Blue Ridge **Torch Club** March 14, 2007

"Why is Loudoun County Named for John Campbell of Scotland?"

by Douglas Foard

The fourth Earl of Loudoun, John Campbell (1705-1782), never set foot in Virginia; much less Loudoun County. Yet, the Commonwealth's colonial assembly decided to name its newest jurisdiction for him in 1757 because the legislators were so pleased that the government in London had sent to these shores one of the United Kingdom's great peers, a member of the House of Lords and the Royal Society. He was an experienced professional soldier, a veteran of continental wars against France, a proven ally of Britain's Hanoverian monarchy (against challenges by the deposed Stuarts), and a favorite of King George's son, the Duke of Cumberland.

Virginia had every right to be relieved that such a distinguished person had arrived on these shores in 1756 with a royal appointment as commander-in-chief but also as Governor of Virginia. If one looked westward from our community that year the fires of burning farmsteads were evident across the mountains; and refugees poured over the Blue Ridge into what is now Loudoun County. The French and their Native American allies were scourging the Shenandoah Valley and Colonel George Washington, commander of Virginia's militia at the time, had to admit that "It is not

possible to conceive the situation and danger of this miserable country…no roads are safe."

The peril experienced by these early Virginians was the result of an imperial conflict that began in the seventeenth century in warfare between Britain and France. This specific war (we call it the French and Indian War but it was, in fact, a global conflict historians term "the Seven Years' War, 1756-1763) began outside of Uniontown, Pennsylvania in 1754. It was there that a troop of Virginia militia under George Washington's command fired upon and killed members of a party of Frenchmen operating out of Fort Duquesne, a fortification at what later became know as Pittsburgh. The conflict became global in short order, involving engagements in Africa, India, the Philippines, Cuba, and, of course, North America.

Here things did not go well initially for the British. The London government responded to the French defeat of the Virginians by dispatching General Edward Braddock and thousands of Redcoats to these shores in 1755. The General marched his troops from Alexandria across the Blue Ridge into resounding defeat near Pittsburgh. So serious was the reverse that

Braddock's temporary successor withdrew his forces into "winter quarters" in Philadelphia even though it was still July.

It was in these circumstances that the London government called upon the 4th Earl of Loudoun to take command of His Majesty's forces in North America.

[read his arrival in New York]

Loudoun moved promptly up the Hudson where he assumed his French counterpart, the Marquis de Montcalm, would be attacking from Montreal down the river system. He was wrong. Montcalm instead successfully attacked Oswego on Loudoun's left flank, exposing Albany and New York to invasion.

In the months thereafter, Lord Loudoun hectored the British colonies to raise funds and forces to meet the French again in the campaign season of 1757. He devised a daring plan that would attack the heart of New France at Quebec by taking Louisbourg, on Cape Breton Island and then moving west ~~down~~ up the St. Lawrence to the French capital. French intelligence sources

anticipated the offensive and reinforced Louisbourg with formidable naval squadrons. After a series of delays, Loudoun's troop ships sailed to Halifax, Nova Scotia, only to discover that their invasion force was outgunned by the French. Loudoun ordered a return to New York City.

It was on his voyage home that "the imperious laird" learned that the French and their indigenous allies had struck at Fort William Henry on the south shore of Lake George, captured the post, and had allowed the massacre of some of its inhabitants. The saga of Fort William Henry would form the basis of James Fenimore Cooper's classic, The Last of the Mohicans, and would inspire Anglo-American rage against the French (and Lord Loudoun).

He was, in fact, dismissed by Britain's new Prime Minister, William Pitt, in 1758, and sent home under a cloud. The plans he devised during his command, however, formed the basis of Britain's subsequent victory over the French in 1758-59. Loudoun returned to quiet retirement in Scotland, but was called again to the colors in 1762. He was commander of British armed forces in Portugal that year when Spain and France sought to capture Lisbon. They didn't. Loudoun and his subordinate, General John Burgoyne, rescued Portuguese independence.

He died in 1782 at Loudoun Castle, a man so noteworthy in his time that he was visited by Samuel Johnson and his biographer, James Boswell. He left no direct heirs and Loudoun Castle burned down in 1941.