



THREE SPRINGS  
*and a*  
WILDERNESS  
STATION

*A pre-history of Mount Vernon, Kentucky*  
1780-1811

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A FARMER. A LONGHUNTER. A TORY.

*When Kentucky became the 15th state in the Union in 1792 the region encompassing future Rockcastle County was yet an untamed and unsettled hinterland. That same year, a middle-aged man, his son and daughter-in-law—along with his girlfriend and her slaves, Sam and Charity—struck out into the wilderness with the impracticable notion of establishing a frontier station. The chosen spot was in a fertile valley cove, well-fed by springs. That no road led to their enterprise would prove to be only a minor obstacle—they would simply build one.*

*Their success is evidenced today by the existence of Mount Vernon, the only town in the Wilderness which began life as a pioneer station.*

*The story of early Mount Vernon and Rockcastle County is the drama and tragedy of Stephen Langford and his family, and of his business partners, Valentine Harmon and William Henderson (and many others). It's a saga of bravery, perseverance, talent and fortune—and one of abuse, broken promises, death and deception.*



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## *Foreword*

Sometimes things just happen. This booklet—I'm not exactly sure what to call it—is one of those “things.” I never intended to write anything, of any length, about Mount Vernon. Practically all of my in-depth area research has revolved around families and happenings on Skeggs Creek, especially the lower section, and on Line Creek. But while researching a new book on the Wilderness Road, I stumbled across a reference to a lawsuit between Valentine Harmon and Stephen Langford in an 1833 Lincoln County deed. I've always had an interest in Harmon (I think he's an important, unsung pioneer figure) and I knew Langford was involved in Mt. Vernon's founding, so the matter seemed worthy of further investigation.

I walked across the street from the Lincoln County courthouse to the new court building where the old circuit court records are housed. After a quizzical look or two from the office personnel, a guard escorted me downstairs to a room where I found the circuit court order books neatly ordered in a large filing cabinet. It took only a few minutes to realize I'd found a treasure-trove of Langford and pre-Rockcastle County information: On a single, yellowed, dusty page were written the answers to years of Langford genealogical speculation.

One thing led to another, and, after a few trips to the Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives, I realized I'd accumulated a fair amount of data on the early days of Rockcastle County,

largely through the various lawsuit files. Combined with my ongoing research on the first roads and what I'd previously filed away from area tax lists and land grants, it was evident that previously published accounts of the Langford family and early Mt. Vernon and Rockcastle County were incomplete.

To say I was surprised at some of the things I found would be an understatement. Who would have thought Mt. Vernon's founder had a live-in girlfriend who spent time in prison? Or that his daughter-in-law had an affair with an up-and-coming area politician? Sometimes the story more resembles a Hollywood script than the true story of a frontier Kentucky locale. Besides a flawed hero, the tale includes abuse, adultery, bravery, broken promises, courtroom drama, death, deception, fortunes made and lost, fraud, murder, perseverance, politics, theft and underhanded dealings.

This is not a history of the town or county. It's mainly a telling of some events leading up to the town's establishment, with a closer look at the town's founder, Stephen Langford, and his station. Some information about the early town is also included, notably a reconstruction of the original configuration of Mt. Vernon. It's not an overview of all of Rockcastle County, as the focus is on events in and around the station and later town. Almost all of the data and views presented here come from primary sources—tax lists, court records, deeds, journals. A considerable amount of the information has never before been published.

Don't neglect to read the notes at the end. In addition to listing source information, the notes often contain expanded explanations and data that wouldn't comfortably fit into the narrative.

The quotes in the text have been reproduced as accurately and originally as possible. In part, that means spelling and grammatical errors have not been corrected, except for the addition of a very few punctuation marks to help readability.

It's never possible to recognize everyone who makes contributions to a historical work, but three individuals deserve special thanks. Shiron Wordsworth and Bob Langford provided me with

information and encouragement and served as sounding boards for my theories. No study of land issues in Kentucky can be properly accomplished without the help of Kandie Adkinson at the Kentucky Land Office in Frankfort.

Staff at the Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives in Frankfort, Rockcastle County Court Clerk's and PVA's offices and Lincoln County Circuit Court were especially helpful,

Thanks also go out to Pat Allen, Martha Cox, James McKinney, Everett Renner, Dorothy Jean Shoemaker, Jenny Sweet and Lynn Tatum. And of course, I can't forget my wife, who has put up with the piles of papers scattered about the office and who helped me wade through the microfilm marshes of the Archives.

Any mistakes or misinterpretations are mine alone.

*Jeff Renner*  
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