The Major Tandy Key Blacksmith Shop at Fort Daniel:
Who Was Key and What Was His Role in the Building of Fort Daniel? by James D’Angelo

During the 8th Annual Frontier Faire, in October 14, the Fort Daniel Foundation dedicated its “new” blacksmith shop in honor of Major Tandy Watts Key (photo 1). The “new” structure is made from salvaged logs of the old Jackson cabin that were donated to the Foundation by the Gwinnett Historical Society (Photo 2). Logger David Coffey of Flowery Branch, (whose farm and mill is located off Hog Mountain Road!) salvaged enough material from the badly deteriorated plank logs to build a 10'x10' three-side structure, which retained the original construction type, including the half-dovetail corner joints (Photo 3).

Who was Tandy Key? Tandy Watts Key was born on September 8, 1786 in Wilkes County. He was the son of Joseph Staunton Key and Judith Watts Key. He died July 7, 1840 and was buried in Linwood Cemetery, Columbus Muscogee County, Georgia. His wife was Nancy Johnson Beaty Key, and their children were Margaret Davis Key, Telitha Adaline Key, Mary Louisa Key and Harriet Elisa Key. His parents had come to Georgia from Bedford County, Virginia. His grandfather was Tandy Key, born in Virginia in 1754.

In a letter dated January 13, 1827 from Tandy Key, to Governor George M. Troup of Georgia, Key wrote:

In the year 1813 orders for a classification of the militia throughout the state were issued from the executive department, which classification took place agreeably to that order -- At that time the frontiers of this and some of the adjoining Counties were in very eminent danger of Indian aggressions -- Having at that time the Honor of commanding the 26th Regt of [the] G.M. Orders were issued from the then Executive [Gov. Mitchell] through the proper channel to erect & garrison a line of Forts on the frontiers of this County and the necessary Arms & Ammunition was furnished by the state for that purpose & the said order further specified that the said Forts should be garrisoned by the Men who were classed in the 1st class each fort to contain Twenty Men besides two reconnoitering Men....

Key was commanding the 26th Regiment of the 2nd Brigade of Major Allen Daniel's 4th Division of the Georgia Militia Army. Major General Allen Daniel's 4th Division, and Major General John Clark's 3d Division, had been organized as General - later, Major-General - John Floyd's Georgia Militia Army. That Army was in service to the federal government from August 1813 to March of 1814.

In his letter to Troup, Key alluded to the fact that Floyd's Georgia Militia Army was formed following an act of Congress on April 10, 1812, which required governors to put portions of their militias on alert status when requested to do so by the federal government. That, and the “very eminent danger of Indian aggressions,” provide the context for Key’s role in the construction of Fort Daniel. The 2nd Brigade of Daniel’s 4th Division, which served Jackson, Madison, and Franklin Counties, was commanded by Brigadier General Beall. It was Beall who had received General Daniel’s orders, dated October 21, 1813, to “forthwith order out thirty of the militia of his Brigade to relieve those now stationed (by his order) at the hog mountain,” and to set up a system for rotation every 10 days.

Further, based on information that Daniel had received that “the fort at the hog mountain is not only formed of old, dry and insufficient timbers, but is also badly constructed, consequently easily destroyed by fire and inadequate for defence,” the letter orders Beall, along with Major John D. Terrell, to supervise the construction of “a new fort at or near the place whereon the present fort stands.” “When the work is completed,” the letter continues, “the militia which may be in Service at the present fort will take possession of the new one.”

Beall passed these orders down to Major Tandy Key, who commanded Beall’s 25th regiment. Key then formed a company of men from that regiment, and put Captain Nehemiah Garrison in charge. We know from another letter of testimony dated April 13th 1814 - that:

Nehemiah Garrison is entitled to twenty two days pay for services rendered as Captain Commanding the troops who completed fort Daniel near the Hog Mountain in Jackson County pursuant to the order of Brigadier Genl Beall of the 21st Nov. 1813...

According to the muster roles of those who served at Fort Daniel under Garrison, the “thirty of the militia of his Brigade,” including Garrison, came to twenty-eight, in three separate drafts. The first draft consisted of 12 men serving from December 2 to December 14; the second draft, consisted of two men serving from December 3 to December 10, and the third draft consisted of 13 men who served from December 2 to December 14. Garrison was there the entire time.
According to Wharton's records and invoices for forage, although there were nine Horsemens, there were only two horses! While it is possible that some men had their own horses, and provided their forage, this apparent incongruity is not addressed.

What of those stationed at Fort Daniel when Garrison first arrived, as Allen Daniel put it: "those who may be in Service at the present fort"? Two of those may be William Cobb and Richard Heath, who, according to Garrison's April 13 letter, "are entitled to twenty four days pay (each) as Spies employed on the Jackson Line..." They are not listed on his official muster roll for the period of construction, which suggests they may already have been serving there as scouts.

Photo 2: The logs of the old Jackson cabin were used to build the new blacksmith shop

One other individual who most certainly was serving at Fort Daniel before and after its construction was Jacob Braselton. In a letter to Governor Troup, dated January 14, 1827, Braselton claimed that he was:

...classified first Class According to The Classification of the Militia of This State and Agreeable to Executive Orders. I volunteered for Sixty days Service and was stationed at the hog mountain Fort...

If the Fort was abandoned by March of 1814, as we believe is the case, Braselton must have been there in October of 1813, before Daniel's letter of October 21. These men may not have been from a special detachment but simply members of the local militia. Unfortunately, no records for garrisoning the "hog mountain fort" have been found.

The next communication from Key is a letter addressed to the Governor, dated October of 1814. The war is over, and he is reporting on his effort to "call together the public arms that was sent to Jackson County," the poor condition many of them are in, and the difficulty in collecting all of

Photo 3: The blacksmith shop being assembled
the original 150 arms, which he nevertheless promises to do. The last letter we have from Key is dated January 13th, 1827, the opening sentences of which I have read.

It was in recognition of the role of Major Tandy Watts Key in sending a Company of men, under the command of Captain Nehemiah Garrison to rebuild the fort at Hog Mountain - thereafter to be known as Fort Daniel - that the Fort Daniel Foundation was pleased to name our first construction at the site in 203 years, in his honor. Work on the Blacksmith shop continues, under the direction Doc Watson, who is supervising the construction of two forges, which will be used for a proposed blacksmith apprentice program (Photo 4).

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Notes
1. See the Gwinnett Archaeological Research Bulletin, Vol. 5 Issue 6 for photo coverage of the erection of the structure in August.
2. https://www.wikitreecom/genealogy/KEY.
3. This letter of testimony, on file at the Georgia Archives, Southeastern Native American Documents, was written to on behalf of the men sent to Hog Mountain who, “having lost or mislaid the said order, ... are at a loss to Know, whether they are by an act of the last Legislature entitled to an extra draw in the present contemplated Lottery.”

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