

PHILLIP SHELLEY

LOST TO HISTORY FOR OVER 135 YEARS

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There is a saying, “Don’t make an archivist mad; they can erase you from history.” We have officially proven that this can be true. On December 4, 2024, we corrected a mistake that was made back in the late 1880s and hopefully, righted a wrong.

This story begins when the archives was contacted by a gentleman in Arizona who wished to return a document to our possession. It was a warrant for the arrest of Phillip Shelly, for a “trespass” on Samuel Tate. The document was dated 1778, and was one of the earliest court cases to come before the newly-formed county court, and signed by John Sevier, the first clerk of the court, and later, the first governor of the state.

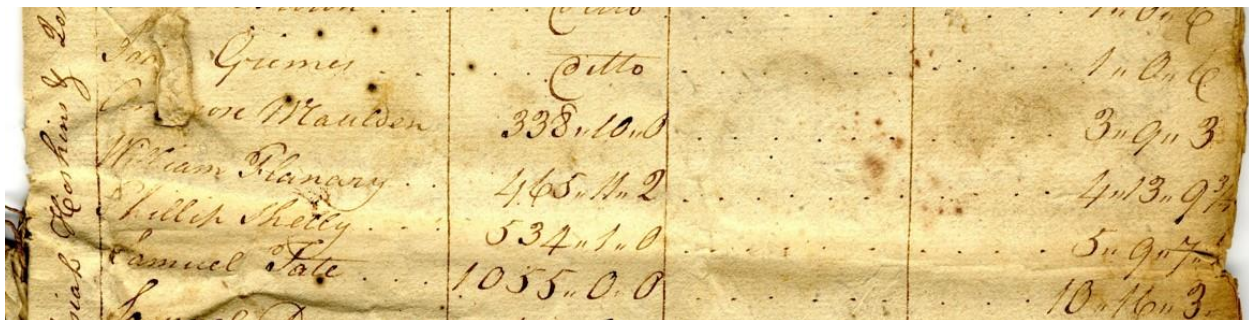
The original arrived in our office on December 3, and in the morning hours of December 4, Ned and I began the accession process in earnest. We were interested in knowing the order in which the case was heard in the court, and we pulled the County Court Minute Book 1, and the WPA’s index. There were several entries for Samuel Tate, but not one for Phillip Shelly. How could that be? He had to be there...it was then that Ned realized that it had been incorrectly transcribed as Phillip SHELBY! The mistake changed his name...until today.

To give a little bit of a back story, our original copies of the County Clerk Minute books were taken to Nashville in 1886 for the Tennessee Historical Society to preserve and protect. In return, they were to provide the county with a written transcription. If you have ever looked at County Court Minute Book 1, it is obvious that it’s not the original, which was written beginning in 1778, when the first county court was organized.

The THS provided the transcribed copy and it is on our shelves in the archives. I have looked at this book many times in the past twenty-five years, and often marveled at the accuracy of the transcription.

Today we made a note in the county minute book and the WPA’s index that the name is SHELLEY, not SHELBY.

Phillip Shelly was listed on the 1778 listing of the taxables in the Sheriff’s Report to court, shown below:



| | |
|----------------|------------|
| Grimes | 338, 10, 0 |
| Waulson | 465, 11, 2 |
| Planary | 534, 1, 0 |
| Phillip Shelly | 1055, 0, 0 |
| Samuel Tate | |

We found that our archives’ volunteers had correctly listed his name as SHELLEY, and when a search was done through our court case files, we found that there were several cases involving him. An attempt to gather further genealogical and historical information was not successful and Shelly disappears from the county records in 1784.

Phillip SHELLY can be found in the following resources in the Washington County Archives

| RESOURCE | PAGE | NOTE |
|---|------|--|
| The Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions, Volume 1 | 32 | 1778: Samuel Tate vs. Phillip Shelby |
| The Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions, Volume 1 | 42 | 1778: Phillip Shelly listed as security for Ambrose Mauldin |
| The Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions, Volume 1 | 45 | 1778: Shelly listed as being summoned to serve on the Grand Jury. |
| The Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions, Volume 1 | 49 | 1778: Shelly was fined for not attending the Grand Jury. |
| The Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions, Volume 1 | 53 | 1778: "Jury men, won suit." |
| The Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions, Volume 1 | 57 | 1778: A listing of the court docket from February to May, 1778, lists the case, Samuel Tate vs. Phillip Shelly. |
| The Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions, Volume 1 | 58 | 1778: State vs. Phillip Shelly, indictment. |
| The Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions, Volume 1 | 121 | 1780: "The Court orders that Alexander Williams do receive forty bushels of corn that was the property of Phillip Shelly being corn due to James Williams from s ^d Shelly for serving as a substitute on behalf of Shelly." |
| The Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions, Volume 1 | 229 | 1783: Mary Goodin, administrator of Drury Goodin, deceased vs. Phillip Shelly. "Find for the plaintiff one hundred and seventeen pounds specie damage, sixpence cost." |
| County Court Judicial case file | | 1781: Hannah Millican (Mrs. James) vs. Phillip Shelly, debt. |
| County Court Judicial case file | | 1783: County Court Judicial case: Mary Goodin vs. Phillip Shelly. |
| County Court Judicial case file | | 1784: County Court Judicial case: Phillip Shelly vs. Solomon Campbell. |
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