

HUNGRY MOTHER

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Hungry Mother State Park is the oldest state park in Southwest Virginia, having been built in the 1930's. It's name is derived from the creek on which it sits, and which it has impounded into a recreational lake. The 7.5 minute United States Geologic Survey map of the area has the creek named "Hungry Mother Creek".

The origin of the name has been lost. As early as the mid 1950's the author asked the park personnel about it, and was told with a smile and a wink that in pioneer times that a young child was found on the creek's valley during pioneer days, alive and in the arms of its dead mother, who had been killed by Indians. The child was crying "Hungry, Mother". After the story was told, the park personnel then told me the truth. There is no documentation of the origin of either the name or of the legend. This story has numerous variations.

However, it was not always so. The origin of the name is to be found in the records of the land grants for the Commonwealth of Virginia, which are maintained on line by the Library of Virginia. The present Town of Marion, Virginia was once known as Royal Oak. Hungry Mother Creek empties into the Middle Fork of the Holston River here. The town site was first patented by Arthur Campbell in 1753, and his grant was later surrounded by those of his relatives. The Campbell surveys do not mention the name of the creek. This bottom land along the creek was not sold to the public until the 1840's, and there are on file in the land grants section of the Library of Virginia four grants for some of this land, including the land at its junction with the river. These grants (Land Office 93-64, 94-454, 98-694, 100-226) all clearly identify the name of the creek in question as being Hungar's Mother's Creek".

Main Street in Marion was once the most prominent Indian and pioneer trail in the eastern United States, The Wilderness Trail or the Great Warrior's Path. Dr. Thomas Walker in the journal he kept of his exploratory expedition of 1750 noted the existence of a settlement along the trail as far west as Reedy Creek in Tennessee. No one knows when the first Europeans passed down the Wilderness Trail. People settled temporarily along the trail without benefit of land title. They moved on often without leaving a trace, except often enough, for their name having been associated with their homes.

'Hungar' is a surname of a family of very early settlers in Virginia. Wm. Cotton got a patent at the "horns of Hungar's Creek 1637" in Northampton County. No one knows who the Hungars were, but the name stuck. Hungar's Parish and Creek were again documented in Northampton Co., Va. in 1683. Recall that

Jamestown was settled in 1607. The family name is not to be found in any of the early records of that parish. They had moved on before surviving records were kept. Hungar's Creek of Northampton Co. and its fork, or 'horns', may be seen on modern maps.

"Hungar" is a German / Saxon surname derived from the Old High German word for starvation. Old High German is the variety of that language that was spoken by the German immigrants that settled in colonial Virginia.

This is as far as the documentation of the origins of the name 'Hungry Mother' will take us. From this we learn that an unnamed man with the surname Hungar found his way from Hungar's Creek of Northampton Co. to the area around Marion, and that his mother had lived on the creek that now bears her transliterated name, "Hungar's Mother's Creek".

Bibliography:

Land Grants Section of the Library of Virginia – on line
http://lva1.hosted.exlibrisgroup.com/F/?func=file&file_name=find-b-clas30&local_base=CLAS30

William Cotton's grant on Hungar's Creek
<http://colonialclergyorg.blogspot.com/2008/07/reverend-william-cotton.html>

USGS Maps on line
[http://store.usgs.gov/b2c_usgs/b2c/start/\(xcm=r3standardpitrex_prd\)/.do](http://store.usgs.gov/b2c_usgs/b2c/start/(xcm=r3standardpitrex_prd)/.do)

Google Search for Hungar's Parish
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hungars_Church

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On line versions of the Hungry Mother legend
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hungry_Mother_State_Park