

PIONEER STATIONS IN NELSON COUNTY*

By John D. Wickliffe of Bardstown

In April, 1775, Colonel Isaac Cox, with seventeen others, left Red Stone on the Monongahela River in a flatboat, and floated down that stream and the Ohio River to the mouth of the Kentucky River, where they left their boat and marched through the unbroken forest to Cox's Creek in what is now Nelson County, Kentucky. There the Cox family made their settlements, and Isaac Cox built a fort known as Cox Station, located where the house of the late Barney King stands [about five miles north of Bardstown].

Cox's was the first fort built in Nelson County, and Polk's was the second, both built in 1775.

Conley and the Polks went eastward from Cox's Station and settled on Simpson's Creek. Benjamin Polk built a fort where the residence of Maud Wakefield stands [about eight miles northeast of Bardstown]. Polk's Station has gone into history as the "Burnt Station," that is, so far as history has condescended to notice it.

In the summer of 1775 Eaton or Heaton—his name is spelled both ways in the early records—and two companions left Cox's Station, going southward, passed the present site of Bardstown, went then to the foot of Roan's Knob, where they struck the headwaters of Pottinger's Creek, and went down that stream until they reached the rich cane land in the bottoms, where Heaton made his settlement.

In the fall of 1775, or the early spring of 1776, James Cox, Proctor Ballard, and others made settlements where Bardstown, is located, and called it Salem, which name the settlement or

*Read before The Filson Club January 2, 1923, by Mrs. Levin L. Winchester, daughter of Captain John D. Wickliffe who died in 1923.

Other details pertaining to these four stations in Nelson County can be found in Collins *History of Kentucky*, the Draper Manuscripts, Webb's *Centenary of Catholicity in Kentucky* and Spencer's *History of Kentucky Baptists*. Captain Wickliffe's short sketch forms a good foundation for a longer article. The Filson Club will be glad to receive short or long sketches on any pioneer station or on the stations in any region or county in Kentucky.

town retained until 1782, when it was changed to Bairdstown after David Baird who owned the preemption where the town is located. Some years afterwards the letter "i" was dropped from the name, and it became Bardstown.

In 1778 the Lancasters, Spaldings, Willetts, Goodwins, and others followed Colonel Cox down the rivers, and, going in their boats up Salt River and the Rolling Fork, made settlements in the rich bottoms of that river from New Haven up into what is now Marion County.

Where the residence of the late Thomas Pottinger stands, half a mile south of Gethsemane Abbey, Captain Samuel Pottinger built his Station. The brick house erected by Captain Pottinger at the site of his Station is probably the oldest brick house in Nelson County, outside of Bardstown.

Goodwin built his fort on the Rolling Fork below New Haven. This was in 1779 or 1780.

Linn made his settlement on the west side of the Beech Fork four miles south of Bardstown, southeast of the residence of George Simms.

In 1780 Captain John Rogers settled in Nelson County, west of Buffalo Creek, and built a fort which stood on the site of the barn of the late B. B. Summers, near the head of Rogers' Run where Wayne Shehan now lives.

These are all the forts I can find any record of that were located in the present boundaries of Nelson County.

Kincheloe's Fort, of which I will speak later, was on Simpson's Creek in what is now Spencer County.

Brashear's Station was on Salt River at the mouth of Floyd's Fork in Bullitt County. Bullitt's Lick was in Bullitt County, four miles southwest of Shepherdsville, and four miles northeast of Salt River.

Sandusky's Fort was on Cartwright's Creek in Washington County. Squire Boone's and Bland Ballard's forts were in Shelby County near Shelbyville.

Haycraft's, Hynes', and Thomas Helm's forts formed a triangle at what is now Elizabethtown. Salem (Bardstown) was not fortified, as it was protected by this chain of outlying stations. In addition to these there was another line of forts still farther out, through which the Indians must pass to reach Salem, and to retreat after having been here. These were, as I

now recall them: Captain William Hardin's fort in Breckinridge County; a settlement at the Falls of the Ohio, which was fortified in 1778 by General George Rogers Clark; Colonels Floyd's and Harrod's in Jefferson County; Boone's and Ballard's in Shelby County; a settlement at Frankfort; Bryant's Station and one at Lexington in Fayette County; Twetty's, Estill's, Boonesboro, McAfee's, Harrodsburg, and Logan's at St. Asaph near Stanford.

When it is remembered that the Indians on their various and frequent invasions of Kentucky crossed the Ohio River between the mouths of the Miami and Scioto rivers, it is readily seen how the outlying forts protected Salem.

We have the history of but three Indian raids into Nelson County. One was in the Chaplin section of the county. Seven Indians attacked the cabin of a settler named Merrill, and all were slain by Mrs. Merrill and a negro man, Merrill being absent at the time. A most graphic and interesting sketch of this incident of early days in Kentucky is given by McClung in his *Sketches of Western Adventure*, and copied in Collin's *History of Kentucky*, under the head of Nelson County.

In 1781 or 1782 a small band of Indians attacked Rogers' Station, but meeting with stern resistance quickly decamped without loss to the garrison. But in August, 1782, a terrible massacre occurred in Nelson County.

It will be remembered that at the Battle of the Blue Licks, when the pursuing force overtook the retreating Indians on Licking River, Boone, Todd, and Harrod urged that they should await the arrival of General Logan, who was gathering the riflemen around Danville and Stanford, and would arrive within twenty-four hours. But the hot-heads and the reckless urged immediate battle, led by Major McGary, who rushed into the stream exclaiming, "All who are not cowards will follow me."

All followed and paid a fearful penalty for their rashness. Every settlement in the Blue Grass settlements mourned its dead.

Logan, as predicted by Boone, arrived the next morning; buried the dead as quickly as possible, and followed the Indians to the Ohio River. He believed they had all left Kentucky. But he was mistaken. With the devilish cunning peculiar to the North American Indian, a band said to have numbered

seventeen, slipped away from the main body, leaving no trace of their movements, passed silently and stealthily between the settlements, reached Nelson County, and encamped at Dugan's Spring, some two miles east of Polk's Station. When the attack was made on Bryant's Station, Colonel Floyd, who commanded the riflemen in this section, was called on to assemble his men and march quickly to the relief of Bryant's. The men at Polk's and Kincheloe's stations promptly responded to the call and marched with Colonel Floyd to the relief of their brothers. When Colonel Floyd reached Frankfort, he received news of the Battle of the Blue Licks and that Logan was pursuing the Indians with horsemen. Colonel Floyd thereupon dismissed his men, and they separated to return to their homes. The men from Polk's and Kincheloe's stations traveled together to where Bloomfield is located, where they arrived some time between dark and midnight. The Kincheloe men invited Polk and his men to go home with them and spend the night, but, being anxious to go home and relieve the anxiety of their families, Polk and his men declined, and took the road across the hills to their homes at the Station. The Kincheloe men went down the creek to their homes, where they soon arrived, weary with the long march. They went to bed and to sleep, that deep sleep that only the very weary enjoy. As they believed all the Indians gone, they placed no sentinels on guard.

Meantime the Indians at Dugan's Spring were biding their time. When satisfied, as midnight approached, that all were asleep at Polk's Station, they silently approached, scaled the palisades, entered the cabins, and killed and scalped all—old men, women, and children—except Mrs. Polk and some few other women who were led away captives. They set fire to the fort, which was completely destroyed.

The Indians then left, going down the creek to Kincheloe's Station. While the Indians were silently and stealthily moving down the creek to commit another butchery, Polk and his men were passing along the road not two miles distant in joyous anticipation of soon embracing their loved ones, most of whom had crossed the beautiful, but unknown, River.

No sentinel was on guard at Kincheloe's to sound the alarm, and the savages silently climbed over the palisades and slew the men in their beds. As at Polk's, men, women, and children

were killed and scalped, except a few of the women who were carried off with Mrs. Polk and the others to the Indian town of Old Chillicothe.

These good women soon afterward were purchased from the Indians by the English Governor of Detroit, who restored them to their friends as soon as he could communicate with them.

I obtained these facts from the late Colonel W. D. Huston, who was a lineal descendant of the Polks.

If the John Fitch Chapter wishes to mark a spot that should be revered by Nelson County people, place a stone on the site of the "Burnt Station"; better and more patriotic, place one at the site of each of the pioneer forts in Nelson County.