

Oke "Okey" Hendrickson

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The following is probably the most complete and sourced biography of the Patriot Oke Hendrickson available. It was published in *The Lewis County Herald*, Lewis County Kentucky on Tuesday, April 30, 2002 and written by Lewis County historian Dr. William M. Talley

Oke Hendrickson:

Patriot and pioneer settler of Poplar Flat

By Dr. William M. Talley

Oke Hendrickson was an early pioneer of Lewis County who offered a 50-acre site on his farm at Poplar Flat on which to build a town for the county seat that he requested to be called Mt. Vernon. After discussing his offer for some time, the court decided to decline it and declared Clarksburg the county seat, probably because of its more central location: The Hendricksons are descended from a long line of Dutch who immigrated from Holland to New York in the 1600s, on the ship "Roseboom," and later moved to Monmouth County, Holmdale Township, New Jersey. The name Hendrickson was originally Hendricks, but the Dutch suffix of "'sen" or "son" was later attached to the name. Willm (died 1711) and Daniel Hendricks (died 1727) were brothers who lived in Monmouth County, New Jersey, and the Lewis County line descended from Willm (or Willem) Hendrick(son). The original pioneer Hendrickson home in New Jersey, built in 1754, is still standing in Holmdel, New Jersey.

The names of Oke, Daniel, and William (Willm) were repeated in the Hendrickson family for many generations. "Oke" is an unusual 'name and is of Dutch origin; 'through the generations it was spelled various ways: Okey, Okie, Aukie, Ouke, Oakey, and Oakie.

Some very important battles of the Revolutionary War took place in the area around Monmouth, New Jersey. Washington's army camped in the general area for three winters. It is believed that the Hendricksons knew Washington very well and that Oke Hendrickson served in the Revolution with him.

Willm Hendrickson left a will dated June 14, 1711, and it was recorded at Trenton, New Jersey. His wife, Willemtje Laen VanPelt died shortly after the birth of their son Daniel.

The Hendricksons were members of the Dutch Reformed 'Church. In order to be given a license to preach, their ministers were required to take an oath of allegiance and swear that they would not preach against the beliefs of the Anglican Church.

Willm and Willemtje Hendrickson had the following children:

1. Geesje (b. 1696, married Matthias Pietersen in 1715)
2. Jannetje (baptized 1699, married Christopher Walmsley)
3. Guisbert (baptized 1703, died 1777, married Mary Elizabeth Polhemus)
4. Hans/John born about 1700, baptized 1705, died 1789)
5. Hendrick (1706-1783)

6. Daniel (born between 1708-1710). This Daniel Hendrickson, who later moved to New Brunswick, New Jersey. The above Daniel Hendrickson died some time after 1776. His first wife was named Magdalena. He married secondly on March 23, 1739, Ida (or Eyda) Van Hengelen Wyckoff, widow of Cornelius Wyckoff and daughter of Ouke Van Reynierse. Ida (Reynierse) Hendrickson was born 1710 and died 1804. Daniel and Ida Hendrickson were the parents of Oke Hendrickson who came to Lewis County.

The children of Daniel Hendrickson and his two wives, Magdalena and Ida were:

- (1) Jannetje, born about 1732, married Michael Van Buren in 1750. Through this marriage the Hendricksons became related to President Martin Van Buren.
- (2) William, baptized in 1736 at the Dutch Reformed Church
- (3) Cornelius, born about 1738, died in 1833/34
- (4) Oke, born November 24, 1744, died in March 1834 in Lewis County
- (5) Gysbert, baptized November 19, 1749
- (6) Johannis baptized in 1751.

During the period before the Hendricksons came to Lewis County there was a great deal of religious conflict in their home area. Many churches were established and there was bickering and hard feelings between members of the Dutch Reformed and other churches such as the Presbyterians. The Anglican Church was the established church and the upkeep of them and their ministers was paid through taxes. The Dutch Reformed Church had a branch called Pietists, who dwelled on the need to be pious. The Presbyterians split and were known as the New Side and the Old Side. The New Side established Queens College in New York in 1747. In this same time period the Baptists and the Methodists grew strong. The revivals held by all of these groups resulted in what came to be known as the Great Awakening and many of the eastern settlers who came to Kentucky brought this revivalist spirit with them resulting in some spectacular religious experiences on the frontier. No doubt, Oke Hendrickson left New Jersey for Cabin Creek thinking they would get away from religious contention only to find that the Presbyterians on Cabin Creek were splitting up over religious dogma. The Forks of Salt Lick Baptist Church eventually disbanded and surviving members moved to what is now the Salem Church. Some of the Hendricksons are buried at Salem. Others are buried at East Fork. Oke had died before the Methodists split over the slavery issue.

A great deal of history was being made in New Jersey during the time that the Hendricksons decided to leave. An article written by Marie McConnell about 1963 gives an interesting speculation about the family.

She says: "The old white oak tree on the campus of Rutgers University which inspired the poem 'Trees' by Joyce Kilmer has always interested me because I love big trees. But it now has a special interest because I believe probably my second, third and fourth great grandfathers (Hendricksons) all passed by or under it. In an article in the Tampa Morning Tribune, of August 18, 1963, it was said that this tree was almost 300 years old, so, using about 1765 as its possible beginning, it would have been 33 years old at the time when the first Daniel (Hendrickson) was born. 63 at the time of birth of Cornelius, and 88 (quite large) when the second Daniel came along. The article described it as having a branch spread of 114 feet and being of almost perfect symmetry. Kilmer, who as a boy in New Brunswick (New Jersey) and a student at Rutgers in 1905-6, often sat under it, was killed in World War I. When it became known that nothing further could be done to save it, second generation trees were started from its acorns and were about fifteen

inches in height in 1963. It was planned to plant them on Capitol grounds and throughout Washington, D.C. Also, by then some 100 schools and organizations had asked for seedlings, one request having come from Kilmer's daughter, Sister Michael Kilmer, at the convent of St. Benedict, St. Joseph, Missouri."

It is speculated that many of the Hendricksons would have passed by or under this tree during their lives.

Oke Hendrickson was living during the time that the calendar was corrected in 1752 and the eleven days following September 2, 1752 were omitted. By royal proclamation, the eleven days following Wednesday, September 2, were omitted in Great Britain and the American colonies, and for the first time in the history of the English-speaking peoples, nothing happened on September 2nd through the 13th for the simple reason that those days failed to exist. The Gregorian Calendar was then adopted to replace the less accurate Julian Calendar. Daniel Hendrickson would have been 42 years old and Oke his son would have been about eight.

It is not known why Oke Hendrickson and his family moved to Poplar Flat from New Jersey. It may be because he received a land grant for his services in the Revolutionary War. He served in January, 1781, in the 3rd Battalion, Middlesex Militia, New Jersey, commanded by Major Robert Nixon. He would have been 37 years old at the time. Before leaving New Jersey, Oke Hendrickson was an innkeeper in Heights' Town (or Hightstown), New Jersey. Old York Road that ran from New York to Philadelphia, was a busy road and ran through this town.

It is not clear where Oke Hendrickson and his family lived between the time that he sold his tools, furniture, and cattle in 1781 until he bought two tracts of four acres each on Cabin Creek in Lewis County. The next year (1796) he received a Kentucky Grant for 1808 and two-thirds acres on Cabin Creek. The two deeds for the four-acre tracts are recorded in Mason County because Lewis County had not yet been organized.

The first Lewis County Court was held at the home of Oke Hendrickson on Poplar Flat in 1807. The court order book says:

"George Fearis, Aaron Stratton, John G. McDowell, John Stephenson. Landon Calvert, John Brown, Hugh Hannah and John Doyal met at the house of Oke Hendrickson, in the said county on Monday, the twenty-seventh day of April, one thousand eight hundred and seven, and each produced commissions from his excellency, Christopher Greenup, Esquire, Governor of Kentucky, appointing them justices of the peace in and for the said county of Lewis with all rights and privileges thereto pertaining."

At this first session of court Oke Hendrickson was granted a tavern license. At the January 1808 session of court the justices discussed the plat of land Oke Hendrickson had offered for a county seat. The justices ordered that a jail be built on the land and James Herbert, the son-in-law of Oke Hendrickson, built the jail and was appointed jailer. This jail was Lewis County's first official building. Poplar Flat never became the county seat because John McBride, of Vanceburg, brought suit to stop the proceedings because he did not believe it was the most suitable site in the county.

We are not certain where Oke and his family attended religious services. His name does not appear in the records of the Forks of Salt Lick Baptist Church or the Ebenezer Presbyterian Church, two of the earliest churches in the county.

The following information was written by Hattie (Van Dyke) Hewlett Farrell (1869-1963). Some of it has not been proved. Mrs. Farrell said:

"Our great-great-grandfather was Okie Hendrickson, a surgeon in the American Revolution. His wife was Mary Ann Gano, whose sister was the mother of President Martin Van Buren ... My grandpa, D.H. Hendrickson, mother's father was a cousin to ex-president Martin Van Buren. Grandpa was born July 1812 in Lewis County, Kentucky. He belonged to the Kentucky Guards in the early 1830s ... Andrew J. Hendrickson was born November 16, 1816 and died February 8, 1899 in the 83rd year of his life. His grandfather Okie Hendrickson was a lieutenant of the Federal Army and rode side by side with General Washington over the battlefield of Trenton, New Jersey. Andrew J. Hendrickson was in the State Legislature in the sessions of 1869-70 elected by the Republican Party."

The family tradition says that Oke Hendrickson, while sitting in front of the fireplace, fell into it and was so badly burned that he died as a result. Some records say that Oke Hendrickson's wife was Mary Ann Steepe, but others say she was Mary Ann Gano. They had eight children, all born in New Jersey:

- (1) Margery no birth date known
- (2) Daniel (1769-1863)
- (3) Sarah (born 1772)
- (4) Richard (1775-77)
- (5) John (1779-1786)
- (6) Elizabeth (1781-1859)
- (7) William (1786-1867)
- (8) Joseph, died circa 1792

Daniel Hendrickson, son of Oke, was born in Hightstown, New Jersey, and came with the family to Poplar Flat. He married first in New Jersey in 1792 to Sarah Herbert (1772-1826). He married secondly in Lewis County Mary McElwain.

William Hendrickson (1786-1867), son of Oke, died at St. Paul, Minnesota, at the home of his son, William George Hendrickson, but his body was brought back to Kentucky to be buried beside his wife, Phoebe Wilson (1797-1865), whom he married in 1815. William and Phoebe Hendrickson were members of the Salem Baptist Church. During the War of 1812, William Hendrickson served as private in Capt. Means' Company of Mounted Riflemen. Col. Richard M. Johnson's Regiment of the Kentucky Militia. The nine children of William and Phoebe Hendrickson were: Marv Ann, Louise J., John Wilson, Cynthia Edna, Daniel Elbridge, William George, Sarah W., Amanda Drusilla, and James M. Hendrickson. Daniel Elbridge Hendrickson was the father of 19 children, by two wives, Lucinda Carter Clary and Chestina "Tina" Hunt.

Alva Wilson Hendrickson (1887-1964) was the youngest child of Daniel E. Hendrickson. He married Alva Lou Kennedy (1885-1984). Their old home about seven miles north of Tollesboro on Route 57 is still standing and we are publishing a picture of it in this issue. The house was built about 1888

We do not know exact location of Oke Hendrickson's farm and home. There is not much left of the village called Poplar Flat - a church, a home, and some farm buildings. At one time there were stores, a school, a church, post office and several homes. Southwest of the Poplar Flat Church there is a wide valley with rolling hills on either side. We speculate that this was the valley where Oke Hendrickson brought his family in the 1790s.

There are many things we would like to know about Oke Hendrickson. Where is his grave? Where was the 50 acres he donated to the county, but was later refused? Was his suggestion to name the county seat Mt. Vernon prompted by his loyalty to George Washington? Did Oke and his family speak Dutch after they moved here from New Jersey?

The old Hendrickson family bible was in the hands of Mary Lou Hendrickson (Mrs. Alva) until her death. We do not know its location now.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:

Without the help of Sandy Ruckel (Mrs. Todd Ruckel) we would not have been able to write this article. We have quoted liberally from her history of the Hendrickson family.

Sources of Hendrickson family history:

1. Early Dutch Settlers of Monmouth County, by Beckman
2. Two Dutch Families Re-Interpreted, by Henry B. Hoff
3. Hendricksons of New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania by Marie McConnell
4. Minute books of Forks of Salt Lick Baptist Church (aka Salem) and Ebenezer Presbyterian Church.
5. "The Hendrickson Story: A Prologue", printed document, owned by Sandy Ruckel. Vanceburg.