

THE BICENTENNIAL of DAN'L BOONE

By ELMO SCOTT WATSON

ON NOVEMBER 2, 1734, there was born to a Quaker weaver and blacksmith in Exeter township, near the present city of Reading, Pa., a son to whom was given the name of Daniel. And now, 200 years later, that boy's name still has the power to stir the imagination of his fellow-Americans. For he was Daniel Boone.

Last month the magic of his name drew to a little town in Kentucky all the high officials of that commonwealth, representatives of the governors of eight states and a great crowd of people from every part of the country. They had gathered there to participate in the opening ceremonies of the Boone bicentennial which is being observed this year and which will come to a climax late this month.

Although the celebration at Boonesboro on September 3 was primarily a Kentucky affair, since Kentucky regards Dan'l Boone as essentially her own, a dozen other states have some claim upon him. Among them are Pennsylvania, where he was born; Virginia, North Carolina



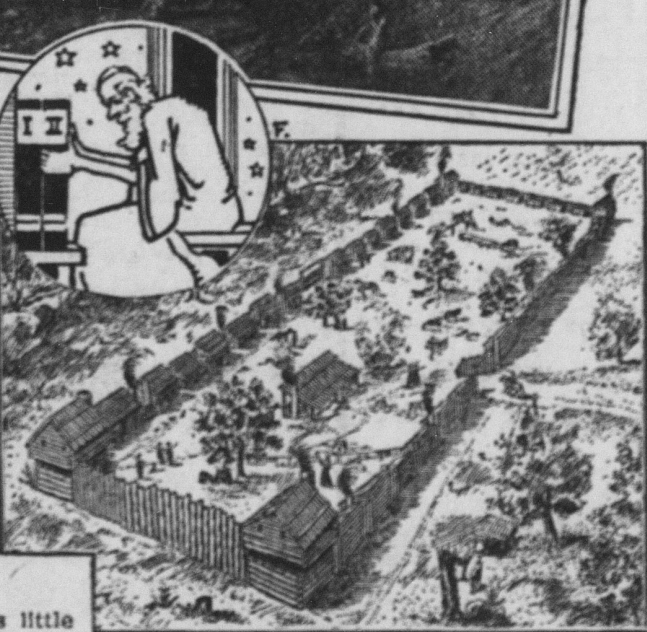
DANIEL BOONE



Daniel Boone Leading a Band of Pioneers into Kentucky
From the Painting by Geo. Caleb Bingham



Birthplace of Daniel Boone



Fort Boonesborough

and Tennessee, where his youth was spent and where he started upon his career as a hunter and frontiersman; West Virginia (then a part of the Old Dominion) where he made his home after the loss of his lands in Kentucky; Ohio, where he had some of his most thrilling adventures; and Missouri, where he spent his declining years and where he was buried when death claimed him in 1820. Even Kansas, Nebraska, North and South Dakota, Wyoming and Montana have more than a casual interest in him. For in his old age, still the keen hunter and trapper, he made long trips into the western wilderness and it is possible that he trod the soil of all those states.

But in a larger sense Daniel Boone belongs to the whole nation. Symbolical of that fact was the authorization by the last congress of a special half-dollar for the Boone bicentennial this year. Designed by one of America's most distinguished sculptors, Augustus Lukeman, the coin bears on the obverse side Boone's likeness and on the reverse the figures of a frontiersman and an Indian and the designation of 1934 as Pioneer Year. These coins will be sold at a premium and the proceeds will go to the Boone bicentennial commission of Kentucky to be used in acquiring the sites of three pioneer forts—Fort Boonesborough, Boone's Station and Bryan's Station. These three, together with the site of the Battle of Blue Licks, will comprise the Pioneer national monument with a memorial highway connecting the four shrines.

Even without these material reminders of the fame of Dan'l Boone, his is a deathless name in the American consciousness. He is the eternal symbol of the pioneer, of a land where there were frontiers to be pushed ever westward and a wilderness to be won. In the America of today there are no more frontiers where venturesome souls may escape the humdrum of everyday affairs; there is no wilderness to be conquered; and pioneer life exists only in the fading memories of a few aging men and women facing the sunset of their days.

So this nation, still youthful but realizing how quickly it spent its youthful heritage of high adventure and brave enterprise, looks back somewhat longingly to those glamorous days and seeks some figure in which is embodied the spirit of its lusty youth. In Daniel Boone it finds such a figure. Americans of today, reading of him and associating themselves in their minds with him, can experience vicariously the adventures which befell him in real life.

Such is the magic of the name of Daniel Boone and to 99 out of a hundred Americans he is the pioneer par excellence. His apotheosis began long ago, for just as George Washington had his Parson Weems to make him more of a myth than a man, so did Daniel Boone have his John Filson to make him a frontier demigod. The result has been many a misconception about Boone's part in the settlement of Kentucky and many a "popular belief" about his importance as a frontier leader which are partially, if not entirely, erroneous.

Modern historical scholarship paints a somewhat different picture of him from the one which our schoolbook histories have presented. Scientific historians, devoted to seeking the truth and making the truth known, have gone back to the source material and out of their findings has

emerged a new Daniel Boone who bears little resemblance to the Boone of the myth-makers.

One of the first of these was the late Clarence Waiworth Alvord of the University of Illinois and the University of Minnesota, whose reputation, gained in his researches into the early history of the Mississippi valley, is too secure for him to be regarded as an idle "debunker" of the great. Writing in the American Mercury nearly a decade ago, he declared:

"The facts of the life of the man Boone, indeed, have little in common with those of the superman so universally exalted. . . . He is idolized as the most heroic of western explorers, as the first to make known to settlers the fertility of the 'dark and bloody country' of Kentucky, and as the first to plant in the West a permanent settlement of Americans.

"But it requires only the most superficial research to knock the story into a cocked hat. A study of the historical sources proves that thousands of men explored Kentucky before Boone, and the region was well known to multitudes who needed no superhuman herald either to tell them of the fertility of the soil or to summon them to action. Finally, in this whole complex movement across the mountains Boone played a subordinate part; he was little more than an employee of an empire builder, Richard Henderson, a North Carolina speculator and the founder of the Transylvania company. Daniel Boone was one of many pawns in the magnificent game of chess being played on Kentucky territory. Of the superman there is no trace."

Another distinguished historian, who is probably the leading authority today on the history of the Old Southwest (Kentucky and Tennessee) and who is now writing a definitive biography of Boone, in an article which appeared in the New York Times Magazine in 1927, corroborated Alvord's statements in regard to the priority of other men as "Kentucky pioneers" but dealt somewhat more kindly with the superman myth. He is Dr. Archibald Henderson who is, incidentally, a great-grandson of Boone's employer. Writing of Boone's activities as agent for the Transylvania company, he says:

"While these are the revelations of modern historical investigation they do not detract from the distinctive qualities of Boone's real fame. Boone was probably the most skillful hunter of big game who ever lived upon the American continent. He was a peerless explorer, a supreme scout. Unsuccessful as a leader—even the leadership in the defense of Boonesborough seems to have fallen not to Boone but to Richard Callaway—Boone was unsurpassed as an individual Indian fighter, who on countless occasions proved himself more than a match for the craftiest and subtlest of his Indian opponents.

"Seen through the glorifying halo of a century and three-quarters of time, Daniel Boone still rises before us as a romantic figure, poised and resolute, simple, benign—as naive and shy as some wild thing of the primeval forest—five feet eight inches in height, with broad chest and shoulders, dark locks, genial blue eyes arched with fair eyebrows, thin lips and wide mouth, nose of slightly Roman cast and fair ruddy countenance. In suit of buckskin, Indian moccasins and coonskin cap, with rifle, knife and tomahawk, alternating with the axe and the surveyor's compass, he is the true Leatherstocking of a Cooper romance."

Here, perhaps, is a clue to the reason why there's still magic for us in the name of Daniel Boone. We are more influenced in our thinking by the fiction we read than we realize. It is easier to think in terms of symbols and types than it is to take into account individual differences in arriving at an estimate of some one person. So, when Cooper symbolized the American pioneer in the romantic figure of Natty Bumppo, we accepted Leatherstocking as the prototype of all frontiersmen. And when a character in real life came as close to fitting the fictitious portrait which Cooper drew as Daniel Boone did, it was almost a certainty that his name would be stamped indelibly on the American consciousness.

Involved in this result, of course, is a matter of racial and national pride—and also personal vanity. We Americans like to consider ourselves superior to other peoples, especially those whose skins are another color, although in this respect we are, perhaps, no different from the British, the French, the Germans or the citizens of any other country.

When we set out to overrun this continent, we encountered a natural opposition from its original owner, the red man. He was wily and daring; he was skilled in woodcraft; he was a first-class fighting man. In order to survive, the pioneers who invaded his hunting grounds had to outwit and outfight him. Those who didn't, soon lost their scalps. Those who did, were able to maintain their precarious hold on their new homes in the wilderness until the overwhelming numbers of the white man made certain the subjugation of the red man and the acquisition of his lands.

Outstanding among the pioneers who were able to survive was Daniel Boone who, as Henderson has said, was "unsurpassed as an individual Indian fighter." So when we read of one of his victories over the "wily redskins" it confirms our feeling of racial superiority. Just as reading of Washington's victories in the Revolution and those of Scott and Taylor in the Mexican war confirm our feelings of national superiority.

Daniel Boone was an American; we are Americans; ergo, we, too, would have been able to have outwitted those "wily redskins." He was a crack shot with the long rifle of that period; he was "the most skillful hunter of big game who ever lived upon the American continent"; he was "a peerless explorer, a supreme scout." Therefore, by the same process of reasoning, we are all of those things. In other words he was a champion in his field of endeavor. And how we Americans do love champions and love to be champions!

The scientific historians may take away our popular belief that Daniel Boone was the first explorer of Kentucky and the outstanding pioneer leader in a romantic pioneering era. But so long as we can cherish our belief in him as the symbol of something which we consider essentially American, his name will be a living memory during the centuries to come as it has during the two centuries that have passed since he was born.

CAP AND BELLS

FOR OLD TIMES' SAKE

Teacher asked a seven-year-old girl what a bridegroom was. "Please, teacher," was the reply, "it's a thing they have at weddings."—Portland Oregonian.

Averting War
"If women had the power, they would avert war," said the idealist. "Would they?" innocently inquired Miss Cayenne. "Of course."

"Then why was the Trojan war not averted? All that would have been necessary was for Helen to put on an ugly make-up."

Trouble
Flatfoot—My son might have been President of the United States. Yesman—What happened to prevent it? Flatfoot—He got married and his wife wouldn't let him go into politics.—Pathfinder Magazine.

Pleasure of Imagination
"What is your reason for asking higher prices?" "I get a certain enjoyment," answered Farmer Cornstossel, "in thinking about the wealth I'd be takin' in if the drouth had left me anything to sell."—Washington Star.

An Expert
Silas—My new farmhand thinks that he knows more about farming than I do. Hiram—He must be a literary guy! One of them magazine writers—Toronto Globe.

NOT FOR HIM



"There's a belief that summer girls are always fickle." "Yes. I got engaged on that theory, but it looks as if I'm in for a wedding or a breach-of-promise suit."

No Friend of Lady Luck

Blinks—So you think you are about as unlucky as a man can be? Jinks—Say, if I paid for insurance on my house for thirty years without ever having a fire and decided to let the darn policy lapse the place would burn up two minutes after the policy had expired.

Plenty of Time

A boy remarked at the dinner table that his class at school was to have a clean-up contest. "A clean-up contest!" exclaimed his mother. "And you come to the table with those hands?" "I know, mother, but the contest doesn't start until next week."—Pacific Methodist Advocate.

Reducing

Two of the comrades were discussing their big fat buddy. Said one: "I saw Ben the other day, and he is not as big a fool as he used to be." "What's the matter—has he reformed?" "No, he's dieting."—American Legion Monthly.

Explained

Little Mae—Mother, I know why little people laugh up their sleeves. Mother—Why, dear? Little Mae—Because that's where their funnybone is.—Toronto Globe.

'Twas Ever Thus

"You look worried. What's the matter?" "Ding it, my doctor just told me I've got to quit worrying or else."—Macon Telegraph.

Usually the Reason

"He has a path worn to his door; did he invent a better mouse trap?" "No, he is slow pay, and that path was worn by the bill collectors."

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CALLING THE DOCTOR

"Do you approve of doctors in politics?" "Sometimes," answered Miss Cayenne. "They always tell you not to worry. And to soothe your nerves they even tell you which way to vote in order to avoid anxiety."

FAIR WARNING



Voice Upstairs—Mary! "Yes, father." "If you're thinking of keeping that young man down there for breakfast, don't do it. Ma says there isn't an egg in the house."

Sunny Jim

Blinks—He always takes a cheerful view of things. Jinks—Yes, when our boat tipped over and he fell in the water, he laughed and said it was O. K. by him, as he intended to take a bath when he got home anyway.

Obstacle Race

"Is your son still pursuing his studies at college?" "Yes, but he doesn't seem able to catch up with them."

It Goes to Your Head

"Yes, I know fish is brain food, but I don't care so much for fish. Hain't there some other brain food?" "Well, there's noodle soup."