

NOTES ON THIS BOOK (By Cheryl Rutledge-Brennecke)

Book published 1882 after his death.

Author **James Ross** born September 3, **1801**. He died March 1878.

His father **Reuben Ross** was born May 9, **1776**. He married Mildred Yarrell on September 30, 1798. He died January 28, **1860** in Montgomery County, Tennessee.

His grandfather was **William Ross, Sr.**, born August 9, **1731**. Citizen of Martin County, North Carolina. Married Mary Griffin 1756. He died December 25, **1801**. Was successful in accumulating property along Roanoke River in North Carolina, lost during Revolutionary War.

His great-grandfather **William Ross**, of Scotland, settled in Roanoke, Virginia. He moved to Martin County, North Carolina at a date unknown.

The family record was brought from North Carolina in 1833 to Tennessee-Kentucky border area.

William Ross (1731-1801) children:

John Ross born September 3, 1757 died in Tennessee

William Ross born January 17, 1760 died in Cape Girardeau, Missouri

Martin Ross born November 27, 1762 died in North Carolina

Winifred Ross born March 9, 1765 died in Tennessee

Nannie Ross born March 26, 1767 died in Tennessee

James Ross born March 19, 1769 died in North Carolina

Mary Ross born February 11, 1771 died young, not married

Nathan Ross born February 11, 1771 died in Tennessee

Reuben Ross, born May 9, 1776 died in Tennessee

Elizabeth Ross, born May 3, 1779 died in North Carolina

Also see about William Ross on pages 112 and 113 (and supporting facts on pages 108-111). Other pages have been highlighted.

LIFE AND TIMES
OF
ELDER REUBEN ROSS

LIFE AND TIMES

OF

ELDER REUBEN ROSS.

BY HIS SON,
JAMES ROSS.

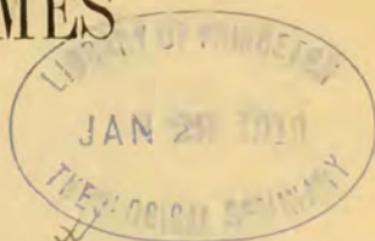
WITH AN INTRODUCTION AND NOTES

By J. M. Pendleton.

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INTRODUCTION.

MEMORABLE among American years was the year 1776. It was the year in which our Revolutionary fathers adopted the "Declaration of Independence," and pledged for its support their "lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor." They were noble men. How brightly did the flame of patriotism burn on the altar of their hearts! How pure was their love of liberty! How anxious their solicitude for the welfare of their posterity! There was something sublime in the fact that, though few in number, they fearlessly threw their banner to the breeze of heaven, resolved on victory or death. They contended against the mightiest nation on the globe, but their heart faltered not. Their military resources were scanty, but trusting in God, and sustained by the justice of their cause, they went forward under the command of the great Washington, till, after a struggle of seven years' continuance, during which their blood stained the soil from Massachusetts to South Carolina, they triumphantly achieved the object of their patriotic exertions. Let it never be forgotten that American independence was secured by as precious blood as was ever shed in the cause of human liberty. Degenerate sons of noble sires are those who do not appreciate the heritage which we enjoy—a heritage bought at such a price—a heritage covered with Revolutionary glory, and transmitted to us by the hands of our fathers.

In the remarkable year to which I have referred, that is to say, on the 9th of May, 1776, in Martin County, North Carolina, the infant, Reuben Ross, first saw the light, and wept at its entrance on the rough journey of life. Alas, the eyes that wept so soon, wept often, and continued to weep till more than fourscore years had fled.

The Ross family is of Scotch descent, and the grandfather of Reuben

settled in an early day at Roanoke, Virginia. The year of his emigration from Scotland cannot now be given. His son William, the father of Reuben, was a citizen of Martin County, North Carolina, and had for his wife a woman of vigorous mind, superior in intellect to himself. They were both Baptists, and, so far as circumstances allowed, brought up their children "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." Many, however, were the difficulties they had to encounter. The whole country was in a state of restless excitement for years before the commencement of the War, and from the battle at Lexington to the surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown anxious fears filled the minds of the people. We may well imagine how such a state of things interfered with the regular training of children.

William Ross was the father of ten children, of whom Reuben was the youngest son. Three of his brothers were in the war of the Revolution, and two of them, Martin and James, became Baptist ministers.

Reuben went to school only nine months in all, at different times, in the course of seven years, and left school finally at fourteen years of age. He greatly desired an education, but could not obtain it. He considered it his duty to contribute, by physical labor, to the support of his father's family. To such labor he may have been indebted for that vigor of constitution which made him every inch a man, and lengthened out his days so far beyond the ordinary limit of human life. He knew in his youth and early manhood the inconveniences of poverty. And why? Because his father had sacrificed an independent estate to promote the objects of the War; and his youngest son, when he had become old, was heard by the writer to say: "I was always proud that my father became poor by spending his estate to carry out the principles of the Declaration of Independence." Such language as this could not have been spoken if patriotism had not reached its climax and its perfection. Poverty is generally regarded as a calamity, but Reuben Ross rejoiced in his youth, in his manhood, and in his old age, that his father became poor by cheerfully surrendering his estate to help forward the Revolutionary contest. How safe would our country be if such a spirit of patriotism pervaded the hearts of all American citizens!

Young Ross was at school but nine months; and these months not

consecutive, but interspersed through a period of seven years, so that he was at school only a few days at a time. "Dilworth's Spelling Book" and the "Psalter" were the books chiefly used in schools at that period. The educational facilities of the country were very meager. None but the rich were able to send their sons from home and give them the advantages of Collegiate training. Hence there were but few scholars.

God had given to Reuben Ross superior intellect, and superior intellect will display itself amid the greatest disadvantages. There is a buoyant elasticity in it which enables it to rise and throw off the incumbent mass with which untoward circumstances oppress it. Well is it that it is so. Owing to this peculiarity of a vigorous mind, the subject of these Memoirs, in spite of the unfavorable surroundings of his youth, rose to distinction, and became a favorite preacher of the learned and the unlearned. For long years the educated and the unlettered listened with the deepest interest to the wondrous things he told them. But I am anticipating :

The mother of Reuben Ross was a woman of prayer, and maintained family worship in the absence of her husband from home. He was often absent during the War. She rose early and sat up late. Her domestic duties probably rendered this necessary, but she had another object in view. She wished to pray in secret without disturbance. Early in the morning and late at night she called on God, supposing that his ear alone heard her. It was not so. The ear of Reuben heard. Sometimes his slumbers were disturbed at night, and he heard his mother praying—sometimes he waked early in the morning and he heard the same imploring whisper. He afterward called them "whisper-prayers." He did not let his mother know that he heard them, yet they made an impression on him which went with him to his grave. In the days of his subsequent thoughtlessness he never forgot that his mother prayed, never forgot her "whisper-prayers." Who knows how much those prayers had to do with his conversion and usefulness in the ministry? One of the greatest blessings known on earth is the blessing of a mother's prayers, and the most cruel manner in which children can be disinherited is not to be prayed for by their parents.

Though often impressed with the importance of salvation, Reuben Ross did not become a Christian till he reached his twenty-sixth year.

LIFE AND TIMES
OF
ELDER REUBEN ROSS.

CHAPTER I.

BIRTH AND PARENTAGE.

ON the right bank of the Roanoke River, in Martin County, North Carolina, stands Williamston. As I remember it when a child, it was a long straggling village, with one principal street running through its entire length, from south to north down to the landing on the river. On each side of this street, which was covered with sand, stood dwelling-houses, stores, shops, taverns, built with little or no regard to what might add to the beauty or attractiveness of the place. There stood on one side of the street the court-house, Williamston being then, as now, the county seat. This was even then, as I remember it, an ancient-looking structure of the rudest kind.

Near this town, but a little to the east, in a locality known as the "Islands," on the ninth of May, 1776, your grandfather was born. He was the ninth of ten children, six sons and four daughters. Among the dim recollections of my earliest childhood, there was a house with a large

central, oblong room, with side rooms adjoining, all under the same roof. In front of this grew a gigantic mulberry tree, which, with its dense foliage, shaded most of the front yard, and under which, in pleasant weather, the family often took their meals. I remember being there often with your grandmother, and feeling quite at home there; and I doubt not that it was the place where your grandfather was born. I have learned lately that there is still in that vicinity what is known as the "Ross Place," long since deserted, where a number of neglected graves may be seen.

Your grandfather's family was originally from Scotland. The name is identified there with many places, and is also borne by many persons. There was, as he used to say, a tradition that in early times several persons of this name left Scotland together, crossed the Atlantic, and settled in Virginia; that their descendants—many of them—emigrated into Maryland and Pennsylvania; that their complexions were generally dark (Ross Dhu); and that almost every family had a John, William, or James in it. The name is not "unknown to fame," having been borne by statesmen, philosophers, warriors, and navigators.

His grandfather, William Ross, a descendant of these supposed traditional ancestors, emigrated from Virginia to Martin County, North Carolina; date unknown. His father, also named William, was born August 9th, 1731, O. S. The maiden name of his mother was Mary Griffin. They were married in 1756.*

* A further account of the family from an old family record was brought from North Carolina in 1833.

"William Ross, Senior, of Martin County, was the son of William Ross, formerly of the State of Virginia, who came to this State, namely

His parents were apparently estimable characters, both members of a Baptist church, and both adorning their profession by pious and godly lives. I have heard your grandfather describe them as a grave and thoughtful pair, having two prominent objects ever in view,—the faithful performance of all the duties of this life, and a diligent preparation for the life after this. All their religious duties were carefully observed, especially family worship. Every night before retiring, the children and servants took their seats, a chapter of the Bible was read, a hymn was sung, after which all knelt in prayer. When his father was from home, the mother took his place at the family altar, and prayed audibly with her children and servants. When in health, she was ever the last to retire to rest, and before doing so, she would kneel a second time at her bedside in silent prayer.

I infer from what your grandfather said, that professors

North Carolina, and settled in the above-named county. His son, the father of the children whose names are under-written, was born on the 9th of August, 1731, O. S., and departed this life the 25th of December, 1801.

"His funeral sermon was preached to a very large audience, by the Rev. Aaron Spivy, from Job 2:17. 'There the wicked cease from troubling and the weary be at rest.'

"The names and births of the children are as follows:

John,	born	September	3rd, 1757.
William,	"	January	17th, 1760.
Martin,	"	November	27th, 1762.
Winifred,	"	March	9th, 1765.
Nannie,	"	March	26th, 1767.
James,	"	March	19th, 1769.
Mary,	"	February	11th, 1771.
Nathan,	"	November	2nd, 1773.
Reuben,	"	May	9th, 1776.
Elizabeth,	"	May	3rd, 1779."

of religion in those days were generally more grave and serious than now. The members of the Baptist churches at that time, almost without exception, believed that a large proportion of the human race, including perhaps many of those dearest to them on earth, had no chance for salvation, but were doomed from the beginning to endless wo. We can hardly conceive how they could feel joyous and happy with a creed so terrible.

I have heard your grandfather say, that in prayer his father was singularly impressive. That his earnestness, together with the beauty and simplicity of his language, could hardly fail to inspire feelings of veneration and devotion in those who heard him; that, like Boyle, the great Christian philosopher, the thought of coming into the presence of the Deity, and pronouncing his awful name, seemed to exalt all his faculties and feelings. I have often heard him speak of a prayer he offered in my behalf, that was long remembered in the family. When the old patriarch heard of my birth, he hurried over to see the young stranger, and to inquire after his mother. After inspecting him, and deciding, as is usual in such cases, that he was a "wonderfully fine boy," he proposed that all should kneel down and invoke a blessing on him. It was said that he seemed on this occasion almost like one inspired, so many, so rich, and so appropriate were the blessings he invoked, in language so elevated and beautiful. Those who heard it could but think of the patriarchal days. He entreated, in conclusion, "when his course is finished, full of days and full of honors, may it be his lot to 'die the death of the righteous,' and may he be worthy to wear the bright unfading crown in reserve for those who, by faithful continuance in well doing, seek for

glory, honor, and immortality." I was often reminded, when a child, of this prayer in my behalf, generally when out of favor on account of bad conduct, and I would be quite penitent for a time, and make many resolutions to do better; but, alas! then, as since, they were too soon forgotten.

His father was successful in accumulating property. The vast cane brakes on the rich alluvial lands along the Roanoke River afforded abundant food for cattle, summer and winter, and the mast that fell from the forest trees enabled him to raise hogs to good profit, but little corn being needed, and that only to keep them gentle. These products were sold chiefly to traders from New England, who ascended the Roanoke in their vessels. This enabled him and others, who were industrious and enterprising, to realize large profits for those times. All this prosperity, however, vanished at the commencement of the Revolutionary war. British cruisers filled the waters. Trade of all kinds was paralyzed, and at the close of that eventful period, he found himself a poor man, comparatively, with a large family to provide for. Yet he was never heard to complain on account of his changed circumstances, but rather to rejoice that, by the sacrifice of his property and by sending his three sons—William, John, and Martin—into the army, he had contributed his mite to obtain the priceless blessings of freedom. Your grandfather always spoke of this circumstance with evident pride.

At length the time appointed for him to leave this world arrived. On the 21st of December, 1801, "he finished his course." His faithful, affectionate wife soon followed him. They were separated a few months only. From what I

have learned from your grandfather, and also from your grandmother, of these pious, amiable old people, I came to feel great reverence and respect for their memory, and to associate with it all that was venerable and good.

Of all these children, not one is now living. They all married and had families, except Mary, who died young. Your grandfather was greatly attached to this sister, and spoke of her in most affectionate terms. Two of his brothers, Martin and James, and two sisters, Mary and Elizabeth, died in Carolina. Two brothers, John and Nathan, and two sisters, Nannie and Winifred, died in Tennessee. His brother William, the first to leave his native State, soon after the war of Independence, settled in Missouri, and died near Cape Girardeau.

CHAPTER V.

HIS MARRIAGE—THE YARRELL FAMILY.

UNTIL the twenty-second year of his age, your grandfather seems to have passed his time in assisting his father on the farm, fishing, hunting, and amusing himself with his young associates, unfortunately without any books to read suitable to his age and taste, everything of the kind being scarce and dear in those early times.

Had this been otherwise, he might, during these invaluable years, have stored his mind with an amount of general information that would have been of priceless value to him in time to come. For such was the character of his mind, that there is no doubt whatever, had valuable books been in his reach, he would have read them with great pleasure and profit.

It so happened that about this time he became acquainted with your grandmother, then about sixteen years of age. I have heard that he first met her unexpectedly, as she and some other girls were out enjoying a walk, and that she was at the time dressed in white, with a wreath or chaplet of wild flowers on her head, and that he surrendered on the spot, or, as the young folks say, "fell in love at first sight." He seems to have pressed his suit earnestly and with gratifying success, for they were married on the 30th of September, 1798, a few months only

after becoming acquainted. It is said he was then a very handsome and prepossessing young man.

I have heard, also, that she was very pretty at that time, and you who remember her late in life can well believe it. Your grandfather always thought her a great beauty, and was as proud of her good looks as we children were. He, as you may remember, thought himself quite a judge of female beauty. Her form, features, and fine presence, as I remember them in my childhood, are so impressed on my memory, that were I a painter or sculptor I could reproduce them with great accuracy. But the beauty of her life and character remain still more deeply impressed on my memory, and I think I may say with the great Scottish poet:

"Time but the impression deeper makes,
As streams their channels deeper wear."

Her maiden name was Yarrell,—Milly or Mildred Yarrell. She was the daughter of Matthew Yarrell. He was born and brought up in Halifax County, North Carolina, but finally settled in Martin County, where he was living at the time of her marriage. He was an orphan child, brought up by an old uncle named Day, who, during his nephew's minority, took good care of his property, which was considered a fine estate for the times when he came into possession of it. But, taking to politics, high living, and speculation, Mr. Yarrell had but little of it left when his daughter was married. I have often heard it said that, when he was in his prime, he was uncommonly handsome, and, as I remember him in old age, his features were very fine.

The maiden name of his wife was Mary Wheatly. She

CHAPTER XI.

AFTER THE JOURNEY.

ON the opposite side of Red River, about two miles from Port Royal, there was living at this time an elderly gentleman named McGowan, who gave your grandfather permission to occupy, for the present, a small cabin standing in his yard. He was a grey-headed man, gentle in his manner, with a pleasing expression of countenance, a widower at the time, and a member of the Baptist Church. His residence was a short distance to the left of where the road leading from Port Royal to Graysville, **Kentucky**, and the one leading from Clarksville to Keysburg cross each other, and in what is now a field, opposite the brick house, formerly built by James Reasons, Esq., a man of some note in his day, and occupied at present, I think, by a gentleman named Powers.

A short distance from this house and in the direction of Port Royal is what was formerly known as the Woolfolk place, where there is a spring breaking out in a sink-hole, the water from which is conducted off in a wooden trough. This place is noted for the mysterious murder, in former times, of a young man near it, which threw all the country around into the greatest excitement. No one was ever brought to trial or punishment for the bloody deed, as no satisfactory explanation of it, I think, was ever obtained. Woolfolk was the name of the victim, a young man highly

esteemed by all who knew him. It was generally believed he was killed by mistake for another who was at the time riding with him.

When we drove up to the little cabin, your grandfather told us children that we were now at the end of our journey, as he had decided to settle somewhere in this part of the country. Could this be so? Was this place the Eldorado of all our young dreams, the beautiful Cumberland on which our thoughts had delighted so long to dwell? It could not be. There must be some mistake. Our little feet, sore with the sharp stones, had not crossed so many hills and mountains to find a home like this. Our hearts were nearly broken. We laid down on the ground and shed bitter tears. Our parents sympathized deeply with us in our disappointment, but there was no help for it. All was soon taken from the wagon and carried in. And here, in the language of antiquity, "our household gods were set up" for the present. As it was now too late in the season to think of renting land and planting a crop, your grandfather, after looking round a little, decided to teach a school for a few months.

He was then about thirty-one years of age, straight, well proportioned, just under six feet in height, and weighing one hundred and forty-five pounds, which was his weight for many years. All his features were good. His eyes were grey, his hair dark brown. His voice was pleasant to the ear, and finely adapted to sacred music. In the prime of life, when he became animated in his discourse it had considerable strength and power, growing feeble though as he advanced in years. His complexion was dark. The expression of his countenance was thoughtful, and this deepened perceptibly as he grew older.

In a large and mixed company he was rather taciturn, but a close observer of all that was said and done around him. In the company of a few friends his conversation was free and animated. His self-possession and sense of what was becoming and proper in himself and others were remarkable traits in his character. I doubt whether any person living or dead ever saw him thrown off his guard. It mattered not how sudden and unexpected a turn things might take, he always seemed to have foreseen what was coming and to be prepared for it. This was often seen in after life while presiding over deliberative bodies as chairman or moderator. I think he had a genius for the management of affairs of great moment in church or state, had he been called to do so.

Soon after stopping here his voice as a preacher was first heard west of the mountains. The place was near what is now known as the Port Royal Mills, where he was then living. His stand was under the branches of a spreading oak, his audience sitting around him on rude seats or on the ground during the services. I supposed when I commenced this writing that I could find some grey-headed man still living who was present on that occasion; but I have failed to do so. They, like him, have passed away. There are some left though who have heard others speak of being present at that time. Would it not be interesting to know how many sermons he preached after that until he delivered his last short address, long years afterwards, in the old Bethel Church, Christian County, Kentucky? At two hundred for each year they would have numbered more than ten thousand.

In the month of November of this year (1807) the first great sorrow fell upon our family. While your grandfather

was lying on a sick bed, we children were playing in an outhouse near by. Our little sister Mildred, so called after her mother, about three and a half years old, was with us. We were amusing ourselves gathering dry leaves and throwing them on the fire to see them blaze up and burn. She ran out and brought in her little apron full of leaves, like the rest of us, threw them on the fire, and turned her back to it. They caught, blazed up, and soon she was enveloped in the flames. The alarm was given. Your grandfather sprang from his bed, hastened to her, and tore off her clothing. It was too late. The burns were incurable; and after a few days of intense suffering she died. We larger children mourned the loss of our little favorite, and thought to ourselves she had traveled a long, long journey to find her tiny grave. Her parents were almost broken-hearted. These were dark days in our family history, but many such were in store for us in the coming years.

There was a burying-ground near by, and neglected graves may still be seen in a cluster of trees to the left just before reaching the cross-roads already mentioned. There she was buried, and in this lonely place her ashes still remain, far from those of her kindred in other places. There is a touching reminiscence connected with her grave. When she was buried, two rough stones were set up to mark the spot where she lay. Several years later your grandfather stopped to visit the grave, as he always did when passing that way, and found to his surprise that some unknown friend had removed the former ones and replaced them by others of gray limestone, with the name and dates accurately carved on them. It was indeed a delicate act of friendship. They have long since disap-

peared, and the exact spot cannot now be identified. It is likely they were removed by some person destitute of respect for the memory of the dead, to be used for some other purpose.

While living here your grandfather was visited by his brother William Ross, who had heard of his arrival in this country. This brother, soon after leaving the army at the close of the Revolutionary War, had come west and settled in what is now Missouri, but was at that time known as Louisiana, a part of the then vast domains of Spain.* The place he selected for a home while still unmarried was near the Mississippi River below the old French town called by the early French adventurers Cape Girardeau, and in a "bottom" famous for its deep and fertile soil. They had not met before since your grandfather was a little boy.

I was present at their meeting. It was very affectionate. They held each other in a long embrace and shed tears freely. He had wandered so far from home—nearly a thousand miles—and been so long absent and lost sight of by his family, that he had come to be regarded very much as one dead. I have heard that he encountered almost incredible hardships and dangers during his long journey on foot, from the shores of the Atlantic to the Mississippi, while passing with his rifle on his shoulder

* This is a historical mistake. The Louisiana territory originally belonged to France, but in 1762 was ceded to Spain. In 1800 it was ceded back to France, and in 1803, during Mr. Jefferson's administration, it was purchased by the United States for fifteen millions of dollars. If this were the place, it would be interesting to show why the great Napoleon was willing to sell so valuable a possession at that time.

through the deep forests and savage Indian tribes. He was very gentle and affectionate, and in consequence we all became much attached to him, considering the short time he remained with us.

He greatly desired your grandfather to remove from where he was and settle near him, describing the country in which he lived as surpassed by none in point of fertility of soil, and in the fall of the next year your grandfather went to see him and to look at the country. But from what he saw of it he concluded it must be unhealthy, and was afraid to take his family there.

In the autumn of 1836, long afterwards, I had occasion to visit that country myself. I learned that he, his wife, and some of his children had been dead many years, and the rest had left there and gone farther west, no one could tell me where. I went to the house where he had lived, but it was occupied by strangers, who knew nothing of the family. It was a pretty place, situated on a little stream called Cape-la-Cruce, near the western bank of the great river.

Although not a great deal could be said in praise of the little village of Port Royal itself, near which we were now living, it would perhaps, be safe to say no finer citizenship could have been found anywhere at this time than in the country around it, extending into Robertson and Montgomery Counties. In evidence of this one need only mention such names as Fort, Norfleet, Northington, Dortch, Baker, Cheatham, Washington, Bryant, Turner, Blount, Bailey, Johnson, and others, too numerous to mention. They were generally men of large stature, dignified and patriarchal in their bearing, many of them wealthy, very hospitable, and always ready to assist those who