JOHN BRUCE

1787 Madison County Virginia tax list-district of Andrew Kennedy John Bruss 8 blacks 6 horses 16 head of cattle

In early 1780, when this area was still a part of Kentucky County, Virginia, one of the most active surveyors on the western branches of Paint Lick Creek was John Kennedy. In his position as assistant to George May, Surveyor of Kentucky County, he ran some of the earliest surveys in what is today Garmard County. In later years several of these early surveys became the subject in later years several of these early surveys of the area was of litigation after a more complete survey of the area was carried out in the early 1780's under the direction of James Thompson, Surveyor of Lincoln County.

The two surveys of John Bruce, a Revolutionary soldier from Virginia, fit Into this pattern. He, like many others, had land surveyed here long before he actually settled on it. This often resulted in another settler occupying the land during the interval only to lose it later in court.

The Bruce surveys were based on the certificates of settlement and preemption Bruce had purchased from Thomas Petitt and were to include Petitt's Spring. Evidently Petitt had established a claim there in 1775 and moved on. In 1776 Soloman Carpenter built a cabin by this spring. He sold his rights to a claim there to James Estill who was able to obtain a preemption certificate for 1000 acres at the site. Estill was involved at this time with his station on Muddy Creek south of today's Richmond and did not occupy or survey the land. It is not clear whether Carpenter or Estill knew of the earlier claim but it is possible they did since neither remained there and the survey was delayed past the usual time.

In 1780 Bruce had the site, probably unoccupied at the time, surveyed by John Kennedy. He does not appear to be living in Kentucky at that time so I assume he returned to Virginia.

In 1781, John Boyle, an associate of Estill, settled by the spring which came to be known as Boyle's Spring rather than Petitt's Spring. He later acquired his own survey on Drake's Creek and moved to it. Following the death of James Estill in 1782, Estill's heirs had a 1000 acre survey run that included this spring.

It seems unlikely John Bruce settled on his survey on Back Creek before the year 1768 as he is not listed on the 1787 tax list in the district of Michael McNeely where the tract lay. When he did settle there he chose the western portion of the survey, south of today's Point Leavell, probably due to the fact that Benjamin Estill was living on the disputed eastern section.

On September 23, 1789, the case of John Bruce vs. Benjamin Estill and Samuel Rice was heard at the Supreme Court in Danville. Bruce was awarded one penny in damages and the defendants were ordered to give up possession of a 400 acre tract in Madison County, the site of the disputed spring.

John Bruce had by this time become a wealthy land owner with larger tracts elsewhere in the state. His son, Henry Clay Bruce, would be granted 50 acres at the mouth of Sugar Creek in 1816. This land originally surveyed for the heirs of James Gordon in 1785. Bruce died in 1827 and was buried in the Bruce Cemetery near his home south of today's Point Leavell.

It appears that Absolem Arnold may have lived at this place after the death of John Bruce. He was the son of John Arnold who lived just down Back Creek. He married the youngest daughter of John Bruce, Tabitha Clay Bruce, and purchased one acre from the Henry Clay Bruce tract at the mouth of Sugar Creek. He and his wife would also be buried in the Bruce Cemetery.

A close relationship existed between the families at least until the time of the Mexican War. Alexander Arnold, son of Absolom and Tabitha, fought in the battle of Buena Vista alongside his cousin Richard Bruce. A tradition asserts he killed the Mexican soldier who shot William McKee, son of noted Garrard Countian, Samuel McKee.

#982 a John Bruce assignee of Thomas Petitt

400 acres on Back Creek

Surveyed 6-18-1780

by John Kennedy asst. S.K.C.
George May S.K.C.

Land on a western branch of Paint Lick Creek, to include Petitt's Spring. Beginning at a poplar on the west side of the creek below and near the said spring. Thence South 15° West 400 poles to a large honey locust, North 75° West 160 poles to a poplar, North 15° Bast 400 poles to a small black locust, South 75° East 160 poles to the Beginning.

Granted 12-20-1783 to John Bruce

by Benjamin Harrison Gov. of Virglnia

#982 b John Bruce assignce of Thomas Petitt

1000 acres on Back Creek

Preemption Warrant No. 219 issued 3-20-1780

Land Entry 4-26-1780

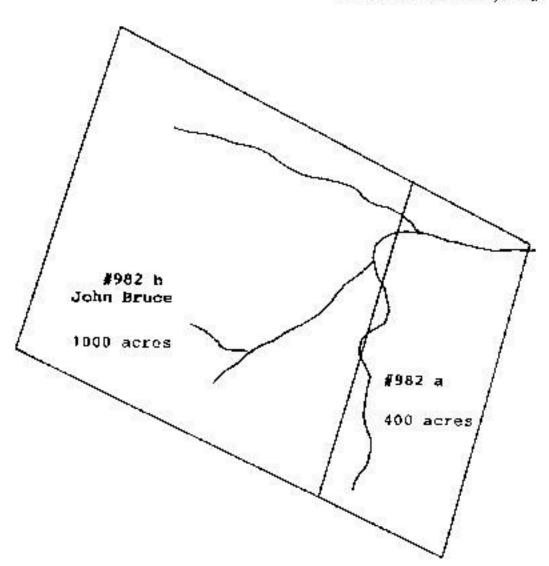
John Bruce, assignee of Thomas Petitt, enters 1000 acres upon a preemption warrant on Paint Lick Creek, joining his settlement on the west.

Surveyed 6-18-1780

by John Kennedy

Beginning at a poplar, a corner to his settlement, Thence North 75° West 400 poles to a sugar tree, North 15° East 400 poles to an elm, South 75° East 400 poles to a black locust, South 15° West 400 poles to the Beginning.

Granted 12-20-1783 to John Bruce by Benjamin Harrison, Governor of Virginia



This survey extends from south of Point Leavell to the East Fork of Back Creek in Flatwoods.