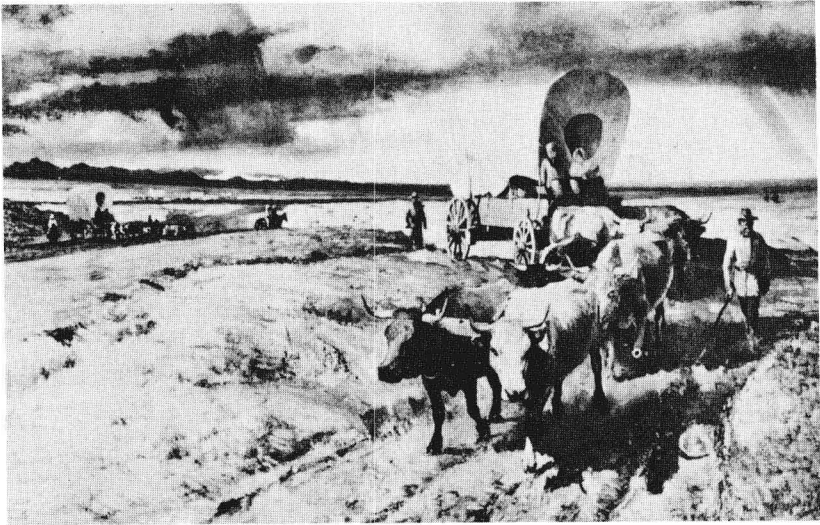


Westward to Alki

The Story of David and Louisa Denny

By Gordon Newell

A Seattle Historical Society Publication
through a research grant provided by
Victor W.S. Denny, Jr.



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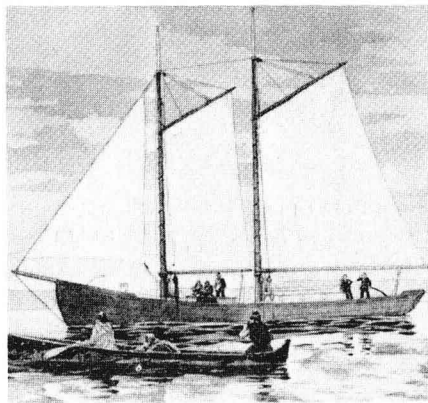
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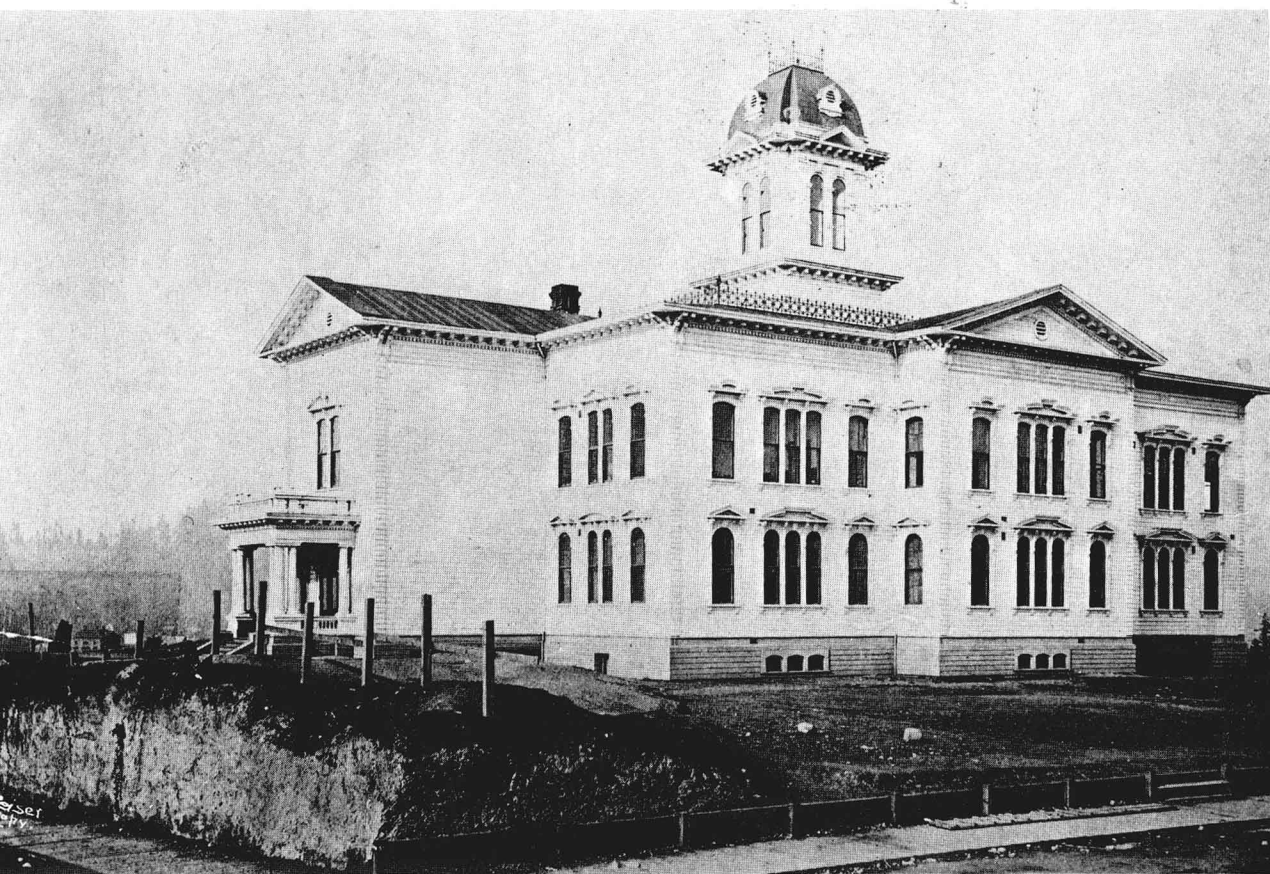
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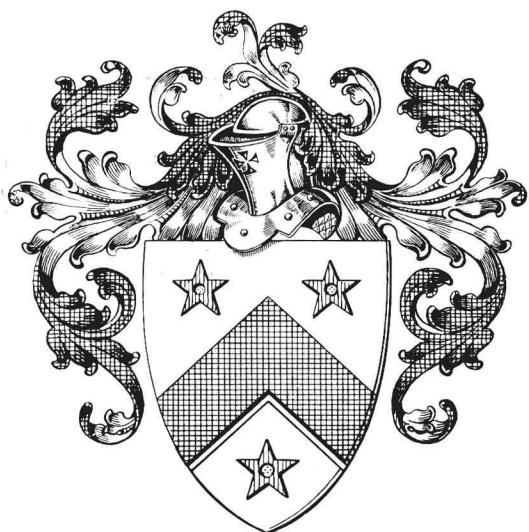


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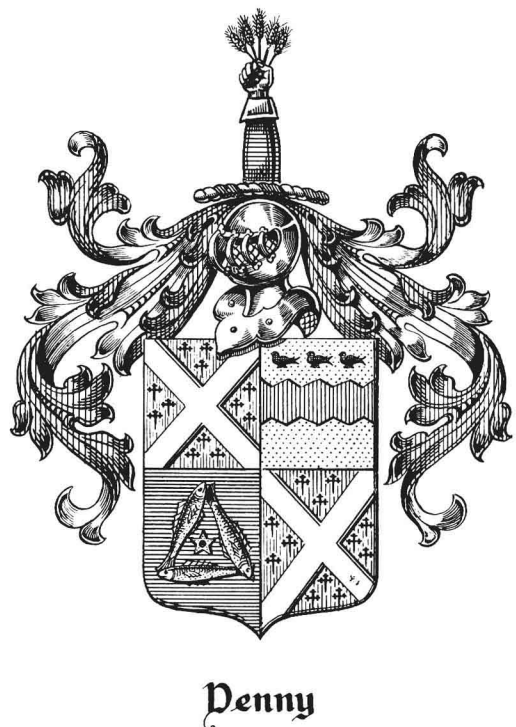
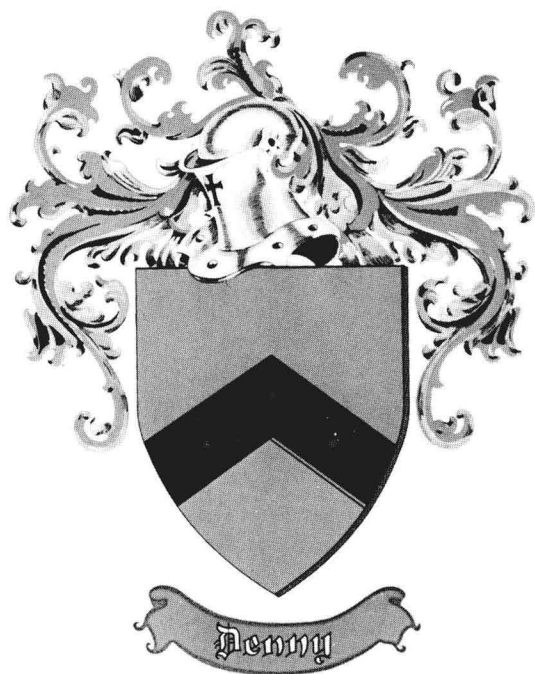
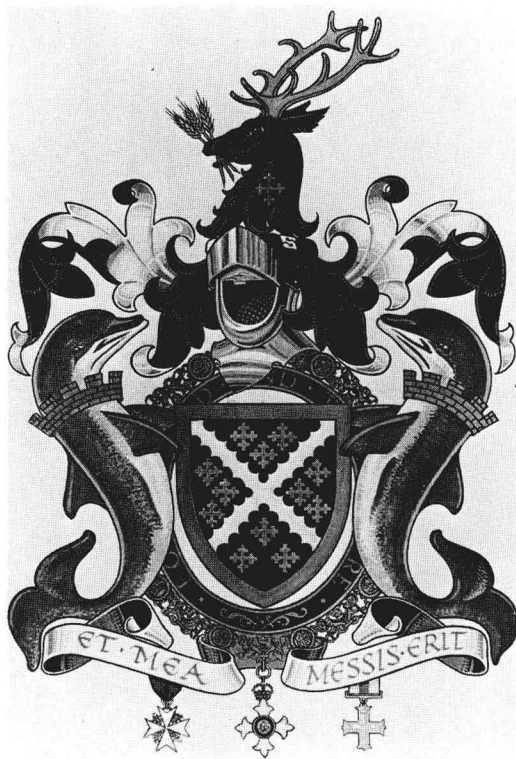
**Westward
to Alki**



Old Denny School, located on the original David Denny claim.



Le Danneys



QUARTERED COAT OF ARMS USED BY SIR ANTHONY DENNY AND
SUCCESSORS IN SUBSTITUTION OF THE ANCIENT DENNY ARMS.

Coats of Arms of various branches of the Denny family.

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FOREWORD

My good friend H. W. McCurdy has often quoted to me the words of Macaulay . . . *"People who take no pride in the noble achievements of remote ancestors, will never achieve anything worthy to be remembered with pride by remote descendants"* . . . while urging me to have recorded the story of my grandparents, David and Louisa Denny.

I have decided to do so because I believe that story has not been fully told by past historians, and because I do "take pride in the noble achievements" of these not so remote ancestors.

As a matter of fact, my grandmother, Louisa Boren Denny, was an alert and vital woman well into my teen-age years, and as a boy I often listened spellbound to her personal reminiscences of the landing at Alki, the Battle of Seattle, and the details of pioneer

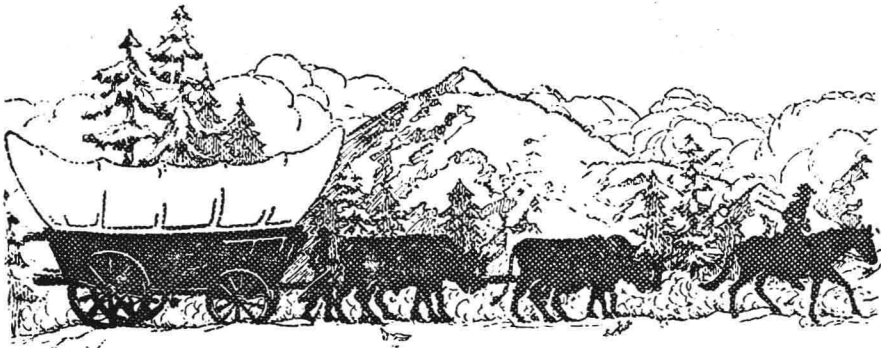
life in the then primitive and isolated Northwest frontier. I remember particularly her repeating to me from memory the moving oration of Chief Seattle which he delivered in his native tongue at the signing of the Point Elliott Treaty, and her conviction that his noble words, delivered in his native tongue, had indeed been translated accurately.

When my generation is gone, people and events of pioneer days on Puget Sound will, in fact, become remote chapters in history books, for there will be no one left who knew and talked to those who lived and made that history.

This, then, is the story of David Denny, who was, quite literally, Seattle's first citizen, and of his "sweetbriar bride", Louisa.

It is a story they were certainly too busy, and I think too modest, to write themselves.

Victor W.S. Denny, Jr.
Seattle, Washington



"Every part of this country is sacred to my people. Every hillside, every valley, every plain and grove has been hallowed by some fond memory or some sad experience of my tribe. Even the rocks, which seem to lie dumb as they swelter in the sun along the silent sea shore in solemn grandeur thrill with memories of past events connected with the lives of my people; the very dust under your feet responds more lovingly to our footsteps than to yours, because it is the ashes of our ancestors, and our bare feet are conscious of the sympathetic touch, for the soil is rich with the life of our kindred.

"The noble braves, fond mothers, glad, happy-hearted maidens, and even the little children, who lived and rejoiced here for a brief season, and whose very names are not forgotten, still love these sombre solitudes, and their deep fastnesses which at eventide grow shadowy with the presence of dusky spirits.

"When the Red Man shall have perished from this earth and the memory of my tribe shall have become a myth among the White Men these shores will swarm with the invisible dead of my tribe and when your children's children think themselves alone in the field, the store, the shop, upon the highway, or in the silence of the pathless woods, they will not be alone. In all the earth there is no place dedicated to solitude. At night when the streets of your cities and villages are silent and you think them deserted, they will throng with the returning hosts that once filled and still love this beautiful land. The White Man will never be alone."

"Let him be just and deal kindly with my people, for the dead are not powerless.

"Dead—did I say? There is no death. Only a change of worlds!"

*... closing words of Chief Seattle's oration
Point Elliott treaty grounds
January 23, 1855*



Only known photograph of Chief Seattle.

INTRODUCTION

Smaquamox

The empty bay, its five miles of curving shoreline backed by seven hills crowned with a centuries-old jungle of towering evergreen trees and shoulder-high undergrowth, appeared devoid of all human life. The only movement was the restless tossing of the giant trees and the surge of salt water on the beach below; the only sound the moaning of the autumn wind and the hiss of the cold deluge of rain sweeping in before it from the vast reaches of the Pacific Ocean.

It was the evening of November 12, 1851, and the place was Elliott Bay, so named ten years before in honor of Chaplain J. L. Elliott of the United States Navy exploration party led by Lieutenant Charles Wilkes to make the first American survey of Puget Sound. In the summer of 1841 Wilkes' cartographers had drawn a beautiful and remarkably accurate chart of the wilderness harbor, but the explorers were not impressed with its future potential and did not include it among the possible sites for commercial development.

Even before the arrival of the Wilkes party, in 1833, Dr. William Tolmie, chief factor on Puget Sound for the Hudson's Bay Company, had scouted the area as a possible site for a trading post, but rejected it because of "an unproductive soil" and "the inconvenience of going at least one-half mile for a supply of water". Tolmie was referring to the only shorelands that weren't covered with an impenetrable forest . . . the low and sandy peninsula at the southern entrance of the bay called "Smaquamox" by the Duwamish and Suquamish Indians, and now known as Alki Point. Tolmie had described it thus in his journal:

"It is about a mile in length and from one hundred to one hundred and fifty yards in extent, raised about thirty feet above sea level,

toward which it presented a steep, clayey bank. Surface flat and dotted with small pines, but soil composed almost entirely of sand. . . At its northern extremity the coast is indented with a bay five or six miles wide, and perhaps three long, into which a river flows . . . the south side of bay and river is inhabited by Tuamish Indians, of whom we saw several parties along the coast, miserably poor and destitute of fire arms."

Eighteen years later the "Tuamish"* Indians still camped occasionally on the peninsula they called Smaquamox and lonely Elliott Bay seemingly unchanged, with darkness already shrouding the trackless forest to the east and night coming down with the November rain along the beach to merge with the luminous haze of Indian campfires. From the lighthouse off Cape Flattery in the open Pacific 120 miles to the northwest, and the candle-lit windows of Olympia, a village of 150 white settlers at the head of Puget Sound 57 miles to the south, no sail or running lights of any ship marked the dark, wind-whipped waters of the Inland Sea.

But change had come to Elliott Bay and it would never be the same again, for out on the low-shored and lightly-timbered peninsula of Smaquamox was the beginning of a city with a white population of one . . . a youth of nineteen, wounded, sick, hungry and huddled, Indian style, in a wet blanket in the embryonic city's only building . . . a log cabin without a roof.

*White settlers had difficulty in adapting the guttural speech of the Northwest Indians to written form, and Dr. Tolmie was no exception. The general accepted spelling of his "Tuamish" has become Duwamish. Tolmie referred to the affiliated Suquamish tribe as the "So-quo-mish" and to Chief Seattle or Sealth of the confederated tribes as "See-alt".



Remains of the original log cabin at Alki Point, 1893.

The single white resident of the future city of Seattle had crossed the plains that year from Illinois and for three weeks he had been alone in the sombre solitude, except for visits from the Indians. A few days before, while working on the unfinished cabin, he had slashed his foot to the bone with an ax and the wound had left him unable to work or hunt for food. He was shaking with malarial chills and fever and his jaws ached with the agony of neuralgia. That afternoon, hobbling back on an improvised crutch from an inspection of the future townsite, he had found a family of

skunks in possession of his doubtful shelter.

Having survived the crossing of the plains and mountains by prairie schooner and a 200-mile hike through the howling wilderness from the Columbia River to Elliott Bay, the teen-aged pioneer was no fool. He waited patiently in the rain until the skunks had consumed the last of his food and departed. The only remaining amenities were an improvised and leaky shelter of fir boughs, a small package of tea that the skunks had spurned and the unconquerable spirit of a boy of nineteen named David Thomas Denny.

CHAPTER ONE

Londonderry to the Shenandoah

The arrival of David Denny on America's last frontier marked the culmination of westward migration by many generations of his family over centuries of time and ten thousand miles of land and sea. A restless urge to explore new lands and build new homes in the wilderness had been in the Denny blood from the dim beginnings of recorded history.

Surviving records of the time indicate that members of the Denny family were with William of Normandy in 1066 when he conquered England and its Saxon defenders, but it seems likely that the family's beginnings were in the runic pre-history of the Viking sea wanderers. In Normandy the French spelling of the name was *le Daney* or *le Deney*, literally "the Dane", derived, genealogists believe, from Bernard the Dane, the Danish prince who, with his brother Rollo, conquered Normandy and whose descendants moved westward again across the English Channel in the eleventh century.

The first written records of a member of the Denny family in England refer to Geoffrey Denny, born about 1329 and later listed as "Patron of the Living" of the Church of All Hallows Staining, believed to have been the first stone church in London. Geoffrey appears to have been ancestor of kinsman of most branches of the Denny family.

In subsequent years the family settled throughout England and its branches extended to Scotland. The ancient town of Denny near Dumbarton probably took its name from one of these early settlers of the Denny family. Gilmori de Deny (William of Denny),

a Baille of Dumbarton, was one of the first to appear in the written records of Scotland. It was his descendants who formed the famous Dumbarton shipbuilding firm of William Denny and Brothers.

Others felt the recurring call of the Viking wanderlust and migrated again, this time from Greenloch and Dumbarton to the northern Irish county of Ulster.

It was one of these "Ulster Scots", David Denny, Sr., the great grandfather of young David Thomas Denny who, in the late 1730's, continued the family migration that began in Denmark in the dark ages and ended at last, in 1851, on the shores of Puget Sound.

In the three-volume *Denny Genealogy* by Margaret Collins Denny Dixon and Elizabeth Chapman Denny Vann, the origin of the Ulster Scots and the forces which shaped their character are described as follows:

"For centuries the English Crown had striven to subdue the turbulent Celtic Irish people. Following the Irish revolt in the time of Queen Elizabeth, more and more emphasis was placed on the settlement in Ireland of Englishmen who would be attached to the Crown, and who might help in bringing the Irish to acquiescence in English rule. Francis Bacon was advocating these 'plantations' in 1606 and the title of Baronet was created in 1611, to be granted to English gentry who would emigrate to Ireland.

"After various Irish insurrections, about two million acres in the north of Ireland, almost the whole of the six northern counties, came into the possession of the Crown by 'the

ancient Roman policy' of confiscation. Since landholding was a personal relationship between king and liege, it was customary to give Crown lands to those who were loyal. Thus, when James VI of Scotland came to the throne of England as James I, it was judged that further 'plantations' would be a solution for the troublesome 'Irish Question'. This was at first planned solely for the English, but it was natural for the Scottish friends of the king to wish to share in his bounty, and about 1610 the Irish land was also opened to certain Scotsmen, who might arrange to bring over Scottish settlers to Northern Ireland. These Scots came mostly from the Lowlands and were almost as English as if they had come from the North of England. While the treatment of the Irish is said to have been less severe than the treatment of disloyal persons in Scotland, yet it was an 'iron age' and men from the 'Border' of England and Scotland would have few scruples in subduing troublesome neighbors, it was hoped. For a variety of reasons large numbers of Scottish immigrants were found and for many years they poured across the Irish Sea to the 'free land' offered them in Ireland."

But, as the *Genealogy* points out, life in Ireland proved to be no bed of roses for the Ulster Scots. Within a few years the hostility of the displaced Irish was matched by that of the English monarchy:

"By the time Charles I came to the throne in 1625, religious difficulties between the Irish Catholics and the Presbyterian invaders was well developed. Furthermore, Charles I believed in the absolute authority of the Crown. The independent Scots in Ireland were opposed to absolutism in government, were dissenters from the established English Church, and naturally fell back on their difference in religion as one means of expressing this opposition. This brought forth retaliatory measures from the English government. So, as early as 1636, Scottish clergymen, who had been deposed from their chapels in Ireland, sailed for America with their flocks in the *Eagle Wing*, but were driven back by storms. All this religious disturbance was little help toward the king's plans for securing the submission and conformity of the Irish.

"In October, 1641, there was a sudden rebellion of the oppressed Irish and they took this occasion to slaughter a great number of

the unwelcome Presbyterian foreigners who had settled on their lands. The number killed has been reported to be as low as eight thousand and as high as two-hundred thousand, depending on the bias of the person doing the reporting. Naturally the armies of the king punished this rebellion with equal ferocity, but the king exerted himself to bring the hostilities to an end. This civil war lasted from 1641 to 1653.

"Not many Scots came into Ireland in the next few years, and the 'type' of character which came to be known as the 'Ulster Scot' began to be fixed at this time. By 1660, a state document said: 'There are 40,000 Irish and 80,000 Scots in Ulster ready to bear arms', this in spite of the fact that, after the 1641 massacres, many returned to Scotland and others had turned to the New World for refuge.

"With the restoration of Charles II to the throne, immediate proceedings were taken by Parliament against Non-Conformists, and the Presbyterian Church in Ulster was an early target. These harsh laws caused further migration between 1660-1665, and this continued under his successor, James II.

"When the English Revolution of 1688 began, the Irish Catholics rose in support of James II. Many Presbyterians who opposed William and Mary emigrated to America at that time. Ulster Presbyterians who declared allegiance to William and Mary, claimants to the throne, remained in Ireland. Then came the famous Londonderry siege, lasting one hundred and five days, and the final overthrow of the Jacobites.

"But, even though they had supported the claim of William and Mary to the throne, the fact that the Ulster Scots were Dissenters from the Church of England brought immediate severe measures upon them. They were prohibited from holding public office and being married by their own ministers (which was not legalized until 1737). Their chapels were closed, they were not allowed to hold schools for their children. They must be buried by the established church. They had become virtual outlaws. Dean Swift said the people were in worse condition than the peasants of France or the vassals in Germany and Poland.

"Their economic condition had become extremely bad. They had brought with them from Scotland their sheep culture and the

weaving of woollen cloth, but laws of 1698 forbade the exportation of woolens, save to England and Wales, which ruined the woollen trade. Instead, the manufacture of linen, in which they were not skilled, was decreed. Many were driven from their farms at the expiration of their leases. From 1714 to 1719 there was insufficient rainfall, the flax failed, the sheep died. In 1716 there were severe frosts and in 1718 smallpox ravaged the section. Their high taxes were ruinous. A sympathetic investigator, Archbishop King, reported: 'I cannot see how any more can be got from them except we take away their potatoes and butter-milk or flay them and sell their skins'. Farming was discouraged by the English landlords in favor of sheep grazing. There was insufficient imported food and hundreds died of famine. Even so, they considered the restrictions on religion a heavier burden. 'They were willing to starve peacefully but not to be thwarted in their views of right and heaven'.

"With the accession of George I in 1714 the real ferment for emigration appeared and 'went through Ulster like a fever'. Many persons came to America in 1716. Five or six hundred came between 1718 and 1720. Six thousand came in 1720. In 1729 six crowded vessels arrived in Philadelphia in one week. The great migration continued to 1750, until a third of the population of Ulster had departed. One man wrote from America: 'I am of the opinion that all the north of Ireland will be over here in a little time.'"

According to the most reliable sources, David Denny, Sr., remained stubbornly on the family land near Londonderry until the late 1730's. Having done everything possible to make conditions unbearable for the Ulster Scots, the authorities had, by that time, taken further measures to discourage their seeking new lives in the New World. When the Irish Parliament tried to pass a measure banning migration, "it only stimulated departures."

The "Landlords and Tythers", who were profiting from the deprivations of the Ulster Scot tenants, persecuted shipowners and master mariners engaged in the emigrant trade, as well as printers who produced advertisements for overseas colonists. One man who threatened to whip any such advertiser was cautioned by a judge that "It must be done according to law."

Glowing reports from America were officially denied, but the long land leases given to the Scots in North Ireland were expiring, and could only be renewed at ruinous cost. The knowledge that one could have fertile land and religious liberty in America could not be suppressed and David Denny finally joined the great exodus.

One of his granddaughters (Isabella Denny Hubbard), when a very old woman, recalled that David had left Ireland on account of the "great derth", and that he had paid the passage of poorer neighbors. This first "Denny party" of American pioneers landed in Pennsylvania and settled there among the other Ulster Scots who, according to the *Denny Genealogy*, "had been established by the Proprietors beyond the Quaker settlements on the seaboard as a buffer against the Indians".

History was repeating itself, as it would continue to do in the saga of the descendants of old David Denny in America. Just as the first Ulster Scots were granted lands in North Ireland in the days of James I as a shield against the rebellious Irish, so those of a century later . . . tougher, hardier and more independent than the Quakers and German Mennonites, Amish, Dunkers and Moravians who had later migrated to Pennsylvania in search of religious freedom . . . were encouraged to establish a new frontier in the Cumberland Valley and southwestern Pennsylvania.

Such was the sturdy stock of which George Washington said that if the Revolution were lost and he had but one banner left, he would rally his Scotch-Irish troopers and plant a new Republic on top of the Blue Ridge Mountains.

Although family records of this period are incomplete and frequently conflicting, it appears that David Denny, soon after his arrival in America, joined the Ulster Scots pioneers on the frontier in Lancaster County, where records indicate that he was living in 1744. It was there that he married a Margaret Denny, possibly a distant cousin, and that the first of their seven children was born, probably in 1741.

Here it was, too, that the family had its first, but certainly not its last, encounter, with Indian hostility, the *Denny Genealogy* recording:

"Their peaceful existence was rudely shattered when John Armstrong, a trader, and his two servants, were murdered by a Delaware Indian. Such an event was a threat to every settler's home. A posse was organized, the bodies were found and buried. The murderer was brought in and imprisoned at 'Lancaster'. On April 19, 1744, David Denny was one of nine men who signed a deposition setting forth the facts of the search and capture".

The growing family later pushed on to the Brandywine neighborhood of Chester County, where records of 1757 indicate that David Denny was a member of the crew of a "Bat-toe, hired in ye service of ye prov'ce of Pennsylvania."*

Thereafter the name of David Denny, Sr., disappears from the records of Pennsylvania and it appears that the restless pioneer was smitten by the "Virginia Fever" . . . the pre-Revolutionary equivalent of the "Oregon Fever" that would, a century later, send his grandson and great grandsons half way across a continent to the last frontier.

The Blue Ridge Mountains had been an effective barrier to western expansion during the first hundred years of colonial settlement, but now a way to the Shenandoah Valley had been opened from the Cumberland Valley of Pennsylvania. David and Margaret Denny and their seven children joined the migration across the Blue Ridge in 1764, traveling as would the later pioneers, by covered wagon. In March of that year David had bought 194 acres of land in the newly settled Frederick County from one William Hoge, for which he paid "100 pounds current money" and, two months later, an additional 235 acres "near Round Hill on the Draughts of Hoge Creek" from Isaac Greenleafe.

It was on those lands that the sturdy old Ulster Scots pioneer died in the summer of 1777. His will and inventory of estate provide

an interesting insight into the material accomplishments of his forty-odd years as a frontiersman in the New World and the social customs of his era.

He left his "well Beloved" wife, Margaret, a life interest in his dwelling house and garden. Since household furniture commonly belonged to the husband, even the wife's own spinning wheel was listed in the will as a bequest to her, as was "the bed on which we usually lay", and a chest. He also left Margaret "one bake pan, one of the four stew pots and all the pewter and earthenware". The rest of his personal estate went to his fifth son, Robert, who was to pay his mother 10 pounds a year, as well as "provide food, fuel and care in sickness".

No tables or chairs were listed in the household inventory, but there was a "liberry" of books, complete with book case. There were a few farming tools, but a high value was placed on his blacksmith's "belles" (bellows) and other iron and wood working implements. The "waggon of cloth", (the Conestoga wagon that had carried the family and their goods from Pennsylvania), with horses and harness, was valued at 102 pounds. By custom, the homestead was left to the two youngest sons, Robert and Samuel. Two cows each were left to his sons, William John and Samuel.

As the hard-earned fruits of nearly half a century in the New World, David Denny left behind him considerable property, a daughter, six sturdy sons, numerous grandchildren . . . and a pioneering heritage that would lead his descendants across the plains and mountains to found a new city and a new frontier.

**Pennsylvania Archives*, 5th Series, Vol. 1, p. 100

CHAPTER TWO

From the Shenandoah to the Mississippi

Robert Denny, fifth son of David, was born during the family's stay in Pennsylvania . . . in 1753 . . . and was a boy of eleven during the journey through the Blue Ridge Mountains to the Shenandoah Valley. It appears that his father, the possessor of that rare frontier "liberry" of books, saw to it that his son received at least the rudiments of a formal education.

The year after his father's death, in May of 1778, Robert married 20-year-old Rachel Thomas and, less than a year later, enlisted in the Revolutionary Army as a private, serving successively as quartermaster sergeant, ensign, paymaster and lieutenant. At one time, it is recorded in the *Denny Genealogy*, "he was given the painful duty of raiding the gun shop of his eldest brother Walter", who had married the daughter of a wealthy Virginia family and become an avowed Tory. On another occasion he was placed in charge of Hessian prisoners of war captured at "Little York". Legend has it that when Lord Fairfax, who held large estates in the Shenandoah Valley and was an ardent Tory, saw so many Hessian soldiers marching toward Lieutenant Denny's stockade, he became convinced that the English had won the war, and suffered an apoplectic stroke when he learned the true state of affairs.

After the war and following the death of his mother, with whose care he had been charged, Robert Denny was free to follow the seemingly inborn family urge to move westward. This he did in 1787, setting out with his wife and three small sons for Kentucky, possibly in the Conestoga wagon that had brought the family from Pennsylvania 23 years earlier. They settled in Lincoln County, where the former revolutionary army officer "secured at least 333 acres on Shawnee Run". Within the next few years he was followed by three of his brothers, William and Samuel, who had also been officers in the Army of the newly-formed United States, and John, a surveyor.

Over the years Robert and Rachel became the parents of seven sons and two daughters, all imbued with the stern Presbyterian moral code of their Ulster Scots ancestors. As the sons of Robert Denny grew up and were married, slavery grew increasingly distasteful to them and, one by one, the third generation families packed their goods and chattels and moved across the Ohio River to the free Territory of Indiana.

In November, 1808, Robert Denny's wife of 30 years died and was buried at Shawnee Run Baptist Church. There was nothing to keep him longer in Kentucky and he set about to sell his property there. By 1813, at the age of