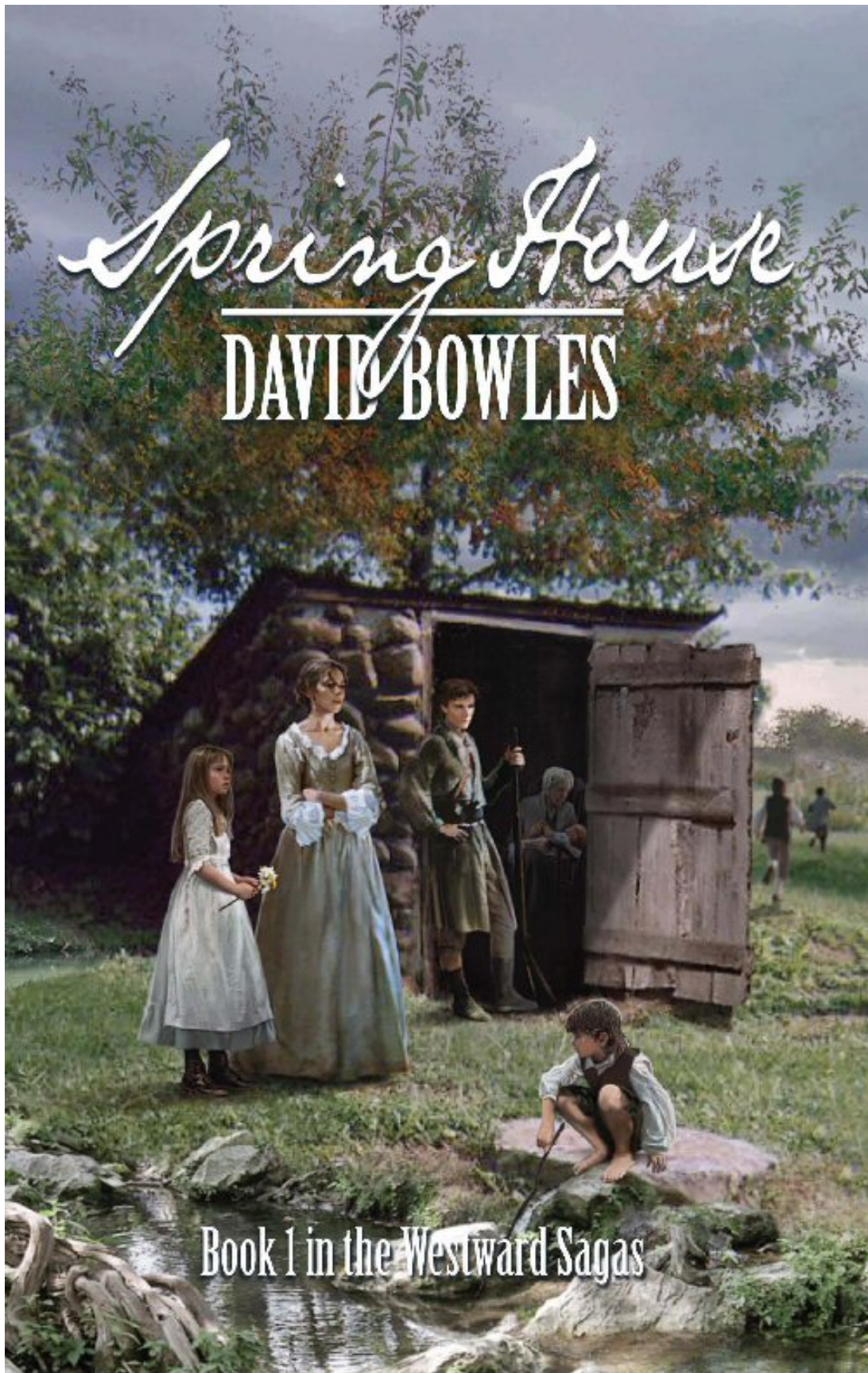


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Book 1 in the Westward Sagas

# SPRING HOUSE

BOOK 1 IN THE WESTWARD SAGAS

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## *Chapter One*

# **The Old Wagon Road**

Young Adam Mitchell handed the reins to his sister Mary and climbed down from the wheel horse.<sup>1</sup> He helped his father remove a pile of fallen trees and large boulders from The Great Wagon Road.<sup>2</sup> That sounded like a grand name for the buffalo path that had been enlarged into a trail by the Indians and settlers who had moved west before them.

Adam rubbed his back, but he wouldn't let the aches that came from long hours sitting on the lazy board<sup>3</sup> or the broad back of the wheel horse and the hard labor of moving the obstacles in their path dampen his natural zest for life or his excitement over their journey this fall of 1762. They were finally moving to North Carolina to join other members of the ScotsIrish<sup>4</sup> Mitchell clan after many months of preparation.

Robert Mitchell, Adam's father, mounted his horse to lead the way again. Adam climbed back onto the wheel horse and took the reins back from his sister.

"Good job," he said.

"You did a good job of teaching all of us," his older sister Jean said. "As always, Dad's right hand ..." Her voice trailed off, and she wiped a tear from her eye.

Adam knew she was thinking of all of the friends they'd left behind in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. As excited as they were about moving, the thought of never seeing the friends he'd grown up with and the farm he'd lived on all his life might have brought a tear to his eye if he hadn't been a man grown at age seventeen.

The trip didn't allow much time to think about what they'd left behind or what they'd find when they got to their new home. They always seemed to be fording a creek, climbing a peak, dealing with rocks in the road, making camp, breaking camp, tending to the team, or doing something they hadn't imagined doing when they left Pennsylvania.

Thank heavens for the new Conestoga wagon that was built to deal with the rough terrain, so unlike the gentle rolling hills the Mitchells were used to. The new wagon was built by German immigrants in the borough of Lancaster in the Conestoga region of Pennsylvania. It was designed to carry heavy loads over great distances. When Robert bought the wagon, his wife had complained about the cost, but now Margaret realized the importance of the four broad wheels that prevented the heavy load of housewares and farm implements from getting stuck. She appreciated the white canvas cover that protected her cherished belongings from the rain and the three girls' light Scots-Irish complexions from the sun. The wagon also sheltered the family during the night, with the women sleeping in the wagon and Robert and Adam sleeping underneath.

The adventures of the days on the road west worked up hearty appetites. Every evening the womenfolk cooked a hearty meal of beans and salt pork over the campfire. Sometimes Adam shot a squirrel or a rabbit, and they ate fresh meat. Robert had taught Adam to make every shot count

with the family musket — ammunition was scarce in Pennsylvania but they knew from everything they'd heard it would prove to be more so in North Carolina.

After Margaret and the girls washed the Dutch oven and cleaned up the campsite, the family gathered round the fire. Robert read passages from the family Bible. Margaret and Mary sang the familiar hymns from the Presbyterian Hymnal. Often a smile or a tear would appear as Margaret or one of the girls remembered that the hymnals had been given to them as goodbye gifts from the congregation of the beloved Nottingham Church in Lancaster.

Adam and Robert discussed Benjamin Franklin's recent electrical experiments that they'd read about before embarking on this journey. They also had long discussions about whether the new King, George III, was really insane and about his new British Prime Minister, Bute. The events of the next few years would soon turn the Mitchell family into Whigs, who resisted the Crown's control over the colonies and opposed the Tories or loyalists, who supported the Crown's rights to control the colonists.

As the oldest, twenty-year-old Jean often had the privilege of reading aloud the letters from Uncle Adam Mitchell, Robert's older brother, for whom Adam had been named. Their new home would be five miles west of Uncle Adam, who had moved to North Carolina some ten years ago to homestead a land grant from Lord Cateret, Earl of Granville.

More excited by the day at seeing their new home, the Mitchells loved hearing the letters over and over again, even though they were months old. The letters told of the Nottingham settlers starting The Buffalo Creek Presbyterian Church in a log cabin near Uncle Adam's home on the Buffalo Creek some six years earlier. Before this cabin was built the congregation had met in Uncle Adam's home. The actions of the new King George III affected this small clan of Scots-Irish settlers; as the entire congregation of the Buffalo Creek Church spoke out on the subject of colonial resistance, the British loyalists and Tories harassed many of the families for their political beliefs.

The Nottingham Group of settlers was an independent group, to say the least. Their free-thinking spirit and 150-year history of persecution had created a very strong-willed group of Scots-Irish Presbyterians who were predisposed to embrace the revolutionary movement and declare openly that they were Whigs. The Nottingham Group was made up of farmers, tradesmen, and trappers who had moved west to avoid the impositions forced on them by Parliament. In the backwoods of North Carolina, they felt they were far removed from the problems of this conflict. Time would soon prove them wrong.