

Review

Reviewed Work(s): *The Frontiersmen: A Narrative* by Allan W. Eckert

Review by: Charles G. Talbert

Source: *The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society*, Vol. 66, No. 3 (July, 1968), pp. 308-310

Published by: Kentucky Historical Society

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23376848>

Accessed: 30-01-2022 22:38 UTC

---

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

*Kentucky Historical Society* is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society*

## BOOK REVIEWS

*The Frontiersmen: A Narrative.* By Allan W. Eckert. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1967. Pp. xiv, 626. \$8.95.)

This is an attractive book. The format and typography are excellent. Inside the covers there is a very good map marred only by the fact that one inch represents at least fifteen more miles than the thirty-nine indicated on the scale.

Painted around the life of the Kentucky and Ohio pioneer, Simon Kenton, there is an acceptable picture of the frontier and frontiersmen. However, if one expects accuracy of detail he will not find it here.

The footnotes (actually backnotes) are purely explanatory in nature. There is a bibliography for each chapter, but, with the exception of Edna Kenton's *Simon Kenton*, the better biographies of the major characters who appear in this book are not listed. Many mistakes could have been avoided if these had been used. Primary source materials such as the Draper Manuscripts are mentioned frequently and used without discrimination.

Each chapter is divided into many sections, and each section has a date for its heading. All too often the dates bear little relation to the material covered in the paragraphs which follow. Errors in geography are numerous, and at least ten individuals appear either with the wrong first name or with the last name misspelled. Military rank is handled carelessly. Frequently a man is referred to by the highest rank that he ever attained regardless of what his rank was at the time. In a few cases men are demoted without cause.

Treated especially unfairly is Colonel John Bowman, county lieutenant of Virginia's Kentucky County and later of that state's Lincoln County. Eckert, who thinks that Bowman was a Virginia line officer rather than a militia officer, refers to him as a "too young commander" in 1777. This is a strange thing to say about a man who had been a militia captain in Virginia's Frederick County in 1760. In 1779 Bowman is described as an "offensive young colonel" and an "arrogant little

colonel." Nearly four years after Bowman's death the author sent him out on an Indian campaign which "proved abortive." This is a result of confusing John Bowman with John Edwards.

The boundaries of the Transylvania Colony included the Kentucky River, which is not mentioned, and did not include the Mississippi River, which is mentioned (p. 110). The Second Continental Congress met at several towns but never at Williamsburg, Virginia (p. 117). Danville, Kentucky, is "abandoned" before it was founded, and Benjamin Logan is accused of "deserting his own small fort" before he had any fort to desert (p. 132). Fort Jefferson, built by George Rogers Clark on the left bank of the Mississippi, should not be described as "overlooking the Falls of Ohio" (p. 225).

Because it "became apparent that Kentucky County was too large" Eckert divided it into Fayette and Bourbon counties in 1784 (p. 283). This county had disappeared in 1780 when it was divided into the counties of Lincoln, Jefferson, and Fayette.

Those who believe that William Whitley built near Crab Orchard the first brick house in Kentucky have, in a few cases, placed its date of construction as early as 1785. Now they will have to do better. Eckert says that in 1781 there were "sturdy brick homes" in Kentucky. He gives as the locations of these homes Lexington and Harrodsburg, two towns which did exist at the time, and two others, Danville and Stanford which did not exist (p. 240).

The account of Benjamin Logan's 1786 Shawnee campaign is very inaccurate (pp. 296-301). This campaign resulted in the court martial of Hugh McGary at Bardstown on March 20, 1787, not at Harrodsburg on November 11, 1786 (p. 306).

Isaac Shelby was chosen as first governor of Kentucky by a board of electors on May 15, 1792, not by the legislature on June 4, 1792 (p. 389), and Aaron Burr was not "the Federalist candidate" for President in 1800 (p. 439).

Many of Eckert's errors are a very natural result of his difficulty in distinguishing between those sources which are acceptable and those which are all but worthless. Inventing conversation, which he does throughout the book is a questionable procedure, but fabricating source material is inexcusable.

George Rogers Clark did not at any time write to his "Dear Sister" a letter which began: "I fear I have grievous news about my nephew, your beloved son, Joseph Rogers. . . ." Clark knew, if Eckert does not, that the Joseph Rogers who was killed by Kentuckians when they mistook him for an Indian was his cousin, not his nephew (p. 237).

Altering of otherwise satisfactory sources also occurs. Levi Todd did not address Governor Beverley Randolph of Virginia as "Governor of the Continental Western Territory" (pp. 314-15), and Randolph did not place after his signature this title which was not his (p. 336).

*University of Kentucky  
Northern Community College*

Charles G. Talbert

*Ghost Railroads of Kentucky.* By Elmer G. Sulzer. (Indianapolis, Ind.: Vane A. Jones Company, 1967. Pp. 257. \$15.)

It is not often that an author succeeds in satisfying the mind's need for facts and emotions but this has been done by Mr. Sulzer in his book about the "Ghost Railroads" of Kentucky. The rail fan who leans heavily to the purely historical side of his interests will find here a historical record that obviously indicates competent and patient research. In this respect this book represents the level of good writing and historical knowledge that one expects from a person who has been a very creative educational leader. Mr. Sulzer was on the UK and the IU faculties for over thirty years where he was responsible for communication systems instruction.

History is told in small items as well as great events. The author, realizing this fact, has reproduced a large number of maps, time tables, complimentary passes, road side notices of special runs and fares, running orders, profile graphs and tickets. To these artifacts of early railroading must be added the written text that abounds in details certain to be of genuine interest to a student of Kentucky life. From the rail viewpoint the text is often organized around the birth, life and death of a small road. Beginning on page 203 as an example is a ten page story of the building of a nine-mile section of rail in 1902 to connect the Cumberland Coal Company's mine