Daniel Boone and the Pioneers' Odyssey Into the American Heartland Lesson 2: The Pioneers Outnumbered but Determined Fight for Kentucky

Welcome back to Fort Bedrock. Today we will continue our lesson on the Pioneer Daniel Boone, a man that helped found Kentucky and a hero of American culture. When we left off Daniel fled Shawnee containment and prepared Boonesborough for an impending attack. Without further adieu, here's what happened next.

The Siege of Boonesborough 1778

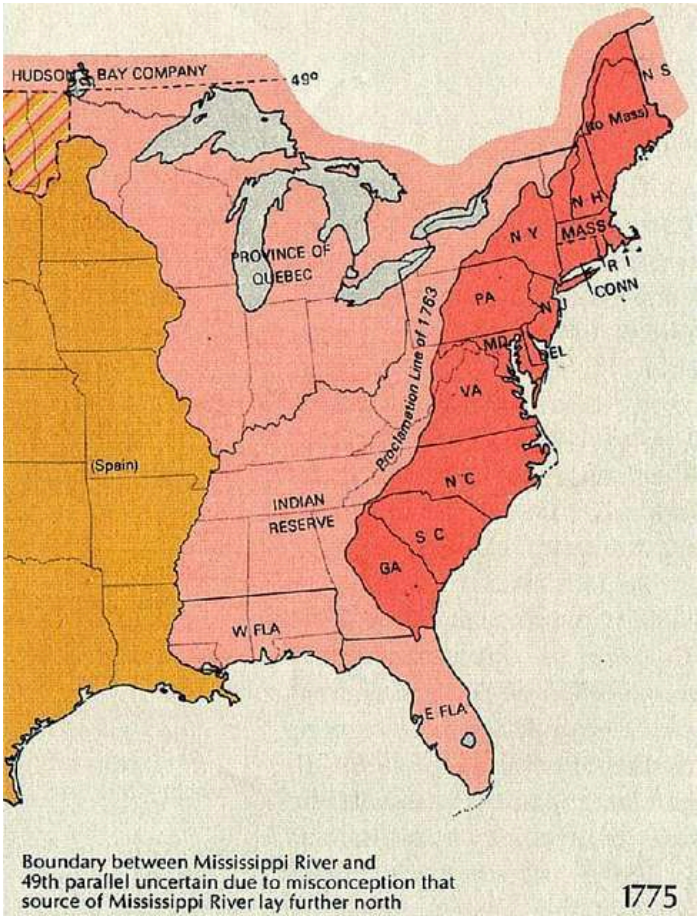
Photo Credit: A sculpture on Daniel Boone's grave in Frankfort Kentucky, photograph from wikimedia commons https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Daniel_Boone%27s_Grave_P6170330.JPG

"The Indians had spies out viewing our movements, and were greatly alarmed with our increase in number and fortifications. The Grand Councils of the nations were held frequently and with more deliberation than usual. They evidently saw the approaching hour when the Long Knife would dispossess them of their desirable habitations; and anxiously concerned for futurity, determined utterly to extirpate the whites out of Kentucke. We were not intimidated by their movements, but frequently gave them proofs of our courage."

- Daniel Boone from *The Discovery, Settlement And Present State Of Kentucky to Which Is Added The Adventures Of Daniel Boon 1784*

The Shawnee arrived at Boonesborough with 440 Shawnee warriors, a French Canadian captain and 11 French Canadian mercenaries. Chief Blackfish and Daniel Boone both put down their guns and with other negotiators, meet about 60 yards outside the fort to try and negotiate to

avoid bloodshed. The two greeted with a hug and Chief Blackfish asked Daniel Boone, his adopted son, why he escaped from the Shawnee? Daniel Boone told him that he left because he missed his wife and family badly. The conversation then turned towards the negotiation. Chief Blackfish said in captivity Daniel promised to surrender the fort. Daniel said that there was new leadership since he left and that they may be unwilling to surrender the fort. Chief Blackfish argued that the Pioneers were not welcome in Kentucke (The Indians pronounced Kentucky as Kentucke) and were disobeying King George who told the British colonists not to settle west of the Appalachian mountains. (This was a point of contention between American Revolutionaries and the British. This decree called the Proclamation line of 1763 didn't allow American Colonists to settle on lands won from the French in the French and Indian War.)



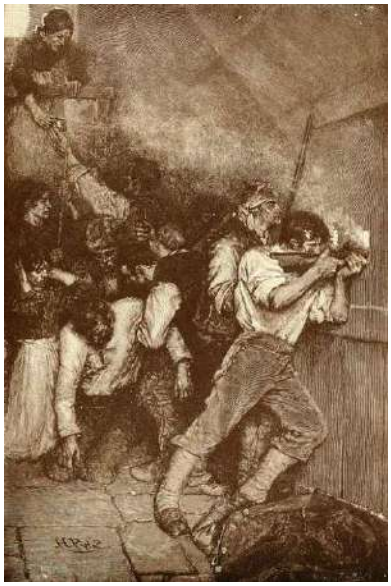
A map of the Proclamation Line of 1763
Photo Credit: Wikimedia Commons, obtained from Picryl
https://picryl.com/media/map-of-territorial-growth-1775-bd635c

Chief Blackfish made an offer to Daniel Boone and the Pioneers. If the Pioneers surrendered the fort, Chief Blackfish had communicated with Governor Hamilton and promised a safe escort to Detroit for all its inhabitants. Chief Blackfish then threatened that if the Pioneers refused this deal there was no telling what his warriors would do to the White settlers. Daniel Boone offered that the White settlers and the Shawnee could live peacefully side by side, as long as the

Shawnee attacks on settlers stopped. The Pioneers were unwilling to surrender the settlement since the White settlers had sacrificed a lot, worked hard and traveled far to build the settlement in Boonesborough and were prepared to fight to the last. Daniel Boone also said the Pioneers did not trust Governor Hamilton the hair buyer. Governor Hamilton got this nickname for buying American scalps from the Indians. These arguments didn't seem to hold much weight with chief Blackfish. Chief Blackfish then became angry and asked what right Daniel Boone had to this land!?

Daniel then argued the White settlers had a right to be there since the land was lawfully purchased from the Cherokee by Richard Henderson's Transylvania Company for a fair price. Chief Blackfish asked one of his negotiators if what Daniel was saying about the purchase from the Cherokee was true. The negotiator told Chief Blackfish that what Daniel was saying was true, he was there and thought the deal was not wise. Chief Blackfish thought for a while and then when he spoke it seemed as if he would honor the purchase. The chief said that the Shawnee and the White settlers would live as brothers but the White settlers must swear allegiance to the British. Daniel Boone talked with his negotiators and it was agreed that this was an acceptable deal. It seemed as if an agreement had been reached, however when Daniel went to shake the hands of the Shawnee negotiators, the Shawnee grabbed Daniel in an attempted kidnapping, and a tussle broke out between the Pioneers and the Shawnee. Daniel Boone and his negotiators broke free! The Shawnee and allied negotiators ran back to their warriors, howls filled the air as the army charged the fort, and the siege began. Daniel Boone and his negotiators ran back into the fort. The Pioneers closed the doors, took their positions, and braced for impact.

About 40 Pioneer men defended the Fort with Daniel Boone moving throughout, encouraging his soldiers, and giving orders. Women and children huddled inside terrified as gunshots and Indian screams filled the air. The force besieging Boonesborough's strategy was to burn down the fort and charge in to kill the Pioneers. To do this there was an attempt to tunnel into the fort and burn the fort down with torches and gunpowder. The Pioneers built a counter tunnel to try and collapse the besieging tunnel and put out fires that the attackers started. Both sides taunted each other throughout the battle. During the battle a heavy rain came, collapsing the tunnel and making the fort more flame resistant. The battle lasted nine days and nights, the longest single battle in the struggle for Kentucky. Finally the Shawnee and French Canadian force retreated. During the battle two Pioneers were killed and four Pioneers were wounded.



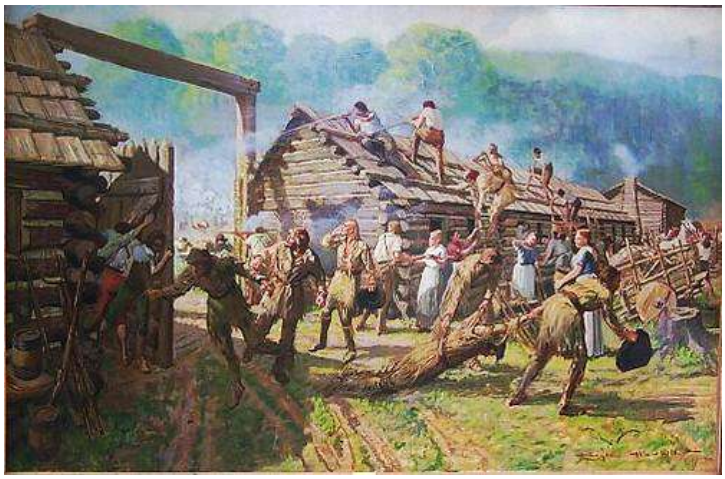


Photo Credit Left: "Defenders In Siege Of_Boonesborough" by American artist, Howard Pyle in Harper's Weekly in June 1887 from the Wikimedia Commons https://jenikirbyhistory.getarchive.net/media/defenders-in-siege-of-boonesborough-h-pyle-harpers-weekly-june-1887-72ea9c

Photo Credit Right: "Siege of Boonesborough" displayed at Fort Boonesborough Museum, obtained from the Kentucky National Guard Flickr account https://www.flickr.com/photos/kentuckyguard/7850999336

Following the battle Daniel Boone was put on trial for treason for accepting the deal to surrender the settlement to the British, but was acquitted and promoted to major. Some other Pioneers including Richard Henderson the owner of the Transylvania Company were also motivated to press charges against Boone because he surrendered a party of salt makers to the Shawnee without a fight as prisoners and did not retrieve them. Following the court case Daniel Boone ended his relationship with Richard Henderson and started a new settlement, Boone's Station in 1779.

"There were 80 odd men, women, and children, against 400, 450 men thirsting for our blood. How other than prayer could we possibly expect to survive such an ordeal."

-Daniel Boone from the Witnessing History Documentary on Daniel Boone

James Boone and other Traveling Pioneers are Attacked by the Shawnee

About 35 miles from the Cumberland Gap there were two parties heading towards Kentucky. Daniel Boone led the main party. The second party was three miles behind, and included Daniel Boone's oldest son, sixteen year old James Boone, bringing flour and cattle to the settlements. Just before the sun rose, Shawnees creeped up onto the supporting party and opened fire. James Boone and Henry Russell were paralyzed by bullets; one Black slave fled into the woods and most of the others were killed. The two wounded survivors were tortured by the Shawnee, their screams echoing through the Valley as their fingernails and toenails were torn out, before being killed by tomahawk blows. Hearing of the tragedy, Daniel rode back to bury his son. Daniel felt a great sorrow overcome him.

Daniel Boone is Spotted by Shawnee Hunters

When Daniel Boone went hunting and exploring, he often slept in Kentucky's many caves or thick cane breaks for shelter and protection. Daniel Boone was spotted by Shawnee hunters when he was staying at the Mercer County Cave. The Shawnee chased Daniel to the palisades of the Dix river, near the mouth of the Kentucky River. Daniel carefully lowered himself off a cliff and jumped onto the trees below climbing down and vanishing into the wilderness. The surprised Shawnee didn't try to imitate Daniel's daring feat. Daniel Boone was able to evade the pursuing Shawnee this time!

Photo Credit: A palisade in the Tom Dorman State Nature preserve, photo taken by Sarah Atendorf and posted on Flikr
https://www.flickr.com/photos/sarah_elizabeth_simpson/6983329505

The Shot Heard Around the World Changes the Game for the Pioneers

Soon after Boonesborough was settled, history was being made back across the mountains in the original thirteen colonies. A shot was fired at Lexington and Concord Massachusetts; the shot heard around the world marked the beginning of the American Revolution. This meant great adversity on the horizon for Daniel Boone and the Pioneers. British loyalist governor Henry Hamilton, headquartered in Detroit, lured the Shawnee, Delaware, Chippewa, Mingo, Miami, Ottawa, and Wyandott tribes into an alliance with Britain. Together they waged war against the settlers on the frontier. The Indians did most of the fighting on the Kentucky front. The British paid the Indians in food clothing, muskets, gun powder, flints, lead, and knives, in exchange for pioneer scalps.

Daniel Attends first Government Meeting in Kentucky

Daniel Boone was not only a tough pioneer and warrior, he was also a statesman. On May 23-27, 1775 Richard Henderson invited delegates from Boonesborough, Harrodsburg,

Boiling Springs, and St. Asaph to establish a government and write laws. The meeting opened with a divine service performed by Reverend John Lythe. The discussion continued after the service that the first order of business would be to establish courts to enforce the laws. Next it was decided that laws should be passed to restrain vice and immorality. Then it was decided there should be plain and easy ways to recover debt, resolve disputes in regards to property, contracts, injuries, etc. Forming a militia to protect Pioneers from Indian attacks was also a top priority. At the meeting, Daniel Boone proposed two bills. One bill was to preserve game from overhunting; the other bill was to improve the local breed of horses, both bills passed. Other bills that passed included a bill to prevent swearing, and Sabbath breaking, and punishment of criminals, today Kentucky is famous for its horse breeding and world famous horse race the Kentucky Derby.

Photo Credit: 2021 Kentucky Derby at the Churchill Downs, photo taken by Don Sniegowski and posted on flickr
https://www.flickr.com/photos/sniegowski/51155219981

Daniel Boone's Daughter and Other Pioneer Girls are Kidnapped

On July 14, 1776 Daniel Boone's daughter Jemimah Boone, along with Betsy Calloway, and Fannie Calloway were boating on the Kentucky River near Boonesborough. Shawnees and a Cherokee chief were hiding in a canebrake on the other side of the river. When the boat ventured close to the shore, the Indians jumped out and captured the boat and the girls! The Indians then dragged the girls through the canebrakes.

Photo Credit: "Capture of the Daughters of Daniel Boone and Richard Callaway by the Indians" by Karl Bodmer displayed in the Yale art gallery https://garystockbridge617.getarchive.net/media/capture-of-the-daughters-of-daniel-boone-and-richard-callaway-by-the-indians-5f602f

The girls broke twigs and left pieces of clothing behind to make a trail. When Daniel Boone discovered what had happened he leaped into action to rescue the girls, gathering eight other pioneers including Fanny and Betsey's father Richard Callaway and went out to find the kidnappers.. The kidnappers were found near the upper blue licks. The pioneers fired their muskets at the kidnappers and the kidnappers fled, leaving the girls behind to be reunited with their fathers. Following the girl's rescue and return to Boonesborough the Pioneers celebrated.

While Daniel was out rescuing the girls there was an Indian attack on the fort. A farmer and most of the cattle outside of the fort were killed. Daniel returned to a distressed community after these events. A few months later at a nearby settlement, Mingos attacked McClellan's station for two days resulting in the Pioneers there fleeing to Harrodsburg. All the recent attacks left many Pioneers shaken up and disturbed. A factor that made their situation more difficult was that the Appalachian Mountains separate Kentucky from the rest of the country, making it harder to communicate and receive help or supplies from their fellow countrymen. Despite the geographic challenges and repeated attacks, Daniel Boone was determined to hold Kentucky. A

retaliatory invasion was launched by the pioneers but the Shawnee successfully repelled the attack.

Shawnee Launch Multiple Attacks Against Boonesborough and Other American Settlements

1777 was a violent year, as the Shawnee launched attack after attack against the settlements. During an attack on Boonesborough, a pioneer was injured outside the fort. Daniel left the fort to rescue his wounded friend. As they were returning, Daniel was shot in the leg. A third pioneer ran out to pick up Daniel and help him back to safety. These battles were fought with around 200 Shawnee attacking one of the American forts, and about 20 fighting pioneers defending the fort. Four of the seven settlements were abandoned with hundreds of pioneers fleeing for their lives back to the East Coast.

We'll stop there for today. Tomorrow we continue Daniel Boone and the Pioneers Odyssey into the American Heartland. Here is your homework.

Exercises:

1. Which American Indian tribe was Daniel Boone and the pioneers most formidable foe?

a) Seminoles
b) Cherokee
c) Sioux
d) Shawnee

2. Who negotiated for the Shawnee with Daniel Boone and attempted to kidnap him?

a) Chief Blackfish
b) Barack Obama
c) Montezuma
d) Chief Sitting Bull

3. What event did Daniel Boone inspire by introducing a bill on breeding horses in Kentucky?

a) Frontier Days
b) Kentucky Derby
c) Daytona 500
d) Superbowl

4. Find a pioneer or founding event that took place where you live. Write a few paragraphs on why and how your town was founded.

5. The first laws in Kentucky were written to restrain vice and immorality. Did this set a good foundation for the State? Was this the right choice or should something else have been the original moral principle like equality, freedom, ethnonationalism, etc.?

Source Material:

Filson, John. *The Discovery, Settlement And Present State Of Kentucky to Which Is Added The Adventures Of Daniel Boon 1784*. Kessinger's Legacy Reprints, 1784.

PART 1-DANIEL BOONE AND THE OPENING OF THE AMERICAN WEST, Witnessing History Education Foundation, 20 June 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gr14TTfWB0Y&t=2650s.

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