

Confessions of Suspected Tories
Bryant & Acles (aka Elias) Fanning
From The William Preston Papers Collection
Of The Lyman Copeland Draper Manuscripts

I have long pondered over a reference found in the Lyman Copeland Draper Papers regarding the Confessions of Tories in Western Virginia namely: Bryant Fanning and Elias Fanning. It had seemed to me that the similarity of the name Elias to Achilles (also spelled Acholis, Acles, Akerless and other variations) might be more than coincidental. Especially, since I had found numerous references to Achillis (various spellings) Fanning in Virginia records and in particular Montgomery, Giles & Wythe Counties of Virginia. Whereas, I had never found any other reference to an Elias Fanning (Faning, Fannin, Fannon or other spelling variations) in the same geographical area.

Having seen this reference several times, in family genealogies such as: 'March of the Sages' by Bonnie Sage Ball, I sought out the manuscripts to verify the names. Unfortunately, the libraries that I had access to only had the printed version of the manuscripts and these versions stated Bryant & Elias Fanning. It wasn't until recently that I had access to the microfilm copies of the original documents that are held at the Wisconsin Historical Society in Madison, Wisconsin.

Draper Manuscripts

Overview

The Lyman Copeland Draper Manuscript Collection, when it came to the Wisconsin Historical Society, was like the working files of many scholars, a mass of partially sorted papers. They were organized by Society staff into 491 volumes divided into 50 series of varying lengths, arranged by geographic area, subject and individual.

The collection as a whole covers primarily the period between the French and Indian War and the War of 1812 (ca. 1755-1815). The geographic concentration is on what Draper and his contemporaries called the "Trans-Allegheny West," which included the western Carolinas and Virginia, some portions of Georgia and Alabama, the entire Ohio River valley, and parts of the Mississippi River valley.

©1996-2008 Wisconsin Historical Society 816 State Street, Madison, WI 53706-1417

The microfilms were located at the Morrow Library of Marshall University in Huntington, W.V. Marshall University has the entire collection of Draper Papers on microfilm.

Microfilm of Draper Manuscripts Series QQ Volumes 4 – 6 Ms 6 Reel 112

The entry in question is found in Series 5QQ68 (part of the William Preston Collection). This is a collection of Confessions of Suspected Tories dated 1780 and includes among others the names of Bryant Fanning and Elias Fanning.

1780 5QQ68 Tories. Confessions of John Clifton, Toloman Harrison, Roger Oats, **Bryant Fanning**, Robert Phristo, David Copeman, Jeremiah Lambert, Marcum Lovell, Andrew Thompson, and Amos Johnson; others involved are John Bullock, John Wyley, Joshua Jones, David Herbert, John Griffith, John Jenkins, Charles Devereaux, Evan Williams, John Newton, Philip Dutton, the Vaults, Bronstetters, Moses Wells, Peter Razor, Jink Williams, Ben Thomas, Griffith Lewis, John Morgan, N. Brittain, John Cox, John Draper, Valentine Harmon, John Henderson, **Colonel Ingles, Elias Fanning**, Richard Oney, Thomas Potter, Jonathan Ingram, and Bernard Gullion."

The entries are enumerated by slide numbers instead of page numbers, of which, there were two number 68 slides. The entry on slide 68 (1)* for "Bryant Faning" is extremely easy to read. The page is divided into four quadrants of which Bryant Fanning's name appears as the first two words in the first line of quadrant 3.

The other entry is found on slide 68 (2)*. This slide was also divided into quadrants of which the upper left quadrant was full of text and the upper right quadrant was about 40 percent full. The bottom left quadrant was empty and the bottom right quadrant contains the following list:

"Col. Ingle
John Draper
Roger Oat
Peter Razor
& others
Torish

_____ \ (aug – " [This is an incomplete entry.]

The first two words on the second line in the upper right quadrant of slide 68 (2)* is the questionable entry for Elias Fanning.

*Note: The (1) & (2) were numbers that I used to distinguish the two slides numbered 68.

Upon close examination of this entry and further upon enlarging copies of this entry, it becomes clear that the entry does not read Elias Fanning. This would have been a logical interpretation by one not familiar with the given name of Achillis (or variant spellings). The mis-interpretation comes from the fact that the transcriber failed to recognize the capital letter "A" at the beginning of the second line. He simply picked up with what appeared to be "elas" Fanning and then he transcribed it as "Elias" Fanning. However, the beginning "A", although faint, is legible upon close examination and thus the name becomes "Aelas". The ink on the second letter of the name has slightly smudged leaving

a perfectly acceptable interpretation of a small case “c” and not a small case “e”. This, combined with the large case “A” as a first letter renders the name as “Aclas Fanning”. Some observers may claim the last vowel to be a lower case “ i “, instead of a lower case “ a “. This none the less leaves the name as: Aclis Fanning. Both of the foregoing renditions could be acceptable with similar results. In every other instance the transcriber uses capital letters for the first letter in every proper name. The result of examining the original documents is as I had first presumed. The exercise has truly become an invaluable lesson in the importance of using original documents, as opposed to transcriptions.

Bryant & Aclis (Eakles, Echles, Achillis, Acholis, Akalis and other variations) Fanning appear in the Southwest Virginia area in a time frame consistent with the Draper record, as seen in the references listed below. This, I believe, confirms the fact that it was Bryant & Aclis Fanning listed in the William Preston Papers of the Lyman Copeland Draper Manuscripts and not Elias Fanning.

Further research into the genealogy of the descendants of Bryan Fannen, Sr. (Fannin, Fanning) who died in Amelia County, Virginia around January or February of 1765 shows only two descendants that match the names and time frame of the Bryant & Aclis (aka Elias) Fanning found in the Preston Papers of the Draper manuscripts. These two descendants were Bryant Fanning & Achilles Fanning, Jr., who were sons of Achilles Fanning, Sr. (ca. 1728 – 1812), the son of Bryan Fannen, Sr. of Amelia Co., Va. The two sons would have been between 20 and 30 years of age in 1780 when the Tory Confessions were made.

Bryant Fannin was listed in the 1830 Federal Census of Lawrence Co., Ky. as being between the ages of 70 to 80, making his birth year between 1750 & 1760. He would have been between the ages of 79 and 89 years old at the time of his death. His son, Rev. John Fannin, Sr. (1779-1853) of Lawrence Co., Ky. is the progenitor of most of the Fannins in Lawrence, Boyd, Carter & Greenup Counties, as well as Lawrence Co., Ohio. This is my family lineage. The Rev. John Fannin of Lawrence Co., Ky. was my third great grandfather, making Bryant Fannin my fourth great grandfather.

Bryant Fannin(g), sometimes Fannon, died in Lawrence Co., Ky. between 1835 & 1840. He is listed in the Lawrence Co., Ky. tax lists through 1834. Lists for 1835 through 1840 are missing. He is not found in the 1840 Census.

Achilles Fannin, Jr died in Wythe Co., Va. in 1833. He is listed in the 1830 Census of Wythe Co., Va. as Akles Fanning being between the ages of 70 to 80 years old, making his birth year between 1750 & 1760. He would have been between the ages of 73 and 83 years old at the time of his death.

I.

**Biography and Genealogy of the men in the Flower Swift Militia Company of
Montgomery Co., Virginia 1780-1783**

Compiled by James A. Quinn, Jan. 2003-March 2004

“There was a famous Tory officer, David Fanning Jr., that led the Tory militia in the old Guilford Co., NC area. This Fanning appears to be the cousin of the Bryant Fannin, son of Achilles Fanning Sr. of today's Wythe County who confessed to the Virginia commanders of his involvement with the Tories. A Bryant and Achilles Fanning are listed in Thomas Ingles' militia company. This line is descended from Bryant Fanning Sr. of Amelia Co., VA. “

II.

The 1782 Montgomery County, Virginia Personal Property Tax

Transcribed by Jeffrey C. Weaver, July 1, 1998

Fanning, Bryan	1	1	4
Fanning, David	1	1	2
Fanning, Echles, Jun.	1	2	2
Fanning, Echles, Sen.	1	1	2
Fanning, John	1	5	16

III.

1793 Wythe County, Va. Tax lists for Districts 1 and 2.

<http://www.ls.net/~newriver/va/wyth1793.htm>

Transcribed by Jeffrey C. Weaver, July 3, 1998

[First Section](#) Present day Wythe and Smyth Counties
[Second Section](#) - What became Grayson County in 1793
[Third Section](#) - Area north of Walker's Mountain

Third Section:

Fanning, Briant	1	7
Fanning, Eakles, Sen.	1	3
Fanning, Eakles, Jun.	2	

IV.

Little Walkers Creek
Virginia Land History
From the Library of Virginia
Richmond, VA

[\[11\]](#) Wythe County, VA Deed Book 5, p. 194.

The above mentioned 75,000 acres was granted to Robert Pollard on October 1, 1794 in the county of Wythe on the waters of East river, Bluestone River, Clinch River and Wolf Creek. Mentions James Shannon, William Patterson, Akalis Fanning, John Crockett, Robert Adams, Hugh McGavock.

Note: With all respect to the transcriber(s), the Draper Manuscripts are often difficult and sometimes impossible to read. It is obvious that a certain amount of transcription errors are to be expected.

Finally, I have attached copies of the microfilm records , including blow-ups to these documents. It is recommended that those interested personally view the microfilm records since copies seldom capture the true image.

Submitted by:

J.Patric Fannin
jpfannin@hotmail.com
221 North Fifth Street
Ironton, Ohio 45638

October 16, 2008