

Derry Coburn: A Chronicle of Boone Family Slavery

By Lynn Morrow

For modern enthusiasts who read of Daniel Boone's adventures, Derry Coburn (c. 1779-1851) is the most famous African American in American history. His named presence in the vast Boone literature is relatively recent. Readers knew of slave Derry, but John Mack Faragher's Pulitzer-prize winning *Daniel Boone: The Life and Legend of an American Pioneer* in 1992 gave him the surname Coburn and an identity that has grown in significance. Since 1992, the computer revolution has aided local historians in their research and compiling of public and private records, especially in Kentucky. To date, additional major narrative and primary source works have appeared and collectively they broadened the treatment of slavery. The following summary includes a context for Boone's proximity to slavery from the 1760s to 1820. It focuses on episodes involving Coburn, drawn from recent major and minor works on Boone, and establishes a setting for Coburn's appearances in the Missouri Ozarks.

Writers and commentators on the legendary Boone, his kith, kin, and contemporaries are faced with an imposing task – authors cannot pen a completely common narrative because they must choose among multiple tales and legends, often contradictory, in order to weave a story that complements their interpretation of primary sources. The common starting point is the massive Lyman Draper Collection at the Wisconsin Historical Society at Madison, where over sixty interviews with Boone family members reside, as well as commentary on the Boone family adventures given secondhand by non-related informants. Authors rightly use the Nathan and Olive Boone interviews and include a few of the other Boone family reminiscences, but apparently no one has yet compiled all of the "Boone references" from the 486 volumes of manuscripts and viewed them chronologically, side-by-side, as a distinct whole for comment and interpretation.

The result is an ongoing mystery about Boone himself and what the possibilities and probabilities were in the hazy, historical past. Whether someone produces a comprehensive

"Boone Reference" volume from the Draper Collection, or not, authors will have to make judgment calls about the particulars; Boone himself left few primary sources. Professionals largely agree on the central core of the Boone story, but the dozens of peripheral stories involving specific times, sequences, places, and individuals continue to attract local and regional historians who are discovering new glimpses of the past.

In Boone's Southern Upland environments (present North Carolina, Tennessee, Kentucky, and Missouri) slaves were always present in the larger society. While Boone did not actually own slaves during his youthful years of market hunting, he often borrowed, or took advantage of their labor, as noted by historian Robert Morgan, "Throughout his long career Boone was often accompanied by African Americans on his hunting expeditions." In December 1760,

Nathaniel Gist and Boone hunted west of the Yadkin River into the Watauga River headwaters in North Carolina where they met the slave Burrell, a highland cowherd. Almost a lifetime later in 1845 the aged Burrell reminisced about guiding Boone to Benjamin Howard's upland herder's cabin that became a mountain rendezvous for several years in the 1760s for Boone's long hunts.

Founders of the early Kentucky settlements in the 1770s brought slaves from Virginia and North Carolina. Boone's first attempt to settle in Kentucky was with wealthy slaveholder William Russell in 1773. Russell's settlement was Castle Wood on the Clinch River, where several slaves were employed and where Boone marshaled a group to explore Kentucky. At Castle Wood young adventurers joined Boone, including Russell's son Henry and Russell-owned slaves, while William stayed

behind to follow with a second party. Once in Kentucky, supplies ran low and Boone sent his son James, Henry Russell, two slaves, Adam and Charles, and others back for provisions. While returning to Castle Wood, in October 1773, Indians attacked the party, killing most of them and torturing James Boone and Henry Russell to death. Slave Adam, hidden in the woods, witnessed all of it, and later reported the gory details. The Boone party retreated to the Clinch River where they remained for the next couple of years.

In 1775, following the Cherokee and colonial settlers' land negotiations at Sycamore Shoals on the Watauga River (now in Tennessee), Boone led some twenty-six men to open Boone's Trace into Kentucky. Will Hays had married Boone's oldest daughter Susannah, who assumed the role of cooking and keeping camp; Richard Callaway provided a slave woman to help Susannah dress game, cook, and feed the backwoods company. From this point forward, slaves commonly worked for women and men in the extended Boone family, even until the Civil War.

Slaves in the Southern Uplands commonly had a modest measure of movement, as several did who worked for and under the oversight of Daniel Boone, his family, and associates. Slaves demonstrated responsibility in the exercise of their entrusted tasks amply demonstrated by their skills in the agrarians' multiple economies and in the physical defense of the larger community of the multi-racial settlements.

By 1777, settlements at Harrodsburg, Boonesborough, and Logan's Station harbored settlers and slaves. As usual, slaves worked the nearby fields and in March 1777 Shawnees killed one while he worked at Boonesborough. Writers can only guess at the number of slaves who were forced to risk their own futures with the whites, but both the Bryans and Callaways tasked slaves with daily chores. Robert Morgan wrote that the best known slave at Boonesborough was Uncle Monk Estill, "an outstanding hunter and marksman and was a fiddler who played for all the parties and celebrations." Monk



Colonel Daniel Boone sans buckskins. The above likeness is an engraving by J. B Longacre, reproduced from an oil painting by Chester Harding. Harding was a young Boston artist and visited Missouri in Boone's last year of life in 1819. He persuaded the aged and ailing backwoodsman to pose for a portrait. It is the only known likeness rendered of Boone during his lifetime. Longacre's engraving is faithful to Boone's features. In the original Harding painting, he wore a plain sack coat, not the fur trimmed finery shown here. Library of Congress.

planted an apple orchard, knew how to make gunpowder, and "some say" he taught the valued process to Boone. Later, Monk's owner, James Estill, constructed Estill Station and during the last year of the Revolution, in 1782, the Wyandottes attacked the stockade and fled with Monk as prisoner. James Estill and company pursued the Indians, who killed Estill and others, but Monk escaped during the melee and carried a wounded man back to the station. The Estill family freed Monk for his valor and "likely he was the first free black man in Kentucky, one of four thousand African Americans estimated by John Filson to reside in the region in 1784." (Writer and land speculator Filson made Boone internationally famous in his book to attract immigrants to Kentucky.)

As the New Year arrived in January 1778, Boone and the men of Boonesborough left the fort for the Lower Blue Licks to boil salt and hunt. The Shawnees attacked and captured Boone there and took him across the Ohio River. Pompey, a former Virginia slave captured by and serving the Shawnee, acted as a translator for Boone and the Indians. Through

Pompey, Boone negotiated the surrender of the rest of the company to avoid a massacre. Once the Shawnees brought all twenty-seven prisoners back to their town, Pompey continued as linguistic mediator. Ultimately, the Shawnees voted 61 to 59 to let the Americans live. Some, like Boone, would be adopted into the tribe, others sold to the British.

Months later Boone escaped back to Boonesborough, but in September 1778 the Shawnees laid siege to the fort. They opened negotiations with the Americans through their chief interpreter, Pompey. Talk, feasting, negotiations, and more talk continued as the local politics of this frontier siege played out. All the settlers saw and heard Pompey as men on both sides hurled insults at each other. Finally, a Kentucky long rifle silenced Pompey. A popular Boonesborough slave, London, owned by famed land speculator Richard Henderson, also died in the exchange. London, another excellent marksman, fearlessly had left the fort in the dark to engage the Shawnees. He was one of two Americans killed in the siege, one of the most famous sieges in American frontier history. Certainly, slaves Bur-

rell, Pompey, Monk, and London all helped to shape the Boone family experience.

Boone and his extended family decided to leave the famous fortified stockade at Boonesborough. By December 1779, they located six miles northwest at Boone's Station in Fayette County. Historian Meredith Mason Brown says the family lands were "worked in part by their slaves, growing corn and tobacco, raising cattle and horses." There is no attribution of any of these slaves being owned by Boone. However, Boone had "married up" into the more affluent Bryan family, and the Bryans and Callaways always seemed to have slave labor available.

An expansion of slavery in Boone's household parallels perhaps the most prosperous period in his life. During the 1780s, Daniel Boone sought the benefits of wealth. These included owning slaves. By 1781, the year that his last child Nathan was born, Boone began investing in slaves. He purchased a Negro girl from his cousin John Grant, apparently to help Rebecca with household duties and agricultural work; in 1786 Will Hays sold a Negro girl to Boone, as the tav-

ern at Limestone (modern Maysville), Kentucky, probably needed more help. By 1787 Daniel Boone owned seven slaves, a benchmark of his affluence.

The year that Boone turned fifty in 1784, John Filson published his famous book, *The Discovery, Settlement and present State of Kentucke*. The work made the previous dozen years of Boone's life the most legendary and assured the frontiersman's reputation both in America and abroad. On the heels of that publication, and with settlers pouring into Kentucky, Boone left the woods for Limestone on the Ohio River to build Boone's Tavern to become a trader, government official, militia officer, and land agent. He also loaned money, traded horses, and housed Indian prisoners for the government. Ironically, his commercial success also bred bad debts. In 1786 he stood security on a large debt, ultimately never collected, prompting his sale of a Negro boy to the creditor. While Boone was away attending to his elected duties, Will Hays managed Daniel's land business, Rebecca and her slaves worked in the tavern, and son-in-law Philip Goe administered the trading and



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warehouse. Regardless of his Quaker family background, slaveholder Boone had no qualms about investing in the labor of bondsmen.

Daniel's land speculation led to fiscal failure. Kentucky's notorious overlapping land claims necessitated Boone's engaging an attorney to represent him as plaintiff and defendant in all his legal disputes. Courts called him to testify in litigation for others as well, and he endured being accused as a fraud, had his character insulted and his life threatened. By 1789 the frontiersman had given land to relatives, sold, or lost to claimants most of his tens of thousands of acres.

At the end of the decade, Boone tired of the ever-increasing aggravations of "town life" and its concomitant legal disputes. He dramatically scaled back his business and had Will Hays and Philip Goe settle his concerns at Limestone. In the fall of 1789 he moved to Point Pleasant on the Kanawha River, near his friends and future relatives, the Van Bibbers, who continued to suffer family losses to the Shawnees. Boone opened a small trading post on the river, while sons Morgan and Jesse marketed skins and ginseng to Maryland. Boone continued as an elected official and militia officer, but when short on funds in 1791, he sold a female slave and child to raise ready cash. Meredith Brown notes that Boone's Kanawha County taxes for 1792 show that he still had one slave left.

Boone's slave sale coincided with a disagreeable business and militia assignment on which he defaulted. His lack of credit and increasing physical disabilities (he was now fifty-seven) exacerbated financial difficulties. After only two years at Point Pleasant, he assigned nephew John Grant power of attorney to handle his business affairs, while he and his long-suffering Rebecca retreated to the Kanawha River backcountry to engage in trapping and trade fur and skins. The frontierswoman helped carry his rifle, shoot game, clean skins, and camped outdoors with her husband. It's not known exactly when, but by 1795 the Boones had left the river and returned to Kentucky to live on son Morgan's Brushy Fork property not far from the Blue Licks. The families of their four daughters were all in the region, too. Now past sixty, with claimants and lawyers clamoring for all of his land, Daniel contemplated yet another

move. He apparently asked Morgan Boone to look for opportunities in the Mississippi Valley. In 1797 the Spanish authorities in St. Louis, interested in new immigrants, lent a sympathetic ear to Morgan and the prospects of a new Anglo colony. Morgan returned to Kentucky and consulted with his father. Then, in fall 1798, as Daniel lost 10,500 acres to Kentucky sheriff's land sales, Morgan and Philip Goe took three or four of Morgan's slaves to the Femme Osage River in modern St. Charles County, Missouri. Apparently, Goe remained with the slaves to prepare housing and a spring crop, while Morgan went back to Kentucky to bring the rest of the extended family. Meanwhile, Daniel and Rebecca moved north from Brushy Creek to near the mouth of Little Sandy on the Ohio.

By September 1799, all was ready for Missouri. Some three dozen of the extended family, slaves, and a hired hand began the trek by water and by land. Daniel, Will Hays, Flanders Callaway, the hired hand, slaves, and Morgan's Negro, Sam, drove the livestock overland.

By this time, Morgan Boone owned slave Derry Coburn, a young man near twenty years old. John Coburn of Philadelphia, Derry's previous owner, had come to Lexington in 1784 and commenced a successful career as a merchant, lawyer, and later judge. He lived in Limestone during the 1790s and it is probably while there he met Morgan Boone and sold the adolescent Derry to Morgan. It is

unclear whether or not Derry was one of the slaves who helped open up the Femme Osage lands in Missouri, but it is probable, especially as Negro Sam was herder of the livestock during the 1799 migration. When the Kentucky group arrived at Morgan's colonial grant, his log dog-trot house overlooked ten or fifteen acres of crops in the bottom land prepared by slaves.

During the first decade of the nineteenth century in Missouri, the Boones made most of their money in market hunting. Derry Coburn seemed to never be too far from the long hunts or the beaver trapping; he bears a universal reputation in the Boone family reminiscences as an accomplished outdoorsman, agriculturalist, and favorite slave of Daniel Boone.

The Boones hunted and trapped in the Ozarks on rivers draining to the Missouri River. They returned to the Femme Osage with profits in furs and pelts from the Pomme de Terre, Niangua, Gasconade, Big Piney, Osage, and Bourbeuse rivers. After a long hunt in 1800-1801 to southwest Missouri, the sons persuaded their father Daniel, now sixty-six years old, to trap closer to home. Morgan assigned the talented Derry Coburn to accompany his father during an expedition in 1801-1802, perhaps on the Bourbeuse. Derry and father Daniel became close companions, the young twenty-two year-old tending camp, cooking, and preparing pelts for the old hunter. The two netted a

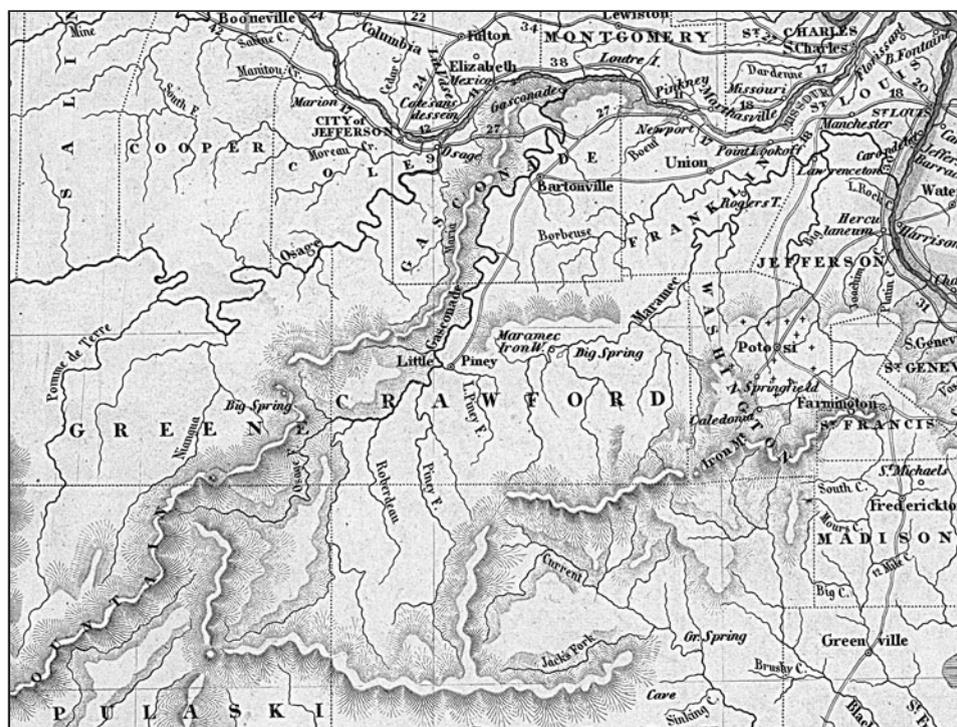
profitable season in beaver.

Encouraged by success, Daniel ventured farther west in 1802-03 for a second Boone-Coburn hunt. This time, however, Osage Indians came to the southwest Missouri camp, plundered their pelts and goods, and warned them to leave their country. Boone and Coburn headed north across the Missouri River into the Grand River Valley, but on a snowy day sighted Osage or Sac Indians nearby. The hunters holed up in a cave where they hid for twenty days before the natives left the area. While rounding up his outfit, Daniel mishandled one of his traps and it sprung tightly on his hand. It was a greenhorn mistake. The old frontiersman was unable to release himself, but dragged himself to camp where slave Derry rescued him from his dilemma.

By 1805, Morgan and Nathan had begun their commercial salt venture at Boone's Lick in Howard County. Their father Daniel was then seventy-one. That fall, father and sons went up the Gasconade, perhaps to the Paydown Spring area in modern Maries County, returning in December. The Missouri River was iced over, but the Boones decided to carefully cross step by step. The sons made it to shore, but Daniel crashed into the frigid shoulder-deep water and barely reached land. The sons built a bonfire to warm their father and then carried him home.

These events, and the fact that Morgan and Nathan were often away from home on various enterprises, caused the sons to be more anxious about their father's continuing talk of trapping away from home. Daniel apparently did stay at home, but only for two years. Historian Faragher writes that family members, during the winter 1808-09, remonstrated against Daniel's talk of another long hunt, but to no avail. Once again, Morgan's slave Derry, was tasked to chaperone the aged hunter, accompanied by Will Hays, Jr. (Daniel's grandson). In the western Missouri woods, Daniel became quite ill and thinking that he would not make it home, he gave instructions to Derry where and how to bury him. Miraculously, Daniel survived and Derry brought him home, where the family commissioned a doctor to start regular examinations of the patriarch.

Derry's association with the prestigious Boone family did not shield Coburn from blatant racial violence.



The Boones roamed a large area of the northern Ozarks on their hunting and trapping forays. From their home on Femme Osage Creek between St. Charles and Marthasville, they ventured south to the Bourbeuse, southwest to the Big Piney, and west to the Pomme de Terre. On this 1845 map by Joseph Meyer, the Big Piney River is recorded as the Piney Fork of the Gasconade.

Caves and Gunpowder

A ready supply of gunpowder was a necessity for the settler, literally a matter of life or death. One of the three necessary ingredients for the manufacture of gunpowder was saltpeter. Saltpeter is a naturally occurring chemical produced from decaying animal excrement and vegetable matter. When England blockaded the ports during the Revolutionary War, the American insurgents were cut off from their supply of gunpowder. To make their own gunpowder, they turned to caves in the Appalachian Mountains inhabited by millions of bats for millenia. Saltpeter is potassium nitrate, produced in caves by decaying bat excrement (guano). The saltpeter forms a white flour-like substance and leaches into the dirt. It requires further refining to produce the niter for gunpowder.

As settlers moved westward, they looked for local supplies of saltpeter. The many caves in the Gasconade River drainage offered an ample supply. By 1810, James McDonald and two sons had floated 3,000 pounds taken from a cave near Waynesville downriver to St. Louis. On his 1818-1819 trek through the Ozarks, Henry Rowe Schoolcraft noted in his journal the commercial saltpeter operation by Colonel William Ashley in a cave in the corner of Texas and Dent Counties, near present Montauk State Park. Ashley teamsters hauled the partially processed saltpeter to his gunpowder manufactory near Potosi. The other two ingredients for the manufacture of gunpowder, sulphur and charcoal, were more easily acquired.



Although not named, the location indicates the Boone saltpeter works might have been at Onyx Cave, previously known as Saltpeter and Boiling Spring Cave, in present Pulaski County. At left is the opening of Onyx Cave today. At the turn of the 20th century, the cave was mined not for guano but cave onyx (calcite flowstone). In the last two decades of the century, it was a commercial cave known as Onyx Mountain Cavern. After the commercial operation closed, the Forest Service purchased the cave and installed a bat gate in the opening. Photo by Terry Primas.

Three white men assaulted him as he traveled to a mill in a neighboring township, beating him so badly that he was unable to work for five weeks. Morgan sued the three assailants in circuit court and received a \$12.64 award, a handsome cash payment on a cash-starved frontier in 1809 that represented the value of Derry's work.

In 1810, Boone received guests from his younger days in Kentucky when Michael Stoner and James Bridges visited their old friend in arms. Despite Daniel's seventy-six years and battles with rheumatism, the trio decided to journey up the Missouri River. The old men planned for the trip, but the younger men - Flanders Callaway and Will Hays, Jr. - along with Callaway's slave Mose and Derry Coburn, accompanied the senior citizens and must have performed the lion's share of the work. No one knows exactly how far west they went, but they were gone six months. Commentators disagree whether or not they made it to Yellowstone. What is certain is that in spring 1811 residents in St. Charles witnessed their descent in boats loaded with furs. Rowing one was slave Derry

Coburn with Daniel Boone at the rudder.

Months later, in fall 1811, Derry Coburn and his Boone overseers were back in the Ozarks, this time accompanied by Stephen Cole and son James. The Coles had met the Boones during their migration through St. Charles County. Later, they moved to Loutre Island, and still later settled in Cooper County. In 1868, James Cole provided reminiscences to Lyman Draper describing one of the earliest recorded events, near a recognizable place, in Northern Ozarks history.

Daniel Boone, Derry Coburn, and Isaac Van Bibber joined Stephen and James Cole and Thomas Massey to establish a three-month working camp below the mouth of Big Piney on the Gasconade River. There they mined bat guano in a large cave (perhaps Onyx in modern Pulaski County or Saltpeter in Phelps) and processed saltpeter (potassium nitrate) for gunpowder. The elder Boone hunted meat for the workers and trapped for profit along Little and Big Piney. Boone had a riding horse and a pack horse to carry his meat and furs - bear, beaver, and deer. By December, the team con-



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structed three cottonwood pirogues and lashed them together. Van Bibber, Stephen and James Cole, and Thomas Massey piloted the saltpeter cargo downriver. Meanwhile, Boone and Coburn took the horses and traps and all met at an appointed site on the Missouri River. They waited for Nathan Boone to arrive in a keelboat from Boone's Lick and transferred the saltpeter shipment to him. Daniel Boone left his traps with Stephen Cole at his settlement near Loutre Island, "nearly opposite the mouth of the Gasconade," stored safely for another season.

The following summer, the War of 1812 began. The Boones, like many settlers in St. Charles County, occasionally took refuge in regional forts. Historian Faragher reports an apocryphal tale about the war that demonstrates how closely Daniel Boone and Derry Coburn became associated in the memory of family and friends. In this story, Boone was at Nathan's home when a hired hand rushed in to report Indians in the neighborhood. Olive Boone wanted to take her children and run to the nearest fortifications. However, Daniel reassured her, "Derry and I alone can defend our house," tossed Derry a rifle, and the two men kept watch all night.

After the war Nathan and Olive Boone remembered the Coburn name when Olive bore James Coburn Boone in 1816. By then, Derry's former owner, Judge John Coburn, had been a presidential appointee as Judge of the Superior Court of the Territory of Louisiana in 1806 and an unsuccessful nominee to become Territorial Governor following the death of Meriwether Lewis in 1809. Judge Coburn, in St. Louis, and others had petitioned in 1809 for a Congressional land grant for Daniel Boone. Ultimately Boone received a grant for one thousand acres in 1814.

In December 1815, Daniel, Derry, and "Indian" Phillips, from one of the mixed-blood families living in La Charrette (modern Marthasville, Warren County) near Flanders Callaway, decided to go trap upriver. Once again, the Boone family protested, but alas, Daniel had his way. Besides, Derry could go with him. Months later, in April 1816, they were reported at Fort Osage in modern Jackson County, about 340 miles upriver. The adventurers returned safely, and resumed life around La Charrette and the Femme Osage. In November

1817, Daniel attempted a short hunt with his grandson James Boone, but this time his frail eighty-two year-old body gave out and he was thought again to be dying. He recovered at Isaac Van Bibber's house on the upper Loutre River, but this was indeed his last hunt.

By 1819, as Nathan finished his great stone house in St. Charles County, Morgan Boone invested in a pine saw mill on Little Piney Creek and moved his family and four slaves to modern southwest Phelps County. Derry Coburn's activities are not recorded, but Morgan surely employed Derry's considerable skills in the fields, on hunts, at the sawmill, and wherever he needed a steady and trusted hand. In September 1820, as Daniel was dying at Nathan's house, Derry was not beside his master's father. Instead, a "family slave," Nathan's Harry, shaved the pioneer on his death bed before family and servants witnessed his demise.

Derry worked with Morgan and other family members until the mid-1820s on Little Piney Creek and then on Big Piney River at Morgan's second pine

sawmill. In 1825 Morgan sold his Ozarks milling business and prepared to migrate to Kansas. He probably needed money for his new venture and forty-five year-old Derry would have commanded a good price in Missouri. Derry was sold within the Boone clan, perhaps to Nathan, but we don't know. Morgan's niece, Minerva, daughter of Flanders and Jemima Callaway, had married Dr. John Jones, a wealthy plantation owner on the west side of Marthasville. At some point about 1825 or later, Jones purchased Derry to manage his agriculture, which he did for the next generation. When Dr. Jones died in 1842, Derry remained with the Jones family. Jones' descendants remembered him with the same affection expressed by the Boone descendants.

Thus, after 1825, Derry was back in a familiar neighborhood and finally allowed to "settle down." Dr. Jones' probate file suggests that only then did Derry, in his middle forties, begin to have a family, as his oldest child was born about 1827. Obviously, this begs the question, "Did Morgan Boone prohibit slave Derry from having a family, or did Derry prefer to

not have one in his younger years?" Whatever the case, Derry married a younger woman able to bear children. One of their sons, Pleasant, went to Greene County with Nathan Boone in 1837. In the early 1840s, Derry and his wife Sophie were hired out to generate income for the Jones estate. Another Jones' descendant recalled that one of Derry's sons, Isaiah, was later sold at a slave sale to a man who went to Texas. Jones family tradition says that Derry was buried in the Jones family graveyard, just a couple of miles west of the Bryan graveyard where Daniel Boone was first laid to rest.

Boone biographers remember Derry Coburn as a "preferred companion" of Daniel Boone, and that may well be the case, but only part of it. By the time the Boones arrived in Missouri, Daniel was in his middle sixties and was nearly fifty years older than Morgan's slave and servant Derry. All accounts relate the increasing physical difficulties suffered by the

patriarch and that he needed oversight and care. Morgan and younger brother Nathan were in the middle of their own careers

and traveling extensively. Surely Morgan, as the elder brother, directed his slave to pay special attention to his father, which included taking care of the aging and failing hunter on his travels, whether hunting, trapping, or digging bat guano in the Ozarks. Derry may well have appreciated this opportunity in bondage of traveling with the senior Boone, given other frontier assignments that might have come his way, and his association with Boone gave the slave some prominence in his own community.

Coburn may have been fond of the old frontiersman, but for Derry to have done anything else but serve as a loyal companion to Daniel was to risk reprisals from his owner Morgan and the Boone family. Besides, Derry had a vested interest in his own future by doing a good job babysitting Daniel. Later, Derry and his wife Sophie ultimately raised their own family in the shadow of the next generation of Boone family descendants. Minerva Callaway Jones died in November 1850. Jones descendants' memories in the Draper Collection, recorded in 1887, recall that the Jones' siblings remembered their black "Mammy" fondly, while

Derry's family was given free use of Jones' acreage to continue their own stock raising and agriculture. Derry died at age 72 in 1851. To date, researchers have not uncovered any pre-Civil War emancipation records for any of Derry Coburn's family.

As an owner of slaves from the 1780s, and the beneficiary of slave labor until the day he died, Daniel Boone had an intimate acquaintance with slavery for forty years. Slaves in Kentucky and Missouri proved they were useful on the frontier; consciously or not, the Boones helped to establish Missouri as a slave state. Like most servants, there is no record that Derry attempted freedom suit litigation against his owners. An illiterate bondsman, Coburn left no writings, but Boone family tradition says he performed his work with consummate skill. However, had Derry "acted out" or refused an assignment he knew about the risk of being sold South.

Instead, Derry Coburn contributed to the commercial surpluses in the extended Boone family's multiple economies. He was a central figure in the family's market hunting, trapping, boating, crop raising, and stock herding. Surely he built fences, pens, stables, and buildings. He supported the exploitation of resources such as saltpeter, pine plank, whiskey, and ginseng in the Gasconade-Big Piney region—all the while protecting the aging American icon Daniel Boone. Finding the historical voice of the Boones or Derry Coburn remains difficult. Historians of the frontier experience will continue to wrestle with the Boone saga, writ large. Informed speculation should continue as the developing archival discoveries in public records in Kentucky and Missouri may yet lead to more primary sources that may add further texture, however small, to the growing literature on the famous frontier icon and his extended reach into American history and folklore. It's fair to say that "an essence of Boone" lingers in the Northern Ozarks as part of our cultural inheritance. In the evolving process of associations, Derry Coburn may assume the stature of other famous early American slaves including York and Dred Scott.

Postscript

Black and white events involving Daniel Boone, Derry Coburn, and slaves continued after Boone's death in 1820; history remains full of

ironies. In 1851, Lyman Draper traveled to Greene County, Missouri, to spend three weeks interviewing Nathan and Olive Boone. When he left, he headed toward Fulton on a stagecoach bound for Jefferson City. En route, Draper's trunk with all his notes fell off onto the road. In Fulton, Draper discovered the accident and started walking south, hoping desperately to meet someone who would lead him to his papers. Days later, "an honest Negro man" revealed the trunk's location to Draper. So it was that a Callaway County slave saved for posterity what has turned out to be the most important source for any biography of Daniel Boone.

Another drama played out beginning in 1845. Kentucky politicians decided to memorialize Daniel Boone in Frankfort and sent emissaries to bargain with family members, especially Jesse Boone's daughters in Jefferson City, who were married to local elites. Panthea was married to Governor Lilburn Boggs and Harriet married to State Auditor Hiram Baber.

Apparently, based on the Kentuckians' promises to properly memorialize their grandfather Daniel, the women gave their consent. The Ken-

tuckians went to the Bryan graveyard on private land east of Marthasville, where the Bryans had marked the Boone graves in the mid-1830s. Convincing the locals of their sincerity, they then hired three black men to dig up the graves. However, some commentators over the years, pointing out the unkempt quality of the site and knowing that family slaves were also buried there, concluded that some of the excavated remains were probably not Daniel's. Nevertheless, they were returned to Frankfort where the Kentucky General Assembly authorized the reinterment. The night before the event, people came to the capitol to witness the placement of remains in new coffins. Some even handled the alleged skull of Daniel Boone!

Missouri and Kentucky boosters have argued ever since over the morality or justice of the reburial. Whosever remains were reburied became front page news again in 1983. A forensic anthropologist examined a plaster cast of Boone's skull made before it finally rested in a new coffin. The investigator claimed that the shape of the skull was Negroid, not Caucasian, but admitted that the cast

(residing in the Kentucky Historical Society) was indeed a poor sample. His speculations set off a new round of controversy about whether or not Daniel Boone is buried in Kentucky

or Missouri.

No one ever interviewed Derry Coburn to ask him what he thought of Daniel's removal to Kentucky.

Suggested readings

Wilma A. Dunaway, "Slaves in Livestock Production," electronic archive to Dunaway's *Slavery and Emancipation in the Mountain South: Evidence, Sources, and Methods*, http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/faculty_archives/mountain_slavery/livestoc.htm

John Mack Faragher, *Daniel Boone, The Life and Legend of an American Pioneer* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1992).

Robert Morgan, *Boone, A Biography* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2007).

Meredith Mason Brown, *Frontiersman, Daniel Boone and the Making of America* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2008).

W. D. Lay, Selected Portions of Draper's Notes Regarding the Boonslick, typescript taken from Lyman Draper Collection, Western Historical Manuscripts Collection, University of Missouri, 1991.

Lynn Morrow, "Gasconade Mills: Daniel Morgan Boone's Piney Woods," Newsletter of the Phelps County Historical Society (October 2009).

Dakota Russell, "African-American Slavery and Freedom on the Nathan Boone Farm," Department of Natural Resources, Nathan Boone Homestead State Historic Site, typescript, 2010.

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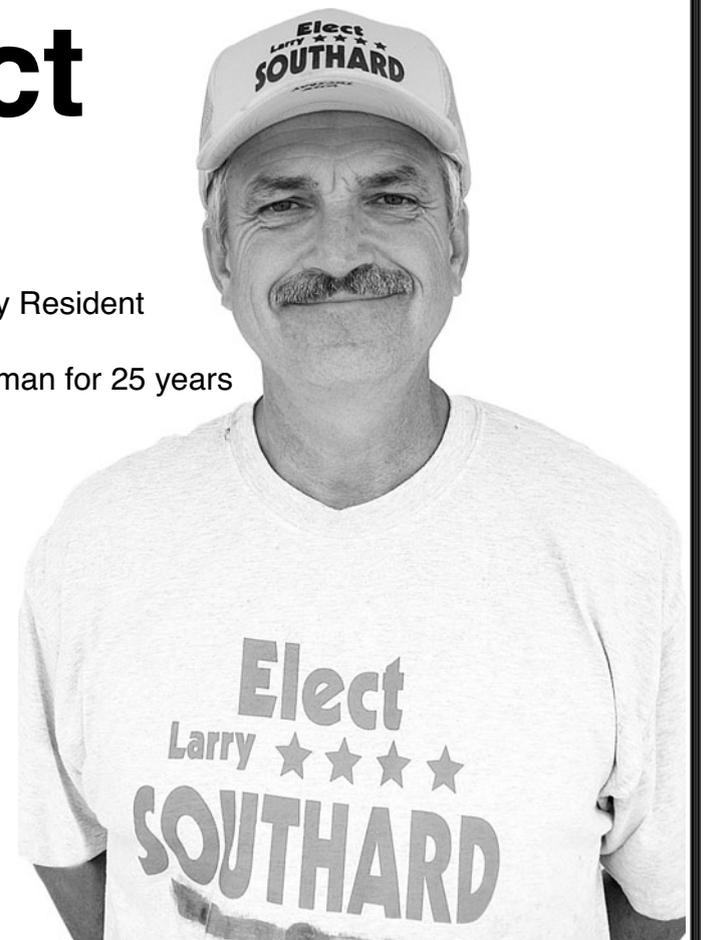
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