



#2 1993

Revolutionary Forts of Blair County

During the French and Indian Wars the region that would become Blair County was very sparsely (if at all) settled. There is the possibility that a few Indian traders might have taken up residence here, but no permanent settlements of white men were begun until the 1770s. As white men started to settle in this region of the frontier the necessity of forts became apparent. The Indians, whom the white settlers were displacing, were not exactly in agreement with the sudden influx of English, Irish, Scottish and German peoples. They had not minded the Frenchmen who previously came into their lands to trap animals for their pelts because the Frenchmen did not stay in one place very long. The new intruders, on the other hand, were farmers who cleared the woods and did not move on. This was a threat to the Indians' primarily nomadic way of life and caused them to resent the new settlers.

The region which lay between the Tussey and Allegheny Mountain ranges (making up the present-day county of Blair) was most heavily settled in the eastern half. The Morrisons Cove to the south (lying between Dunning/Lock Mountains and Tussey Mountain, and stretching northward from Evitts Mountain in the south to the northern end of Lock Mountain) was heavily settled by Germans who saw the farming value of its rich soil. To the north of Morrisons Cove lay the Canoe Valley (lying between Canoe Mountain and Tussey Mountain) which was also heavily settled, but moreso by Scottish and Ulster Scot settlers. Just across the Canoe Mountain to the west (lying in the valley south of the Little Juniata River between the dual ridges of Brush mountain) is the Sinking Spring Valley which became home to quite a number of the earliest settlers because of the limestone springs which were abundant in the valley. Finally, the valley that occupies the central part of the present-day county of Blair (lying west of the Lock Mountain and southeast of the point of Brush Mountain) is known as Turkey Valley in its northern end and is the valley through which the Frankstown Branch of the Juniata River runs; this valley, being the site of the Indian village of Assunepachla, was heavily settled following the establishment of the Frankstown trading site. The large number of families settled in this collection of valleys demanded protection from the Indians. The fortifications which were constructed in the earliest period of this region's history became situated in the vicinity of these heavily settled valleys.

Six forts (*i.e.* fortified structures) are known to have existed in the region now occupied by Blair County. Although not all of these fortifications were *forts* per se (one or two were residents' dwelling houses where the neighbors took refuge because of the location or sturdiness of the building itself), they all served the purpose of providing protection; because of that function they will be referred to in this volume as forts. They were all constructed and used during the Revolutionary War period. These included: Fort(s) Fetter, Holliday, Lowry, Roberdeau, Roller and Philips. In addition, certain historians have included two or three more fortified structures to the list.

Fort Fetter was constructed in the year 1777 on the property owned by Michael Fetter, Sr. The property is located in present-day Blair Township in the vicinity of Wye Switches and south of the Beaver Dam Run. Various sources have stated that the fort on Fetter's land was his barn, fortified for the purpose of housing the Bedford County Militia in this region. Hoenstine suggested that a blockhouse was constructed between 1780 and 1782 close to the fortified Fetter barn (on the Beaver Dam Run near the mouth of the Blair Gap Run); and that it was called the blockhouse at Frankstown or the Frankstown Fort. The name of Frankstown would have had to refer to the blockhouse being situated in Frankstown Township because it would not have been in close proximity to either the

Frankstown Branch of the Juniata River or the old town of Frankstown. This blockhouse is not mentioned in any other histories, and may or may not have existed; Hoenstine stated that his information came from pension applications of certain of the militiamen who served there. They might have, unwittingly, been referring to the Fetter barn, not knowing the name of (nor caring about) the owner of the land.

Until the existence of another, separate, blockhouse can be confirmed, we can assume that Fort Fetter was the fortification referred to as the Frankstown Garrison in some histories. The militia was stationed there, and it was from that fort that the party of Rangers set out on 03 June, 1781 in search of a group of Seneca Indians who had made a recent incursion into the area.

Fort Holliday is the name most commonly given to the barn of Peter Titus which was converted into a fortification in the year 1777. The location of this structure is usually given as "a mile below Hollidaysburg", although that is a rather ambiguous direction. In the 1779 Frankstown Township tax assessment, Peter Titus is recorded as a farmer "on Gordon's Land". This would probably refer to Henry Gordon, who patented the lands in 1774 on which the town of Hollidaysburg now stands. The Gordon property would have been on the north side of the Beaver Dam Run. This location does not correspond to the accepted location of "a mile below Hollidaysburg", nor does it correspond with the location given in the book, *Blair County's First Hundred Years*, in which it is described as west of Frankstown in the vicinity of Gaysport. Gaysport is indeed "below" Hollidaysburg, although not a full mile, and it is on the southwest side of the Beaver Dam Run. It is possible that Gordon's tract of land extended across the Beaver Dam Run to include a portion of the land occupied by present-day Gaysport. Hoenstine suggested that there was also a fortification of the dwelling house of William Holliday in the vicinity of Gaysport, which would explain the reference to a fort in that area.

Fort Lowry was constructed in either 1778 or 1779 on the farm property of David Lowry in Canoe Valley. The book, *Frontier Forts of Pennsylvania*, included a reference to this fort in the form of a letter to the Columbia (Pennsylvania) Press sent in 1894 by a descendant of Alexander Lowrey. In that letter, Samuel Evans stated that the fortification was built either by Daniel or Lazarus Lowry or by their children. Both, Daniel and Lazarus Lowry, were residents in the vicinity of the old town of Frankstown at the southwest end of Turkey Valley - not Canoe Valley on the other side of the Canoe Mountain. J. Simpson Africa, in the book, *History of Huntingdon & Blair Co's, Pennsylvania*, stated that Lowry's Fort was constructed in the Canoe Valley, three miles southwest of the town of Water Street, where the German Reformed Church stood (in the vicinity of the present-day Keller Chapel). This fortified structure was constructed for the protection of the local settlers; it is possible that it was manned by some of the local militia for periods of time.

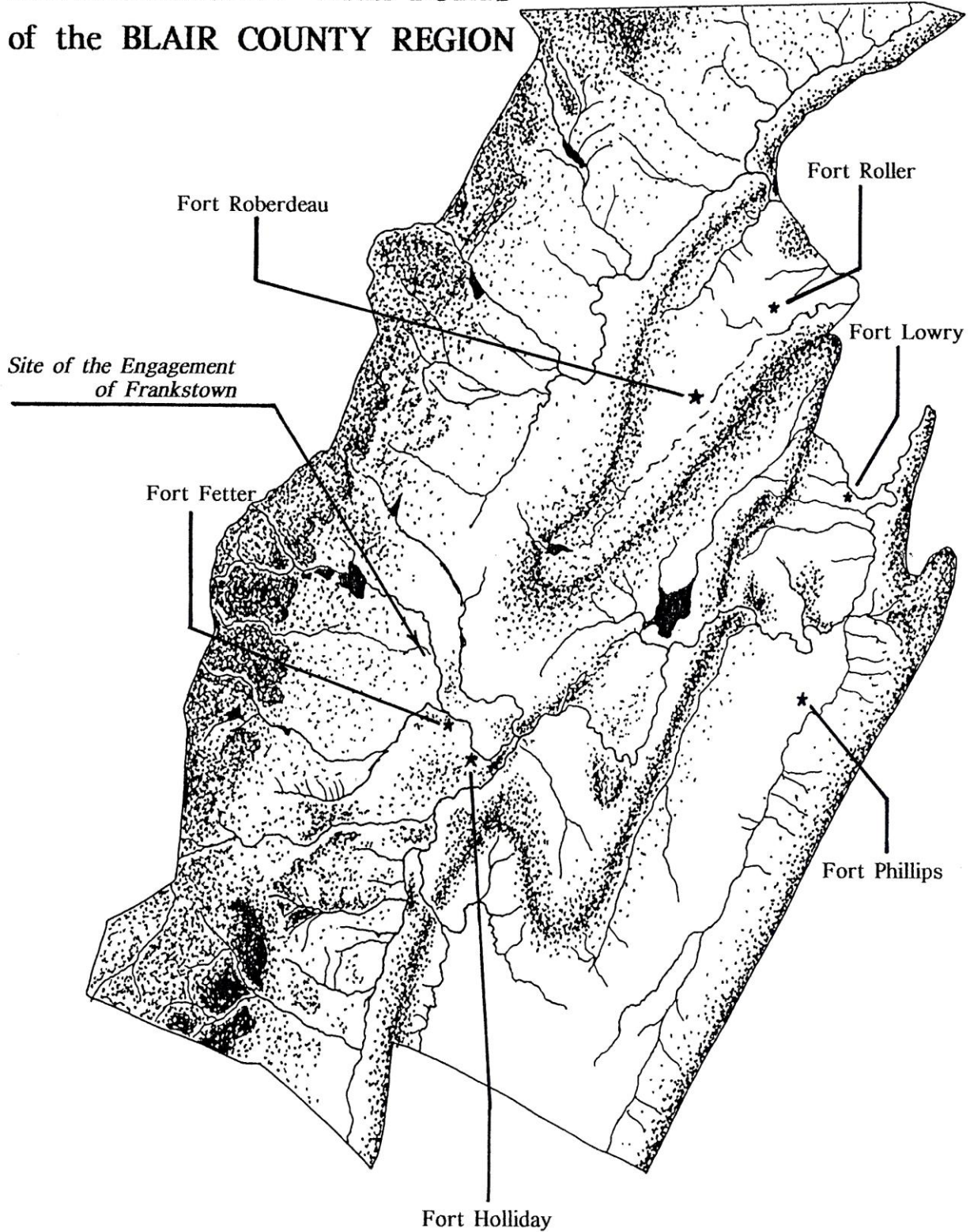
Fort Roller is believed to have been a stockade structure built by Jacob Roller, Sr in the year 1778 in Sinking Valley. Jacob Roller, Sr resided at the "head of the valley" according to U.J. Jones. This would seem to refer to the southern end of the valley. (Jones recounts a tale of Indians killing Jacob Roller, Jr after they passed the father's fortification and continued to the house of a man named Beault, who lived near the Juniata River. The Little Juniata River lies to the northern end of the Sinking Valley.) But the property of Jacob Roller, Sr eventually was purchased by Peter Burket, and was then handed down through the Burket family. The site of this farm is in the northern end of the Sinking Valley, just west of the Arch Spring. This structure would have served the primary purpose of affording local residents protection; it is not known to have housed militia troops.

Fort Roberdeau was a stockaded structure, apparently the only one in the Blair County region to have been authorized by the Pennsylvania Assembly. It was built expressly for the security and protection of the men engaged in mining and smelting the lead that was abundant in Sinking Valley. It was built in the summer and fall of 1778 and continued in active use until the fall of 1779. It was uniquely constructed with the logs which formed the palisade walls placed in a horizontal position due to the limestone strata and shallow topsoil on which it was built. This fort has been beautifully reconstructed. Detailed information on Fort Roberdeau can be obtained from: Fort Roberdeau, RD #3, Box 391, Altoona, PA 16601.

In the heavily settled Morrisons Cove valley, only one fortified structure is believed to have been constructed. Fort Phillips was the house of Captain William Phillips, situated about two miles south of the present-day town of Williamsburg, which was fortified and used by the local settlers as a place of refuge.

The map on the next page shows the general location of the various fortifications situated throughout the Blair County region during the Revolutionary War. As noted in the above, the only restored structure is that of Fort Roberdeau.

REVOLUTIONARY WAR FORTS of the BLAIR COUNTY REGION



100th ANNUAL MEETING PASSAR

The Blair County Chapter was honored to be able to host the 100th Annual Meeting of the Pennsylvania State Society of the Sons of the American Revolution. This event took place during Friday, April 23 and Saturday, April 24, 1993. A Friday evening reception/program and the Annual Meeting were held at the Ramada Hotel, while Saturday evening's Annual Banquet was held at the Calvin House.

The committee which planned and coordinated the arrangements for the Annual Meeting, chaired by Compatriot Edgar R. Hartt, Esq., did a great job of making the event a success. The activities included a Friday evening reception during which William C. Gist, Jr (Historian General, NSSAR) and his wife, Elizabeth presented a slide program titled: *Living In A Landmark: An Endless Adventure*. (The Gists reside in Zachary Taylor's late 18th Century house.) On Saturday morning, following danish and coffee, the Board of Management and the Annual Meeting were conducted. Forty-eight Compatriots attended the Annual Meeting. At 1:30 on Saturday afternoon a Memorial Service was conducted by PASSAR Chaplain, the Reverend James M. Murrey for Compatriots who have passed away during this past year. An excursion trip was taken by fifty Compatriots and their guests to the Horseshoe Curve. On Saturday evening the President's Reception and the Annual Banquet was held at the Calvin House with PASSAR President Joseph Ramsey presiding over the festivities. Members of Philadelphia-Continental Chapter, in Continental Line outfits, served as the color guard. Following the dinner, Reon G. Hillegass, Jr (Treasurer General, NSSAR) and William C. Gist, Jr gave remarks. Awards were presented next. Barret L. McKown (Vice-President General, Mid-Atlantic District) gave the Evening Address to the nearly eighty-one Compatriots and their guests in attendance. The Installation of the Officers for 1993-1994 was performed by Barret L. McKown and Warren G. Hayes, Jr (Former President General, NSSAR), and then following closing ceremonies, the 100th Annual Meeting of the Pennsylvania Society was adjourned.

It was indeed an enjoyable annual meeting for those who attended. The Blair County Chapter was represented by eight Compatriot members. We extend our regrets to those of you who might have wished to, but were unable to attend. Besides the satisfaction of being able to take part in the decision making process of the state society, our attendance at the Quarterly and Annual Meetings gives us all a chance to see our Compatriots from around the state and to make or renew friendships with them.

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Thank you, Joe

A thank you is extended to our Blair County Chapter member, Joseph Ramsey, for the past year and one half that he served ably in the position of President of the Pennsylvania Society, SAR.

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3rd QUARTERLY MEETING REMINDER

This is a reminder that the 3rd Quarterly Meeting of the Blair County Chapter, SAR will be held at King's Family Restaurant at 12:00 noon on Saturday, July 10, 1993. Please plant to attend that meeting.

Compatriot Ben F. Van Horn, deceased

The Blair County Chapter was saddened by the demise of one of its active members, Ben F. Van Horn. Noted for his work as School Superintendent and the individual primarily responsible for having consolidated a number of rural schools into the Northern Bedford School District, and for his work with the Pioneer Historical Society of Bedford County, Ben passed away on April 22, 1993.