

The Fourteenth State

Three others vied for statehood

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This series of articles, which describe a book of Vermont's history one at a time, is called *The Fourteenth State* because of Vermont's status as the first state to join the union of the original thirteen British colonies after they became organized in 1789 as the United States of America. The aspiration of the independent Vermont republic to become number fourteen was always clear, and is etched on its copper pennies in Latin: "stella quarta decima," the fourteenth star.

But there were three other territories that sought statehood and failed where Vermont succeeded. These are described in "The Fourteenth Commonwealths: Vermont and the States That Failed," by William Brewster, published 1960 in Philadelphia. I know little about the author except that he was descended from the Mayflower passenger and Puritan separatist of the same name. Author Brewster had an earlier book that published some of the writings of his ancestor, "October Farm: From the Journals and Diaries of William Brewster."

The other three would-be states were Westmoreland in western Pennsylvania, Franklin in North Carolina and Tennessee, and Transylvania in Virginia.

Vermont's achievement of statehood was, of course, laborious, and was strongly opposed by the politically powerful New York as well as by the Articles of Confederation Congress and the Continental Congress. Factors favoring Vermont included the Federalists' need to balance the increasing power of the south. And one of Vermont's major adversaries, the powerful James Duane, the moving spirit of the land jobbers, had been sidelined with a New York judgeship.

The Haldimand negotiations were certainly an influence. These took place during the last days of the American Revolution when Ethan and Ira Allen flirted with treason by proposing to join Quebec if the United States didn't want to accept Vermont. Finally, after commissioners from both New York and Vermont agreed on the boundary line, Vermont agreed to pay \$30,000 to New York to settle all land claims.

The most important of the would-be states was Franklin, which had become a kind of backwoods republic. Franklin had developed a constitution, elected a governor and assembly, enacted laws, organized

courts, and collected taxes. The territory had been carved out of a section of the western lands of North Carolina which, due to tax burdens, had ceded it back to the federal government. Even after the cession was rescinded, residents struggled but failed to have it recognized as a state. It is now the easternmost corner of Tennessee.

The “state” of Franklin has been the subject of two or three books and a PBS documentary that was aired on Aug. 23, 2013.

Westmoreland, also known as the Wyoming district of western Pennsylvania, was created by a court judgment known as the Decree of Trenton in 1782. That decision settled a controversy with the early Connecticut charter that had claimed its territory ran “from sea to sea.” The proposed state of Westmoreland was supported by Ethan Allen, who was called down from Vermont to assist because he claimed to have created one state and could help with another. But the Congress declared that the new district was in an act of rebellion, and a compromise to keep it in Pennsylvania was reached by that state’s legislature.

Transylvania lived briefly as a land-speculation scheme with independent aspirations. In the summer of 1775 this backwoods assembly was organized by the Transylvania Company, composed of early North Carolina settlers. Its capital was a rough outpost called Boonesborough, named for the Indian fighter Daniel Boone. Transylvania held one legislative session, passed some laws, and adjourned, never to meet again. In November 1778 after rejection by the Congress the new territory was declared null and void by the legislature of Virginia, which absorbed it.

Author Brewster says that the adventure of Transylvania, perhaps enhanced by the fame of Daniel Boone, attracted the attention of Kentucky, which succeeded in 1792 to become the fifteenth state. Here, the slavery question had to be balanced: Vermont free and Kentucky slave.