

The New River Early Settlement

by

Patricia Givens Johnson

i
McConnell Library
Radford University
Radford, Va 24142

Copyright 1983
by
Patricia Givens Johnson
All rights reserved

No part of this publication may be photocopied, reproduced or used
in any manner without written permission from Patricia Givens
Johnson

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 83-81157

Other Books by the Author

James Patton and The Appalachian Colonists
William Preston and The Allegheny Patriots
General Andrew Lewis of Roanoke and Greenbrier
Elder Jacob Miller Founder of Dunkard Churches,
Virginia, Ohio, Indiana and Descendents

Special acknowledgement is due the Great Britain Public Records
Office for all references to the Great Britain Public Records, Colonial
Papers, from transcripts in the Library of Congress. These transcripts
of Crown-copyright records in the Public Record Office in London
appear by permission of the Controller of H.M. Stationery Office.

Sp. Coll. F. 247 .N5 J63 1983

Johnson, Patricia Givens.

The New River early
settlement /

Printed in the United States of America by
Edmonds Printing Inc.
Pulaski, Virginia

Chapter II

New River Named

The New River has had many names in the memory of the white man. These are Teays, Mondongachate, River of Death, Sault, Chinodacheta or Chinondaichio, Wood, Conway, Great Conhaway or Kahaway, Conoy, Kanawha, Allegheny and New. South Fork was once called Fulcarson River.

Geologists call the New, Teays, Indians called it Mondongachete, River of Death or Chinodacheta and the French called it Sault River all the way to its Carolina headwaters and Chinodacheta along the Kanawha portion. De Vaugondy's 1755 map calls it "Grand Cohaway nominee Wood or R. Neuve." Virginia land jobbers called it Wood or Allegheny and Virginia colonial officials called it Great Kanawha for the Algonquian tribe. Generally this name applied to the lower portion below the gorge while that east of the gorge was called Wood or New.

Current theories about how the New got its name are varied and confusing. From discovery by the English until about 1745 it was called Wood River supposedly for Abraham Wood who sent out the exploring party that recorded their discovery. Thomas Wood, possibly Abraham's son, died in an attempt to reach the river in 1671. It was a colonial custom to name a stream after a person who gave their life exploring a stream. The two names, Wood's and New were used interchangeably in records and on maps until about 1770.

Suggestions have been made that it was named for ranger Francis New; for an early ferryman; named by North Carolina's governor in 1750; by Fry-Jefferson on their 1751 map or Peter Fontaine surveying in 1752 or Captain Byrd in 1775; named by the settlers hearing the Indian word for Kanawha or for a Charles City County family.¹

The suggestion that it was named for Francis New in Captain Robert Wade's ranging party in 1758 is false since the river was called

New years before 1758. The suggestion by Jedediah Hotchkiss, Stonewall Jackson's topographical engineer, that it was named for Mr. New who ran a ferry is untrue since the river was called New before ferries ran upon it. The suggestion that Governor Johnston named it when the boundary surveyors found a river "nobody ever dreamt of before" is wrong. Johnston might not have known of it but Pennsylvanians had been calling it New River for years before 1749.

Suggestions that Peter Jefferson and Joshua Fry named it New on their 1751 Map of Virginia is ruled out by the river already having that name before 1751. They simply placed on the map the name the river was already being called.

The claim that it was named by Major Peter Fontaine surveying along it in 1752 is ruled out for the same reason as is the notion that in 1775 a Captain Byrd constructing a road came to the river and not knowing what to call it, named it the New River.

The theory that it was a translation of the Shawnee word Kana-wha which means New Water cannot be disproved yet is not plausible. It assumes that white settlers were well enough acquainted with the Shawnee language to translate and call the river by a name given it by the Indian tribe they most hated. This seems doubtful.

The suggestion that after the exploration of the Batts-Fallam party from Charles City County, that other families from the county, the News, Blands and Laceys, interested in peltry came to the river, naming it New. Although the Blands, formerly of the Skinner's Guild in London, had an interest in peltry, there is no actual proof they came to New River nor changed its name from Wood's to New.

Two decades of research by the present author into the history of the New River Valley has revealed a more logical explanation. Locally in Virginia the river was called Wood's but further afield was called New. There is an explanation for this.

In 1742 John Peter Salling made his trip down the river and upon returning called it Wood's River. In September 1745 when Colonel John Buchanan made a land selling trip to the river his entry book for buyers had written upon it, Wood's River Land Entry Book. The people already settled on the river petitioned Augusta court for a road in 1749 asking that a road be built for them on Wood's River. James Patton writing from New River in January 1753 says, "I have a just claim for 100,000 acres of land on Wood's River."²

John Peter Salling, John Buchanan, James Patton and the river petitioners were all local people.

Further afield, the name was changing. In May 1745 the Court of Orange County, Virginia, could not decide what to call it. So, a court order for a road to Adam Harman's Ford calls it "the road to Wood's or New River."³

Far from the river, in Pennsylvania, the German newspapers by 1745 were calling the river, New River. Religious groups like the Sabbatarians (Dunkards), Moravians and Lutherans all called the river New River. In September 1745 while John Buchanan was at the river carrying along his Wood's River Land Entry Book, a German newspaper in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, mentioned "a river 400 miles distant, running into the Mississippi - New River, by name." In 1748 a Moravian missionary in Pennsylvania said "a few German families live on New River."⁴

Certainly the Pennsylvanians were basing their knowledge of a river 400 miles distant on something other than local tradition. They were basing their knowledge upon maps and official reports coming from London which in turn were based upon earlier reports sent from America. Thus we come to how the New got its name.

In 1651 Edward Bland sent a pamphlet to London describing the western territory of the Carolinas and Virginia within the latitude where the New heads in Carolina as New Brittain. From that time designating the western tramontane territory of this latitude as New Brittain or New Virginia was the practice in official reports to London from America. They called the area of western Virginia drained by the New - New Brittain or New Virginia. This was true from the time of Bland's 1651 pamphlet to 1766 when New Jersey Governor Thomas Pownall's A Topographical Description of such parts of North America as are contained in the annexed map of the Middle British Colonies in North America Based on Lewis Evans 1755 Map was sent to London. It said, "New River, and Greenbrier are fine large branches of Canhawa, which in Future Times will be of service for the Inland Transportation of New Virginia."

Pownall also said that the Kanawha would provide "a passage to the New Virginia, a very great advantage."⁵

Since this area was known in England as New Virginia it seems logical that the river that drained it, the first travelers came to when they crossed the Allegheny divide, flowing in a new direction, should be called New River after New Virginia. We see this clearly when a Lutheran minister writing of the Ephrata Cloister Sabbatarians remarks, "They have one society in New Virginia upon New River."

Another of the ministers speaking of the Sabbatarians says: "The mother cloister began a number of daughters in several places

in Pennsylvania and New Virginia but they were sickly from their birth."⁶

Most maps of the New River area from 1751 show it as New River. One exception is Mitchell's **Map of the British Dominions 1755** which shows the river as Wood's or New River. This is easily explained since Mitchell said he was guided by John Peter Salling's *Journal* and Salling calls the river Wood's River.⁷ Jeffery's *American Atlas of 1776* shows the New River head in North Carolina and calls it **New River**.

FOOTNOTES—Chapter II

1. H.H. Hardesty, *Excerpts from Hardesty's Historical and Geographical Encyclopedia* (New York: H.H. Hardesty & Co. Publisher 1884) hereafter cited as *Hardesty*; p.4. Raymond E. Janssen, "The Teays River," *The Scientific Monthly* hereafter cited as *Janssen, Teays River*, December 1953 pp. 306-314; VMHB, XXX, p. 213; CS, I, p. 434; Hamil Kenny, *West Virginia Place Names, Their Origin and Meaning* (Piedmont, W. Va: 1945) p. 342; Herman Moll, 1720, *New Map of the North Part of America claimed by France* Library of Congress, Map Division, Washington, D.C. Hale, *Trans-Allegheny Pioneers*, p. 54; DU, James Patton, Letter, 1750; Marion Tingling, ed., *The Correspondence of the Three William Byrds of Westover, Virginia, 1684-1776* (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1977) hereafter cited as *Tingling, Three Byrds*, II, p. 703; David E. Johnston, *A History of the Middle New River Settlements and Contiguous Territory* (Huntington, West Virginia: Standard Publishing and Printing Company, 1906) hereafter cited as *Johnston, Middle New*, p. 8; NCCR, IV, p. xiii; James Adair, *The History of the American Indians* (London: 1755) reprint, ed. Samuel C. Williams (New York: Argonaut Press, 1966) hereafter cited as *Adair, American Indians* map opposite p. xxx; DP, I, p. 282; CVS, I, p. 255; John Manahan, "New Light on Charles City County", VMHB, v. 64, p. 473; Father Bonnacamp's 1749 Map of the Ohio River, Charles Hanna, *The Wilderness Trail or the Ventures and Adventures of the Pennsylvania Traders on the Allegheny Path*, (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1911) hereafter cited as *Hanna, Wilderness Trail*, p. 360.
2. Colonel James Patton to President John Blair, January 1753, WH, I QQ p. 78.
3. Orange County, Virginia, *Order Book IV*, pp. 331-332.
4. Gottschalk, *Report, 1748*, VHMB, v. 11, p. 234; J. F. Sachse, *The German Sectarians of Pennsylvania, 1742-1800 A Critical and Legendary History of the Ephrata Cloister and the Dunkers* (Philadelphia: P.C. Stockhausen, 1900) hereafter cited as *Sachse, German Sectarians*.
5. Hugh T. Lefler, ed., *North Carolina History told by Contemporaries* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1965) hereafter cited as *Lefler, Carolina History*, pp. 12-13 and Thomas Pownall, *A Topographical Description of the Dominions of the United States of America* ed. Lois Mulkearn, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1949) hereafter cited as *Pownall, Description*, pp. 137, 144.
6. Felix Reichmann and Eugene E. Doll, *Ephrata as Seen by Contemporaries* (Allentown, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania German Folklore Society 1953) hereafter cited as *Reichman, Ephrata*, p. 75 and Klaus Wust, *The Saint-Adventurers on the Virginia Frontier* (Edinburg, Va.: Shenandoah History Publishers, 1977) hereafter cited as *Wust, Saint*, p. 118.
7. Clarence W. Alvord and Lee Bidgood, *The First Explorations of the Trans-Allegheny Region by the Virginians* (Cleveland: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1912) hereafter cited as *Alvord-Bidgood, Explorations*, p. 204.