

## **WANTED: A NEW STATE WEST OF THE LAUREL HILLS**

At the conclusion of the American Revolution settlers in this region had another reason to complain to the continental Congress, and their Articles of confederation. Residents were motivated to sign a petition for redress from the 'unhappy dispute' over the boundary and jurisdiction between Pennsylvania and Virginia. The settlers rightly wanted full security of their property and person. The signers claimed their full participation in seeking liberty and independence, as well as defending the country from the "ravages of the savages."

The dispute between Pennsylvania and Virginia was deemed to be the principal source of their misfortunes, leaving them without sufficient defenses. They had to provide their own barrier from the inroads of savages. The local residents felt they had been treated more like slaves and feudal tenures than freemen. The signers based their petition on the claim of having fought and bled in the common cause.

Their only solution to their grievances was to lay out a new state upon the western waters, on the west side of Laurel Hill. The petitioners affirmed that the Congress has the power to establish a new state, just as new settlements had been made on vacant land, and boundaries for other states had been set by their authority.

In addition, they asked for the continuation of Fort Pitt, with as many reinforcement men and military stores as could be spared from the service of the United States.

The seats of government of Pennsylvania and Virginia were at a distance from the petitioners. Since the geography was not fully known when state charters were drawn, settlers on the western waters were yet to be recognized. The petitioners did not feel a part of Pennsylvania's charter and Assembly.

Then follows some 1750 signatures on the petition. At least two names are familiar as part of the history of Old St. Lukes. They include Obadiah Holmes Jr., and a William Lee (could it be Lea?), two strong members of St. Luke's Church. The petition was dated January 1783, suggesting that not every dispute had been settled by the completion of the mason & Dixon boundary line.

We are grateful to a dear friend of Old St. Lukes, Helen Harris, Certified Genealogist, Pittsburgh, for her monograph on the signers of a petition to form a new state apart from Pennsylvania and Virginia in the year 1783, which she obtained from the National Archives, Washington, D.C.

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