

What a Character!

FAMOUS PIONEERS  
& FRONTIERSMEN

Notable Lives from History



Marilyn Boyer

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PUBLISHER’S NOTE: Throughout this book, we have made efforts to use culturally appropriate terminology when referring to the Native Peoples of the Americas. However, in certain instances, the term *Indian* may appear within quotations or historical references, particularly in relation to the time period discussed or events such as the “French and Indian War.” Our intent with this series is to convey respect and accuracy in our portrayal of historical events and peoples. We invite readers to approach these references with an understanding of the context in which they are presented and to engage thoughtfully with the narratives shared within this book.

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# Introduction



Just 200 years ago, much of what would become the United States was still a rugged, untamed frontier. Stories were just being written of the daring pioneers, resilient frontiersmen, and legendary mountain men who carved their paths through the wilderness and shaped the course of American history. From the early days of westward expansion to the height of the fur trade era, these brave souls ventured into the unknown, facing countless challenges and forging a legacy that continues to inspire us today.

Many of the courageous men and women living at that time left behind the comforts of civilization to explore new territories, establish settlements, and trade with Native American communities. These people daily witnessed the beauty and brutality of life on the frontier, where every day brought fresh opportunities and dangers.

The conflicts of this life were often rooted in worldviews. The Native peoples lived close to nature, most often taking only what was needed, and many traveled large distances during the seasons of the year in search of food and other resources. Some had their own informal territories and agreements with other tribes, but the concept of owning the land as individuals as colonists did was not one in which they usually lived by. Clashes between pioneers and the Native peoples occurred over resources and viewpoints. Many generations of the Native peoples had lived on these lands with deep cultural connections to it. Now these new people were saying it was only for them and the Native peoples needed to stay away.

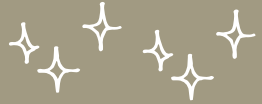
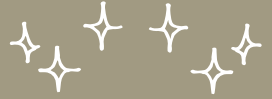
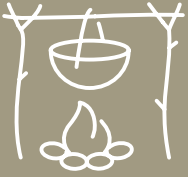
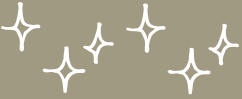
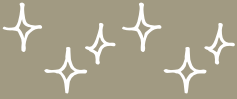
Among the heroes of the American frontier were the pioneers, who blazed trails through dense forests, crossed treacherous rivers, and braved harsh weather conditions in search of a better life and the opportunity for more land to own. Whether traveling in covered wagons along the Oregon Trail or seeking gold in the California Gold Rush, these individuals embodied the spirit of adventure and strength that defined the American West.

No story of the Wild West would be complete without the fearless frontiersmen who made their homes on the edge of civilization, defending their land against thieves and the harsh realities of nature. With their expert marksmanship and survival skills, these rugged individuals became legends of the frontier, earning respect and admiration from settlers and sometimes even Native Americans alike.

Finally, there were the mountain men, solitary wanderers who roamed the remote wilderness in search of beaver pelts and other valuable



furs. Living off the land and trading with fur companies, these tough adventurers carved out a solitary existence in some of the most inhospitable regions of North America. Their tales of survival, independence, and encounters with wildlife capture the essence of life on the untamed frontier.



# 1

## Daniel Boone – Blazing the Wilderness Trail

1734–1820

Virginia–Kentucky

## Who Was Daniel Boone?

Daniel Boone was born on October 22, 1734, before there was a United States of America. At that time, there were 13 colonies that belonged to England. Daniel's family lived in the colony of Pennsylvania. They were Quakers — peace-loving people. Daniel was the sixth child to be born to Squire and Sarah Boone,



who eventually would have 12 children. Daniel grew up loving to be outdoors, especially in the woods.

Daniel was a hard worker. In 1744, when his father bought a big pasture for grazing his herd, Daniel took the responsibility of caring for the animals. He loved the job. When he wasn't guarding the herd, he was hunting. Daniel was alert to signs of wildlife. He developed a friendship with the Delaware tribe, who taught him much about the ways of the wilderness. They taught him how to track, hunt, and survive in the forest, including how to stay warm in the snow. Daniel

**buckskin:** Made from the skin of a deer

soon began wearing **buckskin** clothes instead of Quaker garb. Daniel's father gave him his first long rifle when he turned 13. Daniel became the best shot in the whole family.



During the fall and winter, Daniel would head off by himself to hunt and trap, to supply the family with meat. Animal skins were made into blankets, clothing, and rugs as well. Daniel's skill meant that his family would never starve or freeze. Daniel was always generous to those who needed meat or skins, and people began to respect him. His father taught him carpentry skills. He learned to repair wagons and tools and even build a house.

When Daniel was 14, his sister-in-law taught him how to read and write. Daniel became a devoted reader. He often read books at night while he sat around the campfire. Where he really excelled was in the woods. He hardly ever got lost, knew animal tracks, and listened carefully for sounds around him. He killed his first bear when he was 15 years old.

### **Time to Move West**

Squire Boone felt that the land was getting too crowded with settlers. He decided to move his family south, where the farmland was inexpensive and fertile. The Boones placed all their belongings in a covered wagon and headed for Virginia in 1750. There were no



roads, only rough trails. Daniel, the best woodsman, led his family to Winchester, Virginia, 500 miles away. The family lived there for about a year before heading for the unsettled Yadkin Valley in North Carolina.

Daniel left on what was called a “long hunt,” a Native term meaning a hunting trip that lasted for the entire fall and part of winter. For the rest of his life, he would go on “long hunts” every year. One autumn, Daniel killed many bears. In this way he helped to feed and clothe his family; he made money selling his beaver and otter skins as well. For his entire life, hunting was Daniel’s main source of income.



## War Times

While attending a friend’s wedding when he was 19 years old, Daniel met 15-year-old Rebecca Bryan. Rebecca reminded Daniel of his mother, and the couple began spending a lot of time together. Daniel wanted to get married, but the French and Indian War was gearing up. Daniel was 20 years old when he joined the British army to protect his family’s land. Before he left, his father said, “I’ve never been to war myself, son, but I know if you do the kind of job you’re capable of doing, then you’ll come out just fine. And we’re all proud of you.”<sup>1</sup>

**blacksmith:** Person who makes and repairs things made of iron

Daniel served as a **blacksmith** and supply wagon driver under British General Edward Braddock. Braddock knew nothing of frontier

life or how the Native People fought. He had his men dress in bright blue or red uniforms and stand in long, straight lines to fire at the enemy. The American soldiers tried to tell him how to fight the Native American way, but he would not listen.

Daniel appealed to one of the officers, “Sir, I think we should not stay too long in this place. We’re in the lowlands and the fort’s at the top. It makes us good targets.”<sup>2</sup> In a few moments, they were under attack. Braddock ended up dying; three hours later, 977 British soldiers lay dead or wounded. The wagons were robbed, and prisoners were taken to the fort and killed. Daniel, as a wagon driver, had not taken part in the battle but watched horror-stricken as men fell before his eyes. Someone who knew him later wrote, “He had very little of the war spirit.”<sup>3</sup>

### **Kanta-ke**

One friend Daniel met in the army was John Findley, a hunter. John told him of the wonderful lands beyond the Appalachian Mountains. The Iroquois called the land ‘Kanta-ke,’ what we know today as Kentucky. Wild elk, buffalo, bear, turkey, and deer roamed freely there, and geese



were abundant. People had not settled there yet. It sounded like paradise to Daniel, but it would have to wait for a while.

When he left the army, he went home and married Rebecca. He was 21 now and she was 17. They had a big wedding and Daniel built them a log house on their own little farm. A year later baby James was born. Nine more children would be born to the couple. Daniel once said, “There are three things a man needs to be happy. A good gun, a good horse, and a good family.”<sup>4</sup> The life Rebecca faced was not an easy one. If there had not been women who were brave and determined like their husbands, the West would have remained unsettled.

Daniel loved his family, but he did miss the woods. One day John Findley showed up again at Daniel’s door. He spent the winter with the Boone family. He was excited to fill Daniel in on the Kentucky land. On May 1, 1769, Daniel, his brother Squire, his brother-in-law John Stuart, John Findley, and three of Daniel’s neighbors set off for the “promised land.”

Equipped with their long rifles, salt, kettles, traps, food, blankets, and bear skins, they headed off through the forest. The trip took about five weeks. Upon arriving, they established a base on Station Camp Creek in Kentucky. Daniel later said this was the



happiest time of his life. At night Daniel would sit by the campfire and read his Bible. Hunting provided abundant supplies of pelts and skins from which he hoped to make enough profit to pay for this trip.



### Troubles

A band of Shawnee people came into camp and eyed the huge pile of animal skins Daniel and his partners had been collecting all winter. The Shawnee took the skins, the horses, and the men's rifles. Daniel and John were held prisoner for seven days. When the Shawnee released them, they gave them small guns, **moccasins**, one deerskin, and a small supply of gunpowder to allow them to hunt for food. The chief let them go, telling them to leave the land and go home. Daniel later reported that the chief had acted "in the most friendly manner."<sup>5</sup>

The two men did not go home but stayed for the next winter to try to make up for their losses. They lived in a cave and hunted and trapped, but one day John went out to hunt and never returned. Daniel **surmised** that he had been killed by Native People. Daniel now had no companions but his

**moccasins:** Soft leather shoes made by Native Americans

**surmised:** Gussed

three dogs to whom he sang and talked. After almost two years, Daniel had about \$700 worth of furs and decided it was time to return home. When he was only two days away from home, a group of Cherokees seized his pile of furs. He was disappointed about all that income lost, but at least he had his life. He was ready to get home now.

### **Home Again**

When Daniel got home, Rebecca and the family were at a dance in town. Daniel walked quietly up behind Rebecca and asked if he might have a dance. Looking at the scruffy, dirty man before her, she declined. Daniel told her she had danced with him many times, and then she recognized her husband, screamed, and threw herself into his arms. She thought he was probably dead by now.

People gathered around Daniel and wanted to hear all about the land out west. Rebecca made Daniel promise to stay home for a long time.

### **Moving Again**

After a few years, Daniel was unhappy with how built-up things were getting. He mentioned to Rebecca the possibility of gathering a group of settlers and traveling



together to the **bountiful** land of Kentucky. On September 25, 1773, a group of 50 settlers — men, women, and children — packed their wagons and began their journey beyond the hills. The going was very slow. They were getting close to the Cumberland Gap, which was a passage through the Cumberland



Mountains between Kentucky, Tennessee, and Virginia. Daniel realized at the **pace** they were going, they would likely run out of food before reaching their destination. He sent his 16-year-old son James and some others to head back for more supplies. Unfortunately, the men were attacked by some of the Native Peoples, and James was killed. Only two of the men escaped. Daniel and Rebecca were **devastated**. The rest of the party lost heart and headed back to the Yadkin Valley in North Carolina. This left the Boones alone, without a house. They spent the winter with friends in western Virginia.

**bountiful:** Plentiful

**pace:** Speed

**devastated:**  
Heartbroken and discouraged

## Try Again

In March of 1775, Daniel led a group of 30 men to build bridges and level the trail called **The Wilderness Road**. Daniel's men trusted him completely. As one said, "He was our pilot and conductor through the

**The Wilderness Road:** The path through Cumberland Gap that Daniel Boone had created

wilderness."<sup>6</sup> Each morning, Daniel would mark the trail for the men to clear and then head off to hunt for game to feed them that night. By April, the group had reached the middle of Kentucky. The Wilderness Road had opened the

pathway for settlers to follow safely. Over the next few years, more than 300,000 people traveled on the road.

Upon their arrival, the first order of business was to build a fort. Daniel chose a spot near the Kentucky River. This location was



chosen because it would control the gateway to the west. It took three years to complete the fort. The settlers stayed in the fort for the first year, but then began to claim land and spread out. They named their settlement Boonesborough, after Daniel Boone, their leader. Daniel



returned in June to bring his family to the new settlement. He had built them a new cabin with a wooden floor and windows made from real glass.



### Attack

One summer day in 1776, the Shawnees and Cherokees combined forces and snuck up on the settlement. They captured three girls who had been canoeing. One was Daniel's 13-year-old daughter Jemima. Daniel and the men moved swiftly to try to rescue the girls before the warriors made it back to their camp, where Daniel and his men would be vastly outnumbered. Jemima had learned many useful things from her father. She came up with a plan. She told the girls to break branches along the way and to tear off threads from their skirts to mark their path. Daniel recognized the signs the girls had left. After three days, they saw the Native camp just ahead. Daniel and the men were able to rescue the girls. Daniel said to his men, "Thank Almighty **Providence**, boys, for we have the girls safe."<sup>7</sup>

**Providence:** God's guidance

## The Fort Is Saved

About a year later, Daniel and some of the men went to a place where there were **salt springs**. Wild animals would gather there to lick salt.

The men planned to camp there for several weeks. They would heat

**salt springs:**

Saltwater springs

water in large kettles until it boiled away, leaving only salt. They planned to take the salt back to Boonesborough. But Daniel and his

men were captured by the Shawnees.

Daniel told the men to follow the Native People, and they would try to escape later to warn the people at Boonesborough. Chief Blackfish, the Shawnees' leader, liked and respected Daniel. He wanted to adopt him as a son. He gave him the name of Big Turtle. Daniel and his men stayed with the Shawnees that winter. They knew when spring came the Native warriors were planning to attack the fort at Boonesborough. Someone had to escape in time to warn their families.



Daniel was praying for the right opportunity. It came when the Native warriors needed salt and had taken Daniel to the salt springs with them. Suddenly, a gigantic flock of turkeys flew overhead. For a moment, the warriors forgot all about keeping their eye on Daniel. He made a mad dash for the woods

and kept on running for four days. He covered 160 miles and had only one meal during the time. Exhausted and half-starved, he finally reached the fort.

He found the fort badly prepared to defend itself and at once set about preparations to make it secure. The men were ready to fight. The siege of Boonesborough

lasted for 10 long, terrible days. The men in the fort had no sleep but somehow managed to beat back the attackers. Amazingly, on the 11th day, the settlers found that the Native People, having lost so many of their own, had left and gone home!



### **On to Missouri**

One day, Daniel found out he had been too busy to file the paperwork on his land. The government said it did not belong to him. He was heartbroken, considering all he had gone through to open the Wilderness Road for others. He heard of land out west, present-day Missouri. Daniel, Rebecca, three sons and their wives, two daughters and their husbands, 17 grandchildren, and some other relatives made the long trip. He and his family built a new home there. Daniel hunted



and sold many furs and skins to provide for his family, as he always had done.

In 1800, the United States Congress voted to grant Daniel Boone a tract of 1,000 acres to reward him for all his work exploring and settling the West. He hunted, fished, and trapped for the rest of his

life, and enjoyed his family. Daniel Boone will always be remembered as the man who **paved** the way to Kentucky.

Toward the end of his life, when he was 85 years old, Daniel wrote to his sister, assuring her that he was ready when the time came to meet

**paved:** Opened up his Maker: “All the religion I have is to love and fear God, believe in Jesus Christ, do all the good to my neighbor and myself that I can, and do as little harm as I can help, and trust on God’s mercy for the rest.”<sup>8</sup>