

# BOONE IN MISSOURI: 1800-1820

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## PROLOGUE

Mrs. Hazel Atterbury Spraker, a Daniel Boone descendant and genealogist, has written the following descriptive passage concerning the Boone family:

"A people more rough-hewn than fashionable, more practical than artistic, more constructive than idealistic . . . Not the perfume of courtly ballroom assemblies, but rather the breath of the forest and the tang of the log fire were the atmosphere in which they labored and rejoiced.

"The mountains and plains furnished the home and playground which developed that splendid physical strength and moral courage without which no family can live and prosper . . . They were of the industrious, home-building element which so largely determined the eventual character of our great western states."

Tonight we are going to spend a few minutes with Daniel Boone in one of the states he helped create — Missouri.

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When a man reaches the age of 65 and his wife passes her 60th birthday they usually begin planning a life somewhat less strenuous than that of packing up their belongings and starting out for a wilderness frontier hundreds of miles away.

But this was not the case with Daniel Boone and Rebecca Bryan, the North Carolina mountain couple who with their families had established Kentucky, and were now heading for the Spanish-owned Upper Louisiana Territory west of the Mississippi River.

It was 1799, or nearly 25 years after the Boones had moved to Kentucky. Now, they had their eyes on a section of country which one day would be the state of Missouri.

Daniel Boone was one of the few Americans to become a legend in his own time. In the quarter-century following the settling of Fort Boonesborough on the Kentucky River in 1775 Boone's name became known around the world. He was at the top as an explorer, a frontiersman, a rifleman, a hunter, an Indian fighter, and — probably most

important of all — a leader of men. And the competition for American glory was keen in those years. The talent was plentiful and it is possible we shall never see the like again. It was the day of John and Samuel Adams, Ethan Allen, Aaron Burr, George Rogers Clark, Benjamin Franklin, Nathanael Greene, Alexander Hamilton, Patrick Henry, Thomas Jefferson, John Paul Jones, Henry Knox, Marquis de Lafayette, James Madison, Francis Marion, George Mason, James Monroe, Thomas Paine, Anthony Wayne, and a lot of other history-makers, including the best of them all, George Washington.

Every person has his image of Daniel Boone. Most like him blond, tall and handsome; strong and trim in figure, immaculately clad in deerskin and coonskin cap, and peering with sharp blue eyes into a soundless wilderness while holding in his powerful hands an ever-loaded flintlock rifle. All of us want our heroes to be physically big men and preferably we like them up front in a parade, riding a white horse. We like for them to be glamorous.

Perhaps we should set the record straight even though most people are going to continue to think of Daniel Boone's appearance as they please. Boone instead of being tall and trim was short and stocky. The Shawnee name of Big Turtle, given him by his adopted father, Chief Blackfish, may best describe our hero.

He spent his life in old clothes and as for the coonskin cap with the fur tail hanging down the back, he never wore one. Instead, his favorite headpiece was a weather-beaten felt hat. Now and then he owned a horse, but most of the time he walked. As a business man he was a failure. When the possibility of wealth came his way his mind was on beaver traps and his eyes were fixed on the western horizon.

As for his wife. Rebecca Bryan Boone spent 74 years, 1 month and 11 days on this earth, most of the time in log cabins with dirt floors. Her first child was born when she was 18, and her tenth when she was 42. Husband Daniel often was away from home a year or two at a time, and food supplies frequently dwindled to the poverty level for Rebecca and the children.

At brief intervals in their dramatic lives the Boones, at least on paper, could have been described as wealthy. However, the spirit of the adventurer was stronger in Daniel than was the knowledge of law.

Boone once had in his name more than 100,000 acres of Kentucky land. He paid no attention to such matters as records, deeds, titles and taxes. Suddenly, almost overnight, he lost all of his property. About all he had left were his horse, his rifle, a hunting dog, and Rebecca.

Despite the hardships they endured as man and wife for more than a half-century, the Boones became a symbol of determination on the

western frontier. Always they held high hopes for the future. In their darkest hours their dreams were the brightest.

On their first pilgrimage toward Kentucky in 1773 their first-born, 16-year-old James, was tortured and slaughtered by Indians. Nine years later, their second son, Israel, 23, was shot to death by Indians at the Battle of Blue Licks. A daughter, Jemima, was kidnaped by Indians; Boone's brother, Edward, was killed by Indians, a son-in-law was to die in a duel, a grandson was to be killed by Indians and other kinsmen and friends were destined for tragedies. The Boones and Bryans were a strong breed.

By 1799 Daniel Boone had given up all hope for recovering any of his land in Kentucky. Many of his titles had been faulty, and the rest of his property had been sold for taxes. Boone — as on the day he first entered Kentucky — was penniless. All he had left was fame. This suddenly became an asset.

The Spaniards, noting that the eastern seaboard was becoming well populated and that free land was disappearing on the American side of the Mississippi, started asking American settlers to move to their side of the river. They played it pretty smart. Daniel Boone had opened Kentucky against heavy odds by out-thinking and out-maneuvering politicians, hostile Indians and the adverse forces of nature itself. He was their man.

Spanish officials offered Boone 1,000 acres of land, farms for all of his children and in-laws, and public office for himself if he would lead a pilgrimage of settlers into what eventually would be Missouri.

As the 18th century came to a close Boone actually held a hatred for Kentucky. He was anxious to leave. As always, the Boones and their in-laws were clannish and when Boone moved, all of the kin and most of their neighbors went in the same direction.

The Boones, the Bryans, the Callaways and many others who had helped settle Kentucky joined in the new move west in the fall of 1799. Daniel's sons, Daniel Morgan and Nathan, and brother Squire traveled with Rebecca and daughter, Jemima, and the other women on a river route down the Ohio, while Daniel, Flanders Callaway and others took the overland route with packhorses and the livestock. The departure of Boone and company in September, 1799 was not lacking in color. The party, many aboard a flotilla of canoes, stopped briefly at Cincinnati, and it was there that Boone replied publicly to the question as to why he was leaving Kentucky: "Too many people! Too crowded! I want more elbow room!"

By October, the Boone-led travelers had reached St. Louis, a French-settled trading post with a population of less than 500. He officially took the oath of his new office July 11, 1800.

The highest ranking Spanish officials in the Territory assembled to welcome the distinguished arrivals. Lieutenant Governors Zenon Trudeau and Carlos Delassus poured on the pomp and ceremony. American and Spanish flags were unfurled, sabres flashed, rifles cracked, drums rolled, the garrison paraded, and Lieutenant Colonel Daniel Boone, late of Kentucky, received a military fanfare due his rank. Never before had Boone been so publicly honored, and only in death would he receive another such tribute. It may have been his finest hour.

The Spaniards conferred upon Daniel Boone the title of syndic, or chief magistrate over a huge area of the upper Louisiana Territory known as the Femme Osage District. Boone and his family thus became the first Americans to settle in what is now the state of Missouri.

His new position made Boone a powerful official. It was his duty to mete out justice in criminal courts, to settle legal disputes and to manage public affairs in general. He assigned vacant lands. He kept order. He settled estates.

Daniel Boone hadn't thought much of the courts or the lawyers back in the Colonies or in the United States, so he set up his own kind of judicial system. It was a somewhat rough-shod method but it got results and there were no complaints. After all, he was the commandant! What was more important was the fact that he was still a pretty fast man with the knife, the rifle, or, if necessary, his fists.

Whipping posts already were common in the country and the lash was Boone's principal penalty and he saw to it that the blows were "well laid on." Culprits were whipped for a crime and then restored to a reputable standing in the community, having paid the full penalty. The lash carried no social stigma. One victim when asked how he fared under Boone as a judge replied: "First rate. Whipped and cleared." The expression is still used in parts of Missouri.

The Spanish Territory at the beginning of the 19th century was a turbulent spot. It was the day of the eye gougers and the biters. Frontier fights were like animal fights. One case of record to come before Boone was that of James Meek, charged with biting off a part of the left ear of one Berry Vinzant during a brawl. Historians failed to report Commandant Boone's judgment in that particular case, but our guess is that the blows were extra well laid on!

One of the most painful cases to go before Daniel Boone in the Femme Osage District was that of James Davis, charged with the murder of Boone's son-in-law, William Hays, a frontier hero in his own right.

Captain Hays had been with the Kentucky Militia, had fought in the defense of Bryan's Station and had served under Gen. George Rogers Clark. He was a good fighter and a man of high temper.

Captain Hays was the husband of Susannah Boone, the first daughter of Daniel and Rebecca. A daughter born to William and Susannah Hays at Fort Boonesborough June 12, 1776, was the first white child born in Kentucky. The Hays daughter, named Elizabeth, married Isaac Van Bibber in Kentucky in 1797 and died in Missouri in 1840 at the age of 64.

Back to the shooting of Captain Hays. The officer had ordered his son-in-law, James Davis, not to come to the Hays' home. When Davis appeared, Captain Hays warned that he was going to shoot Davis, whereupon the son-in-law aimed his rifle and fired. Captain Hays died a few hours later.

The shooting occurred on December 13, 1804, a year after the Missouri Territory — a part of the Louisiana Purchase — had been acquired by the United States. However, no new officials had appeared to take over jurisdiction and it was syndic Boone's duty to handle the case. Boone held a preliminary hearing for Davis and bound him over to the grand jury at St. Charles. Boone then went on Davis's bond for \$3,000. The defendant subsequently won acquittal on the grounds that he shot Hays in self-defense.

Events had shaped up in Europe which were to change the way of life in the American west. Napoleon, who sat on the throne of France, had recovered from Spain through a secret treaty all of the Louisiana Territory. Napoleon immediately sold this half-a-continent to President Thomas Jefferson for \$15 million. The United States took title December 20, 1803, but possession through occupation was still a long way off, and life in the Missouri country went along much as it had in the past.

The name of Daniel Boone still was synonymous with law and order as far as Americans in Missouri were concerned. Land-trading among Spain's King Charles IV, Napoleon Bonaparte and Tom Jefferson was all right for consideration by the gentry back east, but this was frontier country and only men like Boone commanded any respect. Of course, there was no holding back the tide of civilization which soon would roll across the west. However, at the moment it was Boone and his followers who stood between the Mississippi River and the unconquered Indian tribes and renegade Spaniards and Frenchmen who roamed the west back to the Pacific Ocean. The United States east of the Mississippi was almost like another world.

The casual manner in which Boone continued to assign lands was to cause lawyers many a headache for years to come, but for the time being at least, old Daniel was judge, jury and attorney all wrapped up in one.

Our hero, in trying to settle everyone else's affairs, had failed to get a deed for his grant of 1,000 acres from the Spanish Crown.

The United States, upon moving into the Louisiana Territory, had instructed its new officials to be as conciliatory as possible. However, Daniel Boone had not cultivated any part of his original land gift from the Spaniards and he therefore was not eligible for a clear title. His land reverted to the federal government and, like in Kentucky, the one man who had done most to open up the Missouri country was without a square inch of land to call his own.

The situation really wasn't so tragic as it might seem. The Boones always stood together. The Boone children saved most of their farms, holding in their names more than 2,000 acres and Daniel was not without influential friends. They went to work in his behalf in Congress.

Testimony from Boone on his land claim was taken in 1806. It was not until 1814 that, through an act of Congress, he actually became a landowner in the Missouri Territory. He was given title to his original 1,000-acre tract. But he wasn't prosperous very long. Creditors back in Kentucky read of his wealth and quickly moved in for collection of their claims. In 1815 Boone sold his land and paid off all of his old debts. Later, a Kentucky family to whom he had given a tract of land years before, showed up in Missouri and reported the Kentucky title was no good. They wanted him to pay for the loss of the land. Even for Boone it was too much. He had to say no. The reason: he was broke!

Boone lived on in Missouri, hunting and trapping while his seventies ran into eighties. He offered his services in the War of 1812 and became disgusted when he was told that at the age of 78 he was too old to be a soldier.

The British finally succeeded in stirring up the western Indians and raids became frequent through Missouri. On two occasions Boone and his son, Nathan, and their families had to race several miles in the dead of night to escape from Indians. The Boone sons saw action in the frontier warfare and a grandson, James Callaway (son of Jemima Boone and Flanders), was killed. Daniel himself was not engaged in any direct fighting although he was always on some kind of guard duty with his trusty rifle.

After an Indian raid at the nearby home of one Robert Ramsey, Boone arrived to render rough-and-ready medical skill while younger men gave pursuit to the savages. An eye-witness describes the scene at the Ramsey place that morning: two children lying on the floor with their heads crushed, and a third with only a fighting chance for life; Mrs. Ramsey in agony in premature delivery in another room; her husband lying on a bed while Boone composedly probed for a bullet in the man's groin. The witness added this observation:

"The old pioneer was quiet and unexcited, as usual, but his lips were compressed and a fire gleamed in his eyes."

At the nearby home of nephew Jonathan Bryan it was another story. The men had been drawn off in pursuit and the women and children were alone. Two Indians appeared, and Mrs. Bryan and her children and her Negro woman ran from a garden into the house with the Indians close behind. Before they could slam closed the heavy door, one Indian was halfway through, his head and one arm being caught in the doorway. While Mrs. Bryan pushed against the door with all of her strength, the negress grabbed a tomahawk from the hapless warrior's hand and brained him. One of the children screamed as the second Indian ran toward the house. Mrs. Bryan snatched a loaded rifle from the dead warrior and killed his comrade.

When the days of the Indian fights passed on, Boone renewed old acquaintanceships in the deep wilds of Missouri — Shawnees he had known back in the days of Fort Boonesborough. When he would go off on his one-man hunting trips, he quite often met roving bands of Indians and always someone in the group would know Boone. There always had been a mutual understanding, certainly mutual fear or respect, between Daniel and the red man.

Boone was a philosopher where Indians were concerned, just as he was in the matter of religion. Born into a Quaker family, he went through life without joining any religious faith or denomination. Most of his kinsmen were Baptists or Presbyterians. In Missouri, under Spanish rule, the Boones were required to live under Catholic domination. Protestants could have services only in their homes, never in public.

Boone was tolerant in his views and he gave his approval to the marriage of his son, Daniel Morgan (a Presbyterian), and Sarah Lewis (a Baptist), before a Catholic priest in the parish at St. Charles, Missouri.

Throughout his long life he attended religious services and ceremonies of all descriptions without any outward sign of discrimination or prejudice. There could be no doubt that he believed in the existence of a Supreme Power. Seldom did he discuss religious beliefs and one of the few quotations attributed to him was in a letter to a sister-in-law, Sarah Day Boone, written when he was 81. He wrote:

"What chance we shall have in the next world we know not. For my part I am as ignorant as a child. All the religion I have is to love and fear God, and to believe in Jesus Christ; do all the good I can for my neighbors; do as little harm as I can; and trust on God's mercy for the rest. I believe God never made a man of my principles to be lost."

Rebecca Bryan Boone, whom Daniel married back in North Carolina when she was only a slip of a girl, died March 18, 1813, at daughter Jemima's home in Missouri. Daniel chose for her burial place a mound

overlooking a creek which flows into the Missouri River, near the present town of Marthasville. Boone directed that he, too, be buried there when the time came.

Settlers continued to pour into the new west and Daniel again felt he was being crowded. In his eighties he would go off on long hunts and often hide away in abandoned cabins. Illness forced him back to the town of St. Charles where he was treated for a skin disease and rheumatism. Again he ventured into the wilderness, this time as far west as the Rocky Mountains. His strong eyesight, however, was beginning to fail and while hunting he was unable to aim his rifle without using a piece of white paper on the sight. In 1818 he suffered a paralytic stroke from which he never fully recovered.

In 1819 (Missouri was still a territory and not a state) artist Chester Harding painted the only portrait from life ever made of Boone. A copy, by Harding, hangs today in The Filson Club at Louisville. An interesting note is that Boone at the time was too weak to sit erect and a friend had to hold his head while Harding painted the likeness of the great pioneer.

When the end came it was quick and merciful. The colonel was taken ill at the home of daughter Jemima Callaway. A physician who married one of Boone's granddaughters treated him. He made a partial recovery, enough to mount old Roan and ride several miles to the home of a son, Nathan. His illness returned and he lay in bed three days in Nathan's stone house which still stands in Missouri. Daniel died gently on September 26, 1820, in his 86th year.

The Missouri Constitutional Convention in session at St. Louis adjourned when notified of Boone's death and its members were directed to wear badges of mourning for 20 days — a day for each year Boone lived in Missouri. The following year Missouri would become the 24th state of the union, and 100 years later Missouri would celebrate its centennial with a special half-dollar minted with the head of Daniel Boone on one side and an Indian on the other.

They buried the old hunter by the side of his Rebecca on the little knoll looking down through the trees toward the Missouri River . . . in peace on his last frontier.

In 1845 Kentuckians demanded that their founding hero be returned. Officials went to Missouri to claim the remains, but the owner of the land on which the Boones were buried refused. Only after permission was obtained by the Boone family did Missouri agree to give up Daniel and Rebecca.

The burial service in Frankfort Cemetery that year was described as a brilliant military affair. Four white horses drew the hearse up to the side of the open graves. The pallbearers included the great and the near-



great from over the state, among them some of Kentucky's aging Indian fighters of Boone's day. State officials gave forth with great oratory. Soldiers in glittering uniforms stood at rigid attention. Swords flashed. A rifle salute was fired. A bugler high on a hill overlooking the Kentucky River sounded a plaintive finale. Daniel Boone finally owned a bit of land . . . in Kentucky.

In Missouri today there are literally thousands of Boone kinsmen and in-laws. It is very probable that in no other state can there be found as many persons related to this great American. The names of Boone and his clan have been given to creeks, rivers, lakes, schools, churches, counties, towns, parks, commercial enterprises and institutions of all kinds. The Boones — literally the first citizens of Missouri — have held positions of leadership in their communities throughout the history of that state.

Boone spent 20 years in Missouri, almost as many years as he lived in Kentucky. In fact, excluding the years between 1775 and 1800 when he lived for relatively short periods in Virginia and North Carolina, the Kentucky-Missouri totals are about equal.

Boone's two decades in Missouri provide a thrilling chapter in American history and one which often is obscured by Boone's association with Kentucky. He was a trailblazer in Missouri and much of the west for that matter. Anyone can reach back in history and pick a name to glorify. It must be remembered, however, that Daniel Boone was to his neighbors, his friends, his kinsmen, and his country a heroic figure in his own lifetime; one destined to leadership and one who was loyally followed.

And now we are to leave Boone, and it's really very difficult. Somehow the picture, history and lore of this man are so vivid and colorful that we are inclined to give way to our imaginative souls and feel that he still lives. This is certainly true of other heroes, both real and fictional.

It isn't too difficult to close our eyes tonight and see Robin Hood and his merry band racing through Sherwood Forest . . . or King Arthur and his magnificent knights exchanging tales around a great oaken table . . . or George Washington comforting his freezing, starving troops at Valley Forge . . . or General Robert E. Lee astride Traveler on a canter through the Virginia countryside . . . or the sad face of President Lincoln turned toward the graves at Gettysburg Cemetery . . .

We like to think of Daniel Boone tonight as being with his Indian friends in the happiest of all hunting grounds; sitting around a campfire that never grows dim and planning tomorrow's hunt in a field where game never becomes scarce . . . there in a silent wilderness keeping his rendezvous with paradise.

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