



Dolly Sods Wilderness in the Allegheny Mountains of eastern West Virginia

OUR PATRIOTS

# EBENEZER ZANE

By Lena Anthony

## *Trailblazer of the Frontier*

**I**n the fall of 1768, the Treaty of Fort Stanwix formally established a new boundary between the Colonies and American Indian territory. Previously at the Eastern Continental Divide, the new limit for Colonial expansion was set at the Ohio River. The following year, the first Colonial explorers arrived to the northwestern-most frontier. Ebenezer Zane, a surveyor, along with brothers Silas and Jonathan, set out from his home some 180 miles away in the Virginia Colony, navigated the deep, unforgiving wilderness of the Allegheny Mountains, and laid claim to lands where Wheeling Creek and the Ohio River converge, in present-day Wheeling, W.Va.

By 1774, he relocated his family, which also included another brother Isaac and sister Betty, and helped to establish a fort there, creating not only a settlement, but also an enduring legacy of heroism and hard work, struggle and survival. Little is known about Zane, but the name lives on in present-day people, places and stories.

### **Fortifying the Frontier**

Records confirming the date of Zane's arrival in Wheeling don't exist, but by the time George Washington surveyed the area in October 1770, it seems the Zane brothers had already been there.

"... We were told by the Indians with us that three men from Virginia ... had marked the Land from hence ...," Washington wrote as part of his "Remarks and Occurs. in October [1770]." Based on Washington's description, Zane had already scooped up thousands of acres in and around Wheeling.

In 1774, the area was embroiled in Lord Dunmore's War, a conflict between the Virginia Colony and the Shawnee and Mingo American Indians, and the nascent settlement required protection. At the suggestion of leaders at nearby Fort Pitt and with approval by the royal governor of Virginia, Fort Fincastle was constructed.

Later named Fort Henry for Patrick Henry, Fort Fincastle was “built out of necessity,” explained Richard Klein and Alan Cooper in “The Fort Henry Story,” an article published by the Fort Henry Bicentennial Committee in 1982. “It was not erected by any specific plan or design, but was one of a number of similar forts built to protect settlers on the frontier in the middle years of the 1770s.”

Supposedly built about 50 feet from Ebenezer Zane’s blockhouse, Fort Henry was situated on about half an acre in present-day downtown Wheeling. Small in size, the fort derived its defensive power from its location.

“The fort . . . was defended on three sides by the topography,” according to “The Fort Henry Story.” “On the south and west (river) sides, the bluff would have prevented or greatly hindered assaults. On the north, the ravine would have done about the same. The only level ingress would have been from the east, and thus Zane’s blockhouse would have represented protection for the entrance since attackers would have had to pass by it to attack the fort, and thus would have been caught in a crossfire between the fort and the blockhouse.”

### The Frontier and American Independence

Fort Henry saw two major skirmishes during the American Revolution. The First Siege of Fort Henry took place in 1777, when Shawnee, Mingo and Wyandot tribes attacked the frontier settlement. The Second Siege of Fort Henry took place in 1782, when British forces joined the American Indian tribes in fighting the colonists. Zane reported what happened in a September 14, 1782, letter to William Irvine, a brigadier general in the Continental Army and commander of the army’s Western Department at Fort Pitt.

According to this account, a force consisting of a British captain, 40 regular soldiers and 260 American Indians made four attempts to storm the fort in two days, but to no avail—the enemy retreated.

Brother Silas, not Ebenezer, was likely commander of the fort at that time, but because of Ebenezer’s centrally situated blockhouse, historians agree that he probably played an instrumental role in fighting off the enemy.

### A Legend in the Making

Ebenezer’s younger sister, Betty, was also thought to have received her Patriot stripes during this battle. As Charles Wingerter describes in *History of Greater Wheeling and Vicinity* (Lewis Publishing Company, 1912): “When the powder in the fort began to give out, and it became necessary for someone to run across the open space to secure a new supply, all accounts

agree that one of the women in the garrison volunteered for the service, returning with the powder in her apron.”

Based on early accounts, Betty was thought to have been that brave woman. But, Wingerter pointed out, an eyewitness account recorded some 67 years later ascribed the heroic deed to Molly Scott—and placed the need for the gunpowder in the Zane house.

“Beyond stating the conflicting versions of this historic incident, nothing can be added to decide the controversy,” Wingerter concluded. “The strength of local tradition and the earliest published accounts incline the honor of Betty Zane.”

### A Savvy Surveyor

After the Revolution ended, Zane continued his involvement in public matters related to his frontier home. In 1788,



Though there are conflicting accounts of the story, an 1851 lithograph illustrates the oft-told tale of Ebenezer’s sister, Betty Zane, passing through hostile Indian lines to obtain gunpowder for the besieged garrison at Fort Henry, Va., in 1777.

as one of 168 delegates to the Virginia Ratifying Convention, he voted in favor of ratification of the U.S. Constitution.

“He thought a stronger national government would cause a rise in land sales by offering greater protection from Native Americans and by improving transportation,” according to Andrew Cayton in *American National Biography Online* (Oxford University Press, 2000).

In 1795, Zane wrote to James Madison, then a representative in the U.S. House, to recommend John McIntire, his son-in-law and business partner, “On the Subject of Opening a Land Office for the Sail [sic] of the Western Land.”

By the close of the 18th century, Wheeling was becoming a burgeoning center of both industry and population, thanks in large part to Zane. The town of Wheeling was officially established in 1795, and the county seat was relocated there two years later.

In April 1796, Zane was authorized by Congress to build a road connecting Wheeling to Limestone (now Maysville, Ky.). Zane—and Congress—believed a major road would encourage more frontier settlement and help boost trade. To build the road, Zane, his brother Jonathan, son-in-law McIntire and an American Indian guide often followed existing footpaths. When it opened the following year, Zane’s Trace was little more than a 230-mile-long primitive path, but it would be the only major road in Ohio until after the War of 1812. Before bridges were built, ferries helped travelers make river crossings. Meanwhile, settlements, such as Zanesville, Ohio (named in Ebenezer’s honor), as well as taverns and inns, sprang up along the road after its completion.

The National Road, started in 1811, and Route 40, built in 1926, followed some of Zane’s Trace. In 2003, the Marietta

The Ebenezer Zane Cabin is now located in the Helen Wonders Blue Memorial Park in Zanesfield, Ohio. Built circa 1805, it was moved to its current site and rebuilt in 1997.



DAR Chapter, Marietta, Ohio, helped fund a Zane’s Trace marker in New Concord, Ohio, along U.S. 40. 🌿

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## 125 Years of a DAR Magazine

The first DAR magazine, *The American Monthly Magazine*, was published in July 1892—125 years ago this July. We can thank Ellen Hardin Walworth, one of the four DAR founders, for spearheading the publication that is now one of the oldest continuously published magazines in the nation.

In 1892, Mrs. Walworth became the first editor of *The American Monthly Magazine*. Mrs. Walworth—who earned her law degree at New York University—served as the editor for two years, until July 1894. During her tenure, the magazine featured poems and drawings from her daughter, Reubena Hyde Walworth, also a DAR member.

The publication was renamed *DAR Magazine* in 1913. In 2001, the NSDAR split the content into two publications: a magazine called *American Spirit*, focusing on American history, historic preservation, patriotism, genealogy and civics education, and *Daughters*, a newsletter covering DAR member business.

Look closely at the first issue, above the banner of *The American Monthly Magazine*. Across the top in script is the original DAR motto: *Amor Patriae*, Latin for “love of country.” According to *A Century of Service: The Story of the DAR* (NSDAR, 1991), it was only the motto for one month. DAR member Flora Adams Darling requested it be changed, and on December 11, 1890, the motto became “Home and Country.” This DAR motto expanded to “God, Home, and Country,” and was changed on the current DAR seal, adopted in 1978.