THE HYRES OF WEST VIRGINIA
Ellis Summers Hyer around 1879.
The Hyres of West Virginia

An account of the Hyre or Hyer families, descended from Lienert the Immigrant, who settled as pioneers in Grant, Upshur, Jackson, and Braxton counties, West Virginia.

by

ROBERT EDWARD SWISHER

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The reader should know at the outset what this book is not, rather than what it is. It is not a comprehensive genealogy of the Hyre family. Rather, it is an account, composed mainly from public records and various lesser-known printed sources, of the early generations of the family in West Virginia.

It is the author's hope that some family members will be moved by this work to use surviving records to compile genealogies of their particular branches of the Hyre family. Included in the bibliography are references to some sources for beginning genealogical research in West Virginia. In addition to these and other sources, interested readers should be aware of the genealogical library of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This library maintains branches at many Mormon churches throughout the country, where duplicates are to be found of the card catalogue of the main library at Salt Lake City. Microfilm can be ordered for inspection at any branch—a great help for those who find it inconvenient to travel.

A word about coat armor—To be entitled to use a coat of arms today one must be descended from a person who was granted a coat of arms. Merely to have the same surname as one who bore coat armor is not enough under the rules of heraldry. It seems unlikely that any of our Heyer ancestors was granted a coat of arms, as the family in Europe were of the landless agricultural class.

Several people rendered invaluable help in preparing the manuscript for this book. I would like to thank Messrs. Bruce
Hyer, Wayne Hyre, and Winton Hyre of Petersburg, West Virginia; Mr. French M. Hyre of Chevy Chase, Maryland; and of Richmond, Virginia Mrs. Eve L. Miller, Mr. John D. Neville, and Miss Ann C. Miller. I especially want to thank my brother Mr. Thomas R. Swisher of Worthington, Ohio for editing the manuscript.

Richmond, Virginia
January 1976

The Shaver log house near Flatwoods, West Virginia. Hopefully this Braxton County landmark will continue to grace the landscape.
And it came to pass, when the people removed from their tents, to pass over Jordan, and the priests bearing the ark of the covenant before the people

Joshua 3:14
Chapter 1
OUT OF THE RHINELANDS

The story of the Hyre family of West Virginia begins in the village of Benken in the Swiss canton of Basel, in the upper valley of the Rhine River. This and other facts from records preserved at the State Archives of Basel, Switzerland enable one to reconstruct something of the lives of the Heyers in Europe. In 1736 Lienert Heyer and his family and most of the other country people around them lived in serfdom. During that year a group of men met at the house of sub-tenant Heyer to discuss their plight and consider the possibility of improving their lot in Pennsylvania. Those at the meetings were Lienert Heyer, his brother, and Anthon Rueger of Benken, plus Jacob Küntzlin, a carpenter, and Hans Kapp, a wagon-maker from Münchenstein.

The Protestant northern Swiss cantons of Basel, Bern, and Zürich were losing manpower rapidly to America, and emigration was considered at that time virtually as a crime by the authorities—a shirking of one's duty to the fatherland. The meetings at Heyer’s house thus were seen as a plot by the local Council, and the obervögt (bailiff) for the district of Münchenstein was ordered to look into the matter. From his report of September 4, 1736, we learn the details of the beginnings of this tale of emigration.

The men at Heyer’s house had been encouraged about America by a letter sent from Carolina praising the fruitfulness and opportunity of that place. The letter had been written in 1733 by Antony Gondy and probably was passed around secretly before it found its way to Biel-Benken through a man.
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from Grenzach across the Rhine. Such favorable letters about the new land encouraged emigration and naturally were irritating to the Swiss authorities. When found they either were destroyed or were confiscated and held in the archives. Therefore, they often were smuggled in, concealed in such places as the false bottoms of wooden drinking vessels. The Gondy letter was discovered and put in the Basel Archives. Thus, this interesting letter describing life in the backcountry of eighteenth-century South Carolina has come down to us. Written in an eighteenth-century Swiss-German dialect, it is published here in English for the first time.⁶

Charleston, May 28, 1733

Dear Brother,

I did not want to neglect to report to you about our condition and life in Carolina because Rev. J. Bugnon departed towards Purisburg [Perrysburgh] where he has become Pastor and he has solemnly promised me to send my letter with his to England and to see to it that it will be sent to Switzerland. I have wanted to report that we were among the 170 persons who by God's providence landed happy and healthy after 11 weeks at sea. The people in Virginia have been very kind to us and have received us with marvelous hospitality. From there we came to Purisburg where we were treated in the same way and were put up for 6 weeks free and where cousin Marianne married a man worth 50,000 dollars, who was a widower and had one child by his first wife. He has assigned everything he owns to her; he is from Pfalz, born in Speyer; his name is Thomas Baumgartner. We were at the wedding and enjoyed ourselves greatly and my new cousin gave me 8 horses for the trip. From there we came to Charleston where we were again put up free as in Purisburg; from there the commissioner led us to Savannah, which has a large river filled with fish 8 hours from the ocean reckoned according to Swiss hours, where we have built our cabins and where each man and woman received 50 acres of good land. Everywhere the soil is exceedingly fat and fertile, nobody works on the land longer than two months; the rest of time one can fish or hunt. Indians live near us; they are the best
people, except that we cannot speak with them, but have to nod and point to one another. They go around half naked and only have an animal skin around their loins. They only fish and hunt, they know no other work and like to do nothing else. We have been able to marry off all our 13 single girls so that they are well taken care of; back home they would not have been so lucky. Our children have gotten so used to this country as if they had been born here, because the air is so healthy but it is hot the whole year long as in Lausanne in August. We hardly know what winter is. When we have winter there is one cold month, dew and rain only at night. As soon as day comes it is warm again. Also there are countless large beautiful trees in the forests. Oak trees of ten shoe lengths in diameter and more bearing so many acorns that the tame and wild pigs have no lack of food in summer or winter. In summer and winter one lets his stock roam around as game; this land is truly an earthly paradise—one has everything he wants in abundant supply. Since the Swiss have settled here there is cheese and butter as were not previously to be had. In different places they have also planted grapes which give good wine, only they do not have the casks and wine presses as in Europe. Therefore when our neighbors from Morges, St. Nyon, St. Pre, Etoy, Anbronne and Roll want to come to us, they should bring coopers along and people of all skills as they can, who will then become happy and rich in this land of Canaan. We have huge forests of 8 to 10 days length and breadth where wild animals swarm like ants. Cousin Albert and I once went hunting with the Indians to see how they shoot game with their bows and arrows. It is a curious thing. Only we managed to get lost on the way home; we would have had to stay with the wild animals in the forest had not one of the Indians found the way that we had come. There were amazingly large cypress trees, nut trees, chestnut, lemon and lime trees, orange, pomegranate, date, jujubes and thousands of others of all types and fruits, herbs and roots. If one of our doctors came here, he could discover herbs of all different kinds, because there are herbs of very precious smell. We have what we want except for the wine which is sent over from England and Spain which costs four Swiss Batzen [a coin] a measure. Otherwise it is like being in an earthly paradise. There are a thousand different birds of all species and colors, red, white, large parrots and smaller ones, and one kind unknown to Europe that is green and has a puros [?] gold mixed in
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with the green, whose name nobody knows [parakeet?]. The Indians call it pitivaor. They sing so enchantingly like a musical instrument, especially like a small Dousse [hard, dark wood?] flute. It is impossible for me to describe the loveliness and charm of the country, and unless you have seen it yourself you cannot believe it. I also would not have believed it had I not seen it, for I am like a doubting Thomas. What I have heard about this country in Switzerland I held to be a fable, but now everything is lovelier, better and more beautiful than one can describe. The Europeans have about 3 to 400 chickens, geese, ducks and pigs, about 6 to 700, 200 cows, 400 horses. In total it is unbelievable; on account of this request all our good friends and relatives who are not well off that they should certainly come to us. They will thank me. The sea journey is not as dangerous as we were made to believe, but it is good if many come together—the costs are less, and it is also good if all different kinds of tradesmen come along, who do best of all. You earn what you want, especially smiths, wagoners, carpenters, masons, potters, ropemakers, cabinet makers, linen weavers, who also will want to be able to weave cloths because of the overabundance of cotton, and all poor women should also strive to do so with scant means if they come virtuously and understandingly to America. Everything will go well where all can make their fortune because one looks after money as in Switzerland. Dear Brother, I am sure that this letter seems to be a veritable fable, but I would be ashamed if a single word was said without the basis of truth. I await you and your whole family. My greetings to you, your wife, dearest children and friends; a thousand times over to all of you the most high protection.

Antony Gondy

The Benken group all were disposed greatly to any likely solution to their problems. In Basel the few patrician families who comprised the ruling class recently had borne down even more heavily upon the poor country folk, depriving them of all possibility of rising above their wretched economic condition. Of the restrictions and burdens of an irksome nature:

... To mention only the principal ones, the tithes and the extent to which they were exacted, the ‘Fronungen,’ statute-labors and their
frequent occurrence, the inability to dispose of property, especially of real estate, which as a rule could only be done at a 'Gant,' a public sale, and with the consent of the government, and finally, if they wished to escape all these things, the obstacles put in the way of emigration.

For a number of reasons it had lately become more difficult for the subject population to find their sustenance. The population had much increased, the best estates were being bought up by citizens of the city, the rate of interest was raised to no less than 5 percent and the peasants did not avail themselves as much of the help of the day-laborers as formerly on account of the hard times.

The Commission on Emigration says in its report of March 15, 1738, that the population of most villages had increased by one third or even by one half or more, during the last 30 or 40 years.

As for the purchases of the best estates by citizens of the city, the Commission calls it in its report just cited the principal evil by which the subjects are deprived of their sustenance, because the purchasers eventually made one estate, on which one or no subject could sustain himself, out of many, on which ten peasants might have found their sustenance.

The higher rate of interest was fixed by the mandate of Jan. 10, 1735, which renewed former ordinances, that had become obsolete in practice, and forbade any regard for the debtor. Nobody should lend money to a subject or 'Hindersäss,' tenant or subtenant, at a rate of interest of less than 5 percent nor take less under the pretext of a voluntary gift, nor refund the interest received to the debtor, nor do anything else by which the rate might become less than 5 percent. . . . This draconic measure affected all, because all were carrying more or less heavy debts, but most of all the day-laborer because the peasants availed themselves less of his aid in order to meet as far as possible their higher expenses resulting from the mandate. Not a few turned to the trade of weaving and especially lace-making, but since the supply soon exceeded the demand, their wages were cut and no longer afforded them sufficient sustenance.
Of the neighbors at Lienert Heyer’s the carpenter and the wagon-maker complained of growing competition in their trades. All five agreed that their heavy debts and the five percent interest they had to pay as a result of the mandate of January 10, 1735 combined with their tithes of grain and wine made it impossible to sustain themselves any longer in their homeland.

Jacob Küntzlin and Hans Kapp gave up the thought of emigration for the time (they did leave three years later). Lienert Heyer and Anthon Rueger, however, actively pushed their preparations and, despite the official obstacles, succeeded in obtaining the consent of the government. They claimed to have friends in the vicinity of Mannheim in the Palatinate and, they told the authorities, if they did not find their fortunes there they would seek them in another country. Heyer and Rueger paid manumission fees for the freedom of the adults in their families and the emigrants’ taxes on their property. If, as they had told the Swiss authorities they would do, the two looked into opportunities in the Mannheim area, they didn’t look for long, as they sailed for America two to three months after they were recorded last in Benken.

Probably kin to Lienert were Ulrich, Burkart, and Hans Ulrich Heyer who left Benken to emigrate in 1772, thirty-five years after Lienert Heyer had left. A fellow emigrant wrote back in 1774 to say that Hans Ulrich, his wife Anna Dietrich, and their five children all died on the ocean voyage. This information is corroborated by a notation of 1828 in the Records of the Small Council which says that the family had never been heard from. Ulrich must have died at sea too, for Burkart Heyer is the only man of that surname recorded as having disembarked from the Sally at Philadelphia in 1772.

The large families of Lienert Heyer and Anthon Rueger most likely boarded a Rhine boat near the city of Basel to begin their journey to America. Their first destination would have been
Rotterdam, the port at the mouth of the Rhine and the point of embarkation for most Rhenish emigrants. From Rotterdam the two families sailed in the ship Virtuous Grace to Cowes on the Isle of Wight. Trade with the colonies in America had to be conducted in English bottoms. Moreover, to enforce the trade monopoly, English law required ships bound for America first to put in at an English port for customs inspection. Thus, the Heyers and Ruegers sailed in an English ship which put in at Cowes only a few days or weeks out of Rotterdam. At Cowes, the ship was passed through, its supplies replenished, and the small vessel generally made ready for the hard ocean voyage ahead. These preparations, together with the time spent waiting for a favorable wind, could put the stay on the island off the English coast up to several weeks. It was during this time on the Isle of Wight that the Heyers’ two-year-old daughter Clara died of smallpox.\footnote{11}

From Cowes the Virtuous Grace set out for Pennsylvania, the destination for most German and Swiss emigrants. Traveling with Lienert were his wife Clara, their children, and Clara’s father Rudolph Lützler. With Anton Rueger were his five children and his second wife Barbara, plus three of her children from her earlier marriage to Jacob Schaub, and her mother Elsbeth Scholerin. Two of the Schaub (Shobe) boys, Martin and Jacob, would marry two of Lienert Heyer’s daughters and settle with Heyer on the South Branch of the Potomac. The ship landed at Philadelphia on September 24, 1737. Soon thereafter the men signed the required oath of allegiance to the British Crown and the oath called “Declaration of Fidelity and Abjuration.”\footnote{12}

The two families first settled in Tulpehocken Township, Berks County, Pennsylvania as in 1739 Lienert Heyer wrote from “Dolben Hagen” where he and Anthon Rueger then were living. Heyer related that his youngest son Hans* Ulrich had died in America but that another child, Antoni, had been born.
The letter, sent to people in Switzerland, is now in the archives at Basel. On July 3, 1743 Barbara Heyer was married to Jacob Schaub in Tulpehocken.

Southeastern Pennsylvania was filling up then with new immigrants and sometime between 1743 and 1750 the families from Benken joined the overflow of German-speaking and Scotch-Irish settlers who took the Great Wagon Road in search of new lands in the backcountry of Maryland and Virginia. The road led from Philadelphia to York and down through western Maryland where it crossed the Potomac River at the place where Williamsport, Maryland now is located. The road eventually extended southward through Fincastle, Virginia and Salem and Charlotte, North Carolina, all the way to Augusta, Georgia. Probably after crossing the Potomac the Heyer, Rueger, and Schaub families left the Great Wagon Road and made their way along the Indian warrior path which threaded up the great valley of the South Branch of the Potomac. Along that stream, in what is now the eastern panhandle of West Virginia, the Heyer and Schaub families came upon a wide stretch of bottom land which they found to their liking. There they settled to make their homes. Anthon Rueger settled on the South Fork, a tributary of the South Branch.

NOTES TO CHAPTER I

1. This is not to be confused with the town of Benken in the canton of Zürich.


3. Lienert Heyer was referred to as the lehnsmann, which translates to sub-tenant, in the September 4, 1736 report of the bailiff.

4. The church in that canton was the Reformed Church.
5. This report is among the documents in the collection called *Auswanderung A* (Emigration A) at the State Archives of Basel.


8. This information, dated May 11, 1737, is from *Finanz-Acien F* (Revenue Records F) in the Basel archives.

9. This information is from the *Manumissionsprotokoll* (Manumission Register) in the Basel archives.

10. This letter by Hans Plattner is among the documents in the collection called *Auswanderung A* (Emigration A) at the Basel archives.

11. This and a few facts about the family in America are known through a letter written by Lienert Heyer two years after his emigration. This letter is in the Basel archives, *Ratsprotokolle* (Records of the Small Council), entered into record August 7, 1756.


13. The letter was entered into the *Ratsprotokolle* (Records of the Small Council) on August 7, 1756.
And Abram went up out of Egypt, he, and his wife, and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the south.

GENESIS 13:1
Chapter II

"... INTO THE LAND OF CANAAN"

The river plain chosen by the Heyer and Schaub families was one of the best pieces of land in its area. Petersburg, the Grant County seat, is today across the South Branch River from that land. When the Heyers settled there, and up until 1753, it was part of a vast Augusta County. From 1753 to 1785 it was the western part of Hampshire County. The area was part of Hardy County from 1785 until 1866 when Grant County was formed. The South Branch Valley lies roughly between the Shenandoah Mountains to the east and the more formidable Allegheny range to the west. It was one of the earliest settled parts of the Mountain State, and the Hyres and others who came as pioneers to the South Branch are thus among the oldest families of West Virginia.

The two families had come to Virginia by 1750 when Lienert Heyer and Lienert Heyer, Jr. were added to the list of tithables in Augusta County. That same year newly arrived immigrant Jacob Pfau wrote of Lienert Heyer's presence in Virginia (see p. 23). About five years earlier the frontier had reached the area of present-day Petersburg. The frontier was an imaginary line, to the east of which lay established settlements, and to the west of which was the wilderness and the Indians. Newcomers looking to establish farms normally settled just over the frontier where unclaimed land was to be had but where they were not too far beyond established white communities and help in case of Indian trouble.

In his diary kept in 1748 while surveying for Lord Fairfax young George Washington noted the presence of "Dutch"-
speaking people in the South Branch Valley. Daniel Dulany wrote to Maryland Governor Ogle in 1745:

You would be surprised to see how much the country is improved beyond the mountains, especially by the Germans, who are the best people that can be to settle a wilderness; and the fertility of the soil makes them ample amends for their industry.¹

In 1746 commissioners of the British Board of Trade confirmed the title of Thomas Lord Fairfax to six million acres of Virginia land claimed by virtue of Fairfax’s inheritance of an old royal grant. Lienert Heyer’s farm lay within the 55,000 acre South Branch Manor of the Fairfax Proprietary. People living in the Proprietary paid annual quitrents to Lord Fairfax rather than taxes to the colony. This arrangement lasted until the Revolutionary War. After the war the dispensation of royalist Fairfax’s lands was confused and brought on a torrent of law suits which persisted a generation.

The woeful tale of immigration which follows is published here in English for the first time. The letter, unsigned but written by Jacob Pfau of Benken, mentions a Liene and a Rudi who lived in the backcountry of Virginia. Albert Faust believed that Pfau was referring to fellow Benken natives Lienert and Rudolph Heyer:

**Anno 1750, the 17th day of September**

My warm greetings to you, my dear father, brothers, sisters, brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law as well as to my godparents and our friends and also to the headmaster of the parochial school and also to all our neighbors, Mr. Jäger from Ulm [?] as well as the gentleman from Neuwied and my good people in Basel, and also to the doctor from Neuwied, who said that I would never make it to this country. But the Lord God was so benevolent that he has led me fresh and healthy with my family into this good land. I thank him day and night that he has led me from the yoke of the cross. I wish that all of you, my friends, were with me, especially
my dear brother, because I think of how things go so badly for him since his craft is not profitable; but this is a land so rich that iron is not very expensive, wood costs little or almost nothing, and the work would be so much better rewarded that it is a place for you. Brother, I wish you were with me; if you want to come, bring the locksmith and smith tools which you cannot make yourself, bring also as many household items as you can, for it takes a long time to purchase things here, take also much to eat and drink—you will not get provisions or anything on the sea; it costs the same whether you have a little or a lot of household goods. My brother-in-law Ludig [Ludwig] would also be as well off as you and I here as an innkeeper, for there is no German innkeeper; there are many Germans around the city and it would be good if he wants to come for him to bring along a large vat to make his own beer and brandy and also a lot of utensils for an inn [leinwat?], metal [zinc] utensils and tea and coffee utensils, no cooking [gekocht = gekochten?] things. It would be wonderful for you with me, Ludig. I wish my sister Dorde were with me as well as my dear old father—he would not have any troubles, hunger or need with me. I wish he were with me; he would not be allowed to do any work. I would tend to his horse if he wished. I have had two horses all along, a mare and a filly, and four cows. My wife and I do not walk more than two miles any more. I have written part of this letter at home and part in Philadelphia because I went there with the German shoemaker who lives near me. Back home there is only one other German in the city, a young saddler; he is from Zurich, the shoemaker from Berne and I from Basel. I bought English men's and women's saddles for more than three hundred German guilders, a red, green, and blue plush cloth [?] as well as silk for two guilders a pound, but no [leim?] or leather that I can get at home. I wish my dear brother-in-law from Neuenburg were here; he would have enough work as I, even if my brother-in-law Hans Rüger and my step brother Jacob Pfauw come, they would have more than at home—a good wage which... they... near by me, in Pennsylvania everything is overcrowded... as in Germany and many people are moving to us in Virginia or in Carolina—657 miles away. They like it very well there. I have also bought 300 pounds of [alum] because I buy a lot of skins and tan them because they are inferior [?] and the leather and the work is expensive; the skins are not worth more than the meat per pound;
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splits and meat do not cost more than three kreuzers . . . a day does not go by without meat, fresh butter, cheese or a good wheat bread. Thank God, we live without hunger or care or need; people bring the work and pay to me. I think you will all come here together within a year, if I can I will get a place for Heinrich and Ludwig and Friedrich from Neuenburg here. Several people have asked and said to me I should write again to see if these letters are useful or not. Nobody needs any letter from the authorities or from the pastor if he does not want; the baptismal certificate is enough for the children when they have to earn their passage. Many move from house, farm and land and leave everything and come to this country. I thank God day and night that he has brought me from misery to this good land and security. For the journey I was on the Rhine ship to Holland and then I was alone and separated from my countrymen with my belongings in London. I stayed three weeks in England waiting for a ship; I did not pay more than 12 dubloons for 2 fares, then we finally got on the ship with tears in our eyes. We were 18 passengers and 15 children who went free. We were 8 weeks in the . . . waiting for good wind. As we got on the ship Master Abraham, my dear son, got sick and first got a fit [?], fortunately he recovered from it, then the other children got it and, thank God, they all recovered healthy and happily, lastly our Magdalena got (tipsy) and then gloomy and . . . and then passed away to the Lord on St. Bartholomew’s day and was buried on this day. The ship’s captain said we should bury her on that day because he hoped for good wind in the morning and if we did not bury her that day she would have to be buried at sea; on the next day we sailed and got good wind and did not see land any longer and spent 9 weeks on the seas, so that we could see no land and were 14 days in this channel and arrived approximately 4 weeks before Christmas and got to Maryland where there were no Germans and my wife was very sick and my companions left me behind and went to Monagiss to German people. The children and I were, thanks to God, hale and hardy and enjoyed the ship greatly, but little angel Katherine Elizabeth was lost without pain and the . . . were so good to us that they took us in and everyone in the vicinity took care of us; they took care of my sick wife . . . and then she was healthy and refreshed again and then in the spring I left and traveled 300 miles to the place [brántz —Prince?, a city or town?] and saw my people who helped me pay
the passage. The ship was there the whole winter and I found them all in peace and thank God in a good . . . Also Liene sent Rudi, who was sent with four horses to pick up my wife, children and belongings; he was with 4 horses for 5 weeks away from home and led me to Frederickstown in Virginia [Frederick, Md.]. They live 80 miles further back in the country than I. You are all commended to God by us, you poor people.

If my brothers-in-law come, they can bring me a lot of ticking, linen cloth, fine cotton cloth as well as red, blue and green plush, several pounds of yarn of all colors, silk and many small iron nails of all kinds, and many brass nails, a few bits and halters for taming. I have written you the truth. A poor man can get something if he wants to make a home here and is willing to work. There is many a rich man in this country who had to borrow his passage.

This letter to go to Master Hans and Heinrich Pfauw, smiths in Biel-Benken, to be delivered to Basel, Switzerland.

In Benken, Switzerland Ulrich Heyer told the authorities around 1772 that some of his relatives in America were in good circumstances. By 1786 Leonard Hyre II’s grange had all the fittings of a successful and self-sufficient family farm. After Leonard’s death that year a sale of his effects was held and the appraisement of his estate and the inventory of the sale, documents which are in the Hardy County records, list some of his possessions. Included are various farm animals and implements, one windmill, eight beehives, cooper and shoemaker tools, and two stills. There are also sundry kitchen utensils, spinning and weaving equipment, four basins, one spoonmold, wooden dishes, one pewter dish, and one pewter tankard. His pewter was valued at £1/10/0. Included too are a candlestick, various pieces of furniture, a Bible, sundry books valued at £10/15/0, one coat and waistcoat, one frock and cap, and one pair of stockings and leggings.

A log house which was a local landmark until it was torn down sometime in the middle of the present century was, according to tradition, the home of Martin Shobe (1721-92), a
neighbor of Lienert Heyer. The house later was owned by Enoch Hyre, and the site is now the property of George Harman. The one-and-a-half story house was connected at the rear by a breezeway to the kitchen and had two stone chimneys. At one time a log barn stood on the place.

**The Surname**

Up until the mid-nineteenth century, people were not concerned particularly about the consistent spelling of words, and researchers should not attach any significance to the various spellings of the Hyre name used in early records. Albert Faust must have found the variant “Heyer” predominating in Swiss records, for he uses that spelling in his book. The immigrants’ records for the port of Philadelphia show “Leonhart Heier.” Both “Heyer” and “Heier” are more Germanic spellings. This writer also has found the name spelled Hier, Hire, Hiar, Hyar, and Higher. Of the modern spellings of “Hyre” and “Hyer” the latter version was the one adopted by the Braxton County branch of the family. A few of the Upshur County clan also are known to use “Hyer.” There is a family in the Petersburg area named Harr. It is at least possible that the name resulted from the vernacular pronunciation of “Hyre,” and that the Harrs are descended from Lienert Heyer.

The ancient practice of using surnames reappeared in the Middle Ages. At that time a man would take on a last name to distinguish himself from other men with the same given name. Often his surname denoted his village or district or his occupation. The name Heyer may be derived from the German word heuer (haymaker) or from heurling (hired man or day laborer).

**The French and Indian War**

The first five years of the Hyres’ residency on the South Branch was one of peaceful growth of the western settlements. After General Braddock was soundly defeated by the French
near Fort Duquesne in 1755, however, the frontier was left exposed to Indian incursions. To protect against these, a string of strategic forts was thrown up all along the frontier by the colonial government. The settlers themselves also looked after their own defense by erecting forts as havens for neighboring families in case of a raid. Fort George on the South Branch River was such a fort. At the rumor of an Indian war party in the vicinity the Hyres, the Shobes, and other nearby families would run from their farm homes into the shelter of the small stockaded fort. Several Indian episodes which centered around Fort George were recorded by the early historian Samuel Kercheval. One of the few old references to the location of the fort is in the 1814 deed in which a Leonard Hyre conveyed to Rudolph Shobe land “about where Fort George formerly stood.” The exact location of the historic fort is debated, but one authority claims it stood on the spot now occupied by a barn on the Riggleman place. On the same farm an old cemetery (which was destroyed in the 1930s) may have contained the graves of the earliest Hyres. The headstones were removed and the land farmed over. Since then at one time the stones were piled in the old blacksmith shop on the place.

The French and Indian War lasted until 1760. By the time the Indian wars were renewed in the 1770s, the frontier had receded west over the Alleghenies and it was the trans-montane people who suffered from those later wars.

The Revolutionary War

There are records of service to the American cause of four Hyre men, although the several mentions of Leonard Hyre could refer to different men as in Hampshire County in 1776 two Leonards, one age forty-nine and his son age twenty-four, are known to have lived.

A pay roll of militiamen made at Romney October 17, 1775
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shows that John Hyre served as a private in a unit commanded by Captain John Harness and that Leonard Hyre served as a private in a unit under Ensign Stephen Ashby. Leonard and Rudolph Hyre are on record as having been compensated by the government for provisions taken from their farms for the use of local militiamen. For a beef cow weighing 275 lbs. furnished in May 1779 Leonard later received £3/8/9. For corn provided in May 1781 he was reimbursed £4/10/9. He is on record as also having been compensated £3/17/6 for corn and pasturage, £2/9/6 for provisions and forage, £4/11/8 for beef, and £—/4/6 for a “bag.”

His pension application relates at length Jacob Hyre’s interesting Revolutionary career. He served during three tours from 1778 to 1781 as a private in militia companies. The nineteenth century historian Wills DeHass wrote of the McIntosh Campaign of 1778 in which Jacob participated:

Convinced that the Indians would, on the breaking up of winter, make increased efforts to retrieve past losses, and also to avenge the death of their slaughtered chief [Cornstalk], the whites lost no time in erecting new stockades, repairing old ones, and making such other preparations for repelling the enemy, as lay within their power . . . an expedition was ordered [by the Continental Congress] against the confederated tribes . . . Three thousand troops were to be furnished by Virginia . . . General McIntosh . . . advanced across the mountains with five hundred men and proceeding to the mouth of Beaver, twenty-eight miles below Pittsburgh, erected Fort McIntosh. This was considered a most favorable position for a body of troops to intercept parties of Indians on their way against the settlements of Virginia and Pennsylvania. The effect was very soon perceptible throughout the entire frontier.

Jacob Hyre was among the men who garrisoned Fort McIntosh while others who had set out from that fort built and defended the even more remote Fort Laurens. After moving to the Buck-
hannon frontier in 1781 Jacob served as an Indian spy based out of Bush's Fort.

Rudolph and Leonard (I or II?) Hyre are recorded as having been part of the 1781 episode which is known locally as the Claypole Rebellion. The insurrection took place in an area which is now parts of Grant and Hardy counties and the participants were mostly Germans. Due to a recent turn of events the populace of the South Branch Valley were vulnerable to the influence of one of their number, John Claypole, who had been converted to the Tory cause. In 1780 taxes were increased and a draft was initiated for the American war effort. These came on top of the established practice of requisitioning farm goods. These measures exasperated particularly the German farming families of the backcountry, whose custom it was to keep to themselves and care for their own. The actors in the Claypole Rebellion, like other groups among ethnic minorities along the frontier, likely considered the Revolution the concern of the dominant planter class of eastern Virginia. Though, the Germans and the Scotch-Irish on the border were the most zealous in the defense of the frontier against British-supported Indians, a matter of immediate concern to them. Attempts to implement the government's new war measures sparked in what was then Hampshire County a short-lived revolt which was subdued with little bloodshed by troops from adjoining counties. The rebels were brought to trial at Romney. The court room there was crowded with the defendants' families, who were hysterical with fear that their loved ones would be given a death sentence. However, most of the insurgents eventually were pardoned by the governor—the names of Rudolph and Leonard Hyre appear on a petition for clemency sent to the governor. Some of the rebel leaders are known to have escaped after the summer incident and before the pardon was granted. There may be some correlation between this fact and
the fact that Jacob Hyre and a John Hyre settled in the fall of 1781 on the remote Buckhannon River.

Some Modern-Day Hyres

The rich sandy-loam soil of the bottom chosen in the eighteenth century by Lienert Heyer still provides a living for one of his descendants, Isaac Wayne Hyre, who raises Hereford cattle. Other Hyres in the Petersburg area are Wayne's brother and neighbor Winton and another family headed by brothers Bruce Hyre, Virgil Hyre, and John Hyre.

Poetess Esta (Hyre) Fox was born and reared on the Grant County farm of her father Saul Hyre. The Christian home life of her childhood is reflected in the inspirational and patriotic poems which Mrs. Fox has published in three booklets. She also has written several songs including "The Mansion in the Sky" which was composed at the age of thirteen. At the time of this writing Mrs. Fox is a spry and happily fulfilled 88-year-old and lives with her son George Fox in Lutherville, Maryland.

NOTES TO CHAPTER II

7. This information is at the Virginia State Library in Commissioners’ Books Three and Four, a Hampshire County court booklet, and in certificates and lists in Revolutionary War Public Service Claims.


9. State of Virginia, Calendar of Virginia State Papers, vol. II, p. 686. There are a number of other petitions, as well as letters, among the Calendar of Virginia State Papers which pertain to the Claypole Rebellion. Three of the more illuminating documents, also found in vol. II, are the letter dated April 14, 1781 from Garret VanMeter, Company Commander, to Governor Jefferson, p. 40; letter dated August 2, 1781 from Peter Hog to Governor Nelson, pp. 284-285; and the petition of John Claypole, pp. 682-683.

...“Be strong—be strong,”
Was Cornstalk’s battle-cry, and long
The frontier bore its sound in mind.
Our women heard it in the wind
That swept the forests, bare and brown,
When autumn nights had settled down,
And fear sat by the chimney side;
And hushed their children when they cried,
In wantonness of baby grief,
With stories of the Cornstalk chief.

from “The Murder of Cornstalk”
by Philip Pendleton Cooke
Chapter III

“GO WEST . . .”

The desire for land of their own stimulated many ambitious young families to leave the older settlements for the wilderness valleys west of the Allegheny Mountains. By the 1760s all the arable land in the South Branch Valley had been claimed, and so during that relatively peaceful decade the first hopeful settlers set out for the trans-montane territory. The South Branch became a funnel for many pioneers who would settle much of the Mountain State, and many old West Virginia family names thus can be traced to that valley. A case in point is the Reger family, who now are identified with several parts of West Virginia. Their ancestor Anthon Rueger settled on the South Fork of the South Branch around 1750. A son of Anthon, Jacob Reger, improved land on Big Run in present Barbour County in 1776. Another son, John, claimed land on the Tygart River and made an improvement in 1773 on the Buckhannon.

One of the Hyres whose descendants spread throughout several midwestern states was Rudolph, a son of Leonard Hyre II. Rudolph Hyre moved from his family’s farm on the South Branch south to near Salem, North Carolina, possibly after having been converted by Moravian missionaries. Two of his sons, Leonard and Isaac, are known to have moved with their families from North Carolina to Montgomery County, Ohio after the death of Leonard’s wife in 1806. A third child, Catherine, left Davidson County, North Carolina in 1826 for Putnam County, Indiana with her husband Abraham Burket. Grandchildren of Rudolph were recorded in several locations.
in Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois. The 1830 census for Montgomery County, Ohio notes Leonard and a Jacob Hyre. It could be that Jacob was a third son of Rudolph who had moved from North Carolina.

The 1830 census for Ohio also shows Hyres in Trumbull, Cuyahoga, Hamilton, and Fayette counties. There is a tradition that some of Christian Hyer's siblings migrated to Ohio. Perhaps some of the men mentioned from these four counties were brothers or nephews of Christian.

Less obvious factors motivated some people to leave the older settlements in search of new lands elsewhere. The outcome of some of the post-Revolutionary law suits concerning the dispensation of Lord Fairfax's lands spurred families to leave the South Branch Valley. In 1787 a suit was filed by James Wood against a John Hyer et. al. In a writ of right the plaintiff claimed title to some land through King George while the defendants claimed their right to the tracts through Lord Fairfax. The Superior Court of Hardy County found against Hyer and his neighbors around 1800 and this John may have departed the South Branch as a result.

Groups of Hyres seem to have established themselves during the pioneer eras of several western states, although any proved connections of these families to the West Virginia Hyres are unknown to this writer. Early Hyres or Hyers are identified with Pike County, Illinois; Dent County, Missouri; and Utah. Historian John Sutton noted that many Braxton County families moved to Illinois and Kansas in the 1840s and 1850s. Perhaps the Hyers of Pike County, Illinois are descended from one of the Braxton County Hyers.

**Upshur County Pioneers**

One of the first trans-Allegheny settlements was made on the Buckhannon River in 1770 by people from the South Branch. At that time the Buckhannon was a western outpost of Augusta
County. From 1784 to 1786 and from 1802 to 1818 the area was part of Harrison County. It was part of Randolph County from 1786 to 1802 and part of Lewis County from 1818 to 1851 when Upshur County was formed. In the fall of 1781 Jacob Hyre settled on Fink's Run, just above its confluence with the Buckhannon River. It was probably around the same time that Jacob's brother John settled on the Brushy Fork of Fink's Run. The Buckhannon settlement, as well as the rest of the frontier, at that time was plagued by Indian trouble which had been sparked in 1774 by Lord Dunmore's War. The last outrage against the community occurred in 1795 when the Bozarth family were massacred on their Buckhannon farm. During the Border Wars Bush's Fort provided a measure of protection for the community and using that stockade as a base Jacob Hyre served as an Indian spy ranging over the wooded hills of central western Virginia as far as the Ohio River during the years 1782 and 1783. As an Indian scout Jacob probably was knowledgeable in the ways of Indians and skilled at woods-craft.4

According to W. B. Cutright, the first mill in what is now Upshur County was built in 1783 on Fink's Run by Jacob "Shaking Jake" Hyre. Cutright contradicts himself by citing elsewhere that Henry Fink built the first mill. It could have been that Hyre resumed operation of a log grist mill which had been deserted by Fink at the time of the earlier abandonment of the Buckhannon settlement. At any rate, Jacob Hyre seems to have been known as the county's first miller:

...This mill was the only mill in the Buckhannon Valley for a score of years. At the time of its building it attracted a great deal of attention and some wonder from the men, women and children in the neighborhood. It was a corn crusher, simple and pure, the use of home-made buhrs being employed to crush the grain. It was a one-story mill; the buhr stones were small and the grinding capacity limited, so much so that it is said by one of our informants that often it took a day to grind a grist.5
Cutright wrote that Leonard Hyre came to the Buckhannon as a small boy with his father John. There is a tradition that Leonard, father of Christian Hyer, at the age of thirteen was captured by Indians, held for three years, and released. Young Leonard probably was taken by the war party retreating from an assault on the Buckhannon settlement in the early 1790s. The attack, the only one against the settlement recorded for the period 1782-95, was made by Ohio Indians who advanced on the whites via Brushy Fork hollow. It was not uncommon for Indians to try to replace a lost Indian boy with a kidnapped white boy who would be reared as an Indian. Leonard likely spent his detention in one of the Shawnee villages in the Scioto Valley wilderness, and his release may have been arranged in 1795 at the Greenville Treaty proceedings where a number of kidnap victims were returned to their families.

With the passing of the Indian wars and the pioneer era, life on the Buckhannon became more settled. People began to think of those institutions which mark a civilized society. Hyre children were in attendance at the first school in the Buckhannon River valley held in a log cabin built in 1797 near the mouth of Radcliff's Run. Jacob and John Hyre were members of the area's first Baptist congregation, which worshipped in a log structure built about 1814 on a hill above Fink's Run. Crude head- and footstones mark Jacob's grave in the cemetery by the site of the old church on today's Hall Road. It was not until 1822 that the town of Buckhannon was started amidst the old farming community.

Jackson County Kindred

Hardesty's Encyclopedia records that a Jacob Hyre (b. January 10, 1784) moved with his family in 1815 from the Buckhannon valley. He established himself in what was then Mason County but in a section which became Jackson County in 1831. The U. S. census for 1850 lists the families of four
Hyer couples in Jackson County: Lyman (b. in New York) and Rebecca (b. in Ohio), Jonathan and Elizabeth, Jacob and Mary, and John A. and Miriam. There are listed today three Hyres in the Ripley telephone directory.

**Braxton County Cousins**

In 1819 Christian Hyer with a Leonard Hyre (probably Christian's father) bought a 200 acre farm on the right fork of Salt Lick Creek, in a section of Lewis County which was to become part of Braxton County in 1836. Christian and his family trekked to that "flat woods country" with Christian's sister Mary, her husband Isaac Shaver, and their small children. Tradition says that the two families, who settled on adjoining farms, made the journey with all their household effects in one wagon. Flatwoods is an old place name which was used to describe several locations. In hilly western Virginia "Flatwoods" connoted good farm land, although the area in Braxton is rolling rather than level. Some of the county's best farms are in the Flatwoods area.

Records for the Shenandoah Valley county of Rockingham show Christian Hyer's marriage in 1815 to the young widow Julian (Sirk) Lloyd.

The Salt Lick Creek farm was to be home for generations of the Hyer family. Today all that remains to mark their long tenure is an overgrown hillside cemetery. A large log house still stands, however, on the old Shaver farm. The structure is used now for farm storage.

**Two Braxton Countians**

Following are sketches of two enterprising men who personified the optimistic and expansive spirit of their era. Jacob Stephen Hyer was born in 1849 and was reared on his parents' farm. Education available at that time was limited and young
Jacob completed only three or four winter terms at a log schoolhouse near his home. At the age of thirteen the ambitious Hyer set out on his own for Weston. For six years in that town he clerked at a store, all the while learning for himself the operation of a small business. At the age of twenty he returned to his home county and established a store above Sutton on the Elk River at Bens Run. A village consisting of a railroad station, a post office, a Methodist church, and several houses grew up around the store and the place came to be called Hyer. It later was known as Gillespie. The site now lies beneath the waters of the Sutton dam impoundment.

A prudent and highly successful businessman, Jacob Hyer also was known as an honest man and an unassuming gentleman. In 1872 he moved his store to nearby Sutton, expanded his business, and soon became the principle merchant of the town. At the age of twenty-nine he married Laura Singleton. Hyer was quick to take advantage of the new interest in West Virginia's natural resources. He acquired a great deal of mountain land and eventually amassed a fortune through coal. He was the prime organizer of the Sutton Bank and was its president until his death in 1903 from typhoid fever. Hyer also dealt in native ginseng and wild furs. In fact, he missed few financial opportunities.

Hyer ran unsuccessfully for the West Virginia House of Delegates and for the position of State Auditor, although he served thrice as mayor of Sutton. He was also once sheriff of Braxton County. He served on the board of the Insane Asylum at Weston and was chairman of that board several times. He generously supported the Methodist church, founded his town's Masonic lodge and built and furnished its meeting hall.

Ellis Summers Hyer was born in 1851 on his family's farm near Flatwoods. Upon reaching manhood he first assumed the duties of a farmer but soon became restless for the sights of
other places. He moved to Illinois where he lived briefly before returning to Braxton County. He learned the rudiments of business while clerking in his cousin’s store in Sutton and at the age of twenty-two married Edna Louisa, a daughter of Elizabeth (Rader) and Henry Petro Evans. At the age of twenty-five he was enough well-thought-of to be asked by the publishers of *The Braxton Mountaineer* to begin in 1876 the editorship of that, the first newspaper published at Sutton. That same year he was a member of the convention in Parkersburg that nominated General Goff for governor. At twenty-seven Ellis Hyer was elected to the West Virginia House of Delegates and served in that body for two years.

In 1879 he opened a well-stocked country store below Sutton at Beall’s Mill. Using his location on the Elk River at Beall’s Mill as a base, Ellis branched out into lumber and stock buying and the building of boats. He sold most of his lumber at Charleston and, as the railroad had not yet come to Sutton, his lumber may have been floated down the Elk to the capital city. Ellis Hyer died in 1884. He is buried in the Beall’s Mill cemetery, which is just east of Gassaway on Route 4. In 1891 tracks were laid into Sutton by the West Virginia and Pittsburgh Railroad. As timber now was accessible more readily for industrial markets, a race was on to denude the hills of their virgin trees and a boom era came to the small town of Sutton. Had his life not been cut short at the age of thirty-two, the ambitious Ellis probably would have taken advantage fully of the post-railroad period.

After the death of her husband Edna Hyer at different times ran several hotels in Sutton (including the Hyer House), which then was bustling with assorted “drummers” and traveling businessmen who were attracted to the town because of the thriving lumber industry. This she did in addition to rearing her three children. Always independently-minded, Edna had vowed before her husband’s death that she would not be buried
with him and the Baptists at Beall’s Mill, but would be put with the Methodists in the Sutton cemetery, where she was laid to rest, according to her wish, after her death in 1940.\textsuperscript{12}

**NOTES TO CHAPTER III**

1. Anthon Rueger was an immigrant shipmate of Lienert Heyer in 1737. See chapt. I.


4. Both the date of his settlement on the Buckhannon and his record as an Indian spy are noted in Jacob Hyre’s Revolutionary War pension application, no. 7856 (Virginia nos. 23039 and 4564), on file at the National Archives, Washington, D. C.


7. Lucullus Virgil McWhorter, *The Border Settlers of Northwestern Virginia From 1768 to 1795*, pp. 171-173. In this book are related in detail the several Indian outrages against the Buckhannon settlement.


10. Other places in West Virginia which were named for family members are Hyers Run in northern Braxton County, a tributary of the Little Kanawha River, and Hier Lick Run in western Randolph County, a tributary of the Middle Fork River.

Living in a border state, the people of West Virginia were divided in their loyalties during the Civil War. The Hyres from Grant and Jackson counties who fought, did so with Confederate units. The Hyres of Upshur County and the Hyers of Braxton County sided with the Union. Below are listed those Hyre men who served in the war. This information was extracted mostly from records at the West Virginia Department of Archives and History in Charleston and the Virginia State Library in Richmond.

CONFEDERATES

From Hardy County
(the area which became Grant County in 1866):

George Hyre served in Companies E and H of the 18th Regiment of the Virginia Cavalry.

Jacob J. Hyre served in Company E of the 18th Regiment of the Virginia Cavalry.

Jacob S. "Coon" Hyre also served in Company E of the 18th Regiment of the Virginia Cavalry.

J. Hyre, probably one of the Jacob Hyres listed above, served in Company H of the 18th Regiment of the Virginia Cavalry.

Jacob Hyre, probably one of the Jacob Hyres listed above, served in Company E of the 14th Regiment of the Virginia Militia.

From Jackson County:

Augustus Hyre (b. January 6, 1841, d. of typhoid fever at Princeton in Mercer County December 10, 1861)—This information from Hardesty's Historical and Geographical Encyclopedia Illustrated: Special History of the Virginias, Jackson County section (Chicago and Toledo: H. H. Hardesty & Co. Publishers, 1883; reprint ed., Richmond, W. Va.: Jim Comstock), p. 44.
Perry A. Hyre served in Company B of the 22nd Regiment of the Virginia Infantry, a unit known as the Border Rifles. He then was enrolled in Kanawha County into Company A of the 36th Battalion of the Virginia Cavalry. He later served in a unit organized in Allegheny County and known as the Rocky Point Grays. This was Company F of the 22nd Regiment of the Virginia Infantry, Patton’s Brigade. Perry was discharged February 27, 1862 with a disability. He lived in the Confederate Soldiers’ Home in 1915 and died July 26, 1916.

Two men who served in Confederate units, but whose county origins are not known:

Henry Hyer enrolled at Staunton, Virginia and served in Company L of the 5th Regiment of the Virginia Infantry. The company was known as the West Augusta Guard (also the West Augusta Artillery).

Peter J. Hyer served in Company G of the 18th Regiment of the Virginia Cavalry.

FEDERALS

From Upshur County:

Charles Edwin Hyer served probably in Battery E of the 1st Regiment of the (West) Virginia Light Artillery.

David H. Hyre served in Company E of the 4th Regiment of the West Virginia Cavalry.

Elijah Hyer served in Company C of the 3rd Regiment of the West Virginia Cavalry.

Elmer Hyre served in an Upshur County militia unit which was captured at Centreville, Virginia September 12, 1863. The men were taken to prison in Richmond and apparently Elmer and Taylor Hyre were among those who died at Richmond or in one of several other southern prisons to which some of the men subsequently were transferred.

Henry O. Hyre served in Battery E of the 1st Regiment of the (West) Virginia Light Artillery. He was captured at Buckhannon August 31, 1862.

John D. Hyer served in Company B of the 10th Regiment of the (West) Virginia Infantry.
John W. Hyre served in Battery E of the 1st Regiment of the (West) Virginia Light Artillery.

Jonathan Hyre served in Company E of the 4th Regiment of the (West) Virginia Cavalry.

J. T. Hyre served in Company E of the 4th Regiment of the (West) Virginia Cavalry.

Noah Hyre served in Company D of the 4th Regiment of the (West) Virginia Cavalry.

Steward Hyre or Stuard Elyer served in Company E of the 4th Regiment of the West Virginia Cavalry.

Taylor Hyre served in the same Upshur County militia unit as Elmer Hyre. See above.

William I. Hyre served in Company E of the 4th Regiment of the West Virginia Cavalry.

From Braxton County:

Leonard W. Hyer served in Company F of the 10th Regiment of the (West) Virginia Infantry. He was discharged May 24, 1865 at Richmond, Virginia.

Nimrod M. Hyer served as the captain of Company F of the 10th Regiment of the West Virginia Infantry. On a scout in Braxton County in the summer of 1863 Capt. Hyer and some of the company took the opportunity to visit their homes. Nimrod was at his Salt Lick Creek farm with some of his comrades when he, his fellow soldiers, and his civilian brother Harvey were captured by the desperate and vicious Tuning brothers, two Confederate bushwhackers. The captives were tied two abreast and were started on a march across the mountains. The destination was Richmond. “They [the Tunings] sullenly trudged on with occasional vile oaths and frequently threatened the lives of the ... prisoners.” Harvey Hyer was released at the Holly River crossing. In Richmond Nimrod Hyer and his fellows were incarcerated in Libby Prison. Altogether Nimrod spent seventeen months in Libby and other southern prisons. “His prison life was one of great privation and danger, and at the time of his release his life hung upon a very brittle thread.” In later years Hyer related to his friends a childhood dream about captivity which, because of its remarkably coincidental details,
turned out to be prophetic of his Civil War experience. See John Davison Sutton, *History of Braxton County and Central West Virginia* (first printed 1919; reprint ed. Parsons, W. Va.: McClain Printing Co., 1967), pp. 178, 195-201, and 390, and also *Hardesty's Historical and Geographical Encyclopedia Illustrated*: Special History of the Virginias, Braxton County section, p. 104. The pieces in Sutton and in Hardesty's, in addition, revealed for the family tree data on Nimrod's family.
Appendix II

THE FAMILY TREE

Using wills, county marriage records, vital data found on gravestones, printed and other sources a Hyre family tree of the earliest American generations has been pieced together. The task was complicated somewhat by the repeated use of certain names, particularly Leonard and Jacob, through numerous generations and branches. Middle names did not come into general use until the mid-nineteenth century, and men with the same given names and surnames commonly are not differentiated by “junior” and “senior” in early records.

Information on the first and second generations came from three groups of documents in the Basel archives, and from the will of Leonard I, which was probated in Hampshire County on May 12, 1772. The Swiss document groups, from which historian Albert Faust drew a Heyer family tree, are the Finanz-Acten F (Revenue Records F), Auswanderung A (Emigration A), and Kirchenbücher (parish registers). Franklin Shobe’s book also provided the author some information.

Of the third generation, the names of the children of Leonard II appear in his will made April 7, 1783 and probated June 16, 1786 in Hardy County. The vital statistics of Jacob Hyre are given in his Revolutionary War pension application.

Ascribing children to Buckhannon pioneers Jacob and John Hyre is difficult. A will (which would name children) for Jacob could not be found. Two children of John Hyre are identified in different sources. W. B. Cutright noted Leonard, one child of John, in his book. In the Harrison County record of the marriage of Elizabeth Hyre and Andrew Westfall in 1809, Elizabeth is named as John’s daughter. John probably had other children. The Lewis County will—made March 18, 1829 and probated May 1829—of a John Hyre names wife Patience and son Peter. The author has not included this family in the genealogical chart as he does not know if this John was the Buckhannon pioneer, his son, or a son.
of Jacob, the other Buckhannon pioneer. While a complete, connected genealogy of the Upshur County branch of the family seems impossible, the Hyres of that county are descended from either one or the other of the two pioneer brothers.

Also of the fourth generation are the children of Peter and Susanna Hyre who are named in his will entered into the court records of Hardy County on January 10, 1826. Jacob and his wife Eve are buried in the Hyre cemetery near Petersburg, West Virginia. This well-cared-for graveyard is not to be confused with the now-destroyed cemetery close to the site of Fort George in which Hyre pioneers may have been buried (see p. 25).

Of the fifth generation is Braxton County pioneer Christian Hyer. This writer has not been able to determine beyond a doubt if he was of one of the Hyre families who remained in the South Branch Valley or a descendant of one of the two Hyre brothers who settled on the Buckhannon River. In Christian Hyer’s death report filed in 1865 by his widow (in Braxton County Vital Statistics) it was stated that Christian was born in Hardy County [on the South Branch] of parents Leonard and Catherine Hyre and that Christian was 74 at the time of his death. He was born, therefore, in 1791 and the age (80) incised on his headstone in the Hyer cemetery near Flatwoods apparently is incorrect. Tax and court records tell us that there was at least one household head named Leonard Hyre living in Hardy County circa 1791.

There were, however, a couple named Leonard and Catherine Hyre in the Buckhannon community around the turn to the nineteenth century; though, Upshur County historian W. B. Cutright wrote that Leonard was born circa 1776 and, if that is correct, would have been a very young father in 1791 if Christian were this Leonard’s son (see W. B. Cutright, The History of Upshur County, West Virginia, p. 485). Leonard’s will, made October 12, 1828 and in the Lewis County records, names his wife Catherine, sister-in-law Catherine (Louden) Hyre (later mistakenly identified by Cutright as Leonard’s wife), and sons John D., William, and Jacob A. Hyre. He mentions no one named Christian. However, Christian may have been excluded from his father’s bequest because it may have been his father who helped Christian pay for his Flatwoods farm (see Lewis County deed book A, p. 490). Flatwoods is about twenty-five miles, as the crow flies, from Buckhannon and
Christian may have been familiar with the Flatwoods before buying his land there.

There is a probability that Christian Hyer was a son of the Buckhannon couple Leonard and Catherine Hyre, in spite of the fact that his birth in 1791 on the South Branch was a decade after Christian's grandfather John Hyre probably first moved to the Buckhannon. For trade purposes, and sometimes for reasons of security, the Buckhannon people for years after settlement maintained ties with the South Branch Valley from where they had come. (Also, a common pioneering practice was first to clear a patch in the forest and then to return from the older settlements sometimes years later to claim one's land). It could have been, because of the Indian threat on the Buckhannon, that Catherine or Catherine with her husband Leonard were with relatives on the South Branch at the time of Christian's birth. This theory could be considered only, though, if one allows for a margin of error in one or some of the above dates.

If, according to tradition, Christian's father had been a captive of the Indians, the capture must have taken place in the Buckhannon settlement, because at the inferred time the Indians no longer were penetrating as far east as the South Branch. All things considered, the author has ascribed the Buckhannon couple Leonard and Catherine Hyre as the parents of Christian Hyer.

Much data for the genealogical chart of the Braxton County Hyers was found in the record group collectively called Braxton County Vital Statistics. Also, writer John D. Sutton mentions Christian's father Leonard, sister Mary (Hyre) Shaver, and several unnamed siblings who moved to Ohio.

Also of the fifth generation are the children of Jacob Hyre who are named in his will entered into the court records of Hardy County on June 1, 1846. Saul Hyre's marriage to Polly Judy on January 20, 1831 too is on record in Hardy County. Polly is a familiar form of the name Mary and the inscription on Polly's headstone reads "Mary Hyre." Enoch Hyre and his wife Mary and Saul and Polly Hyre and four of the latter couple's offspring who died as children (Elijah, Ann Jemima, Felix, and Mary Elizabeth) all are buried in the Hyre cemetery near Petersburg. Also interred in this cemetery are the following three Hyres whose headstones apparently either had been destroyed or the inscriptions
obliterated by the time of the author's visit in 1975. These stones were recorded, though, in 1936 as part of the inventory of the cemetery by researchers from the Works Progress Administration: Isaac F. Hyre, b. 1852, d. 1890 (husband of Mary Susan); Mary Susan Hyre, b. 1852, d. 18(8?)0 (wife of Isaac F.); and Lydia A. Hyre, b. 6/24/1841, d. 4/29/1882.

Of the sixth generation the children of Christian and Julian Hyer are listed in Sutton's book. Extant headstones in the Hyer family cemetery near Flatwoods are those of Christian and Julian Hyer, Leonard W. Hyer and his wife Margaret, Jacob M. Hyer, and Adam Jackson Hyer and his first wife. Also interred there is Christian B. Hyer, a son of Adam Jackson.

In the seventh generation the children of Adam Jackson Hyer are listed in the piece about him in Hardesty's Encyclopedia, Braxton County section. In the piece about Ellis Summers Hyer it was noted by Hardesty that Ellis' parents had six children.
The Hyres of West Virginia

Lienert Heyer I
b. 1696
d. 1772
m. Clara Lützler
b. 1705

Anna Barbara Hyre
bapt. Feb. 22, 1724
m. 1743
Jacob Shobe

Elisabeth Hyre
bapt. June 17, 1725
m. Martin Shobe

Leonard Hyre II
bapt. Dec. 25, 1727
d. 1786
m. Mary Hause

Hans Rudolph Hyre
bapt. May 29, 1729

Hans Ulrich Hyre
bapt. July 29, 1731
d. circa 1737-1739

Clara Hyre
b. circa 1734
d. 1787

Antoni Hyre
b. circa 1737-1739
probably died young

Magdalena Hyre
b. 1739
d. 1827
m. Siegmund Homan

Ewe Hyre
b. 1742
m. Sebastian Hägler

Ursula Hyre

John Hyre
(settled on the Buckhannon)

Leonard Hyre

Lewis Hyre

Peter Hyre
d. circa 1826
m. Susanna

Jacob Hyre
b. May 25, 1757
(settled on the Buckhannon)
d. March 27, 1841
m. August 1783
Elizabeth Powers
b. 1761
d. 1845 or later

Michael Hyre

Rudolph Hyre
(moved from the South Branch to near Salem, North Carolina)
d. 1802

Mary Hyre
The Hyres of West Virginia

-Rudolph Hyre
moved from the South Branch to near Salem, North Carolina
b. 1776
d. 1802

Leonard Hyre
(moved 1806 or after to Montgomery County, Ohio)
m. Elizabeth Burket
b. 1776
d. 1806

-Catherine Hyre
m. Abraham Burket
b. Jan. 13, 1778
d. Aug. 16, 1861
(This couple moved in 1826 from Davidson Co., N.C. to Big Racoon in Putnam Co., Indiana)

-Isaac Hyre
b. March 10, 1776
d. July 1820
m. Barbara Burket
b. January 1781
d. Sept. 5, 1853
(This couple moved from North Carolina to Montgomery Co., Ohio probably with Leonard and Elizabeth Hyre)

-Barbara Hyre
1799-1819
m. Joseph Caylor

-Jacob Hyre
1801-1865
m. Barbara Ritter
(This couple lived in Defiance Co., Ohio after 1847)

-Jehu Hyre
b. 1806
d. infancy

-Rudy Hyre
b. 1806 (twin of Jehu)
d. 1878
m. Mary Shank

-Wesley Hyre
1802-1885
m. Susanna Van Scoyoc
1803-1881
(This couple lived in Whitley Co., Indiana)

-Solomon Hyre
1804-1880
m. #1 Sarah Bowman
#2 Mary A. Peffly
(This couple lived at Adamsboro, Indiana)

-Daniel Hyre
1806-1889
m. Sarah Stouder

-Isaac Hyre
1808-1878
m. Elizabeth Schaeffer

-Nancy Hyre
1812-1884
m. Samuel Miller

-Absalom Hyre
1814-1878
m. #1 Elizabeth Hess
#2 Rebecca Shearer
(This couple lived at Palestine, Illinois)

-Belinda Hyre
1816-1897
m. Benjamin Bowman

-Moses Hyre
1819-1892
m. Rebecca Stoner

-Abraham Hyre
1821-1900
m. #1 Anna Garver
#2 Catherine Emmerick

See page 48
Appendix II: The Family Tree

Christian Hyer
(progenitor of the Braxton Co. family)
b. in Hardy Co. 1791
d. Feb. 25, 1865
m. 1815
Julian A. (Sirk) Loyd
b. 1788
d. Feb. 24, 1875

Leonard W. Hyer
b. Oct. 20, 1816
d. Oct. 30, 1892
m. Dec. 5, 1837
Margaret Anna McPherson
b. 1815
d. Jan. 3, 1903

Adam Jackson Hyer
b. Aug. 24, 1816
d. Dec. 10, 1895
m. #1 May 22, 1845
Hannah Rogers
b. March 30, 1826
d. April 9, 1868
m. #2 March 21, 1870
Hannah (Hutchison) Morrison

Nimrod M. Hyer
b. July 12, 1826
d. 1901
m. Elizabeth Jane Morrison
b. 1830

Jacob M. Hyer
b. 1828
d. Aug. 31, 1858
m. Aug. 29, 1849
Mary Squires
b. 1831

Ellis S. Hyer
m. Clara Wheeler

William Hyer
d. without issue

Harvey T. Hyer
d. without issue

Leonard W. Hyer
b. Aug. 20, 1816
d. Oct. 30, 1892
m. Dec. 5, 1837
Margaret Anna McPherson
b. 1815
d. Jan. 3, 1903

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b. 1831

Ellis S. Hyer
m. Clara Wheeler

William Hyer
d. without issue

Harvey T. Hyer
d. without issue
The Hyers of West Virginia

- **Jacob M. Hyer**
  - b. 1828
  - d. Aug. 31, 1858
  - m. Aug. 29, 1849
  - Mary Squires
  - b. 1831
  - three other children, according to Hardesty's

- **Ellis Summers Hyer**
  - b. Nov. 12, 1851
  - d. July 29, 1884
  - m. Feb. 10, 1873
  - Edna Louisa Evans
  - b. Nov. 11, 1854
  - d. March 26, 1940

- **B. F. Hyer**
- **Jacob Hyer**
- **three other children, according to Hardesty's**

- **Ella Mae Hyer**
  - b. Sept. 17, 1875
  - d. 1953
  - m. 1898
  - Hugh Swisher
  - b. Oct. 6, 1871
  - d. 1924

- **Lee Evans Hyer**
  - b. Aug. 12, 1877

- **Charles Hyer**
  - b. July 10, 1879
  - d. Aug. 5, 1880

- **Mary Elizabeth “Mamie” Hyer**
  - b. May 25, 1881
Arnow, Harriette Louisa (Simpson). *Seedtime on the Cumberland*. New York City: Macmillan, 1960. This is a thorough and charming cultural history of a pioneer settlement representative of trans-Appalachia.

Atkinson, George W. and Gibbens, Alvaro F. *Prominent Men of West Virginia*. Wheeling, W. Va.: W. L. Callin, 1890.


The Hyres of West Virginia


Kercheval, Samuel. *A History of the Valley of Virginia*. First ed., 1833; fourth ed., Strasburg, Va.: Shenandoah Publishing House, 1925. The South Branch Valley is not considered today as part of the Valley of Virginia (Shenandoah Valley). It is, though, in a technically geographical sense a branch of that great valley which is bordered to the east by the Blue Ridge Mountains and to the west by the Allegheny Mountains. The South Branch Valley is separated from the main body of the Valley of Virginia by the Shenandoah Mountains. The pioneer histories of the two areas are intertwined and are treated as one by Kercheval. His book is the classic early history of the region.


“Newspapers Published in Sutton [Ellis S. Hyer].” *The Braxton Democrat.* Sutton, W. Va.: 1 April 1948.


Sims, Edgar Barr. *Making a State.* Charleston, W. Va.: State of West Virginia, 1956. This book is a basic reference for genealogical study in West Virginia in that it is about the formation of the state’s counties. A series of maps showing county boundaries in different years is helpful.


State of Virginia. *Calendar of Virginia State Papers.* Vol. II.

Strassburger, Ralph Beaver, by, and Hinke, William John, ed. by. *Pennsylvania German Pioneers: A Publication of the Original Lists of Arrivals in the Port of Philadelphia From 1727 to 1808.*
The Hyres of West Virginia


"Well Known Sutton Woman Died Tuesday Evening This Week [Edna Evans Hyer]." The Braxton Democrat. Sutton, W. Va.: 28 March 1940.


Works Progress Administration in West Virginia. Part of the WPA Historic Marker Project is the report called "Grant County, West Virginia Records" where is found a transcription from the headstones in the Hyre cemetery near Petersburg, W. Va. 1936. Part of the WPA Writers' Project is a booklet called "Sutton-on-the-Elk." No. 12—Folk Studies. 1941.
