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The Early Settlement of Kentucky



An address by

BRO. CHAS. EUGENE CLARK

K. of P. Hall, West Covington, October, 31, 1913

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THE EARLY SETTLEMENT OF KENTUCKY.

AN ADDRESS BY BRO. CHAS. EUGENE CLARK,
K. of P. Hall, West Covington, October 31, 1913.

CHANCELLOR COMMANDER, BROTHER KNIGHTS, LADIES AND
GENTLEMEN :

FROM the period of 1492, being the discovery of America, and from the later periods of the settlement of Jamestown and the landing at Plymouth Rock, to the time of the War of the Revolution, the pilgrims and early settlers and their descendants had travelled over the great reaches of the territory of the original thirteen states, then Colonies of Great Britain, had climbed the Blue Ridge and were looking with wistful, longing eyes into the great valleys and stretches of the American wilderness as they extended westward from the slopes of the Appalachian mountain ranges to the Mississippi.

Forts Duquesne and Pitt had been established on the westward rivers and the hardy pioneers and hunters were pushing out into the wilderness that lie west of old Virginia and the Carolinas.

That pioneer hunter, John Finley, along with several others, had penetrated the great unknown lands that bordered the Ohio, the Kentucky, the Cumberland and the Tennessee rivers and he, together with other daring companions, brought back to the Yadkin, the wonderful stories of the rich grazing lands, the vast timber country and the great barrens of Kentucky, which was then an Indian haunted wilderness, abounding in all kinds of great game, including the buffalo, the elk, the deer, the panther and the wolf.

Daniel Boone, as a young man, listened to these tales, and his youthful imagination and ardor was worked up to that pitch that he must for himself view these enchanted lands, which were the paradise of the hunter and later to be that of the husbandman.

In 1769, accompanied by Finley, Boone left North Carolina and was soon swallowed up in the vast wilderness that extended from the Great Smokies on to the Ohio, and after many hardships, reached that promised land which for generations had been and then was the hunting ground of the Indian tribes from both North and South and which was the scene of their bloody encounters as they met and clashed on their hunting expeditions, as their parties roamed these forest lands and glades.

In due time, Boone and his companion returned to the settlements in Carolina, and their experiences when related to the border and mountain folk, roused the ambition of these hardy people to view and possess the land with its great savannahs and forest glades lying beyond the Great Smokies and the Blue Ridge.

With all speed other expeditions were fitted out and the land we now know as Kentucky received its first settlers, as many of these pioneer hunters built their log cabins and opened clearings in the wilderness, among which settlements were Boonsboro and Harrodsburg.

The fierce redskins who dominated this great country immediately fell upon the new-comers, seeking their destruction, and many were the lives that were forfeited to the tomahawk, battle ax, rifle and the torch of the Indian warriors who were ever lurking about to encompass the destruction of the settlers.

These fierce onslaughts from the year 1769 and in the following decade, almost destroyed the early settlements, many of whose occupants were either killed or fled back to Carolina.

The horrors and butcheries sustained by the settlers beggar description, for in the course of the early settlement of the then forest-burdened country, a thousand men, women and children gave up their lives in seeking to settle and subdue the land.

The pitiless Indians from time to time were beaten off, but by means of their method of warfare, but slight injury

on the whole was really inflicted upon them. For, when the settlers attacked them in force and the savages perceived that a standing fight meant annihilation, they vanished into the gloomy forests, from whence they had silently come, to again carry fire and murder to some other lonely settler or hamlet.

By reason of centuries of life and warfare in the open, the Indian was at home in the forest. To him, the wilderness was a chartered land. Its umbrage and the sky was as much to him a roof as the wigwam which sheltered his family.

In all pitched battles fought man to man, the hardy pioneer and rifleman of the backwoods proved more than a match for the Indians, but these early settlers had to learn the peculiar methods of savage warfare before they were able to meet him on equal ground in the battles which were fought from time to time in the gloomy forests.

As time sped on, the Wilderness Road was cut and blazed through the mountains down into the gloomy valleys, across roaring streams, along precipitous heights, through the Cumberland Gap into the Promised Land of Kentucky. And, over this Road in the course of the years, many thousands of home seekers with their women and children, trudged and rode into Kentucky, and thus ultimately possessed the land and made possible the later settlement of the territory Northwest of the River Ohio.

The many immigrants, including the pioneer bearing rifleman, among whom were Boone, Finley, Simon Kenton, Logan, Shelby, Brady, Casper Mansker, the Dutchman DeHaas, George Rogers Clark, Robertson, John Sevier, the McAfees, and many other forgotten worthies, not only settled the land and beat back the Indians, but also formed flying squadrons that penetrated the farthest wilderness, followed the roaming, marauding bands of the Shawnees, the Miamis, the Twigwees, the Iroquois, and other tribes to the borders of the Great Lakes, and inflicted where possible heavy punishment upon them, by killing them in battle and attacking and burning their villages and destroying their crops.

These hardy men of Kentucky, who were expert riflemen and the greatest Indian fighters of their day, later joined the columns of George Rogers Clark and threaded their way to the Falls of the Ohio and then on to the Wabash and westward to the great prairies and sinks of what are now known as the overflow lands of south central Indiana and Illinois, to the French settlement at the mouth of the Kaskaskai and then up the Mississippi River to those of Cahokia and then on across the glades and swamps to the Creole Settlements on the Wabash at Vincennes.

All of these lands were ultimately secured through the prowess of these Indian fighters, who crushed the allies of the British and conquered for themselves and their descendants the very heart of this our common country.

Under able leadership, the Kentuckians marched to the Licking and then across the Ohio and fought shoulder to shoulder with Generals Harmar, Putnam and Wayne, being present at the Battle of the Fallen Timbers and at numerous engagements waged with the Indians at Forts Recovery and Defiance under the very walls and guns of the British outposts on Lake Erie.

As the country was dominated by this hardy pioneer stock, substantial towns for that day were erected, Lexington having become a city, boasting several brick buildings and 3,000 souls, while Cincinnati, then known as Fort Washington or Losantiville, was a mere collection of huts built around a central stockade; while Fort Dearborn, now the site of Chicago, consisted of a settlement of three log cabins on the shores of Lake Michigan.

By reason of the vast stretches of almost impenetrable wilderness, the great streams such as the Ohio, the Tennessee, the Cumberland and the Kentucky became the highways for the pioneers and were much traveled. And as the traders and merchants of that by-gone day sought an outlet and a market down the Mississippi at New Orleans, and thence onward to the sea, for their produce, it early brought them in conflict with the Spaniards who held the outlet of the great river in an iron grip and who either imposed heavy

duty on all produce brought to New Orleans or absolutely forbade its sale.

The early pioneers were ever independent dwellers and occupiers of their own land, each jealous of his individual life and freedom as they lived their lives in their log cabins situated in small clearings bounded by gloomy forests, their land holdings usually containing four or five hundred acres.

It was only natural that as the settlement of the territory east of the Mississippi made greater headway and the pioneer population became in a sense congested, that the more hardy and enterprising wilderness farmers and hunters would hunger for more land and for greater freedom, and that they would seek to encroach on the territory of the French and Spaniards west of the Mississippi.

True, to this purpose, and to that end, incursion and settlements were made therein, until by reason of numerous conflicts and after much wrangling, this great domain west of the Mississippi was also possessed and secured and opened to settlement for the hardy sons of the west who carried into this farther borderland the flag and sovereignty of these United States.

These lands dotted with the many habitations of pioneer farmers and hunters who were continually penetrating into and besetting them were through the treaties made by Jay and Pinkney with the European powers thus secured for American conquest without further war with the nations of the old world, and by the later cession of Florida and through the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo with Mexico, the lands of the southwest, and the west, became open for further settlement to the rolling Pacific.

But scant credit has been given to the suffering and privations of these hardy pioneers who but little over a century ago conquered this inland wilderness. The result of their warfare was potent with great events for our country's history and subsequent civilization.

They represented the mountain farmer and pioneer of Pennsylvania, Virginia and the Carolinas, who, crossing the

mountains, came down the troughs of their great valleys, floated down the Ohio, the Cumberland and the Tennessee, and thus, possessed the land, driving out the pitiless Redskins, turning the wild beasts of the forests into food and commerce, and thus helped to reclaim the great northwest and assisted and forced by a never unceasing pressure the free navigation of the Mississippi from its headwaters to the Gulf of Mexico.

The lives and work of these people and that of their descendants form a most wondrous chapter in our nation's history. In 1769 our own fair state, Kentucky, was then an unbroken wilderness; in 1792 they had peopled it with more than 70,000 souls and had it admitted as a State of the Union, while Ohio came in a decade later, that is, in 1802.

Would you familiarize yourselves with the struggles of our forefathers as they sought to live their simple arduous lives and secure themselves homes and carve a future for their children?

Then read their story and spell their history which is largely that of our country, in the "Winning of the West," by Theodore Roosevelt.

This wonderful American, patriot, statesman, historian and scholar, through the genius of his pen, his bigness of heart, largeness of understanding and ready sympathy has preserved to us and to the generations unborn, this wondrous chapter in the settlement of the western continent by the hardy pioneer folk who subdued the wilderness and opened an empire to civilization and mankind.

He has produced for us as it was woven in the loom of time a most wondrous tapestry in whose warp and woof, dyed with the blood of martyrs, he has depicted in imperishable colors and unfading glory the fearful sacrifices, glorious deeds and brilliant achievements of our forefathers.

In their battles, marches, conquering and to conquer the land for American homes, Mr. Roosevelt has gloriously written, "the fathers of the pioneers warred from the high hilled valleys of the French Broad and the Wautaga, to the

Great Bend of the Cumberland. They followed Boone into the tractless and unknown wilderness of Kentucky and battled at King's Mountain. Their sons under Andrew Jackson fought the Creeks, and beat back the British at New Orleans, while their grandsons died at the Alamo or charged and cheered to victory at the Battle of San Jacinto.

"Their warrings extended from the cold and storm-swept shores of Lake Erie and Lake Michigan to the semi-tropical valleys of the Rio Grande, and from Fort Pitt, on the east, across the stretches of the mighty continent to the portals of the Golden Gate through which swelled the long heavens of the great Pacific." And thus within a century was practically conquered for this nation by these backwoods riflemen and farmers, a continental empire, and from the loins of these hardy folk have sprung that mighty people that today with its hundred millions covers a continent.

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