an 'altar unto God'

The history of Bethel Church dates back to the 18th century when there was only an altar unto God and no house of public worship in the vicinity.

Thomas McSpadden built what is known as the old Glen House as his home and set apart a large upper room where people gathered for preaching and worship.

The congregation grew until 1820, when a combination church and schoolhouse was built to serve the Bethel Com-

munity. Land for the structure was given by Robert Edmonson and Matthew Brown, McSpadden's brother-in-law.

The building was called Old Union Church and it stood in the yard of what is now known as the Smith Greer homeplace.

Rock Spring Church, organized in 1784, was the mother church to this congregation.

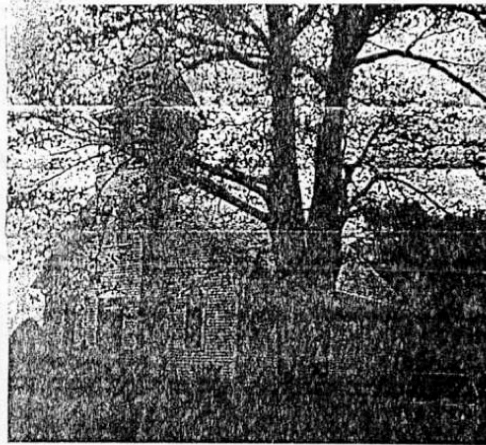
About 1867 it was decided to build a "real church" with a steeple and altar in a more central location.

The first Bethel Church was built on land belonging to Benjamin Reed and which he later deeded to the church. This is the site of the present church building.

On June 10, 1881, a petition was presented to Abingdon Presbytery asking to be organized into Bethel Church. The petition was granted.

The present church building was constructed in 1909.

On Homecoming Sunday, July 5, Bethel Church observed its 111th anniversary.



Bethel Church

Stanislaw to lead King College

BRISTOL, Tenn. Dr. Richard Stanislaw, former vice president for academic affairs at Taylor University in Upland, Ind., became the 20th president of King College effective July 1.

Dr. Stanislaw succeeds Dr. Charles Cauthen, who retired May 31. Dr. Gregory D. Jordan, vice president of academic affairs, served as interim president.

"We are extremely

pleased that our search has produced a man with the gifts and abilities Dr. Stanislaw possesses," said King College board chairman Hugh O. MacLellan.

Dr. Stanislaw holds a D.M.A. in choral musicology from the University of Illinois, master's and bachelor's degrees from Temple University, and a bachelor's degree from Philadelphia College of Bible.

Damascus Church owes its beginning to Ellen Legard Wright

The first Presbyterian in Damascus, Mrs. Ellen Legard Wright, arrived here in 1896 to make her home.

A town in name only, Damascus consisted of not more than a dozen houses, two small stores, two small churches, Episcopal and Lutheran, and a very small school house.

As the lumber industry opened up and with a railroad coming in to town, more Presbyterian families arrived and plans were made to organize a church of their own.

In 1901 Mrs. Wright organized a Ladies Aid Society which shared a common dream of a Presbyterian church in Damascus. Aided by other

Christians, their goal was to raise enough money to build a church.

Dr. Tilden Scherer, then a ministerial student at King College, worked with them. Worship services were held twice weekly in an upstairs room over Mr. J.L. Gilpin's blacksmith shop.

Other King College students Jasper McConnell, Frank Delaney and Frank Clark followed Scherer, who graduated from King College and later served as its president from 1911 to 1931.

The women had ice cream

suppers, lawn parties and took pledges. In 1906 construction finally began on lots on Laurel Avenue, Damascus, main street. The church was completed in the summer of 1907 and dedication services were held in August.

A committee of Damascus elders met in February 1913 with the sessions of Bethel and Rock Spring churches to arrange a grouping of the three congregations. Presbytery approved a resolution to that effect on March 20, 1913, and the relationship has worked successfully to this day.



Damascus Church

Rock Spring is offshoot of Ebbing Spring congregation

Rock Spring Church is more than 200 years old.

In 1784 several members from the Ebbing Spring Church established Rock Spring Church and the Rev. Charles Cummings, the first Presbyterian minister in the area, served as minister of both the Ebbing Spring and Rock Spring congregations.

Rock Spring enjoys the distinction of being registered by the Presbyterian Historical So-

ciet and is the oldest of the congregations in the Rock Spring, Bethel and Damascus yoke.

The sanctuary was the sole structure until 1957, when a fellowship hall and classroom area were added to meet the needs of expanding church activities.

Rock Spring Church Cemetery, located across the road from the church, has several graves of American Revolution-

ary soldiers. Joyce Graham, captain of the Glade Spring Rifle Co. in the Civil War and later a member of the Virginia legislature, was a member of Rock Spring Church.

While the present congregation is small, its members are active in Sunday school each Sunday and worship services every second and fourth Sunday of each month. In addition, the women of the church are organized and the youth meet regularly.

Thornton serves three churches

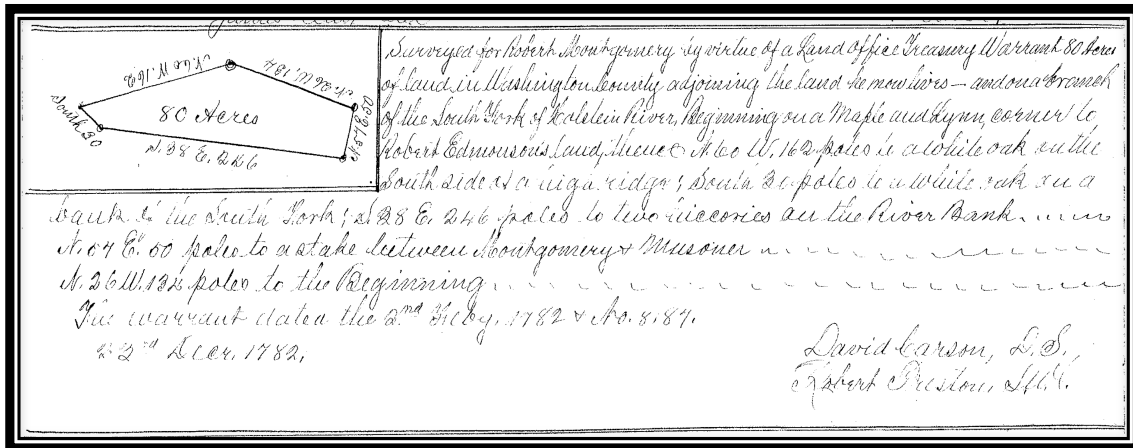


Virginia Treasury Warrant Ledger Book showing entries for Warrant # 8187
& # 8188, dated 2 February 1782

Debit Name	Debit Amount	Date	Credit Name	Credit Amount	Date
John Bay	522	836	February 2d 82		
Thomas	522	836	February 2d		
The same	522	836	February 2d		
Am. Emiston	600	964 1/2	February 2d		
William Moore	93	150	February 2d		
Alexander M. Nutt	525	840	February 2d		
John Emiston	965 1/2	545	February 2d		
<small>John Emiston's account in the ledger of W. M. Nutt dated 18 December 1780</small>					
John Robinson	13 1/2	220	February 2d		
Thomas M. Mahon	682 1/2	102 1/2	February 2d		
John Montgomery	800	1280	February 2d		
The same	1283	2053	February 2d		

No.	Date	Description	Amount	Book	Page
8178					
8179					
8180					
8181					
8182					
8183	100	debt for John M. Nutt		Washington Book	1st ed page 357
8184	229	debt for Thomas Emiston		Washington Book	1st ed page 399
	30	debt for John Robinson		Book No 331	" 368
	30	debt for John Robinson		ditto	" 360
	100	debt for Alexander M. Nutt		ditto	" 370
8185	221	debt for Alexander M. Nutt		Washington Book	No 33 " 370
	100	debt for John Robinson		ditto	" 368
8186	120	debt for Thomas Emiston		Raffin Book	No 27 page 100
	100	debt for John Robinson		ditto	" 27 " 102
8187					
8188					

Robert Montgomery's 80 acre Survey near Alvarado, Wash. Co. VA



**Robert Montgomery's 520 acre Survey, Wash. Co. VA on Martin's Creek of
Powell's River (today Lee County, VA)**

