

## The Westerfield Family

### **The Van Westervelts: From the Netherlands to Colonial America**

The Westerfield family has its roots in the Netherlands. The name Westerfield was originally Van Westervelt, meaning "of the western fields" and refers to an area near the town of Meppel, on the east coast of the Zuider Zee. The first immigrant Van Westervelts, Lubbert and William, were from Meppel. Beyond that, little is known. Walter Tallman Westervelt, a 19th century genealogist, speculated the family could be traced back to a

Dirk Van Westervelt born about 1550 in the Netherlands. However, there is no documentation of a link between the line descended from Dirk Van Westervelt and the immigrant families of Lubbert and William. Since Van Westervelt is a place name, it is quite probable multiple unrelated families from the same area might have chosen to adopt it. Like most Dutch at the time, Lubbert and William often went by their patronymic Lubbertsen instead. It is only in the subsequent generations in America that the Van Westervelt surname was solidly adopted.



New Amsterdam, circa 1660.

The Westerfield family story in America begins, like many others, on the docks of New York City. Only it wasn't New York City when the Westerfields arrived, it was New Amsterdam. In June of 1662, Lubbert Lubbertse Van Westervelt, his brother William, and their families stepped off the ship *Hope* and on to the streets of the Dutch colony of

New Amsterdam. Lubbert and William were farmers, and immediately purchased land in the nearby colony of Flatbush, on Long Island. The Van Westervelt brothers prospered quickly, and by 1672 Lubbert was able to sell his lands for a large profit of 4,000 guilders (about \$48,000 in today's currency, though its buying power was significantly more).

Lubbert then moved his family to Hackensack, New Jersey. He and his family show up in the congregation of the Dutch Reformed Church at Bergen in 1676. In 1686, they are listed as founding members of the Dutch Reformed Church at Hackensack (the "Schaarlenburgh" congregation). Lubbert died sometime around 1686 in Hackensack. His wife, Geesie (Grace) Roelofse Van Houten, appears in church records as late as 1696.

The records of the Dutch Reformed Church of Bergen County, New Jersey provide an excellent paper trail not normally found in early colonial America. From these records it is possible to trace the Westerfield family from Lubbert the immigrant, to his son Lubbert, (born c. 1661 in Meppel, died c. 1695 in Hackensack), to his son Jan (born 27 Mar 1686 Hackensack), to his son Jacobus (born 7 Sep 1712 Hackensack, died 1743, Closter, NJ), and finally to his son Jacobus "James" Westervelt (born 1 Jul 1737 Hackensack, died 1780, Kentucky), founder of the Westerfield family of Kentucky.

### **The Westerfield Massacre**

Jacobus Westervelt married Maria Demarest in on November 5, 1754 in Hackensack, New Jersey. This couple anglicized their names as James and Mary Westerfield. In 1769, James and Mary left New Jersey with a group of Dutch settlers for the Conewago Valley in Pennsylvania, where they established the Conewago Dutch Colony near present day Gettysburg. James and Mary Westerfield stayed on a short while in Conewago and soon joined a group pushing farther west to Berkeley County, Virginia (now West Virginia). In 1780, the family (and much of their Dutch relations) moved west again, traveling west to Fort Pitt (modern day Pittsburgh), then down the Ohio River by flatboat to the Falls of the Ohio (Louisville).

In the spring of 1781, about 30 people set out from Louisville for Herrod's Station (now Harrodsburg in Mercer Co., Kentucky) along the Wilderness Road. The Wilderness Road was the primary route for settlers traveling west from Virginia to Tennessee and Kentucky. It had been trail-blazed by Daniel Boone in 1775. By 1780 it extended to Louisville. The Westerfields were actually traveling the trail in the opposite direction of most settlers as they were headed back east, having come down the river to Louisville on flatbed barge. Indian raids upon settlers traveling the trail was a significant problem between 1780 and 1790.

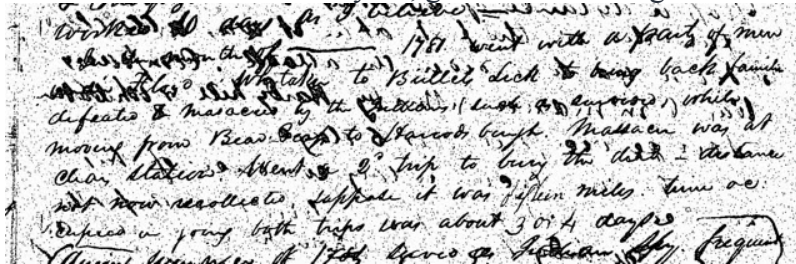


*The Abduction of Daniel Boone's Daughter by the Indians* by Charles Ferdinand Wimar (1853), depicting a similar abduction in 1776.

This group included James and Mary Westerfield, their children, and a cousin named John Westerfield and his family. The group had traveled about 15 miles southeast along the Wilderness Road, and camped somewhere near Clear Run Creek in Bullitt County (the old Wilderness Road at this point was roughly located where modern day Interstate 65 runs through the county -- their camp was likely somewhere around mile marker 119), when a group of Indians, likely Shawnee, attacked the party in the middle of the night.

Two of the Westerfield's daughters were killed in the attack. Mary Westerfield survived along with three of her daughters by hiding in a sink hole. Her husband, James, was killed by the Indians. James had been a large man, weighing upwards of 300 pounds. After he was killed, three Indians wrapped themselves in his great coat and danced. Most of the remaining settlers were scalped and killed. A few were taken as prisoners. These included James and Mary's daughter Deborah Westerfield and her cousin Polly Westerfield. A few settlers escaped and made it to the nearest fort, alerting soldiers on duty there.

A soldier named John Ryker, gave the following account:



"In the month of \_\_ 1781 went with a party of men under Floyd Whittaker to Bullets Lick to bring back families defeated and massacred by the Indians (such as survived) while moving from Beargrass to Harrodsburgh, massacre was at Clear Station. Went on 2nd

trip to bury the dead. Distance not now recollected, suppose it was fifteen miles. Time occupied in going both trips was about 3 or 4 days."

After recovering, Mary Westerfield went in search of her missing daughter Deborah. She was informed that the Shawnee, allies of the British, would likely try and sell their prisoners to the British at Fort Detroit. She traveled alone on horseback north to Detroit. On the way she was attacked and taken prisoner by the Shawnee. Her horse was shot out from under her and she was held captive while the Shawnee stole more horses from a nearby farm. The Shawnee then took her to Fort Detroit, where she was released by the British officer of the fort, who informed her that her daughter and cousin had indeed been there, but had been taken back east to Quebec. Mary searched for her daughter in Michigan and Canada for about a year before returning home. Meanwhile, the girls were either set free or escaped and eventually made their way back to their family via Philadelphia and then west back to Kentucky.

### **The Westerfields - A Kentucky Bourbon Tradition**

James and Mary's eldest son James Jr. was not present with the rest of his family on the Wilderness Road that fateful day. This is because he stayed behind to serve in the Revolutionary War. He was perhaps the James Westervelt who was a Corporal in the 2nd and 3rd Regiments, Dutchess County NY Militia. If so, he was likely present at the Battle of Brooklyn Heights on August 27, 1776, which by number of troops involved was the largest battle of the Revolutionary War.

James Jr. and his wife Phoebe Cozine settled in Harrodsburg, in Mercer Co., Ky.



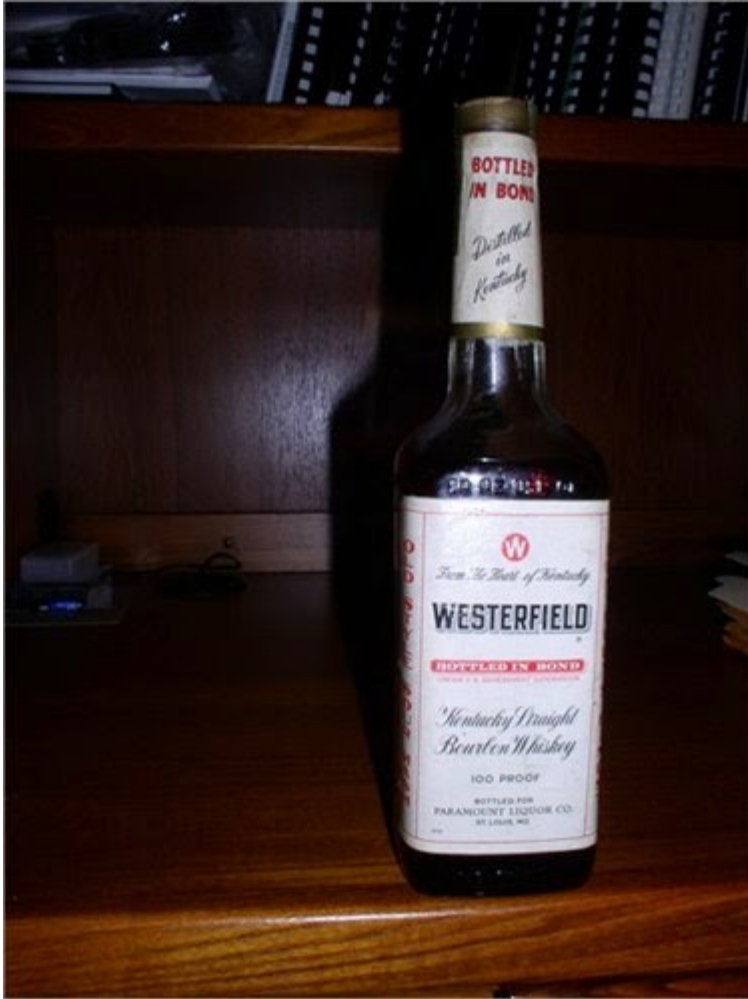
Cornelius

**Westerfield's Homestead, c. 1930**

James Jr.'s son Cornelius married Elizabeth Bruce in 1802 in Nelson county, Kentucky.

The couple moved to Ohio county around 1805. He lived in what became Daviess County, on the banks of Deserter Creek south of Whitesville, Ky. Cornelius distilled his own whiskey and around 1810 he began a commercial distillery on his farm. He was one of the founders of what became a thriving bourbon whiskey industry in Daviess county during the 19th century. Westerfield Bourbon proved extremely successful and his family continued in the distilling business for another three generations.

During the Civil War the Westerfield family provided it's whiskey under contracts with both the Union and Confederate armies.



Westerfield Bourbon

### Whiskey

The Westerfields continued in the distilling business until 1872. The family then sold the brand to a St. Louis businessman who continued to produce Westerfield whiskey at a St. Louis distillery well in to the 20th century.

Cornelius died in July of 1852. He left a simple will devising his entire estate to his wife.

Cornelius' son David Westerfield was known as "Happy Jack," (I have not discovered the origin of this nickname). He married first to Elizabeth Ann Moseley on February 19th, 1838 in Daviess county. They had six children: Robert, Sarah, Nancy, Mary Catherine, Serilda, and Charles. Elizabeth passed away in about 1851. In 1852 Happy Jack married Catherine Ralph Sutton, widow of William Sutton, of Ohio county, Kentucky and moved his family there. There they had an additional seven children: Commodore Perry, William, Alexander, Isaac, George, Ida, and John Morgan.



C.P. and Mary Westerfield with  
daughter Ceona

Commodore Perry Westerfield was generally known as C.P. He married Mary Louise Hoover on January 11th, 1872. They had four children: sons George and David, and daughters Dona and Ceona. In 1903, C.P. sold his farm and decided to move to Edmond, Oklahoma. He lived for a while in Oklahoma, then moved to Arkansas, and finally back to Ohio county, Kentucky where he died in 1927. His daughter Dona married a man named William Daniel Taylor, and stayed in Oklahoma and later Arkansas. W.D. and Dona Taylor were my wife's great grandparents.

### **Selected Sources**

[Genealogy of the Westervelt Family](#) by Walter Tallman Westervelt

The Old Bergen Dutch Reformed Church

Records of the South Schaarlenburgh Dutch Reformed Church, Hackensack, New Jersey  
History of the Conewago Colony

"The Westerfield Massacre" Bullitt County Genealogical Society

Transcript of letter of H.R. Stafford, 1865 describing the Westerfield Massacre (via  
rootsweb)

Cornelius Westerfield and Besty Bruce Marriage Bond

David Westerfield and Catherine Ralph Sutton Marriage Record

Excerpt from History of Whitesville, Ky regarding Cornelius Westerfield's distillery.

Posted by Steven Frank 

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