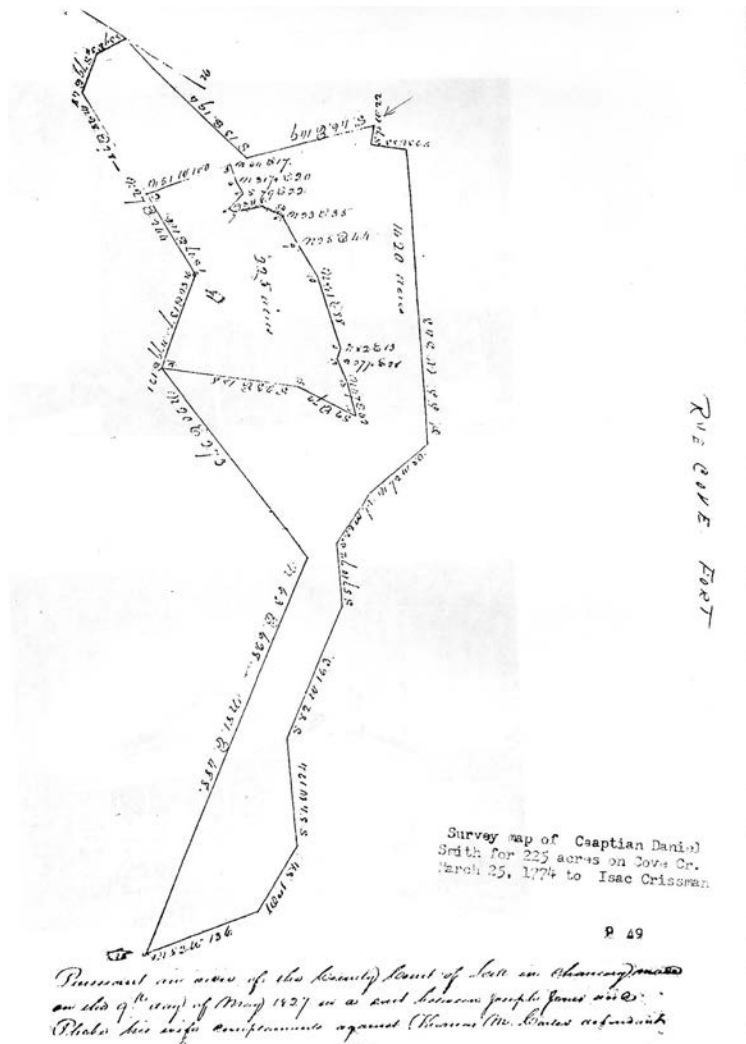


# ORIGINS OF THE CARTER CABIN

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 Jan. 2018 – Big Stone Gap, Virginia

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It has been said that Rye Cove (in Scott County, Virginia) is a living museum.<sup>(1)</sup> Located at the intersection of old Indian Trails, as well as the Clinch Valley branch of the Great Warrior's Path, Long Hunters frequented it before records were kept. It is likely that Europeans were passing by there before the French and Indian War. Its recorded settlement began in the aftermath of Lord Dunmore's War of 1774, when Isaac Crissman saw the place and determined to settle there. Captain Daniel Smith, his commanding officer at the Glade Hollow Fort at Lebanon, surveyed off 225 acres for him, and Crissman (various spellings) entered at the Fincastle Court House the paperwork to apply for a land grant for it.<sup>(2)</sup>



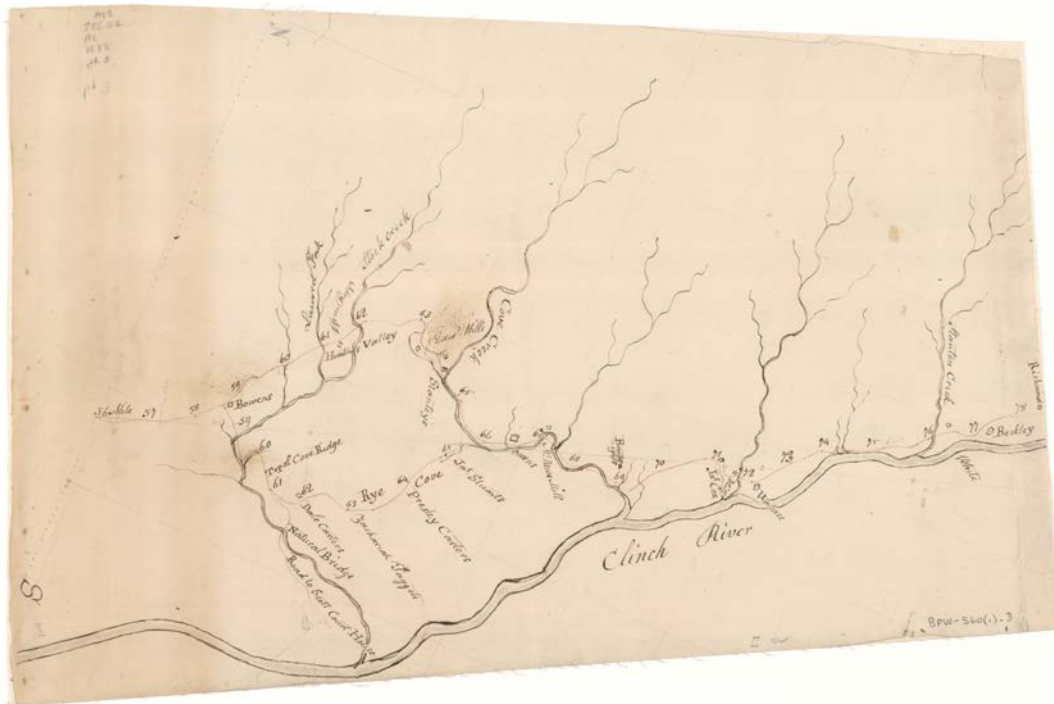
THE SMITH SURVEY OF THE  
 ISAAC CRISSMAN LAND GRANT

NOTE THE ARROW INDICATING  
 NORTH

He built a fort there in 1774. In 1776 when the Great Cherokee War broke out and he and two of his sons were killed at or near the fort by Indians. For this reason, the Crissman grant was never issued, and is not in the Land Grant registry in the Library of Virginia.<sup>(3)</sup> The fort was refurbished by the Holston Militia under Capt. (later General) Joseph Martin later that year. Thomas Carter, a member of the famous family going all the way back to Robert 'King' Carter of colonial days, got a land grant dated June 11, 1789 (LO 11-264) for 1426 acres in Rye Cove, which included the original survey of Crissman.<sup>(3)</sup>

The renamed Carter's Fort (also known as Rye Cove Fort) was intensively fought over during the Revolutionary War Indian attacks on the frontier. If it had not held, the frontier would have been rolled back at least as far east as Black's Fort at Abingdon, and perhaps as far as the New River.

In 1833 the Clinch Valley branch of the road from Fincastle, Virginia was chosen by the Commonwealth as the division it would improve for public use as a passage to Cumberland Gap, and to the Midwest. It was chosen over the main route that followed US 11W for a ways into Tennessee, before ducking back into Virginia. There are no existing records to indicate the quality of the road thus created. We do know that in 1844-45 it was improved again and included width specifications and a water sheading 'turtle back' dirt finish. It is likely that the standards were more lax for the 1833 version. However, there were provisions made for 'way stations' every few miles. This implies that there was to be stagecoach travel on the road. Way stations were where teams of horses were changed. Some of the way stations were inns, where meals and over night accommodations could be obtained.



1833 MAP OF THE CUMBERLAND RD.

The Commonwealth of Virginia had a map drawn up of this road. It is on file in the Library of Virginia.<sup>(4)</sup> It is the first map of Southwest Virginia that was drawn to more or less modern engineering standards. The map can be laid side by side to a modern topographic map, and one will see that the mileages, creeks and mountains are all accurately portrayed, and are easily identifiable with their modern equivalents.

A number of these way stations had, surprisingly enough, survived into modern times. One of them is the “Carter Cabin”, which stood at the eastern side of the intersection of State Highways 650 (the Brick Church Rd.) & 649. On the Map of 1833 it is labeled as ‘Mile Post 64 at Presley Carter’s’. There is a whole body of oral traditions concerning this structure.<sup>(5)</sup> The southern half of it was a log cabin, which was said to have been a way station on the ‘Cumberland Road’. Late in the Twentieth Century an old barn stood to the east of the cabin, which was said to have been the stables for the horse teams. At some point, the cabin had been extended to the north, and the entirety encased in wood siding. The lay out of the place was compatible with its traditional history. The Cumberland Road surface is still very discernable, undisturbed by more modern construction. The Carter Cabin sat within ten feet of the road, an unusual circumstance for a private dwelling of that time. Ancient grown up fence rows ran just behind the barn cut off perhaps a three acre tract from the surrounding farms, all indicating that this lot was attached to the Cumberland Road, and not to the surrounding farms.



THE CARTER  
CABIN  
BEFORE IT  
WAS MOVED

In 1827 litigation was filed in the Chancery Court of Scott County by different heirs of Thomas Carter. A copy of the original survey map of Daniel Smith of Isaac

Crissman's tract was entered as evidence (see page 1). The essence of this move was to prove that the estate of Thomas Carter incorporated the survey of Crissman.<sup>(6)</sup> For our purposes it proves that Joseph Carter, Thomas's brother, contrary to oral tradition, had no surveys in the area of Carter's Fort

In 1997 the Carter Cabin was donated to Natural Tunnel State Park by the Carter Family.<sup>(6)</sup> It was dismantled, and the original log half was reassembled within the gorge of the park, where it is prominently displayed.

Robert Addington, in his outstanding History of Scott County, and this author in his book The Bear Grass, a History, incorporated much existing oral tradition concerning the history of the Carter Cabin. Several on-line articles follow these leads, such as the essay of Rita K. Sutton.<sup>(6, 7, 8, & 9)</sup> The theme of these traditions were that the Carter Cabin was either originally built at Carter's Fort and moved to Carter Town (the intersection mentioned above), or that the logs of Carter's Fort had been used in its construction.

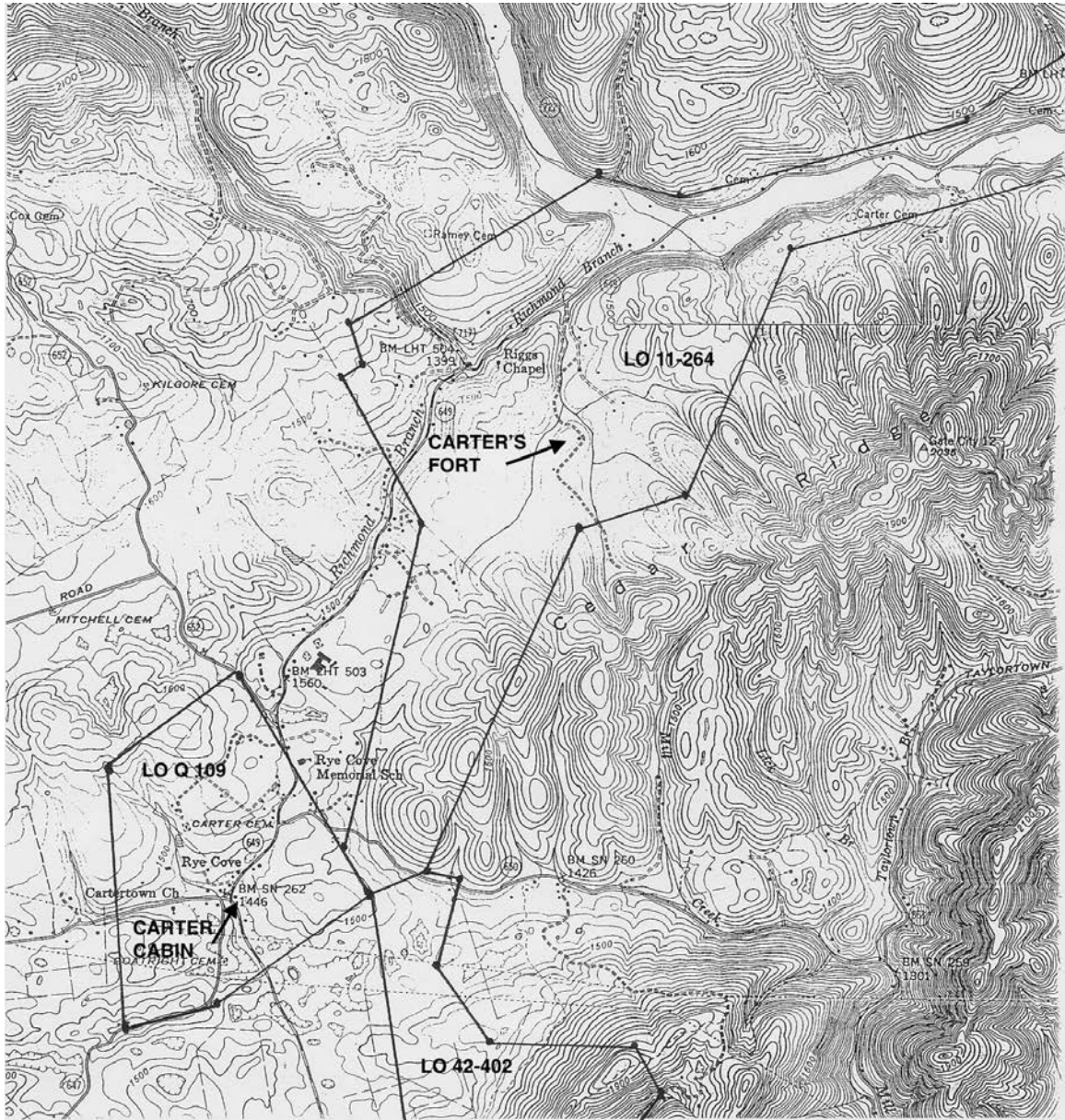
However, when the Carter Cabin was shorn of its weather boarding in preparation for its move to the Park, it was noted that it was built with half dovetail joints, rather than 'V' notches. Corner notches in log cabins are used to date them. 'V' notches were the only available notch until about 1820, when the superior half dove tail notch rapidly replaced them. Since the Carter Cabin is justifiably such a highly regarded relic of our past, it would seem desirable to see what can be done to document its origins.

The brothers Norris, Joseph, and Thomas Carter were among the first to inhabit Rye Cove. The genealogy is well worked out, with the only points of confusion is the frequent recycling of the names Joseph and Thomas.<sup>(10)</sup> Joseph Carter and his wife, Elizabeth Presley, bought LO 42-402 of 200 acres in 1799, well after the era of Carter's Fort. That tract lay two miles south of Carter's Fort, and about half a mile south of the site of the Carter Cabin. One of their sons was given his mother's surname, Presley. The estate of Joseph Carter was divided between Presley, and his brother Thomas, with each getting that portion where they already lived. Presley Carter died in 1806. Since the 1833 map refers to the site of the Carter Cabin as 'Presley Carter's', the implication is that Presley had bought LO Q-109, which had been granted to William Nash in 1785, and that a quarter of a century after his death his name was still attached to that place. None of Presley's children were named Presley, and none of them were alive in 1833. Alternately, Joseph could have bought LO Q-109 and willed it to Presley.

The Carter Cabin was donated to the Park by "the great great grandson of Joseph Carter".<sup>(7)</sup> This line of descent is through Presley's son Joseph H. Carter (died 1909).<sup>(10)</sup>

Therefore it can be reasonably said that the Carter Cabin was originally built on site in 1833 as a dedicated way station. The land on which it was built was not a

part of the original estate of Joseph. Its only connection to Joseph Carter was that it was built by one of his descendants. Neither it, nor its logs, had any connection to Carter's Fort, which had belonged to Thomas Carter, not Joseph. Absolute certainty about any connection between the logs and Carter's Fort can only be obtained by dendrochronology, the study of tree growth rings. This would show whether the logs had been cut in 1774 or in 1833.



LO 11-264 IS THE GRANT OF THOMAS CARTER, AND THE SITE OF CARTER'S FORT  
 LO 42-402 IS THE TOP HALF OF JOSEPH CARTER GRANT  
 LO Q-109 IS THE WILLIAM NASH GRANT, LATER BOUGHT BY THE DESCENDANTS OF JOSEPH  
 CARTER, AND IT THE ORIGINAL SITE OF THE CARTER CABIN, OR THE PRESLEY CARTER WAY  
 STATION



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1 – Davis, Aaron – Park Manager – Southwest Virginia Museum and Historical State Park

2 – Hamilton, Emory – “Historical Sketches of Southwest Virginia”

3 – Library of Virginia Land Grants

[http://lva1.hosted.exlibrisgroup.com/F/?func=file&file\\_name=find-b-clas30&local\\_base=CLAS30](http://lva1.hosted.exlibrisgroup.com/F/?func=file&file_name=find-b-clas30&local_base=CLAS30)

4 – “Map of the Cumberland Road, 1833” – 755/82/R6/1833, now filed as BPW 560 (1) at the Library of Virginia

5 – Carter, Billy – one of the last persons to live in the Carter Cabin – to the author

6 – Daniel Smith’s survey of the Isaac Crissman tract – the site of Carter’s (or Crissman’s, or Rye Cove Fort) – obtained from the Scott Co. Court records by Brad Clark (who was the surveyor who divided the Richmond Estate [the major moiety of the Thomas Carter estate existing in 1827], and was the official Historian of the Carter Family), mentioned in “Early Settlers of Scott County, Virginia” by Rita K. Sutton, and also referenced by the historian Dale Carter

7 - <http://danielboonetrail.com/carter-cabin/>

8 – more oral history on the Carter Cabin, also said to have been incorporated in Addington’s History of Scott County

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9 - Notes on Joseph Carter – family history, especially the Carter Cabin

<http://www.penjacphoto.com/penleyged/nti00640.htm>

10 – Carter family genealogy

<https://www.ancestry.com/boards/surnames.carter/5894.3/mb.ashx>

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