



# BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

## CLIMATE AND LANDSCAPE

Today, Pricketts Fort is located in the Monongahela Valley in what is now Marion County. In 1774, when Pricketts Fort was built, though, it was located in Monongahela County, which extended from the Allegheny Mountains west, and from what is now Pittsburgh, South to the mouth of the Little Kanawha River. The land was covered with an immense forest, allowing very little sunshine to reach the forest floor. One account of the forest at that time described the trees as so massive, thick, and tall, with matted branches, that even at noon on the clearest day, it was still dim and cool. At the time of the settlement at Pricketts Fort, summers were much cooler than they are today. The evenings were cool and the mornings were often uncomfortably cold with heavy dew. There was also little rain during the summer months. Winters set in much earlier than they do now. Frost would set in the first half of September and by the middle of October, you would have seen substantial snows, lasting to the first part of March.

Among the great trees that made up the forest were oak (white, red, black and Spanish), walnut (black and white), ash, maple, hickory, chestnut (now gone), beech, spruce, poplar and hemlock. Some of the lesser growth were crabapple, dogwood, service, laurel, rhododendron (state flower), wild plum, persimmon and many others. These trees helped house and feed the early settlers. They supplied the wood for furniture and cooking utensils. They were also the home of wild beasts that the early settlers depended on for their food, like bear, deer, elk and in some places, buffalo. The early settlers feared the panther and wolf, for they were numerous in this area, so much so, that there was a bounty on the wolf. Also, the rattlesnake and copperhead were very troublesome. The early settlers used the furs and skins of some of these animals for clothing and trade, like the bear and deer.

Cutting through this great forest were many streams and rivers filled with beaver and otter. These were trapped for their pelts, so thoroughly that 225 years later, they are just coming back to this area. The streams were abundant with many kinds of fish, like trout, pike and muskellunge (musky) that were also used as a food source by the early settlers.

In early times, in the midst of this great forest, there were meadows (like the great meadow where George Washington built Fort Necessity). These meadows were used by the settlers to feed their livestock. Orchards of wild plum, crabapple and persimmons were also here. One plum orchard was said to be over 100 acres and was used by everyone in the area. In the fall, everyone would go to the forest and gather nuts for winter. This entire gathering was done with a party-like atmosphere. In the springtime, when the sap of the sugar maple ran, the people gathered to make maple sugar. One big drawback to this great forest was that the land would have to be cleared to be able to build a home and farm.



## NATURAL RESOURCES

There were many resources for the early settlers, and later, for their descendents. The forest provided food, shelter, heat, and lumber. The rivers provided food, transportation, water to run the mills, and industry.

Fertile soil allowed settlers to farm and raise livestock. Coal was discovered in western Virginia in 1747 and was used by blacksmiths in the forge. Coal was initially just picked up off the surface of the land. Wild animals were a valuable resource because of fur trade and the dependency the settler had on wild game. The first iron furnace west of Allegheny Mountains was Redstone in Monongahela Valley, built in 1789. The first iron furnace in this area was built in 1794 at Cheat Lake. Both would have had big impact on Pricketts Creek area.

## ENTERTAINMENT

During the time of the Fort and other early settlements, much of the entertainment was centered on everyday life. For young boys, some of the pastimes were to imitate birds like turkeys or owls or bleat like a young fawn. This would later help them in their hunting skills and warfare. Throwing a tomahawk would help in hand-eye coordination. Boys also ran, jumped, wrestled, and fished. Dancing was entertainment for both sexes, young and old, as was story telling. Rifle matches and horse racing were very common for men.

At this time, there were not very many games and toys for young children. Unlike today, children had very little spare time to play. One of the games they did play was called quoits. This was the forerunner of horseshoes. Pitching horseshoes began about the time of the Revolutionary War. Button on a String was a serrated lead disk threaded on a long double string that could be pulled back and forth to make the disk spin. As it spins, it makes a buzzing sound. Whistles were another toy that could easily be made from a piece of wood. By the time of the Job Prickett House, children and grown-ups had a little more free time, so more toys and games could be played, like toy soldiers, tops, marbles, and wagons.

## DIET

The diet of the early settlers consisted mainly of wild meat or pork. Cattle were seldom used for their meat because they produced milk, butter, and occasionally cheese. Homes always had a garden from a half acre to an acre. These were called truck patches. This is where corn was raised for roasting ears. Pumpkins, beans, squashes, and turnips rounded out the gardens. Tomatoes were not eaten at this time for they were thought to be poisonous. When times were lean, pone or mush was eaten for breakfast and dinner. Coffee was unheard of west of the mountains. Tea was used on the special occasions. Settlers mainly drank water and small beer (non-alcoholic).