

# **Hardin County is Named for John Hardin**

By Tim Asher

Hardin County Kentucky was named posthumously in honor of John Hardin in 1792. John Hardin was born in Fauquier County Va., October 1, 1753 and moved to Kentucky in 1786. He was a veteran of Dunmore's War, the Revolutionary War, and he served with George Rogers Clark in his campaign against the Wabash Indians. He died at the hands of Indians in Ohio in June, 1792 while on a mission of peace.

His father was Martin Hardin who was born in Virginia in 1720. Martin Hardin married Lydia Waters about 1740 and they had four daughters and three sons with John being the fifth child. Martin Hardin operated a tavern at Elk Run in Virginia prior to moving with his family to the Monogahela County in southwest Pennsylvania (then claimed by Virginia) where they settled on George's Creek in what is now Springfield Township, Fayette County when John was 12 years old. Martin Hardin died in that place about 1800

John Hardin grew up on the frontier becoming an expert woodsman and proficient with a rifle. This skill would prove valuable to him in the military service in which he would find himself within a few years.

John Hardin served as an ensign in a militia company in Dunmore's War in 1774. He fought in the Battle of Point Pleasant in October of that year that eventually resulted in the signing of the Treaty of Fort Stanwix - 1784 (aka "1784 Treaty with the Six Nations"). Under the provisions of this treaty, the Shawnee gave up all lands east and south of the Ohio River, agreed to no longer attack colonists traveling down the Ohio River, and agreed to return all white captives. This was the first time that those Native Americans who actually lived in the "Ohio Country" agreed to give up some of their land. John Hardin was wounded in a fight with Indians but soon recovered and returned to action.

With the outbreak of the Revolutionary war he entered the Continental Army and joined the Eighth Pennsylvania Regiment as a second lieutenant. He was next assigned to Daniel Morgan's Rifle Corps and was one of the heroes in the battles of Saratoga that resulted in the surrender of British General Burgoyne and his huge army October 16, 1777. He resigned his commission in December 1779, and was offered the rank of major in a new regiment then being formed, but did not accept it, "saying that he could do his country more good in the capacity in which he was serving."

He is said to have been in Kentucky in 1780 in search of good land for himself and friends. He moved to Kentucky to what is now Washington County (then Nelson County) in 1786 where he became a successful farmer, and part-time soldier. He was later appointed lieutenant-colonel of militia and he participated in every expedition against the Indians raiding Kentucky from 1787 until his death, with the exception of

General Arthur St. Clair's tragic campaign in 1791. John Hardin volunteered under General George Rogers Clark in the campaign against the Wabash Indians and was appointed quartermaster for the force.

In April, 1792, General James Wilkinson selected John Hardin to participate in a "peace mission" to the Indians (in Ohio and beyond) where he and Captain Truman were to carry a message from Secretary of War Henry Knox. Col. Hardin and Truman were to command two separate expeditions into the area we now call the state of Ohio. Col. Hardin was to travel to the area reaching to the Upper Sandusky River and Truman was to visit the Indians along the Maumee River.

The message they carried read, in part:

"To all the tribes south of the (Great) Lakes, east of the Mississippi and northwest of the Ohio (river):

Brothers - The President of the United States (George Washington) entertains the opinion, that the war which exists is founded in error and mistake on your part. That you believe that the United States wants to deprive you of your lands and drive you out of the country. Be assured that this is not so; on the contrary, that we should be greatly gratified with the opportunity of imparting to you all the blessings of civilized life, of teaching you to cultivate corn, to raise oxen, sheep and other domestic animals; to build comfortable houses; so as ever to dwell upon the land."

Col. Hardin and Truman left Fort Washington located in what is now Cincinnati in June 1792. Before Col. Hardin left the protection of the fort, he wrote to his wife about his mission in an attempt to reassure her that he was not in danger and would soon return to her. He wrote:

"The Indians have killed several persons in the quarter lately and leave behind them war clubs, which denotes their intentions of war. But do not let this give you any uneasiness as I have not a doubt that I shall meet with good treatment, as the speech and the belt I shall take is from the president of the United States."

Col. Hardin's party included a guide and interpreter named John Flinn and a servant known only as Freeman. John Flinn was qualified as an interpreter because he and his entire family were captured and spent 14 years living with the Indians in Virginia. Col. Hardin headed north from Cincinnati and was within three quarters of a mile of the current village of Hardin in Shelby County, Ohio when they were attacked by a party of three or four Shawnee Indians. The details of what happened to Col. Hardin and his party was later revealed by Chief Blackhoof, of the Shawnee Nation soon after the peace of 1795 and recorded in the notes of Col. John Johnston.

The story recanted by Chief Blackhoof explained that the murderous Shawnee Indian party had learned of Col. Hardin's mission and interpreted it as anything but peaceful.

The Indians decided to lure Col. Hardin into a trap by feigning friendship after which they would offer to camp the night with the white men and then kill them while they slept. When offered the proposal, Col. Hardin agreed to camp with the Indians hoping to demonstrate the trust and friendship he hoped to garner on his mission. That night the Shawnee murdered Col. Hardin and some of his companions. It was said that Flinn failed in an attempt to escape but his life was eventually spared since he had lived many years with the Indians. Captain Truman was also killed just one day's ride from his destination. Col. Johnston further records that the Shawnee probably murdered Col. Hardin for his fine clothes and the equipment they carried. According to other recorded comments, it is believed that both Col. Hardin and Truman were scalped. With this violent act on the frontier, Col. John Hardin a man, described as "of unassuming manners and great gentleness of deportment; yet of singular firmness and inflexibility" was gone.

He was survived by his wife, Jane Davis and their children who numbered three sons and three daughters.

Source: Bits & Pieces of Hardin Co., Vol. XVII No.3, Summer 1998, Editor Mary Jo Jones

John Hardin Gave name to county, His life to Indians, The News Enterprise, February 22, 1979

<http://www.ohiohistorycentral.org/ohc/h/eve/dw.shtml>, Dunmore's War and the Battle of Point Pleasant.

<http://www.famousamericans.net/johnhardin/>, John Hardin

<http://www.shelbycountyhistory.org/schs/indians/coljohnhardin.htm>