

James Lea

This report will explain the results of specific research tasks assigned on James Lea of Caswell County, North Carolina and eastern Tennessee.

1) The first request involved gathering original signatures of James Lea from documents in Caswell and Person Counties, for comparison with other signatures already gathered, in order to distinguish between the several men by the name of James Lea. In particular, the signatures were sought for James Lea of Kilgore's Branch, and James Lea of Cobb's Creek. The time frame of interest spans the late 1700's and early 1800's. Wills might have the signature of the testator. Deeds of sale required the signature of the grantor, but not the grantee. There were documents for men by that name in Caswell and Person Counties in the relevant time period.

The will of James Lea, Sr. of Person County, dated September 7, 1803, was not recorded until February court in 1816. This is believed to be James Lea of Cobb's Creek. He named sons Richard, Abner and Benjamin, as well as several daughters. The signature is in the same hand as the rest of the document, indicating that the court clerk transcribed the original will into the record book, including the signature.¹

James Lea, Sr. received a state grant for 600 acres of land on both sides of the east fork of Kilgore's Branch on October 29, 1782. The grant is recorded in the Caswell County deeds, but does not have a signature of the recipient. It appears that James Lea, Sr. sold this same land in two parcels the following summer, both on June 17, 1783. These Caswell County deeds of sale by James Lea, Sr. of Kilgore's Branch were located in the microfilmed original land records. The sale of land to his son Gabriel Lea for 260 acres was signed in the same hand as the rest of the document.² He sold 327 acres to his neighbor Thomas 'Evanse', and the signature matched the penmanship of the rest of the document.

Two earlier deeds of sale in Orange County, in 1770 and 1771 by James Lea of Cobb's Creek, were also viewed in the microfilmed original. The signatures were found to be matching the penmanship of the rest of the deed, so they were not true signatures at all.

¹ Document 1: Record Books, Person County, North Carolina, Volume 7, p. 79-80. FHL Film #0019594

² Document 2: Deeds, Caswell County, North Carolina, Book B, p. 49. FHL Film #0018433

A much earlier sale of land in Spotsylvania County, by James and Ann Lea, is dated March 5, 1753. This sale may have signaled the time of departure from Virginia to North Carolina. This James was most likely not the James Lea of Country Line Creek, as he can be documented in North Carolina a full year before this sale in Virginia. If this James with wife Ann was the future resident of Kilgore's Branch or Cobb's Creek, perhaps his signature could be used to match them up. But the deed of sale was copied in the clerk's hand, including the signatures of James and Ann Lea.³

2) The next question involved the disposition of land owned by James Lea of Kilgore's Branch.

Searches for the disposition of lands sold by James Lea of Kilgore's Branch did not turn up definitive answers. From the timeline prepared for previous research, we see him selling 327 acres to Thomas Evans, on both sides of Kilgore's Branch of North Hyco, on June 17, 1783. Thomas is found selling several small parcels in the same area, but not the whole 327 acres. Thomas Evans also had land grants and other purchases before he bought from James Lea, all in the same area, with some of the same neighbors mentioned. The later volume of Caswell County printed abstracts of deeds were also checked, as well as those of Person County.⁴

James' sale of 260 acres to his son Gabriel on that same day, June 17, 1783, does not show up in a sale by Gabriel to someone else, either in Caswell or Person Counties. However, Gabriel sold parcels of other sizes in that area, so it is difficult to pin down matching parcels.

On July 16, 1784, James sold 340 acres to Henry Cooper on South Hico. Henry Cooper sold 576 acres all at once in Caswell and Person Counties, on both sides of the Hico adjacent Thomas Neeley, to John Russell of Warren County on October 6, 1798. This may be the 340 acres plus land he acquired from others. This sale appears in the Person County book. No other sales of Henry Cooper were found.⁵

On June 25, 1792, James sold 200 acres on South Hico to Samuel Nealey adjacent Samuel Johnston, James Johnston, Cooper and Huston. Samuel Neeley sold the whole parcel to Pemberton Burch on January 17, 1798 in Caswell County deeds. The same neighboring landowners were named: the two Johnstons, Henry Cooper and George Huston.⁶

It seems that James had land near the border of Caswell and Person Counties, as indicated by Henry Cooper's sale of land. The DeLorme Atlas of North Carolina shows Kilgore Creek, a tributary of North Hyco River, just barely west of Leasburg. Coney Creek branches off of the North Hyco further south, so my statement in the March 6, 2006 report, Page 4, was in error. Coney Creek was not the same as Kilgore Creek/Branch. I copied the relevant portion of the Caswell County map with Kilgore Creek

³ Document 3: Deeds, Spotsylvania County, Virginia, Book E, p, 102. FHL Film #0034070

⁴ Document 4: Katherine Kerr Kendall, *Caswell County, North Carolina Deed Books, 1777-1817* (Easley, SC: Southern Historical Press, 1989), p. 65, 79, 87, 107 & 217. FHL Call #975.6575 P28k

⁵ Document 5: Katherine Kerr Kendall, *Person County, North Carolina Deed Books 1792-1825* (Baltimore: Clearfield Co., 1993), p. 44. FHL Call #975.6573 R2k

⁶ Document 6: Katherine Kerr Kendall, *Caswell County, North Carolina Deed Books, 1777-1817* (Easley, SC: Southern Historical Press, 1989), p. 187. FHL Call #975.6575 P28k

highlighted. It runs roughly parallel to the North Hyco after branching off, so James' land must have been in that strip of land between the two creeks. Highway 158 goes through that area on its way to Leasburg, and Tatum Rd. takes off north from Highway 158, right down the middle of that stretch of land between North Hyco River and Killgore Creek. Note that Soloman Lea Road heads north from Leasburg.⁷

3) Verify the transcriptions of 'Jr.' and 'Sr.' after James Lea's name in Caswell County deeds:

There were three James Leas in the 1788-1795 time period in the Caswell County printed abstracts of deeds that had either Jr. or Sr. after their names.⁸ The corresponding originals were located in the microfilm collection, and all three validated the transcriptions.

Book B, p. 35: James Lea, Sen'r received a land grant from State of North Carolina for 200 acres on both sides of the east fork of Killgore's Branch, by Will Lea, Thomas Killgore, William McDaniel & William Moore. 29 Oct 1782⁹

Book B, p. 49: James Lea, Sen'r to Gabriel Lea 267 acres on both sides of Killgore's Branch of North Hyco River, near William McDaniel, Thomas Evans, Widow Gibson, Abraham Fulkerson, William Moore.¹⁰

Book B, p. 157: John Cooper, Sr. sold to James Lea, Jun., 345 a. on South Hico. 12 Mar 1784¹¹

How can we be sure that the James Leas in early Tennessee were all the same person?:

The best method of delineating persons with the same name is to create a timeline. The following timeline focuses on the James Lea/Lee sightings in the northeastern counties of Tennessee.

[cf Note: The James Lea of Jefferson/Greene and Hawkins deeds related to Roddy, Luke Lea, Jr. signing as witness, seem to indicate James Lea of this timeline to be the son of Rev. Luke Lea married to Elizabeth Roddy who migrated to Amite County, Mississippi and will be filed accordingly]

James Lea Timeline in Early Eastern Tennessee

1786: Greene Co.—James Lea granted 200 acres in N District.¹²

17 Nov 1786: Greene Co.—James Lee granted 218 acres on Bent Creek, south side Holston River, adj. Brelam Smith, George Evans, John Smith, William Horner.¹³

⁷ Document 7: *DeLorme North Carolina Atlas & Gazetteer* (Yarmouth, ME: 2001), p. 19.

⁸ Document 8: Katherine Kerr Kendall, *Caswell County, North Carolina Deed Books, 1777-1817* (Easley, SC: Southern Historical Press, 1989), p. 38, 39 & 45. FHL Call #975.6575 P28k

⁹ Document 9: Deeds, Caswell County, North Carolina, Book B, p. 35. FHL Film #0358224

¹⁰ Document 10: Deeds, Caswell County, North Carolina, Book B, p. 49. FHL Film #0358224

¹¹ Document 11: Deeds, Caswell County, North Carolina, Book B, p. 157. FHL Film #0358224

¹² Document 12: Barbara, Byron & Samuel Sistler, *Tennessee Land Grants, Surnames L-Lz* (Nashville, TN: Sistler & Associates, 1997). FHL Call #976.8 R2s

- 1 Feb 1789: Greene Co.—James Lea deed of purchase recorded for 300 acres from William Ashorn. James Roddy & William Horner gave oath.¹⁴
- 6 Feb 1790: Greene Co.—James Lea made oath for deed of Alex Outlaw. (Document 14)
- Aug 1790: Greene Co.—James Lea served on an 8-man jury. (Document 14)
- 5 Aug 1790: Greene Co.—James Lea served on a 10-man jury. (Document 14)
- 29 Jan 1791: Greene Co.—James Lea & George Evans witnessed a deed for land on Bent Creek from James Roddy to Isaac Barton.¹⁵
- 29 Jan 1791: Greene Co.—James Lea, Esq. & Equilla Low proved a deed in court from William Asher to Isaac Barton for 300 acres. (Document 14)
- Nov 1791: Greene Co.—James Lea served on a 13-man jury. (Document 14)
- 1791 & 92: Greene Co.—James Lea, Esq. appointed to assess the taxable property in Capt. McFarland's Company. (Document 14)
- 1792: (No county)—James Lea granted 500 acres in N District, south side of Holston River. (Document 12)
- 1792: Greene Co.—James Lea granted 290 acres in N District. (Document 12)
- 2 Nov 1792: Greene Co.—James Lea granted 290 acres from State of NC, "adjacent the plantation whereon he now lives".¹⁶
- 27 Nov 1792: Greene Co.—James Lea granted 500 acres from State of NC on north side of Holston River adjacent David Walker. (Document 16)
- 1792: Hawkins Co.—James Lea granted 200 acres in N District. (Document 12)
- 10 May 1792: Greene Co.—James Lea served on a jury. (Document 14)
- 27 Nov 1792: Greene Co.—James Lee a neighboring landowner to Britten Smith, Jesse Cheek on Bent Creek. (Document 15)
- 24 May 1793: Greene Co.—James Lea made oath in court for the deed of William Murphy. (Document 14)

¹³ Document 13: Goldene Fillers Burgner, *North Carolina Land Grants Recorded in Greene County, Tennessee* (Easley, SC: Southern Historical Press, 1981). FHL Call #976.891 R2b

¹⁴ Document 14: Goldene Fillers Burgner, *Greene County, Tennessee Minutes of the Court of Common Pleas, 1783-1795* (Easley, SC: Southern Historical Press, 1982). FHL Call #976.891 P29t

¹⁵ Document 15: Joyce Martin Murray, *Greene County, Tennessee Deed Abstracts, 1785-1810, Volumes 2, 4, 6, 7 & 8* (Dallas: privately published, 1998). FHL Call #976.891 R28m

¹⁶ Document 16: Boyd J. Holdaway, *Land Deeds of Jefferson County, Tennessee, 1792-1814* (Greenville, SC: Southern Historical Press, 1991). FHL Call #976.9824 R2h

- 7 Sep 1793: Jefferson Co.—James Lea a neighboring landowner in deed from Samuel Smith to Gideon Smith, on a branch of Fall Creek on the south side of Holston River. Also adjacent to George Russell, Jesse Cheeks, George Evans & William Asher. (Document 16)
- 1793: Hawkins Co.—James Lea granted 300 acres in N District. (Document 12)
- 1794: Hawkins Co.—James Lea granted 500 acres in N District. (Document 12)
- 1794: Hawkins Co.—James Lea granted 400 acres in N District. (Document 12)
- 4 Feb 1794: Hawkins Co.—James Lea granted 200 acres by State of NC on both sides of Powell's River. (Document 16)
- 4 Feb 1794: Hawkins Co.—James Lea granted 400 acres by State of NC in Powell's Valley adjacent Campbell. (Document 16)
- 4 Feb 1794: Hawkins Co.—James Lea granted 500 acres by State of NC in Powell's Valley near VA line. (Document 16)
- 24 Dec 1794: Jefferson Co.—James Lea witnessed a deed from Jesse Cheek to James Forrest for 100 acres on Fall Creek. (Document 16)
- 27 Oct 1795: Jefferson Co.—James Lea witnessed a deed from William & Gideon Smith to David Coffman for 200 acres on Bent Creek adjacent James Lea, Jesse Cheek, James Vest. (Document 16)
- 1 Nov 1795: Jefferson Co.—James Lea witnessed a deed from Gideon Smith to James Roddy for 500 acres on Fall Creek on south side of Holston River, and is also mentioned as neighboring landowner along with George Russell, Jesse Cheek, George Evans & William Asher. (Document 16)
- 10 Mar 1796: Jefferson Co.—James Lea a neighboring landowner in a deed from James Roddy to Joseph Anderson for 500 acres on Fall Creek of Holston River. Also George Russell, Jesse Cheek, George Evans, William Asher. (Document 16)
- 1 Aug 1796: Jefferson Co.—James Lea mentioned in a sheriff's sale as having recovered \$100 from Isaac Taylor for debt, probably taxes due. (Document 16)
- 1797: Greene Co.—James Lea granted 70 acres in N District. (Document 12)
- 1797: Greene Co.—James Lea granted 125 acres in N District. (Document 12)
- 1797: Greene Co.—James Lea granted 70 acres in N District. (Document 12)
- 6 Dec 1797: Jefferson Co.—James Lea granted 100 acres in Greene County from State of NC, adjacent to Joseph Anderson and himself. (Document 16)

- 10 Jan 1798: Jefferson Co.—James Lea witnessed a deed of sale from James Roddy to Jesse Cheek for 115 ½ acres at a main crossroads in the county. (Document 16)
- 14 Jul 1798: Greene Co.—James Lea granted 125 acres from State of NC on Bent Creek on south side of Holston River adjacent himself. (Document 15)
- 1799: Grainger Co.—James Lea paid taxes on 600 acres in Capt. Halfacre's Dist.¹⁷
- 17 Jun 1799: Jefferson Co.—James Lea sold to Joseph Anderson 143+ acres in Jefferson County which he had purchased from James Roddy, part of several grants originally granted to Lea and William Asher. (Document 16)
- 19 Jan 1800: Jefferson Co.—James Lea sold to William Horner 40 acres on Bent Creek, adjacent to them both, part of patent granted to James Lea by State of NC on 1 Nov 1786. (Document 16)
- 24 Jan 1800: Jefferson Co.—James Lea sold to Christopher Hanes 300 acres in Hawkins County on Mossey Creek adjacent Johnston. (Document 16)
- 1800: Jefferson Co.—James Lea paid taxes on 800 acres in Capt. Lane's Dist.; Major Lea taxed in same district, no land. (Document 17)
- 13 Feb 1800: Jefferson Co.—James Lea granted 218 acres from State of NC in Greene County on 1 Nov 1786 on south side of Holston River in Caney Valley adjacent Brittain Smith, George Evans, John Smith, Wm. Haines, David Coffman. (Don't know why this was recorded in Jefferson County so many years later, maybe for the sake of establishing title.) (Document 16)
- 4 Apr 1800: Jefferson Co.—James Lea granted 300 acres from State of NC in Hawkins County on 12 Jan 1793 on Mossey Creek adjacent Johnston. (Document 16)
- 18 Apr 1803: Jefferson Co.—James Lea purchased from William Horner 6 acres and on the same day sold him 20 acres on Bent Creek adjacent both of them. (Document 16)
- 15 Oct 1803: Jefferson Co.—James Lea sold to Alexander Ballard 100 acres in Hawkins and Jefferson Counties along the road to Dodson's Ford on the Holston. (Document 16)
- 25 Jan 1806?: Jefferson Co.—James Lea sold to Fuller Grisham 650 acres on Bent Creek adjacent David Coffman and Ballard. Luke Lea, Jr. one of the witnesses. (Document 16)

James Lea of Greene County actually resided there from about 1786 until the formation of Jefferson County from Greene County in 1792. He was noted as an active resident in the records of Greene

¹⁷ Document 17: Pollyanna Creekmore, *Early East Tennessee Taxpayers* (Easley, SC: Southern Historical Press, 1980). FHL Call #976.8 R4cp

County, serving on juries, witnessing deeds, so we know he had a physical presence there. He continued to reside in the same place, on Bent Creek on the south side of the Holston River, until about January 1806. At that time, he sold 650 acres on Bent Creek to Fuller Grisham. **Luke Lea, Jr. witnessed.** He had sold several other parcels of land in Jefferson County in the seven years before this final 1806 sale. After that date, his name is no longer noted in the records of Jefferson County.

James appears to have owned land in the area along the border between Jefferson and Hawkins Counties. He received numerous land grants in the Hawkins County jurisdiction. One of his sales of land, which occurred October 15, 1803, consisted of 100 acres in Hawkins and Jefferson Counties. On April 4, 1800, a grant was recorded in Jefferson County for 300 acres in Hawkins County.

The James Lea who paid taxes on 600 acres in Grainger County in 1799 may or may not be the same man, but he may have been paying taxes there as a non-resident landowner. Grainger, Hawkins, Greene and Jefferson Counties were clustered like a tight four-leaf clover in northeastern Tennessee in the late 1700's, early 1800's.

Bent Creek can be seen on a topographical map of Tennessee, although it is very small. That portion of the Tennessee map has been copied, and Bent Creek highlighted in yellow.¹⁸ It is located in present-day Hamblen County, which was created in 1870 from Grainger, Greene and Jefferson Counties. It does indeed come very close to both the Greene and Hawkins County lines, but a map of the Tennessee counties as they were configured in 1800 puts that specific area in Jefferson County then.¹⁹

James' continual association from 1786 through 1806 with some of the same people ties him together through the various counties. In 1789, James purchased 300 acres in Greene County, with William Horner as one of the witnesses. He sold another parcel to William Horner in 1800, and again in 1803. Other names that follow him through the years were **James Roddy**, Jesse Cheek, George Evans, and William Asher/Ashert/Ashorn.

Evidence is strong that the James Leas who owned land in Greene, Hawkins and Jefferson Counties were one and the same person.

James Lea who died in Giles County before 1830, when widow Elizabeth sold the inherited 25 acres on Mattaponi Creek in King and Queen County:

This appears to be a complete fabrication. A search of the index to deeds of Giles County from 1810 to 1895 did not reveal any sales or purchases by Elizabeth Lea or Lee. James Lee was noted with one deed of sale only, in Book B, page 5. On April 14, 1812, James Lee (also spelled Lea in the same deed) of Caswell County, North Carolina appointed John Yancy of Giles County as his agent to sell sixty acres in Wilson County on Jenings Fork of Round Lick Creek, to any person who may think proper to purchase

¹⁸ Document 18: "State of Tennessee", U. S. Department of the Interior Geological Survey, Reston, VA, 1973, Scale 1:500,000.

¹⁹ Document 19: William Thorndale & William Dollarhide, *Map Guide to the U. S. Federal Censuses, 1790-1920* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1986).

it.²⁰ The sixty acres was part of a 640 acre claim, but the exact manner by which James came into possession of it does not show. James also authorized John Yancy to obtain a duplicate warrant for the remaining 580 acres of the claim.

A check of the Wilson County abstracts of deeds reveals that James Lea of Caswell County, North Carolina sold sixty acres on Round Lick Creek to Isaiah Coe on August 26, 1814.²¹

Various sources online quote this claim that Elizabeth Lea, widow of James Lea, sold twenty-five acres on Mattaponi Creek in King and Queen County, the deed recorded in Giles County. The only source reference that could be found was the very vague "Court Documents". Court records of Giles County are not abstracted into print as early as 1830, so a page by page search of the microfilmed originals ensued. It turns out that a gap in the originals from 1829 to 1833 exists. Another filming of county court records has a gap between 1825 to 1833. Scrolling page by page did not reveal any such entry, but with those gaps, searching the year 1830 was not possible. [cf: Research will be conducted in Giles County, TN March 2012]

Searches for a corresponding deed or court entry in King and Queen County were thwarted by the loss of records there. No deeds have survived before 1864. Court minute books begin in 1858, and chancery orders in 1831. Validating or negating such a sale of twenty-five acres is conveniently impossible, unless further clarification can be unearthed.

It appears clear that James Lea returned to Caswell County by 1812, and that Elizabeth was not his widow. It is also clear that she did not sell land in Virginia. A James Lee paid taxes in Wilson County in 1804, but why was the Power of Attorney for the sale of that land recorded in Giles County? Was it simply because John Yancy resided there?

A very recent posting in RootsWeb's WorldConnect Project tells that John Graves Yancy (1764-1818) was born in Orange County, North Carolina, and died in Giles County, Tennessee. He married Elizabeth Lightfoot Moore in Caswell County, North Carolina on February 24, 1789, and they moved from Caswell County to Giles County around 1810.²² James must have known him in Caswell County, or even been related to him.

Printed abstracts of other Giles County records do not mention James Lea or Lee. Elizabeth Lea appears in the 1830 census there. It appears that she was the female head of household age forty to fifty with young adult children. A female age eighty to ninety also lived in the home, too old to be the mother of the young adult children.²³

The 1820 census shows Elizabeth Lee in Giles County, with a female in each of the five columns. She may be the one in the 26-45 age group. An Edward Lee is listed three names above her, age sixteen to

²⁰ Document 20: Deeds, Giles County, Tennessee, Book B, p. 5. FHL Film #0968853

²¹ Document 21: Thomas E. Partlow, *Wilson County, Tennessee Deed Books C-M, 1793-1829* (Easley, SC: Southern Historical Press, 1984). FHL Call #976.854 R2pt

²² Document 22: "Caswell County Family Tree", RootsWeb's WorldConnect Project, Entry #59769, 20 Jan 2012.

²³ Document 23: Ancestry.com, U. S. Federal Census 1830, Giles County, Tennessee, p. 197.

twenty-six.²⁴ The 1820 census is the earliest federal census available for that part of Tennessee. The printed census index does not show any James Leas, but a few James Lees resided in Davidson, Overton, Smith and Stewart Counties. Of the Lees in Giles County, there was Elizabeth and Edward, also a Daniel and a William, all with the Lee spelling.²⁵

As a substitute for the missing 1810 census, a reconstructed census has been created from other types of records, spanning 1809 to 1811. In those years, a James Lea appeared in court minutes in Anderson County, and another James Lea received a military commission in Hawkins County. A James Lee paid taxes in Davidson County in 1811, and in Sumner County in 1810, by an agent. The only mention of a Lea or Lee in Giles County was John Lee, who served as a juror, as per court records there.²⁶ It may be that James Lea of Jefferson County had already returned to North Carolina by 1810, or he just didn't appear in any county records around that time.

Printed abstracts of Giles County court minutes reveal that Elizabeth Lee was the widow of John Lee, most likely the same John Lee who served as a juror there in 1810. In the March 1815 session of court, Elizabeth Lee and William Lee were granted Letters of Administration on the estate of John Lee, deceased. 'Alizabth' Lee, widow of John Lee, was allotted a "sufficient portion of stock & provisions as will maintain her & her children if any for one year from date of her husband's decease." John Yancy was noted in the records as guardian for some Graves children, but no association between him and the Lee family there could be detected.²⁷

The 1810 census of North Carolina shows three James Leas in Caswell County, and two in Person County. Interestingly, one of the carried the middle name of 'Yancy', but was only sixteen to twenty-six years old. Determining which one of these, if any, might have been the same who lived in eastern Tennessee would be very difficult, if he had indeed returned by then.

In summary, it seems clear that James Lea of Greene, Jefferson and Hawkins Counties is all the same person. He obtained many large parcels of land in those counties, and apparently in Wilson County, as well. He was an active member of the community in Greene and Jefferson Counties, but sold off most of his land and returned to Caswell County by 1812 or [cf: Note: Amite County, Mississippi] What he did not dispose of before he returned to North Carolina, he appointed John Yancy of Giles County as his agent to sell land in Wilson County. No sale of twenty-five acres of inherited land in on Mattaponi Creek in King and Queen County by Elizabeth Lea could be found. No evidence that James Lea ever resided in Giles County can be found.

²⁴ Document 24: Ancestry.com, U. S. Federal Census 1820, Pulaski, Giles County, Tennessee, p. 8.

²⁵ Document 25: Elizabeth Petty Bentley, *Index to the 1820 Census of Tennessee* (Baltimore: Clearfield Co., 2001). FHL Call #976.8 X22b

²⁶ Document 26: Charles A. Sherrill, *The Reconstructed 1810 Census of Tennessee* (Mt. Juliet, TN: privately published, 2001). FHL Call #976.8 X2s

²⁷ Document 27: Carol Wells, *Abstracts of Giles County, Tennessee: County Court Minutes, 1813-1816 and Circuit Court Minutes, 1810-1816* (Bowie, MD: Heritage Books, 1995). FHL Call #976.861 P28wc

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