Colonel William Fleming's Origins

Article: "Col. William Fleming's Origins" by Claire White

SOL's:
History - VUS.3
English - 9.5, 9.8, 10.1, 10.5, 11.5, 12.5

Objectives:

Students will engage with the article discussing the life of Col. William Fleming, explore his experiences, explain the impact of his early life on his later achievements, elaborate on their understanding through discussions and activities, and evaluate their learning through a summative assessment.

Materials:

Copies of the article on Col. William Fleming
Whiteboard or chart paper
Markers
Index cards

Introduction (5 minutes):

- Begin the class by asking students if they have ever heard of Col. William Fleming and lead a brief discussion.
- Introduce the topic of the lesson and provide a brief overview of the article.
- Ask students to share their initial thoughts and questions about Col. William Fleming based on the provided information.

Reading (10 minutes):

- Distribute copies of the article to each student.
- Instruct students to read the article individually or in groups and underline or highlight any important information or unfamiliar vocabulary.
- Students can use the guided notes provided to help with looking for important information.

Discussion (10 minutes):

- Conduct a class discussion to address any questions or concerns students may have about the article.

- Use the whiteboard or chart paper to create a concept map of Col. William Fleming's early life and experiences, ensuring that key details are included.
- Facilitate a class discussion to explain the significance of Fleming's early life in Dumfries, Scotland, and his encounters with the Jacobite Rebellion.
- Emphasize the challenges and dangers he faced during that time.

Activity (30 minutes):

- Divide the class into groups of 3-4 students.
- Distribute index cards to each group.
- Instruct each group to brainstorm and write down at least three questions related to Col. William Fleming's life and experiences.
- After completing their questions, have each group exchange their index cards with another group.
- Each group will now attempt to answer the questions on the index cards they received, using their prior knowledge and the information from the article.
- Encourage students to engage in meaningful discussions and collaborate to find answers.

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Individual Reflection (15 minutes):

- Have students summarize the significance of Col. William Fleming's early life and his experiences with his later achievements.

Assessment:

- Small and whole group discussions, reflections

Options for Differentiation:

- For students who struggle with reading comprehension, provide a simplified version of the article with key information highlighted.
- Pair students with a partner who can provide additional support or guidance during the group activities.
- Offer graphic organizers or templates to help students organize their thoughts during the elaboration phase.

Guided Reading Notes

Reading Questions	Notes
What is the main focus of the article about Col. William Fleming?	
How did Fleming's early experiences in Scotland shape his future endeavors?	
What evidence is provided in the article to suggest that Fleming may have been involved in the slave trade during his mysterious period at sea?	
How does the article support the claim that Fleming arrived in Virginia before 1755 and practiced medicine in Suffolk?	
Based on the information provided in the article, what can be inferred about the impact of Fleming's experiences during the Jacobite Rebellion on his later involvement in the defense of the colony?	

Col. William Fleming's Origins

by Clare White

"The Revolution that took place in North America in the Year 1775 separating the Thirteen United States from Great Britain for ever, and the remote part of Virginia where I now reside, and the Prospect I have of removing to a great distance westwardly, where the communication will be small, and the opportunities to Europe but seldom, it may not be amiss to inform my Family that I am the third son of Leonard Fleming, a Gentleman whose Ancestors have long been settled in Westmoreland in the North of England not far from Winandermeer (sic)...My Father being straitened in his circumstances sold his Paternal Estate...and moved to Scotland..."[1]

Thus Col. William Fleming began an abbreviated, and incomplete, account of his life. He probably wrote it in July of 1782 when he had been named a judge for the District of Kentucky and was contemplating a move to that remote part of Virginia where he owned thousands of acres of land. For Fleming, as for others who lived west of Virginia's Blue Ridge Mountains in the 18th century, Kentucky's meadows and forests had become the new horizon,a lodestone for the men and women whose lives were shaped by a dream. Land! While land and the freedom to possess it may not have brought the earliest settlers to Virginia in the 17th century, it soon became a central theme in their struggle to survive and succeed. A hundred years after the first settlers arrived on the eastern shores of Virginia, Scotch-Irish and German pioneers followed the same beckoning star as they crossed the Atlantic to Pennsylvania, pioneered up the Shenandoah Valley and on to the valley of the Roanoke River, cupped in mountains at the southern end of the great Valley of Virginia. Fleming's house was there, under the shadow of one of those great ridges.

William Fleming was never to settle in Kentucky. His judgeship never materialized. When the powerful Council of Virginia thought over the governor's appointment, they decided it would be unwise to name as judge a man who had already tried to arbitrate the kinds of land claims that were sure to come before him as a judge. Only two years before, he had headed a governor's commission sent to unravel the tangled legal complexities of possession that clouded most titles to land in the Kentucky of the 1780s.[2]

Clare White is a longtime writer of Roanoke area history. A graduate of Hollins College, she is a former women's editor of the Roanoke Times & World-News, a board member, librarian and newsletter editor of the Society. She is the author of "Roanoke 1740-1982." This article is the first chapter of a projected biography of William Fleming, a surgeon, legislator, Indian fighter and prominent settler of the Roanoke Valley. The photographs were made by the author.

Fleming's autobiography never got beyond his entering the University of Edinburgh to study anatomy under the famous Alexander Munro, primus. The account stops almost in mid-sentence, leading one to think he put it aside abruptly when the news reached him, less than two weeks after his appointment, that the Council conceived it "improper that he should sit in a Court before whom cases may come on which he had before given his opinion."[3] That the Council's belated decision was a bitter disappointment may be measured by his immediate resolve to resign his most recent commission to travel once more to Kentucky, this time to settle monetary claims resulting from military expeditions on the Ohio River. It was with difficulty that he was persuaded to undertake that assignment, although, as the reasoning man he was, he must have appreciated the wisdom of the judgeship revocation.[4]

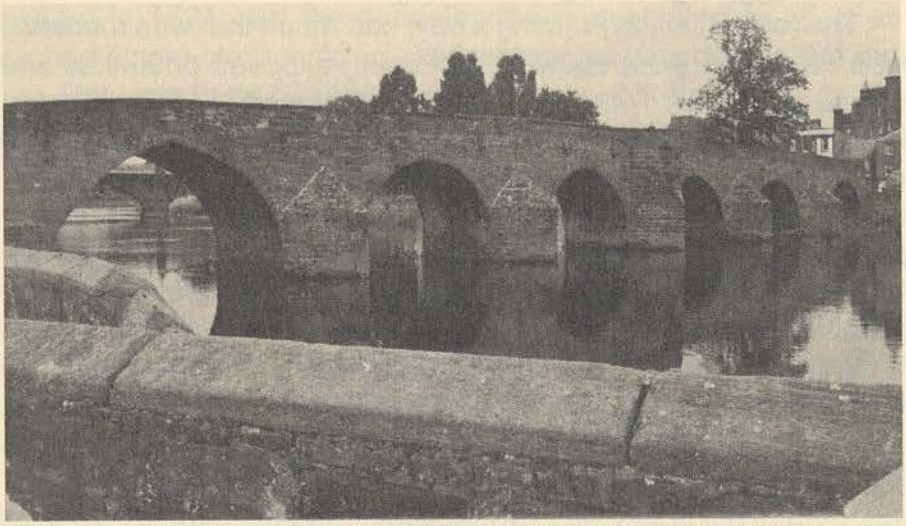
The short autobiographical account, written in the latter years of Fleming's life, serves as a kind of introduction to the man's life before he came to Virginia in the 1750s. A visit to Dumfries in the lowlands of West Scotland, where he spent his youth, fills in some of the background so a sketch can be attempted of the influences that were to mold the man he would become.

As Fleming put it, he was the third son of Leonard Fleming, "a Gentleman." That designation following his father's name immediately puts the senior Fleming in a special class,that of a man of good birth who did not work with his hands. The descent of the Fleming line that conferred that title on him is cloudy. Col. Fleming stated his family had long lived in Westmoreland and, indeed, Flemings had lived there for generations, connected with Rydal Castle. These Flemings were descended from Michael Le Fleming (translation: Michael, the Fleming), whose father, William Le Fleming, came to England with William the Conqueror. William Le Fleming had lands in both England and Scotland; his eldest son, William, inherited his Scotland lands where his descendants became identified as the Earls of Wigton.[5] When the male line of the Earls of Wigton became extinct in the late 18th century, Col. William Fleming of Virginia was reputed to be the nearest male heir to the title. He refused to enter a claim to the title, saying he was then in the decline of life and did not wish to expend the large amount of money necessary to go to England to prove his right, only to aggrandize his eldest son at the expense of his younger children. Furthermore, he said, he was now committed to his adopted country and had no desire to return to England.[6] It is significant, however, that he, like his father, was referred to as William Fleming, Gent., when not designated as Colonel or Doctor. Also, according to a peruser of his papers in the 19th century, he used the Fleming seal on his correspondence.[7]

The Leonard Flemings, Col. Fleming's parents, were living at a house called Reston in England's Lake Country, on the road from Kendal to Ambleside and only a few miles from Rydal Castle[8] when, as his son later wrote, Fleming "became straitened in his circumstances (and) sold his Paternal Estate." The elder Fleming secured a job with the Excise, the English tax collecting agency, and moved his family, first in 1725 to Rutherglen near present Glasgow, and then, a year later, to Jedborough in the Scottish Lowlands.[9] His son notes that, with his salary and an annuity coming to his wife, the former Dorothea Satterthwaite of Westmoreland County, he was able to "live with Credit and Reputation."[10] The annuity must have been truly substantial for William Fleming's unmarried sisters, Margaret and Sarah, after their parents' death, lent the town of Dumfries £1,000, an enormous sum for the 18th century.[11]

At Jedborough on the 18th of February, 1728,[12] a third son was born to Leonard and Dorothea Fleming, a son they named William. They already had two sons, Leonard and John, both of whom died in their youth, and a daughter, Catherine. When the new baby was almost three years old, the family moved again, this time to Dumfries as Fleming senior worked his way up in the Excise service. With the exception of five years in Kilmarnock and a year each in Old Melorum, Wigton and Bridgend, the Flemings would live in Dumfries for the next 45 years. Leonard Fleming became Supervisor of the Excise in 1730 and filled that position for the rest of his life.[13]

William Fleming's parents and sisters were members of St. Michael's Church at Dumfries, Scotland, and they were buried in its graveyard.



A classic 15th century bridge at Dumfries, Scotland, where William Fleming's family lived.

In the 18th century, Dumfries, a town of about 5,000, was known as the "Scottish Liverpool." Situated at the first ford of the Nith River, about five miles from Solway Firth on the west coast of Scotland, the town built ships and carried on a lively trade with Virginia, New England, Gothenburg, the French ports, Spain, Italy, Dantzig, Norway, Holland and all around the British coasts. Many of the trading firms in the town had one son at the Dumfries end and one in the Virginia, New England or Belfast office. All through the century there are records of repeated attempts to keep the river channel open and marked, along with construction of new outports. Tobacco from Virginia was an important import, as was wine from Oporto and timber from the Baltic.[14]

It was on imports such as these, along with exports, that the British Parliament imposed an Excise tax from time to time, a tax similar to the 20th century VAT (Value Added Tax), but collected at the point of manufacture or import rather than at the point of sale. The Supervisor of the Excise had the responsibility of calculating and collecting this tax. In addition, it was his duty to apprehend smugglers. For every smuggler arrested, the Excise officer received an award and half of the goods recovered.[15] During Leonard Fleming's terms of office, Dumfries and the waters of the Nith were besieged by smugglers, so much so that, by the end of the century when the town's foreign trade had been decimated, the blame was laid on the activities of smugglers. The situation was exacerbated by the connivance of the country people. Mobs of women are said to have repeatedly assaulted the luckless excisemen with pitchforks and stones.[16] In the records in Edinburgh is a note about Fleming: "To an old CO (Customs Officer) who must have had many a tussle with the bold adventurers

who ran smuggled goods up the Solway..."[17]

The town itself, in Fleming's day, had much that was medieval about it. Murderers' hands were still being exposed on spikes and conditions in the town's prisons were said to be frightful. Most prisoners had been incarcerated for debt, small debts of a few shillings. One account details that a crofter complained he had been held for six months on a five shilling debt and his creditor had taken over, not only his croft, but also his wife and family. Near the end of the century, the officers of the town were dismissed for refusing to bring down two corpses from the gallows.

Withal, however, the 18th century was a time of growth for Dumfries, if not for its life as a port. The Flesh Market (butchers) was moved and properly laid out in mid-century, despite the wishes of the butchers who insisted on their right to slay cattle anywhere in the streets; one of the steep, narrow lanes that ran down to the river from the High Street had been known as Stinking Fennel for its association with offal (Fennel means "narrow street"). That change would have taken place during William Fleming's boyhood.

The Midsteeple, or Town Hall, with its slender spire, was built in the middle of the High Street in the early years of the century; it still stands in the 20th century as a reminder of the past. The New Kirk, the first new religious building in the town for centuries, was built in 1727 as a result of overcrowding in St. Michael's, a church first mentioned about 1200. In 1742, while young Fleming was still attending St. Michael's, its medieval tower was replaced by a steeple; the body of the church was rebuilt in 1745-1746.[18] Leonard and Dorothea Fleming and their daughter Margaret are buried in the churchyard at St. Michael's, a Presbyterian stronghold.[19]

Other 18th century improvements included a new hospital and the sale of disreputable tenements to new proprietors who promised to repair or rebuild. Thatch roofs were replaced with slate to remove fire hazards and new streets were laid out, altogether an unprecedented effort in civic pride.

On the reverse side of the coin, the town of Dumfries financed all these improvements with loans, and loans coming due were simply repaid with fresh loans. In the 1790s, Dumfries was several times cited in the Houses of Parliament as a shining example of a thoroughly corrupt burgh.[20] Margaret and Sarah Fleming, having loaned the town £1,000, were two who were caught in that loan cycle. Years after Margaret's death, her executor was still trying to collect from the town.[21]

In one respect, Dumfries could, and did, enjoy pride of achievement. The Grammar School of Dumfries dates from the 16th century with an unblemished record of scholarship. A "sculemaister"

turns up in 1521 and the schoolhouse is described in 1548 as a thatched single-story building, 36 feet long with its door in the gable end. This was to be the only grammar school in the town. In 1741, writing of the moving of the schoolhouse, a historian said it had stood in the same place for "nigh 200 years."

In the 18th century, the school was run by a succession of generally brilliant rectors, one of the finest being Dr. Trotter who took it over in 1724 and who was headmaster when young William Fleming received his "classical education" there. An education such as the young Fleming was given included a thorough grounding in Greek and Latin, as well as such subjects as arithmetic, mathematics, writing and English. Among more esoteric subjects taught at the school in Fleming's time were navigation and astronomy.[22] Evidence of Fleming's solid educational background turns up later in the titles of the books in his library. They cover a wide range, from the expected medical books a doctor would have (43 of them) to the 281 other titles he listed in 1787, which may not have been all the ones on his shelves. Of these, however, there are histories, essays, classics such as Plato, Plutarch and Voltaire, books on law, agriculture and military fortifications, poetry, philosophy and religious dissertations, including the sermons of some divines who reflected the new ideas of the Scottish Enlightenment. "Paradise Lost" rubbed shoulders with Kimber's "Peerage," Shakespeare with Dryden, Horace (in Latin) with Webster's "Mathematics."[23] In addition, Fleming wrote a graceful, flowing script of great style and clarity.

After the young scholar had completed his studies at Dr. Trotter's establishment, he decided to study medicine, "rather," he wrote later, "to enable me to Satisfy my curiosity in traveling than as a business on which I was to depend at a future day for my support." To that end, following the practice of the day, he was apprenticed to a surgeon at Dumfries, one Dr. McKie. He was then about 16 years old and he gives a distinct impression he made this decision, and later ones, entirely on his own, an unusual circumstance in a time when, in Europe, maturity was reached at the age of 28 rather than the American 21. He spent three years with Dr. McKie, following him to Kirkcudbright on the Solway Firth when the doctor moved there toward the latter part of his apprenticeship. At this point, let him take up the tale from his short autobiography:

"At the expiration of this time, instead of going immediately to College to study the Theory under the different Professors for a little time, the usual course of the greatest part of the Youth brought up to the Profession of Physick & Surgery in Scotland, I thought the Foundation ought to be well laid and that it was necessary to have a

thorough knowledge in the Materica Medica & Pharmacy, to obtain which I went to Kendal in Westmoreland (near his father's former home) and lived with Mr. Christopher Brown, an eminent Apothecary in that Place till I was master of this."[24]

The year was then 1745 and Charles Edward Louis Philip Casimir Stuart, otherwise known as the "Young Pretender," the "Young Chevalier," or "Bonnie Prince Charlie," had been in Scotland since August, intent upon raising support amongst the Highlanders and anyone else he could rouse, in quest of his claim to the English throne. Having occupied Edinburgh in September, where he proclaimed himself James VIII of Scotland, he left that city in the beginning of November to invade England. He was at the head of at least 5,000 men when he started, but the ranks were gradually thinned by the desertion of the Highlanders, who did not relish a long campaign; their tradition led them to consider war as a raid, here today and home tomorrow. Charles, however, hoped to counteract the desertions by recruiting followers as he went along. On November 9, he laid siege to Carlisle which fell in a week's time. He then started south for London and his way led through Kendal where 19- year-old William Fleming was learning pharmacy. Charles got as far as Derby before accepting his failure to rebuild an army and the attendant necessity for retreat.[25]

"During the time I lived at Mr. Brown's the Rebellion broke out in Scotland. The Rebels having taken possession of Carlisle in Cumberland, marched through Westmoreland by Kendal in their rout(e) to Derby in 1745 and left the Measles which I caught but with care I recovered in the usual time and felt no bad effect from them. The Chevalier or Pretender as he is called, not finding himself supported as he expected on his advancing into England, and that William Duke of Cumberland was advancing with troops against him, retreated from Derby the same way he advanced...

"The Van of his Army consisting of some light horse under the Duke of Perth, passed through Kendal on Saturday in the forenoon, which being Market Day and great numbers of Country People in town, when they spied a led horse which one of the Duke of Perth's servants had, and knew him to belong to Colo. Wilson of Dalentower who had marched the Militia of Westmoreland to reinforce the Garrison at Carlisle before it fell into the Rebels possession, where the horse was captured on the surrender of that city. The People were furious (and) attacked the Party with Stones, Clubs and such Arms as came to hand, knocked the Groom down, seized the horse and drove the party out of town.

"All was immediately confusion; the shops and houses were instantly shut up and several shot were exchanged by which some of

the Townsmen were kil(l)ed and some wounded. The Party galloped through the Town and made the best of their way towards Penrith. The main body of the Rebel Army came in on Saturday evening and next day and continued till Monday, plundering whoever they met of their shoes, stockings and what clothes suited them. The Duke of Cumberland being close in their Rear with the Royal Army, his Van entered Kendal on Tuesday and, after taking a small refreshment, continued the pursuit, the Inhabitants happily relieved from their fears of an engagement being brought on between the two Armies in or near Kendal, which might have been of great detriment to a trading town. (Fleming does not mention his part in any of this but, as an experienced physician and a pharmacist's mate, he surely took a hand with the wounded townspeople, if not an active part in the assault to repossess the horse.)

"To retard the Royal Army in the pursuit, the Rebels sacrificed a few men at Clifton Moor by lining the hedges and dikes (ditches) near the road and firing on the Duke of Cumberland's advanced party, by which means their main body had time to make their retreat good from Penrith to Carlisle."[26]

Charles and his by now ragtag army had started their retreat from Derby on December 6th. By mid-January he managed to defeat Gen. Hawley who had marched from Edinburgh to intercept him, but he continued to be plagued by desertions. At last, on April 16, 1746, he faced the Duke of Cumberland at Culloden and was completely worsted. All that remained was to escape; he finally sailed for France in the late summer.[27]

In the meantime, one supposes Fleming had come down with the measles in due course, a result of the Kendal experience that argues a close connection of some sort with one of the armies as they came through the town.

The young doctor's adventures were not yet over. He wrote that, in the fall of 1746 he left Kendal and went to the University of Edinburgh to study, for which he borrowed money from his sister Catherine.[28] It must have been when he left Kendal that the other adventure of which he wrote in his autobiography took place. After giving a history of Kendal and its geographical and commercial features, he continues:

"In my journey from Kendal to Dumfries in company with my sister Catherine and a young gentleman, when within two miles of Carlisle, the evening gun was fired and a young man who had joined us on the road, observing that the Gates would be shut before we could reach the City, advised us to put up at his Fathers where we could be well entertained as he kept a public house of good repute.

Being strangers and necessarily forcing, we complied with the proposal and were shown into a room. I observed as we went through a public room, a rab(b)le of People drinking, some of them being intoxicated. Some of them viewed our horses in the stables and were in hopes to plunder us of some of them. Before we went to bed I went to the stable and, being obliged to return through the room where they were, I was stopped by them when a fellow in a soldiers dress stepped up to me, looked in my face, swore he saw me amongst the Rebels at Carlisle, on which two or three fellows attempted to seize me. Breaking from them, I got into our room and bolted the door. They broke open the Stable door, took out the horses and rode them off.

"I went after them to the suburbs and found them in a little tip(p)ling house which was the only house that had a light in it. Not being able to enter the City that night, I was obliged to leave the horses (which he seems to have recovered) in charge of the People of the house and returned to our Public house. Next morning we got horses and took the Landlord, his son and the hostler to Carlisle as evidence against the person who was foremost in the outrage, who I found was a person of bad character, but having a vote for a representative of Parliament for Carlisle. (Having a vote meant he owned property.)

"It cost me some trouble and loss of time before I could get satisfaction. However, the fellow was taken up. Other felonious acts coming to light, I withdrew my prosecution and left him to take his fate in a tryal for breaking open a trunk in a stage wagon."[29]

When William and Catherine got back to Dumfries and he related his experiences with the Rebel army, he heard what had happened at home during the Rebellion. The records show that "In the year 1745 the Inhabitants of Dumfries were by the Rebels in three days subjected to plunder by vile, ruffian, barbarous highlanders, and were forced to give hostages for two thousand pounds and upwards, and these lay heavy on the poor inhabitants." The account goes on to say the ransom lay even heavier because the townspeople were already paying two Excise taxes imposed by the British Parliament "with tonnage on merchandise imported by sea."[30]

Another account says that, whereas the town had vigorously opposed the 1715 Jacobite threat, the first of the Stuart uprisings, with massive ditching, re-fortifications and the like, in 1745, 30 years later, no attempt was made at resistance beyond shifting the town's stock of arms to a good hiding place.[31] Perhaps, after five centuries of incessant raids and invasions by both the English and the Highlanders, the border town of Dumfries had decided to accept whatever came and just go on as best it might. Such was the fate of border towns. In the case of Dumfries, the physical destruction was

accompanied by taxes to pay the damages.[32]

No one could claim that life was serene in Scotland during the years of William Fleming's minority, a climate which may have led naturally to his actions when he left the University of Edinburgh. After completing his course in anatomy, he set off for an adventurous life of his own, to realize the desire for travel that had led him into medicine in the first place. The hints to be found of his experiences in the next few years prove that, whether intentional or not, he certainly achieved adventure.

Sometime after leaving the university,[33] he sailed as a surgeon's mate aboard a vessel that eventually landed him off the coast of West Africa. As research into Admiralty records fails to yield a trace of a Dr. William Fleming, the assumption gains credence that he sailed in either a merchant ship, a supply vessel for the slave trade, or a slaver, all of which sailed from Dumfries and neighboring Kirkcudbright. Port records of such 18th century manifests are yet to be found.

In later life, Fleming was to offer only hints of what happened to him during the years he was at sea. He told his children he was captured by the Spanish and put in a Spanish prison; he did not say where, although his children assumed it was in Spain. That he was in some kind of fight was evidenced by a saber scar across his nose which he bore all his life. It seems the reason he even brought up the matter was to explain his not turning away from his door in Virginia anyone who sought food or assistance. He said his life was saved when he was in the Spanish prison by the kindness of a woman, always unknown to him, whose window overlooked the small yard where, after his health began to fail, he was allowed to walk. She dropped food to him and the other prisoners which, he said, kept him from dying of starvation.[34]

The only other reference to that period of his life is in a letter to his friend, Col. William Preston, accompanying the return of some borrowed books in December, 1756. Concerning a book by Blake Morris, he wrote, "What induced me to the reading of his Adventures was his laying one of his Scenes in the Island of Fernando Po where I myself was in more real than he in imaginary distress, but I sufficiently paid for my curiosity by reading such a heap of indigested stuff."[35]

The Island of Fernando Po was at that time a Portuguese possession off the west coast of Africa, later traded to Spain, which was a place for vessels to stock up on water and provisions.[36] The island and the African mainland countries of the Cameroons and Nigeria to the east and north of it were all discovered by the Portuguese navigator Fernando Po toward the end of the 15th century. Since early in the 17th century, British ships had visited the estuaries of the

Cameroons, and English companies had set up trading stations or factories for the slave trade. In 1713, Britain had won the right to furnish slaves to the Spanish colonies in the New World by the Treaty of Utrecht, a monopoly that was supposed to last for 30 years. The contract, or asiento, came to an end in 1739 when complaints on both sides rose to such a height that war with Spain ensued. Peace was not obtained until 1750; it could be Fleming got in the way of these hostilities, hostilities which involved smugglers and the attendant excesses. Even after the British outlawed the slave trade in 1807, ships of other nations continued the slave trade in those waters and merchant ships from Great Britain found profitable markets.[37] In Fleming's time the area was clearly an attractive spot for ships of all nations, for whatever reasons, although perhaps not the safest. The saber cut on Fleming's nose may well have been delivered on these coasts. All that remains are tantalizing conjectures, overlaid by his expressed dislike of the naval service.

The next known record concerning Fleming fits well with a peace between England and Spain in 1750. A series of notices in the annals of the Upper Parish of Nansemond County in Virginia, taken with other evidence, establish his residence there in late 1750 or early 1751, and refute the long-standing claim that he came to the colony in July of 1755. In 1751, 1752, 1753 and 1754, the parish paid a Dr. Fleming for medicines and the care of its, presumably, indigent parishioners. One of the duties of the Vestry of the Parishes of the English Episcopalian (later called Anglican) Church in Virginia was the care of the poor and parish accounts are full of that service. The annual reports of the Upper Parish concerning Fleming read as follows:

"At a Vestry held in Suffolk Town October the 21st 1751 for the Upper Parish in Nansemond County

"To Doctr Wm. Fleming for Medicines and Attendance to Robt. Taylor, £14.0.0.

"To Doctr Wm. Fleming for Medicines etc., £4.7.11" on November 30, 1752.

Again, on November 19, 1753, "To Docktor Flemings for Henry Gwin, £3.12.0."

And, lastly, on November 14, 1754, "To Doctr Flemin for Medicines for the Widow Harmon,£0.15.0."[38]

The Upper Parish of Nansemond County included the Town of Suffolk. Unfortunately, the court records of the county were burned when the courthouse in Suffolk was torched by the British in 1779. Therefore, what may have been corroborating records of Fleming's residence in that county are irretrievably lost.[39]

There were other Flemings in the Upper Parish, as indeed there

were others in other parishes and counties of Tidewater Virginia, some of whom had been resident since the mid-1600s. An Upper Parish processioners' return of March, 1752, takes note of a William and Isaac Fleming being "present on (their) land." Other Flemings named during those years, and after, were John Fleming, Nathaniel Fleming and Mary Fleming.[40] Whether they were related to Dr. William Fleming is nowhere substantiated.

More convincing in the matter of Fleming having been in Suffolk for the years 1751-1754 are references he made in later life to his connection with that town, references which further deny the theory that he came to Virginia right after Braddock's defeat in 1755. The 1775 date was given by his son Leonard Israel Fleming and has been accepted by almost every chronicler since, particularly by those writing about Fleming in the 19th century.

In 1763, in a letter to Gov. Fauquier recommending Andrew Lewis as the County Lieutenant for Augusta County, Fleming wrote that his letter was dictated by a sincere desire to serve his country. "This was my motive when I first entered the service of the Colony," he wrote, "and made me decline a lucrative Business..."[41] Fleming's commission as Ensign from Gov. Dinwiddie is dated August 25, 1755.[42] While the shock waves following Braddock's defeat may have precipitated his resolve to join the Virginia forces, he could hardly have worked up a lucrative practice in the space of the few weeks since the July rout of Gen. Braddock's army on its way to Fort Duquesne. More feasible is the opinion that Fleming's son was mistaken; he was the only son to have reached maturity when his father died and he had then been in Kentucky for six years. The family early on, with no concrete evidence, assumed their father had served in the Royal Navy, a service which entailed seven years of duty. By their reasoning, if he had to serve that long, he must have arrived in America at a later date.

In further support of his earlier years in Virginia, Fleming wrote his father from Suffolk in 1760 saying, "You may perceive I date this from the place I formerly lived at." As he had been in the service on the western frontier continuously since being commissioned in 1755, the only time he could have lived in Suffolk would have been before that year. He also added, in a postscript, "Please direct yours to the Care of Colonel Lemuel Riddick in Suffolk, Nansemond County, Virginia."[43] Col. Riddick had lived in Suffolk since at least the 1730s and had served on the Vestry of the Upper Parish for 40 years when he resigned in 1773. A member of the General Assembly from 1738 to 1775, excepting 1769, he was a very prominent man in the county[44] and was also, evidently, a close friend to William Fleming, a relationship

hardly to have been established between the two with one of them in Tidewater and the other on the Virginia frontier.

There is evidence to suggest Fleming came to America because of the Riddicks. Riddick is a name that turns up in the first written histories of Fleming's native Dumfries. Furthermore, a merchant Riddick of Dumfries, Robert Riddick, had a merchant son in Virginia, Alexander Riddick, in the late 18th century, undoubtedly carrying on the Scottish tradition of one merchant family foot in Virginia and one in Scotland. What more natural than a fellow townsman seeking a berth in the new colony with family friends?[45]

In May, 1779, when Fleming was in Williamsburg as a member of the General Assembly, he wrote his wife about the burning of Suffolk by the British. "A party of them marched to Suffolk and burned the Town. On hearing Gen. Scott was advancing against them they hastily retreated doing all the damage they could. Many of my old Acquaintances & Friends have suffered greatly by burning their houses, having their Negroes & Stock taken off & the women made Captives and exposed to the greatest insults they can be subjected to." The Riddicks were in the thick of that affair.[46]

The evidence would seem conclusive that William Fleming arrived in Virginia some time well before October of 1751 and practiced medicine in the town of Suffolk until, moved by patriotic feeling for his adopted country, he offered himself in its defense, a move that would involve him, in one way or another, until the day of his death.

Notes

[1]Grigsby papers, Mssl 987925 5807, Virginia Historical Society.

[2] Fleming papers, Virginia State Library.

[3] Journal of the Council of the State of Virginia, Vol. III, p. 126.

[4] Calendar of State Papers, Vol. 2, p. 205.

[5]Charles A. Hanna, The Scotch-Irish or the Scot in North Britain, North Ireland and North America, Vol. 2, p.409; Burke's Peerage, p.218.

[6] Fleming papers, Washington & Lee University Library.

[7] Hugh Blair Grigsby, The History of the Virginia Federal Convention of 1788, Vol. 2, p.53.

[8] E. P. Goodwin, Colonel William Fleming of Botetourt, 1728- 1795, p.2.

[9]RH 4/6/1-2 4953D, West Register House, Edinburgh.

[10] Grigsby papers.

[11] West Register House.