

Daniel Boone

GREAT HUNTERS are not born, they're made. A successful hunt requires an almost encyclopedic knowledge of dozens of animal species. It is the product of many hours of study and patience; for Daniel Boone those lessons were learned in Penn's Woods.

Daniel Boone was the son of Squire Boone and Sarah Morgan. Like many of their neighbors, they were immigrants in a New World. Squire was from England, and his wife's family was from Wales. For them and tens of thousands of families migrating to William Penn's "Peaceable Kingdom," Pennsylvania offered a new opportunity long forgotten in Europe, and the desire to own land and practice religion free from persecution proved to be an almost irresistible force.

The Boones settled in the Oley Valley (modern Birdsboro, Berks County), building a home there in 1731. On Oct. 22, 1734 Sarah gave birth to their sixth of 11 children. They named him Daniel, and the deeply rooted Quaker traits of his parents – exercising humility before the Lord and valuing the satisfaction of hard work – would guide his moral compass for the remainder of his life.

Squire Boone was a tireless worker. For generations, his family earned its living weaving and blacksmithing, and his hands were his greatest asset. Along with a profitable textile business, the senior Boone was an emerging gunsmith.

When son Daniel turned 12 or 13, Squire presented him with his first firearm: a short-barreled, flintlock rifle.

But despite all his talents – or because of them – the senior Boone only was an average hunter. Due to his tremendous workload, he rarely took to the forests with his son and was likely unable to teach Daniel the intricacies of how to read deer sign or call in a turkey.

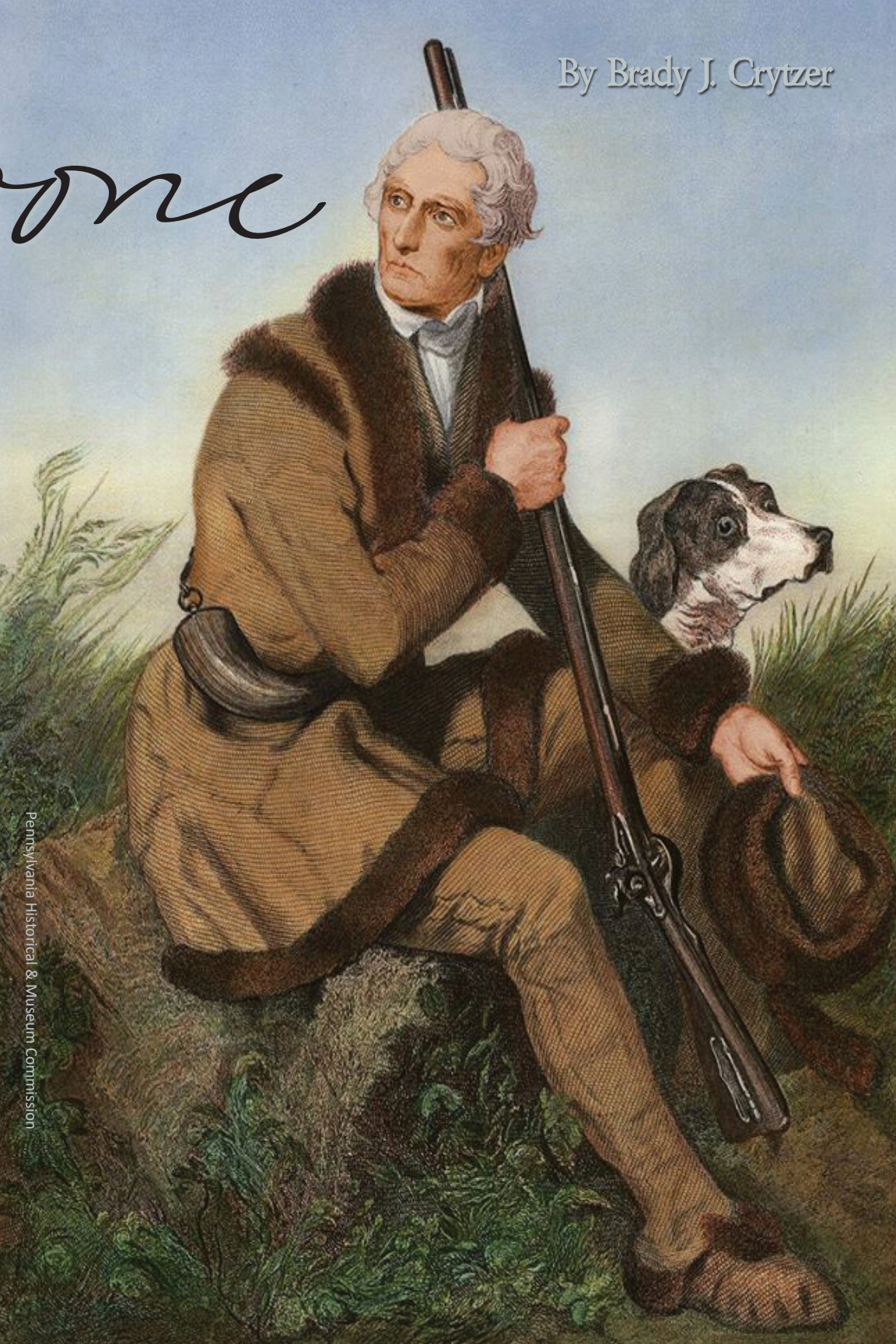
He did show his son the value of taking his time and the importance of pride in one's work. These virtues not only would serve Daniel well in his later life but would prove invaluable during his earliest years as an aspiring hunter.

Long before he became famed for opening the Cumberland Gap, trekking deep into the Kentucky wilderness, fighting in the American Revolution and living among the great Indian nations of the emerging west, he first

An American legend in Penn's Woods

By Brady J. Crytzer

one



distinguished himself in Berks County.

His Mother's Son

From his earliest years, Boone was much closer to his mother than to his father. Though she would have nearly a dozen children, Sarah always paid special attention to the rambunctious Daniel.

By comparison, Squire Boone's business dealings required nearly all of his attention. That strained his family relationships, but allowed him to prosper enough that, in the fall of 1744, the Boone family acquired 25 acres of open ground northwest of their Berks County homestead.

It was good ground with rolling green

meadows ideal for grazing cattle and sheep in summer, much like the farm near Oley.

But with an expanding cattle business, it would prove to be a great windfall for Squire Boone's enterprises.

Unlike Daniel's boyhood home, though, the new acreage was near the dense forests of the Pennsylvania frontier. Thick with brush and trees, the mountains would prove irresistible for young Daniel.

Each summer between the ages of 10 and 17, Daniel would live with his mother, away from the rest of their family, in a rough-hewn cabin built on the site, to watch over their stock. Pens and enclosures housed the cows and sheep while



Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission

Sarah diligently processed the family's supply of cheese and butter for the upcoming winter.

As a testament to the Quaker virtue of patience, Sarah forgave Daniel his chores and allowed him to hone his skills in the wilds. He toiled away in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains.

Before he acquired his first flintlock, Daniel fashioned a knobby tree root into what he called a "herdsman's club," and stealthily harvested birds and small game by bludgeoning them. Using such a raw and comparably ineffective tool likely taught him how to track a variety of animals and forced him to learn their habits, and particularly when they were most

vulnerable. Boone would remember these years in Berks County as some of the best of his life, and in the 21st century many young hunters likely earn their stripes in these same

Pennsylvania forests.

Birth of the Legend

Daniel Boone quickly set himself apart in the wooded highlands of his youth. While he traveled far and wide across the Oley Valley, his most frequent hunting grounds were around Neversink Mountain (outside of Reading) Flying Hills (modern Cumru Township) and throughout the Monocacy Valley.

The people he encountered likely were a grand mix of colonial Pennsylvanians, including Scots-Irish Presbyterians, German Anabaptists, Native Americans, and naturally his fellow Quakers. He truly was a young man in a melting pot, and he borrowed from all his neighbors.

As Boone entered his teenage years, a clear pattern emerged. When his family busied themselves with their agricultural and business obligations, young Daniel took to the Berks County forests.

Though it tested his parents' patience,

The Daniel Boone Homestead, left, stands today in Birdsboro as a piece of living history, bringing visitors closer in touch with one of Pennsylvania's most-famous sons. A young Boone refined his hunting skills in the nearby Pennsylvania frontier.



Boone was an incredibly productive hunter. He would harvest game for the family table, and to Sarah's great joy often cooked it himself.

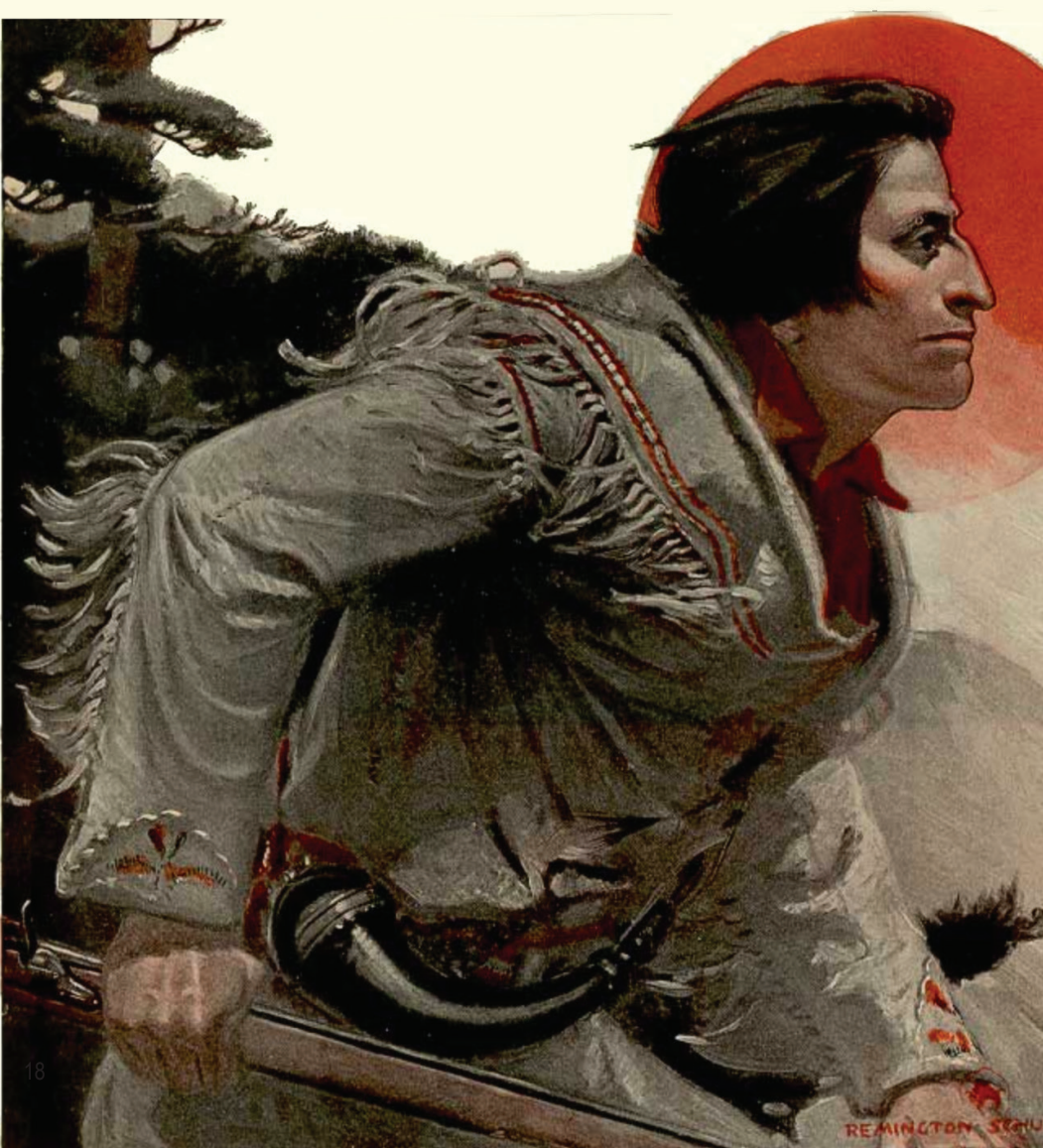
One instance stands out as a testament to his open-minded approach to a wilderness education.

One evening Boone was discovered sitting next to a campfire roasting a fresh turkey; he had fashioned a makeshift spit and was slowly turning the bird to ensure even cooking. His mother was impressed, but puzzled, to discover her son collecting

the turkey's drippings on a large piece of bark. When she asked what he was doing, Daniel explained that he was using the juice to baste the turkey.

Boone nonchalantly claimed that the Indians living in that truly multicultural Pennsylvania frontier had taught him this trick as he continued spooning the hot juice back onto the bird.

Sarah's patient understanding would forge a special bond between Daniel and her. She would "look the other way" at his time spent away from the farm and he



would keep the family table supplied with squirrel, rabbit, deer, partridge, grouse, opossum and bear meat.

If Boone's larger family struggled to keep his focus on work, his peers relished the chance to hunt with him. He earned a reputation among the teens of the Oley Valley as a tireless tracker with a competitive spirit. What's more, he was uncatchable in games of tag, unfindable in rounds of hide-and-seek, comfortable enough in the woods to venture deeper into them than anyone else, just to claim victory.

He was a priceless resource when hunting with friends, too. As tradition holds, he took a group hunting along a creek bottom during one of his long cattle-grazing summers and interrupted a sleeping wild cat laying in the sun. While the species remains a

mystery, it was described as "a panther." The big cat quickly awoke and sprang toward the youngsters, but when his comrades turned to run, Boone simply leveled his sights and dropped the hammer of his flintlock on the attacking beast, killing it instantly.

That story might be difficult to believe, and almost impossible to verify. But it serves as a spine-chilling tale of courage to any hunter who's ever experienced an ill-timed misfire with a flintlock rifle.

One of the most striking stories surviving the centuries focused on Boone's first attempt at a "long hunt."

"Longhunters" became fabled in Colonial America for their epic hunting swings through the American West in search of valuable furs and pelts. These now-legendary hunts would last not days, or even weeks, but months and sometimes

One of the most celebrated folk heroes of the American frontier, much has been passed down – both fact and legend – of Daniel Boone's exploits. The 1922 illustration at left and 1914 image below appeared in *Boys' Life* magazine along with stories about Boone.



years. The hunters would return home with huge quantities of furs, selling them to provide income for their frontier families. It was an unimaginably hard life.

Boone would grow up to become the most famous Longhunter of them all. But before he powered through the heavy cane fields of Kentucky, the teenage Daniel Boone was getting lost in the backcountry of Berks County.

As was typical during the summer months, Boone vanished on a hunt, and his mother diligently picked up his share of the family chores on their grazing property. On top of her usual processing of butter and cheese, she also took up managing the cattle and closing for the evening.

As night fell, though, she began to worry when her son didn't return home. After a restless night's sleep, she woke to find Daniel's bed empty. Panic struck. She hastily dropped what she was doing and rushed the five miles back to the homestead.

The Quaker men of the Oley Valley gathered and – though leaving their farms and responsibilities was a major setback for the fledgling farming community – they convened a search party, combing the hills and creek bottoms of the region calling out for the lost youth. The men searched the entire morning until, suddenly in the late afternoon, someone spotted a pillar of smoke rising from Neversink Mountain (in modern Lower Alsace Township).

The party rushed to the location, only to find the young Daniel laying comfortably on a freshly skinned black bear hide and roasting a cut of bear meat over the fire. Surprised to see everyone so concerned for his well-being, he said he'd tracked the black bear sow for hours the day before and throughout the night, and that he simply could not give up on it.

Besides, he said, he knew precisely where he was, about 9 miles west of the

farm on the south shoulder of a hill – and he was right.

When the men of the village scolded Boone for being selfish and careless, he seemed puzzled. He apologized to his anxious mother and stated that he didn't understand why everyone was so angry. After all, he had just provided them all with fresh bear meat.

Seeing his grief-stricken mother's face was a humbling lesson for Daniel Boone, and the first time that anyone realized just how far he was willing to push his own limits in the name of the hunt.

Not Forgotten

Around the age of 16 or 17 Daniel Boone would leave Pennsylvania, though not forever. After a falling out with the Quaker community, Squire Boone relocated his family down the Great Wagon Road to the Yadkin Valley of North Carolina. It was from there that Boone's incredible life story would transform him into a legend in his own time.

He would often return to the Keystone State, frequenting Pittsburgh to trade and sell his longhunting wares, but his future laid in the great American West. He would become a trailblazer by opening the Cumberland Gap, and an American Revolution war hero fighting in the Battle of Blue Licks.

There are many mysteries that surround America's greatest hunter that likely will never be solved, but one solid fact remains unquestioned: his amazing odyssey began right here in Pennsylvania. He was born and raised here, and the lessons he learned in Penn's Woods stayed with him for the rest of his life. ^{en}

Brady J. Crytzer teaches history at Robert Morris University, hosts "Battlefield Pennsylvania" on PCN and is the author of six books. He lives and hunts outside of Pittsburgh.