



The Journal of William Calk, Kentucky Pioneer

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NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

THE JOURNAL OF WILLIAM CALK, KENTUCKY PIONEER*

In the early spring of 1775 William Calk, Virginian, left his home on the Potomac river to answer the challenge of the Kentucky wilderness.¹ He was of medium height, slightly stout, with black hair, and eyes that were blue and merry. In appearance he was best fitted for the easy life of a country gentleman; but the spirit of the pioneer was in his blood. James Calk, his father, a native of Wales, had become dissatisfied as a young man and had crossed the Atlantic to the new world. He settled in Prince William county, Virginia, and there the Calk family prospered. When William was born on the seventh day of March, 1740, he was heir apparent to a large plantation, numerous slaves, a general store, a grist mill, a distillery, and a blacksmith shop. William's education was unfinished, but not entirely neglected. Among the Calk papers is this memorandum, written by his father under date of April 8, 1758:

An agreement made Between James Calk & John Sleep schoolmaster the said Sleep to Teach William Calk and to tend him with Coppies at home and at School & the said Calk Doth agree to Give the said Sleep Ten Shillings & one quart brandy if he Doth his Duty to the full rule of this years Teaching.²

William, however, chose to be neither a scholar nor a planter. While he was still young his inherent restlessness gripped him. He married a Miss Sarah Catlett, of Prince William county, and shortly afterwards made a venture which he thus briefly describes on the flyleaf of an old arithmetic:

November the 17 1765 I Set out from prince wm. in virginia

*This paper was read before the Filson club on March 1, 1920.

¹ William Calk must not be confused with Captain William Cocks, who was a member of Colonel Richard Henderson's party in the spring of 1775 and who acted as courier from Colonel Henderson to Daniel Boone at the time of the panic along the Wilderness road. See George W. Ranck, *Boonesborough. Its founding, pioneer struggles, Indian experiences, Transylvania days, and revolutionary annals* (Filson club publications number 16 — Louisville, 1901).

² The Calk papers, a collection of historical documents owned by Mr. Price Calk, Hinkston Dale farm, Mount Sterling, Kentucky.

January 24 1766 I Settled in orringe County in Carolinah and bought Larken pairpints improvements for ten pounds on Dan River

March 16th 1767 I Set out from Carolinah back again the 24th day I arrived in prince wm. again. Glory to God —³

The failure of this undertaking apparently made him content to remain in Virginia for the next several years. Account books existing among the Calk papers show that he did a thriving business on his father's plantation. Two children were born to him, and he was by nature domestic. So the immediate cause of his journey to Kentucky in 1775 can only be surmised.

On the political horizon of the thirteen colonies in that early spring were flashing the heat lightnings of the approaching storm of revolution. Economic conditions were uncertain. Life was in a state of flux. Neighbor was wary of neighbor. The seaboard was arming for war, and the result was doubtful. But from the explorers who had penetrated beyond the Allegheny mountains came at this time stories of a country that abounded in game and natural beauty; a pioneers' utopia, rich of soil, covered by untouched forests, where men might build homes and found industries unshackled by British tyranny. It was a tempting prospect. Already the Transylvanians, under the leadership of Colonel Richard Henderson, were negotiating with the Cherokee chieftains in the south for the purchase of central Kentucky. Word of their daring scheme reached Virginia. William Calk's restlessness was awakened; he seems to have had little interest in military and political affairs at home; and again he succumbed to the lure of new lands.

On March 13 he left his family and started out to visit and to see for himself this country of which he had heard. In his journal he records the fact that four other white men accompanied him: Abraham Hanks, Philip Drake, Enoch Smith, and Robert Whitlege.⁴ Their rendezvous was the home of a Mr. Price, on Rapidan creek. From that point they began the journey, riding horseback, carrying their supplies on pack horses, and taking with them several negro slaves. There is no evidence among the Calk papers that this party contemplated meeting Colonel Henderson and his men, who, a week later,

³ Calk papers. The arithmetic referred to is in longhand, on unruled paper, and bears the date 1750. It was written by John Sleep, the schoolmaster, for his pupil, William Calk.

⁴ William Calk's journal, in the Calk papers.

started from North Carolina for Kentucky. Apparently the Virginians intended to explore the western wilderness alone, and, if conditions there were suitable, to make "improvements" for future homes.

Calk's knack as a diarist was most fortunate on this occasion. Written on two sheets of yellowed parchment is a journal that he kept, day by day, from the time he left his plantation in Prince William county until after he reached Boone's fort, on the Kentucky river. The phraseology of the journal is crude; punctuation is almost entirely lacking; a careless and lavish use is made of capital letters; and in numerous instances, where a polysyllabic word is repeated, it is spelled differently each time. In spite of these pardonable defects, however, the strength of style and the vividness with which the journal briefly describes events reflects the sturdy character of the author. Therein is given a more exact idea of the route followed by the first trail-blazers than is found in any other contemporary document. Its touches of humor are as unintended as they are appealing. Roughly but graphically it sketches the brutal hardships endured by the heroes of the Wilderness road. Colonel Roosevelt, whose knowledge of trans-Allegheny history made him an authority on such subjects, once remarked that he considered Calk's journal the most important record extant of pioneer Kentucky.⁵ At least two historians have published inaccurate copies of it, and a number have referred to it; but now for the first time it is given verbatim as written by the hand of William Calk:

William Calk his Jornal⁶

1775 March 13th mond I set out from prince wm. to travel to Caintuck on tuesday Night our company all Got together at Mr Prises on

⁵ This statement was made by Colonel Roosevelt, while president of the United States, to Major A. T. Wood of Montgomery county, Kentucky, who then was at Washington serving as congressman.

⁶ Calk papers. The Calk journal was copied incorrectly in Thomas Speed, *The Wilderness road, a description of the routes of travel by which the pioneers and early settlers first came to Kentucky* (Filson club publications number 2—Louisville, 1886), and in Archer B. Hulbert, *Boone's Wilderness road (Historic highways of America, volume 6—Cleveland, 1903)*. Among those who used one or the other of these as a reference were Theodore Roosevelt, in *The winning of the west* (New York, 1889-1896), and Caroline Hanks Hitchcock, in *Nancy Hanks; the story of Abraham Lincoln's mother* (New York, 1899). Students of early Kentucky history should compare the Calk journal with that of Colonel Richard Henderson. A photostatic copy of the former is on file in the archives of the Filson club, Louisville, Kentucky.

Rapadan Which was ABraham hanks philip Drake Eanock Smith Robert Whitledge & my Self thear abrams Dogs leg got broke By Drake's Dog — wedns 15th we started Early from prises made a good Days travel & lodge this Night at mr cars on North fork James River.

thurs 16th we started Early it Raind Chief part of the Day Snowd in the Eavening very hard & was very coald we travld all Day & Got to Mr Blacks at the foot of the Blue Ridge

fryd 17th we Start Early cross the Ridge the wind Blows very hard & cold and lodge at James loyls

Satrd 18th we git this Day to William andersons at Crows ferrey & there we Stay till monday morning

mond 20th we Start early cross the fery and lodge this night at Wm adamses on the head of catauby

tuesd 21st we Start early and git over pepers ferey on new River & lidge at pepers this night.

wedns 22d we Start early and git to foart chissel whear we git some good loaf Bread & good Whiskey

thurs 23d we Start early & travel till a good while in the Night and git to major cammels on holston River. fryday ye 24th we Start early & turn out of the wagon Road to go across the mountains to go by Danil Smiths we lose Drive' Come to a turabel mountain that tried us all almost to death to git over it & we lodge this night on the Lawrel fork of holston under a grait mountain & Roast a fine fat turkey for our Suppers & Eat it without aney Bread

Satrd 25 we Start Early travel over Some more very Bad mountains one that is caled Clinch mountain & we git this night to Danil Smiths on clinch and there we Staid till thursday morning on tuesday night & wednesday morning it Snowed Very hard and was very colad & we hunted a good deal there while we Staid in Rough mountains & Kild three Deer & one turkey Eanock ABram & I got lost tuesday night & it asnowing & Should a lain in the mountains had not I had a pocket Compas By which I Got in a littel in the night and fired guns and they heard them and caim in By the Repoart

thursd 30th we Set out again & went down to Elk gardin and there Suplid our Selves With Seed Corn & irish tators then we went on alittell way I turnd my hors to drive afore me & he got Scard Ran away threw Down the Saddel Bags & Broke three of our powder goards & ABrams flask Burst open a walet of corn & lost a good Deal & made aturrabel flustration amongst the Reast of the horses Drakes mair ran against a sapling & noet it down we caecht them all agin & went on & lodgd at John Duncans

†A negro slave belonging to William Calk.

fryd 31st we suplayd our Selves at Dunkans with a 108 pounds of Bacon & went on again to Brileys mill & suployd our Selves with meal & lodged this night at clinch By a large cainbrake & cuct our Suppers.

April satd first this morning there is ice at our camp half inch thick we Start Early & travel this Day along a verey Bad hilley way cross one creek whear the horses almost got Mired Some fell in & all wet their loads we cross Clinch River & travell till late in the Night & camp on cove creek having two men with us that wair pilates

Sund 2d this morning is avery hard frost we Start Early travel over powels mountain and camp on the head of Powels valey whear there is verey good food

mond 3d we Start Early travel down the valey cross powels River go some throw the woods with out aney track cross some Bad hills Git into hendersons Road camp on a creek in powels valey; tuesday 4th Raney we Start about 10 oclock and git down to capt martins in the valey where we over take Coln. henderson & his company Bound for Caintuck & there we camp this Night there they were Broiling & Eating Beef without Bread; Wednesday ye 5th Breaks away fair & we go on down the valey & camp on indian Creek we had this creek to cross maney times & very Bad Banks ABrams Saddel turned & the load all fell in we go out this Eavening & Kill two Deer

thurd 6th this morning is ahard frost & we wait at camp for Coln. henderson & company to come up they come up about 12 oclock & we Join with them and camp there Still this night waiting for Some part of the company that had their horses Ran away with their packs; fryday ye 7th this morning is avery hard Snowey morning & we Still continue at camp Being in number about 40 men & Some Neagros this Eavening Comes aletter from Capt Boon at caintuck of the indians doing mischief and Some turns back

William Calk His Jurnal April ye 8th 1775 Satterday

Satrd 8th We all pact up & Started Crost Cumberland gap about one oclock this Day we Met a great maney peopel turnd Back for fear of the indians but our Company goes on Still with good courage we come to a very ugly Creek With Steep Banks & have it to Cross Several times on this Creek we camp this night

Sunday 9th this morning We wait at camp for the cattel to Be drove up to Kill a Beef tis late Before they come & peopel makes out alittel snack & agree to go on till till Night we git to cumberland River & there we camp meet 2 more men turn Back

Monday 10th this is alowry morning & very like for Rain & we keep at camp this day and Some goes out ahunting I & two more goes up avery large mountain Near the top we Saw the track of two indians &

whear they had lain under Some Rocks Some of the company went over the River a bofelo hunting But found None at night Capt. hart comes up with his packs & there they hide Some of thier lead to lighten thier packs that they may travel faster

tuesday 11th this is a very lousy morning & like for Rain But we all agree to Start Early we Cross Cumberland River & travel Down it about 10 miles through Some turrabel Cainbrakes as we went down abrams mair Ran into the River with Her load & Swam over he followd her & got on her & made her Swim Back agin it is a very Raney Eave-ning we take up camp near Richland Creek they Kill a Beef Mr Drake Bakes Bread with out Washing his hands we Keep Sentry this Night for fear of the indians—

Wednesday 12th this is a Raney morning But we pack up & go on we come to Richland creek it is high we toat our packs over on a tree & swim our horses over & there We meet another Company going Back they tell Such News ABram & Drake is afraid to go aney further there we camp this night—

thursday 13th this morning the weather Seems to Brake & Be fair ABram & Drake turn Back we go on & git to loral River we come to a creek before wheare we are obliged to unload & to toate our packs over on alog this day we meet about 20 more turning Back we are obligd to toat our packs over loral River & Swim our Horses one hors Ran in with his pack and lost it in the River & they got it [again]

friday 14th this is a clear morning with a Smart frost we go on & have avery mirey Road and camp this Night on a creek of loral River & are Surprisd at camp By a wolf—

Satterday 15th clear with a Small frost we Start Early we meet Some men that turns & goes With us we travel this Day through the plais Cald the Bressh & cross Rockcase River & camp ther this Night & have fine food for our horses—

Sunday 16th cloudy & warm we Start Early & go on about 2 mile down the River and then turn up a creek that we crost about 50 times Some very Bad foards with a great Deal of very good land on it the Eave-ning we git over to the Waters of Caintuck & go alittel Down the creek & there we camp keep Sentry the forepart of the night it Rains very har[d] all night—

monday 17th this is a very Rany morning But Breaks about 11 oclock & we go on and Camp this Night in Several companeys on Some of the creeks of caintuck

tuesday 18th fair & cool and we go on about 11 oclock we meet 4 men from Boons Camp that Caim to cunduck us on we camp this night Just on the Beginning of the Good land near the Blue lick they kill 2 Bofelos this Eave-ning—

Wednesd 19th Smart frost this morning they kill 3 Bofelos about 11 oclock we come to where the indians fired on Boons Companey & Kild 2 men & a dog & wounded one man in the thigh we campt this night on oter creek—

thursday 20th this morning is Clear & cool We Start Early & git Down to Caintuck to Boons foart about 12 oclock wheare we stop they Come out to meet us & welcom us in with a volcy of guns

fryday 21st Warm this Day they Begin laying off lots in the town and prearing for peopel to go to worek to make corn—

Satterday 22d they finish laying out lots this Eavening I went afishing and Cacht 3 cats they meet in the night to Draw for choise of lots But Refer it till morning—

William Calk his Jurnal April ye 23d 1775.

April Sunday 23d this morning the peopel meets & Draws for Chois of loots this is avery warm day

monday 24th We all view our loots & Some Dont like them about 12 oclock the Combsses come to town & Next morning they make them abark canew and Set off down the River to meet thier Companey—

tuesday 25th in the Eavening we git us a plaise at the mouth of the creek & Begin clearing this day we Begin to live with out Bread

Wednesday 26th We Begin Building us a house & a plaise of Defence to keep the indians off

thursday 27th Raney all Day But We Still keep about our house—

Satterday 29th We git our house kivered with Bark & move our things into it at Night and Begin houskeeping Eanock Smith Robert Whitledge & my Self

monday May ye first I go out to look for my mair and Saw 4 Bofelos the Being the first Ever I Saw & I shot one of them but did not git him when I caim home Eanek & Robin had found the mair & was gone out ahunting & did Not Come in for Days and kild only one Deer—

tuesday 2d I Went out in the morning & kild aturkey and come in & got Some on for my Breakfast and then went & Sot in to Clearing for Corn—

Thus was Kentucky civilization first planted with the hoe and defended with the rifle. The initial journey over the Wilderness road was essentially “the survival of the fittest.” The men who reached Boone’s fort were elected by circumstance, not by self, as conquerors of the untamed “Meadow Land.” “Some turns Back”—a laconic but eloquent indictment of those who retreated in the teeth of danger; a sharp comparison with their comrades who pushed forward and attained their goal.

As was proved by events, two members of Calk’s original

party were ill chosen for so daring an enterprise. Philip Drake comes in for veiled censure at the very beginning of the journal, for owning a vicious dog. Later Calk notes with disfavor that he violated the laws of cleanliness in baking bread without washing his hands. The title of "Mister," so formally applied to Drake, is also significant of the coolness that must have existed between them. Abraham Hanks, however, was a greater favorite. Calk refers to him frequently and intimately.

Hanks and Drake had not gone far back over the Wilderness road, after quitting their companions, when they met another band of pioneers going to Kentucky. The two Virginians regained courage, joined this band, and reached Boone's fort shortly after Colonel Henderson and his followers.

No further mention of Philip Drake is found in the Calk papers. But there are several documents bearing upon Abraham Hanks. He was an uncle of Nancy Hanks, the mother of Abraham Lincoln.⁸ While a well-meaning and likable fellow, no doubt, he appears to have fared badly in Kentucky. His friend William came to his assistance on more than one occasion. Among the Calk papers is a note stating that "I ABraham Hanks Am held and firmly Bound unto William Calk in the just and full Sum of Sixty Eight pounds Virginia Currency." On the back of the note is the acknowledgment: "1777 March ye 17th Received of ABraham Hanks ten pounds Currency in part of the Within Bond." The balance, it seems, remained unpaid, for the note was never surrendered.

It is claimed by the present Calk family that William Calk helped survey the town of Boonesborough. A document substantiating this claim, and done in Calk's own hand, is with his papers. This document is an original plat of Boonesborough, the only one, as far as can be ascertained, now in existence. While differing slightly in its general outlines from that reproduced in Collins' *History of Kentucky*, the boundaries are essentially the same; the compass directions are marked; watercourses are shown; and Calk noted thereon that the diagram is "Platted by Scale a 100 poles to one Inch."⁹

Another document of Calk's, entitled by him "Plan of the Town Called Boonsborough," outlines and numbers forty of the build-

⁸ Hitchcock, *Nancy Hanks*.

⁹ "Plat the first survey Boons Borough," in the Calk papers.

ing lots that adjoined the Kentucky river. It gives a list of the forty men and women owning these lots. Opposite each name is the number of the owner's parcel of ground.¹⁰

One of the projected streets of Boonesborough was called Calk street.¹¹ In Calk's records is this memorandum:

Surveyed for the trustees of Boons Borough 700 acres of Land Beginning at a mapole at the mouth of oater creek [and] Running thence Down the meanders of the River.¹²

A second memorandum, dated February 13, 1786, itemizes the "Days Worck Done on the Boat," showing that £25 were due William Calk and his fellow workmen for their labor. The memorandum is O. K.'d and signed by Calk, who evidently was in charge of the construction.¹³

When Kentucky was admitted into the union and various towns were bidding for the state capital, Boonesborough put forward its claim. Calk and twenty other interested citizens presented a petition headed:

We the subscribers whose names are under written do hereby bind and oblige ourselves, our heirs, Executors and Administrators, to pay in four annual payments to any person or persons authorised to Receive the same for the State of Kentucky, the particular sums and articles annexed to our names. Provided that the permanent Seat of Government for the said State is fixed in the Town of Boonsborough. In witness whereof we have hereunto set our hands this 30th day of August 1792.¹⁴

William Calk was the third man to sign this petition, with the promise of 200 pounds. The copy just quoted in part is among the Calk papers and contains all the original signatures and individual bids of money and land. Two other documents, pertaining to Boonesborough, tell respectively of a jury being forced to try a case in a fence corner¹⁵ and of the need of the citizens for a resident militia officer and magistrate.¹⁶ Both documents were written by Calk.

¹⁰ Calk papers.

¹¹ Lewis Collins, *History of Kentucky*, revised and enlarged by Richard H. Collins (Covington, Kentucky, 1878), 2: 516.

¹² Original memorandum of survey, in the Calk papers.

¹³ "Memorandum of Days Worck Done on the Boat," in the Calk papers.

¹⁴ Original petition from the citizens of Boonesborough, in the Calk papers.

¹⁵ Memorandum of jury proceedings, dated July 20, 1795, in the Calk papers.

¹⁶ Letter from William Calk to "the chief and leader of our county" (addressee's name unknown), in the Calk papers.

The surveying instruments—compass, staff, and chain—which he brought from Virginia are still in the possession of his descendants. His was a mathematical mind, disciplined, precise, thoroughly at home in the realm of figures. He had a passion for business accuracy. Among his preserved papers are hundreds of surveying records, many canceled and uncanceled notes, account books, land warrants, bills of sale, receipts, depositions, and letters bearing on every phase of his intensely active life.¹⁷

William Calk was one of those who soon grew dissatisfied with the Transylvania company's proprietorship. He came to Kentucky with an ideal, and that ideal was not realized in the vicinity of Boonesborough. Two months after he settled there in April, 1775, the old restlessness again possessed him. He, with Enoch Smith and Robert Whitley, mounted their horses and started eastward to explore the country and to make improvements.¹⁸ They went beyond the boundary of the Transylvania grant, beyond the jurisdiction of the proprietors; they crossed the watershed between the Kentucky and Licking rivers and reached the main branch of what now is Hinkston creek, in Montgomery county, about thirty miles from Boonesborough.

According to a tradition the three pioneers suffered greatly from thirst on this journey. A drought had parched the country, drying up the streams and making pure water scarce. Calk and his companions were exhausted to desperation when they reached the source of Hinkston creek. There, by chance, they noticed water oozing from a cleft beneath some rocks. Calk dismounted, took a tomahawk from his belt, and with it scraped away the sod and the stones. A crystal-clear fountain gushed forth, cool and inviting. The men gave a shout of thanksgiving and eagerly quenched their thirst at the spring.

Calk considered the spring so remarkable in furnishing a steady flow in a season of drought, that the next use he made of his tomahawk was to mark the surrounding trees, thus claiming the region as his own.¹⁹ These three men were the first Cauca-

¹⁷ Calk papers. Documents of especial interest besides those mentioned in the text include two blank Transylvania company land warrants and two land grants signed by Patrick Henry and Edmund Randolph, respectively, while governors of Virginia.

¹⁸ Deposition of Enoch Smith, taken in 1812, Calk *v.* Reid, in Montgomery county, Kentucky, court records.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

sians to visit the present county of Montgomery.²⁰ A buffalo trace then led from Stoner creek to the headwaters of Hinkston, down Hinkston and on to an Indian mound, for which Mount Sterling, the county seat of Montgomery county, was named. Calk, Smith, and Whitlege followed this trace to its end, exploring the country.²¹ They then returned to Boonesborough.

Thereafter this spring was known as Calk's spring. He came back to it in June, 1779, and with the help of John Harper erected a cabin.²² This cabin is described as being "14 feet long and 12 feet wide, well covered with sassafras puncheons," and floored with logs. It was about twenty or thirty poles southwest of the spring, fronting the buffalo trace. A clearing was made near by, fenced with rails, and planted in corn. The next year Calk, "by virtue of a certificate," entered 400 acres, including this improvement.²³ It became the most noted place in that part of Kentucky. Calk's hunting cabin, as it was called, was a favorite sporting resort for the men of Boonesborough, and of Boone's, Strode's, Holder's, and McGee's stations.²⁴ The land was exceedingly fertile; the neighboring woods abounded in deer, bears, and wild turkeys; and William Calk was a generous host.

At last his roving spirit was satisfied. His attachment for this location seems to have been an instance of love at first sight. He did not move from Boonesborough immediately, but made frequent and long sojourns at his cabin. In the meanwhile he had returned to Prince William county and had brought his family to the fort. There on April 7, 1784, his son Thomas was born.²⁵ It is affirmed by Thomas Calk's descendants that he was the first male child to have Boonesborough as his birthplace.

Two stories are told of William Calk that throw interesting side lights upon his character. At a time when the Indians were troublesome, he and a party of hunters left Boonesborough for

²⁰ Collins, *History of Kentucky*, 2: 633.

²¹ Deposition of Enoch Smith, *Calk v. Reid*; Collins, *History of Kentucky*, 2: 633. Under "Bath county," Collins says: "Wm. Calk was on Slate Creek in 1779."

²² Deposition of John Harper, *Calk v. Reid*.

²³ Certified copies of deed and plats, in the Calk papers.

²⁴ Deposition of James McMillian, *Calk v. Reid*.

²⁵ Calk family Bible.

his cabin at the spring. As they rode along the old buffalo trace, eyes and ears alert for signs of redskins, a walnut dropped from a tree in front of them, landing directly in the middle of the trail. The hunters were frightened. Men who knew no fear when face to face with danger were cowed by superstition when confronted with what they considered an evil omen. The walnut falling in their path, they said, meant that death awaited them farther down the trail. Calk was the only man among them who retained his judgment. But in spite of all he could say, his companions turned back. He went on alone, and reached his cabin in perfect safety.

Late one winter, perhaps the "hard winter" of 1780-1781, an Indian chief staggered to the door of the cabin and begged shelter. Calk admitted him, found him scantily clothed, famished, and apparently dying. For days the white man tended the red man, laboring to revive his ebbing life. The racial feud was forgotten. They were kinsmen of soul, if not of flesh; between them necessity had forged a bond stronger than any treaty on parchment. With food, warm coverings, and constant care the Indian was restored to health. Calk had saved his life, and genuine was the Indian's gratitude. Yet he had nothing of material value to give his benefactor. As the richest of his possessions, he placed in Calk's hands a turkey-call made of deer horn and lavishly decorated with Indian hieroglyphics. Then the chief went his way and was never heard of again. Calk carried the turkey-call thereafter as a talisman of good luck. It now is owned by his descendants and is in their historical collection.²⁶

After Calk brought his family from Boonesborough to his improvement in Montgomery county, he built a commodious house of hand-pressed brick near the spring. Then he set about to acquire more land. At one time he held claims on a tract of 58,000 acres, extending from Stoner Creek to Hinkston. Most of this was disputed in the courts and was lost.

"From land litigation no county in Kentucky has suffered

²⁶ Included in the Calk collection of pioneer relics is an iron camp kettle, brought over the Wilderness road in 1775, said to have been used by William Calk and Daniel Boone on joint hunting expeditions; two powder gourds, carried by Calk on his first journey to Kentucky; and a bullet ladle, candle molds, fluting irons, frying pan, broiler's and woodsman's ax, brought from Prince William County and used by the family at Boonesborough.

more than Montgomery," wrote Richard H. Collins. ". . . Sometimes as many as five or six patents covered the same piece of land; and the occupant, besides the title under which he entered, frequently had to purchase two or three times more, or lose his home and labor."

In this way Calk was forced to spend much money, suing and defending suits. He also went on the notes of several friends, as was the common but unwise practice in that day. Some of these friends became bankrupt, and their indorser sold many blue grass acres in meeting their obligations. But so plentiful was land, and so rare were the merest mechanical conveniences, that Calk once traded 800 acres for a silver watch. He donated the site of the first church building in his part of the state. This, the old Springfield church, was erected in 1793,²⁷ and is still in use. It stands just across the Montgomery line in Bath county.

All this while, however, William Calk was busy with his compass, chain, and staff, surveying land and adjusting titles for other pioneers. At various times he held the office of deputy surveyor for the counties of Fayette, Madison, and Bourbon.²⁸ Kentucky historians have puzzled long over the exact plan of "the mystical 'Old Town' " of Milford, the original county seat of Madison. It was "established by act of the Virginia legislature, in 1789."²⁹ For more than a century it has existed only in name. Now it is proved that William Calk laid out this town. He then was deputy surveyor of Madison. Three plats of Milford are among his papers, giving the boundaries, the acreage of the public grounds, and the width and length of the streets. He states on the largest plat that the survey was made on July 2 and 3, 1790, "in obedience to an order of the Trustees for the town of Milford."

On his vast estate William Calk lived the life of a frontier baron. When game became scarce, he constructed a deer park near his home. He was a great lover of horses. His slaves were numerous and well cared for. Besides his many virtues, however, he had a large and rare gift of profanity. Often when the sun glared scorchingly upon the fields, his negroes would quit

²⁷ Deposition of John Harper and Jilson Payne, *Calk v. Reid*.

²⁸ Certificates of appointment and signed surveys, in the Calk papers.

²⁹ Collins, *History of Kentucky*, 2: 522.

their labors for the cool creekside. Then their master would appear. Mounting the topmost rail of the fence, where his eloquence would be unobstructed, he would give the blacks a verbal lashing that was the terror and wonder of that section of the commonwealth.

But, first of all, William Calk was practical. He built a tannery and a grist mill below his spring on Hinkston creek, and traded extensively in live stock and farm produce. He was a money lender. According to his papers, he had business relations with such men as Richard Menefee, Sr., Isaac Shelby, James Garrard, Daniel and Jesse Boone, Nathaniel Hart, Green Clay, Judge James French, and James and Samuel Estill. Yet he apparently took almost as little interest in political affairs in Kentucky as he had taken in Virginia. His name is not found on any of the petitions to the mother state. He was not a member of the legislative bodies. Nor is there evidence that he went on a single military expedition. A tradition current in his family declares that William Calk never took a human life. Considering his journeys over the Wilderness road, his residence at Boonesborough, and his explorations through the Indian infested canebrakes, this is a record unique in early Kentucky annals.

Even at the age of sixty-four, the old pioneer was ready for new adventures. In a short journal,³⁰ begun on March 31, 1804, he wrote: "I made the first adventer on a speculation with a Boat loaded with corn tobacco bacon & laird bound to the port of knew orleans." The Mississippi river was then open to Kentucky commerce; and, from Boonesborough, Calk made the trip to the Louisiana capital and back in less than four months.³¹

His last years were clouded by a poignant sorrow. William, his eldest and most beloved son, inherited the *wanderlust* of his father and his grandfather. He received a good education for that day; for a while he taught school; and among the Calk papers are some very creditable bits of verse signed by William, junior. But, like his father, he early grew dissatisfied with his home. He

³⁰ Journal kept on the trip to New Orleans in 1804, in the Calk papers.

³¹ From New Orleans William Calk brought home a Moorish hanging lamp and a beautiful hand-painted curtain, now in the possession of Mr. Price Calk, Mount Sterling, Kentucky.

left Kentucky and went to the Texas frontier, where he married and settled.

William, senior, patiently awaited his return. He must have had considerable sympathy and understanding for his son, remembering his own nomadic youth. But that did not assuage his longing. Again and again he wrote, asking him to come home. It did no good. At eighty-two the old pioneer—"now in a weak State of body but in my proper mind and forseeing my approaching dissolution"—made his will.³² The instrument was transcribed by his own hand, showing, in spite of his age, a remarkable grasp of details and painstaking accuracy. He bequeathed the bulk of his estate to William, "should he return." But William did not return; and on October 18, 1823, his father died.

Thomas Calk came into possession of the homestead; his son, Thomas, next fell heir to it; and now Price Calk, great-grandson of William, senior, resides on the site of the famous hunting cabin. Not far away, on a hillside overlooking the spring, is the family graveyard. There beneath a sheltering cedar tree, is the earthy sepulcher of the old pioneer, joint conqueror of the Kentucky wilderness.

LEWIS H. KILPATRICK

MOUNT STERLING, KENTUCKY

³² William Calk's will, in the Mount Sterling, Montgomery county, Kentucky, court records.