

TALK FOR GIST SOCIETY
Covington, KY
May 1979

It is indeed a pleasure and very flattering to talk to the Gist Society. With the Kentucky State Historical and the Filson Club, this is the most prestigious historical group in Kentucky.

Kentucky is more than a place. It is a state of mind. The word conjures up a host of things and one can get euphoric when hearing or thinking about Kentucky. In many ways Kentucky fulfilled the dream of the ideal life of men and women, of great talent and accomplishments who live this ideal life. There is so much to talk about when you use the word. Unfortunately, I was not born with the ability to write for there is so much I would like to put down, so I am pleased at the opportunity to pick a subject to discuss with you.

When asked to give a short talk, I thought of all I would like to say but had great problems deciding on a subject. I wanted to write on Kenton but Eckert did a superb job. I wanted to write on Isaac Shelby but was beaten out by George Greider. John Colter who joined Lewis and Clark expedition at Maysville, Kentucky would be a great subject for an evening but I just found a new definitive work on him. I am trying now to gather material on Squire Boone but will probably be beaten on this also.

I also thought about discussing Kentucky salt works and the laws relating to this important Kentucky commodity, about rafting, a bygone era and a whole bunch of funny family stories, about the Cabin Creek Presbyterian Church or about Washington, Kentucky, of which I have the original minutes. I also thought of Kentucky place names which I have been accumulating for about thirty years and find most fascinating. I could give you genealogy too, some pretty juicy. I could copy John Ed McConnell's Kentucky, My Kentucky, but mine would be a poor imitation of Big Ed's talk. Ghost stories I used to hear but don't remember well enough to discuss at this time. My wife suggested other subjects such as Kentucky accents, mountain life in general, snake night in Holiness churches and feuds, some of which made the OK Corral a Sunday School picnic.

As the background for my subject, I was born at Booneville, Kentucky on the south fork of the Kentucky River where we were about 100 years nearer to the frontier than most of you have been, where there is still salt and sugar gourds in my grandmother's smoke house for storage. Dark prevailed until after most of the country was lit up, thus fostering superstition and belief in witches and hants and all sorts of supernatural events. But most of all I had a great uncle, very old, who surveyed Eastern Kentucky for fifty years and who had noted all the history and places where occurred and who, as old men

want to do, wanted to tell somebody about this. I was nine or ten years old and literally sat at the feet of Uncle Strat Treadway and listened to his stories for hours, a story teller supreme, a man who has been to where history happened and knew what happened. He fired my imagination and love for Kentucky which has never flagged.

Unfortunately, I cannot find notes he made for a book nor can I tell you with accuracy and completeness what he told me. Unfortunately my first forty years was not as a researcher with notes, but only as a voracious reader and as a great surprise to some of you, a good listener. I could also tell you about a young fellow who happened to be my grandmother Garrett's first cousin, who literally scared you out of your wits, John Hunt Morgan. I felt that this subject would probably frighten you a little bit.

But among all mentioned, I first heard of John Findley from Uncle Strat and followed him all these years and I am still trying to unwind the story. I tried to get a national forest named for him and tried to get the I-471 Bridge named for him. This has resulted in many communications concerning John Findley which I will mention later.

John Findley was the first Kentucky Chamber of Commerce, the first man to learn of the rich Kentucky soil and the first Anglo-Saxon to build a home in Kentucky. He talked so much of Kentucky that many persons moved to Kentucky to see for themselves. Findley was born in northern Ireland in 1722. His parents moved when he was young to Pennsylvania near Lancaster. Here John learned the language and trading customs of the nearby Delaware and Shawnee Indians.

In 1744 at age 22, John was licensed by Pennsylvania as an indian trader. This same year he married Elizabeth Harris, daughter of an indian trader and a river ferry owner. In 1747, Pennsylvania granted him land in Paxtang Township. He had been licensed as a trader in 1745, 1746 and 1748, not in 1747, the year he got his license. He probably stayed at home on his farm this year.

The indian trade was considered profitable and attracted very brave persons. It was a dangerous business, however, as we shall see. The indians produced skins and furs which they traded for white mans products such as weapons, cook kettles, etc. Deer skins, beaver and bear skin were bought very cheaply. The indians were usually cheated out of their skins. Trade was therefore not very peaceful.

A few traders kept storehouses near the indian villages but most used canoes or pack horses to visit the indian towns. France claimed all the banks of the Ohio and England claimed the same to the Mississippi River, because the Iroquois who were allied with Britain claimed that it defeated all the tribes in this area.

These overlapping claims produced friction but neither side wanted war so both tried diplomacy among the tribes. The French trade was official but the English trade was free and each English trader was a potential diplomat dependent upon himself alone for his very survival. There was even rivalry among the English, for both Pennsylvania and Virginia claimed the Ohio Territory.

By 1748, Findley was trading went to the Allegheny which I will explain later, where indians were beginning to live. He was headquartered at Shinopstown near where Pittsburgh was built later. Cresap, Virginia and Ohio Territory agent, wrote Governor Dinwiddie in '71, "One James Findley and another are suspected to be taken and carried off by the French who carry off our men every year. Therefore, I think it necessary to take the French living in Logstown and retain them until our men are restored." The above James was John and Logstown was a post a few miles from present Pittsburgh.

Where this outrage actually occurred is not known surely. It may have been in Ohio, possibly at Shawnee Town, present Portsmouth. In 1752, Findley, Paul Pierce, William Brown started a commercial business at Pickawillany near present Piqua, Ohio. The stock was valued at 1142 pounds of goods. In an attack on the town, the French took and destroyed these goods. Findley may not have been there for he is not mentioned in reports of this attack. Pierce says that after this attack Findley left for Pennsylvania rather discouraged.

Findley was now 32 years old. He had lost twice what was considered a fortune. He probably went back to Pennsylvania where tax books showed he became a property holder in Pennsburg Township across the river from Paxtang. In the Fall of 1752, he bought another stock of trade goods and took four assistants down the Ohio River stopping at Shawnee Town, present Portsmouth. He then went to the falls of the Ohio and found no indians. He went back to the mouth of Big Bone Creek where he met a Shawnee Indian group who invited him to go to their town, Eskipakiphiki in the Kentucky plain on the waters of the Kentucky River.

They assured him a rich fur harvest. Eskipakiphiki was in what is now Clark County Kentucky and was the most southern town of norther indians. This was just what Findley wanted, hidden away from both the French and the English. He built a cabin surrounded by a stockade to shelter his horses and his party from the indians. His gate posts and cabins were still standing when white men came in 1775.

A story came down that he packed his goods at Lancaster with blue grass and Italian grasses brought to the United States by Jamestown settlers and when he unpacked it at Eskipakiphiki, he threw out the hay where it sprouted and spread through Kentucky. Thus making us the Blue Grass State.

I have read that blue grass was found by early Kentucky settlers only in this area. Eskipakiphiki was on the great warriors trace from north to south. The trace entered Kentucky above Vanceburg and went south to Cumberland Gap. There were regular camping places a day apart on the trace. One place was at Blue Licks, another at Eskipakiphiki, now Indian Old Fields. Another on Camp Creek at Jackson County Kentucky and another at Flat Lick in Knox County. There probably one or two other camps also.

Findley gathered all the information and all the topographic features he could. The Licking River originally known by the white man as Fredericks River, the Kentucky plain, referring to that large area of flatland in Clark County, at Indian Old Fields, Pilot Knob, Waseoto Pass which was in Estill and Jackson County and other features. Pilot Knob pointed to the Kentucky plain. Kentucky River was important because it was a route to the Kentucky plain. Later Findley told Boone about this. While Findley was busy at this town of Eskipakiphiki, a band of Ottawas and Kinawba Indians, French praying Indians, came down the pass to attack the Cherokee and Catawba further south. They passed through Eskipakiphiki and on the 29th of January 1753, came to the pictured rocks at the head of Station Camp Creek.

Here they found Pennsylvania traders and took them prisoners. The record tells a story. Major William Trent to Governor Howe on April 10, 1753, "I received a letter from Crogan wherein he tells me that 50 outlaw Kinawba, etc., who met with some of our people at a place called Kentucky, about 150 miles from lower Shawnee Town. They took eight prisoners and 300 or 400 pounds worth of goods from us. On escaped after three days, three of Findley's men were killed at Eskipakiphiki and no account of himself." This is the earliest known use of the word "Kentucky" as we know it today in a public document. The English called the Ohio River, Allegheny as far as the mouth of the Wabash and designated by the place "this side of Allegheny", the southeastern or English side. All maps before the incident called Kentucky either Shawnee Country or Ohio.

Kentucky, an Iroquois word, the last part of Iskiphakiphiki meaning the land of level places was restricted to the big level on the warrior trace located in present Clark County and to the river in that area draining this level land. Its wider usage grew out of Virginia and Carolina custom of speaking of this untamed area as the "western waters" and out of further fact that the first settlements were on the Kentucky River also known first to the whites as the Louisa River.

After capturing the company to which Major Trent refers, the French Indians returned to Eskiphakiphiki and the next day tried to rob Findley. In the attack three of Findley's men as noted above, were killed after which Findley and his fourth man, John Faulkner escaped leaving furs and good behind. They crossed the snow clad mountains to home in Pennsylvania. The others were taken by the Indians. Two escaped the following

day and got home. The others were taken to Canada and two were sent to France and put in a dungeon. They were later rescued and finally brought home by New York and Pennsylvania governments. This is the first Indian outrage against the whites which we know of in Kentucky.

Although Findley lost another fortune, he returned to the frontier. In June 1753, he was at Shinopsintown again. The Kentucky outrage inflamed the colonial frontier from New York to the Carolinas. Although the border was aflame, war was not declared until 1754, the year in which Washington surrendered Fort Necessity. In all these events, Kentucky was soon forgotten.

In 1755, Findley enlisted in Braddock's Army, either in the western scouts or in his brother-in-law's company. Here he met a young wagon driver, Daniel Boone with whom he formed a close friendship. Findley captured Boone's imagination with his Kentucky stories. For the next two years Findley is lost to history. In 1758 he joined McClone's company for defense of the frontier. From these enlistment papers his age and birthplace were found. In 1760, he appears on Fort Pitt census as a civilian. He owned a trading store there for times were too wild to go on to the frontier. The next year he was again listed, this time as a householder with two men in his house, probably clerks. It is not known whether his family was there.

Many people from the fort later went to Kentucky, especially to the Louisville area after hearing Findley. For instance, John Campbell became one of the first citizens of Louisville.

Peace with France and England in 1763 secured all the St. Lawrence and the Ohio Valley to England. The next year, Colonel Bouquet went against the indians to punish and pacify them and this, incidently, is a fascinating setting with Bouquet's report on how to form a frontier army. He was to take boys age 15 for thirty year enlistment. Findley probably was with Bouquet as scout or trader. A number of rescued prisoners later settled in Kentucky. In 1764, Findley embarked on another great adventure thus becoming one of the first Anglo-Saxons in another state.

A Philadelphia trading firm sent a fleet down the Ohio and up the Mississippi to form Fort de Chartres in Illinois. One boat, the Otter, was captained by Findley. The Otter had trouble and had to be lightened. This was Findley's usual luck. We do not know how long he remained in Illinois. Filson says he was in Kentucky in 1767 trading with the indians, but if this was so, it must have been while he was traveling the Ohio, for there were no indian towns in Kentucky that year. Findley probably thought of what Boone told him, his attempt to get into Kentucky in 1767. Findley returned to Lancaster, Pennsylvania and became a horse trader. In the Fall of 1768 he went south to visit Boone in the Agden Valley and other

Braddock's veterans. Findley would leave his horses with Boone and go out to trade and of course, he told them all the wonders of Kentucky. These men dreamed of the great wealth of Kentucky and soon formed an exploring company composed of Findley, Daniel and Squire Boone and their brother-in-law John Stuart. These men employed Joseph Holden, John Mooney and William Cooley as hunters and camp keepers and on 1 May 1769 set out for Kentucky. Squire Boone stayed home to take care of the family, crops, etc. until the crops were laid by, following which he was to bring fresh supplies to Kentucky.

The company equipment^m consisted of rifle, tomahawk, knives, traps, rough clothing and a blanket of bear skin for sleeping, plus minimal provisions and cooking pots. Of course, there was extra lead and ammunition. With this minimum of equipment they lead the transatlantic movement of Anglo-Saxons, an important movement. They crossed the Blue Ridge and other mountains and valleys to Cumberland Gap where they found the warriors trace and from it went to Roundstone Creek in Rockcastle County where there is a Boone's Gap. Later Boone found a mountain which he climbed, probably Bear Mountain in Madison County, and got his first glimpses of the levels of mid Kentucky. This convinced him that Findley was right about the location of Kentucky, remember, we are speaking of the localized area of approximately 3500 acres.

Findley had grown nervous and anxious and was beginning to wonder if they would ever find Kentucky. Boone's report brought new hope and they moved eastward to Station Camp Creek in present Estill County near Irvine, Kentucky on which they built a camp that gave the creek its present name. Leaving the camp, Findley and Boone set out to find Kentucky, that is, Eskipakiphiki, where Findley had had his trading post. On this trip Findley's health failed, Boone made a shelter and left him with food and went along to Pilot Knob which Findley assured him was the landmark for the Kentucky plains.

On the 9th of June 1769, from the top of Pilot Knob, Boone saw "with pleasure, the beautiful level Kentucky". Hurrying back to Findley, Boone cured him with the good news. He brought the others up to build a camp on Littlegrub Creek because the first known book in Kentucky was Gulliver's Travels, a mile and a half from Findley's old station. Boone, however, was soon captured and the indians took everything they had brought to Kentucky except enough to go home, and ordered them to leave. Again, Findley was robbed of a fortune and went home to Pennsylvania. His wife had died so he again set out for the wilderness to trade, perhaps with part of his wife's estate, for in a letter from Philadelphia in January '72, two years after he left Kentucky, it stated that several Seneca were killed by whites and the indian revenge was to murder several whites and rob John Findley of 500 pounds of goods. He lost again. (L.L. Degrad)

Again, he went back to the Lancaster and gave his daughters Esther and Margaret, his life estate and two pieces of land

which had belonged to his wife. Doubtless this was to raise another stake for he set out for the wilderness again at age 53 and according to history he died far from his home, some say he drowned in the Ohio River on a trip to Indiana, however, I have a little bit of additional information on that.

It is difficult for Americans to appreciate and understand the adventure, the hardships, the perils of such a career or to understand the motives and ambitions that impelled it. As a result of local publicity concerning my attempt to get the new I-471 bridge named for John Findley, I have received many letters and some phone calls from decedents of Findley. Apparently there are many in this area.

Yadkin One lady whom I cannot identify called and wrote me several times and I went to see her. Very definitely her husband's parents were direct decedents of John Findley from a daughter in the ~~Agden~~ Agden Valley of North Carolina. They do not know what happened to Findley after he got back to Kentucky but as I explained above, he went back to Pennsylvania and gave his estate to his two daughters. A very distinguished family has descended from this Agden Valley Findley family and these people have no idea that there may be a little bastardy in the clan according to this old lady. Incidentally, her father-in-law rode with Jesse James and was in the Minnesota raid when they were all shot up. I have seen his knife made in Sheffield, England in Northern Kentucky but this was almost a CIA operation and I know that the proud owner is in Campbell County Kentucky and that there are numerous other decedents in the area.

A most interesting event was an hour long distance phone call from a California University professor who was very belligerent about my interest in Findley until he found out I had no ulterior motive. He was or is feuding with his family and assures me that Findley is buried at Big Bone in Boone County. He promised to contact me again and give me the information. This is four years later, however, and no information yet. I am still getting occasional calls and letters concerning Findley and would appreciate any other help or interest that any of you may give. The chapter on Findley is not yet closed.