

# GS Insight

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## Positioning Classics: A Boone To Real Estate

**Not only famous but of good fame  
Without which Glory's but a tavern song ...**

*From Don Juan, by Lord Byron*

Daniel Boone is the purest of American folk heroes, honored for his bravery, honesty, fairness and instinctive intelligence. His exploits as a Western trailblazer are the stuff of legend. Every American child knows him. Revered as a leader and pioneer, Daniel Boone served as the model for a host of different purposes: aspiring politicians like Davey Crockett, romantic novelists like James Fenimore Cooper, organizations like the Boy Scouts, and comic book heroes like Superman.

Europeans are equally enamored of the ultimate woodsman. In the 18th century, he was considered the epitome of Rousseau's "noble savage" — inherently good, strong and honest, and innocent of original sin. Lord Byron even included Boone in his masterpiece, *Don Juan*, and declared him "happiest among mortals."

### **One Part Truth ...**

Like most legends, Daniel Boone was real, an honest man of good character who survived many exciting adventures. But his legend masks a modest life of triumphs and setbacks in the quest for the ultimate American objective — financial security!

The difference between myth and reality is clearly illustrated in the story of Daniel Boone's first trip to the wilderness. It was profit that led our hero to Kentucky in 1769, inspired by the stories of a friend. John Finley had visited Kentucky earlier, and returned with stories of unsettled land teeming with game.

In 1769, Boone, Finley, and three companions crossed the Cumberland Gap into the forbidden land on a two-year hunting and scouting trip. In just seven months, they killed more than 2,000 deer. However, the Shawnee Indians soon detected the alien presence. Boone and company were only interested in the skins, and they left the venison to rot. Outraged by this wanton waste of earth's bounty, the Shawnee captured Boone and one companion.

### **Original Spin**

What happened next depends on point of view. According to Boone, the Shawnee "stole" their hides, horses and equipment. Two days later, they turned the white men loose with a small rifle, ordering them to leave Kentucky for good.

From the native perspective, they were simply confiscating ill-gotten gains from irreverent intruders with no business in their sacred hunting grounds. After chastising the outlaws, they chose to banish them from the land, rather than kill them.

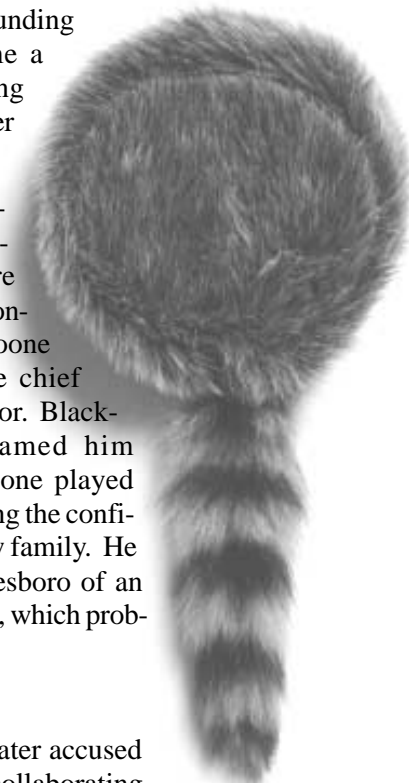
### **Never Give Up**

Truly brave, Boone ignored the friendly advice. His first attempt to bring settlers to Kentucky was turned back by the same Indians in 1773, so it was James Harrod who founded the first permanent town in 1774. But Boone did hack the first crude road through the Cumberland Gap in 1775, on his way to founding Boonesboro. He also became a leading citizen of the fledgling state, noted for his skill as a hunter and Indian fighter.

His most famous adventure occurred in 1778 when he was captured by the Shawnee, who were British allies during the Revolutionary War. In the face of death, Boone managed to impress Shawnee chief Blackfish as an honorable warrior. Blackfish adopted Boone and named him Sheltowee, or Big Turtle. Boone played along for several months, winning the confidence and admiration of his new family. He escaped in time to warn Boonesboro of an imminent attack by the Shawnee, which probably saved the settlement.

### **Damned If You Do ...**

For all his efforts, Boone was later accused of treason by his neighbors for collaborating



with the British. Exonerated at trial but dismayed by the malice of his peers, he left Boonesboro and founded Boone's Station.

He did not stay there long, either, and he never did find his fortune. His Kentucky neighbors respected his woodland skills, but also considered him reckless, impulsive, and rather lacking in good judgment. In fact, Daniel Boone spent most of his life in debt, failing as a land speculator, surveyor, horse breeder, tavern owner, and trader. Happiest while hunting in the woods, he kept one step ahead of civilization, eventually dying in Missouri in 1820.

## Legends Are Created

So how did Daniel Boone become so famous? Why him, and not James Harrod, or Benjamin Logan, or half a dozen other worthy candidates?

That's easy. Nobody created a legend for any of them. Daniel Boone had John Filson, a long forgotten schoolteacher from Pennsylvania who also made his way to Kentucky seeking his fortune. Like Boone, he failed in this endeavor, but found success as Kentucky's "first historian."

Filson had obtained 12,000 acres of land in Kentucky through his father's estate. Looking for a quick profit from selling it, he was dismayed to find the market sluggish. The country was still wild and unmapped, and Indian raids posed a serious deterrent.

Filson decided that all Kentucky needed was a little PR, so he set about writing a promotional guide extolling the virtues of "Kentucke." His model? Dozens of similar promotions used to lure Europeans to the New World.

One important task was to create the first map of Kentucky. For this he hired local surveyors, one of them an old woodsman named Daniel Boone. Now 50, old Daniel spent many an

evening regaling the enterprising schoolteacher with exciting tales of the early days. As a result, when *The Discovery, Settlement and Present State of Kentucke* was published in 1784, it included a 33-page chapter entitled, "The Adventures of Col. Daniel Boone."

Filson's real estate promotion did help spur the settlement of Kentucky, but it was far more successful in creating the legend of Daniel Boone. Within a year it was translated into several languages, and it took Europe by storm. Newspapers printed excerpts, and people everywhere became enamored of Filson's backwoods superman.

The time was ripe. Boone was suddenly famous, much to the amusement of his Kentucky neighbors. Filson wrote the Boone chapter in the first person, with Boone supposedly telling his story in his own words: "At a vast distance I beheld the mountains lift their brows and penetrate the clouds."

Contrast this epic language with an actual letter from Boone to the royal governor of Virginia: "Sir, as Sumpurson Must Carry out the armanstion (ammunition) to Red Stone I Would undertake it on Conditions I have the apintment to vite (victual) the Company at Kanhowway ..."


No matter. Historians incorporated the Daniel Boone legend into their work, and Fess Parker renewed it for millions of Americans on television during the 1960s.

## If Not Boone ...

The world wanted a "noble savage" to admire. Fate put Filson and Boone together. Had it been someone else, Daniel Boone would be little more than a footnote of history, founder of Kentucky's second settlement.

Many Kentuckians might have preferred Simon Kenton. Every bit the backwoodsman as his legendary

friend, he even saved Boone's life during an attack, carrying the injured man on his back into the fort with the Shawnees in hot pursuit.

Kenton was far from perfect. For one thing, Simon Kenton wasn't his real name, and he tended to become testy if people said things like, "So, Mr. Kenton, where are you from originally?" But as we have seen, reality is no impediment to the creation of a legend. 

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