

John McKinney of Kentucky



Wildcat McKinney

John McKinney was employed by the people of Lexington as their first teacher. It was during the years when Kentuckians endured many murderous attacks from the Indians. Since Kentucky had no newspaper, any items of interest coming from other states beyond the mountains were

eagerly greeted by all. In May of 1783, a traveler passing through the blue-grass section, brought with him a newspaper containing the Articles of Peace with Great Britain.

All were anxious to read them. The fact that the Articles had not yet been ratified did not lessen the interest of the citizens. A copy of any paper was a treat, and such news as the Articles meant great hope for the struggling settlers. Before the gentleman departed, however, the citizens appealed to McKinney to copy the Articles of Peace.

At that time Lexington was only a cluster of about thirty cabins, and one which stood just outside of the fort was used as a schoolroom. But the next morning while busily writing, McKinney heard a noise and glancing up saw a ferocious wildcat with bristles erect, tail curled, and eyes flashing. The cat had paused on the threshold and was peering around the room. At first she did not see McKinney, but by some involuntary movement he attracted her attention, and she soon exhibited other than friendly emotions.

There was a saying "The wildcat was not to be frowned down." Having been accustomed to subdue the backwoods boys and girls by the awfulness of his frown, the teacher tried the same tactics now; but the cat was not to be frowned down.

As the teacher reached for a ruler, the cat, with the ferocity of a lion, sprang upon him, fastened her claws into his side and began tearing his clothes, mangling his flesh, and inflicting serious wounds. Knowing he could not long withstand her power and despairing of aught else to do, he threw his weight upon her and pressed her against the sharp corner of the table. Soon her weird cries were mingled with his calls of distress, and ere long the citizens knew something unusual was happening in the little schoolhouse. The women were first to answer the cry of alarm. Reaching the door, they paused to discover the cause of the commotion and seeing Mr. McKinney bending over the table writhing and groaning, they at first glance thought that he had a severe attack of cramp, but quickly seeing the cat, one lady

exclaimed, "Why, Mr. McKinney, what is the matter?"

He very gravely replied, "Madam, I have caught a cat."

By this time the cat was lifeless; but her teeth were so deeply embedded in his side that the neighbors, many of whom had gathered by this time, had great difficulty in disengaging her. The shock, the wound, and the loss of blood made McKinney very sick and weak, and for several days he was confined to his bed while the boys and girls enjoyed a holiday. Nonetheless, he lived to a ripe old age and was often heard to say he would rather fight two Indians than one wildcat. Source: Stories of Old Kentucky by Martha Grassham Purcell.