

Ohio Records and Pioneer Families

Jeremiah Edwards

Life of a Leader: The Story of George Edwards

“Leaders are made, they are not born. They are made by hard effort, which is the price all of us must pay to achieve any goal that is worthwhile.” – Vince Lombardi (Green Bay Packers Head Coach, 1959 -1967)

George Edwards was a leader. Born into a large family in Fairfax County, Virginia, he migrated with his family to the frontiers of Kentucky and Ohio. Once of age, he married, started a family, and served his country as a Justice of the Peace, a Representative in the Ohio Legislature and by commanding a militia unit in the war of 1812. Unfortunately, his contributions to Ohio have all but been forgotten over the last 200 years. The purpose of this narrative is to establish the facts concerning the life and leadership of George Edwards and his contributions to Ohio and America.

He was born 03 January 1772^{1,2} in Fairfax County Virginia to James Edwards and Sarah Jacobs³. In later life, he was interviewed by Lyman C. Draper and said this about the time of his birth: "*That winter was a hard winter – snow fell over three feet deep in Virginia...*" He was born on a tobacco plantation in Truro Parish, Fairfax County, Virginia, where his father, James, leased land from James Ingo Dozer⁴. He remained on this plantation until 21 November 1774, when James Edwards, purchased 208.5 acres of land along Sandy Run Creek in what is now Fairfax Station, Fairfax, Virginia⁵.

There were many children in the Edwards family, of which George was the youngest. He had 9 other siblings: 6 brothers and 3 sisters¹. Two of these brothers, Robert, dying in 1761 and John, dying in 1770, died before George was born^{6,7}. Of his remaining brothers, the oldest three; William, Jacob and Alexander, along with their sister Jane and her future husband William Rains, traveled to Kenton's Station, Kentucky in 1785, prior to the rest of the family^{1,8}. William moved to the Falls of Ohio region, while his other siblings remained at Kenton's Station¹.

His brother, Alexander, was a surveyor in that region and on 22 August 1786, signed a petition to create the town of Washington, Kentucky⁸. He was also a member of the Kentucky Militia under Benjamin Logan and was repairing the cock of his pistol prior to going out on Logan's Raid when he accidentally shot himself in the knee. The bullet traveled down his leg to his foot, and having no surgeon on hand, died three days later from the effects of his wound¹. This occurred a few months prior to the arrival of the rest of the Edwards family. James Edwards moved his remaining family, James, George, Nancy, Eleanor and her husband John West to Kenton's Station, Kentucky arriving at Limestone Settlement (now called Maysville, Kentucky) on 06 December 1786¹.

Although only 14 years old, George quickly became an active member of the Kentucky Militia. Logan's Raid had escalated the fighting between the “whites” and the Shawnee Native Americans. He served in the Kentucky Militia as a Private and was later promoted to Captain during what is now known as the Northwest Indian Wars, which occurred between 1785 and 1795. In his 1863 interview with Lyman Draper, George goes into great detail about his life during this ten year period. The following details and quotations are taken directly from this interview, as a first-person account of this volatile time in American history¹.

“The night before James Edwards landed at Limestone, William McGinnis, who had moved out a little distance from Kenton's Station, was killed... Two strangers appeared at Kenton's Station the day before & had a butcher knife ground. In the evening following, McGinnis, hearing the dogs bark, stepped out to see there were two persons, one at each corner of his cabin. One fired & shot him in the shoulder, when he turned to regain the house then the other shot him through the heart & he fell dead at the door. His wife jumped to the door & shut it before she could stoop down & find the pin with which to fasten it, the enemy pushed it partly open, but she forced it back & fastened it calling aloud to her son, a youth of fifteen, “Tommy, get the gun” when the enemy decamped.”

With this incident occurring the day before they arrived, the entire settlement was buzzing with news of the murder when they landed. A few months later, a young man joined Kenton's Station as part of the auxiliary militia. Wanting to earn a name for himself, he fired off his gun pretending that he shot at an Indian, then caught an old widow's cat, cut its throat and dripped the blood along the trail he made using his own moccasins. George described what happened next, "*The next morning, the blood & tracks were traced till they ceased & finally after some close search, the murdered cat was found, thrust into a hollow tree & covered over with clumps. Then James Jumer proposed to tie the young culprit to a sapling & leave him, but he begged off.*"

That summer, a man named Burk was cooking food for a company of surveyors. "*The surveyors all escaped except Burk who remained at camp. The Indians left him some meat & said they were going to Greenbrier to war & for him to make a hack on a tree each morning & when he had made eight, they would be back. As soon as the Indians were fairly gone, Burk went to the designated tree, made eight hacks and started & came to Limestone.*"

Many deaths occurred within the Limestone Settlement & Kenton's Station and George dealt with it all stoically, but it forced him to mature very quickly. He speaks of the deaths of a few people he knew well during the Northwest Indian Wars. In the spring of 1787, a man named Zachariah Wade went hunting with a friend about 6 miles outside Washington, Kentucky. The Shawnee Indians attacked them early in the morning, killing Wade's friend, but Wade escaped. "*Someone said to Wade after he returned, "Why, Zeph, we heard you were killed." "Yes," he said in reply, "I heard that too, but knew it was a lie."*

Not long after, a Dutchman named John Duzang lived in Washington, Kentucky and was out making sugar in spring of the year 1787. "*He was alone and warned of his danger. "By Joe," said he, "Indians won't kill me!" He had his sugar nearly done & laid down on his bench and fell asleep & "By Joe," said he, "When I awaked, an Injun was astraddle of me." The Indians had some horses & had Duzang on a horse & had bells tied on Duzang, & while the Indians heard another bell & went to see about it, they left him with a single Indian. He seized the slapper of the bell to keep it from betraying his course & dashed off & escaped.*"

In the fall of 1787, "*Norman Tallmadge, having cut tobacco during the day at Lee's Station, went out in the evening with a caudle to gather it, when some Indians knocked him down & scalped him. John Kingsaula & others ran out, but Indians had decamped.*"

There was some good which occurred during this time, though. Not all of his experiences were fraught with violence and the bloodshed of his friends and neighbors. His family was highly involved in the politics of the region. His brother, Jacob, would become a "Gentleman Justice" in 1789 but before that time, Mason County was about to be formed through a great deal of petition.

On 19 September 1787, the inhabitants of Limestone Settlement, Washington, Kenton's Station and other neighboring communities gathered together and signed a petition to the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Virginia, who controlled Kentucky until it became a state on 01 June 1792. The petition asked that Bourbon County be split because the county seat was 40 miles away, through hazardous terrain and unfriendly Native American Tribes. Jacob and James Edwards both signed this petition, however, it was denied. They continued to persist, despite the protests of the Bourbon County officials. After the third attempt, the General Assembly finally granted their request, ruling that on 01 May 1788, Bourbon County would be split⁸ and Mason County would be formed, naming it after George Mason, a vestryman of Truro Parish where George Edwards was baptized and where he and his family had attended worship services.

On 22 October 1787, his father, James, gave his formal, written consent for William Rains to marry his youngest daughter, Jane, writing "*Sir, I hereby permit you to issue a license for my daughter, Jane Edwards, marriage to William Rains and for so doing, this shall be your warrant.*" The next day, at the age of 17, Jane Edwards and William Rains were married. William Rains was a brother to John Rains, who married James Edwards' other daughter, Nancy on 25 December 1788²³. Both William and John Rains were nephews to Simon Kenton².

A few weeks later, George records his first military adventure in what he describes as the "*Limestone Treaty of 1787*". It was more of an exchange of prisoners, than any sort of peace treaty. He writes, "A

Frenchman & sergeant from among the prisoners Logan took in 1786 were sent to the Shawnee town to propose for an exchange of prisoners; Whites having about thirty. Quite a number gathered & met where Aberdeen now is. They had war dances; Indians hideously painted in their grandest war style, with an Indian beating music with a stick on a pair of old saddle bags. An effective scheme occurred: a young white woman, very pretty, who was taken in Ky on a wilderness road, had married an Indian & were now parted, affectionately embraced and wept at parting. Her father came and claimed her return, as she had no child. The winter before, the Indians had stolen the widow McGinnis' mare from Kenton's Station & the animal was now recognized, having been rode in by some of the Indians, by fully twenty different persons. Capt. Calvin said he would have the mare if it was necessary to scalp every Indian there to affect it. Boone & Kenton saw trouble brewing & bought the mare off its Indian claimant for a keg of whiskey, returned her to the needy widow & this allayed the rising storm."

He learned a great lesson from this and that was to fight and even kill when necessary, but to look for avenues of peace whenever possible. Daniel Boone and Simon Kenton had a great impact on his character and his military strategy in future years.

In the early months of 1788, two men from Lee's Station, named Blackburn and Stout, were out hunting buffalo. *"They had been hunting near head of North Fork & had their horses loaded with buffalo meat. Two Indians shot Stout, badly wounding him through the breast & lodging under his shoulder blade, cutting off some of his fingers & shattering the breech of his gun. He ran about a hundred yards & fell out of sight of Indians & was not imprisoned. Blackburn, a tame man, was taken & subsequently returned. Indians got the horses and meat. This was early in the morning and in a few hours, Stout reached Lee's Station."*

In late 1788 or the early months of 1789, Simon Kenton had been out hunting hogs when *"Indians attacked him some two miles away from the Station, they fired at him with a shot gun, & peppered his saddle skirt. He escaped & Indians decamped."* Later that year, a man named Sellars was killed. *"He was out hunting in neighborhood of mouth of Locust Creek in fall of 1789 & they cut off his nose & cut out his tongue."*

In August of 1790, George was commissioned as a Captain under the leadership of Captain Spencer Ricketts and Captain Laban Ricketts. *"Duncan McArthur & Nathaniel Beasley spied above Limestone some 50 miles and John Hughey & Laban Ricketts below about the same distance. The two latter, three quarters mile from the river, up Locust on their each side, found eighteen stones where Indians had whetted their knives, hence inferred that 18 warriors had prepared to make a foray at the settlements & went to Limestone & reported to Col. Henry Lee, who ordered out 15 men each for the companies of Capt. John Kenton and Spencer Ricketts, to assemble at the outside settlements.*

Capt. Spencer Ricketts had the command; Laban Ricketts, John Beck, George Edwards, Daniel Feagrin, John Hughey, Thomas McGinnis, John Dowden, & an old man named Cunningham collected.

The aim was to waylay the Indians on their return & struck Locust about three quarter of a mile from its mouth, left the trail & ran down to the river & above the mouth of Locust about three quarters of a mile where there was a bar on which the Indians went out and used because the river was quite low. Twelve had got over there, but six remained, and a sentinel closely watching their back trail. While Ricketts party came from below & Laban Ricketts had his gun up to shoot the sentinel, when the latter Indian covered him & threw himself upon the ground, crowed off driving the alarm yell, when one squatted in the grass & two jumped into the river, dove & swam & the other three ran up the river bottom, in front of the men pursuing them. George Edwards and Thomas McGinnis both shot at the Indians in the river & both burned some 40 yards. The Indians would dive & come up ten or fifteen feet ahead, shake their heads to prevent being made a mark, take an involuntary breath, & then dive again; these two shots brought the men back from up the river, & Capt. Daniel Feagrin aimed and shot one of the Indians & broke his right shoulder at some 70 yards distance. He swam a short distance with his left hand but soon sunk. The other one took quartering downstream, got over & was helped out nearly exhausted by his fellows on the opposite shore. Thomas McGinnis & John Dowden jumped into the only Indian canoe remaining on the south side, intending to pursue the surviving swimming Indians, but the frail bark canoe sank & had to abandon it.

When Beck, who had been chaining the 2 Indians up stream, came back & about the moment that old Capt. Feagrin shot an Indian in the river, & jumping down a bank of six or eight feet, he jumped upon an Indian concealed in the tall weeds & grass five or six feet high, without knowing he was there. Beck drew back his gun to fire, when the Indian seized it & dropped his arm & both now clinched & wrestled and Beck threw him off in less than a minute. George Edwards ran up & begged Beck not to kill the Indian, but to take him prisoner, but before there was time for a reply, Laban Ricketts ran up with his butcher knife and said, "I'll show him how the Indians cut my father-in-law Sellar's nose off and tongue out last Fall" & plunged the knife into the Indian who cried out, "Oh men, Oh men" & expired in less than a minute. He had 36 silver brooches in his scalp, a large silver half moon on his breast & a heavy silver arm band on each arm, evidence of his high rank as chief. Several of the men now placed or locked their hands together, forming a seat & carried Beck around in triumph.

Six horses were retaken which the Indians stole in Hamilton County. A party from Cynthiana region had pursued the Indian trail to the Ohio, found the evidence of a contest there & the dead Indian followed the trail of the whites to Washington & got their horses. The other property was sold at auction; Indian's guns and silver trinkets, bringing over a hundred dollars, which was equally divided among the party."

George had many more adventures like this over the next five years. Finally, on 03 August 1795, the Treaty of Greenville was signed in Greenville, Ohio between the Western Confederation, made up of a combination of Native American Tribes, and the United States.

On 24 August 1794, William Wood, Justice of the Peace for Mason County Kentucky, presided over the marriage of George Edwards and Susannah Downing in Washington, Kentucky¹¹. Over the years, George and Susannah had 15 children together; eight boys, seven girls, and only 13 living to maturity.

Shortly thereafter in 1795, George states that he settled the land where present-day Aberdeen is today¹. This land was comprised of 1,000 acres of land granted to Phillip Slaughter of the Commonwealth of Virginia by patent on 10 February 1789. Slaughter then hired an attorney named Robert Coleman to sell this property for him. Robert Coleman formally sold that property to James Edwards on 06 August 1796.⁹ George further states and once his father purchased the property; he "*named the place in commemoration of the place of his nativity.*"

Once he settled the land, George established a ferry service between Aberdeen and Limestone, Kentucky. These licenses can be found in the Northwest Territorial Papers, provided free of charge on the Ohio Genealogical Society Website¹⁰.

Page 372 - "*June the 16th. 1796 Licenses for keeping Ferries this Day granted to George Edwards of the Town of Aberdeen and Hamilton County - and Heath of Clarksville in Knox County from the Landings opposite the houses where they now reside across the Ohio river to the shore of Kentucky and opposite their respective Landings -- to continue in Effect one Year.*"

Page 422 - "*June the 16th, 1797 - George Edwards of Aberdeen in Hamilton County was authorized to keep a Ferry across the Ohio River from the Landing against the house of his residence to the Shores of Kentucky and opposite the same for the Term of one Year from the Date.*"

Shortly thereafter, on 11 Jul 1797, George was promoted to the commission of Lt. Colonel of the Northwest Territory Militia¹⁰. "Col. Winthrop Sargent now acting as Governor and Commander in Chief of the Militia in the Territory of the United States northwest of the river Ohio has thought proper to make the following military Appointments for the County of Adams: Lieut. Col. George Edwards."

A year later, on 12 September 1798, George is found serving as a juror in the first jury trial in Adams County, Ohio. "At this session of the court, the first trial jury was summoned to sit in judgment in the case of the United States v. William Osburn charged with the larceny of a hog, the property of John Lindsey. This jury was composed of Daniel Collins, Archibald Morrison, Obadiah Stout, James Williams, Daniel Bailes, John White, David Bradford, George Edwards, John Worley, William Dunbar, Joseph Collier, and John Hamilton, "who being elected, tried, and sworn the truth to speak upon issue joined do say that the defendant did not feloniously steal, take and convey away a hog as in manner and form as the bill against him hath alleged, and do find he is not guilty."

Not only did George operate a ferry along the Ohio River, but we know from historical records that he also operated a Mill along Fishing Gut Creek. During the June session of the 1801 Court of General Quarter Session of the Peace in Adams County, Ohio, it was ordered that a road be built from Holmes' Mill on the east fork of Eagle Creek to Edwards' Ferry. Also, the court ordered a road be built from George Edwards' mill on Fishing Gut Creek to Ellis' Ferry, on the other side of town¹².

He was still living in Aberdeen, along Fishing Gut Creek, when his father wrote his last will and testament on 09 February 1803. *"In the Name of God, Amen, I, James Edwards of Adams County in the State of Ohio, being in a weakly state of body tho of sound mind, memory & understanding and calling to mind the uncertainty of this transitory life do make and publish and declare this my last Will and Testament in the manner and form following vis: first of all I give and bequeath into my beloved son, Geo. Edwards ten acres of ground on the lower side of Fishing Gut to include house running up gut with Rains until it – line crossed the same. I give and bequeath also to him ten acres of ground around the mill on same gut, to begin at the lower corner of Scotts garden and run up the hill so as to take in ten acres to him his heirs and assigns forever. Also I give and bequeath to my said son Geo. Edwards the whole of the land and premises together with appurtenances that is now in my hand (commonly called Aberdeen) being part of a survey made in the name of Philip Slaughter binding on Great River Ohio."*¹³

In a letter dated 24 July 1878 between S. W. D. Stone and his brother, James Edwards Stone, George Edwards is discussed as having sold his property in Aberdeen to Jane and William Rains in 1806 and moved out to Decatur, Byrd, Ohio^{6,12}. The census records available to us support this information as well¹⁴. He purchased land along Eagle Creek in Byrd Township where he raised and sold race horses. From 13 September 1809 to 1812, George served the Byrd Township as a Justice of the Peace¹².

On 18 Jun 1812, he served as a Major¹⁷ in the War of 1812 in defense of Fort Wayne under the command of Col. Allen Trimble^{1,15,16}. He had been given his own battalion to command, under the direction of General Hull. Allen Trimble did not like Gen. Hull and states in his biography that when speaking in confidence to Gen. McArthur, he described Hull thus, *"He is not the kind of man we want, and I fear the result of our campaign; 'twill be disastrous."* When they reached Fort Wayne, their Indian guide, Ash, convinced one of the Captains not to pursue a certain Indian group because they were Miami Indians and friendly. Trimble, however, stated that his own *"native instinct"* told him otherwise, so he had Ash arrested on treason and dismissed¹⁶.

Ash had a wife who was a member of the Miami Indian tribe, so he knew the Miami Indians well. Trimble's lust for power and prestige kept him from listening to anyone's reasoning that went against his own. This is where animosity arose between him and George Edwards. George believed Ash when he told him that the attack would be dangerous, as they only had 407 men and would be fighting 800-900 Indians. Gen. Harrison had promised provisions for his 157 men and horses, but those provisions had not arrived. George discussed their situation with his battalion and they agreed it would be too dangerous to attack with their current numbers and lack of supplies, so he chose to return to Fort St. Mary's for reinforcements¹⁶.

Trimble saw this as mutiny and attempted to have George Edwards court-martialed, but during the court-martial proceedings, George Edwards resigned his commission and requested to return to Ohio. Trimble agreed to drop the charges¹⁶ and George returned to Brown County where he formed the 2nd Ohio Volunteer Regiment, where he was named Colonel. In July and August of 1813, he took his regiment to fight at Sandusky¹. Then from 13 September 1814 – 09 December 1814, he served as a Private under the command of Gen. McArthur in Canada^{1,15}. Once receiving an Honorable Discharge, he was granted 120 acres of bounty land in the Dakotas¹⁵.

Also in 1813, George was initiated into The Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of Ohio. He joined the Scioto Lodge #6, but they lost their charter in 1816, so he had his membership transferred to the Friendship Lodge #32 in Decatur, Ohio. His transfer was accepted on 03 July 1816 and in 1818, he was promoted to Jr. Deacon. He remained with this lodge until 1824, when they, too, lost their charter¹⁸.

During this time, George was beginning to become involved in Ohio politics. In July of 1818, the Ohio House of Representatives named George Edwards director of a commission *"to purchase the land and lay off a town, at the said place fixed on by said commissioners, who thereupon, gave bond and*

*security, in the sum of twenty thousand dollars, for the faithful performance of his duties as commissioner.*¹⁹” This town would then be used as the county seat for the newly formed Brown County. He did as requested and in 1819, purchased land and laid out a town called “Bridgewater” along Straight Creek, which served as the geographical center for Brown County²⁰. The county seat was later moved to Georgetown in 1821. He served the Ohio House of Representatives with distinction from 1820-1824, then again in 1827, 1830 & 1832²¹.

On 09 November 1830, George purchased .25 acres of land in Russellville, Ohio to be used as a family burial ground²². This cemetery is now called the West-Evans Cemetery². He remained on his farm in Decatur until his wife’s death on 06 August 1853. He buried her in the West-Evans Cemetery with the inscription: “She was a kind and affectionate wife. A fond mother and a friend to all”². On 13 July 1860, the United States Census shows George living with his daughter Talitha and her husband, David Thorpe in Jackson, Ohio. On 22 July 1870, the United States Census shows George living with his youngest son, Orange, in Ripley, Ohio.

George died on 28 October 1870 and was buried next to his wife in the West-Evans Cemetery with the inscription, “Children, obey your parents”². Lyman Draper described George as being “*nearly six feet, slim form & slight complexion; Kindly and genial in his disposition.*”¹

It is clear from the historical records that George Edwards lived a long, full life and during that time he served his country, his state, his town and his family with both honor and distinction. He wasn’t born into the role of a leader, but the experiences of his life shaped him and made him into a true leader.

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