

NEW GAME PARK NAMED FOR COLONEL SAMUEL WEAR

By J.A. Sharp

In the naming of the Game Park at Pigeon Forge Sevier County's most prominent early citizen, Colonel Samuel Wear, has been recognized. It is unfortunate, however, that the name "Fort Weare" has been spelled incorrectly. Neither Colonel Wear himself nor any of his descendants spelled the name with the last "e." It is true that it has been spelled variously as "Ware," "Weir," and "Wear," but this writer has never seen the spelling, "Weare," as used by the new Game Park.

The will of one Jesse Moon, made in 1805, and signed by Colonel Wear, as County Court Clerk of Sevier County, is in the writer's possession. His signature was written plainly and simply as "Samuel Wear," with a beautiful flourish that would do credit to Xan Davenport.

The exact date of Colonel Wear's settlement on the West Fork of Little Pigeon near the mouth of Walden's Creek is unknown, but it was probably between the years 1780 and 1785. Wear family history states that he selected this site and left his Negro slave, Frank, to raise corn while he returned to Augusta County, Virginia, for his family. His Tennessee grant, issued in 1803, was for about 500 acres of land beginning at the mouth of Walden's Creek and extending up the West Fork almost to the present Pigeon Forge. Here, on the farm now owned by Charlie Kyker, he built his huge log blockhouse which became Wear's Fort, and the refuge place during Indian attacks for not only the Wear family, but other settlers' families who lived nearby. Revolutionary veteran Flayl Nichols and family, who migrated from Bedford County, Virginia, about 1790, and settled on the river near Colonel Wear, were compelled at first to live in Wear's Fort.

Samuel Wear was born in Augusta County, Virginia, in 1753. His first wife was Mary Thompson who was born in Ireland about 1757. They had six children as follows: Elizabeth, Robert, Rebecca, Samuel, John, and Mary. Robert Wear married Lucretia Thomas, daughter of Isaac Thomas, Sevier's Indian war guide and early Sevierville settler. John Wear married Susannah Mullendore, daughter of Abraham Mullendore and wife Susannah Layman. Colonel Wear's first wife died about 1797, and he was married again to Mary Gilliland, daughter of John Gilliland, prominent early settler of Cocke County. Among the many descendants of Colonel Wear living in Sevier County today are: R.P. Wear, Mrs. Carl Roberts, Mrs. Dana Parrott, Mrs. Clyde Clabough, W.D. Hatcher, John Hatcher, and J.B. Waters.

That Colonel Wear was held in high esteem by Sevier Countians of his day is proven by his twenty-seven years of service as County Court Clerk; service which was singular and unique both from the standpoint of long tenure and the fact that he served in this office under three different governments. First, he was County Court Clerk for four years under the State of Franklin; second, two years under the Southwest Territory; and third, twenty-one years under the State of Tennessee.

An interesting story, regarding Colonel Wear and the selection of the new county seat of Sevier County, was told to Mr. J.B. Waters many years ago by the late T.J. ("Uncle Jeff") Wear, a grandson of the Colonel. Three sites were under consideration, and the question became somewhat controversial. Colonel Wear is said to have offered a site on his estate

at the mouth of Walden's Creek. Spencer Clack, Isaac Thomas, James McMahan and others who owned land there insisted that the "Forks of Little Pigeon" was a more desirable location. The third proposed site was at the mouth of Little Pigeon where such influential early leaders lived as Elijah Rogers, Josiah Rogers, Samuel Blair, and Samuel Henderson. If the county seat had been located here early steamboat transportation on the French Broad might have made Sevierville a sizable town.

The campaign doubtless waxed hot, as political campaigns are still apt to do in Sevier County. Apparently a compromise was reached because the "Forks of Little Pigeon," about half way between the other two sites, was chosen, and in 1795 Sevierville was located on the twenty-five acre tract provided by James McMahan.

Colonel Wear's part in the birth of the infant Tennessee was no less important than his services to Sevier County. He was a close associate and friend of John Sevier, and was a captain under the latter at King's Mountain, October 8, 1780. He supported the Sevier party during the State of Franklin movement, and helped form this short-lived State at Jonesboro in 1784. Also, he helped make the much criticized State of Franklin Treaty of Coyatee with the Cherokee Indians in 1786. In 1793 he commanded an expedition of Sevier County men against the Cherokee town of Tallassee, and Wear's Fort was the rendezvous for this expedition. He served as Sevier County's representative to the Southwest Territory legislature in 1794, and helped draft Tennessee's first constitution at Knoxville in 1796. His last service as a colonel of a regiment of Sevier County men in the War of 1812.

Colonel Wear's political and military career ended with his death in 1817. He was buried in the family plot on his estate where his descendants erected a marker several years ago. His successor as County Court Clerk of Sevier County was his son-in-law, Simeon Perry, who had married his daughter, Mary.