

# H-Net Reviews

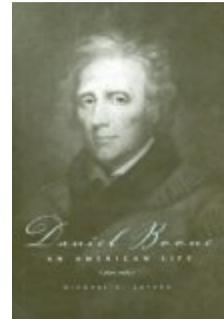
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Michael A. Lofaro. *Daniel Boone: An American Life*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2012. 248 pp. \$19.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8131-3462-8.

Reviewed by Andrea S. Watkins (Northern Kentucky University)

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Daniel Boone is a historical figure who looms large when considering the history of the American frontier. Born in 1734 in Berks County, Pennsylvania, to a Quaker family, Boone's life encompassed many of the key events and developments of the United States in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. His presence at General Edward Braddock's 1755 defeat in the Battle of Monongahela, participation in the Battle of Blue Licks during the American Revolution in 1782, and activity in the settling of land in the Louisiana Territory, among others, point to his experience as an "American life." But within popular culture much of what is known about Daniel Boone is more legend than reality. Author Michael A. Lofaro, professor in the Department of English at the University of Tennessee, provides a detailed look at Boone's life, and attempts to depict Boone as a man who accomplished a great deal, but also as one who "typifies the inner conflict between civilization and the wilderness" (p. ix).

Lofaro presents Boone as a man always on the move and never really satisfied unless looking for the next adventure. Drawn to the woods and hunting at an early age, Boone's attempts at a settled life never lasted more than a few years. After serving as a wagoner with General Edward Braddock's forces at his famous defeat in 1755, Boone married Rebecca Bryan in 1756 and settled near her family in North Carolina. Boone decided to make a trip to Kentucky in 1767, having heard tales of the land's bounty from a fellow wagoner, John Findley, on the Braddock campaign twelve years before. This first trip, with his brother Squire Boone and hunting partner William Hill, took them west to the Big Sandy River and a winter camp near today's Prestonsburg, Kentucky, but Boone was unaware that he was in Kentucky. He was impressed

with the game and disappointed with the terrain. He returned from this first trip without seeing the meadows and cane breaks described by Findley. It was on a second trip in 1769, this time with Findley as one of his companions, that Boone viewed the bluegrass region of Garrard and Madison Counties from Pilot Knob, and he was enthralled.

But Daniel Boone was not the only one interested in Kentucky, and a push by others into the region for hunting, survey, and settlement led Boone to organize a group to emigrate in September 1773. Members of the party, including Daniel's oldest son James, were attacked by Indians and killed. The main body of immigrants met and decided to return east despite Boone's desire to continue. After this, increased attacks by Indians led to Lord Dunmore's War and curtailed settlement until after the natives' defeat at Point Pleasant in October 1774. Richard Henderson, a former North Carolina judge with plans for land speculation in Kentucky, hired Boone to help with negotiations with the Cherokee for large portions of the Kentucky frontier, and then to clear the Wilderness Road to allow for better travel into the region. In early 1775, Boone and thirty men widened a series of buffalo traces and warrior paths to allow for pack horses. Henderson followed with a large group of settlers, and Boone brought his family to Fort Boonesborough in September.

The years in Kentucky are those from which the legend of Daniel Boone was born, and Lofaro provides detailed descriptions of events that in later years took on almost mythical features. In July 1776, when Jemima Boone and Betsey and Fanny Callaway were captured by a small party of Indian warriors while out on a Sunday afternoon canoe trip, Boone used his skills as a hunter

and woodsman to follow and ascertain the party's intended path. After three days, he led a group of rescuers from Fort Boonesborough to the girls, who were safely rescued. This story was inspiration for James Fenimore Cooper's famous tale of the capture and rescue of the Munro sisters in *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), as well as the basis for many illustrations and paintings throughout the nineteenth century. Another series of events related in a clear fashion by Lofaro is what happened when Boone was captured by the Shawnee Chief Blackfish while on a salt-making trip in February 1778. His work to keep the large Shawnee war party from attacking Boonesborough that winter was later called into question by his fellow settlers who feared he was a traitor because of his ease in fitting into native life during his captivity, and his further negotiations with the British at Fort Detroit. But Lofaro aptly argues that Boone's interests were always with his family and their protection. Yet Boone was unable to keep his son Israel safe when the pair participated in the greatest defeat in the Indian wars on the frontier during the Revolutionary War years. Led into an ambush by Indians and their British officers at Blue Licks on August 19, 1782, a force of 182 men struggled for five to fifteen minutes before retreating back across the Licking River to safety. When surrounded by native warriors, Daniel gave Israel a horse to escape, but the young man waited for his father and was shot dead. Daniel was unable to carry him, and returned several days later to retrieve Israel's desecrated body for burial.

In addition to his time spent in the woods hunting and clearing, Boone also supported Kentucky through legislative service. From the earliest days at Fort Boonesborough to his later years in the Femme Osage of Missouri, he worked for the interests of himself and his constituents. However, Boone's dislike of crowded cities and developed towns led him back to the frontier again and again. Boone parlayed his reputation as a skilled woodsman into a busy career as a surveyor following the American Revolution. His abilities were good, but his failure to complete the necessary steps to validate a claim led him into legal trouble. The history of haphazard surveying and "shingled claims" created problems that took over fifty years to resolve in the Kentucky courts. As surveyor, Boone was held liable and he was forced to pay those who found their surveyed claims invalid. This theme of Boone's frequent indebtedness and his trusting naiveté are repeated by Lofaro throughout the book. Boone experienced periods of success as a tavern and shopkeeper in Maysville, Kentucky, and Point Pleasant, Virginia. It was also during this time John Filson published *The Discov-*

*ery, Settlement And present State of Kentucke* (1784). Filson had added a thirty-four page appendix about Daniel Boone to the work that proved more popular than the original work. It was translated into French and German in 1785, and Daniel Boone was made an international frontier hero. Lofaro indicates that such fame profited Boone little, but others sought to improve their fortune using his name and history.

By 1797, Boone had lost his best Kentucky land, and in 1798, just as a new Kentucky county was named for him, two other counties sold ten thousand acres of his land for back taxes. Lured by the promise of land from the Spanish lieutenant governor in Missouri, Boone left Kentucky in September 1799. He was made the magistrate of the Femme Osage in July 1800, but he continued hunting and possibly went as far as Yellowstone on one of his trips. His problems again with completing the necessary steps for valid land claims led to his losing his Missouri land after the completion of the Louisiana Purchase. The final years of Boone's life were marked with visits from those wanting to see the famous frontiersman, hunting trips, and time with family. Rebecca died in 1813, and Daniel lived until September 26, 1820, when he died minutes after his last living daughter, Jemima, arrived to see him. His and Rebecca's remains were moved to Frankfort, Kentucky, in 1845 at the request of the Kentucky legislature. Boone was returned to the land that he defined and in many ways defined him.

Lofaro's extensive reading of available sources on Daniel Boone is evident in the detailed accounts of Boone's exploits and history. His careful description of Jemima Boone and the Callaway sisters' capture and rescue, as well as the interaction between Daniel and Chief Blackfish, are vivid and detailed. Piecing together the truth from second- and third-person reports is not an easy task, and no original Boone autobiography and few firsthand interviews are in existence. However, Lofaro has brought the character of Boone to life by drawing his story from various accounts of those who knew him and from the contemporary records and documents available. In Lofaro's work, Boone is the expert frontiersman who is happiest hunting and exploring the vast frontier. The broader historical context of Boone and his imprint on the development of Kentucky and the United States is not as strong. A more thorough description of the legal system as it related to state taxes, federal land policy, and federal approaches to Native Americans in the post-Revolutionary era would provide a look at Boone and his experiences within the context of United States history. And the importance of Kentucky to the growth of the

United States in the 1780s into the nineteenth century is needed to better understand the larger stakes for victory on the frontier between British, Indian, and American forces. But this is a work about the man and not his times. A three-page postscript to the paperback addition has a nice summary of recent works and primary source discoveries that shed greater light on Daniel Boone since the original publication of the book. For those who are interested in learning about the man who shaped the early American frontier, this book is valuable.

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