

William Smither

Alias “Bill Smothers”

By Laura Mercy Wright
(a great-great-granddaughter)



Notes about the author by Jerry Long



Laura Mercy Wright (1871-1947)

Laura Mercy Wright, was born 12 July 1871 near Rockport in Spencer County, IN and died 18 October 1947 in Rockport, Spencer County, IN. She was buried in the Shiloh Cemetery, at Reo, Spencer County, IN. She was the daughter of John Barnett Wright (1829-1913) & Margaret Elizabeth Greathouse (1831-1922); granddaughter of John Bukey Greathouse (1797-1857) and Elizabeth Grass (1803-1878); great-granddaughter of Daniel Grass (1774-1836) & Jane Smithers (c1779-1867); and great-great-granddaughter of William Smithers (c1760-1837) & Nancy Cecilia Fitzpatrick. William Smither (Smithers, Smothers), a Revolutionary War veteran and Indiana fighter, is recognized as the first settler at Yellow Banks, now Owensboro, KY.

(Miss) Laura Mercy Wright was a teacher for many years in the Spencer County, IN schools. She was a historian. She wrote "The Pioneer Mother," a paper on Nancy Hanks Lincoln's life in Indiana and was read on 27 May 1934, at the annual memorial held at the grave of Nancy Hanks Lincoln under the auspices of the Spencer County Historical Society. In 1935 she organized the Spier Spencer DAR Chapter at Rockport, IN and served as its first regent. During 1927-1935 she was serving as secretary of the Spencer County, IN Historical Society and in 1938-1941 she was president of the group. She prepared papers on her ancestors

William Smithers and Daniel Grass. She presented program, "My Ancestor, Bill Smeathers", to the Gen. Evan Shelby DAR Chapter in Owensboro, KY on 4 September 1931 and to the Southwestern Indiana Historical Association in Princeton, IN on 4 December 1931. Her manuscript on William Smither follows:



William Smither

To appreciate the present age, its civilization in all that it means, we must turn back to the past, for out of its building material come the institutions, the privileges we enjoy today. Henry William Van Loon has said: "It bids me to believe that nothing is ever wasted in this universe of ours, that nothing is ever lost, that nothing can ever be lost. Civilization is galloping on. It cannot come to an end, but merely changes." If this be true and I heartily believe with Mr. Van Loon that it is true; then it bespeaks wisdom to turn back to the pages of past history and seek to learn and to study the folk that have made our own United States of America.

By folk, I mean not only those who have been heralded as the founders of our nation; who have held the wheel in turning its machinery; whose names have embellished the pages in history, or whose forms and countenances have been chiseled out of marble to show our admiration of these personages, and our kindred appreciation for the acts these famous men who have contributed their bit, but also those whose names go unsung in establishing, developing, and fortifying our own beloved land.

Were it not for the alloy in our gold, it would not have its wearing qualities. The folks may be likened unto this alloy. Their names go unsung. Through their daring and courageous spirits; their integrity and perseverance; their keen foresight and intelligent thinking, with standing hardships and privations, our forefathers have wrought tremendous transitions in the unfolding of a country which stands inferior to none.

To such folk belongs William Smither, commonly known as William Smothers, and sometimes pronounced Smeathers. My mother, and also history verify the correct name is Smither. In the fall after his father had been killed by an Indian, William Smither received a letter from his uncle Henry Chrisman, his mother's brother. He was Sheriff at Cartersville, Virginia. The message stated he would educate this nephew, then a lad of twelve years, and when he became grown would present him with L100 in cash. William Smither accepted the offer, however grudgingly, and with hesitation, for his mother was an out-caste among her people because of her marriage.

Upon the arrival at the home of his uncle, Squire Chrisman, which lay in the Big Bend of the James River, north of Lynchburg, his uncle shook hands with him, lost no time in admonishing the lad as to his proper demeanor, emphasising politeness to his friends and neighbors always, and proceeded to say; "Call yourself William Smither, which is your name, and not Bill Smothers."

William Smither's ancestry on his mother's side can be traced back to 1710 in this country. Perhaps it will be interesting to know, that William Smither's ancestry on his mother's side are allied to two families of prominence and wealth in early Virginia, namely, that of Hite and Chrisman.

In 1708, Jost Hite, the great-grandfather of William Smither was a native of Alsace, Germany. He was united in marriage to Marie DuBois in Strasburg. She was a Huguenot. In 1710, Jost Hite with wife and daughter, also named Marie emigrated. to what is now Kingston, New

York. Here he founded a colony. He built two vessels, named them Friendship and Swift. These were built to bring Dutch and German families as tenants for lands he expected to settle.

Hite remained at Kingston until 1715. He then moved to Germantown, Pennsylvania. In the same year he bought land on the Schuylkill river and later built a home on the site where Samuel Pennypacker erected his country home. Hite was a farmer as well as a manufacturer. The mills he built later became known as the Pennypacker mills.

In 1730 Hite became disgusted over the refusal of the governor not signing a petition for protection against the Indians, and for this reason moved into the Shenandoah Valley in, Virginia, taking with him sixteen families. They crossed the Potomac River at Shepherdstown. Hite was the first man to settle in this valley. Here he bought 40,000 acres of land from John Van Meter. Later this land was known as Hite's grant. On October 31, 1731, he and a young Quaker, Robert McCoy formed a partnership and obtained 100,000 acres west of the mountains. Here he built a fine stone house. It was five or six miles south of what is now Winchester, Frederick County, Virginia. Part of this land was purchased from Governor Sir William Gooch at Williamsburg, Virginia. It was specified in the contract for a settlement of one hundred families within two years, but the time was extended to 1735. Hite now had fifty-four families settled in the Shenandoah Valley and he demanded 54,000 acres in full title. The governor refused; law suits lasted in court more than fifty years, long after Jost Hite's death.

Both Hite and his wife, Marie DuBois, lie buried at Bartonville, Frederick County, Virginia, on the Valley Turnpike road.

Perhaps you wonder what bearings these disputes over land titles have in this paper. Several interesting things can be mentioned that are of value, not only in the sketch of William Smither, but in the sketches of all frontier life. First, with no claim to titles of their land, many pioneers moved westward beyond English control. Second, Jost Hite is known as the father of the western movement. His son Isaac was a Representative at Boonsboro, of the first Kentucky Legislature.

Jost Hite's daughter, Magdalena, sister to Isaac was united in marriage to Jacob Chrisman. Chrisman was a native of Wurtenburg, Germany. Both Jacob and Magdalena Chrisman, the grandparents of William Smither, on his mother's side lie buried at Chrisman Springs, Virginia, for it was their daughter, Anne Marie, known as Mary who was born November 9, 1735, who married the father of William Smither. I am in doubt as to the Christian name of his father. However, I do know that Mary was an out-caste from home for marrying the father of William Smither. With the man she loved, she faced the dangers of the frontier, and with him endured its privations and hardships. Her vows at the altar were kept, and with a faith in her mate, and in the wisdom of God, she dared bare three children, that like their parents, would have the wilderness as their habitation, the Indian their foe, and a life confronting them that called for strength of mind, body and soul.

William was their first born. Their second child was James and their third and last was Mary, familiarly called "Mollie" or "Polly".

Before following the direct line of William Smither it may be interesting to you to know that his brother James married Elizabeth Bell on April 4, 1805 and had a son called "Archie", who was married to Molly Taylor on Sept. 29, 1828, in Owensboro, Ky. Also a son named "Asa". These family names are familiar in Daviess County today. From this line one of your citizens, Mr. Drury Smither, is a descendent. Mollie Smither never married.

I regret very much I cannot be as explicit concerning the family of Smither as I was that of Hite and Chrisman. However, I will give you what knowledge I have pertaining to the family. The

name Smither is Scot-Irish, and is identified in early Virginia history. I have been told that a George Smither was in Richmond as early as 1630.

In the Counties of Botetourt and Washington, on the Holston River and Catawba Creek, lived the Smither families at the time of the Revolution. Here they possessed land. John, Gabriel and Steven Smither were Continental soldiers, enlisting from Botetourt County. After carefully compiling dates, I feel safe to say the father of William Smither was born about 1735. Data tells us his wife, Mary, was born in that year, and knowing young Smither was at the battle of King's Mountain which was fought in 1780, with two years spent with his uncle Henry at Cartersville, Va., where he attended school, and knowing he was twelve years old when his parents died, it is safe to say William Smither's father was killed by an Indian approximately between the years 1770 and 1774. I feel safe in saying it was on the eve of the Revolutionary War. I almost believe the father's Christian name was William. Doubtless their daughter was named for her mother, and in those days family names were prized highly. I hope sometime in the future to delve more deeply in the family of Smither.

In this lengthy discussion I trust I have made a proper setting for this most romantic individual, made so by his traits of character, his outstanding individuality and strong personality.

It is said that William Smither had many gifts, enumerated as personal courage, inferior to no man; a good understanding, sensing quickly the value of any situation, for the operations of his mind were alert, keen and spirited to the point of conception. He never failed to interest his listeners, both the literate and the illiterate. "He rarely descended to vulgarity, and never affected a coarse manner, nor used the rude speech of the ruffian. His voice and mind were clear and distinct, and all could understand". But his lack of a thorough education, and an environment dominated with illiteracy, and little culture led him into many improprieties.

William Smither was five feet, eleven inches high. He had dark brown hair, a thin brown beard, prominent clear, deep blue eyes, and a fair complexion. His countenance was playful and intelligent. His figure was erect, and body and limbs had a singular roundness that gave him symmetry of form. Due to his muscular power he was easy and graceful in motion, and of great action. What he did was done deliberately. He was never in a hurry. He was frank, hospitable, and spoke the truth, excepting when he planned mischief for fun. Then it is said his imagination invented, what was necessary to the success of scheme or joke, - miraculous lies, and particular and attendant circumstances being so earnestly told, as well as minuteness of detail, that the listeners accepted his incredulity as substantiated truth.

The first great shock in the life of this pioneer was the tragic death of his father and mother.

One morning Anthony Thompson, Justice of Peace for Nelson County, and who lived near Vienna visited William Smither at Yellow Banks, now known as Owensboro, Kentucky. As a proper setting for this interview between Thompson and Smither, permit me to describe his home, then more vividly may we see these men and enjoy their meeting.

The home of Smither was located on the site of Bransford Stemmy. His house was made of round logs, with two doors. From one of them he had the view of the Ohio River, and the other opened into his garden. A shed-room, where he kept his peltries and groceries, was built on the lower side of his house, by extending the main roof. It was enclosed by slabs of timber, planted firmly in the ground. The passage way to this shed was an opening four feet long cut in a single log. This shed served also for a bed-room, when he entertained a large company and. this was not infrequent.

Smither was wiping his gun when he saw a well-dressed man hitching his horse to the corner of the garden fence. But Smither went on cleaning his rifle. Thompson came up, and

extending his hand to Smither said: 'I am Anthony Thomson. I have the pleasure of addressing Captain Smither.'

"This is William, not William nor Captain either exactly, but plain Bill Smothers."

"I thought we all had titles now," replied Thompson.

"For that reason I prefer none", answered Smither.

"Well, titles are small matters and the meanest frequently were the highest. I have been withing three hours ride and never have you visited me. I concluded I would come over and spend the day with you."

"I am glad to meet you, but feel sorry I have nothing to offer you after your long ride."

"I am provided", said Thompson, and drawing a bottle from his saddle-bags," with the first drink their conversation was general, with their second drink it was social and agreeable, and with the third it became confidential." Both men were pleased with each other. Both handsome, well built figures, quiet and self-possessed men, endowed with uncommon horse-sense, keen appreciation of wit and humor, and the stern problems of those times their easy flow of language delighted each other.

In this mutual discourse Thompson said: "I have a favor to ask you. I desire that you will give me your early history."

Smither replied: I was born on the western frontier o Virginia, near the Holston River. My father was fond of hunting and frequently took me to assist in bringing home the game. One morning he started at day-break, telling my mother that he would take a little round and be back to breakfast. He failed to come and mother became uneasy. At dinner I noticed my mother was growing very pale. I told her I thought father would be back before night. She made no answer. I saw tears stream down her cheeks. Before night she became so tremulous that she could do nothing. My brother James and I got supper. Early the next morning she told us to get the neighbors to go out with us to hunt for my father. I went to see three of them. None refused. We walked rapidly all that live-long day. We discovered nothing that indicated the fate of my father, except some Indian signs that the men said looked tolerably fresh. The anguish of my mother, I cannot describe. She hardly looked like my mother. She spoke not a word; she shed no tears. There was a strange and fixed look about the eyes. One of the men told her it was a bad chance, but if she said so, they would hunt again tomorrow. Mother bowed her head. in gratitude for the offer, and the men went to their homes. By sunrise we started, trying to avoid as far as possible the places we had seen the day before. About the middle of the afternoon, and about two miles from our house, one of the men found a small piece of walnut dyed jeans, which we all thought had been torn from the pantaloons of my father. After looking around for a short time, I found what was left of his body. Nearly all the flesh had been devoured, by wild beasts and we could not see where he had been shot, but the narrow blade of an Indian tomahawk had been driven deep into his brain. We gathered up his bones as well as we could and started home. We had passed. the spring and got into the yard, when my mother seeing that we were carrying something in our arms, ran to meet us. She toot one look and started for the house but fell before she had reached the door. We laid down my father's bones, and placed her in bed. My father was buried the next day. My mother never changed her position, and you could scarcely see whether he was dead or alive; but she lingered for eight days and died on the morning of the ninth. She was placed in death where she had been in life – close by the side of my father. I could not sleep a wink that night. Before day I went out and standing by their graves, boy as I was, I raised my hand and swore that I would devote my life to the destruction of the Indian race."

After a silence, due to emotion, he resumed: "Thompson, I have seldom spoken of these matters for the simplest reason that I cannot, but from that day to this I have never seen an Indian that I did not fire at, and I don't think I have missed one very often. I should dislike to kill a woman. I am glad I have never met a squaw, Say Thompson, is a squaw a woman?"

Thompson replied: "No sir, she is a female, but she is not a woman, and I will so decide if ever that point comes up before me."

"How can that point ever come up?" inquired Smither.

"Very. easily", answered Thompson. "There is a law against striking a woman, and if a man would strike a squaw, I would that he had not violated, the statute."

Then Smither said to Thompson: "I suppose you are satisfied, as I have already related the events that have decided my character, if I have any."

"Tell me about the children and what became of them", replied Thompson.

"Well, I was the oldest and was twelve years of age; James was nine; and Mollie was seven when my parents died. One of the men who had assisted in the search was a new-comer, and having no place of his own, he proposed to take ours and support the children for the rent of the farm, and as he had two children, a boy and a girl, the neighbors all said it would be a good arrangement and he moved on. I worked a little that season and hunted a good deal. During the fall I got a message from my uncle on my mother's side, saying that if I would come to his house he would give me an education and L100 in cash when I had grown up. I had made up my mind to reject the proposal as the whole family had cast off mother on account of her marriage. Everyone said I was a natural fool if I didn't go; that I had a first rate chance of making a man of myself and that if I staid. where I was, I would never be worth hell-room, and they did wish a rich man would make such an offer to their boys." I told them it was too far to go alone, and that I could never find the way. It was quickly answered that by mere good luck Dutch John would start to Lynchburg next Saturday for his supply of goods and groceries, and I could go to that place with him, and then walk to my uncle's, who lived some distance above Richmond."

Let us now picture this Dutchman, whose name was John Wimp, and William Smithers approximately in his thirteenth year in a covered wagon driving through the valley with Blue Ridge Mountains on the right and on the left. On Monday they crossed the mountains at Buford's Gap and camped on the other side at a spring. On Tuesday they forded. The Staunton or Roanoke River, for it was called by both names, and spent the night on the northern bank of this stream. William Smither said: "The dreary solitude of the pine woods through which we passed did not meet my expectations, as I supposed the country would improve as we approached the James River." He found., too, the people were extremely poor and as he said "in very thin order." After sunset Thursday the travelers reached Lynchburg. Here they staid over night with a German grocer, from whom Wimp made his purchases. On Friday morning after breakfasting at daylight he took a stroll, expecting to see rich bottom land, but was disappointed. Instead, the hills were steeper and higher on the opposite shore from Lynchburg, which was built on the side of a steep hill. So disappointed was this youth of thirteen years, he decided to return with Wimp to his home on the Holston River.

"You go back with me, dey laugh at you. Wen I is no bigger as you, I come from Holland and worked my way at dat," said Wimp by way of encouragement.

"Well, good-bye Wimp", said Smither.

"God bless you", said the Dutchman.

Now the lad took his way northward by way of the road to Cumberland Court House, feeling he had left his only friend on earth behind. At that place a black-smith directed him

towards the home of Henry Chrisman. Friendless and alone, tramping through the pine-woods, going to live with an uncle, whom he had never seen, and for whom he felt no love, because of his mother's disinheritance and alienation from her family, must have called forth anguish of soul in this forlorn youth, making his way on foot through this strange country. Why? To avail himself of better opportunities in the way of education and culture. Somewhere he stayed all night, for he said "by the middle of the afternoon on Saturday I reached my uncle's home". Just one week it took to make this trip. His uncle shook hands with him, when he told his name, but did not ask about his mother or the children. Smither said: "I looked around the premises, and saw everything was in neat order. His four negro cabins were better than any dwelling I had seen on the Holston. His house was a square frame building, one story high, with four rooms on the lower floor, and two rooms in the garrett, – one a bed-room and the other was called the store-room."

"Remember always you are living with a man of respect and moving in a circle of genteel society. You will be associated in school with young Grayson from Richmond, Cabell, from Lynchburg, and Taliaferro from Amherst, who are worthy of your highest respect, and you ought to esteem it an honor to have a privilege to keep such company."

Smither replied: "Tit for tat was my rule".

That rule will do very well towards your equals", retorted his uncle, "but toward your superiors a different course of conduct would be expected."

William Smither's judgment being sound, said no more, but he said to himself: "I understood my uncle Henry's character as well as if I had known him all his life. He worships the rich and despises the poor".

On Monday morning he went to school with George Carlisle, a son of a rich flour mill man at Lynchburg, who boarded and roomed at Henry Chrisman's, to attend school. George Carlisle and William Smither were room mates and became fast friends. The school they attended was taught by an Englishman named Finley, a man of learning, and highly esteemed by both patron and pupil. Smither said: I was called "Wild-cat", and "Chicasaw Bill". I was glad they had struck on my strong suit, and at that game I knew I could hold my own. In about two weeks, when I had learned their peculiarities, I began to return the compliment and the names I gave them stuck to them as long as they remained in school.

Col. Willis and his neighbors would not permit their children to attend school at Cartersville, lest they be led into dissipation, but sent them to Mr. Finley. Other families of note, whose children went to Mr. Finley, were the Harrisons, the Watkins, and the Bowlings. Bowling was a very rich man owning two farms of 1000 acres each and an island in the James River. He had married an Indian. Their sons were prouder of their Indian blood than they were of their European descent, because she was an Indian princess. I imagine this did not set well with William Smither.

The rambles of these boy friends extended from Palmyra in Fluvanna County to Big Bend Creek in Goochland County. In Goochland county, Smither once bet on Harrison's mare and lost his bet.

It will be pleasing I am sure to recall the last day of the first year's school that Smither attended while living with his uncle. Such testimonials as a fine coat came from Col. Willis; a riding horse from Mr. Harrison; two barrels of flour from Mr. Carlisle, and one-half gallon of whiskey from Squire Chrisman, evidenced the approbation of his patrons, making Mr. Finley feel a security for the coming year.

So on the last day of June Mr. Finley held an examination, and on the next morning the Grand Exhibition was held. This was a gala day for the boys and girls. Speeches for the boys were

written by Mr. Finley, and the compositions for the girls were written by Mrs. Finley. Each boy delivered his "original" speech, and every girl read her composition. "We spoke under an arch of pine and cedar branches and roses" said Smither. Carlisle spoke on manufacturers; Harrison on Filed Sports; Taliaferro on Mountain Scenery in Virginia; Willis on Hospitality; Chrisman on Economy; Cabell on Law; Grayson on Commerce; Crunk, (son of Willis's overseer) on Agriculture and Smothers on Doom of the Indians. This subject just suited me. I pitched in freely. When I got to the part which said that the hand of the avenger was already uplifted to smite and slay me, it seemed I was engaged in a bloody work. "

After this program of oratory, fathers and mothers embraced their children. Purses were drawn from pockets, arrearages were paid, even some paying in advance for the next session of school. Such homely expressions as "Did I ever!" "Could you have thought it!" "Well, my goodness", and "Well, my stars!" were heard on this happy occasion. Proud parents were rejoicing; Mr. and Mrs. Finley were bowing and bending graciously, receiving the congratulations accorded them so generously; the boys and girls with books forgotten felt they were the pride and admiration of the community, and the ruling factor in their parents' hearts.

Mr. Harrison and Mr. Carlisle went home with Squire Chrisman. Mr. Willis had invited Mr. Harrison to dine with him, but since he had a pressing invitation to dine with Chrisman, Col. Willis said: "Oh, well take dinner with the Squire, but be at my house at 5 o'clock." Then turning to Smither, he said: "Bill, you made the best speech of the whole batch." William Smither described his feelings in these words: "If you ever saw a nigger sitting by a gourd of whisky you may have some faint idea of my feelings at this time. I felt good all the way down."

After a long grace at dinner, a toast was drunk according to the custom of the times. The men rose, and drank to the health of "our gracious sovereign George III", after which proceeded the dinner.

At this time Mr. Carlisle complimented my uncle on his whisky, saying "no home had so good whisky between Lynchburg and Richmond as Henry Chrisman's." Smither said his uncle squared himself back in his chair and said: "Gentleman, I am deficient in many respects, but I have undertaken to make up my manifest and manifold deficiencies by the systematic and almost scientific arrangement of my affairs. My farm, my office, and my house will all bear evidence of the truth of this observation. But with reference to the whisky, my plan is this; when I remove two barrels of whisky from the store-room to the closet, which I do once in two years, on the first day of May, these are replaced by two new barrels of whisky, and I commence the use of the two barrels which are then precisely two years old., and which are destined to last me precisely two years. I open the two bung-holes, and introduce into each two pounds of loaf sugar, and one-half pound of brown peaches. I leave the bung open two years, when I consider them ready for use. The window of the storeroom is kept hoisted so as to allow the escape of any unpleasant odor that might collect in the room. By the care in the selection of the pure article to start on, and the strict observance of these rules, any man may have the pleasure of treating his friends to good whisky, the only difference in point of economy being the paltry amount of interest on the cost price of two barrels. The whisky of which you are partaking is three years and two months old to a day.

Carlisle and Harrison said that a barrel of whisky in their store-room would not last three months – and wondered where such trusty servants could be found – Chrisman informed the gentlemen double locks on the door and the keys in his pocket, and the small sized window hoisted twelve inches was sufficient.

After dinner Mr. Harrison and son repaired to the home of Col. Willis, and Carlisle and Chrisman went over to Mr. Finley's for the afternoon. The boys betook themselves to the orchard.

Here sitting under an apple tree, Carlisle said.: "I can't see any use of whisky waiting two years before it is tasted."

Smither replied: "I am of the same opinion."

Your uncle thinks it is impossible for anyone to reach it", continued. Carlisle.

"He forgot the ladder that stands against the yard fence, and also forgot there is such a thing as a rye straw."

To make a long story short, the boys convinced themselves of the practicability of the ladder and the rye straw, which properly sucked would raise the whisky above the bungholes. "We bottled it," said Smither. Its stimulation made us progress. Mr. Finley said we were the aptest and smartest boys he had ever seen, and on the first of April informed my uncle I was ready for Latin.

On the first day of May the two boys' anxiety was intense. It was the day to move the barrels from the store-room. They took their seats on the stile-block to watch the removal of the barrels. Two negroes were summoned, and they with their master proceeded up-stairs. In less than a minute the Squire came thundering down stairs, telling his wife there was not ten gallons of whisky in either barrel. His wife returned with her husband to the store-room, but soon returned, slamming the door behind her.

Without investigation, William says his uncle called him an "ungrateful, contemptible wretch, void of shame and destitute alike of honor and common honesty."

Then George Carlisle defended Smither by saying: "Squire Chrisman, I have been with Bill all the time. Whatever he has done I have done. Whatever is done to Bill shall be done to me. If you are going to try to whip us, come on. We will do the best we can."

Squire Chrisman replied kindly: "George you are a son of a valued friend and you might presume to take extra privileges about my house."

He then turned to Smither and pointing his finger at him said: "To think I should be plundered and robbed by a vagabond, whom I raised from dirt and ashes is too much. William, I never told you a lie. I am one of his Majesty's justices, and I tell you now I will never stop till I have your ears cropped close to your head and the letter "T" branded on your jaw."

This was too much for Smither to stand. He retorted: "I am sorry I ever darkened your doors. You are the meanest man on earth. You kneel to the rich and you kick the poor."

After a moment of silence George Carlisle and Bill Smither shook hands, bade farewell to each other. George took the road to Cumberland Court House and later joined Washington's army, and was frozen to death at Valley Forge while on picket duty. William made his way toward Lynchburg, and fearing his uncle would send a bailiff to arrest him, he turned his way into strange paths, passing through Prince Edward, Charlotte, Halifax to Hillsboro, North Carolina.

Penniless and friendless he was hired as a rider, rubber and washer of a race horse. Soon he learned he was among a gang of thieves. He was asked if he could hold a horse back, and still convince the public he was pushing it to its very best. Smither answered: "I believe I can." So he stayed with this gang of gamblers, and won a race for which he received 100 c, in solid pewter. He then left them, glad to depart.

The Revolutionary War broke out about this time. Col. Isaac Shelby found him at Taylorsville, near the Catawba River. The Colonel was hunting volunteers to fight the English at King's Mountain, and Smither enlisted as a soldier. The next day after the battle Smither found a horse. Col. Shelby gave it to him and with his discharge he mounted this horse which he called Ike in honor of his Colonel, and wended his way toward Hillsboro. Later he concluded to go to Guilford Court House, upon hearing General Green was there, thinking he would find General Shelby and his men there also. Before he reached his destination he was taken by a squad of men,

who had been sent out to press in teamsters to drive wagons. Smither said: "I am a soldier and no teamster. I demand to see General Green."

"I need you", said the General, "but you shall be discharged as soon as I can spare you."

Under General Green, William Smither was in the battle at Guilford, Court House, and at Camden and Eutaw Spring. The British had now begun to abandon the cause, and General Green, remembering his promise sent Smither his discharge. On his horse, Ike, he started for Hillboro. Finding no work he decided to face his uncle's ire, that he might see Laura Willis and learn if she were married.

He was the guest of Mr. Finley. He found, owing to the war, his beloved teacher had been deprived of his livelihood, and was living off the bounty of Col. Willis. While here the Colonel and Mrs. Willis gave a party in celebration of the victories of the Continental army in the South, and along with the names of Green, Campbell and Shelby, William Smither heard his own name mentioned.

"Bill," said Col. Willis, "I had almost given you out. Come, walk into the dining room, take a mug of apple-jack." From a large punch bowl they filled their mugs, and Col. Willis raising his said: "Long life and happiness to Bill Smothers."

Squire Chrisman and Mr. Harrison were sitting in the corner of the room conversing. "Col. Willis took me by the arm", said Smither, "and led me over to these men". Then Col. Willis said: "Squire Chrisman, here is the son of your sister Mary. He is brave and worthy of your friendship or any man's friendship. I have always thought you were hasty and rather harsh in your conduct toward the boys and that you may have positively treated them with injustice."

"Squire Chrisman hesitated to acknowledge me, when Mr. Harrison arose and said: "I shall be a little plainer and a little more frank than Col. Willis. You will be doing injustice to yourself, if you fail to embrace the opportunity of friendship. You have made the gravest of grave charges against the boys, and permit me to say you never offered a particle of proof for their support."

Then Squire Chrisman spoke out: "Does anyone doubt?"

Mr. Harrison then proceeded to say: "Sir, there are not six men within ten miles of this place who believe you ever lost a drop of that whisky. I repeat- "Double lock, keys rendered safe in your pocket, and your whisky is secure. "Besides in accepting the two barrels from Mr. Carlisle, you became as guilty as they were. If they stole your whisky, you compounded it with felony and whenever you commence your prosecution, though I despise the office, I shall become the informer. I do not know what Smither will take, but as he has nothing but his character, I would advise him to vindicate it at a court of justice, unless the charges are withdrawn. Squire Chrisman, do you know the history of these boys since they fled from your house? Carlisle joined the army of Washington. He froze to death on picket duty at Valley Forge, rather than leave without orders. It is an instance without parallel. Bill Smothers fought under the hot sun of the South. He has been on four of the bloodiest fields of war and returns with honorable discharges endorsed by Shelby and Green.

We sit here sipping apple-jack, and rejoicing over victories, refusing our hands to such men who achieve them."

"Uncle caught me by the hand, "said William Smither. "Make my home yours as long as you remain." This Smither did until after the party at Harrison's home in honor of the surrender of Cornwallis. He then left but he never received the money promised him; neither did his uncle invite him back.

Did he see Laura Willis? Yes. Was she married? No. When Thompson asked him if he had ever seen Laura since and did she ever marry, he replied: "I would rather never know. I prefer to remember her as she was. Not a day passes over my head, but I think of her."

With a heavy heart William Smither left Cartersville by way of Lynchburg for home. Within a week's time he proposed to and married the daughter of the man who had moved into his home and cared for his brother James and sister Mary. In the spring with his wife and sister he went to Kentucky. Lexington was too densely settled, so he and others went farther into the wilderness and built the fort at Hartford.

Thus far we have seen Smither as a boy in frontier life; a soldier of the Revolution, and now let us think of him as a citizen in Yellow Banks. Already we have pictured his home. But here, too, fate destined him to show his manhood in the protection of his home. May we draw aside the curtain of time, and see William Smither sitting by the side of his sister Molly on their doorstep as the sun was sinking in the west, with a view of the beautiful Ohio flowing peaceably on its downward course skirted on either side by a dense woodland, to join the Father of Waters, the Mississippi River on its way to the sea. A keel boat had landed, unnoticed and seven men were already in the yard before this brother and sister were aware of their presence. The foremost man was of Herculean strength. His name was Norris. It is said he had never been matched in a fist-cuff from Louisville to New Orleans. Smithers rose and invited them in. Their language was too free, and their behavior such that his sister Mollie sought safety at the home of Husk, to avoid their insulting manners. Smither reminded the men that their behavior was unbecoming. Six of the men returned to the boat. Norris did not go. In the dim twilight ten or twelve of the crew returned, and when they entered the house they found the lifeless body of Norris on the floor. Smither hid at first in the garden, but spent the night in the woods. A charge of murder was made against him, so he demanded a judicial investigation. A Court of Inquiry was held. Smither's friends rallied to his cause. He gave bond and was ordered to appear at Hartford on the first day of the next court.

In all previous offenses which had been minor ones, Smither appeared in his own defense, but in this case of life and death he was afraid to trust himself. He was a poor man, and lawyer fees were high. He did not know what to do. Joe Daviess, for whom your County was named had always admired Smither because of his indomitable courage, sent him this message from Frankfort: "Don't ruin yourself hiring a lawyer. I will be with you on the day of the trial."

Joe Daviess was no mean orator. But he did things different to other folks. He stayed at the home of Stephen Stateler on Monday night, preceding his trial, On Tuesday morning, leaving directions that his negro boy was to ride in town that evening, Joe Daviess and Stephen Stateler walked the four miles to Hartford. They sat on a bench in a remote corner of the courtroom. Dressed in blue jeans, they resembled the farmers who had gathered to hear the trial. Stateler had no idea he was talking to Joe Daviess, a foremost lawyer in the State of Kentucky. Judge Broadnax called the case. Joe Daviess left Stateler and took his seat beside his client. Smither was not surprised, and shook his hand. John Daviess, a brother of Joe Daviess was the prosecutor. When he saw his brother he was surprised, fully realizing his brother's superiority, now knew his case was lost. The two men embraced. The Judge repeated the call of the case with emphasis and said he wished to be advised if the Commonwealth was ready. The trial proceeded.

When Joe Daviess rose and addressed the jury, it was done in a manner of style and tactics that were all his own. Naturally eccentric and eloquent he began repeating in substance what had fallen from the lips of the prosecuting attorney – "Hang the marauder! the out-law! the assassin! the Murderer! Proof or no proof let the hangman proceed on his mission of strangulation!" He dwelt upon the tender mercy of the law; the safe guards it threw around life and liberty of its

citizens. The friends of Smither began to whisper he was a snake in the grass. He was helping his brother. But Joe Daviess had merely used the substance of his brother's speech, to obtain the effect he desired with the jury, by means of contrast. At the right time he presented the side of his client, stating a case was not one of murder unless done in malice, and that this deed was done in self-defense of family and home. This manslaughter was a virtue and not a crime, and it had not been proven his client had slain Norris, moreover, if Smither did direct the blade, Norris was the aggressor. He said too, that his client was a man of sense and prudence, who would never have dared an encounter against a giant; thirty of his comrades said they would stake their lives that Norris had never found his equal, and that he unbidden invaded a quiet home, and for civility and hospitality had returned injury and insult, and his foul tongue aimed at infamy upon a maiden sister's name. For these things the prisoner slew through the holy cause of religion and virtue, said Joe Daviess. Then he paid a tribute to these brave and hardy pioneers, who had through their intrepidity had won the Great Valley from the Indians, and had converted it into farm-lands, trade centers and the cultivation of the arts. As a fitting climax he said Julius Caesar received a golden crown for his victories in Gaul, and its addition to the Roman Empire, but these pioneer patriots had conquered a territory three times as fertile as Gaul, and neither had charity, nor the bounty, and justice of this government induced this country to bestow upon one of these noble frontier men as much as an iron skillet.

The jury was out just ten minutes. Smither was found not guilty. Joe Daviess went home with Smither. He was so charmed with the location of Yellow Banks, he made it his home thereafter. The only monument he has to his name today, so I have heard, is the County of Daviess, for whom it was named.

We have shown that William Smither possessed unusual courage, inferior to no man, a good understanding, a keen perception, an affable manner, a character of unwavering decision, of integrity and trust-worthiness, void of hypocrisy and affectation. He was a gentleman in all that that word means, holding womanhood in highest esteem.

Now, may we depict some instances that will bring us still closer to the man showing his sense of humor, and peculiar traits that made him an outstanding figure in your own vicinity?

Smither left Hartford, when game became scarce, as well as Indians. So he moved to Yellow Banks. Here he roamed at pleasure from Panther Cree: to the Ohio, from Green River to Blackford as the only resident. He roamed these forests alone. He slaughtered game at pleasure, and the wilderness was a vast pasturage for his stock. The barges stopped and gave him salt, flour and groceries in exchange for venison, and pelts. He lived in style beyond the means of his friends. It is said no gentleman below the falls at Louisville fared more sumptuously, nor entertained more hospitably. Old rye and wheat flour were his, and these articles were unknown in the interior.

A man called Leatherlegs when guest at the Smither home said.: "Smothers, I believe I will pull up stakes where I am and come down here."

Smither was not pleased with his domain being interrupted by settlers. He replied: " I intend to pay you a visit soon on Pond River, and take a long tramp through the hills for game. I like to hunt in the hills and the water is much better there than down here in the bottoms. You are clear of the gnats, mosquitoes, and gallinippers."

Leatherlegs, so nicknamed because quoting Smither, "since he wore no breeches, his legs looked like tanned dog-skin," took the hint that he was unwanted and said.: "You are taking a good deal of trouble, to tell me you don't want me. I won't come. If I break up I will go to the mouth of Wolf or to Red. Banks. (Now where Henderson, Ky. is). "Well, then, we shall be neighbors and I will call and see you there", said Smither.

Smither soon saw his range of 150,000 acres of land molested. The surveyor's cabin was built, and the subdivision of land began. Trees marked these boundary lines. Many of them were felled, but it was not said he ever cut one. At last, twenty families moved in. Then he knew the quietude of his home was gone, but he met his fate and "made a virtue of necessity", and cultivated the friendship of the new-comers. He visited their homes. At this time he visited Natty and Ely Bell on Blackford. Here he found his brother James. On his return he met Felty Husk, who was building a house, where Thomas H. Pointer built his residence years after. These men became fast friends, though they differed. Husk was a bible reader, and quoted Paul and Peter upon every provocation, while Smither was indifferent to such moral precepts. It was Husk who helped Smither, however, carry out his deviltries.

When Anthony Thompson departed for Vienna after the day's visit with Smither, the sun was hiding behind the horizon, the host regretted he had not a drop of spirits as a "stirrup cup."

"I am a well-balanced man", replied Thompson. Whenever you find a bottle in one end of my saddle-bags, you may know there is one in the other end. I find it very inconvenient to carry one in one pocket without something to balance against it."

Smither and Husk accompanied Thompson as far as Panther Creek. Thompson forded the stream singing "Daniel Boone." Smither said to Husk: "He is an uncommonly smart man."

Husk replied: "Yes, he is as wise as a serpent and as harmless as a dove."

Here on Panther Creek Smither and Husk camped for two days to hunt, then decided to go to the home of James Gentry, a man who raised "lots of hogs, but raised little corn." He climbed trees for miles around to find the best of mast, whither he would drive his swine.

On their way to the home of Mr. Gentry, the two hunters found him in a tree. Smither said to Husk: "There is Gentry looking for mast. Let us keep him here all night." "The old man will go to sleep and fall," said Husk.

"No", answered Smither, "Apostles may go to sleep, but gentlemen never."

Smither gave a war-hoop. Gentry sat still. Then the gun of Gentry, which was at the foot of the tree went off, the bullet whizzing nearby. All night an occasional war-hoop from Husk in the distance was an echo to that real war-hoop of Smither, and at day-break, Smither said: "If you are a white man, come down. We are your friends. If you are an Indian you will never reach the ground."

"I am white. I am a settler. I am James Gentry.

"Gentry never did realize the joke", said Smither.

Now the three returned to Blackford for bears. Smither's dogs, named Rouser, Sounder and Music had a tussel with a bear. "Great God, Gentry, are you going to stand by and see all my dogs killed." Smither had trailed, the dogs to the creek and now he leaped into the branch, and killed the bear. The bear was so heavy, the three men skinned it and quartered it while standing in the water. This stream was then named Bear Branch.

I desire to mention one prank of Smither before he leaves Yellow Banks forever, in order to leave with you a more vivid picture of this outstanding individual.

One evening a finely dressed roan, mounted on a fine horse, and carrying a single-barrel shot gun, rode up to the home of Smither. Smither looked him over. He did not like the stranger. On his fingers were rings, across his breast was a gold chain. His feet were dressed in fine high-heeled boots, and on his head he wore a polished beaver. A splendid New Foundland dog was his companion. He desired to stay all night. "It will be dangerous to do so," said Smither. "Around here people steal horses. We have to stay up at night and guard our stock."

Husk verified what Smither said by quoting the Scripture concerning the wise and foolish

virgins.

The stranger became alarmed, but agreed to buy one-half gallon of whisky from the store-boat, if the men would watch his horse.

Then Smither said: "We will tie your horse in the ravine yonder. Near by is a log which extends out over the ravine. From there we can keep our eyes on the horse. Each of us will take our place on the log and watch for prowling thieves. At the end of each watch, let the one watching fire a gun. That will not only scare off the thieves but wake us fellows up for our turn."

Needless to say, the ravine was full of water. Husk sat the first watch; Smither sat the second, and the stranger sat the third and last. Smither loaded his gun for the stranger full of powder and wet wad. The stranger took his place on the log, when his turn came. At the end of his watch he fired his gun. Over went the be-spangled stranger into the water. Smither had previously provided himself with a long pole. With it he fished the stranger out of the ravine and remarked: "That report stranger, will keep off the thieves. We need not watch any longer." The stranger left before breakfast. He forgot both his dog and gun.

Pictures of pioneer life are fast fading away. May I review the last bear hunt in which Smither participated, before he left Yellow Banks, that we may get a glimpse of some of the pleasant diversions of these simple folk?

He desired to see his friend Tarlton, on Rough Creek, before his departure for Texas. In company with Husk and Glenn, he with his dogs, left to have a final bear hunt. The men stayed with Tarlton all night. The next evening they joined Hardin and some hunters on Rough Creek. At day-light on the next day they were cooking and eating their breakfast. By sunrise they were in their saddles, starting in double-file, Smither and Hardin in the lead. The dogs chased rabbits and opossums unnoticed. Smither suddenly reined up his horse, listened a moment, and then brought his horse to a lope. "Are you certain it is a bear," asked Hardin. "Men might lie, and did lie, but Rouser never", replied Smither.

When the party arrived at Rough Creek, sure enough there were bear tracks. Smither assumed command. "Go in couples. Surround the cane brake. Don't let him get out alive. If he is trailed out, follow the direction of the cry. I will keep up with him", said Smither to the party. Now turning to his dogs he said: "Roll him up my Rouser! Speak to him my Sounder! Sing it out, My Music.!"

The bear was trailed to a cave. Some of the men wanted to smoke him out, others tried to imitate young bears in distress, and still others barked like squirrels; chattered like jay-birds, cawed like crows, hooted like owls and screamed like panthers. Smither was sitting at the root of a tree, and tired of all this nonsense he said: "Beaver you and Bob Tarlton are the stoutest men in the crowd. Arm yourselves and go in and kill the bear."

"There are too many depending on me for bread and meat for me to undertake the job," replied Hardin. "I have always been opposed to going underground, and never intend to do so as long as I can help it," said Tarlton.

Smither then rose to his feet, and with his little oath said: "It shall be said," and drawing out his knife passed his thumb along its edge. During the breathless silence a young man, name William Cunningham, who belonged to the Hardin party, stepped in front of Smither and said: "If you are going in that hole, it shall never be said out of this company of twelve men, that you went alone."

Smither surveyed, this man with scrutiny. He saw in his thin visage, his long nose, and his firmly compressed lips that he meant what he said. Looking with admiration at the slight figure, he extended his hand and embraced him with more than the affection of a brother. Then Smither

said: "If we failed, to get the stoutest, we certainly have the youngest and the oldest. I am in my fiftieth year, and I suppose you are in your twentieth or twenty-first."

Cunningham bowed his head. He took a tallow-candle from his pouch. He cut it into two pieces. One he tied near the muzzle of his gun; the other near the lock. When they were lighted this youth of twenty years said: "I am ready. I shall go before, since I have the gun."

Smither carried his knife in one hand, and a tomahawk in the other. "If the bear should come rushing at us, fire, and then take out your edged tools and go to work. At the crack of your gun, I will be at your side, and I bet my head against a button he will never see daylight again. I have killed many a one with a hatchet, and many more with one thrust of the knife. If he is an old, fat and lazy fellow, and is asleep when we approach his nest, his eyes will shine when he opens them. You must then draw a fine bead between them, and then raise a little and fire. A bear's eyes are very low down in his face. Take good aim, and put the lead into his brainpan. I will not insist upon the necessity of keeping cool, for I discover that you are as cool here as you were out of doors."

Cunningham made good aim. Smither opened the jugular vein, and proposed that Cunningham wash his hands in the blood of the bear, and return and tell the men that Smither was killed. Cunningham replied: "I never told a lie, and would prefer starting on a smaller scale, should I ever start in the business."

Smither then suggested that he, himself, would go out and tell a whopper, and leave Cunningham in the cave. But Cunningham contended that no good could come out of such a course and insisted the two ascend to daylight together.

Since Cunningham had been a leader and had fired the first shot, Smither said: "I will sneak out, but it looks like a sin to do so." So the conscience of Cunningham spoiled the fun of Smither. The two walked out together.

Cooking now began on a large scale. One man was fond of ribs nicely browned before the fire; another, a stew with red-pepper and garlic; another a steak of tenderloin, and another bears feet roasted in the ashes. So these varied appetites made a busy scene around the fire. Supper lasted from four in the afternoon until eleven at night.

Next morning the hunt continued. Smith drank little, and Cunningham none. That evening after the two jugs of whisky had been consumed, the party went to their homes.

Cunningham and Smither bade each other farewell with the cordial shake of the hand. I would like to hunt with you next fall," said this young man. "If you do it will be a great distance from here," replied Smither. "I would go with you to Indiana, Illinois or Missouri", continued Cunningham. "I shall hunt the balance of my days beyond the boundaries of the United States," said Smither.

I cannot refrain from saying that Cunningham died, at Leitchfield, Grayson County, Kentucky, full of years and full of honors maintaining through life the virtues he practiced in young manhood.

On his return home, Smither commenced his preparations for his departure for Texas. It was Joe Daviess who advised him to leave, for his life was in jeopardy from the enraged river-men, since his acquittal of the murder at Hartford.

First he visited his brother James on Blackford. When he announced his intentions, James gave vent to his sorrow. "Jim, be a man. If I had been hung at Hartford, I should not have drawn a sigh or shed a tear, and I don't like to see you crying as if you were a woman or child."

James and his wife with their sons, Asa and Archie, came to Yellow Banks to stay till William Smither left. How the children enjoyed their uncle! Asa was the constant companion of

him. They would take long walks together. On one of these trips he asked his nephew: "Asa, how did God make man? The child. replied: "God made man out of dust."

Smither then descended into a deep wash on a hillside. After scratching in the soil he found what he was seeking, then said.: "Asa, I can create a man, and I am going to make one now."

Raising the skull he said.: "I will make his head out of this." Then taking the shin-bones he said: "I will make his legs out of these, and the crooked pieces will do for the ribs." This clay is too red to make a white man; it is not dark enough for a black man, and I will have to make an Indian."

"Uncle Bill, don't make a big Indian. Make a little fellow about my size."

Smither looked at the boy and asked: "Are you afraid a big Indian would kill you?"

"Oh, no! You could whip any Indian; but I wanted a little one so we could take him to your house and let Archie and mother see him. A big one might get away."

Smither discovered he had failed to excite fear in the mind of the child. After a few moments of silence, on their way home, Smither noticed the child was thoughtful. "What are you thinking about, Asa? "Uncle Bill, I want to ask you one question. Did you tell the real truth, when you said you could make a man? "

"No, Asa, there was not one word of truth in that statement. I killed an Indian before you were born, and threw his body into that wash. Those were his bones I had in my hands. I said what I did to try your spunk and see if you were of the true grit. Ever since we have been hunting together, I have been trying you. Whenever I have left you in the woods, it was done to satisfy myself whether one day you would be a man or a mouse. I shall leave you all in a few days, and when I am a thousand miles from you, it will do roe good to reflect that no coward bears the name of Smothers."

At sunrise on Sunday, Smither took an affectionate farewell of his family. With his three dogs, Rouser, Sounder and Music he stepped into the loaded skiff, protected, with skins. While Husk was untieing the skiff:, he said: "Remember, Smothers, that two hundred three score and sixteen were saved in the shipwreck because Paul believing in God. Also remember thar doubting Peter received help when he was about to sink, from the Hand which never fails to save. I would speak more but" – Husk's voice became thick. He could say no more, but straightening himself he waved, a last adieu.

Smither landed in New Orleans after a prosperous voyage of two weeks. He spent one day here buying ammunition. The next day he embarked and descended to the delta, and entered the Gulf of Mexico. Hugging the shore he rowed toward Texas. About the first day of May, 1812 he rowed into Galveston Bay. He spent one month on the island. He found the water brackish, and left, famished for a drink of fresh water. On one afternoon he entered the mouth of the Brassos River. After eleven days of toil ascending that river, he reached the mouth of the Yeagua (Yawaw) Creek, that empties into the Brassos. Hiding his skiff he began to explore the country and select a place for a permanent home. Forty miles from the point he landed he found a prairie, embracing 2000 acres. Near the center was an elevation fifty or sixty feet high. At the foot of the hill was a spring. Trees here were interlaced with grape vines. Here the creeks had water as clear as a crystal. Fish could be seen to the depth of six feet. Here on top of the hill he built his hut, covering it with Spanish moss. He called his place "The Island", due to the insular character of the grove. A delightful sea breeze blew from the Gulf. Here he was happy, for by nature Smither was a lover of natural beauty, with an innate love for freedom from the irksome and humdrum realities of civilized life.

Here from his hut he could watch with delight the wild horse and the buffalo graze with uninterrupted freedom on the prairie below. Here the bear was not afraid to lap the water from his spring. Here the wolves prowled around for prey. Here the Kickapoos wandered through the country, while at the falls of the Brassos the Wacos had their villages, and on the spurs of the Rocky's dwelt the fierce Comanches. Here on the prairies between the Brassos and the Colorado he went for his favorite pass-time, hunting Indians. He dressed himself in a suit of soft doe skin, stripped from the dead body of a Waco. In this disguise he was more able to escape observation.

For more than one hundred miles around his house he explored the country alone. His unaffected love for nature helped him pass away many a lonely hour. He studied the soil, the flowers, listened to the music of the cascade, admired the starry heavens, the distant mountains and the quiet valleys. These reflected upon him the feebleness of mortality, and the all prevailing presence of God. But with such meditations, the mangled body of his father would rise before him, and the pleading voice of his mother urged him still to pursue his mission of vengeance and slaughter.

For fifteen years Smither trod this wilderness uninterrupted, and again he saw his domain disturbed, for the Mexican government had granted land to Stephen F. Austin, and settlers began moving in.

Now his activity was waning, but his courage never. After recovering from an attack of heart trouble, a friend of his, named Fallnash said: "Smothers, what do you think was the matter with you the other day?"

"I do not know exactly", replied Smither, "but I am afflicted precisely as "Old Rouser" was previous to his death, and I believe he died with old age. I brought him from Kentucky with me, and as he had always been a good dog, I nursed him as if he had been a child. He would go with me to the spring, but frequently gave out climbing the hill, and I sometimes carried him to the house in my arms. While I walk tolerably well on level ground, it tires me greatly to ascend a hill. His limbs were generally swollen a little in the morning, and I discover the same disposition in my own. I have watched him when he was asleep. His breathing would become thick and difficult, his jugular veins would swell, and he would soon be in perfect agony. Then suddenly with a yelp, he would bounce up and trot off, shaking his tail. So, I often with a start can scarcely get my breath. A violent pain seizes me in my left side and a stinging sensation runs through my veins. Rouser died when he was fast asleep, after making three struggles to catch his breath, and I would not be at all surprised if I go some night in the same way. I have always been fond of company, but I would prefer to die alone."

James Bowie with a squad of men, called to see Smither to procure his services as a guide into the territory of the fierce Comanches. Unable to make the trip he stopped at the home of his daughter. This daughter had induced her husband, Berry, to go to Texas that he might provide for his wants. Her zeal to make him comfortable, her filial attention worried him. He said to her: "I will never come to see you again, as it is impossible to have anytime to play with my grandchildren." May I say here, that his play was rough. He would lie on his back upon the grass, and tell the children they could not jump over his legs. When they ran to make the jump, he would trip them with his feet, and throw them heels over head.

Bowie on his return stopped at the home of Berry. Smither could not be persuaded to remain with his daughter. The fortitude of Smither was shaken for a moment, when he bade his daughter farewell. She fully realized it was the last time she would see her father alive.

Bowie enlivened the trip back to Smither's home with animated descriptions of the battle in the prairie.

Bowie, if I could only recall forty years, yes, a dozen or half a dozen years, I would like to scour the plains with you. I know them well and have probably rested under the same tree that you picked your Indian, from which he fell. But every dog has his day, and I have had mine."

Bowie proposed that Smither go on to San Felipe with him, and get medical aid. Smither declined saying: "I have never taken a dose of medicine in my life, and I never intend to."

Early in October, Fallnash and a friend named Colvin started for a bear hunt. They went by for Smither. They hitched their horses at the spring. They walked up the hill. When they climbed over the yard fence the dogs sallied forth and resisted the intrusion. The familiar voices of these men quieted them, calling them by their names. They entered the house. There they saw Smither's body extended on a bear skin. He had on his head a white woolen cap. His hair and his beard were whiter still. His tomahawk was belted to his side. His open palm rested upon the lock of his gun, which stood in the corner of the room.

Fallnash, kneeling by his body, offered the last tribute to his memory with gushing tears, for was it not this eccentric, good and heroic man who had saved his son's life by springing astride an alligator fourteen feet long, which had risen noiselessly from the lake seizing the boy by the legs, and with his hatchet struck fiercely and powerfully the reptile between his eyes. Colvin overcome with emotion left the hut. Already the once active limbs were stiff and cold; the tongue that had expressed so much of the inner man was mute forever; the heart and pulse that had beaten in the van of the battle of life had now ceased to beat no more. Thus the loyal friend, the implacable enemy, the lion-hearted Smither was no more.

Tragic to the end was his life. He sought no honor. With a gentle soul, untamed, he could gather the children about his knee, but when a need came up that gentle heart was steeled to face that need. He lived what he believed was right. Pretense and hypocrisy were not his friends. As a great-great grand-daughter, I have drawn aside the curtain of Time, and, have viewed this great man – the first man in Yellow Banks, now your own city of Owensboro – the first white man in Texas, the Lone Star State.

The sun has risen and set these many years, and yet Smither has not been forgotten. Today, we the D. A. R's. of the General Even Shelby Chapter of Owensboro, Kentucky, do honor his name, and have kept his memory alive, and will keep in its archives a summary of his life.

His Creed

I am resolved I shall never regret anything I have done. I shall never do anything I am ashamed of. I shall value a man for what he is worth. Morality seasoned with justice, generosity, truthfulness and honesty, void of hypocrisy will be my religion. God alone is great.

GENOLOGY OF WILLIAM SMITHER.

THE HITE LINE.

Yost Hite married Marie Dubois in 1708 in Germany.

- Mary born 1709 in Germany. Married George Bowan
- Elizabeth married Paul Froman
- Magdalena baptised Sept. 13, 1713 married Jacob Crisman 1732. He was born in Wurtenburg, Germany.

- John
- Jacob
- Isaac
- Abraham
- Joseph

THE CRISMAN LINE.

Jacob Crisman married Magdalena Hite 1732.

- Abraham born 1733
- Sarah born 1734
- Mary born 1735 married (? William) Stateler 1761
- Isaac born 1739
- Jacob Jr.
- Henry (the uncle who educated. William Smither)
- Rebecca
- George

THE SMITHER LINE.

(William) Smither married Mary Crismann 1761.

- William born 1762 married Cecelia Fitzpatrick 1782; married Mary Winters of Tenn. April 22, 1795
- James married Elizabeth Bell, April 4, 1835 Daviess county. Their sons, Asa and Archie. Archie married Dolly Taylor Sept. 28, 1828.
- Mary (Polly) never married.

WILLIAM SMITHER LINE.

William Smither married Cecelia Fitzpatrick 1782.

- Jean born 1783, in fort in Hartford, Ky. Married. Daniel Grass Feb. 1800 Buried in old cemetery in Rockport, Ind. 1867.
- Elizabeth, born 1789, died 1859. Married 1808 to George Stateler of Pa. Moved, to Spencer County from Daviess County, Ky. in 1818. Buried in Spencer County.
- Archie, married. Samie Moore June 1816 record at Boonville, Ind. Buried, at Bloomfield, Spencer County.
- Margaret died.
- ? married ? Berry. This daughter and her husband followed her father to Texas.

William Smither married Mary Winter 1791.

- Mary born Apr. 27, 1795, died Aug. 14, 1876. Married Henry Jones May 14, 1812.

Jean Smither married Daniel Grass in 1800.

- Joe, a doctor (never married), Practiced medicine in Rockport, Ind. Buried in the old cemetery there.
- Garrett
- Alfred married Jane Brady, Spencer County, Ind.
- Daniel (called Dac) married Patsy (Rose Jane) Roberts of Daviess Co. Ky.
- James married Tutra Howard, Daviess Co. Ky.
- Margaret married Daniel Brown. Sam Brown of Hawesville was a grandson.
- Elizabeth married John Buche Greathouse. Their daughter, my mother, was united in marriage to John Barnett Wright, Rockport, Ind. Sept. 1, 1857.

Mary Smither, daughter of William Smither, married Henry Jones May 14, 1812.

- Ollie Jones married Alfred McCoy Oct. 15, 1839. Their son, Dr. Leonidas McCoy married Emma Matilda Hatfield March 17, 1875. Their daughter Alda married George Honig June 12, 1917.

CONCLUSION.

With much interest I have written this paper, and have traced the geneology, arranging it in a form which can be readily understood.

I want, to give source of my, information. As a whole, what I have given you, have been verified by my mother. Often I have heard her mention her cousin Asa, and Archie, and their father. She told me her grandfather Smither was an Indian hunter, the territory as far as Vincennes and beyond the Wabash into the prairie of Illinois were known to him, even the slaying of the last Indian in Spencer County, Indiana, was laid. on William Smither. He was innocent of this deed, but it was done to clear the man who did.

To your own late senator McClary [sic] *, I am responsible for much of the direct discourse found in this paper, having read an article in the Public Library written by him.

To Mr. George Honig, the Hite and Crismann geneology I give credit. The immediate geneology I received from the lips of my mother, who was born March 20, 1830 and died Aug. 22, 1922.

(Note – The date of "Aug 22" should be Aug 10, 1922.) By request of Miss Wright.

M.H.D. [note by Jerry Long – signed by Mary Hale Dean]

* Senator McCreery is the one referred to above. M.H.D.

This paper was read by Miss Wright at a Chapter meeting 1931 [note by Jerry Long – Evan Shelby DAR Chapter, Owensboro, KY.



Rockport Journal, Rockport, IN, Friday, 24 October 1947, p.1:

Miss Laura Wright, Retired Teacher, Dies

Miss Laura Wright, 76, former teacher in the Spencer county schools, died Saturday morning at the Simpson nursing home. She had been ill for several months.

Services were conducted Monday afternoon at Trinity Methodist church in charge of Rev Robert DeLong. Burial was at Shiloh in the family burial plot.

“Death has come to a friend

It is the door where her suffering ends.”

Laura Mercy Wright was born on a farm near Rockport July 12, 1871 and died in Rockport on Oct. 18, 1947.

She was the daughter of John D. and Margaret Elizabeth Wright. Her ancestors on both sides were among the earliest and best known pioneer citizens of Spencer county; her great-grandfather being Judge Daniel Grass, Spencer county’s first land agent and the first white settler to take out a land grant on the present site of Rockport.

“Miss Laura” as she was affectionately known by young and old was a graduate of the 1889 class of the Rockport high school. After the completion of her high school course she chose teaching as her life work and entered the Indiana State Teachers’ College at Terre Haute, Ind.

Later she studied at Indiana and DePauw Universities, then branching out into music, domestic science and art she attended Valparaiso Art School, Chicago School of Art and then was a student at Evansville College.

She was a tireless seeker after knowledge in all lines of education. Her first school was taught at Gum Grove in Spencer county and then for forty years she was a most successful and beloved teacher in Indiana schools at Richland, Eureka, Hatfield, Rockport, Lake Mill, Princeton, Union City, Haubstadt, Grandview and Silverdale.

She was a woman of wide interest, a writer of prose and poetry and has left many beautiful paintings to prove her gift as an artist, She extended her education by constant reading and by contact with people outside of her own circle. Her life touched many lives and her pupils everywhere were devoted to her. She was outstanding in her devotion and loyalty to friends.

She was a member of the Rockport Lutheran church; member of the Rockport Woman’s Club; Literary Club; Spier Spencer Chapter D.A.R., and was its organizer and first Regent; Rebekah Lodge; Past Noble Grands Garden Club, and president of the Spencer County Historical Society. She will be long missed in this community and other communities by countless friends.

She leaves one sister, Miss Amanda Wright, and a large number of relatives, to mourn her passing to the Great Beyond, which is not so far away, but just across a little space where the Master waits.

Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Sunday, 30 November 1941, p.5A:



Laura Mercy Wright

Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Friday, 4 September 1931, p.7:

D. A. R. MEETING
The General Evan Shelby chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution will meet with Mrs. John D. Howard, at her home in Griffith avenue, at 3 o'clock this afternoon. Miss Laura Mercy Wright will talk on "My Ancestor, Bill Smeathers." Hostesses will be Mrs. Eugene Mobberly, chairman, Mesdames John D. Howard, Fred Weir, E. R. Bennett, Ella Benton, Beatrice Cottrell Slaughter, Overton Cheatham, and Miss Mary Brame.

Rockport Journal, Rockport, IN, Sunday, 15 June 1930, p.7C:



Laura Mercy Wright portrays Mrs. Daniel Grass, wife of the first land owner in Rockport, in the historical pageant, "When Lincoln Went Flatboating From Rockport", to be presented at Rockside Park in Rockport on 4 July 1930.

