

4. WILLIAM SENTELL (1756-1835)

William Sentell was born in Southside Virginia on 14 October 1756,¹ one of the older, if not the firstborn of the six known children of Jonathan and Ann Sentell.² He probably saw his first light of day on Red Oak Creek in northern Brunswick County. Jonathan's father had entered land here in 1748 (100 acres), and again in 1753 (316 acres), and a brother, three years younger than William, was born ". . . in Brunswick County State of Virginia."³

Alva Sentell wrote that his great-grandfather "has been described as a man medium in size and not very tall."

He was very stout and spent a great deal of his time in hunting. He was a man who enjoyed what he had but made no effort to accumulate much property. The probability is he came to Henderson County and settled where he did on account of the great abundance of deer and wild turkeys and fine fish with which Willow Creek abounded at that time. As to his morals, he was always a law-abiding man and never was in the courts for any offense. In his religious life, he was a devout Christian and was a member of a Baptist Church nearby.⁴

His in-laws objected to William, we are told. "Her people all opposed the marriage to a young man who was not educated and who had little property," Alva wrote.

William may have been literate, but like most people of the time he probably was not. In 1816, he could sign his name to a transfer deed.⁵ Alva said that his great-grandmother "not only taught her husband how to read and write, but she instructed him in the study of the Bible." And perhaps she did. She recalled that a certain name was signed to her husband's military discharge, and this suggests at least a marginal literacy on her part.

¹ Alva Sentell, "A Sketch of the Sentell Family," Among unpublished papers of R. Nicholas Sentelle; F. M. Huggins, "History of the Sentelle Family," Unpublished paper loaned by Richard Ennis Sentelle; Frank L. FitzSimons, **From the Banks of the Oklawaha** (Golden Glow Publishing Company, 1976), p. 35.

² **Edgefield County** (South Carolina) **Will Book A**, pp. 156-157.

³ Samuel Sentell, Military Pension Records, W.6017.

⁴ Alva Sentell, *loc. cit.*

⁵ **Henderson County** (North Carolina) **Deed Book 1**, p. 118 (1 April 1840). This is a second registration of a Buncombe County deed dated 10 February 1816.

But we might question why in 1845 she sealed her pension declaration with a mark if she could write. And we might wonder why half of her children, those born after 1789, are missing from the birth record submitted to support her pension petition. The removal of the family to South Carolina about that time may have had something to do with it. Whoever provided the record in their old home was no longer available after the move.

Service in the Revolution

William Sentell was a veteran of the Revolution, and our knowledge of his military service relies heavily upon the account sworn by his widow in her petition for pension benefits.

He enlisted in the Service of the United States, in Hallifax County North Carolina, About the Latter part of the year Seventeen Hundred and Seventy Six or in the beginning of the Year following for a Term of One year, he was Marched from the County under Captain William Brinkley, to Hallifax Town which was then called head Quarters. Under whom he was placed then She does not know though he was marched from there to georgetown and from thence to Charlestown, Soon after his arrival at Charleston his term of Service Expired, He then Immediately enlisted in the Service again for how long a Touer and under Whom She does not Reccollect. though he marched from Charleston to Savannah and was taken Prisoner at the fall of Savannah and was placed on a British Prison Ship where he remained three Months and thirteen Days a Prisoner, And was then Released by being exchanged for, he was in the Battle of Sullivans Island, under Gen^l Moultry he was at the Siege of Savannah he was in the battle at Guilford Court House and the battle of Rugeleys Mills and after Remaining in the Service for a Term of about two Years and a half after this first enlistment, and being in the battles above mentioned he Received a Discharge at Charleston Signed by Peter Oree or Harry what Grade M^r Oree or Harry held in the Army She does not Reccollect but that his name was signed to the Discharge She does Reccollect. as She has often Seen it in the possession of her Husband. and that two, many years after his Services were ended Though it has been lost or mislaid many years Since. ⁶

At the time Elizabeth Sentell made this declaration, her husband had been dead nearly ten years, and she was relating secondhand events which had taken

⁶ William Sentell, Military Pension Records, R.9382, National Archives Building. This Peter Oree may have been Capt. Peter Horry of the 2nd South Carolina Regiment under Col. Moultrie in 1775.

place sixty-five years before. Her version may be too brief and garbled in certain particulars, but other accounts add some detail and color to the brief record she left us.

William Sentell apparently served with militia units for two or more discontinuous tours. There is a record of William, Sam'l, and Luke Senter on the payroll of Capt. Wm. Brinkley's Company of the 1st North Carolina Regiment commanded by Col. Sam'l Jarvis.⁷

On 12 April 1776 the Provincial Congress sitting at Halifax voted overwhelmingly for independence from Great Britain. The spirit of patriotism was running at a fever pitch, and when the resolution passed many men rushed to take up arms. William probably enlisted at this time, and certainly before June 1776 if he was in the Battle of Sullivan's Island.

Sullivan's Island. North Carolina and Virginia troops arrived 11 June 1776 on Sullivan's Island which guarded the approach to Charleston Harbor, and Col. William Moultrie set the new recruits to work building breastworks and gun emplacements.

A key to the defenses was a crude fort, unfinished on two sides, and constructed of palmetto logs bolted together with spaces between filled with sand. Gen. Charles Lee called the fort "nothing but a death-trap -- a mere slaughter pen." The Governor wrote to the fort:

Colonel Moultrie,

Genl. Lee wishes to evacuate the Fort. You will not do so without an order from me. I will cut off my hand sooner than write it.

John Rutledge⁸

The battle began on 28 June with a bombardment by eight British war vessels mounting 287 guns, against 62 guns in the fort. "If the ships could have silenced the battery," reported a British officer, "the army was to have made an attack on the back of the island, where they had about one thousand men entrenched up to their eyes."⁹

⁷ North Carolina Daughters of the American Revolution, **Roster of Soldiers from North Carolina in the American Revolution** (Durham: The Seeman Press, 1932), p. 623; Cites **State Records of North Carolina** (Vol. XVII, **Clark's Miscellaneous State Records**), p. 1060.

⁸ Col. Red Reeder, **The Story of the Revolutionary War** (New York: Dwell, Sloan and Pearce, 1959), pp. 70, 72.

⁹ Henry B. Carrington, **Battles of the American Revolution; Battle Maps and Charts of the American Revolution** (New York: The New York Times and Arno Press, 1975), p. 188.

But contrary to all expectations, the shelling failed to reduce the fort. To the surprise of both sides, the palmetto logs and sand simply absorbed the shot and deadened its effect.

William Sentell was probably in or near the fort during the attack, and he may have actually witnessed the reckless act of heroism that day by Sgt. William Jasper of the 2nd South Carolina. Sentell was nearby, we are told,¹⁰ when the provincial flag in the fort was shot down. Sgt. Jasper left his gun crew and jumped to the parapet. After running the length of the embankment exposed to enemy fire, he recovered the flag, raised it on a ramrod, and gave three cheers.¹¹

Prisoner of war. Elizabeth Sentell tells us in her pension deposition that William "marched from Charleston to Savannah and was taken Prisoner at the fall of Savannah." This was probably the action on 29 December 1778 when a force of 1,200 to 1,500 Americans in front of the city was outflanked by a superior British force with heavy losses. Over a third of the Americans, 453 men, were taken prisoner.¹²

Following this debacle, William and a number of his comrades were placed on a British prison ship where he was held for "three Months and thirteen Days," or until mid-April 1779 when he was exchanged.

While on the British ship, he and his companions came almost to the point of starvation. In this extremity of weakness and hunger, William captured a rat and roasted it whole. He ate it, and the nourishment saved his life. And his posterity. The account of our generations might at this point come to an untimely end except for this unfortunate rodent.

When the time finally came for exchange of prisoners, there was no response as his name was called repeatedly. Someone spoke out and said he was dead. When William heard this, he rose up and declared with an oath that the statement was a lie.

William was carried back to his company, and when he sat down to a full table, the camp doctor gave him medication to make him sleep so he would not kill himself eating. He and his comrades ate so heartily that they had to lie on their stomachs to breathe more freely, and they were in such discomfort that they did not care whether they lived or died.

¹⁰ FitzSimons, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

¹¹ Reeder, *op. cit.*, pp. 73-74.

¹² Carrington, *op. cit.*, p. 459.

The Siege of Savannah. William probably remained in the vicinity of Savannah during the next few months after his release. He was in the siege of that city, according to his widow, which culminated in the delayed and abortive attack of 9 October 1779.

He was under fire for a period of several weeks at Savannah. He was a member of a platoon commanded by Sgt. William Jasper which rescued a group of American prisoners from the British near Savannah, and he saw Jasper killed when the sergeant attempted on 9 October to repeat his deed of Sullivan's Island.¹³

One of the happiest experiences. William's second enlistment may have ended sometime after the Siege of Savannah. During a long absence following his second enlistment, he was given up for dead, and his parents had lost all hope for his return.

But he arrived home one evening after dark, and his mother out in her yard heard him "hawk and spit." She recognized her son by this familiar sound and ran in the dark to meet him.

All through his life, Alva tells us, William Sentell delighted to relate this incident more than any other of his war experiences. He always said that this was the happiest time in his life.

Disaster at Camden. If this return was the happiest time of his life, the debacle at Camden, South Carolina, on 16 August 1780 must have been the most terrifying.

Gen. Horatio Gates had assumed command of the Southern Department in July. On 7 August the North Carolina militia under Gen. Caswell joined the American forces, and on 13 August Gates encamped his army at Rugely's Mills.¹⁴

The Americans outnumbered the British, but most of the rebel units were militia forces. They had little training in maneuver and military discipline, and no training in use of the bayonets issued just before the battle. The British were nearly all regulars, and their leader was popular with the men. Gates was not liked by his men.

¹³ FitzSimons, *loc. cit.*

¹⁴ Elizabeth Sentell said her late husband had been in the "battle of Rugeleys Mills." The actual battle site was at Sander's Creek, five miles from Camden and three miles from Rugely's Mills.

In addition, the Americans for the most part were starved. Some of the soldiers had marched without food for days, then gorged on peaches, green corn, and raw beef -- with devastating results. Their general, against all advice, had marched his army "through the pine barrens where there wasn't enough food to support a hog."

Each side began a night advance on 15 August. Gates ordered his hungry troops forward through the woods on both sides of the Camden road at ten o'clock, and they made first contact with the advancing enemy about three in the morning. The fight was one of the fiercest of the war. The British began the main attack after daybreak, and the raw militia recoiled almost instantly at the first bayonet charge. The Virginia and North Carolina troops with the exception of a couple of units threw down their loaded arms and fled. "At least two thirds of the army," said one observer, "fled without firing a shot."¹⁵

Most of the men, William Sentell perhaps among them, scattered to the woods and swamps. Gates and Caswell reached Hillsboro, nearly two hundred miles away, without collecting enough of the fugitives to form even an escort. The rout at Camden marked the darkest hour of the struggle in the southern states.

Guilford Court House. The last action in which William Sentell participated may have been Guilford Court House on 15 March 1781. Gen. Nathanael Greene who succeeded Gates in command of the Southern army described the battle in his official report to Congress.

The militia troops panicked, repeating their flight at Camden. The British advanced in three columns, Greene wrote.

. . . The whole moved through the old fields to attack the North Carolina brigades, who waited the attack until the enemy got within one hundred and forty yards, when part of them began to fire, but a considerable part left the ground without firing at all. The general and field officers did all they could to induce the men to stand their ground; but neither the advantages of the position, nor any other consideration could induce them to stay.¹⁶

Gen. Henry Lee, then a lieutenant colonel, described the scene in his Memoirs.

¹⁵ Carrington, *op. cit.*, p. 517.

¹⁶ Henry Lee, **The American Revolution in the South** (New York: University Publishing Company, 1869), p. 597; Gen. Greene's Official Report of the Battle of Guilford to the President of Congress, 15 March 1781.

. . . Stevens . . . stung with the recollection of their inglorious flight in the battle of Camden, had placed a line of sentinels in his rear, with orders to shoot every man that flinched. . . . To our infinite distress and mortification, the North Carolina militia took to flight, a few only of Eaton's brigade excepted, who clung to the militia under Campbell; which, with the Legion, manfully maintained their ground. Every effort was made . . . to stop this unaccountable panic; for not a man of the corps had been killed; or even wounded. Lieutenant-Colonel Lee joined in the attempt to rally the fugitives, threatening to fall upon them with his cavalry. All was vain; so thoroughly confounded were these unhappy men, that, throwing away arms, knapsacks, and even canteens, they rushed like a torrent headlong through the woods.¹⁷

American losses that day totaled 1,311. Of the North Carolina militia, six were killed, five wounded, and 584 reported missing. The large number of missing, William perhaps among them, were accounted for by both British and American authorities as having fled to their homes.¹⁸

William's powder horn. A relic of William Sentell -- one of only two known to us¹⁹ -- which has survived across the generations is a common garden gourd which he dried, cleaned, and used as a powder horn during the war. Owing to its good preservation, he must have taken and used it at a late date, one subsequent to the night march at Camden and the flights of the militia through the Carolina woods and swamps.

We are told that William pulled this gourd in the Shenandoah Valley.²⁰ If this tradition is true, he must have spent some time in that area after Guilford

¹⁷ Lee, *op. cit.*, pp. 287-288.

¹⁸ Carrington, *op. cit.*, pp. 563-564.

¹⁹ The other known relic is a record of charges (in pounds and shillings) for shoe repairs from "William Alston to William Senter" in the military pension file. The record is barely legible, and appears to have been deliberately marked over. On the reverse side is a birth record of the older children "of William and Betty Sentell." This apparently was the only documentation with which Elizabeth Sentell could support her pension claim.

²⁰ Displayed at one time in the Andrew Johnson Tailor Shop National Monument, the gourd was owned by Mrs. Carl Sentelle. The relic is sealed in an apothecary jar with the following inscription: "Gourd belonging to William Sentelle, Grandfather of Gideon S. Sentelle, Esq. William Sentelle emigrated from France with two of his brothers just before the Revolutionary War. With these brothers he served in the Continental Army.

"William Sentelle pulled this gourd in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia, dried and cleaned it and used it as a POWDER HORN during the War. He married an Aunt of Alexander H. Stephens,

Court House during the summer of 1781 when the British had invested the Virginia Tidewater. Perhaps he was still there when the British surrendered at Yorktown in October.

The veteran. Alva Sentell wrote of his great-grandfather that "We have every reason to believe he was a very brave and faithful soldier." And among the militia troops, notorious in any war for their deficiencies of training and military discipline, perhaps he carried himself as well as any.

We suspect that he broke and ran with the others at Camden and Guilford Court House, and by running he was able to return and fight again. Perhaps he and his comrades understood better than any how it could be well said of their Gen. Greene that he never won a battle -- and never lost a campaign.

Nothing pleased him [William] so well as to relate his experience as a soldier, and so long as he lived he would look after the welfare of a Revolutionary soldier when he could come up with one. My grandfather has often told me that when a soldier would come to his father's house, his father and that soldier would sometimes spend the whole night in talking over their hard-fought battles and other hardships in the war.²¹

The whole night, at least, would have been needed to retrace the six years of fighting and marching and waiting from Savannah to the Shenandoah. We have a pleasant vision of the "very stout" veteran holding forth through the wee hours. "He told of many bloody conflicts and how he and many others when tired would sit down on dead men to rest." We suspect that he never failed to satisfy the listeners about the open fire in his cabin on Jeter Mountain.

Elizabeth Stephens

The Stephens family. There seems to have been a continuing close relationship between one or more Stephens families and our Sentell ancestors over an extended period. Elizabeth Stephens said that she married William Sentell in Halifax County, North Carolina, and a Nancy Stephens stated that she married his brother Samuel in the same county.²²

Vice President of the Southern Confederacy, and her brother, John Stephens, cut his name on the horn.

"The gourd was presented to the Trustees of the Andrew Johnson Tailor Shop by Gideon S. Sentelle, Esq. who served for 36 years as a member of the Court of Greene County, and who was in the Union Army during the Civil War."

²¹ Alva Sentell, *loc. cit.*

The gourd powder horn used by William Sentell is inscribed with the name "John," supposedly cut by William's brother-in-law and comrade during the war, John Stephens. The census taker found a Jno. Stevens living next door to Wm. Sentel in Halifax County in 1786. And by improbable coincidence, when the 1790 Census was taken in Edgefield County, South Carolina, the head of the household next to our Wm Senter was a John Stephens.

At various places in the Buncombe County (North Carolina) records, we find mention of one Gideon Stephens between 1819 and 1834.²³ On 30 March 1821 William Sentell sold him one hundred acres.²⁴

In Elizabeth Sentell's pension file, "Gideon Stephens, a brother of the widow, is referred to but there are no particulars in regard to him."²⁵ He must have been highly regarded in any event, since the family saw fit to perpetuate his name in 1840 through a grandson, Gideon Stephens Sentelle.

These Stephens associations for at least a half century beg for some inference beyond mere coincidence. We suspect that William came to know John Stephens during his military service. Through John, he may have met and married Elizabeth. John's family moved from Halifax to Edgefield with William and his family. And another brother may have removed with the Sentell family to western Carolina.²⁶

The marriage. Elizabeth Sentell said in her pension declaration on 27 March 1845 that she was eighty-four years old,²⁷ and that "She was Married to the Said William Sentle" on 26 December 1780. This meant that she would have been three or four years younger than her husband, and that they married when

²² Samuel Sentell, Military Pension Records, W.6017, National Archives Building. Nancy further testified that she was the daughter of John Stephens who "Kept a registry" of the family, but that she and her husband were both illiterate. Samuel Sentell in fact signed his name to his pension declaration in 1837, but the signature appears awkward and obviously labored.

²³ **Buncombe County** (North Carolina) **Deed Book 16**, p. 63; **Minute Book 4**, 1819-1825, pp. 77, 117; **Minute Book, 1833-1840**, pp. 4, 31, 53, 69, 119.

²⁴ **Buncombe County Minute Book 4**, 1819-1825, p. 47.

²⁵ Letter from A. D. Hiller, National Archives, to Mrs. E. A. Kelly, Knight Hotel, Sylacauga, Alabama, dated 23 September 1936.

²⁶ The descriptive note with William's powder horn alleges that he married an aunt of Alexander H. Stephens, the Vice-President of the Southern Confederacy. Rev. Francis Huggins repeated this claim in an early paper (about 1936), and tells us that Elizabeth and Nancy "evidently" were sisters. The family record of Alex Stephens is well known, however, and we can find no substance to any of these claims much as we would like to accept them.

²⁷ This indicates a date of birth between 28 March 1760 and 27 March 1761.

she was nineteen or twenty years old and he was twenty-four.²⁸ Great-grandson Alva has left us some comments on the union.

At the close of the war the young soldier returned to his home in Virginia and settled down to peaceful pursuits. . . . Being a young man of good habits and of good personal appearance and having been a brave soldier, he naturally became very popular. He then sought the heart and hand of Elizabeth Stevens, a beautiful and accomplished young lady of his community. She belonged to one of the wealthiest and most influential families of that part of the state and was well educated for that age of the world. But her people all opposed the marriage to a young man who was not educated and who had little property. But all their threats and all their persuasions were of no avail, for the girl braved them all and cast her lot for life with the young soldier of her choice. So long as she lived, she would tell with pride how she had cast her lot with her choice and how happy she and her husband had lived together. She related that her people refused to give her any property, and that she and her husband had to begin life with almost nothing of this world's goods. But still she did not regret her choice.²⁹

Personal characteristics and traits. Human nature being what it is, people generally credit their maternal lines for favorable characteristics and traits. And the Sentell family has been no exception with regard to its Stephens blood. "I wish I knew more of such a noble woman as she has been described to me," Alva wrote of Elizabeth Stephens. "But I often think of what my grandfather used to tell me and that was: If there was found any talent in our family, he said it

²⁸ Note that William and Elizabeth were married, not after the war as Alva has written, but during the war -- after Camden and before Guilford Court House, when Rebel forces were behind the Dan River. The deposition is a bit confused in its chronology. William must have been in active service before June 1776 if he was in the Battle of Sullivan's Island. This first enlistment was for one year, after which he immediately reenlisted "Soon after his arrival at Charleston." A one-year tour would have been completed no later than mid-1777. He was discharged, then, at Charleston "after Remaining in the Service for a Term of about two years and a half **after this first enlistment.**" This would be late 1779 or early 1780, and certainly before May 1780 when the British took Charleston. After Loyalist forces had invested the major population centers, and especially after the debacle at Camden, the war in the Southern Department became in many respects a guerrilla effort prosecuted by irregulars and militia. These circumstances perhaps explain why the only discharge cited in the pension record must be dated so early, and why there was no formal discharge at the close of the war. And why Elizabeth could accurately depose that she and William were married after this discharge which must be dated before May 1780. She erred in placing the discharge after Camden and Guilford Court House.

²⁹ Alva Sentell, *loc. cit.*

came mainly from the Stevens family. But I suppose he was very fond of his mother and wanted to give her credit for almost everything."

Elizabeth Sentell was a woman of more than average intelligence. Her parents were people of means and they took great pains to educate their children -- and especially their girls. The family was noted for high standing intellectually and socially. . . . In her habits she was very industrious and frugal. She was one of the most cheerful women of her whole community. She had a smile for everyone who came her way. In her home she was always bright and cheerful and was even playful with children in her old days. She was very religious and not only taught her husband how to read and write but she instructed him in the study of the Bible. She was a Baptist as were all her people who were religious at all.³⁰

Perhaps she did instruct William in the study of the Bible. But the mark seal on her pension petition suggests that she did not write, and if she was able to read then her skill was probably poorly developed.

The birth record she produced to support her pension claim was incomplete as we noted earlier, breaking off about the time of the removal of the family from Halifax to Edgefield, and this suggests that the record had been provided by someone outside the home -- ostensibly of necessity. Yet the mark Elizabeth Sentell made on the pension declaration when she was eighty-four years old may simply indicate infirmity at the time. In any case, literacy was not such a necessity in that day and time. And beyond this minor detail we have no reason to question any of the accolades Alva paid to the memory of his great-grandmother.

Her name on the pension birth record appears as "bettey Sentell," by which she was probably known to their friends and neighbors in Halifax County. And the use of this familiar diminutive form quickly suggests all the warmth, cheerfulness, and generosity of spirit for which she is remembered to this day.

Her death. After more than fifty years of marriage, Elizabeth Sentell became a widow at the age of seventy-five or seventy-six years, and she joined her husband on 7 March 1847, nearly twelve years later. "She was buried," wrote Alva, "beside her husband on the hill where her husband was buried."

Their Family

³⁰ *Ibid.*

The military pension file to which we are indebted for our only firsthand account from William and Elizabeth includes her testimony that they were married in Halifax County on 26 December 1780. They probably made their first home together somewhere in that part of North Carolina, and their older children were most likely born there. A state census shows Wm. Sentel as a head-of-household in Civil District 12 of Halifax County on 12 February 1786. Thomas Harvey reported for the Sentel home one white male between twenty-one and sixty years of age, one white male less than twenty-one or older than sixty, and two white females.³¹

These would have been the parents, William and Elizabeth Sentell, Nancy aged three (born 28 September 1782), and John Edward (born 4 November 1784) who was fifteen months old at the time of the enumeration.

By coincidence, Samuel Sentell, William's brother, and Nancy Stephens were married in 1782 or 1783 "by Thomas Harvie a Baptist Clergyman And also an Acting Justice of the Peace in Halifax County."³² We suspect that this minister is identical with the census taker. And since Elizabeth was a Baptist, he perhaps also performed the nuptial services for her and William on the day after Christmas in 1780.

Move to Edgefield. This same Thomas Harvey may have been the person who provided a birth record for the young family on the reverse side of a bill for shoe fittings and repairs.

Only the older children are listed on this curious document, and the break in the record after the birth of their fourth child late in 1789 (22 November) may date a removal shortly afterward to Edgefield County in South Carolina.

The move was part of a general migration from Southside Virginia and eastern Carolina to this area on the Savannah River in the decades following the close of the Revolution. Jno. Stevens who had lived next door to the Sentel home in Halifax probably made the trip with William and his family. The move certainly came before the first Federal Census in 1790. The enumerator in that year found Wm Senter living next door to one John Stephens in Edgefield County. Sam and Jonathan Senter, the brother and father respectively of our Wm, were also living nearby.

³¹ Alvaretta Kenan Register, **State Census of North Carolina, 1784-1787** (Raleigh: North Carolina Department of Archives and History, 1969), p. 66.

³² Samuel Sentell, *loc. cit.*

Alva Sentell noted the variations in the spelling of the family name in these early records.

Names are changing with us yet among a great many families. And as we read history we find a great many names spelled quite differently from the way they now spell the same name. We all feel quite safe in claiming that the William Senter was the William Sentell as we now know it. Besides, he said himself that his name was so spelled on the [military] roll and that he was often called by both names.³³

William's family in 1790 reported one free white male over sixteen years of age, three free white males under sixteen, and two free white females. In addition to the father and mother, these would have included Nancy now seven or eight years old, John Edward about age six, Samuel about age four years (born 3 March 1787), and Guilford the baby (born 22 November 1789).

The move to the mountains. Jonathan Sentell died early in 1799, and the larger family seems to have broken up about this time. Samuel crossed the Savannah into Georgia, and William took his family up the river and into the mountains of western North Carolina. The terms of the will left nearly everything to brother Steirling who remained in Edgefield on the old home place.

We have some testimony, noted earlier, that dissatisfaction with the terms of the will was one reason for the breakup of the extended family at this time. William said that no one should have been favored over the others, and that the recent war with England had been fought to do away with such ideas. The holdings seem to have been rather meager, however, to have occasioned too many harsh words.

Some people have suggested that William moved to North Carolina to claim state bounty land for his military service, but we have found nothing to support this theory.

Alva Sentell has speculated that the abundance of wild game brought his pioneer ancestor to the mountains. A local historian has expanded on this theme.

He had heard the Indian traders passing through Edgefield District tell of a wonderful land in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Western North Carolina. . . . He had been told that it was a wild land of mountains and timber, clear streams of sweet water abounding with fish. It was also a land of fertile valleys and the mountains and valleys were full of wild game for food; deer

³³ Alva Sentell, *loc. cit.*

and bear, wild turkey, grouse and partridge and the wild pigeons in flocks so large that at times the sun was blotted out during their flight. And those same Indian traders told of the fur bearing animals, mink, beaver and the like whose pelts were better than hard money when trading for the necessities of life.³⁴

Several families may have made the journey to the mountain country at the same time. Shortly after 1800, there was a general exodus from Edgefield through upper South Carolina and into present-day Henderson County in North Carolina. Among the migrating families was that of John Barnett whose father had owned and operated a boat yard on the Savannah. A Barnett son married one of the Sentell daughters. And Solomon Osteen, the husband-to-be of another Sentell daughter, moved to the mountains from Edgefield where his father had been a planter on the Savannah River.³⁵

The trip from Edgefield to the Carolina upcountry was made on foot with at least seven of the eight children.³⁶ We have been told that the move required a matter of months to complete, but even on foot this seems to be something of an exaggeration.

The end of their journey found them on the Underwood Plateau of Jeter Mountain on the present-day boundary between Henderson and Transylvania Counties.

This was the year 1800. The clear sparkling Crab Creek flowed by on one side of the mountain and Big Willow Creek on the other side. Settlers were few and far between in this area in 1800. A body had elbow room in which to get about and breathe the pure, crisp mountain air. William Sentelle . . . had found his Promised Land.³⁷

The home place on Jeter Mountain. The pioneer family raised a log cabin on the mountaintop near where today a road from Little River community runs into the Jeter Mountain road. Family historian Nicholas Sentelle who grew

³⁴ FitzSimons, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

³⁵ Sadie Smathers Patton, **The Story of Henderson County** (Asheville: The Miller Printing Company, 1947), pp. 41-42.

³⁶ FitzSimons, *loc. cit.* All of the children were listed in the 1810 Census for Buncombe County except John Edward. Apparently he moved to Alabama before this date, and perhaps even directly from Edgefield. He would have been sixteen years old in 1800.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

up on the mountain has indicated a spot about a half mile due east of this fork, on the south side of the road, as the actual site of the first home place in western North Carolina.

The site is corroborated by a transfer of fifty acres, part of the tract where William was then living, to son Guilford (10 February 1816). Its location on the headwaters of Little Willow and crossing a branch of Crab Creek places the tract squarely across the top of the Jeter Mountain plateau.³⁸

The old cabin has long since disappeared, but it may have been described to us by Alva Sentell (born 1846) who lived here or nearby in his early years.

When I go back in my mind to my boyhood days, I find my father and mother located in a log house about 16 by 18 [feet], with a stone chimney at one end. In the chimney was a wide fireplace, and in winter we would roll in large logs of hickory and oak and keep the fire going all night.³⁹

William and Elizabeth Sentell probably attended a Baptist church at the foot of Jeter on the old road from South Carolina by the French Broad River. The early records of this French Broad congregation have been lost, but we have some of the records of Beulah Baptist Church which was raised from the older church in 1815.

Three entries in the official minutes of Beulah Church probably relate to the old veteran of the Revolution, now threescore and ten years of age. On 2 December 1826 we find "Brother Sentale . . . appointed to cite Brother Barnett to attend next meeting." Brother Barnett may have needed special guidance from the church ". . . as a Report is [in] Circulation that Brother Barnett has bin [in] a state of Intoxication . . ." Two years later (5 July 1828) we find ". . . William Sentell . . . appointed delegate to next Association." And finally (6 September 1828), ". . . the Church appoints Brother Sentell to invite Brother Cantrell to attend our next meeting . . ."⁴⁰

The Underwood Plateau on Jeter Mountain seems to have passed into the hands of one or more of the older children before 1830. A small cemetery a few

³⁸ Dr. George A. Jones, (Henderson County Genealogical and Historical Society, P. O. Box 2616, Hendersonville, NC 28293), interview 13 July 1996; **Henderson County** (North Carolina) **Deed Book 1**, p. 118 (1 April 1840). The original deed is dated 10 February 1816; many Buncombe County deeds were registered again in Henderson County after its erection (1838). We suspect the "head of a branch of Little Willow" is the spring by the boyhood home of Nicholas Sentelle north of the road and a few hundred feet northwest of the Guilford Sentell cemetery.

³⁹ W. Clark Medford, **R. A. Sentelle** (1958), p. 6.

⁴⁰ **Beulah Church Minutes** copied by Bert J. Sitton, Hendersonville, North Carolina, 22 February 1969. Photocopy of original in possession of William Ernest Merrill.

feet east of the old home place contains badly weathered stones which apparently belong to son Guilford and some of his family. William and Elizabeth, however, were buried at Big Willow about four miles to the northeast in a family cemetery near the home of son Richard. We suspect that late in life the parents moved off the mountain and shared their final years with Richard and his family.

This move may have been about 1816 when William, then aged 59 years, deeded fifty acres (10 February 1816) where he was then living to 26-year-old son Guilford.⁴¹

William Sentell died on 7 May 1835, five months short of his eightieth birthday. Alva tells us that he was buried

. . . near a walnut tree which he had planted with a request that he might be buried near it. It was told me that he prepared the lumber and had the nails made to be used in making his casket to be buried in. So much for the old father of us all.

. . . A few years ago I took it upon myself to place a monument to the grave of William Sentell and his wife [writes Alva]. I thought everyone who claimed kin with him would almost jump at the opportunity to help. After working for some time and making several trips to Henderson County, I found that most of the cost and nearly all the work would fall on me. While I did not put such a monument up as I wished to, I did erect one and it stands there today to mark where the good people who were my parents in the past now rest. Uncle George⁴² and Brother John⁴³ and Rev. Francis Huggins⁴⁴ did good service in making up the funds to aid in the work. Some others gave some, but after all the greater part of the expense fell on me. My Uncle Gid⁴⁵ in Tennessee aided some also. But I have no regrets; for if any of my children have ambition to want to know anything of their past history, they can find the beginning, so far as I have been able to trace it, at that place.⁴⁶

⁴¹ Jones, interview; **Henderson County Deed Book 1**, p. 118.

⁴² George Newton Sentell (1843-1922)

⁴³ Rev. John E. Sentelle (1859- 1935)

⁴⁴ Rev. Francis Marion Huggins (1862-1963)

⁴⁵ Gideon Stephens Sentelle (1840-1836) Alva visited Uncle Gid at least one time, as recorded in Alva's diary in 1891. The monument probably was placed before 1922.

⁴⁶ Alva Sentell, *loc. cit.*