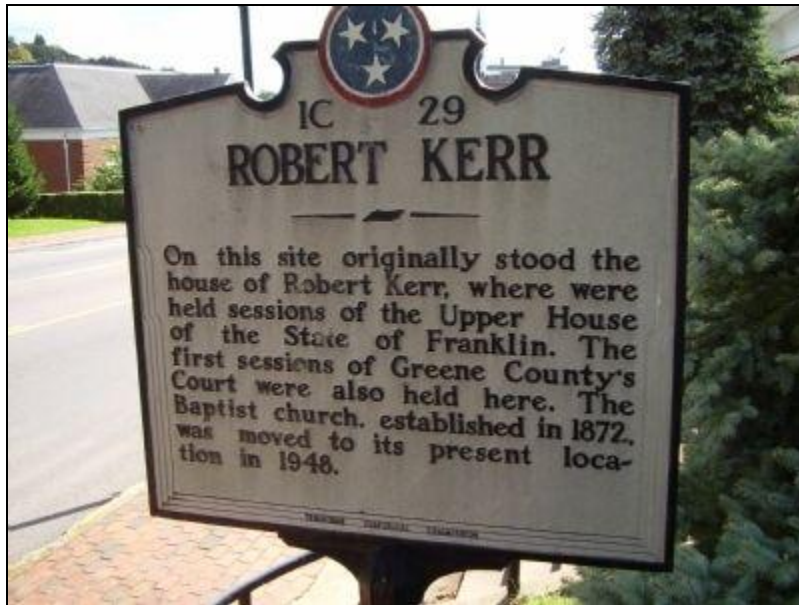


ROBERT KERR SENIOR

Robert Kerr [Senior] was with General Shelby's men at the battle of King's Mountain according to Greene County Historian Tim Massey.



North Main Street, Greenville, Tennessee

Robert Kerr Senior was living in what would become Greene County, Tennessee, by 1783 when he appears on the very first tax list. On July 13th of 1786, here he married Agnes Wagoner. She was Robert's second wife. It is said Robert was born on December 14, 1732 in Mecklenberg County, Virginia. Land Entries were registered between 1784-1786, Warrant #28 and on September 20, 1787, Warrant #528. One son is known, Robert Kerr Junior whose date of birth is given as May 15, 1758. He, too, obtained Land Warrants on May 12, 1810, Warrant #116 and on November 28, 1814, Warrant 758. Robert Junior married in Greene County on December 12, 1786 to Amy George.

Robert Senior owned 300 acres of land and made his home across from the "Big Spring", where he built a log cabin and operated a Tavern [*McAmis First Settlers and Soldiers*, page 348]. The "Big Spring" is an historic landmark in today's Greenville. The Big Spring is located behind the Greenville Greene County Public Library.



Neither Robert Kerr Senior nor Robert Junior are found in the Greene County Tax List of 1809 or thereafter. Robert Senior was deceased by this time [died intestate] and Robert Junior lived in Sevier County by 1807 as is documented in a Greene County Chancery Court Record. [Sevier County was organized in 1794 from Jefferson County that had been created in 1792 from the western areas of Greene and Hawkins Counties.]

January 1807 Court Session

James Galbreath }
vs } award returned
Robert Kerr Junr. }

The Arbitrators to whom the determination of the matters in difference between the parties, were submitted by a rule of this Court the 29th Instant, this day returned their award in the following words

"To all to whom these presents shall come Greeting. Whereas a controversy and law suits hath lately arisen between James Galbreath of Greene County in the State of Tennessee and Robert Kerr of the County of Sevier and State aforesaid of the other part, touching a note of hand, executed by the said Robert to the said James in the year 1786 for the sum of six pounds, seventeen shillings and 8^d which sum is considerably reduced by credits thereon endorsed. And whereas for putting and end to the said difference and law suits, they the said James Galbreath and Robert Kerr have mutually agreed to stand, abide and perform the award and final determination of us Robert Guin and John Russell arbitrators by the consent of said parties contending, indifferently chosen by the Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions for the County of Greene aforesaid to arbitrate and determine said difference between the said James and the said Robert. Now know ye that we the said Arbitrators whose

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names are hereunto subscribed and seal affixed, taking upon us, the burden of the said award, and having fully examined and duly considered the proofs and allegations of both the said parties, do for the settling, amity and friendship between them, make and publish this our award by and between the said parties tiligant in manner following (that is to say) FIRST we do award and order that all actions, suits, quarrels and controversies between the said parties whatsoever touching the said premises to the day of the date hereof shall cease and be no further prosecuted, And we do also award that the said Robert Kerr shall pay or cause to be paid unto the said James Galbreath within the space of forty days from the date hereof, the sum of Eleven dollars cash for the security of the payment whereof the said Robert Kerr shall without delay execute his Note or obligation with security to the said James Galbreath, And further we order and award that the said Robert Kerr do pay all costs incurred or expended in the aforesaid suits and controversies from, from their commencement, And lastly we do award and order that the said James Galbreath and Robert Kerr on the receipt of the several sums herein before mentioned or refered to, shall in due form of law execute each to the other of them or the others use, general releases sufficient in Law for the releasing by each to the other of them, his heirs, executors, administrators etc. of all suits arrests, quarrels and controversies whatsoever touching or concerning the premises aforesaid, or any matter or thing thereunto relating from the beginning of the world to the date of these presents. In witness whereof we have hereunto set our hands and seals the thirtieth day of January 1807.

Robert Guin
John Russell (Seal)

Robert Kerr Junior [1758-1819] is buried in Saffell Cemetery in Sevier County. The engraving on the stone is mostly illegible.

(2) Gideon Richie, James Dillard and Henry Conway
 (3) Alexander Kelley, Jeremiah Jack and Henry Earnest and for the 4th district the names were unobtainable. The constables appointed were John Hammond, James Robinson, Joseph Box and Robert Ore.

At the November session of the County Court in 1783, the first grand jury was summoned. It was composed of Henry Conway, Joseph Carter, David Russell, Lanty Armstrong, Alexander Galbreath, Archibald Stone, Andrew Martin, James Rogers, Jeremiah Jack, Anthony Moore, George Martin, David Copeland, Richard Woods, Robert Allison, and others. The jury, however, found no indictments and was soon discharged.

In February, 1784, the Court levied a tax of one shilling specie on each hundred pounds of taxable property for the purpose of erecting public buildings. At the same time a road was ordered to be constructed from Robert Kerr's house "to the confines of the county in the direction of Sullivan courthouse." The next term of court allotted to Robert Kerr 8£ for the use of his house, while at the same time Sheriff James Wilson issued a protest against the jail erected by Kerr.¹³

Greeneville Established as the County Seat. The importance of the Big Spring had attracted Robert Kerr and others to the present site of Greeneville. The present metropolitan area of 50 acres of land was originally owned by Kerr who laid entry on 300 acres in 1783, and was granted by him to the commission that laid off the county seat in order to have the seat of local government on his property. In 1786, a grant or patent was issued to him, and the following year he conveyed this same tract of land to Robert Kerr, Jr. Tradition holds that both Rheatown and Warrensburg were claimants for the honor of being the county seat, but the generous offer of Kerr tipped the scales in his favor.¹⁴ Fifty acres of this tract were subdivided into town lots, and on May 4, 1789, Robert Kerr, Senior, conveyed the remaining 250 acres of this land to John Beard.

Kerr retained Lots 37, 43, 44, 57 and 64, which include the present courthouse corner and the two other corners of Main and Depot Streets, as well as the Big Spring property and the lot immediately across the street from it.¹⁵ The Commissioners made sale of the lots in this subdivision at prices ranging from \$4.50 to \$17.50 each, only Lots 43 and 44 bringing the maximum price.

The remaining part of the original grant to Kerr was later sold under a court decree, when John Russell became the purchaser. The neighbors of Robert Kerr were Robert Hood on the south, James Richardson on the west, Copeland on the north, and Anthony Moore and William Morrow on the east.¹⁶

Prior to this conveyance by Kerr (spelled Carr in Ramsey's *Annals*), the town was referred to as Greene or Greene Courthouse. In a short time after the Kerr grant, one or two stores were opened near the location of the present courthouse, and the proprietors, for the purpose of drawing trade, erected at their own expense a log courthouse between March and November, 1785. This rude structure stood directly in the middle of the crossing of Main and the first cross street (Depot) and it was in this building that the deliberations of the Franklin conventions were held.¹⁷ The Senate, however, met at Kerr's house near the Big Spring.¹⁸

The first settlers in the vicinity of Greeneville besides Kerr were Robert Hood and William Dunwoody (Dinwiddie or DeWoody) who were thought to have come here around 1780. Hood lived on the south edge of town, while Dunwoody is said to have kept a tavern on Main Street. However, the first tavern was kept by Kerr himself, who in 1784 built a log house on the north side of Main Street facing the Big Spring. Tavern rates were fixed by the County Court as follows:

Diet, 1 shilling	Lodging, 4 d.
Liquor, half pint, 6 d.	Corn, per gallon, 8 d.
Pasture and stable, 6 d.	Oats, per gallon, 6 d.

¹³ Goodspeed, p. 883.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 883.

¹⁵ *Greene County Deed Book No. 2*, page 313.

¹⁶ C. E. Coile, "Some Early History," (Unpublished manuscript in the Greene County Library) p. 1.

¹⁷ R. N. Price, *Holston Methodism III* (Nashville, Tenn., Dallas, Publishing House of the M. E. Church, South, 1908), p. 378.

¹⁸ *History of Tennessee*, Goodspeed Publishing Co. Edition, p. 885.



The Big Spring

The stone bridge adjoins the parking lot of Walters State Community College to the backside of the Greeneville-Greene County Public Library on North Main Street. Seen to the right is the historic home of Valentine Sevier.

The area was beautifully landscaped by the Master Gardner's Club.