

## THE MATHEWS TRADING POST GREENBRIER COUNTY, WEST VIRGINIA

*Introduction:* **Sharon Hobart** of Saginaw, TX, a 6th Great Granddaughter of Samuel & Elizabeth Gilliland, recently provided Gilliland Trails with a stellar find of Gilliland family history in the early Greenbrier County, West Virginia area. Two vintage issues of the Greenbrier Historical Society's *Journal* concern the old Mathews brothers' trading post, including the names entered in the Mathews' Day Books and Ledger.

It is with the expressed permission of the archivist for the Greenbrier Historical Society that I have transcribed portions of these articles for the Gilliland Trails library. These texts should not be posted elsewhere without the permission of the GHS. Some copies of the original *Journal* may still be available for purchase from the Greenbrier Historical Society but in such cases where originals are no longer available, reproductions of the articles can be requested for a very modest copying fee. (The page numbers are given in the transcriptions.) For more information on the Greenbrier Historical Society's *Journal*, please contact their Library and Archivist at [archives@greenbrierhistorical.org](mailto:archives@greenbrierhistorical.org)

The first excerpts here are from Dr. Harry E. Handley's article, "The Mathews Trading Post", published in *The Journal of the Greenbrier Historical Society*: Volume 1, Number 1 (Lewisburg, West Virginia: Greenbrier Historical Society, August 1963). Dr. Handley's article provided a brief background on the Mathews Trading Post as well as a list of customers recorded in the two "Day Books" between 8 April 1771 to 26 January 1773. It is interesting to note that even at this date the various and evolving spellings of the family surname were evident, though Gilliland and Gillilan were recorded in other documents such as marriage bonds. The Gillelans, Gillelands, Gillilans and Gillilands of both articles were descendants of Nathan Gilliland who was recorded in Augusta County, Virginia by 1745.

Many thanks to Sharon Hobart for providing her copies of the *Journal* and for her research of the Gillilands in early Pocahontas, Bath and Greenbrier counties.

--- Kate Maynard

## THE MATHEWS TRADING POST

by Harry E. Handley

The first trading post, or store, within the confines of the present limits of Greenbrier, for which there is any known record, was owned by Sampson and George Mathews,\* and is said to have been located on the Greenbrier River, not far from the mouth of Howards' Creek, at or near the shallows in the river now known as Mathews Ford.

Two of the Day Books, in which were kept an accounting of the charges for purchases made and credits for produce sold to the store, have survived. They cover the time interval 8 April 1771 to Jan 26 1773.

The names of many of the customers appear only once during the more than twenty-one months covered by the two books, but the names of others appear repeatedly, and from the various entries it is possible to gain considerable insight into the tenor of community life in this frontier area. It is proposed to explore this approach in considerable detail in a future article, but for the present only the names of those mentioned in the two books are being given, followed by the month and year of the first mention, the month and year of last mention, and occasional notation of relations or associates and types of purchases and sales. Names are spelled as shown on the first entry, with later spellings indicated in parentheses.

\*Sampson and George Mathews were two of the sons of Capt. John Mathews, who with his family settled to the south of the Borden Grant, between Lexington and Buena Vista, in the present Rockbridge County, Va., during the period 1730-1737. Mention is made of other stores operated by the Mathews contemporaneously with the one in Greenbrier, which were located in Staunton and on the Cowpasture.

Customers at the Greenbrier trading post included:

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**GILLILAN, James (Gilliland)** - Apr. '71 - Jan '72 (2 weeding hoes)

**GILLELAND, John** - March '72

**GILLILAND, Samuel** - Jan. '73 (1 pr. leggons, 1 silk hand)

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This second article on the Mathews Trading Post appeared in the *Journal of the Greenbrier Historical Society* Vol IV, Number 4, from 1984.

## THE JOURNAL OF THE GREENBRIER HISTORICAL SOCIETY

### THE MATHEWS TRADING POST LEDGER

1771-1779

Compiled by Frances Alderson Swope

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Dr. Harry Handley, founder of the Greenbrier Historical Society, in its 1963 *Journal*, published names of customers at the Mathews Trading Post from 8 April 1771 to 26 January 1773. Dr. Handley's list was derived, he said, from two "Day Books" which were thought at that time to be the only record of the store in existence.

However, last year the Greenbrier Historical Society had the great good fortune to receive, among other gifts from Mr. Denny Wood, a John Stewart descendant, the Mathews Trading Post's *Ledger* for the years 1771-1779, and an additional "Day Book".

In the introduction to Dr. Handley's list, he said that Sampson and George Mathews operated a "chain" of stores, one of which was in Staunton, and another on the Cowpasture. Their Greenbrier trading post was on the Greenbrier River near what is still known as Mathews Ford. The map accompanying this article gives an idea of where this trading post was, and the extensive geographic area from which its customers came -- the "little levels" in what is now Pocahontas County, from Indian Creek and Wolf Creek in present Monroe, Anthony's Creek and even as far as the New River.

For more background on the trading post the reader is referred to Dr. Handley's article in Volume I, Number 1, of the Greenbrier Historical Society's *Journal*.

The first seven pages of the *Ledger* are missing, and when a double check was made of the names on Dr. Handley's "Day Book" list against the *Ledger*, it was discovered that seventy-four names appearing in the early "Day Book" are missing from the *Ledger*. So anyone doing genealogical research should check both the "Day Book" list in Volume I, Number 1 of the Greenbrier Historical Society's *Journal*, and the names listed here from the *Ledger*.

A few words here are in order as to how the list of names, dates and purchases was compiled from the *Ledger*: In the *Ledger* the left-hand page is used for debits, dates, and amount charged, and the right-hand page shows how and when payment was made. This compiler undertook only to list the name of each customer on the debit side of the *Ledger*, give his page number for future reference, any pertinent

comment about him, the year, month and date of each recorded visit to the Trading Post, and itemized purchases where possible. Many time only “Sundries” were noted. No attempt was made to report payments from the credit side of the *Ledger*. This would have been a more interesting account had the method of payment been included. Payment was frequently in ginseng, deer skins, or trade rather than in pounds or shillings. However, it was thought it most important to produce the list of customers for publication now, with whatever information might be gleaned from the debit side of the *Ledger*.

There were almost 400 names for which there were charges, some only once or twice, others numerous times. An effort was made in copying to get the spelling of names

1. “Day Book” names not listed in the Ledger of 1771-1779: John Akering, Eliza Alsbury, James Anderson, S. Beard, Thomas Benner, Wallace Britan, James Callison, Christopher Cantrell, Michael Cassady, Wm. H. Cavendish, John Clark, Patrick Constantine, Simon Cooper, Wm. Craine, James Daly, Walter Davis, Solomen Davis, C. Dickerson, James Divier, Margaret Drawdy, Betsy Drody, James Eavens, Thomas Ellis, Thomas Ellis, Sr., Zilpha Ellis, James Estill, \_\_\_\_\_ Filson, Thomas Fitzpatrick, Robert Floyd, John Footreau, Thomas Footreau, **James Gilleland, John Gilleland**, David Glassburn, Michael Francis Johnson, Samuel Kincaid, Sarah Lindsey, B. Lindsey, John Little, Liverpool, Patrick Lockhart, William Lockhart, John Lockridge, Catherine Lovell, Joseph Mays, John McClinticks, Wm. McClintock, Geo. McMullen, Wm. McCulloch, John Miley & wife, Joseph Miller, Elkene Morland, Daniel Mosley, Matthew Moss, John Patton, Samuel Price, James Richardson, James Sonce, Michael Sea, Samuel Standyford, Wm. Stevenson, Sabina Stewart, James Tennere, Wm. Ward, Wm. White, Fred Wighmore, John Wighmore, Jacob Williams, David Wilson.

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exactly as they appeared, and to list every year and every month in which a debit was recorded. Sometimes deciphering purchases was a puzzle to the compiler, either because of the handwriting, or perhaps because of a strange word such as “ozgn”, apparently a fabric of some sort, or “Dyet”, which was probably a meal. “Removes” was a puzzle when one person was charged with “6 Removes.” There were two charges for “mending a watch” at that early date. The Trading Post apparently also served as a Bank for its customers, making payment for them to other individuals or to the Sheriff.

Some purchases are surprising when one considers that in the 1770s this was still the frontier, and that there were hostile Indians about. It will be remembered that Fort Donnally was attacked by Indians in 1778, and that Thomas Griffith was killed by Indians as late as 1780. Purchases included spelling books, silk, hats, “ozgn”, handkerchiefs, silver, and even a tailor-made suit. All this gives some insight into frontier life in this area.

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**GILLELAN, NATHAN** pg.106

1773 Dec Sundries

1775 March 1 mans saddle

**GILLELAND, SAMUEL** (Jas. brother)

1771 Dec. Sundr

1773

\*For more information on Fort Donnally, situated some seven miles north of Lewisburg in the Rader Valley, see: "Attack on Fort Donnally", West Virginia Daily News (Ronceverte) March 3, 1969 By Mrs. Sharelle Renick  
<http://www.wvculture.org/history/settlement/fortdonnally04.html>

*Transcriptions by Kate Maynard, 2009.*