

## 9. "Year of the Three Sevens"

THE kidnapping was the most spectacular, but not the only, evidence that Kentucky's Indian troubles had fairly begun. It was not long before several hunters failed to return. The cabin of David and Nathaniel Hart was burned, and five hundred apple-tree scions, which had been carried through the forests from Virginia, were ruined by raiding Cherokees. Two men were killed near Licking River.

Worse still, ammunition was beginning to run low. The Transylvania Company had previously supplied it, but the Company's days were obviously numbered, and the new state government of Virginia had little ammunition to spare. The Chiswell lead mines in Virginia were working furiously, but Washington's army used up most of the powder and shot that could be produced.

Even before the girls were kidnapped, George Rogers Clark and John Gabriel Jones set off from Harrodsburg to Virginia, determined to persuade the state government to supply powder and lead for defense and do something about the land-title question. They had a desperate trip, taking turns on the only horse fit to ride, both of them suffering from "scald feet," while every now and then they could hear somewhere in the woods shots which could only come from Indian hunters. Not once did they hear the sound of a white man's rifle which, with its heavier charge, had an easily distinguishable report. They found

Powell's Valley settlements partly burned and Martin's Station abandoned. At length they met a party of white travelers, who mistook them for Indians and made ready to attack, but, discovering the mistake in time, helped them on their way.

The Virginia officials, having a first-class war on their hands, were dilatory. But Clark was a blunt and emphatic person. He told the Virginians that a land worth having was also worth defending, and he got his powder—five hundred pounds of it. Meantime, on September 7, 1776, Colonel Arthur Campbell sent a little ammunition overland from the Holston Valley for Daniel Boone to distribute. He sold it to the people, charging six shillings for powder and ten pence a pound for lead. One pound of powder was reserved for official use by scouts.

The Virginia militia sent the five-hundred-pound consignment to Pittsburg and Clark took it down the Indian-haunted Ohio River. Finding the Indians too close for comfort, he hid the ammunition on islands in several different places near Limestone (modern Maysville, Kentucky). Then, taking his boat a little way down the river, he and Jones set it adrift and started overland to get pack-horses.

Clark went on to Harrodsburg, while Jones and a party of ten men went back for the ammunition, were ambushed by the Mohawk chief Pluggy on Christmas Day, and lost several men. But the Indians did not find the powder on which the safety of the settlers depended.

Four days later (December 29, 1776), Chief Pluggy and his band attacked McClelland's Station, which stood them off, being at the moment the best-fortified post in Kentucky. The chief was killed. His warriors hung about for two days, then started north to their villages.

Simon Kenton and an equally adventurous friend trailed the band lately led by Pluggy, deceased, to the vicinity of Lime-

stone, where they found the place at which the Indians had crossed.

Hardly more than a boy, Kenton was already one of the most daring and skillful of wilderness scouts and hunters. According to a legend long current in Kentucky, he and Boone once approached a wilderness ford from opposite directions. Each discovered the other's presence at the same moment. Neither recognized the other for a white man. They maneuvered for shots all day long, with such consummate use of cover that neither was able to recognize his friend until the end of the day. True or false, the legend shows the high opinion Kentucky's connoisseurs of woodsmanship held of each man's skill.

Relying on his adroitness and knowing where Clark had hidden his powder, Kenton lingered long enough in this dangerous country to make sure the store of ammunition was safe and then hurried home with the news. A force of thirty men went out and brought it in. They wished to return by a short cut along the Warriors' Path, but Kenton, always cautious when there was no need for desperate chances, warned them not to try. The powder was too valuable to risk. They took the longer way back in safety.

Though they had been victorious and though the Indians were plainly gone, the settlers of McClelland's Station knew well enough the redskins would soon be back. Deciding that their station was too exposed, they withdrew while they were still safe, and took refuge in Boonesborough on New Year's Day, 1777. Their despair was an appropriate beginning to the desperate and bloody year which was remembered ever after as "the year of the three sevens." It was only a little while before the settlers at Hinkston's Station (later called Riddle's, or Ruddle's, Station) also gave up the struggle.

The discouragement of these people proved contagious, and when they set out for the East, ten Boonesborough men decided

the risks in Kentucky were too great and went with them. This reduced the strength of the little fort to thirty riflemen. Seven stations were abandoned within a short time and two or three hundred people left for the settlements. Boonesborough, Harrodsburg, and Logan's Station (St. Asaph's) were now the only settlements on the Kentucky frontier.

The abandonment of the weaker settlements had its bright side, however. It concentrated the settlers in three strong forts instead of leaving them scattered in a great many weak ones. And the departure of the more timid pioneers left behind an iron breed that would not be defeated.

"I want to return as much as any person can do," wrote John Floyd, "but if I leave the country now, there is scarcely a single man who will not follow the example. When I think of the deplorable condition a few helpless families are likely to be in, I conclude to sell my life as dearly as I can in self defence, rather than make an ignominious escape."

There would soon be need of this gallant spirit. Raids like Hanging Maw's were somewhat unofficial—just aboriginal high spirits. Pluggy's raid had been more serious, but his band was too weak to do much harm. The other attacks had been nothing but casual raids for scalps and plunder. But the Shawnees and other northern Indians had now gone over to the British side. Armed and equipped from royal arsenals, aided by royal officers, they would soon be ready to take the warpath in force.

Kentucky was now organized as a single large county of Virginia. Following the British model, it had a county lieutenant as civil head and was defended by an organized county militia. John Bowman became the first official Kentucky Colonel, though Daniel Boone had previously held this title, apparently by Henderson's authority. One of the two majors in the new militia was George Rogers Clark, soon to become the military hero of the West. Daniel Boone, James Harrod, John Todd, and Ben-

jamin Logan were captains. Hitherto, each settlement had had a chief of its own selection. Now these same leaders were to hold commissions by state authority. These were the men who bore the brunt of the savage Indian fighting of the next few years, compared to which the earlier Indian fights seemed insignificant.

Kentucky was developing a military organization none too soon. Captain Daniel Boone had hardly been commissioned when more Indians began to arrive. By early March the first really strong war party was lurking in the vicinity of Boonesborough, watching the white men and biding its time.

There had been wrath among the wigwams when Pluggy's disconsolate warriors returned with news of their chief's death. The White Peril was getting serious. Mkahday-wah-may-quah, or Blackfish, war chief of the Shawnees, now took the warpath in earnest, with a couple of hundred men, intent on wiping out all these Kentucky settlements at a blow before they were large enough to be dangerous.

The warriors reached the deserted settlements just as Simon Kenton and a few others set out from Harrodsburg to get some flax and hemp that had been left behind. One man, riding ahead, saw Indians moving among the empty cabins and turned back to give warning to the rest. But he was not quite quick enough. The Indians had seen him, too, and the white men had to ride for their lives.

Kenton had been ordered to take part of the flax to Boonesborough, but that was now impossible. As his men slipped back through the woods he saw so many signs of a large war party that he sent the others to Harrodsburg to help defend it, and himself rushed off to warn Daniel Boone. Kenton reached Boonesborough after two dangerous days in the woods, too late. Blackfish and his braves were already there and had killed two unsuspecting settlers. Kenton, with his usual mixture of cold

daring and equally cold caution, hid on the edge of the clearing at Boonesborough, because he thought the Indians might try to pick him off as he crossed the open space to approach the fort. When he did reach the gate, the two bodies were just being brought in.

Meantime, near Harrodsburg, a sugar-maker and some friends were attacked. Young James Ray had taken several men over to his brother William's sugar camp, where they were drinking the fresh sap. They heard some sounds in the woods, but, supposing they were caused by animals, paid very little attention. No one dreamed Indians were anywhere near. But Blackfish's warriors had seen the white men and were creeping up. Suddenly forty or fifty of them appeared only a few yards away. The white men, some of whom were not armed, scattered in all directions. The Ray brothers stayed together as they ran, until it was obvious that William could not hold out. His brother James panted a suggestion that he surrender. Instead, William turned back to fight and was captured.

James Ray slipped behind a tree, slashed off his leather leggings while a dozen Indians dashed past him, firing harmlessly into a tree-top where they supposed he was concealed. Emerging, Ray dashed for the fort, distancing the fleetest of the Shawnees after a hot pursuit.

Meantime, a certain William Coomes, at work near by, ran over to see what the trouble was. He took along his shotgun, which, after the usual Kentucky fashion, he had given a name—Beelzebub. Coomes almost ran into the arms of fifteen Shawnees, but he saw them in time. He and Beelzebub dodged quickly behind a tree, while the warriors rushed into a cabin to look for him. While they were still inside, Coomes slipped into the branches of a fallen hickory whose yellowing leaves blended with his leather garments. Here he lay concealed while the Indians dragged in William Ray, wounded. Ray was toma-

hawked and then scalped, while Coomes watched from the fallen hickory. Once a warrior sat down on a log so close that Coomes could all but touch him. At another time, as he told the story afterward: “A great tall yellow fellow stepped up in front of and stared him in the Eyes for two or 3 minutes, He said dad drabit I was a great Mind to let Belzabub off at him.”

Toward evening the Indians left, but Coomes stayed in hiding, afraid to move.

James Ray covered four miles in thirty minutes, reaching the fort at dusk. The alarm spread instantly. Families outside picked up and scampered for the stockade after sundown. Among them was Mrs. Squire Boone, who was living in a cabin near Harrodsburg while her husband was in North Carolina on business. The men who had gone with Kenton for the flax arrived late the same day without encountering Indians.

Everyone had “forted up” safely, but there was a terrific scene between the impetuous Hugh McGary and the hot-tempered James Harrod. McGary roared that the commander had neglected necessary precautions. (Like every other commander in Kentucky, he had.) The dispute grew fiercer. Both men raised their rifles. Mrs. McGary thrust her husband’s rifle barrel to one side. In the end they agreed to go out with thirty men and see whether any of the Ray party were still alive.

They found William Ray’s body, so horribly mangled that it could not be identified.

“See there!” said one. “They have killed poor Coomes.”

“No,” came a voice from the tree-top. “They haven’t killed me, by Job! I’m safe.” Coomes crawled out.

Next morning, smoke was rising from a workshop outside the fort, and a party which went out to investigate saw a rifle leaning against one of the cabins. A moment later Indian rifles blazed from ambush and the party retreated with only one man wounded, after killing and scalping an Indian, whose body they

took back to the fort to show the women their prowess. The Harrodsburg settlers were always rugged souls—it is they who are credited with feeding dead Indians to their dogs “to make them fierce.”

With William Ray’s mangled body as a ghastly warning, Harrod hastily put his neglected defenses in order. He had not yet set up palisades in the gaps between the cabins. Everyone worked through the night to build the stockade and they finished just in time. Blackfish attacked on the 18th and 28th. Once the Indians almost killed Mrs. Squire Boone, who was outside gathering chips. Bullets struck the gate of the fort as she slipped through to safety.

The baffled Blackfish eventually withdrew from the vicinity of Harrodsburg, leaving a few warriors as usual to hang around, steal, kill, and in general give the settlers something to worry about.

They could get fresh meat only by sending a hunter out before daylight to hunt at a great distance, returning with his game after dark. James Ray, seventeen years old, was the only man in Harrodsburg skillful enough to do this with impunity. He used to ride away from the fort at full speed, so as to give lurking Indians a difficult target, travel about twelve miles, hunt, butcher the deer while holding his bridle over one arm, load it on the horse, and ride back. He always galloped the last quarter of a mile and regarded the final spurt of one or two hundred yards as the most dangerous part of the dangerous journey. Even at night Indians had a chance to shoot him as he crossed the clearing. Other hunters who tried to do the same thing disappeared.

One man was scalped within a hundred yards of the fort while his family watched from the stockade. Another settler, cut off from Harrodsburg by the Indians, took refuge in Boonesborough for two weeks. Then, after he had been given up for



dead, he walked into his cabin one day as if nothing had happened, casually inquiring of his wife: "How are you by this time, Nancy?"

At Boonesborough, parties of Indians were seen frequently. Luckily Daniel Boone had commenced new fortifications after the capture of the girls and, though work on them had lagged for a time, he had strengthened his defenses a good deal during the winter.

Boone had learned much about the value of reconnoissance since he had led Henderson's advance guard into Kentucky in '75. He now kept sentinels alert at the fort. Each of the three settlements had two scouts in the forest constantly. These six men patrolled as far north as the Ohio and moved east and west along its banks. They were usually able to warn of the movements of large parties of Indians; but small war parties could slip up almost to the forts themselves and lie in ambush until victims approached. Eventually Boone was forced to divide his meager force, now only twenty-two men, into two reliefs, who took turns soldiering and farming.

Between assaults on Harrodsburg, Blackfish tried his luck against Daniel Boone on April 24. It was the first attack in force on Boonesborough and the first of many encounters between the two men, who to the end of their battles retained a certain queer, half-chivalrous liking for one another.

Boone's permanent scouts, Simon Kenton and Thomas Brooks, failed to observe the approach of the Indians. Some forty to a hundred of Blackfish's Shawnee warriors arrived unexpectedly, hid, and succeeded in decoying most of Boonesborough's fighting men outside. There was some suspicion that Indians were about. The cows had stood at the head of the lane that morning, snuffing and showing signs of uneasiness, and would not go out to pasture. This was usually a sign of Indians. Squire Boone's

“Old Spot” was particularly sensitive to their presence and often gave the alarm in this way.

Nevertheless, two men had left the stockade at sunrise. Indians fired on them from the woods and then gave chase. One poor fellow was overtaken, tomahawked, and scalped within sixty yards of the fort; but Kenton, who was standing at the gate with a loaded rifle, ran out and shot the Indian at close range. The noise brought Daniel Boone and nearly a dozen others charging to his aid. As they came, Kenton saw another Indian drawing a bead on Boone and fired just in time to down the redskin. The Indians cleverly retreated far enough to draw the white men along the lane, away from their fort. Then a great many more warriors rushed into the lane in their rear, cutting them off.

“Boys, we have to fight!” exclaimed Boone, as he saw them come screeching up. “Sell your lives as dear as possible.”

There was nothing for it but to fall back fighting and try to shoot, smash, club and cut a way through the Indians. Boone yelled an order to charge for the stockade:

“Right about—fire—charge!”

That meant one shot apiece and then a savage hand-to-hand with clubbed rifles against knives and tomahawks. Kenton managed to reload twice during the scrimmage, and looked up from his powder-horn to see Boone down with a broken ankle, while an Indian was preparing to finish him with a tomahawk. Again Kenton fired at the crucial moment and for the second time that day saved Boone’s life. Still another brave rushed up to take Daniel’s scalp. Kenton knocked the Indian down with a clubbed rifle. Then, picking the wounded man up in his arms, he dodged through the Indians and back to the stockade.

The women of Boonesborough had been looking on from the fort. As they watched Kenton’s approach, they suddenly saw a girlish figure dart from the gate, out on the battlefield. It



*C. Frank Dunn*

The "Ann McGinty" blockhouse and a corner of the stockade.



*C. Frank Dunn*

A pioneer interior.

HARRODSBURG RESTORED

was Jemima Boone. She had slipped unobserved away from the other women and was now proudly helping Kenton carry her father in.

Safely inside the gates, the laconic Daniel expressed a qualified approval. Too badly wounded to leave his cabin, he sent for Kenton, then only twenty-one:

“Well, Simon, you have behaved like a man today; indeed you are a fine fellow.” It was an accolade.

Boone’s old comrade, Michael Stoner, was also hurt in this skirmish. Shot through the arm, so that he could no longer hold a rifle, he made for the fort—but not before he had picked up the loaded weapon with his one sound arm and handed it to another man, profanely adjuring him, in his Pennsylvania Dutch accent, to shoot “one of tem Got tamn yellow rascals.”

Captain Billy Bush, seeing how badly he was hurt, tried to help him, but Stoner cried: “Oh Push! Push! don’t make so big a mark. We was too big a lump to shoot at.”

Bush let him stagger on alone and paused to load. He had just poured in his powder and had a bullet ready in his mouth, when he saw some Indians loading, reflected that he was a fool to make a target of himself, and ran for the fort. The Indian bullets struck so near him that the pebbles they threw up cut his legs.

Daniel Boone was temporarily out of the fighting—the old wound ached, on bad days, ever after—though neither a broken bone nor a gunshot wound was any great matter on the frontier. Blackfish and his Indians, having failed to carry the fort, hung about for a while, stealing what they could. Then they went back to Harrodsburg. On May 23 and 24 they made two more attacks. The first was kept up until eleven at night. The second began next morning and went on until midnight, when the band drew off after several attempts to set the fort on fire.

Through all the danger, flames, and uproar, Daniel Boone directed the battle from his bed.

His brother Squire, just back from the settlements, went out from Harrodsburg on May 26 "to hunt Indians" and found one too many. As his party slipped through the woods, they saw that Squire had lagged behind to search for moccasin tracks, and called to him:

"Boone, come on!"

A moment later Squire heard another call of "Boone!" This time it came from one side. He walked straight to the place. Ambushed Indians shot him and escaped unseen.

He had barely recovered from this wound when in September he was wounded in another fight. A group of men who had gone out to shell corn were attacked by Kickapoos. Squire, after firing a shot, had retired to some high weeds for shelter while loading. An Indian, running in to scalp another man, discovered him when the two were only ten feet apart. Squire got a glancing tomahawk blow on the head, but the Indian lost his tomahawk, just as the white man drew a small, silver-hilted, three-edged sword—the pride of his life—and ran it clear through the warrior. Seeing that the hardy savage was still full of fight, Squire grasped him by the belt and hauled him closer and closer till the swordblade protruded fourteen inches from his back. Both men were dripping blood. After a desperate effort to get Squire's hunting knife, which was too slippery with blood to grasp, the Indian, still gripped by his adversary, backed to a fence, broke loose, climbed over, and fell dying, breaking the sword short off as he fell. Squire later told his son that it was "the best little Indian fight he ever was in—both parties stood and fought so well."

As the Indians left Boonesborough after their final attack, one of Logan's scouts, lurking in the forest, saw them go. Observing that they were heading toward his settlement, he

slipped back through the forest and was barely able to give the alarm before the war party appeared, May 30. Logan, finding his ammunition running low, slipped out at night, made his way to the Holston settlements—either alone or with Harrod as a companion—and was safely back in ten days.

Indians were heard outside Harrodsburg imitating owls and using the gobble of the wild turkey as a decoy. This familiar ruse failed, but James Ray had to sprint 150 yards to the fort on one occasion, only to find the gates closed and the Indians so close behind that the settlers dared not open up. Ray dropped behind a stump just outside the wall with the bullets kicking up the dust around him, while his anxious mother watched his predicament from a loophole. After four hours of this, Ray had an inspiration and called to the others inside: "For God's sake, dig a hole under the cabin wall and take me in."

There was a sound of spades busily plied. Then the earth opened beside him and he crawled gratefully into it, under the logs, and to safety within the stockade, while the bullets thudded against it.

On July 4 the indefatigable Blackfish again attacked Boonesborough, concentrating his forces and keeping up the siege for two days. During this attack the Indians burned an old structure, now empty, variously known as Fort Boone and the Little Fort, from which the settlers had moved when the new stockade was finished.

Reënforcements finally began to come in. Colonel John Bowman brought one hundred Virginia militiamen. William Bailey Smith had gone back to North Carolina and on his own authority enlisted forty or fifty mounted riflemen, mostly former friends and neighbors of the Boones. These men arrived in July, too late for most of the fighting, but their presence helped to scare the Indians off. Smith had his men open

ranks as they marched into Boonesborough, with a distance of six feet, head-to-tail, between their horses. Watching Shawnee scouts were deluded into reporting the arrival of two hundred men—four or five times their real number. Thus reënforced, the Kentuckians took the offensive and again went out looking for Indians. When snuffing cattle gave the alarm at a turnip patch near Harrodsburg, white men silently surrounded an ambush that had been laid for them. They drove off the Indians, and captured fifteen "bundles," as the Indian packs were called.

It had been a desperate struggle; but in spite of that George Rogers Clark enters in his diary at Harrodsburg, July 9: "Lieut. Linn married. great Merriment."

Blackfish, meditating by a hidden camp fire somewhere in the forest, had at length concluded it was no use and, for the time being, retired. There were no more assaults in force. The Indians were content to hang about and "practised secret mischief." They had not driven Boone and his settlers out, but they had burned cabins, destroyed crops, forced the abandonment of various settlements, killed a number of men, and created a real food-shortage which would grow more serious later in the year.

It was too late to start new crops, but Boonesborough was agreeably surprised to find that, though the new cornfields had been laid waste, the old cornfield of the year before had spontaneously produced seven bushels an acre from natural seeding. This field the Indians had overlooked. The incident gave rise to the famous remark that Kentucky soil, planted and cultivated, produced twenty bushels an acre; merely planted, ten bushels; not even planted, seven. In spite of this fortunate chance, however, food was scarce. In December one settlement reported that it had but two months' supply of breadstuff and commented significantly on the number of widows and or-

phans. Even the news of Burgoyne's surrender, in October, 1777, which reached Kentucky during the winter, was no reason for supposing that Indian raids would cease.

All in all, Blackfish need not have been discouraged.