

Settlements In Old Virginia and the Holston Valley

Causes That Led Pioneers Into Kentucky From The Older Settled Regions.

(By George Chinn, Jr.)

During the Pre-Revolutionary period, the great Valley of Virginia between the Blue Ridge and the Alleghenies, was far the most inviting region in America for frontier settlement, for it was extremely fertile, was accessible from eastern Virginia, Maryland and Pennsylvania, and was free from troublesome Indians. It contained a stretch of some three hundred miles of beautiful rolling lands—from its highest part gradually descending northeastwardly about two hundred miles along the valley of the Shenandoah to the Potomac, and southwestwardly about half that distance along the valley of the Holston to western North Carolina and north-eastern Tennessee.

The Holston is joined by the Watauga, a little mountain stream. Along the Holston and Clinch were many small gatherings, collectively called "The Holston" and by the Kentucky pioneers more often termed "the Settlement." Still farther west, on the waters of the Clinch River in Powell's Valley, in what is now the extreme southwestern point of Virginia, were less populated settlements.

There were clearings and pioneer homes widely scattered from one end of the great valley to the other. There was war and the Revolution during the twelve intervening years. The number of immigrants in the valley increased considerably and some of them penetrated the Alleghenies and settled along the banks of the Kanawha, the Monongahela, and other upper tributaries of the Ohio.

Several causes combined to make the Virginians the pioneers in the settlement and winning of the trans-Allegheny wilderness during the eighteenth century. One was their comparative nearness and their colony's charter title to the most accessible and desirable part of it; another was the absence of Indian inhabitants south of the Ohio. A third cause was the intense individualism of the Virginia pioneer people and their peculiar adaptability for frontier life and warfare. They were often farmers and stock raisers, accustomed to living far from any neighbors and not averse to moving farther into the wilds for more and richer lands. In this they differed from the New England people, who, inclined to live closer to one another, adhered to the Puritan township method of granting lands and usually migrated in groups and settled in communities.

The difference may be explained, in great measure, by the fact that the pioneers who settled west of the Alleghenies and fought for their country were almost exclusively from Virginia, North Carolina, and southwestern Pennsylvania, of which the latter region was, until the outbreak of the Revolution, claimed and governed by Virginia and mainly inhabited by Virginians.

A large part of the settlers in the Valley of Virginia were Scotch and Scotch-Irish Presbyterians whose religious persecutions had driven them from Europe. They were of a strong-fibered, individualistic, militant race, intensely religious and resolute for freedom. Reading the Bible themselves and teaching their children to read it; they deemed essential to salvation; and certainly there was not a better educator. The result was that there were few who did not read and write fairly well; and, judging from their letters, they seem to have been more highly educated than any of the other frontier peoples—more highly, perhaps, than was common among the seaboard colonists.

For ages Kentucky had been the frontier hunting ground of the many Indians living north of the Ohio and south of the Tennessee. It was well called the "dark and bloody ground" for it was often their field of battle. Its geographical location, separating these northern and southern Indians, proved a fact of very great importance during the Revolutionary War, for it exposed the towns of the savages to flank attacks from the future Kentucky inhabitants. Being uninhabited, the Cumberland Gap offered the apex of an entering wedge for pioneer settlements.

GAP INTO KENTUCKY

Cumberland Gap is, perhaps, the best known mountain pass in North America. It has had an outstanding part in the history making of the yesterday. The Alleghenies and the barriers to hold back the westward settler. The Gap in the Cumberland is one of the few gateways that has made travel easier. Then, too, the cut made by the Cumberland River through Pine Mountain, at a point almost opposite and due north of Cumberland Gap, makes a double doorway. Although Doctor Walker called this "Cave Gap," he later called it "Cumberland Gap." He named it after William Augustus, the Duke of Cumberland, a son of George II and Queen Caroline. William Augustus was a soldier in command, in 1745, in Flanders. In the last battle fought he defeated, with great slaughter, the Highland forces, refusing quarter to the wounded and prisoners. Byron calls him "The Butcher." Some, whose sympathies were with the Highlanders, were disappointed that the beautiful mountains of the Appalachians, this Gap, and a most scenic river, should carry his name. It is claimed that many pioneers, in the early days, endeavored to call them "Quasiotto"—the Indian name, rather than give honor to the Duke of Cumberland.

The easterly side of the main range of the Cumberland rises abruptly perhaps 1500 feet to make a wall in many places hardly scaleable by the most expert mountain climber. Thus, Cumberland Gap, cut wedge-like out of the main ridge, affords a convenient pathway into Kentucky.

Beasts of the forest obviously were first to find the gap in the Cumberland. Cumberland towers aloft as natural Gap pass. The hoot-owl shrieked,

the cricket chirped and the moon, rising above the Pinnacle, cast its reflected light to make queer shadows sweep the valley a quarter mile beneath. It was a scene of enrapturing charm in the evening, when the towering pines and firs were lightly veiled and delicately softened behind a summer haze.

It is said that on the Pinnacle the warrior chieftains gathered for council, smoked their pipes, danced their war dances, and signaled out for countless miles to their tribesmen. Here, it is said, their war cries went forth, to echo and re-echo against mountain after mountain, which, like so many teeth, push their heads into the heavens. The Indians called the Gap by the name "Quasiotto."

The French have the distinction of being the first white men to pass through the gap and into this section of Kentucky. Their marks left by hunters and trappers near the Pinnacle. There they have carved, on beech trees, some large crosses—testimonials to their religious faith. No other record of their identity was left.

It was in 1784 that efforts were made toward exploration of the inland west of the Alleghenies and on beyond Cumberland Gap. In that and the succeeding year two large land companies were formed in London under Royal Charter. The Loyal Land Company, with authority to survey and locate 800,000 acres of land, now a part of Kentucky; and the Ohio Company, authorized to locate 600,000 acres beyond the Kanawha and Monongahela rivers. Dr. Thomas Walker was engaged to make the first exploration and Christopher Gist was engaged to lead the second. These two men were the first to leave a record of their observations. Their journals are available today. Since Dr. Walker had charge of exploration in the Cumberland vicinity, portions of his journal are interesting in connection with this story.

He was born in King and Queen county, Virginia, in 1715—his ancestors having come from Staffordshire, England, in 1659. There's was a sturdy planter's stock, which constituted the most respectable and influential element of the colonial population. Walker's wife, whose maiden name was Mildred Thornton, was a second cousin of George Washington.

BOONE'S ATTEMPT TO SETTLE KENTUCKY

With the coming of John Finley into the Yadkin Valley, Boone's career really began, especially that part in which we are vitally interested regarding the building of the Wilderness Road and the exploration of Kentucky. Up to the present time Boone had done little to set himself up as the hunter and scout he is remembered to be. At this time he was thirty-five years old. Two of his three military campaigns had been miserable failures and his life had been spent as many other young pioneers—roaming, hunting, fishing, and studying nature. However, with the coming of Finley and his many stories of Kentucky—such as the fertility of the soil, the plentitude of wild animals, the exceeding abundance of game, the natural beauty of the land, the exceptional frequency of rivers and their tributaries—Boone's old ambition was renewed and he was led to anticipate the possible realization of his greatest dream—the exploration and settling of Kentucky.

Such an undertaking would be imprudent without a company of true woodsmen. With this problem in mind he collected about himself a group of "thirty guns," among whom were Finley, John Stuart, a brother-in-law of Boone, and three other settlers of the Yadkin Valley. They left the valley on that memorable day, September 25, 1773, which is of the utmost concern and importance in the history of Pioneer Kentucky. They must have presented an impressive, yet sinister spectacle as they left their homes, with their wives and children, all having had families except John Finley. We have no record of any unwillingness of those families to enter into this tremendous and difficult task. It seems that the true American blood and love of adventure rushed through the veins of men and women alike. Forfeit and suffering was not unusual—the comforts of home life and an assurance of what the next day would bring forth was by far more out of the ordinary.

The trail into Cumberland Gap was rather the extraordinary. To embark on such a pilgrimage does just credit to the courage and hardihood of such women as Rebecca Boone and the other women who composed the inspirational element. As a result of the failure of Pontiac's uprising, 1763 to 1765, little danger was anticipated at the very beginning of the journey. In recognition of this fact and that treaties resulting from the above mentioned failure had so recently been signed, they did not deem it necessary to prepare themselves immediately with anything more than the common measures of defense. They were planning for a trip made more arduous rather by natural obstacles—for the greater part of their trip would have to be made along narrow, vine-choked trails, often beset along the precipitous and difficult ascents and descents, continually harassed by briars and thorns. Knowing these things beforehand, Boone's party were equipped with only the absolute necessities for existence during the journey. The main course of sustenance being supplied daily by groups of two or three leaving the main party to hunt meat on the trail and returning with whatever fall might throw across their path. Often, along the narrow ridges, it was necessary for the women and children to travel aloft alongside the men. The nights probably offered, to those not so well fitted for such adventure, the greatest horrors. Instead of living in the canvas-covered wagons, as they had been in the practice of doing up to this time, they were forced to sleep out in the open and unprotected wildness which surrounded them and

which was full of wild, vicious animals; while in spite of all signed papers and verbal promises of peace, the woods further on would still be full of scalp-seeking Indians.

Enduring such hardships as these required a physical condition at its best. Consequently, when hunting was poor and energy supplying foods were not obtainable, and since the food they had was meagre, their suffering was increased a hundredfold. Yet the invaders were full of joy and hope at the prospect of reaching a richer and more permanent residence—even though with the remote possibility of a peaceful home.

The trail known as the Old Settlement Road was nothing more than a glorified path. Its beginning has been a subject of much discussion, nevertheless its first importance to early Kentucky began on the banks of the Yadkin River in North Carolina and it was from this point that Daniel Boone, after painting verbal pictures of the earthly paradise, together with Finley's contributions and able descriptions of what was to be found beyond the mountains, induced the three other above mentioned families, with his own, to accompany him to Kentucky.

One can almost see the pack horses, laden with various kitchen plunder of the frontier family. The women rode side-saddle, with the children too young to walk held close in their arms while they carried beside them on the saddle little buckskin bags containing gourd seed, which, if history is to be held accountable, was nature's most useful gift to mankind.

The boys in their "teens" wide-eyed with excitement at the possibility of settling in a place where game and fish were plentiful even beyond the most remote dreams of their fancy, always insisted on pushing ahead of the party—serving the triple capacity of hunter, scout and pathfinder. It was much to the pride, and sometimes to the amusement of their fathers, when at times the youngsters became lost and had to be tracked down by the elder woodsmen. Upon being returned to the fold they were victims of much jesting and often it was suggested that a cow bell be attached, in order that when their roaming carried them to such a distance that the ringing of the bell became faint, they could be called back.

The men were dressed in the picturesque fashion of the day. Buckskin breeches, hunting shirt worn on the outside, as far down as the knees, and a belt that fairly bristled with tomahawks, hunting knives and bullet pouch. The hunting shirts had large pocket across the chest, which was divided in the center—on one side was carried the journey cake and other provisions, while the other half of the pocket held loose powder, to be used to sprinkle the pan of their flint-lock rifles.

If this brief description will suffice, let us pick up our story a short hour before dawn, 1773, when Boone's party, leaving their homes on the Yadkin, turned their faces away from the breaking day and followed the sun's course westward. With the rising of the fog from the valleys they could see to the left, smoke rising from the cabins of Salisbury. They continued to press onwards to the little hamlet of Kikesboro that was situated at the foot of the mountain range, later to be known as the Big Smokies. At this place they came to a halt, as it was the last of the settlements until they should cross the mountains and reach the valley on the other side.

From this point onwards the road began a more pronounced ascent and in a wandering manner wound its way along the "backbone" of the foothills of the Appalachians. When, upon reaching the summit, they found themselves on a broad plateau, Boone was thoroughly at home, figuratively speaking, for he had previously built a cabin near the spring which paralleled the trail. He had used this cabin time and time again on his many hunting and scouting forays into Kentucky, in his attempt to find a pass in the mountains which would enable him to take a party of settlers through. It is recorded that they remained at this point for a few days, after which Boone led them down the plateau to a point called by the Indians "Blowing Rock"—an oddity of nature with a sheer drop of several thousand feet and where an upward current of air was continuous, with sufficient velocity and force to support and blow fairly heavy objects back to the brink if thrown over. It is legendary that Indians used this as a place for executions of others than their own tribes, and captives binding them and then casting them into the upward rushing stream of air and, if the air forced them back up to safety, they were released or declared innocent. If they did not come back they were dashed to pieces on the rocks a quarter of a mile below, consequently they must all have been guilty. From this lofty summit there was stretched before them a panorama of the entire countryside. They could see for miles and miles back over the valleys through which they had not recently come.

LOOKING INTO KENTUCKY

It is easy to imagine the feelings of the women and children as they strained their eyes into the space before them, trying to pick out in the distance familiar landmarks that permitted them once again, and perhaps for the last time, to gaze on the only homes they had ever known. To the east of them were their cabins—not spacious but comfortable—their relatives, their friends, an access to civilization which was essential in times of dire need, either medical or spiritual. All their lives they had seen the sun come up above the pines in the flat country oceanward from the Yadkin but from now on every sun rise was but to remind them of this mountain which stood as a barrier between themselves and home.

A little farther on there was a place where one could see to the west a considerable distance. The Cumberland range extended for miles in a blue unbroken line like a cloud bank. It is to be believed, from a study of their type, that they did not tarry long at that spot—it being more consistent with their nature to de-

sire a view of that section at close range—and the sooner the better.

After the party had been refreshed, additional venison killed and jerked for the journey, they prepared for the descent down the mountains into the valley below. It was not an unwise decision for they had gone on by a comparatively short distance before one of the party found evidence of a Cherokee war party. This was the heart of the Cherokee country and "Dragging Canoe," the war chief of all the Cherokees, had been harassing the Holston and Clinch river settlements until the mere mention of his name made one shudder at the fiendish acts attributed to him and his warriors. Scouting parties composed of crack woodsmen went ahead to prevent an ambush, while the remainder of the party were constantly on the alert—even the breaking of a limb might bring to their ears the dread scalp halloo of the Cherokees. In this atmosphere of dread anxiety the little caravan wended its way down the treacherous slopes and over obstructions that today would seem impossible, even to one on foot. Nor were they without mishaps, for one horse, losing his footing in the loose rocks and leaves, fell and rolled over a cliff—killing himself in the creek bed below. Fortunately it was a pack horse without a rider and after recovering the baggage they distributed it on the remaining horses, thus continuing the tortuous descent until they crossed Wolf's Creek and stood in the Valley of the Holston. Now, for the first time, they could build fire and prepare food. While they had been in the Indian country they had had cold bear and deer meat and journey cakes—the latter prepared on the hearth of their homes on the Yadkin.

The flat country gave them additional security by allowing them, in case of sudden attack, to throw their horses—their hind and fore legs in such a position they could make no attempt to arise—then placed their bodies in a circle. The pack saddles already on the backs of the horses, fully loaded, made sufficient armament to ward off bullets and arrows of the attacking Indians. Behind this crude but effective shelter the men would fire while the women loaded the long barrel rifles. The children would be made to lay their little bodies close against the stomachs of the horses, thereby being not only completely hidden, but out of the way of the defenders.

The journey from the banks of Wolf Creek to the Block House was of little interest and uneventful. Fully seventy-five per cent of the time was spent in the fording and ferrying of the innumerable streams of the vicinity. Crossing the head of the south fork of the Clinch river, they pushed on to Laurel Creek, which they crossed and again re-crossed where it flows into the north fork of the Holston. Here the trail ran parallel with the river for several miles, again re-crossing the river at regular intervals until reaching Carter's Valley, in which place was located the block house of Captain John Anderson. Captain Anderson was born in Augusta county, Virginia, on May 6th, 1750, and on the third day of January, twenty-five years later, he married Rebecca Maxwell. It is believed that he established his block house early in 1773. We have record of his having been at Fort Blackmore in 1774 and from there returning to his own stockade—thus implying its existence at that time. Captain Anderson's block house played a large part in the settling of Kentucky. Its location made it ideal for the assembling of travelers since the roads from the East, North and South brought the wayfarer to this point. This block house was also the last frontier station before reaching Big Moccasin Gap which was, in reality, the gateway to the Indian Country—for at Moccasin Gap began the "Warrior's Path" while about thirty-five miles to the East was Little War Gap—the only two gaps passable in the Little Clinch mountain range. The Warrior's Path drove straight North through Cumberland Gap in a remarkably direct line until it reached the banks of the Ohio river, where it continued northward again to Lake Erie—ending at the exact spot on which Sandusky now stands. This path was not only narrow but was packed hard by the countless war parties that shuttled north and south with the seasons—being the much used and bloody thoroughfare of the Shawnees, Cherokees, Delaware, Wyandottes, Mingoes, Cayugas and the dreaded Iroquois.

We digressed only for an explanation as to the relative position and important part the block house played in Boone's attempt to first settle in Kentucky—for it was here that he rested his party and later persuaded quite a number to accompany him northward on this first trip into Kentucky.

With the common medium of exchange of that day the little party bought more powder and lead, repaired their harness, baked more journey bread, and were again ready to face the perils of the wilderness—but not, however, until Boone had again used his descriptive powers to entice them with his stories of broad acres covered with cane, of fertile fields that were waiting to be taken, and the numerous springs and streams that abounded with fish. Such word pictures appealed tremendously to these frontier folk and when Boone's party left the block house more than thirty people had joined them. This additional strength in numbers made them feel comparatively safe. With light hearts they waved farewell to Captain Anderson and, crossing "Long Island" headed for the barely visible niche in the foothills of Clinch Mountain, hither to described as Big Moccasin Gap.

Up to this time, in spite of their fears, they had not been molested by marching Indians. Now the story takes a slightly different turn. Little did they know the deadly trap the Indians were laying and which was soon to startle them into the reality

of the cruel and uncivilized slaughter practiced by those roaming Indian war parties. This first great tragedy that entered Boone's life came as a blow from out of thin air. Seemingly there was nothing to fear from the Indians, and yet, it was the sly, cunning red man who was to delay the first settlement of Kentucky to a later date and thereby deprive Boone of laying the plans and erecting Kentucky's first fort.

Boone, as had been arranged, made camp pending the arrival of expected addition and reinforcements. While at this camp he sent out his oldest son, James, with two other men to visit a settlement on Clinch river, to obtain fresh supplies. From their camp it was not more than a day's journey to the settlement and back. With the approach of sunset and no sign of the return of James and the other two men, Boone wondered if all was well. James, in the meantime, had arrived at Russell's settlement on the river, had obtained the desired necessities, and, with some of the Clinch river people, was returning to the camp of his father. Unfortunately, in the dusk of the evening, they lost the trail and were forced unknowingly, to spend the night within five miles of their destination. In their preparation of the evening meal, fires were built and the upward curling stream of smoke attracted two Shawnee Indians, whose overwhelming fiendish desire for more scalps proved the downfall of all but one of the missing party. These Indians planned an ambush—such as is common in Indian warfare.

INDIAN AMBUSH

It was the habit of the pioneers to move only those obstructions which made progress impossible. The Indians would place a tree along the trail and then line both sides of the path sufficiently far back so that the entire party to be ambushed could be fired upon from both sides, the full length of their company. James, his two friends, and the obliging Clinch river settlers, fell into such a trap the following morning while searching for their lost road. It was probably farthest from their worst expectations that on the previous day the two Shawnee warriors had scaled the pinnacle at Cumberland Gap, and, after building a hot fire, placed on it green wood and brush, which threw off a dense smoke, and by holding a damp blanket over it compressed it to the extent that its sudden release shot skyward great puffs of white smoke. This was a signal to all the Indians in the vicinity to assemble for a council. To this gathering of Indians, Panther, the son of the chief explained that two white hunters had discovered a party of whites, evidently, intending to go through Cumberland Gap and into Kentucky. The Indians had never allowed even their own race to defile their sacred hunting grounds by making homes there. Now, the pale face white man, not content with his own lot, was obviously intending to invade the "dark

and bloody ground." As a result of this "pow-wow" plans for an ambush of the whole party were laid.

The ambush was so cleverly planned that only one man escaped—Shadrach, a negro. Resistance was futile and impossible, so deadly and sudden was the onslaught—and on neither side of the ravine did the Indian give an inch. Even as the small and greatly outnumbered party tried to defend themselves and sell their lives as dearly as possible, others sank back, riddled with bullets, pierced with arrows, or brained with tomahawks and war hatchets. Shadrach immediately went out to find Boone. The grief of Rebecca and Daniel beggars description—for James was their first born and was growing into the very image of his father. He was stalwart, intelligent, brave, and but seventeen years old. Daniel, in spite of the crushing news, portrayed the true sacrificial spirit of the American frontiersman. He had long been familiar with Indian warfare, but until now it had been impersonal—the red man against the white. But now—one of the great toll had been his own! His entire attitude toward the Indian changed. He felt a personal interest in their utter annihilation and extinction.

As Daniel Boone rode from the scene of the massacre with Shadrach these thoughts were running through his mind—and we cannot justly blame him for his hatred of the Indian. We, who have never known the horrors of an ambush and the torture of the stake, cannot judge too severely, or condemn the spirit of unreasoning revenge which permeated the very being and every action of the early pioneer in his dealing with the Indian during those troublous times.

It was a sad party that encircled the open grave and with bowed heads paid a last tribute to the murdered lad. The Reverend Thomas Hickman, from Russell's Settlement, performed the simple rites of the early "burying." As the rough boxes that contained all that remained mortal of the scalpers' victims were lowered in one large grave, he raised his hand and in a clear voice repeated: "Oh God, whose nature and property is ever to have mercy and to forgive, receive our humble petition. And tho we be tied and bound by the ruthlessness of the hand of the vandal, yet let the pitifulness of thy great mercy loose us. For vengeance is our and we shall repay—for the honor of Jesus Christ, your mediator and advocate. Amen."

DEFINITE PROOF

Teacher—"Johnny, who was Anne Boleyn?"

Johnny—"Anne Boleyn was a flat iron."

Teacher—"What on earth do you mean?"

Johnny—"Well, it says here in the history book 'Henry, having disposed of Catherine, pressed his suit with Anne Boleyn.'"

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