

**Stephen Holston
1750-1787**

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“Stephen Holston” is the way the name of the first European to live within the Holston River shed, which was named after him, is usually spelled. His biographies are confused with two other persons of the same name, one over 30 years older, and with our subject’s son, Stephen Junior.

He was chief surveyor of the Patton Expedition of 1748, and was in an excellent position to get settlement rights to his choice of the land in the Valleys of the New River, and the Indian River (later the Holston).

He later canoed all the way down the Holston to Natchez, Mississippi. John Redd, a frontiersman and chronicler of the era, stated that Holston lived at the head spring of the Holston by the Wilderness Trail. Traditionally he sold the land to James Davis, who built his plantation “Davis’s Fancy” there.

Just to the north of I-81 and the Mountain Empire Airport near the Smyth / Wythe Counties line there is a Davis Valley, a Davis cemetery, a Davis Valley Road, and a Dry Run. (The survey calls of the Davis’s Fancy grant notes a “sinking spring”, a frequent synonym for a “dry run” in the pioneer vocabulary.)

There is confusion about the personage of “Stephen Holston”. It is said that he was born in New Sweden, and was therefore a Swede. No known example of his signature exists, and it is reasonable to expect that he was illiterate. It is also apparent that however his name was originally spelled, it was in transition to a more conventional American spelling. It is widely accepted that the original spelling of the surname was ‘Holstein’.

‘Holstein’ is a former independent Duchy at the base of the Jutland peninsular south of Denmark. It is now a province of Germany, being in the vicinity of Hamburg. The people have always spoken German. A person who lives in the province of Holstein is referred to as a ‘Holsteiner’. Even though Denmark briefly owned Holstein in the nineteenth century, this was long after the Holsteiner family was in America. It is sometimes inaccurately stated that the Holsteiners in New Sweden were Danes. They were no more Danes than Swedes. They were ethnic German Holsteiners.

New Sweden was the short lived Swedish colony of the lower Delaware River Valley. Besides Swedes, Danes and ethnic Germans lived there. It was first conquered by the Dutch of New Holland, which was in turn captured by the English.

Henry Holsteiner was from New Sweden. He is documented on Catawba Creek in Craig County, Virginia which is the location of the Wilderness Trail as it made its passage from the Valley of the James River to that of the New River. Henry married Jane Looney of the famous Looney's Ferry family on the James at present Buchanan. She named their son "Stephen", using that spelling instead of the German form 'Stefan'.

'Stephen' is the Greek spelling of that name. The German form is 'Stefan'. The Germans do not like, and rarely use the Greek form of the first name.

Stephen married Lucy Looney, relationship to Jane unknown.

Holston did not ever own the land where he lived for a while at the head spring of what was then called the Indian River. It was granted by Virginia in 1753 to James Davis by grant LO (Land Office) 32-162, which is available on line at the Library of Virginia. The most Holston could have owned and sold to Davis was a settlement right to the land, which was only a warrant giving the right to buy the land based on Holsteiner's settlement on it. This settlement right could be sold on the secondary market. The texts of the land grants usually noted any settlement right that was used in the purchase of land. The grant of LO 32-162 does not reference any settlement right, but merely mentions the sum of money Davis paid Virginia for the land.

Militiaman John Redd, a thorough journalist, wrote that Holston's home was on the Wilderness Road. There are three routes in use across the divide between the watersheds of the Holston River and the New River on the 1935 US Geologic Survey topographic map. South to north they are the N&W railroad; the Lee Highway (US 11); and State 617, or the Davis Valley Road. Both the current routes of the railroad and of the Lee Highway are generally very good indicators of the route of the original Wilderness Road, however, in this case Redd's notations prove the Davis Valley Road is the documented original route, though the route may have wandered.

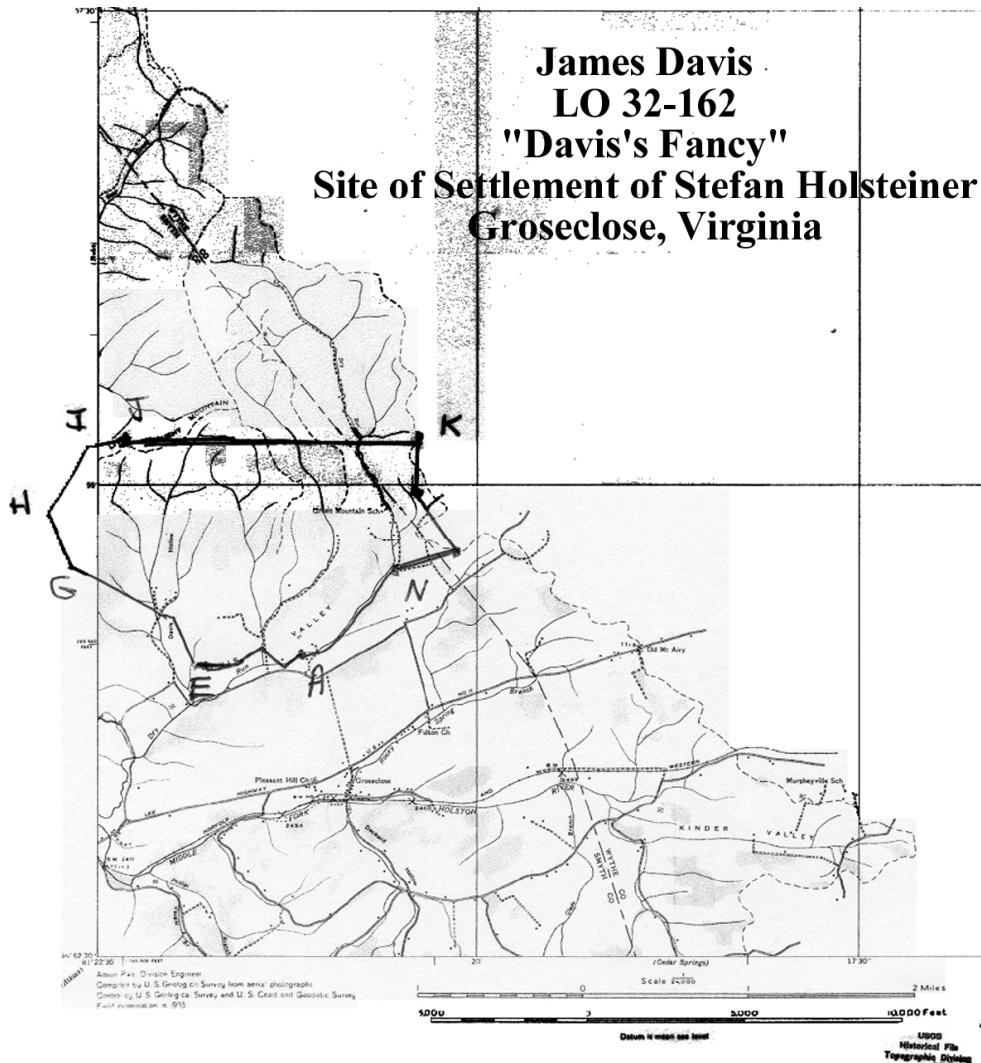
Holston canoed from his home on the Holston to Natchez, Mississippi. Notations about his being in South Carolina are incorrect, and are related to the older man of that name.

The first written use of the name 'Holston River' was on the 1751 map of Peter Jefferson and Joshua Fry documenting their survey extending the state line between North Carolina and Virginia.

In 1757 he was captured by Indians, but escaped. He fought at the Battle of Point Pleasant in Lord Dunmore's War of 1774, and took part in Christian's Campaign in the Great Cherokee War of 1776. Having attained the rank of Captain, Holston fought at Guilford Courthouse in 1781.

General William Campbell of King's Mountain fame, called Holston the greatest of all the long hunters.

Holston moved first to Sullivan County, Tennessee, where he lived among his wife's Looney relatives. The Looneys were, themselves, long hunters, and left their name on both the Virginia and Kentucky sides of Black Mountain. His last home was further down 'his' river in Grainger County, Tennessee, between Rogersville and Knoxville, where he died.



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