

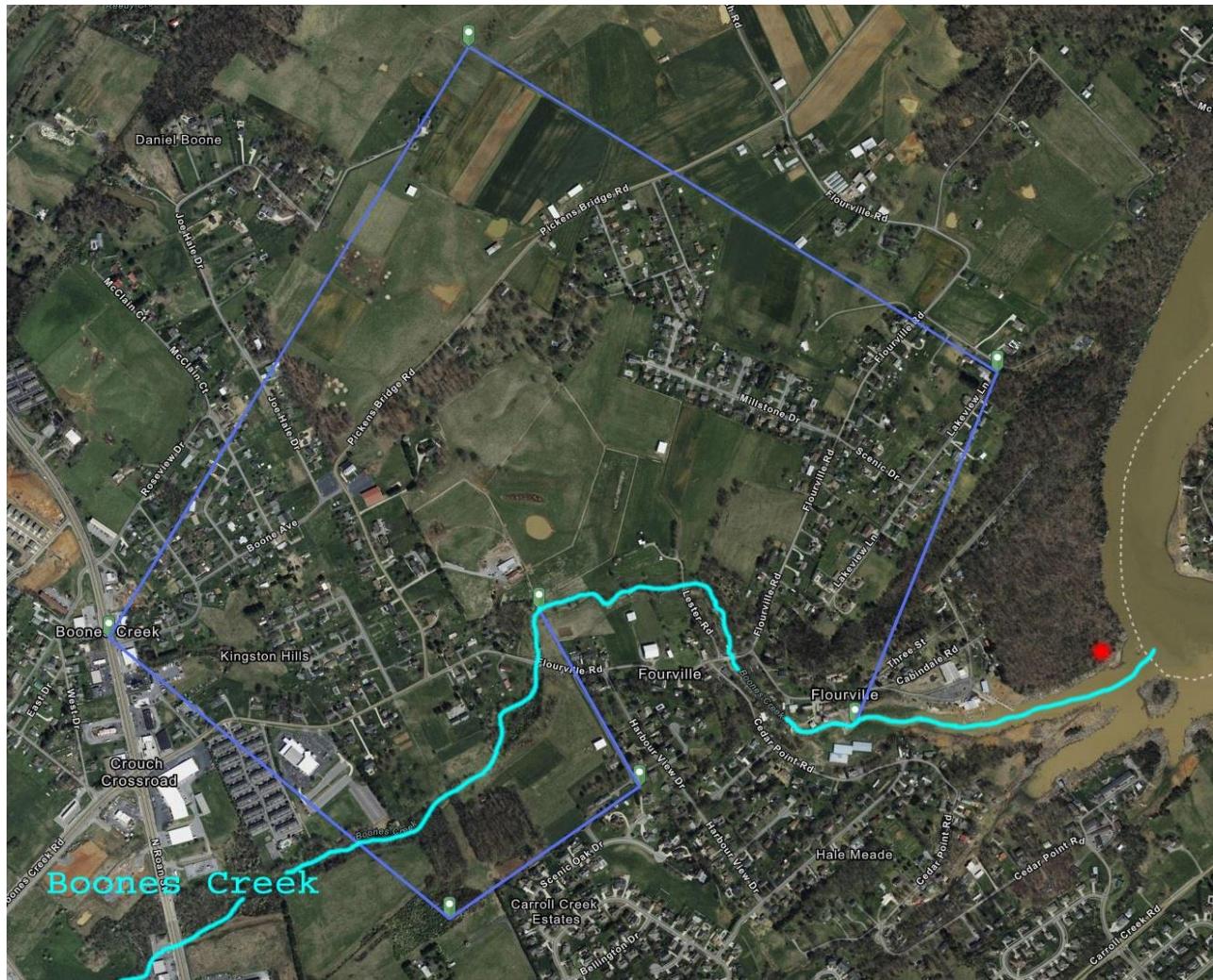
William Bean, Settler Number One

What were we thinking?? We've worked on the Early Settler Project for several months now, and we have completely skipped over the FIRST PERMANENT SETTLER in what is now the state of Tennessee!! Actually, I can tell you what we were thinking. Everyone knows about the Bean family, and we hoped to showcase some of the other less-known settlers who were here before statehood. It is widely accepted by historians that William Bean was the first permanent settler in Tennessee, and we know about Bean's cabin, the marker on Boone Lake, Lydia and Nancy Ward...let's see what else we can learn.

William Bean was born in 1721 in Northumberland County, Virginia; his parents were William Bean, Sr. and Margaret Hatton Bean. His wife was Lydia Russell, and the two were married in 1744. While in Virginia, the two were the parents of eight or nine children. In 1768, William began selling their property in Virginia, and it was at that time that the family moved to Boones Creek.

It has been said that Bean was a long-hunter who travelled with Daniel Boone, who as we know, had made hunting trips into this area. It was just after the family moved here, that their son, Russell Bean was born (May 1769). It is widely accepted that he was the first white child born within what is now Tennessee.

As you know, though, this series is all about where these early settlers lived—where their land was and sometimes, even where their house was! It was easy enough to find Bean in the county records, and it was easy to find him within the deed records. It was here, though that there was a problem. Our team has looked at Google Earth, topographical maps, the lay of the land, the mouth of Boones Creek, the placement of the Bean marker, and every photo we could find, including some taken by the TVA in 1952. Hours were spent poring over these images, and we looked at every reputable reference we could find. This settler's land proved to be quite difficult to ascertain, but we're very confident with the boundaries shown on the map below. For a larger, more detailed map, go to our website.



North Carolina Land Grant, #951, found in Deed Book 4, page 222, Washington County, Tennessee.

The large red dot shows the approximate, current location of the Bean Historical Marker.

What you first need to remember, is that when Bean moved into this area, there was no Watauga Association—there was no way of recording land entries or deeds. William Bean being the first in the area, simply chose a place to settle and worried about the details later. Taking all this into account, it is with a smile that we tell you that Bean probably did not live on his land. The first land records were not recorded until 1775, at least six years after Bean set up residence. When the deeds were drawn up, the boundaries fell into place with later deeds and the waterways, including the mouth of Boones Creek and the Watauga River. Any of the proposed locations of his cabin, do not fall within the boundaries of his property. At the time of Bean's settlement, who cared? No one. The writer, Samuel Cole Williams gives this description of the location of Bean's cabin in his book, *Dawn of Tennessee Valley and Tennessee History*, written in 1937:

“...[Bean] built his cabin on Boone's Creek about one hundred yards from its junction with Watauga River, where Boone on his trips across the mountains had a hunting camp. The immediate mouth of that creek is a fall. The place was wisely chosen, first by Boone, and then by Bean for his home. His cabin, constructed on the side of a ridge was hidden from any Indians who might pass by canoe along the river. The fall prevented the turning of a canoe out of the river into the creek.”

The two photographs below were a part of the Mary Hardin McCown Collection at ETSU's Archives of Appalachia. Taken in 1951, these two photos both bear an inscription on the back indicating that the red X shows the location of Bean's cabin. A good guess is that when you take into consideration Samuel Cole Williams' statement above concerning the waterfall, one might surmise that the second photo is the more likely spot. The persons in the photos were not identified.



We then looked at the DAR records and the placement of the marker on the banks of what is now Boone Lake. The marker originally was further out, near the waters, prior to the TVA projects. When it was learned that the marker would be in the flooded area, the DAR had it moved further up on the banks of the river, where it remains today. Access is possible, but it is certainly not the easiest marker to locate.



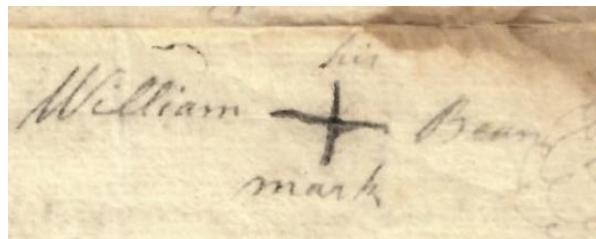
William became active in the Watauga Association and was elected as a commissioner in 1772. In 1776, he signed the petition of Watauga settlers asking to become part of North Carolina. Bean's wife, Lydia, was captured by the Cherokee in July 1776. She was befriended by a Cherokee woman named Nancy Ward. Lydia Bean showed Nancy how to weave fabric and raise cattle.

Sometime around 1775, Bean travelled to present-day Claiborne and Grainger Counties and chose this area as a new home. It became known as "Bean's Station."

By 1780, the county court moved to allow a William Bean to build a mill on Boones Creek. William Bean is mentioned several times in the county minute books, but some of these entries may actually be for the elder Bean's son, who also bore the name, "William."

William Bean's will was written in January 1782 and he died the following May at Bean's Station. Remembering that this area was at the time still a part of Washington County, his will is on file in the Washington County, Tennessee Archives and it was probated here. A transcription follows and a scanned image of the will below the transcription. (Spelling, capitalization inconsistencies, and punctuation were not corrected)

In the name of God, Amen. I, William Beane Sr being in perfect mind and memory and Calling to mind mortality of any one body & nowing (sic) that it is appointed for all men once to Dy (sic) Do make & ordain this to be my Last will & Testament Revokeing (sic) all others by me made. Just Principally and first of all, I give and bequeath my soul to almighty God, relying on his mercy through Christ and my body to the dust from whence it came and as touching my worly (sic) estate Where with it has bin (sic) pleas (sic) God to bless me with in this Life I Give & bequeath in the following manner & form First of all I give and bequeath to my beloved wife, Liddy, one negro girl, named Grace, and all my Horses and Cattle and Hogs and Sheep, and all my Housel (sic) [household] goods, toGether with the Land & mill whare (sic) on I now live, during her natural Life and after her decease, the Land and mill to be given to my beloved son, Russell, & the remainder that is Given to my beloved wife, at her decease to be Equally Divided amongst my surviving children, and all the residue and Remainder of my Estate, real and personal, after my just debts being paid, to be Equally Divided amongst my Surviving Children. Also I leave my sons, William, and Robert, and George, executors of this, my last will.



Signed, Sealed, published, and declared in the presence of us, this 6th January, 1782.

The will is signed by Thomas Hardeman, John Callahan (his mark), and Robert Stone.

The Will of William Bean:

In the name of God amen I William Bean late^r being in
perfect mind and memory and calling to mind mortality of any one
body & noting that it is appointed for all men on this Earth to die &
I do this to be my last will & Testament revoking all others
by me made past Principally and first of all I give & bequeath my
soul to almighty God living & dying through him
the last body to the dust from whence it came & as touching
my worldly Estate where with it has bin please God to bless me with
in this life I give & bequeath in the following manner & form
First of all I give & bequeath to my beloved wife Liddy one negro
girl name Grace and all my Horses & Cattle & Hogs & Sheep & all
my house Goods & Furniture with the Land & mill where on I now
live during her natural life & after her Decease to be given
the Land and mill to be given to my beloved Son Robt &
the remainder that is given to my beloved wife at her Decease
to be Equally Divided amongst my Children & all the Predeces-
sors and remainder of my Estate Real and personal after paying
just Debts being paid to be Equally Divided amongst my
surviving Children also I leave my Sons William and
Robert and George Executors of this my last will

Signed Sealed published and Declared in presence of us the 6th Day of January 1782

Thomas Hudeman
John ^{his} Collahan
Robert Stone

William Bean ^{his} mark