

Descendants of Evans Hear Family History¹

Attorney David Reay Extolls Character of Colonel John Evans and Praises Aggressive and Energetic Spirit of Early Settlers—Hardships and Labours Were Many with Fruits of Work Hidden

Large numbers of the people of Morgantown and this part of West Virginia will be interested in the following paper read by David C. Reay, of this city, at the first general gathering of the descendants of Colonel John Evans one of the first settlers of Monongalia county, and an officer in the Revolutionary War. Sanctioning such reunions as “omens of better things and, in a measure, a return to the customs prevalent in what many believe to be the best period in our national life.” Mr. Reay told the following story of the family, at the reunion held on Saturday, September 19, at the Dille homestead at Evansdale.

“In the days of John Evans the circumstances surrounding those who lived in this section were such as to make for a clannish spirit. The rigors of life in a new country beset on all sides by danger of many kinds naturally operated to draw the few settlers into very close personal bands. Things that we would regard in this day and time as the most trivial incidents, were to John Evans and his few neighbors events of great importance.

“It is almost impossible for one of us to visualize the conditions surrounding the early settlers of this valley. We can hardly realize that the entire country was one great forest of primeval timber, the home and lurking place of many wild beasts and savage men. Upon the settler’s arrival he found no open spaces or vacant fields. His vision was necessarily restricted by the forest to his own immediate vicinity. He found the land in the raw, and in order to establish the semblance of an abiding place, the first task that confronted him was to cut and remove the timber to such an extent as would enable him to establish his clearing and erect himself a simple log cabin.

“The timber that in this day and age is becoming so scarce and is a source of such great wealth to those sections of the country in which it is produced, was, in that day a curse to the settler and the cause of his greatest labors. It had to be cut and removed from the land by hand with no mechanical assistance, and save for that portion used by the settler in the building and construction of his cabin and buildings, it was absolutely useless. It was cut down, rolled into vast piles in the most convenient hollow and there fired and burned. The waste of such methods was indeed appalling, but its removal and destruction was a necessity in order that homes might be established and fields cleared for the production of meager crops necessary to support and sustain the lives of these hardy spirits.

“As before remarked it is practically impossible for us to reconstruct and visualize the situation that then existed and the conditions surrounding the settlers in this section. There were no roads at all except the Indian and game trails leading across the low

¹ *The New Dominion*, Morgantown, WV, October 1, 1925, p. 12. Microfilm at the University of West Virginia Library, Colson Hall, Morgantown, WV.

passes in the mountains and hills and along the water courses. No towns existed except the primitive village of the Indians. No mails at all, few if any publications. No neighbors save at great distances. No system or means of communication of any kind except that of a personal visit, of necessary these visits were few and far between and their undertaking was most difficult and beset with grave dangers. In all this vast valley no such thing as medical assistance could be obtained and so all ways one who came here at that time was in every sense of the word dependent on his own resources, courage and skill in order to sustain his life and the lives of those who were under his care.”

“In circumstances such as these the clan spirit existing among families that came to this section was fostered and nurtured by the very circumstances that of necessity surrounded them. The advent of a stranger into any part of the county was a most notable occasion and he was assured of lavish hospitality on every hand. Such happenings were rare and such visitors were the only source of communication these people had with the outside world. A visit from one who came from “Over the Mountains,” as Eastern Virginia was in that day called, was indeed an event and a cause for the gathering together of every one in the community who had knowledge of such an arrival, and days were spent in entertaining the stranger and in eliciting from him such information as he possessed as to matters and things in the East or “Over the Mountains” from whence practically all of these people came.

“No such thing as money existed as a circulating medium of exchange. Business was transacted by the exchange of simple commodities as the settler had, furs, Indian corn, weapons, government land grants or warrants and script issued at various times by the Colonial government.

“Such were the conditions existing in the Upper Monongahela Valley in the days of John Evans and his associates.

“The inducements for strong, brave and adventurous settlers to cross the Alleghany Mountains into what is now West Virginia were great but the dangers incident to such emigration was also great on account of incursions of hostile savages living in what was then the unknown region beyond the Ohio River. The colony of Virginia and later the State of Virginia encouraged such emigration and “Tomahawk Rights” to valuable lands were afterwards confirmed by legislation.

“John Evans took up several of these rights. His home plantation survey dated November 6, 1781 sets out the following: “surveyed for John Evans assignee of Samuel Owens 369 acres of land in Monongalia county. Including his settlement made thereon in the year 1769. Agreeable to a certificate for 400 acres from the Commissioners for adjusting the claims to unpatented lands for the district of Monongalia, Yohogania and Ohio. This survey which is recorded in Surveyor Book No. 1 at page 120 sets out by metes and bounds 360 acres of land and was made by Valentine Merriwether, assistant to John Madison, surveyor of Monongalia county. This land was afterwards granted by the Commonwealth of Virginia to John Evans on the 25th day of October, 1783. The original sheepskin grant has been lost, much to the regret of the now owners of the farm. Col.

John Evans on January 11, 1814, conveyed this farm of 360 acres to his son, John Evans, Jr., usually called, "Captain Jack," this conveyance reserves a life estate to the grantor and his aged wife, his wife does not sign the same. The same is recorded in deed book No. 5 old series page 605. Capt. John Evans owned said farm from the date of this deed to the date of his death, May 19, 1849, and devised the same by his last will and testament dated Jan. 27, 1844 to one of his sons, James Evans, afterwards known as Col. James Evans of the 7th West Virginia Infantry in the war between the states, who in turn owned the same, until April 1st, 1875, when he conveyed 248 acres of said 360 acres to Oliver H. Dille, husband of Col. James Evans daughter, Gillie Coleman Evans, which conveyance is recorded in deed book No. 10, new series, page 393, conveying all of the farm lying on the west or south of Morgantown and Collins Ferry road leaving about 112 acres of said farm, which he later conveyed to his son, Thomas Ray Evans, and which 112 acres includes the beautiful Morgantown Country Club property about 71 acres and about 29 acres laid out by the University Realty Company and the residue is owned by Monongalia county.

"Col. John Evans and his sons took up several tracts of land by survey and grant in Monongalia county, and their land transactions cover more space in the grantor and grantee indecies (sic) of Monongalia County than most any other family.

"Col. John Evans was one of persons interested in the establishment of a separate county of the domain denominated the "District of West Augusta" and upon the formation of Monongalia county, October 1776, it is said was made the first 'Clerk of the Count', the office now being known 'clerk of the county court.' At that time Monongalia county included what is now Preston, Marion, Taylor, Harrison, Barbour, Tucker, Randolph, Upshur, Braxton, Lewis, Ritchie, Gilmer, Calhoun and parts of Wood, Doddridge, Wirt, Webster, Pendleton and possible (sic) more counties, including Greene, Fayette and Washington counties located in Pennsylvania. The act of the assembly of Virginia in creating the three counties out of the District of West Augusta is found in Hennings Statutes at Large, Vol. 9, pages 262 to 266 and provides among other things, that "the landholders of the county of Monongalia to meet at the home of Jonathan Coburn, in said county, on the eight day of December next." *** then and there to choose the most convenient place for holding courts for the respective counties in the future. Much interesting data and many valuable records were lost by the burning of the records of Monongalia county in February 1796, twenty years after the formation of the county.

"John Evans is also named as one of the trustees of the town to be established on 50 acres of land the property of Zqckquell Morgan, the other trustees of said town being Samuel Hanway, David Scot, Michael Kearnes and James Daugherty, Gentleman, the act creating this town by passed October, 1785, calls it Morgans-town and it is also found in Hennings Statutes at Large, Vo. 12 at pages 212 to 214.

"Among other activities of John Evans was his participation in Dunmore's war in the year 1774 and in McIntoshes Campaign as a lieutenant colonel in the year 1778. A very interesting record is the following one:

“At a court held for Monongalia County on Friday the 15th day of November, 1811, present William John, Boz Burrows, William N. Jarrett and Rawley Scott, Gentlemen:_____

“Daivd Scott personally appeared in the Court and made Oath that John Evans Senior now of Monongalia County Served in McIntoshes Campaign as a Lieutenant Colonel in the year 1778; that he also served as a Lieutenant in Dunmore’s Campaign in the year 1774, which is ordered to be certified.” This record is copied from Order Book No. IV, 1810, County Court, Page 243, in the Circuit Clerks Office of Monongalia County. John Evans was one of the Delegates from Monongalia County to the Virginia Convention to pass upon the adoption of the Federal Constitution, which met in Richmond, Virginia, June 1788 and which ratified the Constitution by a narrow majority. John Evans, Patrick Henry, French Strother and George Mason being among those who opposed its adoption. He was a member from Monongalia County to the Legislature of Virginia for the year 1791, 1794 and 1800. He was for many years the County Lieutenant, the highest military officer of the county and as such engaged in the Revolution and border wars. In the calendar of Virginia State Papers are to be found letters from Col. John Evans to those in authority at the capital at Richmond, which show the condition of affairs in Monongalia County as it then existed which are certainly most interesting and instructive but the length of this paper make it unwise to enter on this field of endeavor.

“Col. John Evans married Ann Martin in Eastern Virginia before he migrated to the Monongahela Valley.

“Children of John Evans were eight in number:

1. MARGARENT EVANS (DENT) 1764-1851.
2. DUDLEY EVANS, 1766-1844.
3. JOHN EVANS, JR, 1768-1849.
4. NIMROD EVANTS, 1770-1828.
5. ENOCH EVANS, 1773
6. RAWLEY EVANS, 1777-1859.
7. JAMES EVANTS, 1782-1870.
8. MARMADUKE EVANS, 1784-1816.

The following members of the family were present at the reunion held on Saturday, September 19, at the Dille homestead in Evansdale. William Strother Evans, Thomas Gilmore Evans and Miss Lucy Evans of Pittsburgh; Paul McCoy of New York City; E.L. Bland of Sutton, W. Va.; Richard W. Dawson of Uniontown, PA.; Robert L. McCoy, J. Harvey Steele, Dudley Evans Miller, Mr. and Mrs. Ernest McCoy, Dr. and Mrs. H.H. Carr, Mr. and Mrs. James Evans Anderson, Miss Missie McCoy, Miss Sarah R. McCoy, Miss Kitty Carr, Mrs. Robert L. McCoy, Mr. and Mrs. A.M. Michael of Fairmont.

Mr. and Mrs. L.H. Dent and Miss Kathleen Dent, of Clarksburg. Mr. and Mrs. Harold W. Campbell, Alexander Oliver Campbell, Harold W. Campbell, Jr., Thomas Ray Campbell, Richard Dille Campbell, Mr. and Mrs. John A. Dille, Miss Drusilla Kirk Dille, and Miss Jane Evans Dille, of Wheeling.

Miss Linda Evans Smith of Huntington, W.Va.; Mrs. Martha A. Miller, Mr. and Mrs. William Teter, and Donald Miller Teter, of Rivesville; Mr. and Mrs. Harry Dent, Mrs. Lou Dent Frum, Mrs. George Evans Dent, Miss Frances V. Fruit (?) and Miss Helen Louise Dent of Mona, W.Va.; Daniel Clark Hoffman, Mrs. Gillie Evans Dille, Mrs. Lucy Evans Finnell, Thomas Ray Dille, Miss Rachel Jane Hagans Dille, Mr. and Mrs. Elisha M. Dille, Merrill M. Dille, Mrs. Mary Dille Chittum, Mrs. Evelyn Dille Miller, Miss Betty Lee Miller, Mrs. Lizzie W. Brock Johnson, Miss Kate Edna Garrison, Miss Olive M. Johnson, Harley D. Johnson.

Mrs. Louise Finnell Gibbons, Miss Virginia Gibbons, Roy O. Dent, Miss Margaret Dent Reay, Miss Virginia Dent Reay, Mr. and Mrs. David C. Reay, David C. Reay, Jr., Mr. and Mrs. James Evans Dille, Miss Barbara Howard Dille, Miss Edith Elaine Dille, Mr. and Mrs. Frank Oscar Selby, Mrs. George Parfitt, Mrs. Eliza Jacobs, Miss Martha Mae Dille, Max Mathers, Mrs. George M. Barrick, George M. Barrick, Jr., Mrs. Thomas A. Barrickman, Miss Rosalie Barrickman, Mr. and Mrs. John H. Jamison, Miss Beulah Jamison and Miss Margaret Jamison, all of Morgantown, and Mrs. Rose Reay Allender, of Baltimore, Md.