7. Life at Boonesborough

THE return of Daniel Boone and his family in late August of 1775 was the real beginning of permanent settlement in Kentucky. Wandering hunters could be driven off. Land speculators and adventurers might be harassed until they gave up and fled to safety in the settlements. Many of the fainter-hearted settlers could be frightened away, families and all. But there was a grim little remnant of Boones and Callaways, Todds and Harrods, Kentons and Logans, and bearers of other names famous on the frontier who sat stubbornly down to live in that land or be buried in it.

Boone and the others who brought their wives and children and all their pitifully small worldly goods to the wilderness, had given pledges to fortune. They had ventured all they had. There was nothing in the settlements for them to go back to. They had come to make their homes on lands where they meant to end their days.

Daniel Boone brought back with him a party of such settlers, besides twenty adventurous young men from North Carolina. He brought with him also a supply of salt, as well as ammunition, cattle, and dogs. His party traveled together as far as Dick's River, south of the Kentucky. Here they separated. Some went on to Harrodsburg. The rest, thirty in all, led by Daniel Boone, struck north for Boonesborough, where they arrived early in September. In Daniel's own words, they "arrived safe

without any other difficulties than such as are common to this passage." And he added proudly: "My wife and daughter being the first white women that ever stood on the banks of Kentucke river."

What Rebecca Boone must have thought as the pack-horses topped the low pass in the southern hills and she looked down for the first time upon the great meadow where Boonesborough stood, is beyond conjecture. This was the promised land. This was the country for which Daniel had left her and risked his life year after year. This was the land from which he had returned again and again, each time bubbling with enthusiasm. This was the land that Daniel and Squire and John Finley had described as an earthly paradise, in many an enthusiastic evening by a Yadkin cabin fire.

Rebecca was used to the backwoods. Never in her life had she known the comforts so dear to women, and she didn't miss them. But the frontier as she had known it was after all a frontier which still touched civilization's outer edge. The Yadkin Valley was wild and rough, to be sure, but not too many miles to the east were colonial towns with courthouses, churches, merchants, doctors, parsons—some kind of contact with civilization.

Boonesborough was wholly cut off from the outside world. To reach it, she had ridden three hundred miles through unbroken wilderness without so much as a cabin or a trace of humankind.

What she saw, at the journey's end, as the weary horses dragged slowly down the hillside, was four or five rough cabins straggling along the river where the meadow joined it. A sixth cabin, Nathaniel Hart's, stood at some distance. There were a few cornfields here and there, and the remains of the garden that Henderson had planted in the spring. Around the meadow were the forests. Across the river a wooded bluff rose menac-

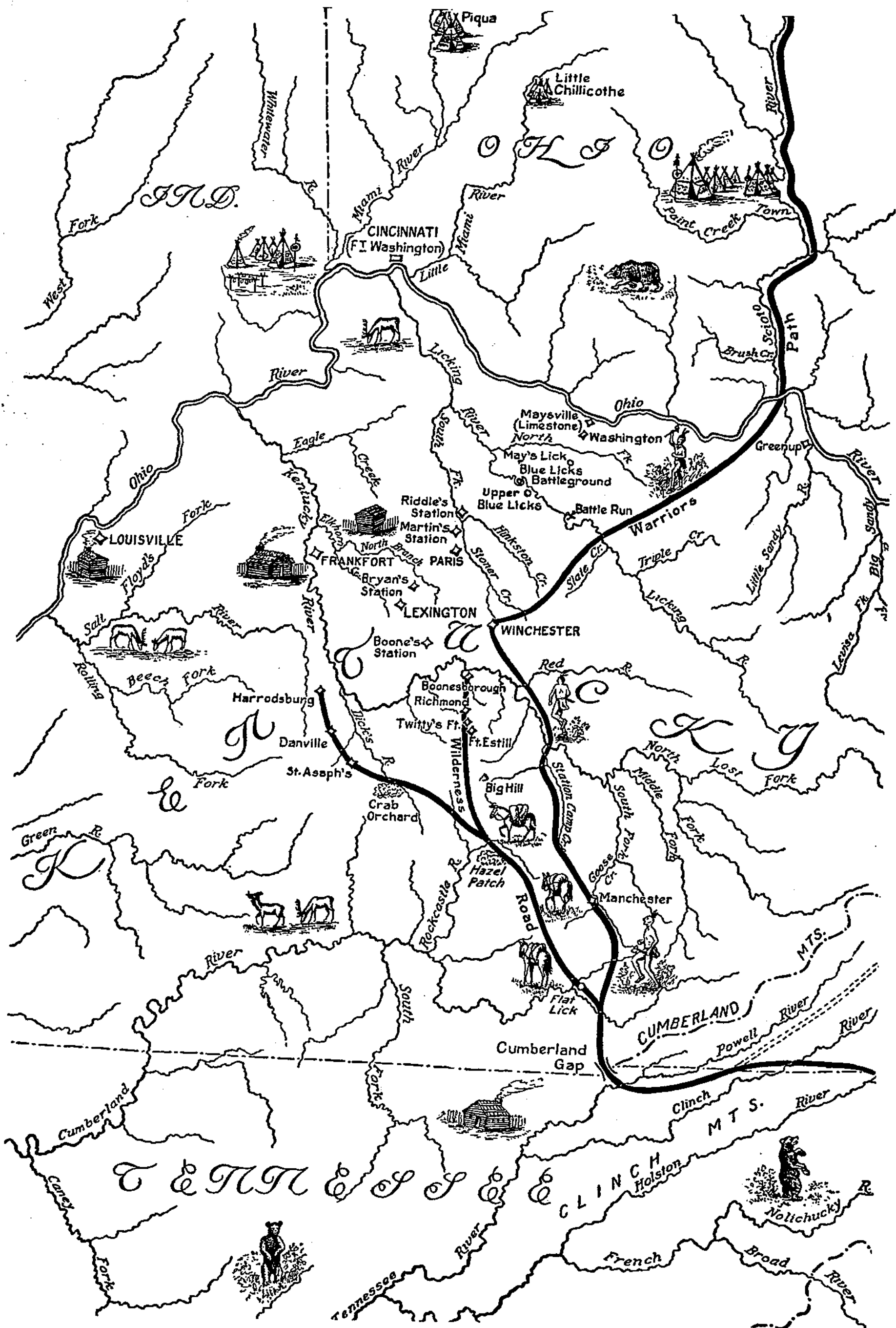
ingly, giving any casually roving Indians a clear view of the cabins.

Nor were these wretched little shelters even fortified as yet. Henderson had talked about a "fort" in his diary, but he had never managed even to get a stockade built all the way around his proposed enclosure. Settlers arriving after the Boones in September found the cabins "not picketted in being open on two sides." Any enemy who wanted to could walk right in, though the cabins themselves were strongly built and close enough together to support each other by rifle fire. The stockade remained unfinished all winter and most of the following summer, at least.

There were no comforts or conveniences of any kind. It was hardly possible even to be cleanly. At the moment there were no other women at all, and it would be a long time before many came.

For this Rebecca had left the East. This was home. Here she would rear Jemima, her last unmarried daughter. Characteristically, Daniel hurried off to the woods for a hunt, or at least laid in supplies for one, as soon as he arrived. Henderson's account books show a charge against him for half a pound of powder and twelve pounds of lead on September 8, 1775.

Squire Boone came soon after, bringing with him the Bryan family, Rebecca's relatives from the Yadkin Valley, who had shared the Boones' disaster in 1773, but who still had faith in Daniel's schemes. On September 26 came Colonel Callaway, with his family and other settlers, including a certain William Poague, who turned out to be a valuable addition to the community. He was an "ingenius contriver," able to make piggins, noggins, and churns, for which the settlement had great need. This cavalcade also brought cattle, hogs, ducks, and chickens. The Cherokees were still so friendly that a band of them, meeting Callaway's party, divided part of a buffalo with them.



Piqua
Little Chillicothe
OHIO
IND.
Whitewater R.
Miami River
Little Miami River
West Fork
Paint Creek Town
CINCINNATI
(Ft. Washington)
River
Licking River
Brush Cr.
Scioto River
Path
Ohio
Ohio
Maysville
(Limestone)
Washington
North Fk.
South Fk.
Eagle Creek
May's Lick
Blue Licks
Battleground
Upper Blue Licks
Battle Run
Greenup
River
Riddle's Station
Martin's Station
Kentucky River
Elkhorn
North Branch
LOUISVILLE
Floyd's Fork
FRANKFORT
PARIS
Hinkston Cr.
Stoner Cr.
Bryan's Station
LEXINGTON
Warriors
Slate Cr.
Triple Cr.
Licking R.
Little Sandy R.
Big Sandy R.
Levisa Fk.
Salt River
WINCHESTER
Boone's Station
Rolling Fork
Beech Fork
Red R.
Harrodsburg
Boonesborough
Richmond
Twitty's Ft.
Ft. Estill
Danville
Dick's R.
Wilderness
KENTUCKY
North Fork
Lost Fork
St. Asaph's
Big Hill
Crab Orchard
Station Camp Cr.
South Fork
Middle Fork
Green R.
Hazel Patch
Rockcastle R.
Road
Goose Cr.
Manchester
MTS.
River
South Fork
Flat Lick
CUMBERLAND
Powell River
River
Cumberland Gap
Cumberland
Clinch
MTS.
River
CLINCH
Holston
TENNESSEE
Caney Fork
River
Nolichucky R.
French Broad River
Tennessee

As general land agent of the Transylvania Company, Colonel John Williams, one of the proprietors, opened a land office on December 1, 1775, and there was a wild scramble for real estate. Already the danger of rival claimants to a single piece of real estate was showing itself. It was to cause Boone and other Kentuckians years of litigation and heavy losses. So intense, even in these early days, was the eagerness for land, that John Todd remarked: "I'm afraid to loose sight of my House lest some Invader takes possession."

During the next ten years Daniel Boone entered claims for well over ten thousand acres of land, while his brother Squire and other members of the family made claims almost equally lavish. At one time Daniel Boone's own land claims must have totaled something like one hundred thousand acres. Some of these were military grants with which Virginia rewarded soldiers in the colonial wars. Others were ordinary settler's claims under the land acts, fertile areas discovered on his wilderness journeys and marked off by tomahawk blazes on the trees.

The kind of writer who enjoys denigration of heroic figures, frequently endeavors to represent the whole Kentucky epic, and Daniel Boone's rôle in particular, as nothing but greedy speculation and land grabbing of heroic extent. It is certainly true that Boone wanted land and laid claim to land on a gigantic scale, as did most of the pioneers. To all these sturdy, independent souls, land that a man could call his own and walk over was the *summum bonum* of human existence. They agreed heartily with Henderson's "rapturous idea of property," and fully endorsed Colonel Callaway's opinion that "there is not any better way to make money than by land." One of their young associates, Nathan Reid, used to sit on a log in the wildest part of the primitive forest, discussing with a friend "the pleasure we should one day enjoy in the possession of boundless wealth. Spread out before us lay the finest body of

land in the world, any quantity of which, with but little exertion, we could make our own."

But land was something more than a material possession, something greater than mere wealth. It was a symbol of a man's independence, something uniquely his own, carved by his own effort from the wilderness. Held captive by the Indians in Ohio, Daniel Boone was quick to note that the land there was so good as "to exceed the soil of Kentucky, if possible, and remarkably well watered." Simon Kenton, doomed to the stake by the Indians, had two thoughts in his mind, even in the midst of his peril. One was obvious: to escape the torture. The other was to own some of the "fine country"—in which at the moment he had every prospect of being burned to death. That same interest in land—good, rich land, something tangible and real—still remained to him as he lay shattered and broken in the dirt of an Indian village after having been beaten nearly to death in the gauntlet.

Freehold, land, estates a man could see and walk on, raise his crops on, use to endow the children that he got—that was what the pioneer wanted.

Daniel Boone was a poor man, the son of a poor father. He had a family to provide for; and when the land which he had risked his life to win through long and bitter years was to be had for the asking, he undoubtedly asked for some of it. His claims seem large in modern eyes. Actually, they were no larger than those of many another Kentuckian.

The settlements had agreed to warn each other instantly of any Indian "sign" discovered, and to aid each other if it came to a fight. The Cherokees to the south, who had been paid for the land, were friendly. Casual marauders were not a serious menace. Henderson, therefore, thought himself "secure against a formidable attack; and a few skulkers could only kill one or two, which would not much affect the interest of the company"

—a somewhat cold-blooded and capitalistic view of the matter.

So far, the Boonesborough settlers had had only nature to contend with. As late as June, while the Powell's Valley settlements in the east were convulsed with fear, Henderson still felt safe from Indians in his half-defended Kentucky cabins. Indians were certain to leave traces of their presence that a skilled woodsman could find, he wrote; and the skilled woodsmen with him found no such traces. In fact, one did not need to be a very expert scout. The "grass and herbage" were "so tender and luxuriant that it is almost impossible for man or dog to travel, without leaving such sign that you might, for many days, gallop a horse on the trail." The white men hunted on horseback. Any footprints, therefore, would be those of Indians. But there were no footprints. Not yet.

It was some time before stray Shawnee hunting parties observed with perturbation the presence of white men who showed every sign of making their settlements permanent. The news began to spread among the Shawnee villages north of the Ohio.

The settlers were fortunate in meeting with no attack during the warm campaigning weather which Indian war parties preferred. This was the time of the white men's greatest weakness, while the hasty cabins of the settlements were still without adequate defense and many isolated settlers were "cabining" all over the country in the blithest confidence.

The Indians did not at first realize what was happening. Not until December did word begin to go about among the wigwams north of the Ohio that the white man was in Kentucky in force. Whereupon so many scalping raids resulted that Boone later said the Indians seemed "determined to persecute us for erecting this fortification."

The attacks began just before Christmas, on December 23, 1775. Colonel Arthur Campbell, with two boys named Sanders and McQuinney, crossed the Kentucky River. They were so

sure they were safe that they did not even take rifles along. The boys went on up the hill on the other side of the river. Campbell went two hundred yards upstream alone, and "took up a bottom"—that is, marked out a claim on river bottom land, which was certain to be fertile.

However safe they may have felt, keen and hostile eyes watching the fort had seen their coming. Lurking Indians were deliberately letting the unsuspecting white men walk deeper into danger. Ten minutes after they separated, there was a shot and a yell, and a cry was raised in the fort that the Indians had killed Campbell. The rescue party met him running for the landing, one shoe off and one shoe on, and learned that he had encountered "a couple of Indians," only about three hundred yards away.

When nothing further was heard of the boys, the fort became alarmed. Not only were these two in danger, but there were a dozen unsuspecting hunters scattered through the adjoining forests, engaged in the ceaseless pot-hunting on which Boonesborough depended for its food.

Daniel Boone hurried off with a party in pursuit of the Indians who had attacked Campbell, but found only two moccasin tracks. Since Boonesborough's hunters all were mounted, these had probably been made by the Indians. But the two boys had also gone out on foot and no one knew exactly where they might have wandered.

Toward nightfall the hunters began to straggle in, quite safe and entirely unaware of their danger. None of them had seen Indians and none had seen the boys. The search continued until, four days later, McQuinney was found lying scalped in a cornfield, three miles away.

Nothing was ever heard of Sanders again. Did he falter on the trail along which the Shawnees led their captives to their own country somewhere beyond the Ohio River? If so, one

swift blow with a tomahawk ended everything and his scalped body was left to rot. Did he reach the Ohio country alive? Then he was either burned to death or he was adopted and grew up as an Indian, learning the lore of the forest, loving its wild life, and forgetting white man's ways. Many a white lad disappeared like that into the deep forest forever.

Next day fifteen rangers went out to scour the country thoroughly, urged on by an offer of five pounds for every Indian scalp they brought in. They picked up the "tracts" of six or seven Indians thirty or forty miles north of Boonesborough and heading toward Ohio. Then, quaintly says John Williams, the land agent, "we began to doubt there was a body of Indians about, who intended committing outrage on our inhabitants."

The raiders seem to have been a small group who had set out from the Shawnee country "to take a look at the white people on Kentucky" just before the treaty at Fort Pitt between the American commissioners and the chiefs of the western tribes. "King" Cornstalk, the Shawnee chief, when signing the treaty in October, had warned the American commissioners that this party from his tribe was out on the warpath and added that until they returned he could not be responsible for their conduct. He had, of course, no exact idea where they were and no way of reaching them. He added "that they might do some mischief, and that if any of them should get killed by the whites he should take no notice at all of it."

At worst, this had been a solitary raid. Daniel Boone was famous for absolute calm under all conditions. He and his veterans had seen Indian raids before and were not much disturbed. But the killing was enough to stir up a panic among the less experienced settlers, nervous in their isolation. Who knew how many other Indians might be lurking in the forests, or who would be the next to die? Kentuckians did not yet feel so sure of their own prowess as they felt a few years later when

the war whoop was a familiar sound; when scalping raids were a familiar part of life's routine; when they had beaten off overwhelming Indian forces again and again.

Ammunition was already running low. Even for hunting, the powder supply would hardly last beyond March. If the Indians attacked in force, Boonesborough could not hold out. Actually, conclusion of the treaty with Cornstalk at Fort Pitt had for a time removed the danger; but no one in Kentucky knew of the treaty yet, and no one anywhere knew how far an Indian treaty could be relied on.

Settlers began to flee to safety in the settlements. There had been nine hundred land entries, laying claim to 560,000 acres. Five hundred people had come into Kentucky; but soon a scant two hundred were left. Only twelve women—including, needless to say, the dauntless Boone and Callaway wives and daughters—stayed with their men.

The settlers who remained were torn with dissension. Henderson and his friends had raised the price of land and claimed seventy thousand choice acres at the Falls of the Ohio, very nearly the best in the state. Early in 1776 Daniel and Squire Boone went with a party of hunters and surveyors to lay out Henderson's own holding there.

Many settlers resented such wholesale preëmption by the proprietors, for everyone was well aware of the future value of this site, which is today the city of Louisville. In December of 1775 or May of 1776, a remonstrance was presented to the Virginia Convention from "the inhabitants, and some of the intended settlers of that part of North America, now denominated Transylvania." The names of Daniel and Squire Boone and of Richard Callaway were conspicuously absent. They had been among "the few adventurers who went to see the country last summer [1775], overawed by the presence of Mr. Henderson."

The petitioners, "anxious to concur in every respect with

our brethren of the united colonies," doubted the validity of Henderson's original title to Cherokee land. If they were right, every land title in Kentucky was worthless and had been worthless from the start. The petitioning settlers further viewed with alarm "the late conduct of those gentlemen in advancing the price of the purchase money from twenty shillings to fifty shillings sterling, per hundred acres." Bad as those extortionate terms might be, there was worse: "they plainly evince their intentions of rising in their demands as the settlers increase, or their insatiable avarice shall dictate."

Some practical and politically minded gentlemen at Harrodsburg sent in another petition, asking that Kentucky be made part of Virginia. They also hinted delicately "how impolitical it would be to Suffer such a Respectable Body of Prime Rifle Men to remain in a state of Neutrality" merely for the sake of "a Certain Set of men from North Carolina stiling 'emselves Proprietors."

All Harrodsburg indignantly entered into an agreement to apply for no more land grants until the earlier and cheaper terms were restored. In May, 1776, as the dispute grew bitter, John Floyd wrote hysterically that "the Harrodsburg Men have made a second revolt & Harrod & Jack Jones at the head of the Banditti—God knows how it may end but things at this time bear but a dull aspect—they utterly refuse to have any Land Surveyed or comply with one of the office rules."

Henderson and Company met the rising tide of doubt as to validity of their Cherokee title by agreeing not to ask any money for lands already occupied, until September, 1776. By that time, they hoped, the matter would be legally decided in their favor. But they did issue a proclamation warning new settlers off disputed lands, and they brought pressure to bear both upon the Virginia Convention and on the Continental Congress. One, or perhaps both, they hoped, would support the Company.

Instead, the Virginia Convention adopted a resolution condemning all land purchases from the Indians without state authority, while Congress remained wholly unresponsive.

It was the beginning of the end for Henderson. The only authority he could now hope to claim would have to come from the home government in London. At best, that authority was doubtful, and if America became independent it would be wholly impotent. The Transylvania Legislature—which had begun with such a flourish when Henderson reached Boonesborough in 1775, and which was to have assembled again in 1776—never held another meeting.

So far as the settlers themselves were concerned, these legal problems could be peacefully adjusted sooner or later, but the Indian danger could not. The new American government was working with all its might to keep the Indians quiet, but British emissaries were equally diligent. The Indians themselves were slow in taking sides. It was rather pleasant to keep the white men pleading.

The Delawares on the Wabash soon sent word to their brothers the Long Knives at Harrodsburg that the British and Kickapoos were holding a council. Delaware chiefs would attend to learn their plans. "If their Brothers of the Long Knife * would send a man they could rely on, they would on their Return inform 'em of the same & they were Apprehensive the Kiccapoos would strike their brothers ye Long Knife."

James Harrod, who could take a hint, went off to see the Delawares at once "to converse with 'em on ye same." It was not long before these same friendly Delawares were fighting with the British.

Perhaps the Kentuckians, too, might at this stage have joined

* The Indians very early began to call the Virginians "Long Knives" or "Big Knives," and the name was eventually applied to all Americans. Though it is commonly supposed to be derived from the cavalry saber, it is more probably derived from the big hunting knives carried by the early woodsmen.

the British side in the Revolution. The British later hoped to win them over, and very nearly did so. After all, Washington and the rest were in illegal revolt against constituted authority. But the Indian danger was imminent, deadly, and obvious; and the British made the fatal mistake of trying to terrorize Kentuckians. They helped the Indians in their effort to frighten the Long Knives away.

For a time the British and the Indians succeeded in producing an almost hopeless situation. In July of 1776 Colonel William Russell, Daniel Boone's associate in the ill-fated expedition of 1773, was advising the complete abandonment of the Kentucky settlements. Cut off from the other settlements by hundreds of miles of Indian-haunted forests, Kentucky seemed unable to defend itself; and it was nearly impossible either to reënforce settlers living at such a distance or to supply them with munitions.