THE KELSOS IN AMERICA

John Kelso (1702-?) married Polly who gave birth to Alexander, Hugh, and Joseph. We have very little info on John and Polly. We know that they both were born in Scotland and probably came to America with their sons, but we have no confirmation of this. We do know that both John and Polly lived in the Virginia Colony for at least part of their lives.

Alexander Kelso Sr. (1723-1761) married Mary Blair who gave birth to Alexander Jr., Hugh, Margaret, and Mary. The senior Alexander was known as Reverend Alexander because he had been commissioned as a missionary to the Native Americans of Greenbriar Valley, Virginia where he had a land grant.

Alexander Kelso Jr. (1758-1835) never knew his mother and father because they both died before his third birthday. Family history gives no hint at the cause of death, but some have conjectured that they were slain by Indians. Alexander Sr. and Mary are buried in the New Providence Church graveyard located midway between Staunton and Lexington, Virginia.

Alex and his siblings spent several years in the home of their Uncle Hugh. However, Hugh and Mary Kelso had nine children of their own and apparently Alex and Hugh spent most of their formative years elsewhere. This is evidenced by the fact that Hugh’s six sons entered adulthood well educated, while Alex had almost no formal education.

By 1775 the American Revolution was underway and Alex age 17, was living in Wachaw settlement, South Carolina. On November 1 of that year he was drafted into the South Carolina Militia. His regiment, under the command of Colonel Richardson, marched about 90 miles and secured a fort for the Americans without incident. Alex was able to return home in time for Christmas, but two weeks later he was drafted again, this time for the defense of Charleston. In those times a draft was for a particular engagement and the draftee could go himself or obtain a replacement to go in his place. Alex’s younger brother Hugh had just turned sixteen and he agreed to go to Charleston in place of Alex.

Hugh returned safely to Wachaw in March 1776 and the two teenage brothers decided to head west beyond the Allegheny River where they would be less susceptible to the draft. Some of their relatives were already living in Greenbriar Valley on land that had originally been a grant to their father Alexander Sr. They stayed in Greenbrier until August 1776 and then went to visit their Uncle Hugh in Rockbridge County, Virginia. They remained there until the spring of 1777 and then Alex moved further south into Bedford County, Virginia where his cousin Mary Blair Rice lived. He remained in this area for three years and met a woman, Margaret Ann Balch, who would become his wife in 1781. The wedding had originally been planned for 1780, but before it could take place, war again intruded upon Alex’s life.

In 1780 the fortunes of the American rebels had not fared well. British Colonel Patrick Ferguson and Colonel Banastre “No Quarter” Tarleton had laid waste much of Georgia and South Carolina. Lord Cornwallis was now headquartered at Charlotte with plans to speedily overrun North Carolina. The only thorn in the side of the British was the over-mountain frontiersman who had settled in the Northwest corner of the state and periodically conducted raids against the Redcoats. Colonel Ferguson sent a message to the frontiersmen that if they “did not desist from their opposition to British arms, he would march his army over the mountain, hang their leaders and lay their country waste with fire and sword”. This message reached the ears of Colonel Isaac Shelby who had in his commanded one Alexander Kelso.

Shelby met with Colonel John Sevier and they agreed to assemble a force to go after Ferguson’s troops. They were joined by troops commanded by Colonels William and Arthur Campbell and a Colonel McDowell. On Monday, September 25, 1780 a force of over 1,400 men gathered at the Watauga River at Yellow Mountain and set forth to find the British. Each man was equipped with a Deckard rifle, a shot pouch, a tomahawk, a knife, a knapsack and a blanket. In 1780 the fortunes of the American rebels had not fared well. British Colonel Patrick Ferguson and Colonel Banastre “No Quarter” Tarleton had laid waste much of Georgia and South Carolina. Lord Cornwallis was now headquartered at Charlotte with plans to speedily overrun North Carolina. The only thorn in the side of the British was the over-mountain frontiersman who had settled in the Northwest corner of the state and periodically conducted raids against the Redcoats. Colonel Ferguson sent a message to the frontiersmen that if they “did not desist from their opposition to British arms, he would march his army over the mountain, hang their leaders and lay their country waste with fire and sword”. This message reached the ears of Colonel Isaac Shelby who had in his commanded one Alexander Kelso.

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On Friday, October 6, 1780 a patriot spy reported that he had found Ferguson’s army of 1,500 men encamped on King’s Mountain, North Carolina some thirty miles to the east of the American force. The American commanders decided to proceed with just 910 of their best horsemen and soldiers. Alexander Kelso was among those selected.

The Americans rode eastward through the night and reached their destination on Saturday morning. It had rained most of the night and into the morning, but by mid-morning the rain ceased, the skies began to clear and the Americans made their battle plans. The American commanders decided to proceed with just 910 of their best horsemen and soldiers. Alexander Kelso was among those selected.

The top of the mountain was a bare plateau, but the slopes were wooded and would give protection to the advancing forces. Colonel Shelby’s force (Alexander’s group) advanced from tree to tree up the southeastern slope as Sevier’s men proceeded up the opposite slope. The other companies were to attack from the northeast and northwest.

Shelby’s men advanced up the hill and were the first to draw fire. As they approached the top each man fired once and then retreated. The British brandishing bayonets followed in hot pursuit. At that point, Sevier’s men reached the crest from the opposite side and poured fire into the British backsides. This gave Alexander and his comrades the opportunity to reload and attack again as their foe was turning to face the threat from the rear.
Three times Shelby’s forces reached the crown of the ridge and fired. Three times they rapidly retreated as Sevier’s men opened fire from the other side. On the fourth attack, Sevier’s men firmly gained the crest and they were joined by Shelby’s troops as they surrounded the enemy forces. With the battle less than one hour old, Colonel Ferguson’s bullet riddled body lay on the ground and his troops surrendered to the Americans. The British losses were put at 300 killed or mortally wounded while the Americans suffered only 60 casualties.

Thus ended the short Battle of King’s Mountain that historians Trevelyan, Roosevelt, Van Tyne, Greene, Nevins and Bancroft unanimously called the turning point of the Revolutionary War. Thomas Jefferson later wrote "that memorable victory was the…turn in the tide of success which terminated the Revolutionary War with the seal of independence".

On Sunday, October 8, the victors started the long trek northward with their British captives. Great hardship befell the soldiers and their prisoners on this trip. Their progress was slowed by the need to care for the wounded and by an anticipated counter attack. The counter attack never developed, but because of the earlier destruction of the countryside by the British, little food was available and everyone suffered from hunger and exposure. After a few days, it became necessary to release many of the prisoners and permit the frontiersmen to return to their homes. The deprivation of this time etched itself firmly in the mind of Alexander Kelso Jr. Fifty-two years later when he applied for his Revolutionary War pension, Alex testified "I suffered very much with hunger and fatigue".

Alexander finally reached his home in early November and found to his dismay that his fiancée was gone. The threat from Native Americans had increased when the men went out to fight the British, so Margaret Balch and many others left the area and headed East toward the coast which was more heavily settled. Fortunately, Alexander and Margaret were reunited the following spring and they were married in late May 1781 in Jonesborough, Tennessee.

The newly married couple suffered a financial setback almost immediately. The Indian threat was reasserting itself and Alex was drafted to fight again. Rather than leave his new bride, he hired an acquaintance, Charles Logan, to care for her. Charles cost him several weeks’ earnings (we don’t know his occupation). A year later, in the summer of 1782, both Alex and his brother Hugh was drafted to fight the Indians. This time Alex did go and for his services he was issued a voucher called a "specie" which could be exchanged for land. According to records in the North Carolina State archives, Alexander Kelso received specie in the amount of eight pounds and two shillings on August 16, 1782. In October 1783 Alex used his voucher to purchase land on the north side of the French Broad River at the exchange rate of ten acres for each pound.

The fighting in the American Revolution effectively ended in October, 1781, a year after the Battle of King’s Mountain, with the surrender of General Cornwallis and his troops in Yorktown, Virginia. The treaty of Paris, signed in September 1783, officially ended the war between the British and the Americans, but there was no peace between the American frontiersmen and the Indians.

The land that Alex Kelso purchased was in an area that the North Carolina legislature had set aside for settlement in the "Act of 1783". However, this had been done without regard to the Treaty of 1777 that reserved that same land for the Indians. Naturally the natives felt the settlers had no right to be there, so they continued to attack the new inhabitants whenever they could. Defense of the settlers was complicated by the fact that there was no effective government in the region.

In an effort to reduce its Revolutionary War debt, North Carolina ceded its northwestern territory back to the United States. There was no real federal authority to deal with the Indian threat, so in the latter half of 1784, the citizens of the area held conventions for the purpose of establishing a new state government. In March 1785 a constitution was adopted and the new state of Franklin (named to honor Benjamin Franklin) applied for admission to the Union.

The United States Government did not accept the petition for statehood and North Carolina attempted to reclaim the land they had given up, but that the U.S did not honor the action. In the midst of all this confusion the Indian raids increased markedly and Alex and his brother were repeatedly called into military service against the Indians.

The Indian wars went on until 1793 and the last campaign extended into Alabama. Alex served as a private while Hugh had attained the rank of Captain. In 1796 Tennessee became a state and Governor John Sevier (one of the colonels in the battle of King’s Mountain) commissioned Alex as a lieutenant in the Jefferson County regiment. Three years later Hugh was commissioned as a major.

ALEX, MARGARET AND FAMILY

Alex and Margaret Kelso became the parents of six children: Charles was born in 1785 in Greene County, North Carolina; Mary in 1787 in the State of Franklin; Velva, 1790 in Washington District, North Carolina; Ann in 1793, Dorcus in 1795 and James Balch Kelso in 1796 were born in Jefferson County, Tennessee. The shifting political boundaries of the young American nation become evident when it is realized that all six of the Kelso children were born at the exact same geographical location.

The Kelso family lived in the same location for some forty-three years, but in December 1828, after the first freezes made the roads more passable, they gathered up their belongings and moved north to Morgan County, Indiana. The research done by Don R. Kelso indicates they moved because of their opposition to slavery, which was becoming increasingly controversial in Tennessee and Kentucky. Alex and Margaret were accompanied on this journey by four of their six children, two daughters-in-law, two daughters-in-law, and eleven grandchildren, a party of twenty in all. Thomas Hudinburgh, his wife, eleven children, two sons-in-law, and four grand children also moved to Indiana with the Kelso's. The families were good friends and Dorcus and James Kelso married Lewis and Malvina Hudiburgh respectively.

The Kelso's did well in Indiana and Alex lived to see his two sons, Charles and James, his son-in-law, James Blair, and his grandson Alexander Blair Kelso, become prosperous Morgan County landowners. Additional grandchildren were born in Indiana and Alex even lived to see three great-grandsons.

Alex died in 1835 at the age of 77 and was buried in Old Boles Cemetery located about 2 miles west of Morgantown. His grave is unusual in that it has two headstones. The family placed one and the U.S. government many years later in recognition of Alex’s Revolutionary War service provided the other. Muriel Leon Kelso, a great-great grandson, put the second headstone in place in 1910.

THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR PENSION OF ALEXANDER KELSO JR.

In June 1832, forty-nine years after the end of the American Revolution, Congress passed an act providing a minimum pension of $20 a year for veterans of the Revolutionary War. The pension was to be paid at the rate of $10 for each six-month period retroactive to March 4, 1831.
In November, 1832, Alexander Kelso Jr., age 75, appeared before the Probate Court of Morgan County in Martinsville, Indiana to submit his claim for his pension. Judge John Matthews received five and a half handwritten pages of oral testimony to establish Alex’s claim. This testimony contained his personal history and war experiences and is the basis for this written history.

In May 1833, J.L. Edwards, Commissioner of Pensions, declined Alex’s application pending the receipt of clarifying information from the War Department. The following month Alex returned to the court and gave two more handwritten pages of clarifying oral testimony. Two months later, on August 26, 1833, the war department authorized a pension for Alex and paid him $50 for all that was due him from March 1831. Alex received pension payments for two years until his death in September 1835. There was no provision for widows, so Margaret received no more money.

In July 1836, Congress acted to amend thisshortcuting by passing a bill that extended the pension to widows of Revolutionary War veterans who had been married prior to the veteran’s discharge from military service. In March 1838, Margaret Kelso applied for her husband’s pension, but her request was denied because she and Alex married in 1781, after his qualifying service in 1780. In July 1838, Congress further amended the act to provide for widows even if they married after discharge. For reasons that are not clear, Margaret delayed reapplying for the pension until April 1843, when she was 88 years old. She appeared in the Circuit Court of Monroe County, Indiana and gave oral testimony consisting of eight and a half handwritten pages.

Several friends and relatives also gave affidavits on her behalf. Thomas Hudiburgh, her son-in-law, testified that "They (Alex and Margaret) had the reputation of being persons of the highest worth and respectability and also for truth and purity." Hudiburgh also stated that "Margaret Kelso would not under any circumstances… hazard a pension in 1835, she signed her name with an "X". When she reapplied five years later, she carefully spelled out each letter in her name.

Apparently these testimonials helped for in November 1843, her application was approved and she was paid $171.50, which included all arrears back to September 2, 1835.

It is interesting to note that Margaret only learned to write her name after age 85 while her grandchildren were learning to write theirs. When she first applied for the pension in 1835, she signed her name with an "X". When she reapplied five years later, she carefully spelled out each letter in her name.

Margaret died on May 5, 1847 at the age of 92. She was buried next to Alex in the Cemetery outside Morgantown.

- James Bate Kelso (1796 – 1870) was the youngest child of Alex and Margaret Kelso. James saw military service in the War of 1812 at age 16 and later in the Seminole Indian Wars under General Andrew Jackson in 1817 and 1818. During the War of 1812, he served from September 23 to December 22, 1813 as a private in Captain James Anderson's Cavalry Company in Major James P.H. Porter's Squadron of the East Tennessee Militia. For his service he was paid $8 a month for a total of $24, but since he used his own horse for his cavalry service, he received an additional $36.40 (40 cents a day) for the animal. His total pay at discharge in Knoxville on December 22 was $60.40. This information was provided on Military records available from the National Archives Bureau.

James married Malvina Hudiburgh (1809 – 1841) in 1825. They had four sons and three daughters before Malvina died at the age of 32 after giving birth to their last child. Their children were Thomas McMllin, 1827, Hugh Alexander, 1829, Charles McLeod, 1832, Margaret, 1835, Stephen Bloomer, 1837, Margaret Ann, 1839, and Mary Malvina, 1841.

- Stephen Bloomer Kelso (1837 – 1888) was born in Morgantown and married Sarah J. Thompson in 1858. From 1859 to 1886, Stephen and Sarah had ten children, six sons and four daughters. The children were Clarence, 1859 – 1939, Henry, b. 1861, James, 1863, Tyna, 1871, Lillie 1874, Olive, 1876, Leroy Maxwell, 1878 – 1964, Homer, 1881, Mary, 1883 and Herbert, 1886. Roy’s birth certificate lists his father’s occupation as that of a farmer in Elk Prairie, in Jefferson County Illinois. At some point in the 1880’s Stephen and his family moved to Nebraska. According to his daughter Ethel, Roy Kelso had to quit school at about age 15 or 16 and work to help support the family. Stephen died when Roy was just 10, so one can see how that might have been necessary.

- Leroy Maxwell Kelso (November, 1878 – March, 1964) was working as a bookkeeper for a lumber company in Manistique, Michigan in December 1898, when he was told "to join his militia company at once in Toledo, Ohio". This information is according to an announcement that was published in the Detroit Free Press.

By the time Roy Kelso saw army duty, the Spanish-American War was over. The hostilities between the two countries only lasted from April 24 to July 26, 1898. Total casualties for the U.S. were 359 killed in battle and 5,083 lost to disease, notably yellow fever. The U.S. took possession of Puerto Rico, Guam and the Philippines and briefly occupied Cuba, which had been given independence from Spain. Roy Kelso was part of the army occupation. His army experiences are told in a series of letters written to his family (and excerpted at the end of this history) and in one long letter which was published in a newspaper, probably the Toledo Blade or the Detroit Free Press. That letter has been reproduced in its entirety at the end of this text.

In April or May 1889, Roy returned to Toledo and took a job with a lumber company. It was there that he met Adda Vane McAllin (1879 – 1974) and they were married in May 1902. Adda had moved to Toledo from Crawford County, Pennsylvania and was working at the lumber company where Roy was employed. They had three children, Maxwell Robert (September, 1903 – March, 1988), Ethel Rose (1905 – present) and Donald Sterling (1907 – 1931).

Roy worked as a salesman for one or more lumber companies in the Chicago area from 1899 to the late 1930’s. He worked steadily through the Great Depression and during that period he invested regularly in the stock market. He also bought glass bottles and pitchers, furniture and other items and built up a valuable collection of antiques.

In the summer of 1946, Roy and Adda helped their son Max buy a home in Euclid, Ohio, a suburb of Cleveland, and moved in with them and their three children. They lived in Euclid in the house at 282 E. 276 St. until 1954 or so. By then the strain of having three generations under one roof was too much for Max and Ruth. In 1966, Adda fell and broke a rib and her health declined to the point that she had to move to a nursing home in 1967 or ’68. She continued to live in a nursing home until her death in 1974 when she was 95.

Roy Kelso smoked cigars, played golf, had Washington State apples shipped in every winter, had a temper and used to “blow up” at the dinner table periodically. “Damn, goddamned and hell” were the only curses he used, but they were always delivered with great gusto in a loud voice and he usually managed to upset the other adults in the family. Roy liked to sit in a rocking chair on the back porch of the house in Euclid and as the Kelso children (Anne, Don and Bob) ran out to play he would shout, “Don’t slam that door!” Invariably the door was slammed.

- Maxwell Robert Kelso (September, 1903 – February, 1988) became the most highly educated of the Kelso’s to date, obtaining a Ph. D. in European History from Harvard University on the early 1930’s.
Max was born and raised in the Chicago area but moved to Cleveland, Ohio to attend college at Western Reserve University (now known as Case Western Reserve after its merger with the Case Institute of Technology in the early 1960’s). Max was a history major and ran the mile in track and field. While at Western Reserve, he set a record in the mile run that lasted until the mid 1950’s.

After graduating from college with a bachelor’s degree, Max went on to Harvard University where he obtained Masters and Ph. D. degrees. At Harvard he studied under William Langer was one of the world’s preeminent scholars of European history. Max’s thesis dealt with the French labor union movement in the 1860’s.

In the late 1920’s or early 30’s, Max met Ruth Risk, an elementary school teacher from North Olmsted, Ohio. Ruth and her brother Bob were also from a family of Scottish descent.

Max and Ruth were married in the fall of 1935 and spent their honeymoon in Europe. Anne, their first child was conceived on the Atlantic crossing and was born in May 1936.

During the 1930’s, Max served in teaching positions at Claremont College in California and Blackburn College in southern Illinois. Following those assignments, he became the Dean of Westminster College in New Wilmington, Pennsylvania. He was there in December 1941 when the United States entered World War II.

Max enters the U.S. Navy and was appointed Administrator of the Naval Reserve Training Center in Mount Pleasant, Michigan. Since virtually all eligible young men became involved in Military service and stopped going to college, the Naval facility that Max Kelso directed took over the vacant campus of Central Michigan University.

When the war ended in 1945, Max was faced with important career choices. His family had grown to include three children (Don was born in 1938 and Bob followed in June, 1941) and he questioned whether he should go back to the Dean’s position at Westminster with its salary of $3,000 a year. He explored other opportunities and decided to accept a position as personnel manager for the Sterling & Welch Furniture Company in Cleveland. Shortly after he agreed to take the job in Cleveland, Harvard University asked him to head up their office of veteran affairs (thousands of returning servicemen were entering college under the GI bill), but it was too late. Years later, Ruth told Bob that she always regretted that they had missed that opportunity to remain in academic circles, but apparently Max was satisfied with the change.

In the summer of 1946, Max and Ruth, Anne, Don and Bob were joined by Max’s parents Roy and Adda and they all moved into a large house in Euclid, Ohio, an eastern lakefront suburb of Cleveland. The house had six bedrooms and a large, unheated sleeping porch, two second floor bathrooms, a front and back staircase, a formal living room and dining room, a playroom or recreation room, a sunken study, a breakfast room, a kitchen, a front porch and a back porch. The basement consisted of five rooms that included a toilet in the laundry area. The garage was about 100 feet away from the house and had room for four cars plus small attached rooms for tools and storage.

The house that the Kelsos bought had been built in 1913 and originally sat in the middle of about seven acres that included a formal, sunken garden and a lighted main driveway that included a bridge that ran over a small creek. There was also a hill in the back yard that sloped down to the creek. By 1946 the bridge had collapsed and the street entrance was from the back on E. 276 St. The sunken garden was overgrown with weeds and no longer resembled a garden of any kind. However, the land was still there and while the Kelsos only owned about one acre, they had free use of the surrounding area.

In the early 1950’s, Sterling and Welch joined with Lindner and Davis department stores and became known as the Sterling Lindner Davis Company. One unique feature of the original Sterling building was its five story central atrium. Each year in November a huge, live evergreen tree was brought into the store and decorated for Christmas. On the Saturday evening following Thanksgiving, the Kelso family went to downtown Cleveland for dinner at Clark’s Restaurant and then went over to see the tree be unloaded from a flatbed truck and taken into the store. The next day, Sunday, Max and Bob and Don frequently returned to the store to see the tree being decorated. As an added bonus, Bob and Don got to run around the toy department (the store was not open for business) and play with all the latest offerings.

Max continued in his personnel manager’s position until his retirement at age 65 in 1968.