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Today's Stories: [Daniel Boone](#)

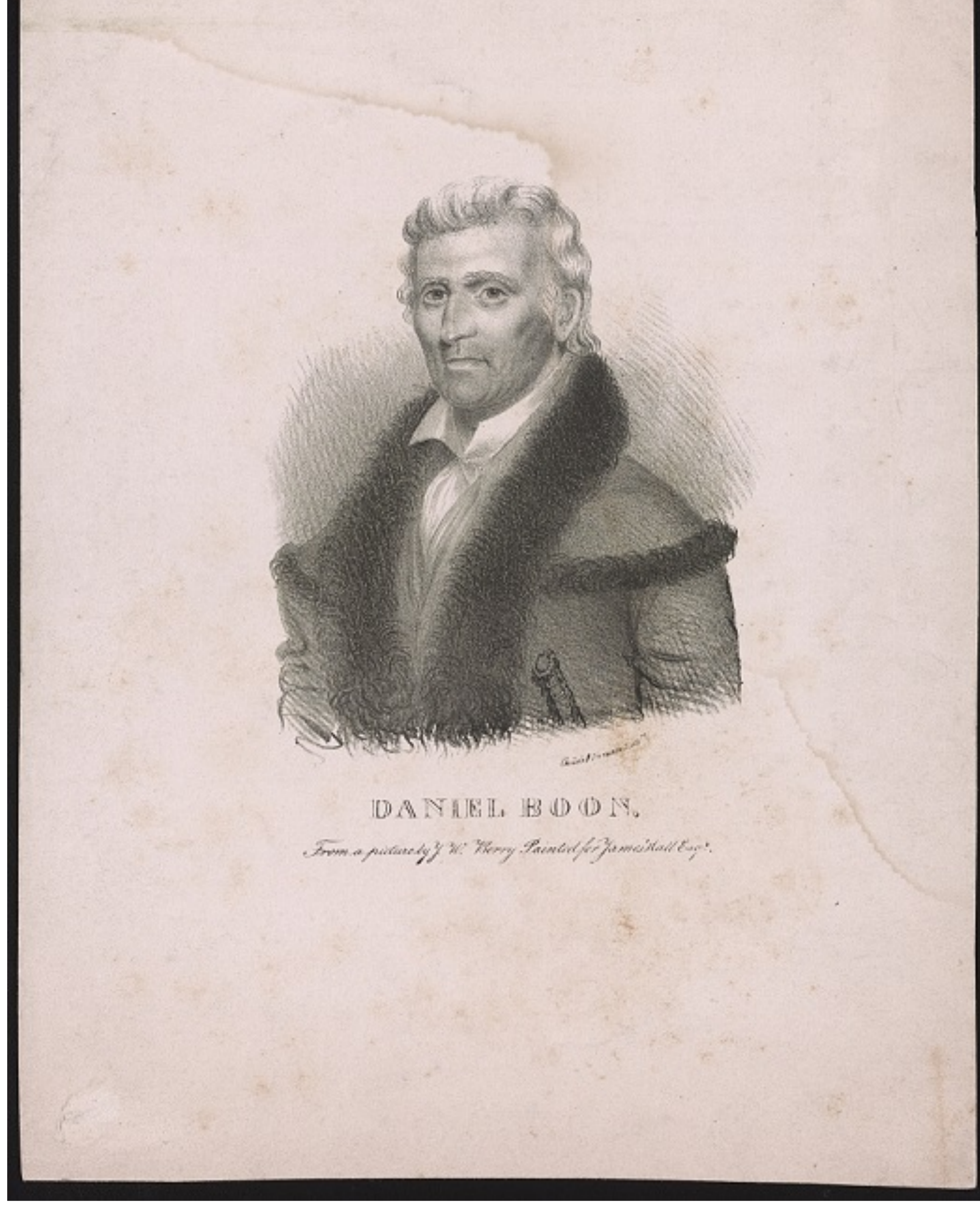
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Daniel Boone

On **June 7**, 1769, frontiersman Daniel Boone first saw the forests and valleys of present-day Kentucky. For more than a century, the [Kentucky Historical Society](#) has celebrated June 7 as “Boone Day.”

Not a breeze shook the most tremulous leaf. I had gained the summit of a commanding ridge, and, looking round with astonishing delight, beheld the ample plains, the beauteous tracts below.

“The Adventures of Col. Daniel Boon.” p.55 In [The Discovery, settlement, and present state of Kentucke...](#). Wilmington: Printed by James Adams, 1784.



[Daniel Boon\[e\] from a Picture by J.W. Berry...](#) [Philadelphia]: Childs & Inman lithrs., [between 1831 and 1833]. Prints & Photographs Division

Born on November 2, 1734, in Berks County, Pennsylvania, Daniel Boone spent much of his youth hunting and trapping on the North Carolina frontier.¹ By the late 1760s, Boone had ventured into the Cumberland Gap region, which was little known to white people. Although the westward opening in the Appalachian Mountains had been identified by Virginian explorer Thomas Walker in 1750, the French and Indian War discouraged exploration and settlement of the Kentucky territory. After the war, lacking the manpower or resources to protect their empire’s trans-Appalachian frontier, the British prohibited westward migration. Boone was among the many settlers who ignored the Crown’s ban.

In 1775, Boone worked with Richard Henderson’s [Transylvania Company](#) to establish a trail through the [Cumberland Gap](#). With some thirty associates, he constructed the Wilderness Road, which soon became white settlers’ primary route to the West. Just months after its completion, Boone’s wife and daughters traveled the new thoroughfare to the new settlement of Boonesborough, becoming the first Anglo-American women to settle in Kentucky.

During the Revolutionary War, Kentucky was organized as a Virginia county and Daniel Boone served as captain in the local militia. The settlers feared both the Indians and their British allies. Captured by the Shawnee in 1778, Boone escaped in time to warn Boonesborough residents of an impending attack, enabling the settlement to survive.

Already legendary in [Kentucky](#), Boone’s fame was furthered by the publication of his “Adventures” in John Kenton’s [The Discovery, Settlement and Present State of Kentucke](#) in 1784.

In the 1930s, native Kentuckian [Mrs. William Price](#) recalled the Daniel Boone stories of her childhood for a WPA interviewer:

If I were not to tell you of the stories handed down to us by our father of Daniel Boone, the most adventures of our states heroes, you would justly feel that we had not been taught the true folklore of the Kentucky forest and the stories of the huntsman. It was John Finley, a fur trader of Pennsylvania that led Daniel Boone and his brother-in-law, John Stuart, into Kentucky by way of Cumberland Gap, that famous trail which was afterward known as the Wilderness Road, which was travelled by the pioneers...



[Boone's Cabin, High Bridge, Ky.](#) c[1907]. [Detroit Publishing Company](#). Prints & Photographs Division

When the Transylvania Company was organized [in] North Carolina for the purpose of establishing a colony in Kentucky, it was on the report of which Daniel Boone had carried back with him to his old home on the Yadkin River that Colonel Henderson decided to send a colony to Kentucky under the delegation of Daniel Boone to treat with the Cherokee Indians for a tract of land lying between the Cumberland and the Kentucky river’s.

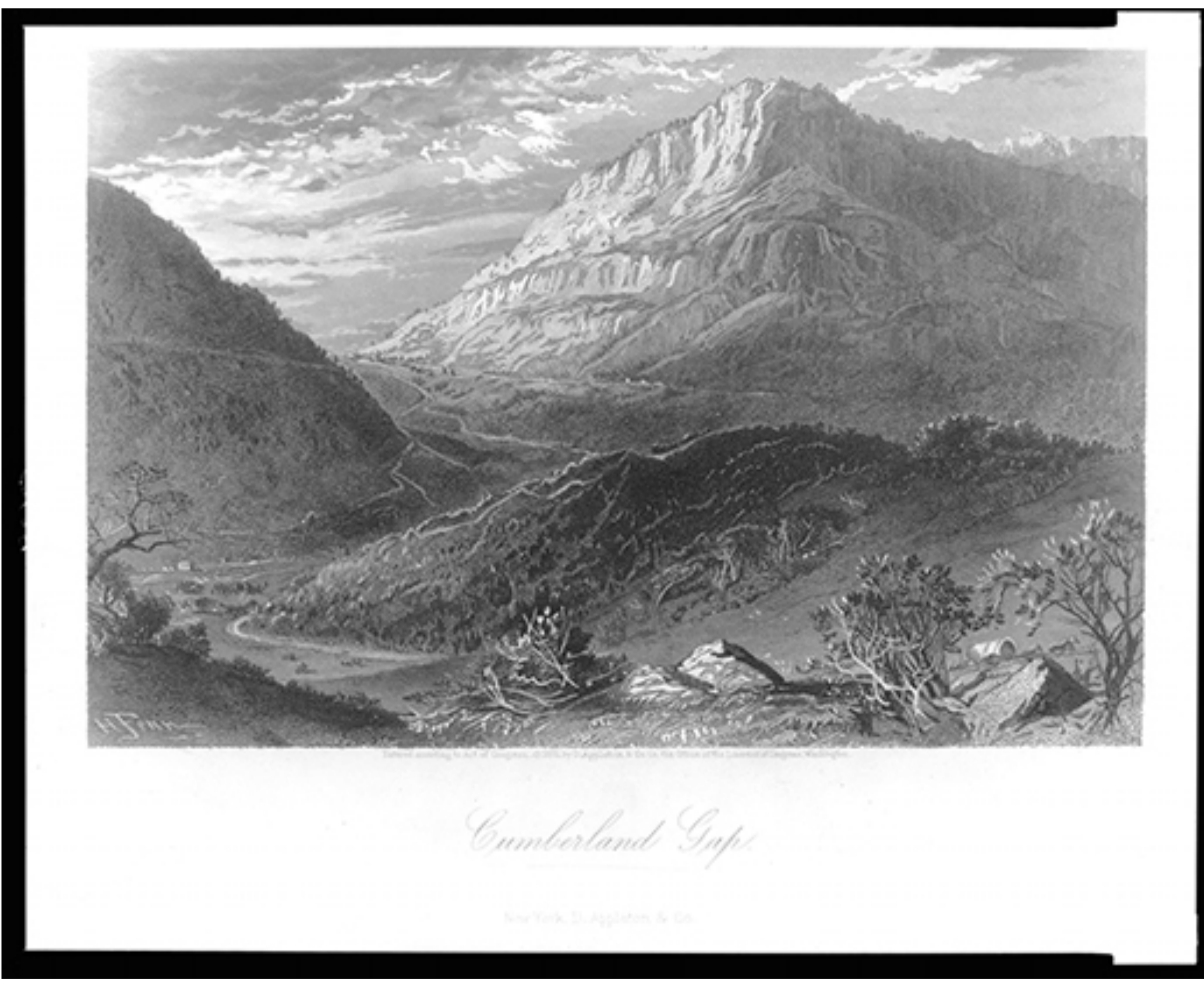
“Mrs. William Price.” Effie Cowan, interviewer; Marlin, Texas between 1936-1939. [American Life Histories: Manuscripts from the Federal Writers’ Project, 1936 to 1940](#). Manuscript Division

An inveterate pioneer, Boone continued to move West. After the Revolutionary War, he settled for a few years in Kanawha County, Virginia (now West Virginia). In 1799, he followed his son to Missouri. He is said to have explained his decision to move as follows:

Being asked “why he had left that dear Kentucke, which he had discovered and won from the wild Indian, for the wilderness of Missouri,” his memorable reply betrays the leading feature of his character, the primum mobile of the man: “Too crowded! too crowded! I want elbow-room!”

[Flagg’s The Far West, 1836-1837](#), by Edmund Flagg. New York, 1838; reprinted in facsimile, [Cleveland, Ohio: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1906]. 281. [American Notes: Travels in America, 1750 to 1920](#). General Collections

Although a brave man and respected leader, the frontiersman failed to capitalize on his adventures. In his seventies, Boone made a final attempt to profit from his career as a trailblazer. He [petitioned the U.S. Congress](#) for land grants in recognition for his now “been greatly instrumental in opening the road to civilization in the immense territories having attached to the United States.” An explorer and hunter to the end, Daniel Boone died in St. Charles County, Missouri, in 1820, secure in his place in history as the nation’s archetypal hero of the frontier.



[Cumberland Gap](#). Engraving by S. V. Hunt from a painting by Harry Fenn. Illus. in: [Picturesque America / William Cullen Bryant](#). N.Y.: D. Appleton & Co., c1872, v. 1. Included in [The Evolution of the Conservation Movement, 1850-1920](#). Prints & Photographs Division

1. With the intention of more accurately reflecting a solar year, England and its colonies replaced the Julian (“Old Style”) calendar with the Gregorian (“New Style”) calendar in 1752. At that time Boone’s October 22 birth date was adjusted to the “New Style” date of November 2. ([Return to text](#))

Learn More

- For a sense of Boone’s importance in early America, search [Daniel Boone](#) across the collection [American Notes: Travels in America, 1750 to 1920](#) to find numerous references attesting to his fame, including one [traveler’s description](#) of a meeting with Boone in his old age.
- Search the [Map Collections](#) using terms such as [Kentucky](#), [Cumberland Gap](#), [Kanawha](#), and [Missouri](#) to find early maps of some of the places where Daniel Boone lived and explored.
- Examine a letter from [William Preston to George Washington](#), dated January 31, 1775. Preston informs Washington of Henderson’s Transylvania Company and expresses concern about settling the Kentucky region. Locate other relevant resources by searching the [George Washington Papers](#) using [Daniel Boone](#) or [Cumberland Gap](#).
- Search the collection [A Century of Lawmaking for a New Nation: U.S. Congressional Documents and Debates, 1774-1875](#) on [Daniel Boone](#) to learn the fate of Boone’s petition. Find out, for example, that Boone’s petition was presented to Congress on January 2, 1810, yet not brought to conclusion until February 15, 1814.
- Was Daniel Boone really looking for ginseng plants when he first went west? Search on the keywords [Daniel Boone](#) or [settler](#) in [Tending the Commons: Folklife and Landscapes in Southern West Virginia](#) to look into that possibility. This collection includes an audio interview that discusses [Daniel Boone and ginseng](#).
- View [Today in History](#) features on Boone’s contemporaries, frontiersman [George Rogers Clark](#) and explorer [Meriwether Lewis](#).

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