Published on *NCpedia* (https://www.ncpedia.org)

Hart, Nathaniel [1]

Hart, Nathaniel

by Vance E. Swift, 1988

1734–82

Nathaniel Hart, pioneer, Revolutionary officer, and proprietor in and chief negotiator for the Transylvania Company [2] of Kentucky, was born in Hanover County, Va., the son of Thomas and Susannah Rice Hart. His grandfather, Thomas Hart, a merchant, emigrated from London, England, to Hanover County about 1690 and left an only son, Thomas (1632–1755), father of Nathaniel. His mother was an aunt of Daniel Rice, the renowned Presbyterian minister who, before moving to Kentucky in 1781, is said to have taken part in the establishment of one or more early Presbyterian churches in Orange County [3] (now Caswell County [4]), N.C., among which Hyco (now Red House) is one of the oldest in central North Carolina.

Shortly after Thomas Hart's death, his widow and children moved to Orange County and settled on Country Line Creek, where three of her sons—Thomas, Nathaniel, and David—in the late 1750s and early 1760s obtained land grants in the area that was cut off from Orange in 1777 to form Caswell County. Nathaniel Hart's estate, known as Red House, located at Nat's Fork on Country Line Creek, was of considerable proportions. Referred to as "Captain Hart," he was not only a polished member of society but also an "accomplished and complete gentleman." As one of the proprietors of the Transylvania Company, he was a leading spirit in opening the Kentucky territory and in establishing the town of Boonesborough. At the Battle of Alamance [5], Hart led a company of infantrymen in Governor Tryon [6]'s army; after the battle, he was highly complimented by the governor and his officers for the gallant and spirited behavior of the detachment under his command.

Following the efforts of Daniel Boone [7] and his brother, Squire Boone, to settle Kentucky, Richard Henderson [8] of Granville County [9] in association with Nathaniel Hart, Thomas Hart [10], John Williams [11], William Johnson, and John Lutterell, on 27 Aug. 1774 organized the Louisa Company for the purpose of purchasing from the Cherokee Nation a large territory lying on the west side of the mountains on the Mississippi River. In the autumn of 1774, Nathaniel Hart, the chief negotiator, along with Richard Henderson, president of the company, visited the territory and met with the chiefs of the various tribes in the Cherokee country to discuss their interest in buying the land west of the Cumberland Mountains. Nathaniel Hart, Jr., wrote that his father returned to his home with six or eight of the principal men of the Cherokee Nation, who remained with him until the latter part of the year and assisted in the selection of a large supply of goods to be used in exchange for the land.

By 1775 the enterprise had outgrown the Articles of Agreement of the Louisa Company. After a reorganization, a new company, called the Transylvania Company, was formed and Daniel Boone was hired to explore the territory. Soon Nathaniel Hart and Richard Henderson brought vast quantities of goods from Cross Creek (now Fayetteville [12]) to Sycamore on the Watauga River near what is now Elizabethton, Tenn. The Watauga meeting, arranged by Hart, lasted twenty days and was attended by 500 to 1,000 Cherokee Indians along with their chiefs. The Transylvania Company was represented by Hart and his brother Thomas, Henderson, and John Williams. Negotiations broke down and the Indians left, but it is said that Nathaniel Hart overtook them the next day, persuaded them to return, and an agreement was reached. On 17 Mar. 1775, the conveyance or treaty was signed, by which the Transylvania Company acquired all of the territory from the Kentucky to the Cumberland rivers. Title to the land was taken in the name of Richard Henderson, Nathaniel Hart, and the other seven proprietors of the company as tenants in common. This purchase was said to have been the largest private land deal ever undertaken in North America.

Nathaniel Hart and his associates invested much of their time and private fortunes in the venture; they succeeded in obtaining for the colonies peaceful possession of the land from the Indians, thus permitting the opening of the Kentucky territory for colonization. Nevertheless, they received very little for their efforts. Because of a proclamation by the royal governors of Virginia and North Carolina that prohibited treaties or purchases of land from Indians by individuals, the Crown [13] refused to recognize the transaction and declared it null and void. The same proclamation, in substance, was reenacted by the Virginia assembly after the colonies gained independence from Great Britain. As a consequence, the Transylvania Company retained only that small area of the land lying on the Green River in Kentucky and that portion lying on the North Carolina side of the Virginia line, and its plan to establish an original fourteenth colony in America resulted in failure.

In 1760 Hart married Sarah Simpson, daughter of Captain Richard Simpson, a large plantation owner who was one of the earliest settlers in what is now Caswell County. Their daughter, Susanna [14], in 1783 married General Isaac Shelby [15], planner of the Battle of Cowpens [16] and hero of the Battle of Kings Mountain [17], who became the first governor of the state of Kentucky and for whom the towns of Shelby, N.C., Shelbyville, Tenn., and Shelby County, Ky., were named. Nathaniel and Sarah Hart's grandson, Thomas Hart Shelby of Traveler's Rest, Ky., was said to have been the first importer of thoroughbred livestock, including racehorses [18], into the state of Kentucky.

Hart was appointed a justice of the peace by the royal governor. He served as captain of militia before the outbreak of the Revolution and as captain in the army during the American Revolution. He was killed by Indians near Logan's Station in Lincoln, Ky., where he left his will. In 1783 his widow and their son Nathaniel, Jr., went to Logan's Station to prove the will.

References:

John R. Alden, *John Stuart and the Southern Colonial Frontier* (1966).

Walter Clark, ed., *State Records of North Carolina*, vols. 16, 19, 22, 24 (1899–1905).

Lewis Collins, *Historical Sketches of Kentucky* (1850).

Dartmouth Papers, 5, 127, 1353 (North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh).

Lyman C. Draper Papers (Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison).

Genealogical Narrative, "The Hart Family in the United States" (North Carolina State Library, Raleigh).

Archibald Henderson, *The Transylvania Company and the Founding of Henderson, Kentucky* (1929).

Land grants of Caswell and Orange counties (Office of the Secretary of State, Raleigh).

William S. Lester, *The Transylvania Colony* (1935).

George N. MacKenzie, *Colonial Families of the United States*, vol. 2 (1966).

W. P. Palmer, ed., *Calendar of Virginia State Papers*, vol. 1 (1875).

William L. Saunders, ed., *Colonial Records of North Carolina*, vols. 6, 8–10 (1888–90).

Tyler's Quarterly 31 (1949), 32 (1950).

Virginia Magazine of History and Biography 7 (1899–1900).

Frederick A. Virkus, *The Abridged Compendium of American Genealogy*, vol. 5 (1933).

Additional Resources:

"CSR Documents by Hart, Nathaniel." Colonial and State Records of North Carolina. Documenting the American South, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. https://docsouth.unc.edu/csr/index.html/creators/csr11699 [19] (accessed April 3, 2014).

Draper, Lyman Copeland. *The Life of Daniel Boone.* Mechanicsburg, Pa.: Stackpole Books, 1998. 572. http://books.google.com/books?id=6npr_LGJH-cC&pg=PA572#v=onepage&q&f=false [20] (accessed April 4, 2014).

Ranck, George Washington. *Boonesborough; its founding, pioneer struggles, Indian experiences, Transylvania days, and revolutionary annals.* Louisville, Ky., J. P. Morton & company, printers. 1901. https://archive.org/details/boonesboroughits00ranc [21] (accessed April 4, 2014).

Engle, Dr. Fred. “Nathaniel Hart, Pioneer,” Madison's Heritage Online.http://library-old.eku.edu/blogs/digital/items/show/1578 [22](accessed April 4, 2014).

Nathaniel Hart Letter, 1791 Jan. 10, Special Collections, The Filson Historical Society, Louisville. http://kdl.kyvl.org/catalog/xt7wpz51gs1w/guide [23] (accessed April 4, 2014).

Subjects:
Biographies [24]
Military personnel [25]
Pioneers and Explorers [26]
Authors:
Swift, Vance E. [27]
Origin - location:
Orange County [28]
From:
Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, University of North Carolina Press.[29]

1 January 1988 | Swift, Vance E.

Source URL:https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/hart-nathaniel?page=0

Links
[1] https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/hart-nathaniel [2] https://www.ncpedia.org/transylvania-company [3] https://www.ncpedia.org/geography/orange

[4] https://www.ncpedia.org/geography/caswell [5] https://www.ncpedia.org/alamance-battle [6] https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/tryon-william [7] https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/boone-daniel [8] https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/henderson-richard [9] https://www.ncpedia.org/geography/granville [10] https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/hart-thomas [11] https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/williams-john [12] https://www.ncpedia.org/fayetteville [13] https://www.ncpedia.org/crown [14] https://archive.org/stream/kentuckypioneerw00tane#page/62/mode/2up [15] https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/shelby-isaac [16] https://www.ncpedia.org/cowpens-battle [17] https://www.ncpedia.org/kings-mountain-battle [18] https://www.ncpedia.org/horse-racing [19] https://docsouth.unc.edu/csr/index.html/creators/csr11699 [20] http://books.google.com/books?id=6npr_LGJH-cC&pg=PA572#v=onepage&q&f=false [21] https://archive.org/details/boonesboroughits00ranc [22] http://library-old.eku.edu/blogs/digital/items/show/1578 [23] http://kdl.kyvl.org/catalog/xt7wpz51gs1w/guide [24] https://www.ncpedia.org/category/subjects/biography-term [25] https://www.ncpedia.org/category/subjects/soldiers [26] https://www.ncpedia.org/category/subjects/pioneers-explorers [27] https://www.ncpedia.org/category/authors/swift-vance-e [28] https://www.ncpedia.org/category/origin-location/piedmont/o [29] https://www.ncpedia.org/category/entry-source/dictionary-no