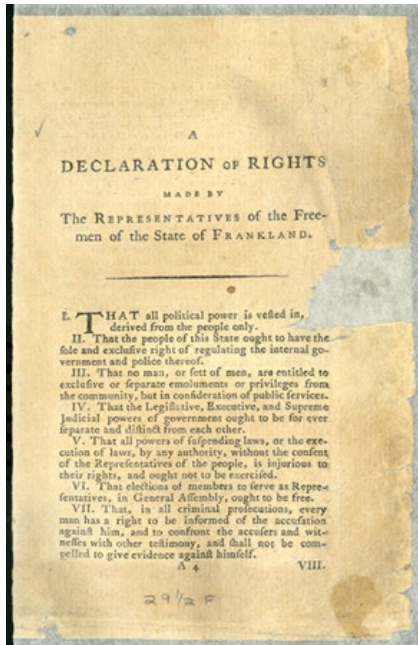
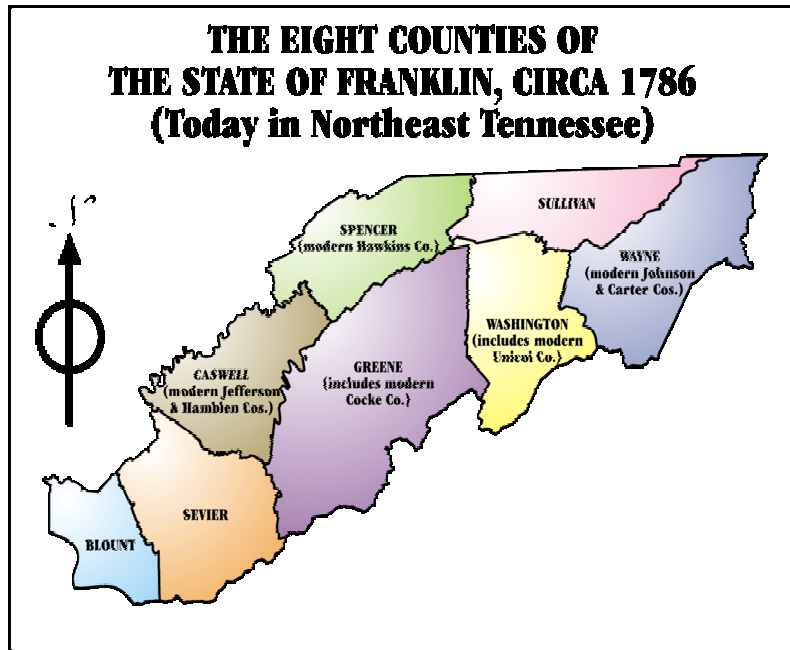


# The State of Franklin, Tennessee



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[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/State\\_of\\_Franklin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/State_of_Franklin)

Throughout the American Revolutionary War, in spite of resistance from the Indians living there, settlers poured into the rich territory west of the Appalachian Mountains and south of the Ohio River. Cut off by the mountains from state governments to the east such as Virginia and North Carolina, the people were obliged to form governments for themselves if they wanted to have any at all. In addition, attacks from Indians were frequent and the residents sought more adequate protection that geographical separation hindered. In the early 1780s, settlers in upper East Tennessee launched a movement to secure their independence from North Carolina a new state to be called Franklin.

The first settlers of North Carolina's western lands banded together in the Watauga Association (a quasi-government in the wilderness of present day- upper East Tennessee) as early as 1772 and exercised governmental functions until 1776, when the area was organized as Washington County. In 1782 the state began selling large quantities of this western land to eastern speculators. Further increasing the frenzy of speculation was the passage of the Land-Grab Act of 1783 passed by the North Carolina legislature that vastly expanded the region's population as numerous towns and counties were developed. In 1784, the North Carolina legislature, under the influence of the state's eastern political leadership (which considered the land claims west of the Appalachian Mountains a nuisance), ceded sovereignty over Washington County to the Confederation Congress; however, as the rival political camp from the west gained influence, they acted to repeal the act.



*Gov. John Sevier*

[http://www.johnsevier.com/bio\\_johnsevier.html](http://www.johnsevier.com/bio_johnsevier.html)

John Sevier then emerged as the leader of the region's settlers. Sevier and the eastern settlers in Western North Carolina took cession at face value as they launched a movement to establish statehood in upper East Tennessee. Primarily, the proponents of the state of Franklin argued that their lives, liberties, and property could be more secure by creating a sovereign state. The settlers, led by Sevier, called a convention and appointed delegates to meet in Jonesboro. During the convention, Sevier was named governor of the proposed state of Franklin, a name chosen by Sevier himself. The delegates drew up a state constitution in December 1784 and then demanded admission to the Confederation. For the next three years there were two governments contesting the area, that of Franklin and that of North Carolina, not to mention the Spanish government, which was exerting its influence through bribery to pull the settlers into Spanish allegiance.

In the spring of 1785, the conflict between the people of Franklin and North Carolina intensified when North Carolina Governor Alexander Martin warned the Franklinites that further opposition to state laws could result in a civil war. In May, Sevier sent a Franklin leader, William Cocke, to New York City, then the nation's capital, to lobby the Confederation government to admit Franklin as the fourteenth state in the Union, but he was unsuccessful. Nevertheless, the Franklin delegates met again in November 1785 to discuss instituting a new and permanent constitution. But they divided into two factions, with Sevier's faction, favoring the previous constitution of 1784, prevailing. Therefore, by formally adopting a constitution that was essentially a replica of North Carolina's constitution, they embraced the very institutional provisions that they had originally rebelled against.

Disputes with the Cherokees over official boundary lines resulted in many armed conflicts between the settlers of Franklin and the Indians. In an effort to reach a settlement, Governor Sevier compelled Cherokee leaders to meet him at Coyatee (northwestern South Carolina) in August 1786. The resulting treaty extended the boundary line of white settlement south to the Little Tennessee River. This of course resulted in increased hostility with Cherokees, and over the next few years Sevier would further enhance his reputation for being a fierce and relentless Indian killer. The worst episode occurred in 1788, when Sevier and his men lured

some Cherokees under a flag of truce and then brutally slaughtered the defenseless Indians. A leading historian on the topic has written: “The State of Franklin gave every indication that it would take over Cherokee lands with impunity and exterminate anyone who stood in its way.”



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The State of Franklin managed to operate successfully during its first two years, but internal dissention and opposition from the North Carolina legislature after 1786 destroyed any hope that the Franklinites clung to. Anti-Franklinites were later elected to the North Carolina Senate, and the legislators granted tax forgiveness to Franklin residents in 1787 in an act of conciliation. The Constitutional Convention of 1787, meeting in Philadelphia’s Independence Hall, delivered the final blow to the State of Franklin. According to Article IV, Section 3 of the proposed national constitution, no new state could be formed “without the consent of the Legislatures of the States concerned as well as of the Congress.” After Sevier’s governorship expired in March 1788, Samuel Johnston, the Governor of North Carolina, ordered Sevier’s arrest on the grounds of treason. He was compelled by force to stand trial but was rescued by friends, family, and loyal Franklinites. There was no pursuit and so ended the push for statehood. In November 1788 North Carolina officials issued a blanket pardon to all Franklinites, including John Sevier.

North Carolina’s legislators finally ceded the state’s land claims west of the Appalachian Mountains permanently to the United States Congress in 1790. Sevier, along with his land-speculating ally William Blount, would push the Tennessee region into territorial status and eventually into statehood in 1796.

Sources: John R. Finger, *Tennessee Frontiers: Three Regions in Transition* (2001); Paul H. Bergeron, Stephen V. Ash, and Jeanette Keith, *Tennesseans and Their History* (1999), 39-45.