

1755 Frontier Life – An Intertwining of Local and International Events

Cumberland, Maryland & Bedford, Pennsylvania

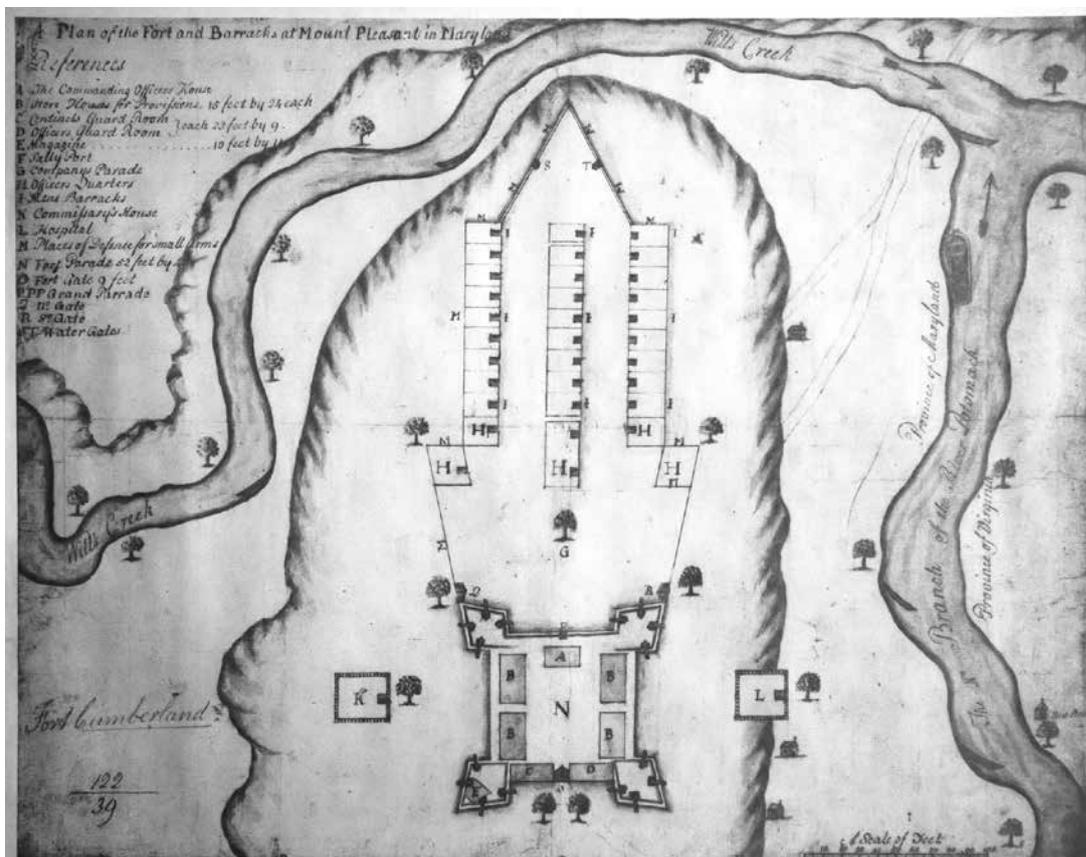
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Newlyweds Jane and John Frazier imagined that after establishing a residence near Evitt's Creek they would live a typical frontier life, filled with hardships but unlimited promise. Increased economic and military activity at the confluence of Will's Creek and the Potomac River during the French and Indian War (1754-1763) meant that John's gunsmith skills would be profitable. Additional experiences as an interpreter, trading post owner, and woodworker, made John exceptionally prepared for the economic environment of what was to become Allegany County, Maryland. In 1755, their plans were interrupted after Jane's capture by Native Americans near Evitt's Creek. Jane's abduction and subsequent escape created excitement at the time and the building of a legend over the decades. The Frazier's story provides an intertwining of local and international events.

John Frazier emigrated from Scotland to Pennsylvania where his language skills caught the attention of Colonel George Washington during a journey to Fort Duquesne in 1753.

Washington's mission was to warn the French about encroachment into territory claimed by the British; Frazier served as an interpreter and guide during the mission. The skilled frontiersman later accompanied Washington and General Edward Braddock during the latter's ill-fated mission into Pennsylvania during the French and Indian War.

The French gained ascendancy in the Ohio Valley after Washington's mission to Fort Duquesne, at that time Frazier retreated and eventually made his way to Winchester, Virginia, where he met a young widow by the name of Jane (Bell) McLane. John and Jane married and soon after located to a site near Evitt's Creek, approximately two miles from a store house that had been established earlier



Plan of Fort Cumberland,
circa 1755.
Courtesy Thomas Starkey



by the Ohio Company, a private venture focused on facilitating European settlements and trade in the Ohio Valley.

John and Jane's original log cabin was likely a two-story structure typical of the time period. A Historic American Buildings Survey Inventory on the home place yields little information, and no formal study seems to have been completed. Primary sources of information include mid-twentieth century photographs that show an abandoned two-story dwelling with a long wing. It is obvious the wing and double balcony were not Frazier's work, but the east end of the building depicts a log cabin structure that could date to the 1754 time period. In addition to the house, Frazier is said to have built a workshop suitable for the gunsmith trade.

Only a brief mention of the dwelling is provided in a biographical summary of Jane Frazier compiled



John and Jane Frazier's house was located along Maryland Route 51, just south of Messick Road in South Cumberland. The two-story house with a double balcony, shown above, dated later than a smaller dwelling originally built and occupied by the Fraziers. Rough-hewn logs at the east end of the house that had been covered by later improvements helped to identify the original cabin. Road construction in 1964 caused the abandoned dwelling's demolition, but a Maryland State Historical Marker (left) may be viewed near the site of the Frazier house.

in 1897 by Colonel Wm. T. Beatty, Jane's great-grandson. Frazier is quoted as saying, "Soon after we (Jane and John Frazier) came to this place, my husband, who was a gunsmith, concluded to build a shop and engage in business."

In October 1755 as work proceeded on the Frazier dwelling, Jane and a worker by the name of Brady prepared to visit Fort Cumberland located at the confluence of Will's Creek and the Potomac River. The two descended a ridge near the house, crossed Evitt's Creek, and then "ascended the hill and while yet in the sight of the house were fired upon by Indians." Her companion was killed during the incident, and Jane's horse suffered a minor injury. Jane's narrative continued, "The chief asked what so many men were doing at the house. I replied that they were building another house. He then wanted to know if they were armed, and I informed him that they were, meaning the arms of flesh, for they were poorly supplied with firearms; if the Indians had known they would have massacred the whole party."

Another account of Jane Frazier's hostile encounter was written by Ruby Frazier Frey, a descendant of Jane and John Frazier. *Red Morning*, the novel written by Frey and based on historical events, enjoys popularity among local book collectors and historians. Frey's story describes Jane's seizure, forced mounting on horseback and binding to one of the captors before departing Evitt's Creek.

The incident proved to be a newsworthy event that was reported as far east as Annapolis where the *Maryland Gazette* noted, "...We are told that last Wednesday the Indians had taken a man prisoner who was going to Fort Cumberland from Frazier's and had also carried off a woman from Frazier's plantation."

Jane's three month journey to the Miami River in Ohio proved to be exhausting and dangerous, particularly since she was within weeks of giving birth to her first child.

The period of captivity was to last either 13 months or 18 months, depending on which source one reads. While the reported length of captivity differs, all accounts seem to agree that she did not experience physical mistreatment after arriving in the Native American encampment.



The only known portrait of Jane Frazier – a charcoal sketch made near the end of her life. Artist unknown.

Not long after arriving in Ohio, Jane's troubles worsened with the death of her child; in her words, "my cup of sorrow was full to overflowing." The child only survived several months after birth and was buried with assistance from her adopted family. Despite the emotional trauma, Jane not only survived the captivity but helped to devise a plan of escape.

The Native Americans periodically organized raids into Pennsylvania. Most of the warriors participated in the raids, leaving the encampment in the hands of boys and a few older men. Two recently captured Pennsylvanians, in the same predicament as Jane and longing to return home, noticed the lack of enforcement. It was the Pennsylvanians who decided to escape upon the advent of another raid, "and they let me in on their secret," stated Jane.

After securing a few provisions, the party of three departed the camp. Lack of food quickly became a problem, but they agreed not to fire their only musket at wildlife for fear of giving away their position.

After one week, Jane decided to break ranks with her fellow travelers and face the wilderness alone. The result was "untold privation, having to live on vegetables and bark of trees and climb into a tree or hide in a hollow to be secure at night from wild beasts."

Fortunately Jane came upon a settlement and was provided with supplies and directions to her home. Upon arrival in Western Maryland, a group of neighbors greeted Jane with great fanfare. The homecoming was tempered by the news that John had remarried after believing that his wife would never return after the abduction. The uncomfortable arrangement was resolved when the second wife returned



John Frazier's Tavern was located on what is now the corner of East Pitt and North Richard Streets in downtown Bedford, PA. A Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission marker may be viewed at the site.

to her family; John stated that his second marriage was illegal since Jane was alive.

John and Jane resumed their lives along Evitt's Creek, enlarging their home and constructing additional buildings. The couple raised three children while residing at the location, over a four year period of time.

Military matters overshadowed John's domestic life along Evitt's Creek and, after corresponding with Colonel George Washington in 1758, he joined detachments of the army at Raystown, today called Bedford (PA). The couple would never return to their Evitt's Creek home.

John and Jane built a dwelling along the Raystown Branch that also served as a tavern (still standing and designated with a historical marker) and it was in Bedford that John established himself as a person of integrity and prominence. In addition to the military rank of Lieutenant, he later served as a justice of the peace, guide, and conciliator. John died in 1773 and was buried in Bedford.

Jane then married Captain Richard Dunlap, an Irish immigrant, who also preceded her in death. In 1815, at the age of 80, Jane died in the home of a daughter in

Schellsburg, Pennsylvania, and was buried in "The King's Burying Ground."

John and Jane left behind two distinct legacies, depending on one's perspective. Allegany County, Maryland, residents primarily recall Jane, the wife who bravely overcame tragedy and returned to "Jane Frazier's House." Bedford County, Pennsylvania, residents, while certainly acknowledging Jane's accomplishments, proudly note the military and civil achievements of John Frazier. Consideration of both Frazier's legacies presents a unique local perspective on the circumstances surrounding the French and Indian War in the region.

**The Frazier's names are spelled a number of different ways including Fraser (Frazier) and Jean (Jane).*

The author acknowledges Allegany County resident Thomas Starkey. Written sources of information include: *The Old Pike Post*, Vol. 16, Number 3; *Jane Frazier Survived Imprisonment by Indians*, by Ruth Averill Clauson; *Captured by the Indians*, compiled by Col. Wm. T. Beatty, 1897; *Red Morning*, by Ruby Frazier Frey.