

Southwest Territory (Tennessee): William Blount

While he was not part of the U.S. Marshal Service, as Governor of the Southwest Territory, William Blount conducted the 1790 Census for his area. Like a majority of his contemporaries, Blount was both a veteran of the American Revolution and dedicated public servant in the arena of state and national politics. Born in Bertie County, NC, on March 26, 1749, William Blount worked in his family's mercantile business before the outbreak of the American Revolution in April 1775.²⁰⁰ When hostilities commenced between the British and the American colonies, Blount quickly joined the 3rd North Carolina regiment as its paymaster.²⁰¹ As the paymaster of the 3rd North Carolina, Blount accompanied his regiment as it marched north in time to participate in Washington's 1777 Philadelphia Campaign.²⁰² Two years later, Blount returned to North Carolina and became the deputy paymaster general for North Carolina's militia forces. Finally, Blount's military career concluded after he witnessed British General Horatio Gates' defeat at the battle of Camden, SC on August 16, 1780.²⁰³



William Blount

Courtesy U.S. Senate Historical Office

Having served his state and new nation as a soldier, Blount began his political career as a member of North Carolina's House of Commons (1780-1784), but quickly entered the national political scene as one of North Carolina's delegates to the Continental Congress (1782, 1783, 1786, and 1787).²⁰⁴ During his time as a congressional delegate, Blount championed a series of legislative acts that provided settlers and land-speculators, like himself, with increased access to frontier land that is located in present-day Tennessee.²⁰⁵ Perhaps, it was Blount's active role in state politics that led to his appointment as one of North Carolina's delegates to the 1787 Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia.²⁰⁶ Despite his lack of active participation in the debates surrounding the creation of the U.S. Constitution, Blount added his signature to it on September 17, 1787.²⁰⁷ Blount's role as one of the signers of the U.S. Constitution proved

²⁰⁰ Toomey, Michael, "William Blount (1749-1800)," North Carolina History Project, last estimated release 2016, <https://northcarolinahistory.org/encyclopedia/william-blount-1749-1800/>. (Accessed November 14, 2019).

²⁰¹ Toomey, Michael, "William Blount (1749-1800)."

²⁰² "William Blount: North Carolina," U.S. Army Center for Military History, <https://history.army.mil/books/RevWar/ss/blount.htm>. (Accessed November 14, 2019).

²⁰³ Toomey, Michael, "William Blount: North Carolina."

²⁰⁴ "Blount, William, (1749 - 1800)," Biographical Directory of the United States Congress: 1774-Present, last estimated release November 14, 2019, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=b000570>. (Accessed November 14, 2019).

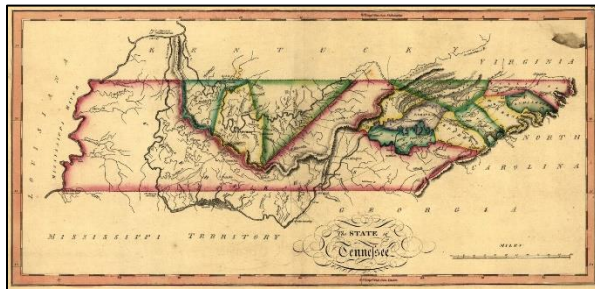
²⁰⁵ Toomey, Michael, "William Blount: North Carolina."

²⁰⁶ "William Blount/North Carolina," National Archives and Records Administration, last estimated release November 14, 2019, <http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/conlaw/marrynorthcar.html>. (Accessed November 14, 2019).

²⁰⁷ Toomey, Michael, "William Blount: North Carolina."

instrumental in his future career as a politician because he was able to meet George Washington, who served as the president of the Constitutional Convention.^{208 209}

After returning home to North Carolina from the Constitutional Convention, Blount continued to strategically position himself to personally benefit from the formation of a new national government and westward expansion. He continued to buy land in the western part of North Carolina with the hope that it would become more valuable as explorers, settlers, and entrepreneurs developed the land and its resources.²¹⁰ Meanwhile, Blount participated in both of North Carolina's conventions to ratify the U.S. Constitution (July 21-August 4, 1788 and November 16-23, 1789) and served as a state senator for almost two years (1788- 1790).²¹¹ Because Blount had almost decade of political experience and had strongly supported the U.S. Constitution, President Washington appointed him as the governor of "Territory of the United States, South of the River Ohio," also known as the "Southwest Territory," on June 8, 1790.²¹²



Map of Tennessee c. 1817
Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Approximately five months after receiving his appointment as governor of the Southwest Territory and a simultaneous appointment as the Superintendent of Indian Affairs (1790-1796), Blount left North Carolina and established the Southwest Territory's temporary capital in a present-day, Piney Flats, TN.^{214 215} Almost immediately afterwards, Blount worked to forge peace between the distinctive Native American tribes and settlers,

train a professional state militia, and, among a host of other tasks, oversee the enumeration of the territory's population.²¹⁶

Initially, Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson wrote to Blount saying, "As the census of all the rest of the Union will be taken in the course of this summer... it is thought extremely desirable

²⁰⁸ Toomey, Michael, "William Blount: North Carolina."

²⁰⁹ "North Carolina: William Blount (1749–1800)," National Constitution Center, last estimated release November 14, 2019, <https://constitutioncenter.org/learn/educational-resources/founding-fathers/north-carolina>. (Accessed November 14, 2019).

²¹⁰ Toomey, Michael, "William Blount: North Carolina."

²¹¹ "Blount, William, (1749 - 1800)."

²¹² "From Territory to State," Tennessee Secretary of State: Tre Hargett, last estimated release 2017, <https://sos.tn.gov/products/territory-state>. (Accessed November 14, 2019).

²¹³ Masterson, William H., *William Blount* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1954). Retrieved from: <https://archive.org/details/williamblount00mast/page/176>. (Accessed November 14, 2019).

²¹⁴ Toomey, Michael, "William Blount: North Carolina."

²¹⁵ "Rocky Mount," The Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture, last estimated release September 30, 2007, <https://web.archive.org/web/20070930170936/http://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/imagegallery.php?EntryID=R048>. (Accessed November 14, 2019).

²¹⁶ Toomey, Michael, "William Blount: North Carolina."

that of your Government should be taken also, and arranged under the same classes as prescribed by the Act of Congress for the general census. Yet that act has not required it in your Territory, nor provided for any expense which might attend it".²¹⁷ As W.S. Rossiter, former Chief Clerk of the Census Bureau, observed Blount did not have to carry out an enumeration of the Southwest Territory's population, especially since the federal government was unable to pay his militia captains who acted as enumerators.²¹⁸

Yet, Blount provided Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson with an almost completed 1790 census return on September 19, 1791, thus demonstrating the dedication of Blount and his militia captains in serving the interests of their community and the federal government.^{219 220} After tabulating the results from Blount's 1790-91 census return, the Southwest Territory had a population of 35,691 people, which meant that, according to the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, it failed to meet the threshold of 60,000 people required for a territory to become a state.²²¹ Undeterred, Blount and his fellow "Tennesseans" conducted another census in 1795 and were able to meet the 60,000 population threshold with a population of 77,262 people.^{223 224} In this way, Blount succeeded in laying the administrative and political foundations for Tennessee obtaining statehood on June 1, 1796.

Shortly afterwards, on August 2, 1796, Blount was elected as one of Tennessee's first U.S. Senators.²²⁵ Blount's term came to an end, when he was expelled from the Senate for his involvement in a conspiracy to incite Native American tribes and the British to conquer the Spanish territory of West Florida.²²⁶ Although Blount never participated in national politics

²¹⁷ From Thomas Jefferson to William Blount, 12 March 1791. Found in W.S. Rossiter, "The First Census of the United States," in *A Century of Population Growth/1790-1900*, ed. S.N.D. North, Director (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1909), pg. 45.

²¹⁸ W.S. Rossiter, "The First Census of the United States," pg. 45.

²¹⁹ According to Blount's 1790 census return, the numbers in his return were from July 1791 and they were the results from the militia captains, who were able to complete their enumerations not long after the May 2, 1790 deadline.

²²⁰ "Territory of the United States of America, South of the River Ohio". *Return of the whole number of persons within the several districts of the United States: according to "An act providing for the enumeration of the inhabitants of the United States," passed March the first, one thousand seven hundred and ninety-one*, pg. 56. PDF. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/content/census/en/library/publications/1793/dec/number-of-persons.htm>. (November 14, 2019).

²²¹ "Territory of the United States of America, South of the River Ohio".

²²² "Northwest Ordinance (1787)," www.ourdocuments.gov, last estimated release 2001, <https://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=false&doc=8>. (Accessed November 14, 2019).

²²³ Toomey, Michael, "William Blount: North Carolina."

²²⁴ Finger, John, "Southwest Territory," *Tennessee Frontiers* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2001), pgs. 125–151. Google Book. Retrieved from https://books.google.com/books?id=1H2_CwAAQBAJ&pg=PA345&lpg=PA345&dq=John+Finger,+%22Southwest+Territory,%22+Tennessee+Frontiers&source=bl&ots=EIHdZAhQsA&sig=ACfU3U3-H8ZdwPSrXkU62TzBx3NOz3fftW&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKewimol6O5PvIAhUqw1kKHd5RBIYQ6AEwBXoECAoQAQ#v=onepage&q=John%20Finger%2C%20%22Southwest%20Territory%2C%22%20Tennessee%20Frontiers&f=false. (Accessed November 14, 2019).

²²⁵ "Blount, William, (1749 - 1800)."

²²⁶ "Blount, William, (1749 - 1800)."

again, he served a state senator and as the president of Tennessee's state senate, until September 1799.²²⁷ William Blount died in Knoxville, Tennessee on, March 21, 1800.²²⁸

²²⁷ *Ibid.*

²²⁸ Toomey, Michael, "William Blount: North Carolina."