

Copy of letter dated May 21, 1860
Written by John Dickson (when about 80 years of age)
To Mrs. Harriet Powers, his niece, of Dover, Missouri
Sketching the life of Josiah Dickson (1750-1834)

Submitted by Cassie Hill

Dear Niece:--I have thought you would probably like to have a short biographical sketch of the life of your grandfather, Josiah Dickson. He was the oldest son of Peter Dickson, born in the town and parish of Suanquhar, Scotland, in the year 1750. While growing up, a part of his time was employed in taking care of sheep, his father having a large number. When a young man, he came to America, shortly before the Revolution, and remained in the western part of Pennsylvania until General Rodgers Clark obtained from the state of Virginia ammunition for the forts in Kentucky, when my father and six others were employed as a guard down the Ohio river from Pittsburg. They landed at the mouth of Limestone creek, now Maysville, Kentucky; there they pushed their boat out and let it float off. They divided the ammunition in different parcels and buried it in the sand, then went into the country to give notice to the forts and raise a party sufficient to guard it in. The first fort they came to was Ruddles Station on the south fork of Tickenir, four miles below where Paris now stands. Here they found the fort so bare of ammunition that hearing of Gen. Todd and Col. Trigg with a surveying party, Gen. Clark waited a few days with a view of raising a party sufficient to bring in a part of the ammunition, but failing in finding the surveying party, Gen. Clark proceeded with part of his former guard to notify the other forts. Soon after the surveying party came in and raised a company of ten men and seven horses and started, riding and walking alternately, the three men on foot to go about 200 yards before the horses. If they saw Indians, they were to ascertain their number and if too numerous, retreat, if not call back to the horsemen to tree and fight. They went on to near the lower Blue Lick, where they came to a fire burning small dry sticks not yet burned in two, and then they knew the Indians were near. They were secreted in a half circle round the path and fired on the three in front before they saw them. As soon as they fired, they jumped up and gave the war whoop. There were ten Indians. They had not killed any of the three footmen, and these called back to the horsemen to tree and fight. My father and a man named Johnson were the two front riders. They each took a tree. When my father looked around to see what trees the others had taken, he saw the last man (Gen. Todd) and nearly out of sight. They had crossed a creek a little piece back. The idea struck my father that the horsemen who ran off would make a stand there, as a more favorable position. By this time, the Indians had fired again and killed the three in front. My father ran for the creek, and when he got in sight of it there was no one there. In the meantime, the Indians had mounted the two horses and pursued them. They caught Johnson first, and overtook my father near the creek, when he turned around and set down his gun, and when they rode up he handed them the gun and his tobacco box. They were not satisfied, and he gave them all he had in his pockets. They they stripped of his clothes and gave him an old Indian blanket and marched him back to where Johnson was. They had stripped him and were whipping him unmercifully. When father came up, he said to him" "O Dickson,

Dickson, what shall I do! Father told him he expected to be in the same condition presently, but they never whipped him, and he learned afterwards that the reason they whipped Johnson was that when they stripped him they saw he had a very dark skin and thought he was some kin to them and was fighting against them. This occurred the evening before Christmas. The prisoners were then taken to the Piqua plains, now in the state of Ohio. At night the Indians would cut down a sapling cut notches in it, lay the prisoners on their backs, separate their feet, put them in the notches and lash them in with tug rope; then stretch their arms, tie a tug rope to each wrist and tie it to a tree on each side, then an Indian would lie on each side of these ropes. Thus they were taken far into the state of Ohio in the winter, bare of clothing and the ground being frozen. When they got there they ran the gauntlet. A long fire was made, the Indians formed a line around the fire armed with clubs, and the prisoners had to run twice around the fire and ward off and dodge what blows they could. Johnson was knocked down once, but father succeeded in keeping his feet, and neither he nor Johnson was materially injured. After this, they had more liberty; were adopted into families, and while not allowed to carry arms or accompany them on their hunts, they always shared in the game that was killed, which was sometimes plentiful and sometimes scarce. Father was of a very jovial disposition and would often wrestle with the Indians. They were more active but not so strong as he. He would give them a strong grip around the waist, lift them off their feet, and turn them over. He never met with an Indian whom he could not throw down, which seemed to please them well. He sometimes bled them, and having no lancet used a chip off a flint rock. In this way they passed the time for about 18 months with the Shawnee tribe. About this time, they went to Detroit for the purpose of organizing and making a raid against Gen. Clark on the Wabash. Here they sold father to the British for a bundle of store goods. Johnson joined the Indians in their expedition against Gen. Clark and was killed in the battle on the Wabash. Father was now a British prisoner with a number of others, in Detroit. They were at liberty to hire themselves to do any work they chose, but must report night and morning to the officer. Soon after this a report was circulated that the prisoners had made a plot to run off, and that father and one James Calloway were at the head of the same. Whether the report was true or false, I never heard father say, but the consequence was that father and Calloway were put in irons and shipped to Quebec and put in a strong prison built of stone, the walls being four feet thick. Here were a number of American prisoners. The winter was very cold--snow four feet deep with a crust of ice on top of the snow. The prisoners broke a bar of iron in the window, prepared for themselves snow-shoes, (made of wood with broad bottoms), tied their blankets together, and let themselves down, and all escaped except two. Father had never been accustomed to wearing snow-shoes and was unwilling to risk himself, and one other prisoner remained with him. Next morning the keeper of the prison came in and ordered so many into the yard for wood and so many for water, and after getting through with his orders turned to father who was standing on the floor combing his hair, and asked him where the rest of the prisoners were. He told him they had gone home. They had fixed up the beds to appear as though persons were lying in them. The officer went to the beds, tumbled them up, and went hastily through the prison and finding no more, locked the door and gave the alarm in the city. The prison was soon filled with people who searched till evening before they found where the prisoners got out; then, one man passing the window, happened to lay his hand on the broken bar which dropped out. By this time, the escaped prisoners had a good start, and father heard of but one of them being overtaken. James Calloway made his escape at this time.

Father saw him afterward in Franklin, Missouri, about the year 1833. The next spring, father was taken out of the Quebec prison and put on board a prison ship; was taken to the West Indies, and was never landed until after Cornwallis was captured off Yorktown in Virginia, which was near the end of the Revolution. Father suffered much on the prison ship. Several times he and his fellow prisoners carried water in their hats to put out the fire in the ship in different attacks. Soon after the surrender of Yorktown, father was landed and obtained his liberty, and after peace was made, returned to Scotland to visit his parents and friends. He returned to America in 1784, and came to where Paris, Kentucky, now stands. He helped to build the first cabin Paris. He bought land one-and-a-half miles from Paris, but on account of the Indians it was too dangerous to improve. He then bought out-lots in Paris (seven acres), which he improved, and married Isabella Reid, then of Nelson county, Kentucky, daughter of Alexander Reid, born in the eastern part of Scotland, north of \Edinburg. My parents settled in Paris in 1787. In 1790, they removed to their land about one-and-a-half miles from Paris. About this time, father made a profession of religion and joined the Presbyterian church, then under the care of Rev. McCure. A few years after, mother joined the church. In 1804, father having lost his land in Bourbon county, by a prior claim, removed to Mercer county, Kentucky, where he lived until 1819, when he removed to Missouri and settled in Cooper county. He died on the 27th of August, 1834, of congestive fever, leaving ten children living, (seven sons and three daughters,) one son having died in infancy. Their names according to birth are as follows: Margaret, Alexander Reid, John, James, Katherine, Robert, William, George, Josiah and David, and Nancy. Josiah and David were twins, but David died at the age of six weeks. Father's children, grand-children, and great-grand-children numbered 70. His height was five feet, eight inches. He had black hair, blue eyes, and fair complexion. His hair became white, with a yellowish twinge. His hair early commenced to turn gray, but when between seventy and eighty years of age, it began to return to its original color, and when he died at the age of 84, the front and top part of his hair was black. As a christian, he was emphatically a man of prayer, and his path seemed that of the just, which shone more and more unto the perfect day. Cheerfulness was a prominent trait of character through life. His weight was from 180 to 200 pounds. Mother died three years and two months after father, aged 80 years.

I have given you an imperfect sketch of the life and death of your grand-father. I have written it at different times, and sometimes I can scarcely hold a pen to form letters.

Your uncle,

JOHN DICKSON

Note from Cassie Wisner Hill: I own the original "copy" of this letter which was copied by Leah Wiseman in 1915. I received it from Glo Smith, Regent of Sacramento Chapter DAR, whom I befriended on the internet. It was offered to her by chance. Margaret Tingley of Woodland, California was a secretary to the owner of the "copy" of the letter. When the woman died, Margaret had it for several years and decided to offer it to a descendant. She called Glo who was regent of the local DAR and Glo remembered that Josiah was my ancestor and sent this, along with other letters, papers, and photographs, to me. Interestingly, Sacramento Chapter was started by another Josiah descendant, Elizabeth Gundrum. Thank you, Glo and Margaret! The

letter has been widely copied. The original "copy" is bound in leather with gold lettering which says "Copy of Sketch of Life of Josiah Dickson 1750-1834").}