

DANIEL BOONE AND THE PATTERN OF THE WESTERN HERO

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Boone's was one of the most fully realized lives ever lived in modern times, and for that reason we cannot be sorry for him, no matter what ill fortune came his way. It was also one of the most credible; he was the American Ulysses. (J. Donald Adams, *Literary Frontiers*, New York, 1951.)

The importance of Daniel Boone in the history of American heroes and symbols can hardly be overstated. He set the general pattern which later western heroes were to follow; he personified the epical move westward during colonial and Revolutionary times; he came to symbolize the frontiersman and the self-reliant hunter in American life. Boone made the mold into which Davy Crockett, Kit Carson, Paul Bunyan, and the American cowboy were poured, and has managed to maintain his unique importance despite the number of heroes who have seemed on the verge of eclipsing him and occupying his place in the nation's imagination. He remains the American Moses, who led us into the Promised Land.

When one realizes that Boone was a modest man who claimed to have killed only one Indian, an illiterate man who had trouble writing his name, and an unsocial man who was always moving westward to avoid losing what he called elbow room, the achievement is all the more remarkable. A brief summary of the historical Boone must precede an account of the legendary and mythical Boone, if we are to see the whole picture clearly. To understand the impact of his life on his own and later generations we must have the basic facts about our supreme frontier hero.

How is it that Boone has been raised to such a pinnacle, while his equally brave companions (Squire Boone, Harrod, McAfee, Logan) have sunk into oblivion? His position rests both upon a combination of attributes which fitted him uniquely for the tasks at hand, and upon a set of fortunate historical circumstances. It was Boone's good fortune to be active while the Romantic Revolution was at its peak—when a large number of writers and intellectuals, following the leadership of Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), dreamed of the natural man and the noble savage, free from the shackles of society and convention. Boone's hero pattern is not basically American, despite

its coonskin trim and backwoods flavor; it is the enlightened "natural man" this his legend is modeled after, so that Europe lionized Boone before many Americans heard of him. John Filson's book on Kentucky published in 1784 at Wilmington, Delaware—and translated into French in 1785 and German in 1790—spread Boone's fame throughout Europe. He was the simple, innately good man of the forest, a sort of rustic homespun Ben Franklin. His very weakness (aggressive individualism, inability to get along in a settled community, financial ineptitude) only endeared him all the more to his followers. No less a figure than Lord Byron fell in this category, as the glowing tribute to Boone in Canto Eight of *Don Juan* makes manifest.¹ Later on, Boone made an admirable hero for the Jacksonian Democrats, and in our times he emerges as the unsurpassed trailblazer of a nation which no longer has a frontier.

The elevation of Boone to these heights has been the triumph not only of the "the times," but of the painstaking, devoted, and effective work of six fellow Americans whose combined output set the heroic pattern of the trailblazer. They are John Filson, Timothy Flint, James Fenimore Cooper, Walt Whitman, Lyman Draper, and Dan Beard. To examine what they contributed to the Boone legend is to see at close range just how a major American hero and symbol has been created.

This is not to deny of course that the blood of the real hero flowed in Boone's veins, or that he might not have achieved his high status had others championed his cause. But the fact remains: Boone himself did little to publicize his exploits or attitudes; and because these six men did, they are heromakers in the fullest sense of the word. It is not to discredit Boone, who was a very great man, nor to make heroes of his publicists, who were certainly not as great as he, that this material is presented; it is, rather, to make clear the type of relationship which exists between the great man and the members of the society which reveres him.

Boone was born near Reading, Pennsylvania, in 1734, but never thought so much in terms of state as of frontier loyalty, preferring to be ahead of rather than in society. He was the sixth son of Squire and Sarah Boone. The Boones were Quakers, but they were not particularly devout. It was the promise of religious freedom that caused George Boone, Daniel's grandfather, to leave Devon County, England, and to take up his residence at Abingdon, twelve or fourteen miles north of Philadelphia for a short time. He eventually moved to Oley Township, new Berks County, Pennsylvania. The Boones were born wanderers. They were always answering the call of that something which manages to stay just over the ridge.

As a youth Daniel got little education even for that place and time. According to one story, young Daniel was taught first by Sarah Day Boone, wife of his brother Samuel. Later Daniel made a slight attempt to further his education, especially to improve his always highly individualistic handwriting. Uncle John Boone attempted to guide Daniel in the ways of books, but he later gave up in despair because of Daniel's obvious lack of interest. It was to John Boone that Squire Boone made the well-known statement in defense of his son: "Let the girls do the spelling, and Dan will do the shooting." At an extremely early age young Daniel was exposed to the ways of the wilderness. He learned to shoot as soon as he was big enough to handle a gun, and at the same time became familiar with the way of the wild life in the dense woods surrounding his father's home in Pennsylvania. A great deal of the knowledge of the wilds he learned while supposedly caring for his father's cattle on a small twenty-five acre plot of ground located some miles distant from the main farm. The task was somewhat neglected, and the cattle were usually left to wander at will as did Daniel himself. He also became acquainted with the friendly Indians thereabout, mostly Delaware, who even attended the local church services from time to time. These experiences with the Indians and the forest left an indelible mark on the young boy's life.

Boone was only 15 when his parents left Exeter Township, Pennsylvania, and headed for the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. For a year and a half they lived near Harrisonburg before moving to Rowan County, North Carolina. A nearby Virginian neighbor was John Lincoln; his great-grandson was to usurp the position of America's number one hero-symbol from George Washington, whose ancestors were by now well established on the Northern Neck.

When he was 22, Daniel Boone married the granddaughter of a Virginian farmer, Morgan Bryan. Legend has it that Daniel almost shot his wife-to-be while "fire-hunting" for deer. When "fire-hunting," the hunter would flash a torch until he attracted a curious deer; the fire reflected in the animal's eyes showing the hunter his target. Boone caught sight of the gleaming eyes and raised his rifle to shoot, but he discovered just in time the figure of Rebecca. She rushed home to tell her father she had been chased by a panther. This, not even their children believed, although the story is widely told.

The young couple had been married less than three years when in 1759 Boone had to take his wife and two children to Virginia in order to avoid the Indian uprising brought about by several unnecessary killings of Cherokees by a group of treacherous white men. The little family settled in Culpeper County, where the husband made his living hauling tobacco to Fredericksburg. But this was no life for a man

of Boone's temperament. In 1773 he sold his property and left with six families and forty men for Kentucky. The party was attacked by Indians before they reached Cumberland Gap, and six were killed, including Boone's son James, who was with a group somewhat to the rear of the main party. The colonists insisted on turning back. Such failures as this merely added to Boone's appeal to the American public which later worshipped at his shrine.

In 1774 Boone was sent by Virginia's governor to warn the surveyors in the Kentucky territory of the impending danger of an Indian uprising in that locality. Boone was accompanied by "Big Mike" Stone, who is supposed to have shared with him several amusing and thrilling adventures. They covered a distance of eight hundred miles in sixty-two days, going as far as the Falls of the Ohio. Boone was then placed in command of Moore's Fort in the Clinch River Valley. In 1775, he was commissioned by Colonel Richard Henderson, of the Transylvania Company, to carve out the Wilderness Road to Boonesborough, where he built a fort. He returned for his family and brought them to Boonesborough.

Here he and his companions resisted several Indian attacks on Fort Boone; and Boone was the leader in the famous rescue of his daughter, Jemima, and the Calloway girls, who had been kidnapped by the Indians while canoeing on the Kentucky River. In 1777, he aided in resisting a British-inspired Indian attack on Boonesborough and, in 1778, was captured by Indians at Blue Licks and adopted as a son by the Shawnee Chief, Blackfish, at Old Chillicothe, Ohio. He received the tribal name, "Big Turtle." The following year he escaped in time to warn his comrades at Fort Boone of an Indian attack.

When the Virginia Legislature appointed a land claims commission in 1779 Boone went to Richmond on foot, but his plans were frustrated when the money which he was carrying was stolen. He went to Richmond again two years later, this time as representative in the Assembly from newly-formed Fayette County. Boone was elected to the same body on two other occasions. When the Legislature was dispersed at Charlottesville in 1781, he was taken prisoner and paroled by the British.

Although he lived to be 86 years old, Boone did little that added to his stature or historical importance in his later life. A chief concern was with contesting the loss of various pieces of land which had been improperly entered. In 1785 there occurred the first of a series of ejectment suits which eventually deprived him of all his holdings. Dismayed, the old hunter left the Kentucky which was later to consider him its special saint, and in 1788 moved to Point Pleasant, in what is now West Virginia. About a decade later he pushed on to present-day Missouri, where his son Daniel Morgan lived. There he

became magistrate of the district. Once again his land claim was voided, this time by the United States land commissioner; but finally Congress confirmed his claim in 1814. In 1810 he traveled back to Kentucky to pay off his debts and (says tradition) ended up with 50 cents to his name as a result of this act. He only stayed long enough to transact his business, after which he returned to Missouri, to spend his last years with his son Nathan.

Admirers traveling into the wilderness to see the frontier sage wondered why he preferred to live his life out on the cutting edge of the forests. His answer, according to the Boone legend, was quite in keeping with the Rousseau "natural man" pattern out of which the legend was cut. "It was too crowded back East," Boone is supposed to have replied. "I had to have more elbow-room."

The tranquillity of his twilight years did not dim the luster of Boone's earlier achievements, or the enormous respect with which his fellow Americans viewed him. James Audubon, for example, recorded after interviewing him that "The stature and general appearance of this wanderer of the western forests approached the gigantic . . . The very motion of his lips brought the impression that whatever he uttered could not be otherwise than strictly true."

This quotation is all the more remarkable when we recall that the man being described, by the testimony of many who knew him, was only five feet 8 or 9 inches tall. Plainly Audubon viewed Boone as a symbolic as well as an historical figure. Boone to him was a living legend. The component parts of the symbol that resulted were recognizable even in his day: an incredibly beautiful demi-paradise west of the mountains; land-hungry families who pictured it in their mind's eye as a new Eden; and a brave and stalwart leader who, Moses-like, was to lead the people to this demi-paradise; a lone wanderer guiding a destiny-filled generation on a God-sanctioned trek into the virgin forests.

That scores of people had preceded Boone into Kentucky (such as Couture, Walsh, Nairns, Morgan, Finley, and Stone) did not damage the legend. The achievements of these earlier explorers were merely laid at Boone's feet, and he was the recipient of the esteem and stories that were historically others' due. Some historians have lamented this, and seen it as a unique situation. Far from being unique, it is the usual procedure so far as heroes are concerned. They are the bottle-necks through which many of their contemporaries' feats and accomplishments are funneled. Almost every American hero has been as fortunate in this regard as was Saint Daniel of the West, about whom, as Clarence Alvord pointed out, "popular fancy was granted opportunity for unrestrained imagination in creating a myth, which

age so hallowed that even well trained historians have hesitated to submit it to the violet rays of scientific analysis."²

One of the most interesting aspects of the Boone legend, and one which he himself tried unsuccessfully to puncture, is the contention that the old hunter never relished civilization and society. Actually he seems to have gotten along reasonably well with his neighbors, and to have sought out companionship, particularly in his later years. Boone was no misanthrope, but the revisionists do not do him justice when they try to make of him a "typical" character of the American frontier. With his native capacity for leadership and decision, his enduring tranquillity despite setbacks, his love of hunting, trapping, and the outdoors, he was one of the great unmechanized men of our frontier days. This quality has been especially appealing to the twentieth century, whose science and technology have brought on a whole series of perplexing and unsolved problems. Americans can look with nostalgia, and mountaineers with pride, at the history of a man most happy when he was miles away from the nearest gadget, factory, or smokestack. A fitting epitaph for the Boone story was penned by the American writer who understood his period best, Mark Twain; as the last line of *Huckleberry Finn* reads: "But I reckon I got to light out for the territory ahead of the rest, because Aunt Sally she's going to adopt me and civilize me, and I can't stand it. I been there before."

How did the Boone stories get started, and how was his fame spread throughout the land? The first man to perceive epic qualities in the Boone Story and to record them for his contemporaries was an early schoolmaster and explorer named John Filson, often called "the first historian of the West." Born on a southeastern Pennsylvania farm in 1747, Filson was the grandson of an English immigrant who became inspired at an early age with the vision of western land and adventure. At the close of the Revolution he moved to Kentucky to take up land of several Virginia military warrants, spending his first year in Lexington, Kentucky, as a school teacher. Soon he secured several thousand acres of land, and wrote *The Discovery, Settlement, And present State of Kentucke*, judging from internal evidence, to attract other immigrants and enhance land values. Of much greater importance to us is the appendix called "The Adventures of Col. Daniel Boone," the first authentic sketch of the hero to appear in print. Although the account is cast in Filson's and not Boone's idiom, it had a great influence in creating the legendary Boone. The florid and pedantic account purports to be an autobiography, although it is obvious that thoughts in the "sylvan shades" about "the ruins of Persepolis or Palmyra" were about as familiar to the real Boone as arguments over the latest coiffures at Versailles. In fact, the book made much more of an impression at Versailles than it did at Boonesborough; when trans-

lated into Chateaubriand-like prose in 1785, it became a favorite among French intellectuals and courtiers. While later Boone scholars have considered Filson's account pompous and inaccurate, it was twice endorsed by Boone himself as being the best account of his life, and as "not having a lie in it."

Some idea of the early popularity of Filson's account can be gained by noting the number and variety of editions it enjoyed within a few years of its appearance. Less than a year after the first printing in Wilmington, Delaware, it appeared in Paris as *Histoire de Kentucke, Nouvelle Colonie a l'ouest de la Virginie*. Two years later it rolled from the presses in Philadelphia as *Adventures of Colonel Daniel Boon, One of the Original Settlers of Kentucke*; and three years after that, in Leipzig as *Reise nach Kentucke und Nachrichten von diser new Angebauten Landschaft in Nordamerika*. After that, excerpts and stories from it cropped up in numerous other accounts of western life and heroes. The book made an international figure of Boone, established his identity with the "natural man" of the eighteenth century, and connected Boone in the popular mind with the exploration of a new and exciting territory. Filson went on to publish articles in the *Kentucky Gazette* in Lexington and to suggest laying out the town of Losantiville, which grew into the present city of Cincinnati. Ironically enough, the man who had so successfully described Boone's triumph over numerous Indians was himself a red skin's victim, as the story goes, being killed while traveling up the Little Miami River in October, 1788. He had left behind him, in his life of Boone, an account that had been well attuned to the times in which he lived: an artificial but influential story of a man who was not well enough educated to understand such a passage as this one, which John Filson put into his mouth:

The diversity and beauties of nature I met with in this charming season, expelled every gloomy thought . . . At a vast distance I beheld the mountains lift their venerable brows and penetrate the clouds.

In 1934 The Filson Club of Louisville, Kentucky, celebrated its semi-centennial and the sesquicentennial of Filson's account of Boone—a book the club's president rightly described as "one of the most important in American pioneer history, the foundation of Boone's reputation." Through its meetings and publications, The Filson Club not only perpetuates the memory and traditions of Kentucky, but of John Filson, for whom the club is named, and Daniel Boone, whom Filson helped raise to a heroic plane.

Filson first cast Boone into the "natural man as hero" mold, but Timothy Flint (1780-1840) was his Parson Weems. History was to Flint as it had been for Weems, a means of conveying moral ideas and

edifying stories, and not a coldly scientific recounting of past truth. When Weems had finished describing Washington, and Flint Boone, their subjects had not quite acquired haloes, but they were unmistakably holier than thou.

Born near North Reading, Massachusetts, Timothy Flint graduated from Harvard in 1800, after which he began his career as a preacher of the gospel. Restless and adventurous by nature, he was never content to settle down, but always sought something new beyond the horizon. The "notion of new and more beautiful woods and streams" enthralled him and he read Chateaubriand as if it were Holy Writ. His twenty-year residence in the west provided him with material for numerous books and articles. Few men traveled so widely, and observed frontier life so closely, as he. "From the hum-drum life of everyday," one critic has written, "he sought relief in melodramatic action . . . he supplements Cooper's chronicles of warfare between red men and white men by a new romance of the border, in his depictions of romantic scenery, and still more in his reflection of his own personality or, to put it broadly, of the typical romantic dreamers of his age."³

That Flint was a devout hero-worshipper, with the frontiersman raised high on the altar of the mighty, is clear. This turn of mind revealed itself not only in his writing, but in his obsession with auto-graphs. He modestly proclaimed he has "the largest collection in the country." Flint has this to say of frontier heroes:

There is a kind of moral sublimity in the contemplation of the adventures and daring of such men . . . They tend to re-inspire something of that simplicity of manners, manly hardihood, and Spartan energy and force of character, which formed so conspicuous a part of the nature of the settlers of the western wilderness.⁴

Of all this hardy breed Daniel Boone, "the Achilles of the West," most captivated Flint. He knew much about Boone through Albert Gallatin Boone, one of his pupils. With this grandson of Daniel he often visited the sage's home, interrogated him in detail on his career, and made extensive notes of the talks. While a certain number of inaccuracies in Flint's account of Boone are obvious, Albert Boone maintained throughout his life that Flint's was the most accurate and inspiring history of his grandfather.

Some of Flint's vividness comes from his high and romantic conception of what Boone, the "Achilles of the West," represented. Boone was a walking embodiment of coonskin individualism, which seemed to Flint America's great contribution to the human personality. In his mind he imagined Boone (as he imagined William Weldon, the hero of his best novel, *Shoshonee Valley*) "disgusted with social and

civilized life," and anxious to purge his soul by lonely treks into the interior. Perhaps it was to cleanse his own soul that Flint traveled thousands of miles in the west, suffering from fever and ague, but always moving restlessly forward, seeking a place he never seemed to find. Timothy Flint believed so much in what Boone symbolized and what he imagined Boone was, that he led a life of quiet desperation, of endless wandering and adoration, with only the warm glow of his own hero worship to console him.

We have said that Flint was Boone's Parson Weems; but he did not hit upon any single imaginary episode that rivaled in popularity that of the famous cherry tree. The one episode of Boone's life which comes closest to being his cherry tree is the killing of a bear, and making this known to posterity by an inscription on a nearby birch tree reading "D. Boon cilled a bar." Flint played this episode up dramatically, and with the help of many a locality that claimed to have the very inscription in question near by, managed to make a national legend of the bear inscription. How many trees have been subjected to real knives, and how many bears slain by imaginary Daniel Boones, the historian dare not guess. Flint's affinity to Weems can also be shown by such episodes as Flint's accounts of the hero's school days. He pictures, without the slightest historical justification, Boone slipping tartar emetic into the whisky bottle of his Irish schoolmaster, and makes this the episode which ends Boone's brief tustle with book learning. In his last chapter he has Boone take of the creed of the noble red men of the forest. "Such were the truth, simplicity, and kindness of his character, there can be but little doubt, had the gospel of the Son of God been proposed to him, in its sublime truth and reasonableness, that he would have added to all his virtues, the higher name of Christian."⁵ When some of his contemporaries objected to such outlandish fabrication on Flint's part, he replied with a line that Parson Weems would have quickly comprehended and loudly applauded: "Like Pindar's razor, the book was made not for use but to sell."

And sell it did. In Cincinnati alone fourteen different editions of his life of Boone appeared between 1833 and 1868, assuming by 1856 the historically inaccurate title of *The First White Man of the West; or The Life and Exploits of Col. Daniel Boone*. Flint's stories were retold in other books, and his imaginary Boone dialogues plagiarized—sometimes so blatantly (as in *Unde Phillip's Conversations*) that Flint's mathematical errors were copied without correction. The Boone that most people of the nation read about in the middle nineteenth century was the Boone that had been compounded of part truth, part legend, part idolotry, in the brain of Timothy Flint. It is a Boone that has been public property ever since.

As with all national heroes, Boone's virtues had to be displayed in literary as well as historical accounts, in cantos and couplets as well as prose travel books and biographies, before he was apotheosized. Even while he was moving westward he appealed to his contemporaries as a fitting hero for an American *Odyssey* or *Aenead*. One elaborate tribute was the long epic poem by Daniel Bryan published in 1813. The title is *The Mountain Muse, Comprising the Adventures of Daniel Boone; and The Power of Virtuous and Refined Beauty*. This is the first account in which Boone achieves a purely legendary status and cavorts with the fates. His mission is plainly superhuman:

O'er all the mazy complicated chain
Of objects, which are link'd to the grand theme
That with sublime sensation swell the soul;
Boone now in all its forceful influence felt.⁶

All the forces of evil confront Boone in the ensuing pages, but the "sinewy sons of Enterprise" will not be denied; they push on into the "rude featured Wilderness." When Boone finally reaches the Mississippi, he looks ahead to a time when the mighty rivers will be linked

With the products of a thousand farms
And riches of Mercantile Kingdoms fraught
With Freedom's Cities and Republics too
And Happiness and Heavenly Virtue cheered.⁷

The author who placed Boone in the literary Hall of Fame was James Fenimore Cooper (1789-1851), one of America's early literary giants. Raised in his father's village of Cooperstown, New York, he was not far from the eighteenth century frontier, and knew the forests first-hand. His career as writer began virtually on a wager, but his literary efforts were so successful that he soon became the leading American novelist, with a high reputation throughout Europe. No less a figure than William Thackeray wrote that Cooper's Leatherstocking was a better fictional figure than any invented by Scott: one that ranked with Uncle Toby, Sir Roger de Coverly, and Falstaff. If this be true, there is little doubt that the boost he gave the Daniel Boone legend was inestimable; for Leatherstocking, like his other famous frontier characters of Hawkeye, Natty Bumppo, and Deerslayer, are thinly disguised portraits of the famous Kentucky hunter.

Of the five novels of the Leatherstocking Series Cooper wrote from 1823 to 1841, the first was *The Pioneers*. While Cooper did not state specifically that Boone was the prototype of his hero, perceptive reviewers noted and pointed out the similarity. In 1827 Cooper specifically acknowledged his debt to Boone biography and legend, and based part of *The Last of the Mohicans* on the famous exploit of

Boone's rescuing his daughter and two other white girls from the Cherokees.⁸ Cooper also accepted as an historical truth the story that Boone moved on beyond the Mississippi "because he found a population of ten to the square mile, inconvenient." While there is some question as to the exact extent to which Cooper drew from Boone's life, there is none at all about his using Boone as his model, and about his readers' accepting the result with enthusiasm.

Like Boone, Leatherstocking was vested with an historic mission, which is one reason they both appealed to an America intoxicated with the heady wine of Manifest Destiny. Leatherstocking demonstrated frequently the traits we have seen the early historians assign to Boone: moral stamina, physical courage, indomitable will, individualism, and an obsession with "elbow room." Cooper's hero even looked and dressed as did Boone, being tall, agile, leathery, quiet, and buckskin clad, with a coonskin cap sitting casually on his head. Cooper's model was not the historical, but the legendary Boone; not the Boone that actually was, but the Boone America believed in, and hence the Boone that should have been.

Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales*, with the Boone-like hero appearing successively as Hawkeye, Deerslayer, and Natty Bumppo, had enormous vogue at home and abroad. This was the unsurpassed account of American empire-building and fortitude, of the dramatic struggle in the forests. In addition, as Ernest Leisy has pointed out,

There was dramatic tension when the old hunter and the Great Serpent, sons of nature both, bowed to the encroachments of civilization and took their departure toward the setting sun. It was the legend of Daniel Boone with but a difference in locale.⁹

Leatherstocking, Cooper's greatest artistic creation, has a consistency, a nobility, and a simplicity that makes him easy to understand and hard to forget. Like Boone, he demonstrates that a man need not talk, act, and dress fancy to be a hero. He is the *beau ideal* of the frontiersman, and he carried the fame of Boone around the world in a form palatable to young and old alike.

A number of Cooper's contemporaries tried, with less success than he, to use Boone's life as the theme for artistic creations. As early as 1824 a play was successfully produced in Cincinnati (called *Daniel Boone or the First Settlers of Kentucky*) with the trailblazer as hero. Judge James Hall's popular *Legends of the West* (1832) contained a great deal of Boone material. Robert Montgomery Bird of Philadelphia published in 1837 a novel called *Nick of the Wood*, obviously modeled on Boone's life. More important than all of these was the considerable use of Boone material by the prolific William Gilmore Simms.

A Boone prototype has been established in art as well as in literature. Horatio Greenough's famous work in the National Capitol, portraying the contest between civilization and barbarianism as a death struggle between Boone and an Indian brave, set forth what has become an official view. A number of painters have reflected the same type of prototype, but only one of them painted him from real life. This was Chester Harding, who traveled to Missouri to paint the ninety-year-old Boone in 1819. Not having seen the living Boone did not prevent such artists as John J. Audubon, Thomas Sully, Alonzo Chappel, W. C. Allen, Reuben Macy, J. B. Langacre, and Y. W. Berry from doing Boone portraits, and putting onto canvas some of the legendary traits and features other Americans were busy putting onto paper. The painter who best reflected the symbolic importance of Boone was George C. Bingham, leader of the genre school in American art. In 1851 he painted "The Emigration of Daniel Boone," which shows the old hunter leading a group of settlers into a lush, Eden-like land. Capturing the naiveté, expectancy, and optimism of the times, it places Bingham among those who have created our American culture heroes.

Later on in the nineteenth century another major American writer, Walt Whitman (1819-1892), was to add further material to the growing cult of the pioneer and the pathbreaker in the west. Himself a Long Islander, Whitman went in 1848 to New Orleans, and returned home via St. Louis, Chicago, and upstate New York. That the frontier which he saw, and the stories he heard about the pioneer heroes, made a deep impression is apparent in poems like "The Song of the Pioneers," "Song of the Broad Axe," or "Pioneers! O Pioneers!" which contains these resounding lines:

Come my tan-faced children,
Follow well in order, get your weapons ready,
Have you your pistols? have you your sharp-edged
axes?
Pioneers! O pioneers!
Have the elder races halted?
Do they droop and end their lesson, wearied over
there beyond the seas?
We take up the task eternal, and the burden and
the lesson,
Pioneers! O pioneers!¹⁰

Whitman was keenly aware of the East's contribution to the West and the frontier. One of his poems entitled "Virginia—The West" pointed out that the Old Dominion had given the United States "The stalwart giant of the West," which had paradoxically supplied the

troops and materials necessary to defeat the Confederacy in which Virginia played so prominent a role. He felt that much that was fine about early America now dwelled in the West, and that if he were ever to be fully recognized, it would be "where the fat prairies spread." The frontier heroes had carried the essential greatness of democracy over the Alleghenies with them. Or, as Emerson had put it, America began west of the Alleghenies.

If Whitman made few direct allusions to Daniel Boone, he glorified the kind of leader for which Boone was the prototype, and praised the trailblazer's exploits in vigorous and explosive verse. Boone has since been a favorite hero for historical novelists in the United States. The hero of one of Winston Churchill's most popular novels, *The Crossing* (1903), meets Sevier, Boone, and Kenton in a fictional account of the Wilderness Campaign. Elizabeth Madox Robert's *The Great Meadow* (1930) is a story of early frontier life in which the spirit of Daniel Boone is the motivating factor. The family of Berk Jervis travels from Virginia to Harrod's Fort, where its members are separated by an Indian attack. The action of Boone is indirectly responsible for their final reunion. Two years later Stewart Edward White's *The Long Rifle* (1932) appeared; the central figure, Andy Burnett, has inherited a long rifle from his grandfather's friend, Daniel Boone—a fact he never allows himself to forget. The list can be easily extended to include such recent titles as D. M. Henderson's *Boone of the Wilderness*, C. H. Forbes-Lindsay's *Daniel Boone, Backwoodsman*, Horatio Colony's *Free Forester*, A. B. Guthrie's *The Big Sky*, and Caroline Gordon's *Green Centuries*. Soon after its publication Katherine Clugston's *Wilderness Road* (1937) was adapted for radio presentation, and it was an episode of Daniel Boone's life which was being broadcast over a national hookup when the nation heard the dramatic news of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's death on April 12, 1945.

Filson, Flint, Cooper, Whitman are important in establishing the high reputation of Boone; but none of them is more important than a short, slender scholar of whom they probably never heard. Lyman C. Draper (1815-1891) is a figure whose importance has been largely overlooked; whose essential contribution to American historiography must be accounted a major feat; and whose Boone devotion did more to elevate the old hunter's academic standing than any other one factor.

Born in western New York, Draper resolved while still a young man to devote his life to collecting data on, and compiling the biographies of, America's frontier heroes. This early obsession with historical material he apparently acquired from Peter A. Remsen, who

had married Draper's cousin, and who frequently invited the young New Yorker to his home in Mobile, Alabama. After working unsuccessfully on a weekly newspaper in Mississippi and in a clerical post in Buffalo, he moved to Wisconsin, where he was appointed secretary to the Wisconsin State Historical Society in 1854. No historical society has ever made a happier appointment, and the Draper Collection that is his monument is one of the most important in the country. If Wisconsin had not had a Lyman Draper, it might never have had a Frederick Jackson Turner.

For more than half a century the thorough and meticulous Draper, working with meager funds and support, devoted his time, effort, and money to assembling 478 huge portfolios of manuscripts, covering the years from 1735 to 1815, and comprising a collection unsurpassed in its special field.

No early frontiersman is better represented than Daniel Boone, about whom no less than 39 manuscript volumes center. Five of these (totaling over 700 pages) contain Draper's longhand life of Boone up to 1778—the most detailed and authoritative early life of the hero ever written. The next 16 folio volumes contain information on Boone furnished by descendants, neighbors, and friends. Two separate volumes deal with inscriptions, stories, and legends traceable in Draper's time. For our purposes, these are the most interesting. They prove that Boone was the subject of innumerable apocryphal stories and legends even in his early manhood; specify dozens of locations that consider themselves the true home of the "D. Boone cilled a Bar" inscription; and contain a number of eyewitness accounts of Indians being killed by Boone: to be held up against Boone's own statement that he only knew of having killed one Indian in his life.

In the remaining manuscript volumes one finds letters from Boone's descendants and associates, original Boone documents and surveys, and scores of notes and allusions pertaining to his life. In the years involved in gathering all this, Draper visited or contacted all the direct and collateral descendants of Daniel Boone, and obtained their written permission to do his authorized biography. He thus made all the relatives and friends Daniel Boone-conscious, and implanted in many a mind the notion that a giant had once dwelled on the land. Draper did much more than that. He gave Boone scholars a mass of documents to work with unequalled for any frontier figure; he opened up new facets of interest and speculation for historians, archivists, and textbook writers. His legacy was an authoritative body of Booniana that dispelled forever lack of documentation, details, or testimony about Boone's essential greatness or status among his contemporaries. Draper impressed a group of people who might have been touched

by Filson, Flint, and Cooper. He made Boone eminently respectable as the subject of intellectual and historical probing on the most scholarly level. He dusted off the coonskin hat and found an exalted position for it in the archives.

Draper had a passion for factual minutiae that eventually became a curse. "I have wasted my life in puttering, but I see no help for it; I can write nothing so long as I fear there is a fact, no matter how small, as yet ungarnered."¹¹ But he had not wasted his life, despite the fact that he never became the writer he thought he was destined to be. His passion for absolute verification made him a most important manuscript collector, and documentor of the whole Boone cosmology.

How he would have loved to get the manuscript biography which Boone dictated, but dropped into the Missouri River in 1814. How he would have swelled with pride had his own Boone biography been finished and published. In his files are letters to and from the artist B. J. Lossing suggesting that they collaborate on the biography, but nothing ever came of the idea. The only volume Draper ever completed was *King's Mountain and Its Heroes* (1883), a book which plainly shows that he always thought of history in terms of great men. In 1889 he even did an essay on the autographic collections of the signers of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, for no crumb from a hero's plate was too insignificant for Draper to pick up. On the surface his life paralleled that of the T. S. Eliot protagonist who can never decide whether or not he should eat a peach, and who wonders how he should presume. Underneath he worked with a determination, a clarity of purpose, and a diligence that makes him one of the greatest cultural allies Daniel Boone and the other frontier heroes ever had. On the archival level he has been their greatest advocate and friend, and he did his job so well that no one will ever have to undertake it again. There are not many people in American historiography of whom this can be said.

No twentieth century figure has fostered and developed the Boone legend more effectively than Daniel C. Beard (1850-1941) whose Boy Scout movement has become the best youth indoctrination course in United States history. That Beard has quite consciously walked in the shadow of Boone, and turned millions of young Americans into adolescent trailblazers, Indian fighters, and Boonesborough builders can be demonstrated by observing troops of khaki-clad youngsters in action from Maine to California.

After spending his childhood in Cincinnati, Ohio, Beard went to New York City to study art, and instructed in this field from 1893 to 1900. It was the West, however, that captivated his imagination, and the outdoors that seemed to him the proper stage for his activities: In

his autobiography Beard displays a deep admiration for the western heroes, and pride in his "contacts with such picturesque characters as Yellowstone Kelly, Buffalo Bill, John Burroughs, Bat Masterson, Buffalo Jones, and Charles Russel." The hero on whom he modeled his youth movement was the same one Cooper had modeled Deerslayer and Leatherstocking after:

I suggested a society of scouts to be identified with the greatest of all Scouts, Daniel Boone, and to be known as the Sons of Daniel Boone. Each "member" would have to be a tenderfoot before he attained the rank of Scout. Eight members would form a stockade, four stockades a fort . . . I never realized that the Boy Scouts would sweep over much of the world and become my real life's work.¹²

From its conception at the turn of the century the Boy Scout movement depended on hero worship of a distinctively American flavor. In place of the lance and buckler was the American long rifle and buckskin clothes; in place of the plumed helmet was the coonskin cap; in place of the aristocratic *noblesse oblige* was something Dan Beard labeled "the natural democracy of Daniel Boone himself." The nativism of the movement, and the exultation of the frontier past, help explain its rapid growth and success.

In 1907, at the invitation of Theodore Roosevelt, Beard called at the White House to explain the Boy Scout ideal and win official support for it. Beard was completely successful in his presentation. The conference ended with Roosevelt shouting "Bully!" and pounding on the table with his fist. Seldom had an American president and a youth movement had so much in common. As a result the Boy Scouts have enjoyed a semi-official governmental endorsement and backing that has made them an integral part of the American scene in every state of the Union.

Beard personally supervised the publication of the first editions of the *American Boys' Handbook*, which as the official Boy Scout manual has been a best seller for four decades. His own *American Boy's Handy Book* (1882) was the prototype on which all later editions were based. More copies of this handbook have been distributed since World War I than any other single volume except the Bible. Beard boasted that he and his associates "built up the most complete scheme of training ever devised, practically from the cradle to old age." At the center of the scheme, standing as a symbol of the whole movement, is the lithe and picturesque figure of the greatest of all American Scouts, Daniel Boone.

In the Boone Bicentennial year, 1934, thousands of uniformed Boy Scouts from all over America convened in Covington, Kentucky, for

what one of the Protestant denominations would have called a Revival Meeting, but what the more secular scout officials labeled a Camporee. In the mammoth parade and pageant that was staged, the names of Daniel Boone and Dan Beard, who had modeled his life, dress, and movement on the earlier Daniel's achievements, were linked together. This was entirely fitting. The two of them merged into a lofty and anachronistic figure of the frontier fighter and hunter, as well known to most American youths as that of the American cowboy. Boone and Beard were part of the same hero legend: Beard had merely modified it to suit a new age and an America hungry for symbols and paragons to cling to in a perplexing and terrifying age. One of the events which gave Dan Beard reason to feel that his organizing efforts were appreciated by America was the naming of one of the highest Alaskan mountain peaks Mt. Beard by the government. The peak is right next to Mt. McKinley in actuality; but in most American minds it is metaphorically next to Mt. Boone.

On the state as well as the national level Boone has had his special advocates. These persons have not been as instrumental in making Boone a major hero as those already mentioned, but they have provided a backlog of admiration and legend which has been culturally important. At least half a dozen states (Pennsylvania, Virginia, North Carolina, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Missouri) have claimed Boone as their very own. To illustrate how Boone is handled on this level, we need only mention the contribution of several local historians of the Old Dominion. The account of a western Virginian author, Robert Addington, contains twenty-two references, and many words of praise, for the favorite among pioneer heroes. Every link in what he calls "the chain of cause and effect which connects us with Daniel Boone" is examined.¹³ In his summary of southwestern Virginian history William Pendleton maintains that Boone is the greatest man who ever set foot there, and that only his presence enabled Virginians to push westward to Kentucky.¹⁴ A decade later Goodrich Wilson, in his *Smyth County History and Traditions* credited Boone's "great and vigorous defense of southwest Virginia" with the section's emancipation from the Indians and actual survival. Probably the most diligent local historian in Virginia, Oren F. Morton, wrote the *Story of Daniel Boone* from what might be called the Virginian point-of-view; Morton even asserts in this account that Boone was beyond any reasonable doubt a Virginian at heart:

Inasmuch as Kentucky was, until 1792, an integral part of the Old Dominion, Boone was to be a Virginian during the next twenty-six years. This was a longer period than he sojourned in any other state.¹⁵

Abingdon, Virginia, a cultural center for the western part of the state, is perhaps the focal point of Boone stories and lore in the Old Dominion. The town site was once his camping ground, and the town creek is named after him. A leading Abingdon family possesses a piece of bark on which is inscribed that legendary Boone trademark: "D. Boon cilled a Bar." Although skeptical about authenticity of this relic, James Taylor Adams, editor of the *Cumberland Empire* and historian of the region, has no doubt that Boone is the leading hero in western Virginia. He writes:

There are many legends of his bravery and daring adventures. He spent one winter and part of a summer in Russell County and his son was killed in Lee County. Scarcely a creek or hollow in this part of the country but a tree has been reported there bearing his name, initials, or the carved statement that "D. Boone Kilt a Bar." If all these inscriptions were true, Old Daniel must have put in the better part of his time carving on the bark of trees.¹⁶

The single event of our era which did most to hold the Boone image up for public attention was the 1934 Boone Bi-centennial, at which time such groups as the Daughters of the American Revolution, the American Order of Pioneers, and the Boone Family Association prodded politicians and officials into an orgy of Boone activity and adulation. Samuel M. Wilson tapped some of the prevailing clichés to describe Daniel Boone, who was once so disgusted with Kentucky that he moved west to Missouri, and described Boone as "this Prince of the Pioneers, this Founder of Boonesborough, this foster-father of Kentucky, this favorite son of all America, this peerless pilot of the Republic, this instrument divinely ordained to settle the wilderness."¹⁷ The coonskin hunter who had set the pattern for the western hero was demonstrating that hero-wise he was still near the top peak of Olympus. That year the General Assembly of Kentucky passed a resolution creating a commission to "promote and direct a fitting celebration of the two-hundredth anniversary of Boone's birth." Shrines to Boone's memory were established at Boonesborough, Boone's Station, Bryan's Station, and Big Licks Battlefield. In Washington, Congress passed a law authorizing the minting of 600,000 souvenir half-dollars, and eulogies of Boone filled the legislative halls. While Boone's reputation has grown steadily, it has not rivaled that of the reigning trinity of heroes, Washington, Jefferson, and Lincoln. Unlike them, Boone is not closely connected with governmental or political symbols, and does not exercise the same kind of appeal. Still he has a unique place in not only American but world symbolism: he represents man's protest against the restraints of society, and an ever-

encroaching technology. In his poem "To Daniel Boone" William R. Wallace reflected well this quality that so fascinates the twentieth century mind:

One State
 Have I made eminent with the wild,
 And men have that from me which they call "Peace."
 Still do the generations press for room,
 And surely they shall have it. Tell them this:
 Say "Boone, the old state-builder, hath gone forth
 Again, close to the sunset."

William Carlos Williams is another contemporary who sees Boone as one of our great heroes; in summing up Boone's significance, he writes:

Possessing a body at once powerful, compact, and capable of tremendous activity and resistance when roused, a clear eye and a deadly aim, taciturn in his demeanor, symmetrical and instinctive in understanding, Boone stood for his race, the affirmation of that wild logic, which in times past had mastered another wilderness and now, renescent, would master this, to prove it potent.¹⁸

In this affirmation and this mastery the reputation of the first major western hero and the man who set the pattern for all those that followed is so preserved that it is a permanent part of the American scene.

FOOTNOTES

¹ Byron sums up Boone's life, to which he devoted seven stanzas, in these romantic lines:

Boone lives hunting up to ninety;
 And what's still stranger, left behind a name
 For which men vainly decimate the throng
 Not only famous, but of that good fame
 Without which glory's but a tavern song,—
 Simple, serene, the antipodes of shame,
 Which hate nor envy e'er could tinge with wrong.

² Clarence W. Alvord, "The Daniel Boone Myth," in *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, 19:16-17, April, 1926.

³ Dorothy Anne Dondore, "Timothy Flint" in *Dictionary of American Biography*, Volume 6, pp. 474-5 (New York, Scribner's, 1931).

⁴ Editor's preface to *Pattie's Personal Narrative*, in Reuben G. Thwaites' *Early Western Travels, 1748-1846* (New York, 1904-7,) Volume 13, p. 27.

⁵ Timothy Flint, *Biographical Memoir of Daniel Boone, the First Settler of Kentucky* (Cincinnati, N & G Guilford Co., 1833), p. 263. This passage is quoted in Dixon Wecter, *The Hero in America* (New York, Scribner's, 1941), p. 187.

⁶ Daniel Bryan, *The Mountain Muse* (Harrisonburg, Va., Davidson and Bourne, 1813), p. 136.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 180.

⁸ The question of Cooper's specific use of Boone material, and of Leatherstocking's significance, is discussed in Henry Nash Smith's *Virgin Land* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1950), chapter VI.

⁹ Ernest F. Leisy, *The American Historical Novel* (Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 1950), p. 58.

¹⁰ Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (New York, 1891), p. 188.

¹¹ Reuben Gold Thwaites, "Lyman C. Draper: A Memoir," in *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, Volume I, 1903, p. xvii.

¹² Dan Beard, *Hardly a Man is Now Alive—The Autobiography of Dan Beard* (New York, Doubleday, Doran, 1939), p. 353.

¹³ Robert M. Addington, *A Syllabus of Scott County History* (Gate City, Virginia, Boatright Co., 1915).

¹⁴ William C. Pendleton, *History of Tazewell County and Southwest Virginia* (Richmond, Hill Co., 1920).

¹⁵ Oren F. Morton, *Story of Daniel Boone* (Hot Springs, Va., 1913), p. 15.

¹⁶ Letter to the author from James Taylor Adams, Big Laurel, Virginia, dated September 7, 1948.

¹⁷ Samuel M. Wilson, "Daniel Boone, 1734-1934," *The Filson Club History Quarterly*, 8:183-204, 1934, p. 203.

¹⁸ William Carlos Williams, *In the American Grain* (Norfolk, Conn., New Directions, 1925), p. 137.