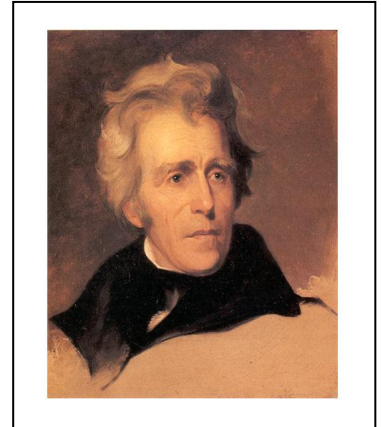


# THE STORY OF RUSSELL BEAN, ANDREW JACKSON, AND SHERIFF JOE

By Robert M. Wilbanks IV, © 2008

Joseph Crouch, my ancestor, had served as Captain of a Virginia Militia unit during the Revolutionary War before taking his family west, to East Tennessee, in the early 1780s. He settled near Jonesboro, Tennessee's first town, in Washington County and helped found the Cherokee Creek Baptist Church. Upon Tennessee's admission to the Union in 1796, Governor Sevier appointed Joseph Crouch magistrate of Washington County. Later, he served as Sheriff of Washington County from 1800 to 1806.

Andrew Jackson, the future President of the United States, was also a Pioneer settler of Tennessee and was also developing a reputation. Known as a drinker, gambler, brawler, duelist, and horse racer, he had also educated himself and became a frontier lawyer. Upon Tennessee's Statehood, Jackson was elected as a Representative and then Senator to the United States Congress. Disgusted with all the "deceivings" of politics, he resigned and left Washington DC. From 1798 to 1804, Jackson served upon the bench of the Tennessee Supreme Court, with his court sitting in Jonesboro.

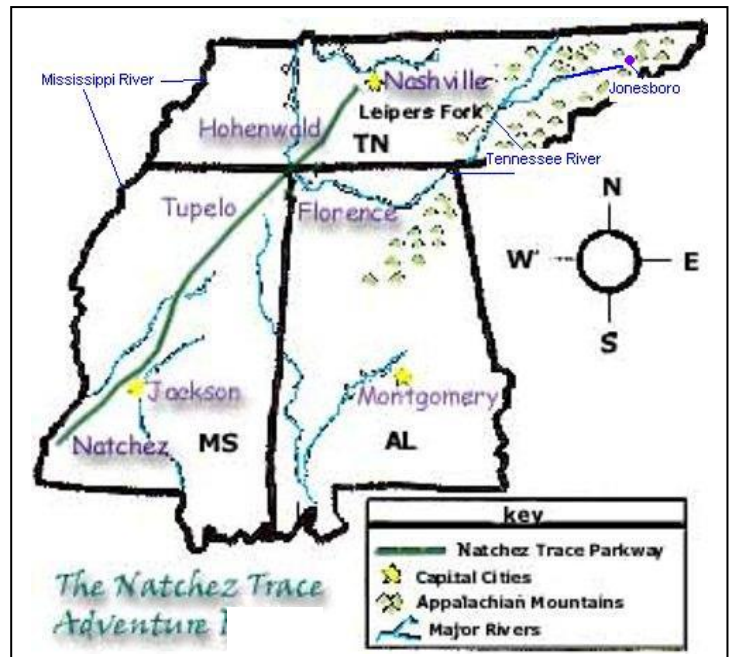


Andrew Jackson

Russell Bean was a notable and imposing figure in East Tennessee. Known as the first white child born in Tennessee he was a "great hulking fellow" who always carried a loaded pistol and bowie knife. He had great physical strength and endurance, and was fearless of man or beast. He was considered a genius at the skills of manufacturing arms, and was very skilled at their use, noted as being a "crack shot." He operated a weapons manufacturing business out of his cabin home.

The following story varies in details, but the basis of it is confirmed by September 1802 court records, interviews of contemporary witnesses in their later years, and family tradition of descendants of the Bean family.

In about 1800 Russell Bean took a cargo of furs, weapons of his manufacture, and other goods, on a flatboat by way of the Nolichucky, Tennessee and Ohio Rivers, on to the Mississippi River and down to New Orleans. Selling his wares and the flatboat for firewood, he briefly engaged in foot races, horse racing, cock-fighting and other sports of the times, before finally heading back home by way of the Natchez Trace; a noted Indian path from New Orleans to Nashville. It was nearly two years before he arrived home to Jonesboro and upon his return found his wife nursing an infant. Russell left the house without a word, got drunk, came back, took the baby out of his cradle, and deliberately cut off both of his ears saying that he "had marked it so that it would not get mixed up with his children". Then he went to town to find the man who seduced his wife. Instead he found the man's brother and beat him nearly to death. He continued to create a disturbance around the court house screaming and cursing. Waving his loaded pistol and bowie knife, Bean threatened anyone who would come near him. Eventually, he made his way back to his cabin on the south side of town.



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A warrant was immediately issued for his arrest. Word got to Sheriff Crouch that Bean was calmly sitting in front of his cabin with weapons about him and threatening to kill any man who would come near his cabin and try to take him. Crouch tried to get a posse of men together but no one dared go with him. Crouch went to Jackson to report on the situation. Jackson angrily ordered Crouch to "Summon every man in the court house to bring Bean in dead or alive." Sheriff Crouch responded "Then I summon your honor first!" Jackson called a recess of the court, grabbed a loaded pistol exclaiming, "By the Eternal, I'll bring him!" Crouch led Jackson out to Bean's cabin. Jackson yelled to Bean "Surrender you infernal villain, this very instant, or I'll blow you through!" Terrified by the determined look and flashing eye of Jackson, Bean surrendered immediately without a struggle, and was taken into court. Bean would later explain that he could see that Jackson had the look of a man ready to kill.

Bean was convicted and sentenced to a branding on the palm of the hand and eleven months in jail. It is said that immediately upon branding he bit out the palm of his hand with the brand and spat it on the courthouse floor. He was also imprisoned, but soon escaped from jail and was allowed to remain at large as everyone was afraid of him. His wife soon divorced him and the baby later died of the wounds. Bean headed further west and some say became the Sheriff of Memphis and while in that capacity was killed by being stabbed in the back.

Jackson became the great Indian fighter and hero of New Orleans, and eventually President of the United States.

Joseph Crouch remained a Jonesboro community and church leader, and a prosperous farmer and businessman. He helped to found Tennessee's first Iron Foundry. He died at the ripe old age of 81. I enjoyed the great privilege of visiting Historic Jonesboro, and the grave of Joseph Crouch and his wife, in the summer of 2006. The burial site was on his old farm which was part of land originally granted to him for his service in the Revolutionary War. In 2005, that land was finally sold by descendants to developers and the graves nearly plowed over for a housing community. Fortunately, the graves were saved and preserved for future descendants.



Headstone of Russell Bean  
Washington County, Tennessee



Graves of Joseph Crouch and wife



Headstone of Joseph Crouch

FYI that Joseph Crouch is my Great – Great – Great – Great – Great Grandfather