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### THE DEFEATED CAMP

For most of the Eighteenth Century, Kentucky was a land of indescribable beauty and undefined boundaries. To determine these boundaries and to make settlement possible took some doing. By general agreement, Kentucky lay south of the Ohio River, including that river. The eastern boundary was the Proclamation Line of 1763 which the British government imposed upon a very reluctant set of colonies. Virginia concluded a treaty with the Iriquois under which the Iriquois ceded their rights to all lands lying between the Ohio and Cumberland Rivers. However, the Iriquois' claim to Kentucky was tenuous. It rested on their hegemony over the so-called Seven Nations which included the Cherokee, who were accustomed to hunt and fight in Kentucky though they did not live there. In fact, by the middle of the Eighteenth Century, the last Indian town in Kentucky was abandoned. No one knows why. It may have been that there was a general agreement between the northern and southern tribes to keep Kentucky as neutral territory in which all tribes could hunt and carry on their annual wars with each other. As is well known, the name Kentucky is said to mean either a hunting ground or the Dark and Bloody Ground.

The absence of Indian inhabitants was the main reason that the first settlements in the 1770's could be established so quickly. It also explains the lack of Indian place names in Kentucky. The first settlers had no way of knowing the Indian names for Kentucky sites, so they gave them familiar English names.

Virginia was satisfied that its treaty with the Iriquois gave it title to Kentucky, but the treaty meant nothing to Richard Henderson, a North Carolina judge and land speculator. The Cherokee also refused to accept the acts of the Iriquois in signing away their rights to Kentucky, so Henderson decided to buy or lease Kentucky from the Cherokee through a private treaty. This was illegal under North Carolina, Virginia, British law, but he reasoned that success would excuse his actions. He knew that North Carolina would not really object to his acquiring Virginia territory, and, like most frontier Colonials, he was scornful of British law. When the negotiating was over, Henderson thought that he had bought all the land between the Ohio River and the Cumberland River, west of the Proclamation Line, and he proceeded to hire Daniel Boone to survey it and to settle it. The flood of settlement was about to start and from 1770 on it never stopped, although it ebbed and flowed and many discouraged settlers returned to the East devastated by the loss of their property and the lives of loved ones.

These first settlers found that Kentucky was crisscrossed with trails. In some cases, these trails were made by buffalo, smooth and wide enough for two wagons to travel side by side. In other places, they were tracks through woods not wide enough for two people to walk abreast. Boone and the other Long Hunters who had ranged over Kentucky in the 1750's and 1760's had learned most of these routes and had gained a general knowledge of the geography and topology of the country.

Boone's Trace was the most famous of these routes. It led through Cumberland Gap into the Bluegrass Section of central Kentucky. It was actually part of the Warrior's Trace, a trail which ran from Florida to the

Great Lakes. Near present-day London was the Hazel Patch where the trail split away from the Warrior's Trace. Boone's Trace went north to Boonesborough, and Skagg's Trace went northwest to Crab Orchard, Logan's Fort, and Harrodsburg.

From 1770 to 1794, the settlement of Kentucky was essentially confined to the Bluegrass region and the Falls of the Ohio. Settlement stalled because of the Revolutionary War which in the West was fought between the Settlers and the Indian allies of the British. The war was primitive, passionate and remorseless on both sides, and it continued after peace had been made with Britain because the Indians were determined to destroy the Kentucky settlements.

In the face of all this opposition, a few settlers tried to push on into western Kentucky. In 1767, James Harrod and Michael Stoner had crossed western Kentucky, traveling on foot from the Illinois country to the site of Nashville, probably using the Saline Trail which passed through Hopkinsville. In 1782, the first hardy and daring settlers appeared in Christian County; James Davis and John Montgomery settled in the area near Pembroke. They explored widely, and Davis was killed on Eddy Creek by the Indians while he was surveying.

The Indians hated surveyors because they were the forerunners of the settlers. The surveyor with his compasses, telescopes, and chains seemed to be magical figures to the Indians. The Indians did not feel the same way about the Long Hunters, at least not at first, recognizing that the Long Hunters were very much like themselves. They did not object to the Long Hunters killing buffalo because they were not as important to them as they were to the Plains Indians; but they objected strongly to the killing of deer and the trapping of beaver, animals which the forest

Indians used in their economy. There were many instances where Boone and other Long Hunters were captured, robbed of their furs and skins, and sent back over the mountains. This forbearance ended as the inexorable pressure of hunters, surveyors and settlers continued.

With the end of the Revolutionary War, the British stopped supporting the Indian attacks on the Kentucky settlements, but the Indians continued their efforts to drive out the settlers by changing their tactics. Instead of attacking stations like Boonesborough or Bryan's Station, the Indians turned to attacking isolated farms and farmers working in their fields, or to waylaying travelers. All in all, the 1780's were a decade of destruction in Kentucky.

The Cherokee were a particular threat to travelers coming through Cumberland Gap on Boone's Trace, and on the night of October 3, 1786, on the banks of the Little Laurel River a few miles south of present-day London, occurred the worst Indian massacre ever committed in Kentucky. This affair has passed into history and legend as the Defeated Camp.

A party comprised of from fourteen to twenty families, totaling some sixty people, had come through Cumberland Gap. Many, if not most, had emigrated together from Botetourt and Rockbridge Counties in Virginia. As was customary, they had chosen officers to lead them, and a man recorded as James McNitt had been made captain. McNitt is probably a corruption of McNutt or McNaught. Virginia records indicate that a man named McNutt was killed in Kentucky at about this time. The names of other known families were Ford, Barnes and Prewitt.

The group had passed through the Gap in safety, and thinking themselves free from danger because they were so near the settlements, was not properly alert. Some reports say that they did not post a

guard, but more credible reports indicate that they did. In any event, they decided to celebrate their success thus far. The night of October 3rd was a night of a full, harvest moon, and the emigrants apparently spent the time in dancing, playing cards and generally having fun. Surely the jug was passed around, but there are no reports of drunkenness.

About midnight or early morning after the moon had set, the party was attacked by a large number of Indians of the Chickamauga band of Cherokees. One story says that a sentinel rushed into camp to give the alarm, followed by Indians who struck him down even as he yelled out a warning. In the massacre which ensued, more than twenty people - men, women, and children - were killed and scalped. At least five children were known to have been taken captive, including eight-year old Polly Ford who lived with the Indians fifteen years before being rescued. Her eighteen-year old sister Anna was also taken, but she managed to escape some months later. The other children were never heard of again.

The Ford family was a large one, consisting of Peter Ford, his wife, and several children of all ages from his present and earlier marriages. In addition to Anna and Polly were his sons, Jacob, Laban and Obadiah. The grandson of Peter Ford, writing in 1896 when he was an old man, said:

They were encamped on a narrow strip of land between the creek and a mountain. They had out two guards, one at the upper and one at the lower end of the valley. About two hours before day the attack commenced, just as the moon went down. Grandfather was at the upper end on guard when he suddenly heard the guns firing, women and children screaming and the Indians yelling in the camp. He fired several times at what he supposed were Indians. Then a man came along supporting his mother and said, "Don't shoot again. I saw several of our people shoot our friends. Help me out of here with my wife and mother." So they went up the valley into the mountains. The next day he tried to find his way back to the trail, but he

was unsuccessful and for two days and nights was without food.

On his way he met a party coming to see about the defeat and to bury the dead. They found that a great many had been killed and that the Indians had taken away or destroyed all the property. He found his father and half-brother Laban in the camp. His father had slipped down the bank and hidden in a drift. After the Indians had left, he crawled out calling Jacob and Obadiah. Laban answered, he being up a tree where he had climbed to escape the Indians. Obadiah had been badly wounded by the Indians. They took him prisoner, carried him a few miles from camp and tomahawked him since he was unable to keep up. Anna and Polly were taken prisoners.

There is a tradition that one woman, hiding in a hollow tree, gave birth to a child that night. She and the child were found the next day and taken to the settlements where they were united with her husband who had escaped, thinking she had been killed.

The treasurer of the company, a man named George Barnes, is supposed to have hidden all of the party's funds under a fallen tree, hoping to return and recover them. The money was never found. Folklore enlarged these funds into a great treasure, and for many years treasure hunters combed the area looking for the money. Reports said that the McNitt party consisted of wealthy people, but this is evidently an exaggeration. In 1909, farmers plowing the field turned up two pewter plates engraved with the name of Sara McNitt and a few pewter utensils. They were found upside down over charcoal as though they had been used to put out a fire. These are the only items ever recovered from the site.

The rumors of wealth apparently were responsible for an unsubstantiated charge against a man named William Martin, who kept a small station at Rose Hill, Virginia, eighteen miles east of Cumberland Gap. A neighbor, William Cöcke, accused Martin in a letter to the Kentucky Gazette in Lexington of April 12, 1788, of inciting the Indians

to attack the McNitt party so that he could steal their money. Martin turned out to have an alibi, and the Gazette published his letter in December 1788 proclaiming his innocence.

George Barnes had left Botetourt County with his wife, Agnes, and four small children - three sons and a daughter. In later years, a man named William McClelland in Fayette County who knew Barnes said, "Barnes was a neighbor of my father. Had a little boy who didn't want to go; said the Indians would kill him. He wanted to stay with my father. The Indians did kill him." McClelland was not exactly right. In an affidavit to prove his Revolutionary War service, George Barnes said, "Upon Laurel River as I was moving to Kentucky we were attacked by Indians. Two of my sons were carried off by them, my property all taken and all my papers."

All the reports of the massacre note especially how the Indians killed the pack animals and destroyed everything which they could not carry off. Feather beds and pillows were ripped apart; furniture was broken; chests were broken open; and trunks were torn apart and the contents destroyed or stolen.

By daylight on October 4th, the Indians were on their way with their captives and their booty and scalps. The survivors fled to Crab Orchard. There is a story which may refer to Barnes about a man and wife who had fled, each thinking the other was killed, and who were reunited at Crab Orchard. In any event, George Barnes, his wife Agnes, son William, and daughter Annie were among the survivors.

Men from Crab Orchard, under the leadership of the Reverend Augustine Eastin, went back to hunt for survivors and to make an ineffectual attempt to pursue the Indians. They buried the dead in two

mass graves, the men in one and the women in the other, and they brought back everything salvageable. Later all these items were sold at auction at Logan's Fort and the proceeds divided among the survivors. Many years later, a local woman recounted how her father had bought her a comb at the auction.

In later years, a Chickamauga chief, who said he was not involved in the massacre, said that the Indians had come to the site on the banks of the Little Laurel to conduct religious ceremonies on the night of the full moon. They were angered by the presence of the whites desecrating their sacred ground. This explained the savagery of the attack. Archeologists have found a stone at the site which they believe to be an Indian altar, which lends credence to this story.

In May 1790, four years after the massacre, Bishop Francis Asbury on his way to a Methodist conference in Lexington saw the mass graves. He wrote in his journal:

I saw the graves of the slain, twenty-four in one camp. I learned that they had set no guard and that they were up late, playing cards. A poor woman of the company had dreamed three times that the Indians had surprised them and killed them all; she urged her husband to entreat the people to set a guard but they only abused him and cursed him for his pains. As the poor woman was relating her last dream the Indians came upon the camp; she and her husband ran away, one east, the other west, and escaped. She afterwards came back and witnessed the carnage. These poor sinners appeared to be ripe for destruction.

The day after the massacre, Colonel William Whitley, the leader of the area and the self-appointed guardian of the trail, returned home and heard of the half-hearted pursuit of the Indians. He was outraged, got together another party and tried to track the Chickamauga, but the trail was cold by this time. Whitley had good cause to hate the Cherokees. They had murdered and scalped three of his children and had taken his



wife and fourth child captive. In giving his report of the tragedy, Whitley said, significantly, "I was then in Virginia and they were not followed."

In 1794, Whitley finally got his opportunity. He led a large force against the two main Cherokee towns in north Georgia, Running Water and Nickajack, and completely demolished them. He killed most of the warriors, destroyed the crops and burned the towns. The remaining Cherokee retreated into the mountains. From that time, the Cherokee depredations stopped, and the process of their assimilation into the white culture began. This assimilation was so complete that in a few years they had adopted agriculture, accepted Christianity, took to wearing white men's clothes, and bought slaves.

In the same year, another Indian defeat freed Kentucky from attacks by the northern tribes. General Anthony Wayne defeated an Indian confederation at the Battle of Fallen Timbers and forced the withdrawal of these tribes from Ohio and Indiana into the northwest.

With the threat of the Indians removed, settlers spilled out of central Kentucky into western Kentucky. Hopkinsville was founded in 1796, and in 1797, Christian County was created out of Logan with Hopkinsville as its seat. When the commissioners had agreed on Hopkinsville as the county seat, they proceeded to let a contract for clearing a site for the courthouse and cutting and stacking the timber to be used in building the courthouse and jail. The contract was awarded to William Barnes, the son of George Barnes who had escaped capture or death at the Defeated Camp.

George, Agnes, William and Annie had settled in Mercer County where he had prospered in a modest way. Tax records indicate that he

had acquired a little property. In 1796, the Barnes family moved to Christian County where they settled on a farm owned by William at Fruit Hill where Pleasant Hill Baptist Church is located now. George lived until 1838, a respected Revolutionary War veteran. His daughter Annie married a man named Daniel Campbell, and they have numerous descendants in the county today. William did better than Annie. He married a woman named Elizabeth Myers, and they produced fifteen children; there are many of his descendants in the county and over the state.

One wonders what these people might have thought had they seen the great Cherokee removal in 1835, as well they might, as party after party came through Hopkinsville, camped, and moved on to the Oklahoma territory escorted by detachments of U. S. soldiers. Could they have believed that these Cherokees in their horses and buggies, with their possessions and slaves, and Baptist preachers, moving on what sentimental historians called the Trail of Tears, were the same Indians who had attacked them? Did they wonder if their missing sons and brothers were among them? Would they have called this movement a Trail of Tears, or would they perhaps have thought that term more appropriate for their journey on Boone's Trace to the Defeated Camp?

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