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Colonel John Jordan: A True Local Hero

I pledge that I have neither given nor received any unacknowledged aid on this paper.

Upon the arrival of Colonel John Jordan, the upper James River Valley was beginning to grow and thrive. However, it was not until Jordan set foot there in the early 1800's <sup>that</sup> <sup>9</sup> it began to reach its full potential. With the help of a strong and very talented young man, western Virginia began to resemble eastern Virginia <sup>becoming</sup> ~~and became~~ "less dependent on commercial centers to the north" (Simms, 19). ✓

John Jordan was born on June 2, 1777, in the county of Goochland, located near Richmond, Virginia. According to Marshall W. Fishwick, he "was a descendent of one of the First Families of Virginia," where the Jordan line can be traced back to the early 1600's (Fishwick, The Commonwealth, 1). At the age of twenty-three, John married Lucy Winn of Hanover County. Shortly after the marriage in the spring of 1802, Mr. and Mrs. John Jordan moved to Lexington, Virginia, "a handsome little village with good buildings" (Simms, 1). It is here, at this point, that Col. Jordan began to make his huge and lasting impact.

Young Jordan gained interest in the building and brick-making business, as well as iron making, from his father, who made cannon balls for the patriot cause during the revolution. One theory leads us to believe that the reason Jordan came to Lexington was because he had heard and read about the great fire that had swept the small village town in 1796. Between 1802 and the very beginnings of the war of 1812, Jordan helped construct <sup>9</sup> few <sup>h</sup> ✓

buildings; he erected some parts of Mulberry Hill, Monticello, and a school for girls called Ann Smith Academy. According to Fishwick, although Jordan had just begun his life of hard work and labor, Lexington became a "thriving little community built on the North River" (Fishwick, Iron Worker, 2). After the completion of the school, tensions began to arise in Great Britain, and John Jordan decided to join the military.

The war of 1812 had just begun, and Jordan volunteered, serving as a Lieutenant in Virginia's Fifth Regiment, under the control of Captain Archibald Lyle. Among his fellow soldiers, he was known for his outstanding bravery, and he was recognized for his valor on several different occasions. He carried a large sword with him at all times, characterized by twenty melted silver dollars on the sword, and according to Harrington Waddell, it was "a weapon which could not be utilized by a man of ordinary strength" (Waddell, 2). Jordan then became frustrated with the militia because the maneuvers around Chesapeake Bay did not allow him to distinguish himself, so he returned to the Valley and got back to work.

Shortly after his return from the north, Jordan purchased a point of land known as Jordan's Point, located between the North River and Wood's Creek (present day East Lexington). In 1818, he completed his large home on Jordan's Point, known as "Stono" (news paper clipping). Soon Jordan's home and plot of land became the center for "woolen mills, grist and flour mills, lumber and metal

shops, and brick kilns, with machines making, and repairing machinery used on the place" (Fishwick, The Commonwealth, 1). While Jordan's business investments began to flourish once again, so did his family. John and Lucy had fourteen children, two of whom were girls.

*at what time?*  
Although John Jordan never admitted to it, his religious affiliation was with the Presbyterian church, the only place of worship in Lexington. However, under the persuasion of his wife, John converted to the Baptist church, and Col. Jordan erected the first Baptist church in the county. Soon after, John Jordan became a powerful man within the church, just like he had done with his *awk* other types of work.

Besides his work with the Baptist church, Jordan was a prominent contractor and road builder and was aware of the need for better transportation within the Valley. Col. John Jordan built the road connecting Collierstown and Longdale over North Mountain. He also helped improve the stretch between Covington *ad* to Lynchburg, by way of Lexington. When the Rockbridge County court was very hesitant about building a road system in the Blue Ridge, John Jordan said, "Give me the men and I will build the road" (Simms, 23). In addition, Jordan also helped to improve the navigation on the James River. Finally, after Jordan received the contract to build a canal around Balcony Falls, larger boats could now navigate the river through the Blue Ridge with much less trouble.

Besides his activities in the church, building buildings, and contracting, he also was involved in the iron industry in six counties: Rockbridge, Bath, Amherst, Louisa, Allegheny, and Botetourt. John Jordan, throughout his life, owned and operated ten furnaces:

1. Lucy Selina Furnace, Allegheny County.
2. Bath Iron Works, near Goshen.
3. Wilson Furnace, Boutetourt County.
4. Buena Vista Furnace, Buena Vista.
5. California Furnace, on Guy's Run.
6. Hamilton Furnace, west of Covington.
7. Dolly Ann, east of Jackson River.
8. Low Moor, on Jackson River.
9. Victoria Furnace Larisa County.
10. Stone Coal Furnace, near Richmond.

(Half-Forgotten Bits of Local History.)

If someone typified the hard-working Scotch-Irish personality, it was John Jordan. Col. Jordan was well aware of the natural resources and manufacture of iron because of his connections with the shipping of products on the river, so the iron industry was his next logical business. In 1827, along with John Irvine, Jordan erected their furnace on Simpson's Creek, between North Mountain and Brushy Mountain, and "named the furnace for their wives, Lucy Jordan and Selina Irvine" (anonymous, 33).

According to the Virginia Cavalclade, no records or

descriptions of the Lucy Selina in the ante-bellum days is available. However, it was believed to be made certainly of stone, and by observing the other furnaces in the South at the same time, it did not exceed twenty-five to thirty-five feet high. Limestone, fuel, and ore were placed into the furnace from the top; then water triggered the cold-blast from bellows which allowed for combustion and smelting. The only fuel was charcoal, used for its high carbon content. As far as transportation, "The ore and fuel had to be hauled to the furnace, the latter from ever greater distances as nearby areas were rapidly denuded of their timber" (anonymous, 33).

Because of the blast-furnace, like the Lucy Selina, efficiency in the use of the natural resources was not normal. The efficiency was not usual at the Lucy Selina because much charcoal was needed for its operations, and one ton of pig iron resulted from 2 1/2 to 3 1/2 tons of ore. However, the Lucy Selina had a great impact on the people around it: "The rhythmic blowing of the bellows, the smoke and sparks from the top of the stack, the red glow of the molten pig iron flowing through sand troughs to form castings, made an indelible impression on the community and gave man a furnace-man nostalgia for its sights and sounds when he was removed from them" (anonymous, 34).

*great quote!*

By 1831, John Jordan, along with his partner John Irvine, owned over forty thousand acres of land, on which all the company's iron industry was located. Although Jordan owned many different furnaces, each one had its own characteristics. For example, the

furnace at Clifton Forge consisted of "the forge house with two hammers, one chafery fire, and six refinery fires; another small forge with one hammer and two chafery fires; a charcoal storage house; a sawmill; and a grist mill" (anonymous, 34). In somewhat of a contrast, the Lucy Selina consisted of a sawmill, grist mill, coal house, bellows, and a bridge.

*and what explains  
the nature of these differences?*

In the realm of labor, since the white man was hard to find during the period, "the ironmaster depended upon the negro to fill most of the jobs except those of manager and bookkeeper" (anonymous, 34). In a fascist type manner, the ironmaster learned that each man was capable of only doing a certain amount; thus, it was cheaper for the manager to hire slaves by the year rather than making a risky investment. For example, at Lucy Selina in 1830, of the thirty-eight slaves working in the furnace, thirty-two of them were rented for the year at very minimal costs. In order to rent slaves, the Jordan and Irvine Company had to go through agents to hire them, usually in the winter months, because the demand in the transportation business was so high. The Clifton Forge operation had forty-four slaves, only twelve were owned, and the rest were rented out yearly at normal rates, "except the man whose skill in 'drawing' the iron into shape made his services worth \$150 per year" (anonymous, 35). In addition at Clifton Forge, there were twenty-two other slaves, engaged in various other activities: servants, cooks, boatmen, wood chopping, keeping stock records, and hauling wood.

At all of Jordan and Irvine's furnaces, the cutting and transportation of wood was a necessity, and the conversion of the wood into charcoal had to be done with great precision to minimize the waste. In extremely busy times, the ironmaster would hire white workmen to cut and transport the wood, but "slave labor could be used seasonally in customary agricultural pursuits when it was not needed for the iron works - for example, to grow corn" (anonymous, 35).

*elaborate on this with be most helpful*

Since Jordan and Irvine enjoyed much success with their industry, the iron-making was not just completed for local use. Instead, in order to make cash, Jordan and Irvine would sell castings at the furnace and iron tools at the forge. By making contacts in such cities as Richmond and Lynchburg, Jordan and Irvine felt the need however for pig and bar iron, and they "formed commission merchants eager for new business" (anonymous, 35). Then, in November of 1828, with John F. Caruthers acting as their agent, the Jordan and Irvine Company cosigned an agreement with Burns Trimble and Company, and John Jordan and John Irvine established their company among the ranks of the companies in the North. Now, throughout the early 1830's, the Virginia iron industry had a wonderful reputation for its iron, and a totally new demand accrued when iron workers in the city of Lynchburg developed the iron pipe. During this time period, no records of the Jordan and Irvine Company have been located, but by observing the businesses with whom they did most of their work, the profits were very good. With the death of John Irvine in 1834, Edwin and Ira F.

Jordan replaced their father as operator of the Lucy Selina Furnace, but Col. John Jordan still remained involved with the family business until his death.

With the introduction of two new improvements, the steam engine and ~~the~~ the Virginia Iron Industry was able to recover from the Panic of 1837. In order to keep up with the Northern Iron Industry, the Jordan family introduced in 1848 the Dolly Ann Furnace near Covington, a breakthrough in technology because it was a hot blast furnace. With the introduction of this new furnace, the Jordan Company recognized some new competitors in the nearby counties. In 1852, the Jordan Company closed down the Lucy Selina Furnace, and within two years they had built a new furnace near the mouth of Simpson's Creek. Colonel John Jordan died on July 24, 1854, the same year that the Australia Furnace was introduced, and the Jordan family ended its stint in the iron industry in July, 1863.

According to L. Moody Simms, John Jordan was a very powerful man in Rockbridge County, and "as much as any one man, he had helped bind the Valley to eastern Virginia" (Simms, 28). John Jordan was a man of great energy; he was a gentleman with great character and integrity. According to a letter read at the courthouse, the reader says John Jordan "possessed a character unsullied by vice, a name untarnished by defamation, and a life devoted to useful labors" (letter read by Shields, 4). Thus, according to Marshall W. Fishwick, the motto, "Si monumentum

requiris, circumspice," meaning "if you seek his monument, look about you" would have been appropriate (Fishwick, The Commonwealth, 2).

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