

William Downs, Sr.

Killed by Indians in 1788

By Jerry Long
c.2024



**History of Kentucky, Volume II, Lewis Collins & son, Richard H. Collins,
(Clearfield Company, 1874) McLean County chapter, p.597:**

A party of Trappers from the fort at Vienna, in 1790, while at the mouth of Green river, was attacked by Indians—who killed - McElmurray, and wounded Wm. Faith, a lad of 17, who made his escape and returned to the fort. About the same time, the Indians killed Thos. Downs near the fort.

[Note: Death of Mr. Downs was not referenced by Lewis Collins (father of Richard) in his 1847 edition, Historical Sketches of Kentucky.]



Notes on William Downs, Sr. (c1750-1788)

by Jerry Long

Richard Collins in his 1874 history gives the name of the victim of the Indian attack at Fort Vienna as Thomas Downs. J. H. Spencer in his A History of Kentucky Baptists From 1769 to 1885, Vol. I (1885) also mistakenly gives the victim's name as Thomas Downs. These sources have caused the propagation of this error in many subsequent accounts. Several other early accounts report the unfortunate fatality's name simply as "Mr. Downs" or as the father of Revs. Thomas & William Downs (account of Indiana captivity of Isaac Knight (1839); An Illustrated Historical Atlas Map of Daviess County, KY (1876); "Fragments of the Early History of Ohio County", by Harrison D. Taylor, published in the Hartford Herald newspaper (1877); and History of Daviess County, Kentucky (1883).

The victim of the Indian attack at Fort Vienna was William Downs not Thomas. This is proven by documents recorded at the Nelson County, KY courthouse – tax lists, will, administrator bonds, and estate inventories. William appears in the 1786 and 1787 tax lists for Nelson County; no Thomas is found in the 1786-1792 tax lists. In the court minutes of Nelson County on 3 July 1788 it is recorded that the administration of the estate of the late William Downs was granted to Evan Williams with Morris Brady & Joseph Ross as security for 500 pounds; Robert Baird, John Atherton, Henry Keith and Robert Mosely, or any three were ordered to appraise the estate of William Downs. In Nelson County Will Book A (pp.43-45) is recorded the inventory & appraisal of the estate of William Downs; it was made on 4 December 1788 by the said Baird, Keith & Mosley and it was reported on 13 March 1792.

Roscoe Irvine Downs (1884-1975), a great-great-grandson of William Downs (Sr.) in an article, "The Downs family in McLean county history" published in the McLean County, KY newspaper, McLean County News, in 1959 correctly states that his ancestor, William Downs, Sr. was killed by Indians in an attack on Fort Vienna in 1788.

Evan Williams was appointed administrator of the estate of William Downs. The children of William Downs, were placed under the care of Evan Williams. Evan was a brother-in-law of William Downs. Numerous family trees on Ancestry.com and Familysearch.org report that Evan Williams' wife was Sarah Downs, a sister of William Downs. After the death of William Downs his children left Fort Vienna (in what is now McLean County) and went to live with their uncle, Evan Williams in Nelson County, KY.

Children of William Downs are reported as:

- Rachel Downs, married Samuel Hinton, 1792 in Nelson County, KY;
- Sarah Downs, married Richard Collard, 1795 in Nelson County, KY; on marriage it is recorded that she is the "niece of Evan Williams", who signed consent for her marriage;
- Elizabeth Downs, married Alexander Campbell Stewart, 1795 in Nelson County, KY; Evan Williams signed consent for her marriage;
- (Rev.) Thomas Downs, married Rebecca Osborne / Osburn, 1797 in Nelson County, KY;
- Rebecca Downs, married Daniel King, 1803 in Nelson County, KY; on her marriage it is recorded that she was a "ward of Evan Williams", consent for her to marry was signed by Evan & Sarah Williams;

- (Rev.) William Downs, married Rachel Ashby, 1799 in Muhlenberg County, KY;
- Jeremiah Downs, married Ann Mayes, 1808 in Wilkinson County, Mississippi.

See also articles, “Rev. Thomas Downs (1773-1850” and Rev. William Downs (1782-c1860), by Jerry Long on website, [West-Central Kentucky History & Genealogy](#).



THE HARTFORD HERALD.

Hartford Herald, Hartford, Kentucky, 16 May 1877, p.1:

Fragments of the Early History of Ohio County.

By H. D. Taylor, Chapter V.

Whether the Indians, from strategic motives thought best to attack the larger and more populous settlements of the upper counties, and thus destroy the nucleus of white emigration, thereby restoring the country to its original owners, and relieving their own territory on the north side of the Ohio River from repeated invasion, by which their own towns and corn fields were destroyed; or found their raids into upper Kentucky more productive of spoils and plunder, it is certain they made but feeble efforts to rid that portion of which Ohio County is composed of its white settlers. They seemed to have abandoned the idea of holding the territory as their own, and only visited it occasionally for the purpose of hunting or horse-stealing, always killing or taking prisoners such white stragglers as came in their way. Tradition relates but a single instance of an attack upon any fort or station. The town of Vienna was at one time regularly besieged by a large party of warriors who resorted to all their wily arts for several days to subdue the place. Things began to grow serious, and two daring men made their way through the Indian lines at night and reached Hartford in safety. A very short time elapsed until every man capable of bearing arms, who could be spared, was on the march to relieve Vienna, but before the rescuing party reached the place, the Indians had raised the siege and fled. The names of the two gallant young men who thus risked the horrors of Indian torture, to carry the news to Hartford should be handed down to posterity. But unfortunately tradition gives but one name : that of Stephen Rowan, the father of Dr. A. Rowan and Wm. C. Rowan, of Ohio County and John Rowan, of McLean County. Stephen Rowan will also appear in another incident. As Mr. Collins in his history of Kentucky, under the head of Ohio County, gives some very thrilling incidents in relation to Indian depredations, and the book is no doubt in reach of most of the readers of the Herald, they will be omitted here. There are others, however, worthy of note, and in the first place there are some in relation to the killing of Anderson’s children, that were omitted in the narrative. Several women and children had left the fort [Barnett's Station] to attend preaching in Hartford. The Indians had no doubt seen their tracks, and waylaid them on their return; the road crossed a deep ravine less than a fourth of a mile from the fort. The Indians had concealed themselves in this ravine, covered with cane, and rushed upon the party as they passed, killing Anderson's two children, by dashing their heads against the root of a tree, tomahawking and scalping Mrs. Anderson, who, however, survived and lived some years afterwards, and bearing off Miss Barnett, quite a small but very handsome girl. The appearance of John Miller, (usually called tick-eyed John,) who happened to be near the place, armed as usual, no doubt saved the lives of others of the party. Harrison Taylor, Jr., had just arrived

at the fort and was sitting with his gun across his lap, when the screams of the women and children were heard. Springing to his feet he ran to the gate, and saw an Indian running at his utmost speed through a small field that adjoined the fort. He gave chase and was gaining on the Indian, but as they were approaching the fence, on the outside of which was thick undergrowth, he saw at a glance, that his only chance was to fire before the Indian crossed the fence. With a loud ugh! the Indian disappeared. A few drops of blood was all that was found afterwards.

The citizens of Hartford had a field cleared on the farm since owned by Mr. Isaac Morton, near town, where they had a crop of flax; A party of women and children, guarded by armed men, went out one day to pull the flax. Among them was a foolish woman, but a few degrees above an idiot, and who would should not have been permitted to go. Regardless of repeated warnings, she would go into the woods to gather flowers, and at last ventured out of the range of the guns of the men on guard. The report of a gun and the screams of the woman, alarmed the whole party. Samuel Neal, who was nearest, ran to the fence, saw the poor woman running, and an Indian after her. She soon fell, and as he was preparing to take her scalp, Neal dispatched a bullet, which caused him to stagger off, and other Indians ran to his aid, and helped him away. The white men were too much incumbered with women and children to give chase. Tradition gives two stories as to the fate of the wounded savage. One, that he was found in a gully covered with logs and brush in a gully, about a mile from where he was wounded. The other, that the party buried him under a pile of loose stones, near the present site of Concord Church. Such a pile, heaped up some four or five feet high, nearly in the shape in which earth is usually heaped over a new grave, was to be seen at that place for many years afterwards.

A negro man started with some horses from Hartford to Vienna, some Indians fell in with him, and from hatred to the negro, or love for the horses or both, killed him, took the horses, but were good enough to leave his scalp – perhaps because it would not sell to their white allies. While the people were confined to their fort at Vienna, their cows, although the bell could be heard, failed to come home at night – their bell still be heard in the morning. The same young Rowan mounted his horse, and with his rifle on his shoulder, was passing the gate, when his father called out: "Stephen, my son, be on your guard; I fear the Indians are keeping back the cows, to draw some one into ambush." Young Rowan soon reached the vicinity of the cows. They were at the head of a very narrow ravine, where the bluff hills were so steep that they could not climb up them. He could only approach them, by passing up a narrow bottom. He had nearly reached them, his horse took fright and refused to advance. A blow caused him it to rear and plunge into the air, which threw Rowan so high that he was enabled to see over a log, behind which an Indian, with a gun, was concealed. He instantly wheeled his horse, and, as he did so he saw another Indian on the opposite side of the ravine. Horse and rider were both willing to make the fastest time on record for the fort. Rowan was met at the gate by a Mr. Downs, who asked, in an imperious manner: "Where are the cows?" "Indians! Indians! Indians!" shouted Rowan. Downs made some contemptuous remark, and said the children should cry no longer for milk. "He would have them cows!" Rowan dared him to go, and Downs immediately prepared to start. Several tried to persuade him, and one man even caught him, but Downs jerked away; young Rowan now relented of his banter, and called out: "Mr. Downs, do come back! Just as sure as you go out there, you will never come back alive! I know there are Indians there!" banter and called out, "I know there are Indians there. I saw them, Come back." But Downs was heedless to this appeal, and hurried away. In the meantime, women and children gathered around young Rowan, and after hearing his report, resolved on a reconnoissance in force, but before they were armed, they heard several guns in quick succession, and as Downs did not return, a party cautiously approached the place, and found poor

Downs dead, scalped, and most savagely mutilated. The trail of a few Indians was discovered and followed to the Ohio, but they had made their escape. Young Rowan was no doubt indebted for his life to his fine horse, and his bright, beautiful silver mounted rifle, which restrained the Indians from firing until he had passed so far up the ravine that he could not escape.

A pet squaw was for some time living with the white families at Hartford, and was guilty of a most singular freak. The late William Sharpe, of Owensboro, was said to have been the first male child ever born in the town; and for whom this squaw evinced the greatest attachment this squaw showed the greatest attachment; fondling and caressing him on every opportunity. About the time he was beginning to walk he was missed, and the whole town was alarmed, and his parents in hopeless agony. From some cause the squaw was suspected, and closely watched, and finally found with young Sharp concealed in the woods. where she seemed to have provided everything in her power for his comfort and safety.

In after years when Indians would meet with our citizens on the other side of the river, they would frequently tell of their visits to the vicinity, and boast of passing through the town at night. An old Chief used to enquire about that pert little boy, Jo Barnett, and tell how often he tried to entrap him, and adopt him as his son. He used to watch and admire him in the woods. He had frequent opportunities to shoot him but wanted to take him unhurt, but he was always too fleet to be caught. At one time he had him penned in a narrow bend of Rough creek and threatened to shoot him if he did not surrender, but he whipped, his horse into the stream, swam across, and with a loud laugh, hid behind a tree, and "cussed me for darn old steal hoss."

Indian depredations mainly ceased after 1796 and 7, and save an occasional band of friendly Cherokees, who continued to visit the country as late as 1802 or 3, the citizens were uninterrupted except by the needless alarm those friendly bands of redskins gave the women and children, and it was perhaps to be relieved from this trouble, that, some unprincipled white man shot one of their party, after which they never returned; and most of the children of the country grew up in entire ignorance of the looks of a savage, until a straggling band passed through the country a few years after the close of the War of 1812, all the men had certificates that they had fought bravely under General Jackson. Their progress was a great ovation. The people everywhere flocked to their camp and loaded them with presents. This trip proved such a success that we soon had marauding bands of braves, squaws, and papooses, in quick succession, of whom the people at last became as weary as they are now are of their present horde of insurance, benevolent, commercial, religious, political and all other kinds of agents and hangers on too tedious to mention, and of which they were relieved in the manner in which is now recommended to get rid of our present pestiferous swarm, namely, by treating them with silent contempt.

Note. The venerable William C. Downs published a card in the Hartford Journal, differing with the incidents here related, in relation to the death of his grandfather, the particulars of which I now forget, or I would reiterate them in this chapter. I think, however, the only exceptions to the foregoing version that he could take is that his ancestor's courage and daring exceeded his prudence – a failing very common to mankind, especially those who are brave.

[The author of the preceding chapter is Harrison D. Taylor (1802-1889). Except for the last paragraph the above was published as chapter III, "Indian Depredations", in the book, Ohio County, Kentucky, in the Olden Days, by Harrison D. Taylor (Louisville, KY, 1926) pp.10-14.

William C. King (c1807-1878) referred to in the last paragraph is a son of Rev. William Downs (1782-c1860) & Rachael Ashby (c1770-1855) and grandson of William Downs, who in 1788 was killed by Indians at Fort Vienna, now Calhoun, McLean County, KY. and who is referred to as "Mr. Downs" in the preceding chapter.]



History of Daviess County, Kentucky,
(Chicago, IL: Inter-State Publishing Co., 1883) p.57:

p.57: Thomas Downs and William Downs, brothers, were among the early Old-School Baptist preachers, both entirely self-made men, and reared in the wilderness. Their father was killed by the Indians near the old stockade fort at Vienna, now Calhoun, on Green River.

pp.64-65: They built a fort at Hartford, on Rough Creek. When they were besieged they found that the Indiana generally came from lower Kentucky, wading Green River at the falls. They established a fort there and called it Vienna. At first, of course, it was only a fort; afterward a town was laid out there and called Vienna. It is now called Calhoun. The father of Wm. and Thomas Downs, a Baptist preacher, was the last man killed by the Indians here, which was in 1790'2, within a few hundred yards of the fort.



McLean County News, Calhoun, KY, 27 August 1959, p.2:

The Downs family in McLean county history

This story, written at the request of the NEWS, will be of interest to many readers who know the Downs family, as well as those interested in McLean county history, Baptist Church history, and Lincolnians.

Editor, Landon Wills, The McLean County News, Calhoun, Kentucky,

Dear Landon: in your letter of this week you ask me to write a history of the Downs Family. It is with some hesitation that I undertake such an assignment. To write of my kinfolds in the way I would perhaps be of such a personal nature that little real history would be included, yet all our lives are history; some in the making and others already made and cannot be changed.

The writing of such an article as you suggest must of necessity be confined, to what knowledge I have and the background that is familiar to me. Some of the data that I shall incorporate are of known facts and others are of my own recollection as given me by my parents and learned by me during my lifetime. I trust the readers will not confuse the known facts with some of the conclusions that I shall bring.

And personal modesty also will handicap me to some extent for I will not desire to incorporate some of my conclusions such personalities as should rightfully be included in any supposedly historical writing. I shall endeavor to limit my persona; references of myself or of my immediate family to the very least way possible. It is largely of the past that one records history,

but the present must also be incorporated if the proper perspicuity is given. I shall try to confine this account mostly to the past and let the present account for itself.

In the early settlement of Kentucky and particularly in the settlement of this western section and even more particularly to what is known as the Green River Country, those early pioneers coming as they did from Virginia, North Carolina, Pennsylvania and other eastern states, came through the Gap in the Cumberlands or down the broad Ohio River. Most of the early migrants of the Downs family came from Virginia. while my paternal grandmother came from Pennsylvania. Thus our ancestry were of both the North and the South – Yankee and Confederate. It is to this mingling of blood of the two sections that later would be locked in mortal combat, my early ancestors to Kentucky gave to me and to my people a compromise that held during the years and perhaps still gives to us a broader and more free consideration that we might have had if only one or the other sections of the nation had claimed our ancestry.

It might be well here to say that my kin on both sides of my lineage were adherent to the causes of both the North and South. The Maddox strain from which my mother had her ancestry were sincere adherents to the South in its struggle in the great Civil War, While my paternal ancestry were as sincere in support of the North. Many of my early maternal ancestry served In the Southern Army, while my grandfather and uncles served as faithfully in the Union Army. My grandfather enlisted in the Union Army at the age 54 and, though at that advanced age, he served for some time, even being sorely beset by illness that prevented him from being in any major engagement. Thus the divided sentiments of my ancestry in the great and tragic War Between the States gave to us the understanding that, we believe has prompted us to look upon that war with a more tolerant attitude, and without the prejudices that others are imbued with. This is merely a preliminary to the actual history and conclusions that I shall attempt to produce.

Killed By Indians

It has been my privilege for some years to have' gathered some data on the geneology of my family and at some time I hope to record this data in such manner as to provide a complete record of the Downs geneology that covers eight generations and over a period of two and a quarter centuries.

The first accounts I have of the Downs name in Kentucky is that of my great-greatgrandfather William who was killed and scalped by the Indians at Old Fort Vienna (now Calhoun). I do not have the actual account of. the pioneer ones who came to this section of Kentucky, first settling at Barnett's Station at what is now Hartford, but moving later to Fort Vienna. It is thought that he was closely associated with the Rowan group that came down the Ohio River and up Green River to Fort Vienna. It was about the year 1792 that he was killed in an attempt to find the cows that had strayed from the Fort, after a young Rowan had had encountered the band of Indians. Little is known by us of this occurrence, but much of it is had from accounts and as recorded in "A History of Daviess-McLean Baptist Association" by the Rev. Wendel Rone.

At the death of our great-great grandfather by the Indians, my great grandfather, William Downs, having been born at old Fort Hartford in 1782. but moved with his father to Fort Vienna, being a mere boy of nine was placed under the care of Evan Wilson in Nelson County where he was reared. He received a fair education as prescribed at that time and began teaching school. He early in life began to "exercise" in public and soon after his conversion and baptism began to preach. He organized a church near Hodgenville called Little Mount (Separate) Baptist Church.

It was at this time and place that we were led to believe that our great-grandfather became closely associated with the Lincoln family. One of biographers of Abraham Lincoln records a statement that Lincoln was asked to whom did he accord the greatest influence in his young life and he replied that it had been the Rev. William Downs. My grandfather was born at or near the place of Lincoln's birth and at nearly the same date – Lincoln February 12, 1809 and my grandfather April 9, 1809.

My grandfather Thomas A. Downs was born as stated on April 9, 1809, his mother being Rachael Ashby. It is from strain of ancestry that we record the genealogy as referred to above.

Jesse Ashby born in Virginia 1738 came to Kentucky in 1793. He was married twice, both times in Virginia. First wife, Nancy Williams died in Virginia. His second wife, Tamar Ruby Downs died in 1841 at the age of 85 years. Jesse Ashby died in 1823. Both Jesse Ashby and his wife Tamar Ruby are buried at Walton's Creek burying ground.

My great-grandfather, the Rev. William Downs, married Rachael Ashby, daughter of Jesse Ashby by his first wife, Nancy Williams, thus the Williams train finds a place, in our ancestry, as well as Ashby and Downs.

Ancestor in Revolution

Jesse Ashby, our great-great-grandfather on our paternal side, served in the early years of the Revolution, being enrolled in the records of the Virginia troops under the command of Captain Daniel Morgan, Ashby being a private.

Our great-grandfather, the Rev. William Downs, was a great religious debater and debated with noted personages of other Christian denominations, being victor on most every occasion. One of these debates was at Hawesville, where we now reside. It was about the year 1828 – one year before Hancock county was formed and Hawesville established.

He served many churches as pastor in both Kentucky and Indiana. Because of his drinking habits, at that time engaged in by many, he was excluded from the Rolling Fork Church, and joined with the Separate Baptists, a non-missionary denomination of Baptists. He died about 1860.

Our grandfather Thomas A. Downs, was born as stated on April 9, 1809. He was married to Palmyra N. Ray on June 18, 1838. To them were born five daughters, Elizabeth Aurel, Rachael A. V., America Jane, Lucy Ry, and Victoria Lee Ann, and one son, Leander Powell Downs.

Our father, Leander Powell Downs, was born January 22, 1850 on a farm in Ohio county near Rough Creek (now River). He was eleven years of age when the Civil War began and when his father enlisted in the Union Army. His early life was beset with great poverty and illness among the family. All his sisters died early in life and with his father in the war he and his mother suffered greatly. His father returned from the army broken in health and it evolved upon our father to support the family. Debts of his father being pressed upon him as under age, it became necessary at the age of 16 years to go before the court and be declared of age so he could provide for his mother and ill father.

Leander Powell Downs married Bernice Maddox Rowe on June 2, 1869. His father died the same year, and his mother continued to be supported by him until her death on October 15, 1876. To the marriage of Leander Powell Downs and Bernice M. Rowe were born ten children, three daughter and seven sons. Two daughters died at early age, the other still living, Mrs. Ella Brown, living with her son, J. Powell at Owensboro. Two sons died in early childhood. One son, Hury Leander Downs died in 1941. Four sons are still living. Alfred Franklin, 89, South Carrolton, Kentucky; Charles Otto Downs, 79, Owensboro, Kentucky; Roscoe Irvine Downs, 74, Hawesville, Kentucky; and Edward Boyt Downs, 88, Los Angeles, California.

This is recorded the family of Leander Powell and Bernice Rowe Downs. As the present generation of the Downs family.

Credit to Parents

The reader will pardon the following account of our parents, for it is with the greatest of love and regard that we have their remembrance so closely recorded in our hearts and think of them as our heritage that gives us honor and respect.

L. P. Downs as he was known by so many along Green River during the past century arose from the direst poverty and difficulty to rear a family and make a name for himself among all who knew him. His integrity and honor was never questioned nor respect for him denied.

For more than half a century he bought, cut and delivered timber from the virgin forest of Green River to the lumber market at Evansville. We quote from a biographical sketch carried in a book published by W. P. Green entitled "The Green River Country" in 1898:

"He (L. P. Downs) has probably run more saw logs of his own cutting than any other man on the river. Mr. Downs is known by almost every man on the river, and is universally respected for his integrity and business character."

The home life that our parents afforded us as we were children and grew to womanhood gave us a rich heritage that makes us proud and humble. Our home was right religious home. God and Jesus Christ were ever magnified by mother and father and from their lives and teaching it was given us to endeavor to follow them. Boyhood days were happy days. Story telling before a big fire on cold winter, nights by our mother gave us the wholesome entertainment that those early days afforded. The returns of our father after being long months of arduous labors on the river with his timber were days of happy rejoicing with the whole family in joyous accord.

Always the whistle of the old river steamboats, "The J. C. Kerr," the "Evansville" and the "Bowling Green" brought a tingle to our spine as we heard them, and when, their signals indicated the stops at our river landing our joys were complete.

As we stated in the beginning history is the recording of events in the past, and in this brief accounting of the history of the Downs family as requested by the Editor of the McLean County News, is given with a full heart of love and regard for the rich heritage of our ancestors who braved the unknown wilderness to come to this beautiful Green River Country and there with other hardy settlers hewed out of the great forest this rich land we love.

[Note: The preceding article was written by Roscoe Irvine Downs (1884-1975).]



**Kentucky Family Records, Vol. 9, West-Central Kentucky Family
Research Association (Owensboro, KY: McDowell Publications, 1981) pp.37-44:**



THE TWO DOWNS FAMILIES OF DAVIESS COUNTY

Prepared and submitted by: Bobbie H. O'Brien, 515 Smith Street, Hartford, Ky. 42347

When Michael J. Edgeworth presented two completely different sets of heirs for THOMAS DOWNS in KENTUCKY FAMILY RECORDS, Volume II, pages 78 and 79, he had hold of something which at that time he did not understand. Mrs. Cox has told me just recently that he had determined that there were two different Thomas Downs as fathers of the two sets of children, When Irene Peveler of Lubbock, Texas, wrote me last Spring and asked my assistance in proving her descent from the Rev. Thomas Downs, I found Mr. Edgeworth's information. The more I read it, the more perplexed I became, but I could no longer ask Mr. Edgeworth about his lists of children as he had passed away before I started working on the case. As my work progressed, I found other lists of children for Rev. Downs, some with as many as 12 children.

Because of these erroneous lists that are being passed from one generation to another, I would like to present here my findings on the DOWNS families. Mrs. Cox said that Mr. Edgeworth had labeled them the Buck Creek Downs and the Knob Lick Creek Downs, but since the head of one was a minister while the other was apparently a farmer labels are not really necessary. The Buck Creek Downs was headed by the Rev. Thomas Downs; the Knob Lick Creek by the other Thomas Downs, Using MJE's label of Buck Creek Downs, me will start with that family.

I would like to back up one generation and begin with the father of Rev. Thomas Downs, It is not known when he brought his family to Kentucky, but we know it was after 1773 when Thomas was born in Pennsylvania and 1782 when his brother William was born at Hartford, Kentucky. OHIO COUNTY IN THE OLDEN DAYS by Harrison D. Taylor and A HISTORY OF OHIO COUNTY KENTUCKY by McDowell A Fogle tells the story of the demise of the elder DOWNS by the hands of the Indians of the area. Neither author names him.

Proof that his name was WILLIAM DOWNS follows:

(1) WILLIAM DOWNS on a list of tithables for the year 1785 taken by Joseph BARNETT "on the southern waters of Rolling and Beach Forks westwardly of the waters of Hardin's Creek" - p. 10 THE NELSON COUNTY PIONEER - Simmer 1977 Issue

(2) "Administration of the estate of WILL DOWNS granted to Evan WILLIAMS with Morris BRADY and Joseph ROSS security for 500 pounds. Robert BAIRD, John ATHERTON, Henry KEITH, and Robert MOSELY, or any three, to appraise personal estate," Nelson County Court Minutes 3 July 1788 - P. 33 THE NELSON COUNTY PIONEER - Fall 1977

(3) Inventory and Appraisal of effects of William DOWNS deceased - Total 71/18/0. Taken 4 Dec 1788 by Robert BAIRD, Robert MOSLEY, Henry KEITH. Reported 13 Mar 1792 - p. 27 THE NELSON COUNTY PIONEER - Fall 1978

Nothing is known of other children, but I believe that there were as there were other DOWNS men on the tax lists of Nelson County and later in Grayson and Breckenridge Counties. I have not explored these possibilities at this time.

Although the Rev. William DOWNS was the younger of the two brothers, I will give him first place since there is less material on him.

WILLIAM DOWNS, Baptist minister, married in December 1799 Rachel ASHBY (Muhlenberg Co Marriage Records). Proof of his wife and children is found in Ohio County Circuit Court Case 1247(E). The suit was filed 6 Sept 1858 with Rev. William DOWNS Plaintiff and his sons, William C. and Thomas A., Defendants. In it appears this statement: "He says his daughter is not able to support herself and that he is now 76 years old and so prostrated by the infirmities of

old age that he is not able to labor, or support himself - yet the defendants have driven him and his daughter from their home and refused to speak to him and scowl upon him if he should happen to pass along in their presence and are teaching their children to loath and despise him."

The suit was brought because he (William) had deeded land and personal property to his sons with the provision that they take care of their mother and him as long as they lived, as well as the care of their single sister, "This indenture made and entered into this first day of January eighteen hundred and thirty-four between William DOWNS and his two sons, William C. DOWNS and Thomas A. DOWNS." It mentions 202 acres of land in Ohio County as well as a lot in Hodgenville, Hardin County, and all their household goods. The wording includes the phrases "my wife, Rachel" and "my daughter Nancy." It also gives the names of the sons' wives - P. LANE and Penelope KING. In the statements for the suit, he mentions that his wife Rachel died September 1855.

On 2 Nov 1858 a request was signed by William DOWNS to drop the suit as it had been settled between him and his sons. He was living with son William C. in Ohio County in 1860.

His children:

(1) William C. DOWNS b ca 1807; m. 2 Jan 1836 (Ohio County Marriage Records) Penelope KING. Both are buried on their farm in "the Bend" north of Hartford; graves marked with field boulders. (Lineage Lines by - Harry D. TINSLEY)

(2) Thomas Ashby DOWNS b, 9 Apr 1809; d, 6 July 1869; m, 19 June 1838 (Ohio County MR) Palmyra N. Ray b. 18 Mar 1814; d. 15 Oct 1876; both i/West Providence Cemetery (Dates and family of 6 children given in "The Family Tree" (Agnes ASHBY)

(3) Nancy DOWNS b, ca 1811; no record found of her after 6 Sept 1858

THOMAS DOWNS, Baptist minister, is not the Thomas DOWNS living with David DOWNS and family in Daviess County in 1850. The date of the census was 17 August 1850, 6 months and 9 days after the Rev, Thomas DOWNS d. 8 Feb. 1850. This date is inscribed on his tombstone which stands on "a little plot of ground located about 500 yards southwest of the present crossroads at Nuchols, KY on Hi-way 75." (A HISTORY OF DAVIESS-MCLEAN ASSOCIATION, Wendell H. Rone). Found in the Estate Papers, File 282, Ohio County was a bill from Dr. WORTHINGTON for visits and medicine beginning on 28 Jan 1850 --"old account, Box pills, and Cream of tartar." He did not visit Rev. DOWNS on January 29, but beginning January 30 he went each day thereafter through and including February 7.

Interesting items among the estate papers include (1) Holy Bible (Family) valued at 50c; (2) Bill from A.R. ROWAN to Revnd T. DOWNS, 20 July 1847 for \$12 for medicine and visits; (3) Account at Livermore with Henry J. BELT for Rev, Thomas DOWNS .., 6 Aug 1849 ...1 Rough and Ready Hat \$1.50; and (4) one note which read "Received of A.B. BAIRD, Administrator of Thomas DOWNS, deceased, \$5.00 which I am to pay to John HENRY it being the amount Thomas DOWNS signed to repair Greenbrier meetinghouse which was proven by oath of Henry HOWARD 5 Sept 1850 Terry THORP'." Also included was the "Green Brier Note" which was a page of names who had subscribed certain amounts to pay for the "finishing of the meeting house." It was dated 27 Oct 1849 and appeared to be a copy and not the one that Thomas DOWNS had actually signed. (His signature appears on various marriage records in both Daviess and Ohio Counties and on the Title Bond found in Ohio County Circuit Court Case 1079(E).

All information I have seen says that Rev. DOWNS m, 1798 Rebecca SAULSBERRY but NO ONE says where or gives any proof. I have found no marriage record to date for them. I found a marriage record for one Thomas DOWNS to Rebecca OSBORNE, d/o Samuel, on 22 Feb 1797,

Nelson Co. A Thomas DOWNS appears on the tax lists of Nelson County in 1797, 1799 (1798 list not in existence) but not in 1800,

"Our" Thomas DOWNS appears on Muhlenberg County Tax List in 1800, the same year that he was elected clerk of the old Hazel Creek Church in that county, (Wendell H. RONE) The 1809 and 1813 Tax List, Muhlenberg County, lists him with 200 acres in Ohio County on Rough Creek in name of Morris BRADY as well as 200 acres on Hazel Creek in name of John HUTSON. The 1816 list of Daviess County lists him with only 200 acres on Rough Creek, The 1818 list says he is enrolled in Priest's Militia Co. In 1824 he was listed, Thomas DOWNS, preacher.

His will is recorded in Ohio County Book C. page 97:

"In the name of God Amen. I Thomas DOWNS of the county of Ohio and state of Kentucky calling to mind the uncertainties of life and the certainty of death do make constitute and ordain this as my last will and testament. In premise my will and desire is that my body be buried in a decent and Christian like manner and as to what worldly goods and estate it hath pleased God to bless me with after the funeral expenses and all my just debts are paid I desire my property to be distributed in the following manner (I desire John M. TANNER to administer) I have a tract of 200 acres of land being in Ohio County on the waters of Rough Creek purchased of William ABLE joining or being part of a tract of 2000 acres belonging to Morris BRADY. This land I bequeath to my 2 granddaughters the children of my oldest daughter Nancy ASHBY Viz Malinda and Amanda ASHBY to them and their heirs forever. I will that all my household and kitchen furniture and everything that is in possession of John M. TANNER that I took there when I broke up housekeeping be his and his heirs. I will that my tract of land being in Daviess County be sold at my death and the proceeds be equally divided between all my children Viz Nancy ASHBY, William DOWNS, Sarah TANNER, Malinda WILLIAMS, Eliza TANNER, Rebecca WILLIAMS. In witness whereof hereunto set my hand this first day of January 1847."

s/Thomas DOWNS, Wit: J.R. ALLEN, Lucinda ALLEN

Will proved in July term of court 1850 and recorded. Proven on oath of witness J.R. ALLEN. John M. TANNER waived right by will and "refused to administer,"

Further proof of his heirs is given in Ohio County Kentucky Circuit Court Case 1079 (E). The best detailed list followed these words: "Thomas DOWNS died leaving the following heirs"

Eliza (m, John B. TANNER);

Sally (m, John M. TANNER) now deceased with heirs: Samuel, Nancy who m, Felix OWEN, Elvira and Elizabeth, the last two being infants;

Nancy (m. Peter ASHBY);

Malinda (m. Stephen R. WILLIAMS);

Rebecca (m, David A. WILLIAMS) now deceased with heirs: Richard E., Thomas, Evan, Alfred, Larkin, Levi, Sally, Artelia, Nary Eliza, the last 7 being infants;

William DOWNS now deceased with heirs: Isaac W. DOWNS, Fatura DOWNS m, William TANNER, Sally m. Mr. SMITH, Thomas J, William, Evan, Willia A., Jeremiah D., Cornelius, Bradford now deceased with 2 heirs - whose names were not given,

This document was dated 20 Sept 1853.

The children of Rev, Thomas DOWNS:

(1) Nancy DOWNS b. ca 1799; m. 3 Dec 1838 in Daviess Co. as 2w/o Peter ASHBY. Ohio Co. 1850/Nancy d, before 1860

(2) William DOWNS b, ca 1802; m, 4 Oct 1821 Daviess Co. Willie Ann KING. He reportedly met his death in 1848 by the act of hanging whether by his own act or not is not known. Documentation of his children is found in Ohio Co KY Circuit Court Case 1043(E) H. STEVENS,

Administrator vs William DOWNS Heirs and others, Summons issued 7 September 18149 for Milla A. DOWNS and her children; Higgerson BELT, Henry BELT, C.N. WORTHINGTON, John ROWAN, James S. JONES, William H. BROWN, R.L. MORTON, and A.R. ROWAN. Summons executed on" Milly A. DOWNS and Isaac W., Bradford, Fetura E., Sary M., William, Thomas J., Rebecca, Eliza, Even, Milly A., Jeremiah and Cornelius H. DOWNS, as well as on the others mentioned above, (Eliza, Rebecca and Bradford apparently were deceased by 20 Sept 1853.)

(3) Sarah DOWNS b. ca 1807; m, 22 Nov 1830 Daviess Co. to John M. TANNER

(4.) Malinsa DOWNS b. ca 1812 m. 29 July 1835 Daviess Co. to Stephen R. WILLIAMS

(5) Eliza DOWNS m. 29 Sept 1832 John B. TANNER, Daviess Co.

(6) Rebecca DOWNS m. 10 Feb 1829 in Daviess Co. to David A. WILLIAMS, She died 5 Sept 1852 and is buried in the Williams Family Plot (Reuben TINSLEY farm) near Ohio-McLean County line. ("Lineage Lines" by Harry D. Tinsley)

The "Knob Lick Creek Downs" was headed by Thomas DOWNS whose father was Jeremiah DOWNS. Proof is found in Daviess County, Kentucky, Deed Book B, page 5.

"Whereas I Thomas DOWNS of the county of Daviess and State of Kentucky am entitled to a portion of the estate of Jeremiah DOWNS my deceased father late of the county of Fayette in the state of Pennsylvania and it being inconvenient for me to attend in person thereto Be it therefore known that I hereby nominate constitute and appoint my son David DOWNS of the said county of Daviess my true and lawful attorney in fact for me and in my name to demand of the Executor of my said deceased father, or in the event he died intestate, of his administrator and receipt for all sums of money or property to which I may be entitled as one of his heirs, hereby vesting my said attorney with full power and authority to do and perform every act in the premises which I could do were I personally present herewith ratifying and confirming whatsoever my said attorney may lawfully do. In testimony whereof I have hereunto set my hand and seal this 5th day of December 1823."
s/Thomas DOWNS

According to information furnished by his fifth great-granddaughter and my client, Irene Peveler, 6801 19th St. #51, Lubbock, TX 79407, Jeremiah DOWNS served in the American Revolution from Westmoreland County Pennsylvania, from which Fayette County was formed in 1783. Estate Settlement filed in Fayette County in 1816 and recorded in October 1829 names widow Elizabeth and all children including names of daughters' husbands. Copies of settlement are available from the Clerk of Orphan's Court, Uniontown, PA 15401.

Further information on Jeremiah was obtained from GENELOGICAL AND PERSONAL HISTORY OF THE UPPER MONONGAHJA VALLEY, WEST VIRGINIA, Bernard Butcher, 1978, Volume II, page 968.

"This DOWNS family were originally residents of England, the first of the number coming to America being Jeremiah DOWNS, who upon coming to this country located In Fayette County, Pennsylvania, where several generations are descended from him. Jeremiah DOWNS, the English immigrant, settled in Redstone township, Fayette County, Pennsylvania, about the close of the eighteenth century. He was one of the early settlers and a prosperous farmer. In the family that he reared was a son, Jonathan," This text proceeded to trace Jonathan's family through the oldest son of each generation. It was interesting to note that Jonathan DOWNS had sons named David and Jonathan as did his brother Thomas who came to Kentucky,

THOMAS DOWNS, son of Jeremiah, was born circa 1779 in Pennsylvania. His birthplace was given as Virginia in the printed copy of the 1850 census of Daviess County, Kentucky.

(WCK/FRA) Because I was so sure that this had to be incorrect, I went to the microfilm and found that it was difficult to determine at a glance just what it was. I took a magnifying glass to read it and checked other birthplaces for samples of the handwriting. In comparing it to Ann BETHEL 54/55 who was born in Virginia and to Robinson McINTIRE 75/78 who was born in Pennsylvania, I found that Thomas DOWNS' birthplace was Pennsylvania. The insertion of (Minister) beside his name was also in error.

The first proven record I have of Thomas DOWNS, son of Jeremiah, is his appearance on the Muhlenberg County, Kentucky, Tax List, 17 July 1806 - Thomas DOWNS - 200 acres on Pond River in name of Thomas DOWNS. He remained on there until 1817. In 1818 he appeared on the Daviess County tax list with two horses valued at #100. He was enrolled in Brumfield's Militia Co.

31 March 1828 he sold the property in Muhlenberg County, Deed Book 6, page 498 "Thomas DOWNS and Elizabeth of Daviess County to Elizabeth LOVELACE, Daniel LOVELACE, and Mary LOVELACE, Heirs of John LOVELACE, deceased, and Elizabeth JORDAN of Muhlenberg County the said Thomas DOWNS and Elizabeth, his wife for #300 a tract of 200 acres on the waters of Pond River... bound as follows Beginning at Benjamin WORTHINGTON's corner a triple poplar....

9 July 1831 he bought property in Daviess County, Deed Book C, page 308 - Thomas DOWNS bought from Adam JORDAN and Polly his wife, for #200, a tract on Knob Lick Creek, a branch of Panther Creek "beginning at two maples and elm corner to George COUCHMAN,,,. John MADRIL's line 198 acres,"

Thomas DOWNS and Solomon BRAND were security, for David DOWNS, Administrator for Tilman V. BETHEL, deceased; Bond \$400; Appraisers were William FAITH, Jr., Charles TRAVIS, Luke WALTRIP, William MUSGROVE. Daviess Co Ky Order Bk D, p.352 - 14 Nov 1842 (WCK/FRA)

David DOWNS qualified as Administrator 10 Nov 1851 for Thomas DOWNS deceased, Securities: Jesse B. MOSELEY, William FAITH. (WCK/FRA)

Daviess County Circuit Court Box 327 - "We the undersigned heirs of Thomas DOWNS dec'd agree and consent that the land descended to us from Thomas DOWNS our late father may he sold and we do hereby relinquish our right of Dower and inheritance given under our hand this the first day of March 1854." s/Anna BETHEL, Elizabeth WALTRIP, Jane DAVIS, Martha LYNN, Joanna MOSELEY. On one of the papers it mentioned that our "Father left 8 children." Another paper named three sons: David, Jonathan, Thomas Jr.

Daviess Co Ky Deed Book N, p.45 - 21 Mar 1856 - Commissioner William B. WALL appointed to sell and convey land to B.B. BLINCOE and Gabriel BRYAN a tract containing 198 acres - petition in equity filed 8 Sept 1853 Daviess Circuit Court. Land offered at courthouse door on 29 May 1854.

Highest bid: \$1320. Description: "Beginning at 2 maples and elm corner to George COUCHMAN being the same land conveyed by A. JORDAN and wife to Thomas DOWNS on the 9th of July 1831 by and named in Deed Book C, page 308, of the Daviess County Court Clerk's office, containing one hundred ninety eight acres,"

The Muhlenberg County 1810 Census gives Thomas DOWNS' household: Males: 1 age 10-16, 1 age 16-26, 1 age 26-45; Females: 5 under 10, 1 age 10-16, 1 age 16-26, 1 age 26-45,

In 1820 Daviess County: Males: 2 under 0, 1 age 16-18*, 1 age 16-26, 1 age 26-45 (Thomas would have been 41); Females: 1 under 10, 1 age 10-16, 2 age 16-26, 1 age 26-45.

*1 could not be sure if "1" or a smudge; however, it should be noted here that even if it were a "1" in this column, there were still only three "sons." (Reference: "The 1820 census differs little from the preceding two, i.e. 1800 and 1810, except that an additional column is added, this being one showing males from 16-18. This was primarily for military purposes. It must be remembered that those in this bracket were also shown in the bracket 16-26," so care must be taken not to mistake the total number in the family," IS THAT LINEAGE RIGHT? NSDAR)

Since this census shows the three sons and since the 1830 census shows a female child under 10, this would account for the eight children of Thomas DOWNS. This leads me to believe that the older two girls and one boy in the 1810 census were not daughters and son but possibly sisters and brother of Thomas and/or of Elizabeth. Perhaps this is where John DOWNS fits in; he married Polly BASSETT 30 Dec 1818 in Daviess County.

Be that as it may - we have 8 proven children of Thomas and Elizabeth DOWNS:

1. Anna DOWNS b.ca1800 VA, m. 31 Jan 1822 "according to the rules of the church to which I belong" by Rev, William BARNETT, Daviess Co Book A, p. 24 to WILLIAM BETHEL who d. before 1850. Marriage record gives her name as "Patsy" which is usually considered a nickname for Martha.

2. David DOWNS h. 1802, VA; d, before 17 Apr 1858; his wife d. before 1850. No marriage record has been found for him. His heirs named in Deed Book O, p. 267, Daviess Co:

a. Margaret DOWNS m. 18 May 1847 Creed MEADE, Daviess Co Bk A, p. 176

b. Elizabeth DOWNS m. 29 Oct 1851 Matthias COLE, Daviess Co Bk A. p. 233

c. Melvina DOWNS m. 25 Apr 1854 Samuel D. SHEPHARD, Daviess Co Bk B, p. 225

d. Martha DOWNS m. 13 Oct 1857 Miron P. MERCHANT, Daviess Co Bk D, p. 115

e. William T. DOWNS

f. Emeline DOWNS

3, Martha DOWNS b. 1803, VA; m, John LYNN; living Daviess Co 1850; no marriage record found.

4. Jonathan DOWNS b, ca 1812, Muhlenberg Co KY; d. before 10 Nov 1851 (David DOWNS qualified as Administrator, Daviess Co - WCK/FRA) m. 1 Dec 1845 Nancy DAVIS, Breckinridge Co (COOK). Heirs named in Circuit Court Case Jonathan DOWNS Heirs vs His Heirs, File Box #327:

a. John Henry DOWNS

b. James Edward DOWNS

5. Elizabeth DOWNS b. ca 1812, Muhlenberg Co KY; d. Apr 1869; m. 1 Nov 1827 Daviess Co Bk A JOHN WALTRIP, s/o Joseph WALTRIP and Henrietta PRIOR. (This is ancestor of my client Irene Peveler.)

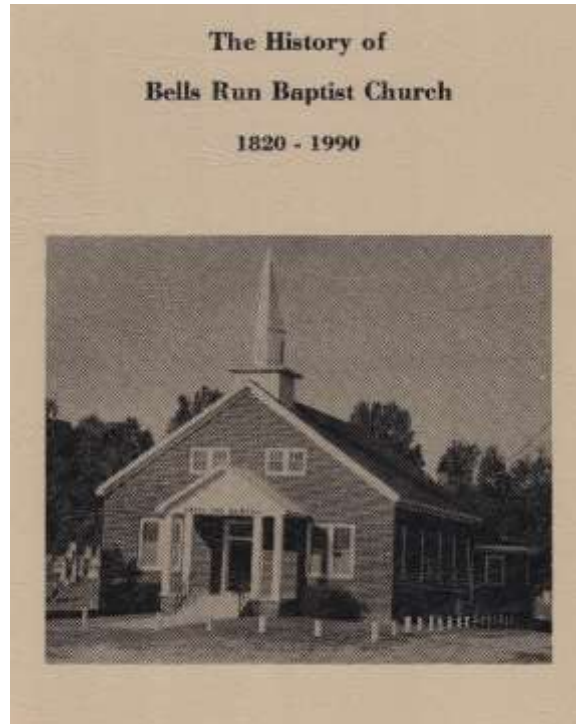
6. Thomas DOWNS, Jr. b. ca 1816, Muhlenberg Co KY; shoemaker by profession, d. May 1859 of consumption in Breckinridge Co (Mortality Schedule); m/1 on 20 Oct 1842 (Daviess Co Bk A, p. 129) Mary R. TUCKER; m/2 before 1850 Elizabeth MOORE; living Breckinridge Co 1850. These are ancestors of WCK/FRA member #654 Sue G. Acton.

7. Jane DOWNS b. 4 July 1818, Daviess Co KY; d. 9 Oct 1887; m. 23 May 1843 Daviess Co Book A, p. 137) William L (Billy) DAVIS b. 28 Mar 1806; d. 17 Apr 1873. These are ancestors of WCK/FRA member #299, Carrola S. RUGGLES,

8. Joanna DOWNS b. 14 Feb 1821, Daviess Co; d. 10 June 1893; i/Mt. Pleasant Cumberland Presbyterian Church Cemetery (WCK/FRA) m. 19 Dec 1837, Daviess Co (Book A, p. 83) Jesse B. MOSELEY b. ca 1811, s/o John MOSELEY and Jane TARLT ON.



The History of Bells Run Baptist Church, 1820-1990,
Rev. Wendell H. Rone (Utica, KY: McDowell Publications, 1990) pp.21:



... William Downs and wife were among the first settlers in what was then Jefferson County (1780), Virginia, now Ohio County (1799), Kentucky. Their first stop was at Barnett's Station (1782), where their son, William Downs, was born, the first known birth after the fort's erection. It was located about two miles north of the present site of the county seat of Ohio County - Hartford, on Rough River.

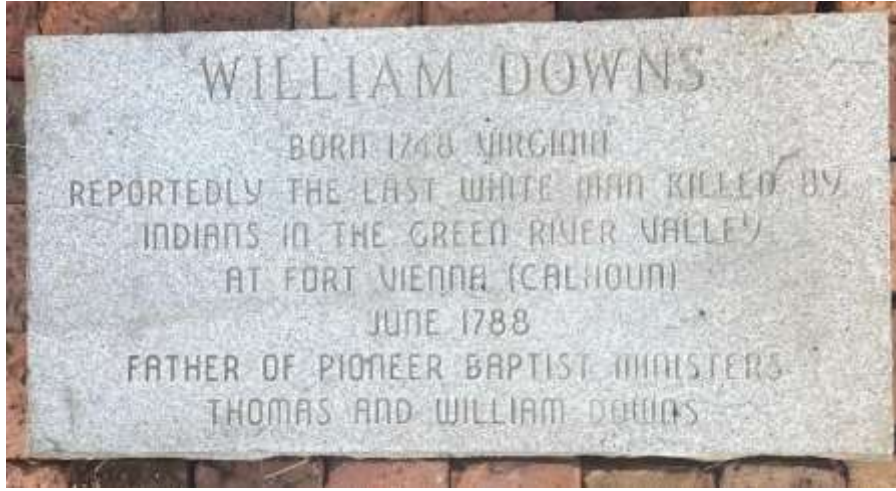
On May 11, 1784, Captain William Rowan led several families from the Barnett's Station-Smeather's Station-Fort Hartford enclaves to build another fort at the "Long Falls of Green River." He was the father of John Rowan, who later built "Federal Hill" near the city of Bardstown, Nelson County, Kentucky, now known as "My Old Kentucky Home." The Captain William Rowan Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) of Livermore is named for this noted Revolutionary War officer. The settlement was first known by the name of Rhoadsville; but became Fort Vienna in 1785, after the completion of the fort on and inside the bluff overlooking the Green River near the site of the present Calhoun Lock and Dam. The area became Calhoun in 1851. It was the first settlement within the bounds of what later became the original Daviess County (1815), and still later, McLean County (1854), Kentucky. The "Long Falls of Green River" went out of existence with the erection of the lock and dam at Rumsey (Calhoun) in 1833-1838. Long Falls Creek got its name from the falls.

Among the settlers accompanying Captain Rowan were Henry Rhoads "The Father of Muhlenberg County," his brothers, Solomon Rhoads and David Rhoads, William Downs, Senior, their families and others.

As the Indians often crossed the Ohio River into Kentucky from the north to hunt, and to attack the early settlers near Fort Vienna; William Downs, Senior was killed near there in about June, 1788 as he went to look for his horses and cattle. This incident, brought great grief and dislocation to the Downs family. Young Thomas Downs was then in his fifteenth year, while his brother, William Downs, Junior was in his sixth year. At this time, Fort Vienna was in Nelson County, Virginia. The county had been founded on January 1, 1785 out of Jefferson County, Virginia. In February 1787, William Downs, Senior is listed among the "List of Taxables and Taxable Property in Green River lower district pursuant to an order issued at Nelson County February Court, 1787." This placed him in the Fort Vienna vicinity, where he was killed the next year. According to the tax listing he was: 1 free tithable, 1 above 21, owning 2 horses and 10 cows. According to the Nelson County court minutes of July 3, 1788, "Administration of the estate of Wil Downs granted to Evan Williams with Morris Brady and Joseph Ross security for 500 pounds. Robert Baird, John Atherton, Henry Keith, and Robert Mosely, or any three to appraise personal estate." The three men, Baird, Mosely, and Keith reported on December 4, 1788 that the estate was valued at 71 pounds and 18 shillings. It was reported on March 13, 1792.

In addition to Thomas Downs and William Downs, Junior, a daughter, Elizabeth Downs, existed. A Jonathan Downs and a Richard Downs appear on the Nelson County tax lists in 1793-1799, while a Benjamin Downs appears in 1800. It is not known by the writer if they were related to our subject. We have no information concerning other children....





Marker in memory of William Downs, who was killed by Indians at Fort Vienna (Calhoun, KY) in 1788. It rests in front of the DAR memorial marking the site of Fort Vienna on Hwy 256 West below the Green River Bridge in Calhoun. The creation and erection of the Downs memorial was done in 2023 by Gary W. Tunget, historian and former registrar and president of the Lt. Robert Moseley Chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution. Gary's wife, Mary Lisa, is a 5th great-granddaughter of William Downs, Sr.

