

OHIO'S MIGHTY MEN

# Col. EBENEZER SPROAT

...THE FIRST "BUCKEYE"

**E**BENEZER SPROAT WAS BORN IN MIDDLEBOROUGH, MASSACHUSETTS IN 1752. HE DIED AT MARIETTA IN 1805.

HE SERVED IN THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION, ATTAINING THE RANK OF COLONEL.

AT THE CLOSE OF THE WAR, HE WAS MARRIED TO THE DAUGHTER OF COMMODORE ABRAHAM WHIPPLE AND CAME TO OHIO WITH THE FIRST OHIO COMPANY SETTLERS. HE WAS THE FIRST MILITIA COLONEL IN THE N. W. TERRITORY.

AND FIRST SHERIFF OF WASHINGTON COUNTY.



HIS 6-FEET, 4-INCH FIGURE SO IMPRESSED THE INDIANS THAT THEY NICKNAMED HIM HETUCK, "THE BIG BUCKEYE"

JIM BAKER

COL. EBENEZER SPROAT was born in Middleborough, Massachusetts, in the year 1752. He was the son of Col. Ebenezer Sproat, a respectable yeoman, who owned one of the finest farms in that vicinity, with a large, commodious dwelling-house, which, for many years before, and during the Revolutionary War, was occupied as a tavern. Like his son, he was an uncommonly tall and portly man. A brother of Ebenezer was a lawyer, and settled in Taunton.

His early education must have been the best the schools afforded in that day, as he was familiar with the principles and practice of surveying. During his boyhood and youth, he assisted his father in cultivating the farm; and when the War of Independence commenced, 17 found him in the prime of manhood, he entered the service as Captain of a Company, and soon rose to the post of Major in the Tenth Regiment of the Massachusetts Line, commanded by Col. Shepherd. In 1778 Glover's Brigade of Four Regiments was stationed at Providence, at which time he was a Lieutenant-Colonel, and said to be the tallest man in the Brigade, being six foot and four inches tall, with lines formed in nature's most perfect model.

In the duties of his station, he excelled as much as in size, being the most complete disciplinarian in the Brigade. His social habits, pleasant, agreeable manners, and cheerful disposition rendered him a general favorite with the officers, as well as with the private soldiers, who always followed with alacrity, wherever he led. His superior tact and excellence in discipline attracted the notice of General Steuben, who appointed him inspector of the Brigade, which office he filled with great credit to himself, and the entire satisfaction of the Baron.

Having served through the war with credit to himself and the regiment to which he belonged, and witnesses the acknowledgment of the United States as an independent Sovereignty amongst the nations of the earth, he retired, satisfied, to the pursuits of private life. As a proof of his attachment to the common soldiers, and all who were or had been engaged in fighting the enemies of his country, the following anecdote is related:

Col. Sproat was, all his life, fond of keen repartee, and a good joke, whenever an opportunity to exercise it occurred. At an early period of the war, while he was a captain, he was at home on a short furlough. His father, as has been before noticed, kept a house of entertainment, more especially for eating than drinking. While there, three private soldiers, on their way home from the Army, called for a cold luncheon. His mother set on the table some bread and cheese, with the remains of the family dinner, which Ebenezer thought rather scanty fare for hungry men, especially as the bones were already pretty bare. He felt a little vexed that the Defendants of the country were not more bountifully supplied. After satisfying their appetites, they inquired of him, how much was to pay? He replied he did not know, but would ask his mother. Going to the kitchen door, where she was busy with her domestic concerns, he inquired, "Mother, how much is it worth to pick those bones?" She replied, "About a shilling, I suppose."

He returned to the room, and taking from the drawer on the bar, three shillings, with a smiling face, handed each man one, wishing them a good day and a pleasant journey home. The soldiers departed, much

gratified by their kind usage. Soon after they had gone, his mother came in and asked Ebenezer what he had done with the money for their dinners. In apparent amazement, he exclaimed, "Money! Did I not ask you what it was worth to pick those bones; and you replied, a shilling? I thought it was little enough for such a job, and handed them the money from the till, and they are gone!"

It was such a good joke, and so characteristic of the favorite son, that she bore it without complaining.

After the close of the War, he lived, for some time, in Providence, employing himself occasionally at surveying.

He became acquainted with Miss Catharine Whipple, the daughter of Com. Abraham Whipple, and was united with her in marriage. Soon after his marriage, he entered into merchandise, purchasing a large store of goods from Nightingale and Clark, a noted importing house of the day. He had no taste for the new business and in a short time he failed, swallowing up his wife's patrimony, as well as his own resources.

About this time, 1786, Congress ordered the first surveys of their lands, West of the Ohio River, to be executed; seven ranges of township, beginning on the Ohio at the Western boundary line of Pennsylvania were directed to be prepared for market. Col. Sproat was appointed the surveyor for the State of Rhode Island, and commenced operations in the Fall of the year.

In 1787, the Ohio Company was formed, and he was appointed one of the surveyors of their new purchases, for which his hardy frame and great resolution eminently fitted him. In the Autumn of 1787, they

resolved to send on a company of boat-builders and artificers to the head waters of the Ohio at Sumrills Ferry, for the purpose of preparing boats for the transportation of the provisions and men to commence the colony in the Spring. Col. Sproat led one of these detachments.

The party arrived at the mouth of the Muskingum on the 7th of April, 1788. Col. Sproat immediately commenced his labors as surveyor for the company, and continued them until the breaking out of the War in January, 1791, when all further operations in the woods were suspended. Many of the savages visited the new settlement to see the Bostonians, as they were called, and to exchange their meats, skins, and peltry, for goods with the traders at Marietta and Fort Harmar.

The tall, commanding person of Col. Sproat soon attracted their attention and they gave him the name of "Hetuck" or Big Buckeye. From this, no doubt, originated the name of Buckeye, now applied to the natives of Ohio, as the phrase was familiar to all the early settlers of Marietta.

On the arrival of Gov. St. Clair and the organization of the County of Washington, he commissioned him as Sheriff, which post he held for fourteen years, or until the formation of the State Government, when a change in the political measures of the administration threw him out of office. He was also, at the same time, commissioned as Colonel of the Militia.

In the Fall of 1791, just before the commencement of the attack on the settlement, he was authorized by Gen. Knox, Secretary of War, to enlist a company of soldiers for the defense of the Colony, appoint rangers, and superintend the military affairs of the United States in Washington County.

His family arrived here, with Commander Whipple, in 1789. It consisted of his wife and one daughter. After the close of the War she married Solomon Sibley, Esq., of Detroit, who commenced the practice of Law in Marietta.

As Sheriff of the County, Ebenezer Sproat opened the first court ever held in the territory, now Ohio, marching with his drawn sword and wand of office, at the head of the Judges, Governor, Secretary, and company, preceded by a military escort, from the Point to the northwest block-house of Campus Martius, on the 2nd day of September, 1788. It was an august spectacle, conducted with great dignity and decorum, making a deep impression on the red men of the forest, many of whom witnessed the ceremonies, and at this time bestowed on him the Indian name, by which they ever after designated him.

During the whole period of the War he performed his duties as superintendent of the military post at Belpre, Waterford and Marietta, and paymaster to the rangers and colonial troops.

In disposition and temperament, Col. Sproat was cheerful and animated; exceedingly fond of company and jovial entertainments; much attached to horses and dogs; always riding on his long journeys over the country, then embracing half the State of Ohio, some of the finest horses the county afforded, and generally accompanied by two or three large dogs, who, next to horses, shared largely in his favors.

In executing the sterner requisitions of the law among the poorer classes of society, he has been often known to furnish the money himself for the payment of the debt, rather than distress an indigent family. His heart, although full of merriment and playfulness, overflowed with

kindness. He had no enemies but those of a political kind. In personal appearance, he was remarkable for his tall, majestic figure, and exact proportions: towering like a Saul, a full head above the height of other men.

The office of Sheriff was filled with great dignity and propriety, commanding by his noble presence and military bearing, the strictest silence and decorum from the audience, while the Courts were sitting; and when on duty, wearing his sword as an emblem of justice, as well as of execution in fulfilling the requirements of law. This badge of office was very appropriate, and was kept up in several of the states for many years after the war, but, like many other good and wholesome usages, has given away under the prevalence of ultra democratic principles.

He died suddenly, in full vigor of health, in February, 1805, having his oft-respected wish of a sudden exit fully answered. His memory is held in grateful remembrance by all who knew him.

Early Pioneers of Ohio  
Samuel Prescott Hildreth, M.D.