

John and Esther Houston Montgomery (JM/EH) and Their Children in Washington County, Virginia

By John Russell Montgomery

Since 2001, my sister Susan Montgomery Hoffman, cousin Joe Montgomery, and I have researched our Montgomery family history in an effort to determine the ancestor of our John Montgomery who was born on 4 May 1775 in Virginia and who settled in Lawrence County, Alabama about 1820 and where he lived and later died in 1856. Thanks to the history documented in the family book titled *JOHN and ESTHER HOUSTON MONTGOMERY 1719-1973*¹ coupled with several years of intensive research, we were able to piece together the missing links and determine that the father of our John Montgomery was Alexander Montgomery a son of John and Esther Houston Montgomery. This research has now been documented in the book titled *John and Margaret Alexander Montgomery, Pioneers from Virginia to Lawrence County, Alabama (1775 - 1856)*². However, one of the unresolved family mysteries has been trying to determine just where John and Esther lived and died after they transferred their Augusta County, Virginia property to their son James Montgomery in 1779. Both John and Esther were obviously living in 1779 as evidenced by John's signature and Esther's mark on the deed of sale, but no further evidence of John and Esther in Augusta County was found after that date which led us to believe that they disposed of their land and left the area. Then on January 11, 2010, I received a transcribed copy of a document that was left in a collection of loose Montgomery papers (vertical file) at the Historical Society of Washington County Virginia in Abingdon that had a hand-written note scribbled as follows: "Mrs. Moore adds this: In another part of the letter from Aunt Alina Tibbals, she writes that the Samuel Newell ledger record reads thus: '*John Montgomery and his wife Esther Houston Montgomery lived and died in Washington County Virginia*.'" Samuel Newell's wife was Jane Montgomery, a daughter of JM/EH, and they did live in Washington County VA before they moved on to Blount County TN, so Samuel Newell would certainly have been in a position to have known this information. Though it sounded credible, this unverified information about JM/EH still required further research which led me to twice visit Washington County, Virginia.

From Chapters 1 & 2 of the John and Esther Book cited above, there is the following information about the children of John Montgomery and his wife Esther Houston:

1. James, born 1740 in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, and died about 1809, Blount County TN. He married Margaret Weir, daughter of Hugh and Margaret Weir.
2. John (Rev.), born December 5, 1752 in Virginia, died February 10, 1818 in Virginia. He married Agnes Hugart, the daughter of Col. Thomas and Rebecca Estill Hugart.
3. Margaret, born 1754 in Virginia. She married Col. William Edmondson.
4. Esther, born February 27, 1755, died 1807. She married Rev. Samuel Doak on November 30, 1775. He was the son of Samuel and Jane Mitchell Doak.

¹ Anderson, Montgomery, et al, *JOHN and ESTHER HOUSTON MONTGOMERY 1719-1973*, Maryville, TN: Brazos Printing Co., 1974.

² Hoffman, Susan Montgomery, *JOHN AND MARGARET ALEXANDER MONTGOMERY Pioneers from Virginia to Lawrence County, Alabama (1775-1856)*, privately published, 2009.

5. Ann, born August 15, 1756 in Virginia, died March 13, 1829 in Sevier County TN. She married around 1777 John McCroskey.

6. Dorcas, born 1758 in Virginia. She married John Lowry before 1800.

7. Jane (Jean), born September 1763 in Augusta Co. VA, died February 11, 1843 in Owen County, Indiana. She married Samuel Newell, b. Nov. 4, 1754, d. Sept. 21, 1841. He was the son of Samuel Newell Sr. and his wife Mrs. Elizabeth Colville Black.

8. Robert, born 1764, Augusta County, VA and died in 1813 in Washington Co. VA [note: this birthdate does not appear to be correct as Robert is known to have settled on property in Wash. Co. VA in 1769 when he likely would have been about 21 years old; a birthdate of 1748 would appear to be more correct]. He married Sarah Colville in 1784, the daughter of Andrew Colville and his wife Mary Craig.

9. Alexander, b. 1767, died 1815. [note: the preceding birth/death date for Alexander is incorrect. The authors of the John and Esther Book admittedly had very little information about Alexander. In her research/book, Susan Montgomery Hoffman notes that Alexander Montgomery was born about 1750 and married Sarah Alexander in Augusta County, Virginia about 1772; their son John has an exact birthdate of 4 May 1775; Alexander and his wife Sarah died on 13 July 1830 and 8 May 1832 respectively in Limestone County, Alabama].

10. Isabella, b. ?, died 1792 in Rockbridge Co. VA. She married Capt. William Buchanan on January 24, 1764 in Augusta Co. VA and lived on Walker's Creek at the original home place of James Buchanan and Martha Allison.

Alexander Montgomery's precinct of the 1782 Tax List for Washington County, Virginia has 5 children of John and Esther Houston Montgomery: Alexander Montgomery (wife is Sarah Alexander) who is the precinct captain, Robert Montgomery (wife is Sarah Colville), Dorcas Lowry (wife of Capt. John Lowry), Mary Edmondson (wife of Lt. Robert Edmondson, deceased), and Ann McCroskey (wife of John McCroskey). A John Montgomery, Sr. (wife is likely Esther Houston), is also listed as a taxable in Alexander's precinct and he is believed to be their father. Hugh Weir, the brother of Margaret Weir who was the wife of James Montgomery and another son of JM/EH, is also listed. The Samuel and Robert Hueston [Houston] who are listed were likely close relatives of these Montgomery siblings through their mother Esther Houston. Alexander Montgomery was not listed as a taxable per se in his own precinct that year because he had already sold his property to George Masoner and was likely living with one of his siblings at the time of the 1782 tax list. The next year (1783) Alexander Montgomery and his brother James were found residing in Greene County, NC [now Greene County, TN] close to their sister Esther and her husband Rev. Samuel Doak.

Mary [Montgomery] Edmondson had been overlooked and had not previously been identified as a daughter of John and Esther by previous historians of this Montgomery family. However, her family identity has now been revealed through the information contained in the will of her husband, Robert Edmondson. Robert Edmondson wrote his last will and testament in Washington County, Virginia on 23 March 1779 prior to his death on October 7, 1780 at the Battle of Kings Mountain. In his will he mentioned his wife Mary and also named his brother-in-law Alexander Montgomery and his brothers William and Samuel [Edmiston/Edmondson] as the executors of his estate. Witnesses to the will were his wife's cousin, James Houston, and his brother-in-laws John McCroskey and Robert Montgomery.

James Houston was a son of Samuel Houston (wife Elizabeth McCroskey) and Samuel was a brother of Esther Houston Montgomery thus making James Houston a 1st cousin to the 5 Montgomery siblings previously discussed as being listed in Alexander Montgomery's precinct on the 1782 Washington County VA tax list. From the Major James Houston Bible, printed 1803, we learn that James Houston was born 11 Nov. 1757 in Rockbridge Co. VA and served as Ensign under Colonel Isaac Shelby at the Battle of Kings Mountain. He 1st married his first cousin, Esther Houston, daughter of Matthew Houston on November 3, 1780. In 1784, he moved with his family to Blount County, TN [then it was Knox County] where he acquired a large estate six miles south of Maryville [not then established] where he built a home later known as "Houston's Station". He 2nd married Polly Gillespie on October 10, 1791. He died on Mar 22, 1840 in Maryville, Blount Co. TN and is buried in the New Providence Cemetery, Blount County, TN.

Margaret Montgomery, another daughter of JM/EH, married Maj. William Edmiston, the brother of Robert Edmondson (note: William spelled his last name Edmiston, whereas his brother Robert spelled his last named Edmondson). Therefore, it is now clear that two Montgomery sisters married two Edmiston/Edmondson brothers in Augusta County VA and they were among the early settlers to move to Washington County VA.

According to *The Historical Society Washington County Publication Series II*³, John Edmiston [Edmondson] of Augusta County, Virginia was the father of (Col.) William, Robert, Samuel, and Elizabeth Edmondson (wife of Capt. William Edmondson). From the book titled *NEW PROVIDENCE CHURCH, A History 1746-1966*⁴ by Katharine L. Brown we learn that John Edmiston, William Edmiston, John Montgomery, and John Houston were among the names of the New Providence Presbyterian Church members who in 1754 and 1755 signed the call and pledged to pay the salary of Rev. John Brown, their first minister. Katharine Brown's book further states that John and William Edmiston were two of the members who had proved their own importation in 1740 from Ireland in order to qualify for the grant of fifty acres head right granted by the colony to each immigrant who paid his passage, and the same for each member of his household for whom he paid passage. In *Chronicles of Scotch-Irish Settlement in Virginia*⁵, there is this entry from the years 1751-1752: "Petition for road from Joseph Kennedy's Mill to John Huston's and from John Huston's to the great road from Timber Grove to Wood's Gap:..... John Edenston [Edmiston], ... John Huston [Houston], Samuel Huston [Houston], Robert Alexander, Patrick Hays, John Mountgomery [Montgomery], Andrew Steel, and John Steward." It is apparent that John Edmiston and John Montgomery were contemporaries and lived close to each other in the Borden Tract of Augusta County, Virginia and both the Montgomery and Edmiston [Edmondson] families were founding members of the New Providence Presbyterian Church. From this close association of the Edmiston and Montgomery families in Augusta Co. Virginia, we can easily see how the Edmiston brothers (William and Robert) came to know and then marry two daughters (Mary and Margaret) of John and Esther Houston Montgomery.

According to a March 23, 1980 Bristol Herald Courier newspaper article titled "*Edmondson Family Name Holds Unique Place Among Early Settlers of Area*"⁶ (by noted Washington

³ *The Historical Society Washington County Publication Series II*, No. 16, pg. 14

⁴ Brown, Katharine L., *New Providence Church, A History 1746-1966*, The News-Gazette, Lexington, VA, 1996.

⁵ Chalkley, Lyman, *Chronicles of the Scotch-Irish Settlement in Virginia*, Vol I, The Commonwealth Printing Company, Rosslyn, VA, Vol. I, pg. 437.

⁶ Bristol Herald Courier, Bristol, TN, "Edmondson Family Name Holds Unique Place Among Early Settlers of Area", Gordon Aronhime, March 23, 1980.

County genealogist Gordon Aronhime), Robert Edmondson settled on his property near the South Fork of the Holston River in Washington Co. VA in 1763 which gives him the unique distinction of being the first of the early settlers in this particular area. This occurred because Robert Edmondson served as a soldier in the campaign of Col. William Bird against the Cherokees in 1761 during the French and Indian War and in this campaign, came into this area for several months. It was then that he decided to select his tract of land, knowing, as did almost everyone that at the close of the war, land would be given as a bounty warrant.

Robert Montgomery acquired his 1st parcel of property, 300 acres, in 1769 near the South Fork of the Holston River, Washington County, Virginia adjacent to his sister Mary and her husband, Robert Edmondson. This property was surveyed on 22 Dec. 1782.

Robert Montgomery later acquired a 2nd parcel of land totaling 80 acres was that was immediately adjacent to the 1st parcel. According to the survey dated 22 Dec. 1782, the following description is provided: "adjoining land he now lives....and on a branch of the South Fork of the Holston River". The survey document also records that Robert Montgomery acquired this 80 acres as the assignee of John Montgomery by virtue of Virginia Treasury Warrant No. 8187 dated 2nd Feb. 1782. After Robert acquired the title to the 80 acres, he then had a total of 380 acres all located immediately adjacent to the property owned by his brother-in-law Robert Edmondson. However, the 80 acre tract had actually belonged to his brother Alexander Montgomery who had already sold (or agreed to sell) it to George Masoner of Maryland. Robert Montgomery had the 80 acre tract surveyed and titled to himself since Alexander had left the area and gone to Tennessee so that he (Robert) could then provide a "proper title" for the tract to George Masoner in order to complete the sale. Here is the sequence of transaction events involving the sale of Robert Montgomery's 300 acres and Alexander's 80 acres located on the South Fork of the Holston River in Washington Co. VA:

On 12 September 1788 George Masoner of Maryland [spelled Masoner or Mesoner or Massoner] gave his power of attorney to Adam Kerr "my true & lawful attorney to recover of Robert Montgomery a proper right for land which I bought of Alexander Montgomery".

On 13 Dec 1788, Robert Montgomery sold 240 acres between the Middle and South Forks of the Holston River to his father-in-law Andrew Colville for £150,. (WCVA DB 1, 103.) (Lewis Preston Summers, "Brief of Deeds--Washington County Record of Deeds No. 1" in *Annals of Southwest Virginia: 1769-1800*, p 1283.) By subtracting this 240 acres from the 380, Robert Montgomery was left with a balance of 140 acres in the area near the South Fork of the Holston River.

On 10 Feb 1789, Robert Montgomery deeded 140 acres of land located on the north side of the South Fork of Holston River (Wash. Co VA Deeds Book 1) for £85 to Adam Kerr, attorney for George Masoner of Frederick County, Maryland. This deed for 140 acres included the 80 acre tract which Alexander Montgomery had previously sold to George Masoner for which Masoner sought [and herewith obtained] "a proper right for the land [80 acres] which Masoner had bought from Alexander Montgomery". In this 140 acre transaction, Robert Montgomery also sold the remaining 60 acres he had remaining in that area to Masoner. Thus having disposed of all his property along the South Fork of the Holston River, Robert Montgomery and his wife Sarah then moved near Abingdon and lived on property located on Wolf Creek that Robert had acquired from Sarah's father, Andrew Colville.

Robert Montgomery later acquired a 3rd parcel of land totaling 520 acres in Washington Co. VA by again using Virginia Treasury Warrant #8187, dated 2 Feb. 1782, as the assignee of John Montgomery. This property was located in the Speaks Chapel area in what is today part of Lee County, VA and was surveyed on 6 Nov. 1783. On 27 January 1795, Robert Montgomery and his wife Sarah sold this land which had fallen into Lee County, VA in 1793 to Charles "Cummins" for 100 pounds. Cummings was a popular minister at Abingdon and Glade Spring who invested in several properties at various places. His home was located above the Andrew Colville land and the Robert Montgomery land on Wolf Creek in Abingdon, Virginia.

The location where Robert Montgomery owned property along the South Fork of the Holston River in Washington Co. VA adjacent to Robert Edmondson is outlined on a 1980 map prepared by Gordon Aronhime.

Robert Edmondson^{6,7} served as the Lieutenant under his brother-in-law, Captain William Edmondson and his brother, Major William Edmiston [Edmondson] at the Battle of Kings Mountain on October 7, 1780 when he was killed. His brother-in-law Alexander Montgomery served in Captain David Beattie's company during that battle according to the research/book published by Susan Montgomery Hoffman as previously cited. Mary Montgomery Edmondson, widow of Lt. Robert Edmondson, 2nd married David Lowry and they are buried next to each other in the Green Spring Presbyterian Church Cemetery in Washington County VA. Their tombstones read as follows: David Lowry, d. 11 Dec 1828, age 74y; Mary Lowry, d. 26 Jan 1825, age 80y. Robert Edmondson and his wife Mary Montgomery had no children and neither did Mary and David Lowry.

By 1796 when Tennessee became a State, siblings Alexander Montgomery, James Montgomery, and Ann Montgomery (husband John McCroskey) were all residents of Blount County, Tennessee. Dorcas Montgomery (husband John Lowry), Mary Montgomery (husband David Lowry), Robert Montgomery (wife Sarah Colville), and Margaret Montgomery (William Edmiston) all lived out their lives in Washington County, Virginia. Two other Montgomery siblings, Jean Montgomery (husband Samuel Newell) and Esther Montgomery (husband Rev. Samuel Doak) also came to Washington County, VA for a time before moving on to Tennessee as well.

It appears that John Montgomery and his wife Esther Houston accompanied 9 of their 11 children to Washington Co., Virginia sometime about the year 1779, the year when they deeded their Augusta County VA property to their son James. James then turned around and sold the same property in 1780 and so they likely were disposing of their Augusta Co. property preparing to leave the area. It now makes perfect sense to find John Montgomery, Sr. also listed in Alexander Montgomery's 1782 Washington Co. VA tax precinct living in close proximity to 5 of his children as a family group. But even though John and Esther were likely there in 1782, no record of their death or burial in Washington Co. Virginia has been found to confirm Samuel Newell's ledger entry that they lived and died there. But that is not too surprising since so many of the tombstones in the old cemeteries are either completely missing or are so weathered that all the writing is now illegible.

⁷ Draper, Lyman C., *King's Mountain And Its Heroes: History Of The Battle of King's Mountain, 1780, And The Events Which Led To It*, pgs. 304 & 407, Peter G. Thomson, Publisher, Cincinnati, 1881

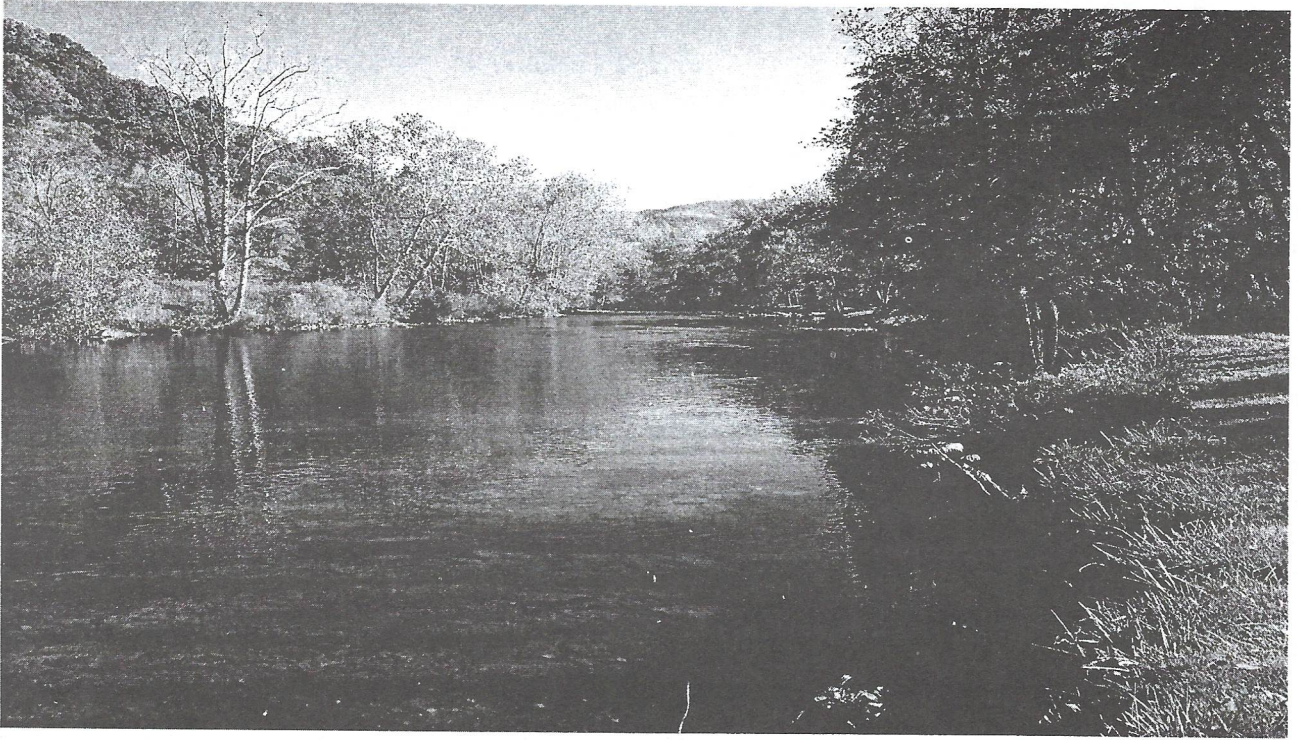


Figure 1. South Fork of the Holston River in Washington County, Virginia bordering properties owned by Alexander Montgomery, Robert Montgomery, and Robert Edmondson. Photo taken by J. Russell Montgomery on Oct. 20, 2013.



Figure 2. Alexander Montgomery's 1782 property in Wash. Co. VA. Photo by J. Russell Montgomery on Oct. 20, 2013