

NATHAN BOONE, MORE THAN HIS FATHERS SON

Ash Grove, Missouri, seventeen miles northwest of Springfield, has been home to two persons of interest related to the history of northeastern Oklahoma. One, Ma Barker, matronly member of the Barker Gang, was born there in 1873. Today, Ma and “the boys” are permanent residents of the Williams Cemetery, near Welch. The second, Nathan Boone settled near Ash Grove. A 300 acre site, a portion of his original farm, is dedicated to the memory of Boone, however no such memorial exists for Ma.

The youngest son of Daniel and Rebecca Bryan Boone, Nathan was born March 2, 1781 at Boone’s Station, Kentucky. In 1799 the family moved to St. Charles, Missouri where Nathan gained a reputation for being an efficient guide and outstanding militia officer. Later, in 1812, he was commissioned as a captain of the Missouri Mounted Rangers and participated in the war of 1812, as well as other conflicts with hostile Indians in the region.

His early connection with northeastern Oklahoma occurred when, in 1832, he surveyed the northern and middle section of the military road that has played such an important role in our history. Boone’s territory included Iowa, beginning at Fort Snelling, near St. Paul, Minnesota, south through Kansas to Forts Leavenworth and Gibson in Indian Territory. Later, that same year, now reassigned to Fort Gibson, he was employed to survey the boundary between the Creek and Cherokee nations in Indian Territory.

In 1833, having decided a mounted force was necessary to combat renegade Indians who were attacking other tribes as well as white settlers, Congress passed a bill to raise a regiment of mounted dragoons. Captain Boone was selected to command one company. The following spring of 1834, his company was ordered from Fort Gibson to negotiate a treaty with nomadic Indian Tribes further west which was successfully concluded. After returning to Fort Gibson, Boone’s company and others were then ordered to old Fort Des Moines where the Des Moines River empties into the Mississippi. Their charge was to relocate the fort, which is now the capital of Iowa, to a more strategic site. He remained in Iowa for the next three years and saw hard service suffering through many dangerous engagements and hardships.

In 1838, returning to Indian Territory, he was assigned as one of three commission members to review the defenses along the frontier, and in that capacity recommended the retention of Fort Gibson as well as construction of an encampment further south, future Fort Coffee. For a short time thereafter, he was assigned as commandant at Fort Wayne in today’s Delaware County. Following that assignment, he led an expedition up the Arkansas from Fort Gibson, seeking the exact location of the Great Salt Plains.

Captain Boone inadvertently became involved in Cherokee tribal politics in 1845 when he was ordered to the Arkansas line to prevent an outbreak of violence between Treaty Party advocates and the established Cherokee government. Stand Watie had collected a band of sixty men at Old Fort Wayne and an insurrection seemed assured. Through the presence of the Dragoons and the persuasion of Boone, violence was avoided.

In 1853 and at age 53, Nathan Boone, now a Lieutenant Colonel, resigned from the army and returned to his home two miles north of Ash Grove. Over the years, Boone became a wealthy man and, at the time of his death, owned 1200 acres of farm land and many slaves. During his years of service, Nathan was absent from his family for months at a time. An

account of one his reappearances was recalled many years later by Mary, one of thirteen children. “At times he would be away from home for months and we would fear that he was dead. Then one fine day he would come down the hillside hale and hearty....he would go into the bedroom and take off a concealed canvas belt on which had been sewn two canvas pockets.....these pockets would be filled with gold, for the government paid its soldiers in gold. Then the family would gather around while Mrs. Boone held her husband’s hat, upturned to catch the shining gold pieces as he counted them.”

Nathan Boone died January 12, 1857 and is buried with his wife and several children at the historic site near Ash Grove. Oklahoma scarcely recognizes Boone’s many contributions, but upon becoming a state, Iowa named both a city and county in his honor. Apparently, there are few tributes acknowledging his contributions. Following his death, one written by an acquaintance noted, “He was a most finished woodsman, and it is doubtful that he had any superior in that respect in our army.....he was a worthy son of Daniel Boone of Kentucky.” Despite his own outstanding contributions to the development of our part of the country, Nathan’s primary legacy continues to be that he was Daniel Boone’s son.

