

0. WHY WAS BOONE CHARGED WITH TREASON? - Story
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This artistic interpretation depicts “Daniel Boone & his friends rescuing his daughter Jemina.” Published on September 19, 1851, the lithograph is maintained at the Library of Congress. Click on the image for a full-page view.

Native-American raids on Boonesborough—and other nearby forts—often left their inhabitants with insufficient food supplies and deplorably bad living conditions. Never really safe, in the Kentucky wilderness, settlers were also at risk of capture by the Shawnee.

One of Daniel Boone's daughters—Jemina—and her friends were kidnapped (in 1776) while they were rowing their canoe on a river near Boonesborough. Three days later, Boone rescued his child (but not without first killing some of the Shawnee warriors).

During the winter of 1778, Boone and a party of about thirty men left the fort to get more food and salt. They needed food for obvious reasons; they needed salt to preserve the food. Without those supplies, the people of Boonesborough could not survive the winter.

On February 7, 1778, after Boone had killed a buffalo, he saw several Shawnee warriors closing in on him. The warriors were part of a larger war party led by Chief Blackfish.

Their objective was to avenge the death of Chief Cornstalk who had been a moderate in his dealings with the encroaching Americans. Inconceivable to the Shawnee, Cornstalk—of all people—had been killed by the Americans.

The Shawnee * had been camped at Hinkston Creek. The four warriors were scouting the area and were on their way back to the camp. They had found Boone's salt makers at the Blue Salt Licks. Their plan was to kill the salt makers—until they found, and captured, Daniel Boone.

Later, Boone said he was unable to flee the warriors because he was in his mid-40s and could not run away fast enough. As Boone told the story at his trial, he devised a "stratagem" to save his men and the fort.

He told Chief Blackfish he would convince his men to surrender as prisoners of war. More importantly, he told Blackfish he would negotiate the surrender of the fort in the spring.

Boone did indeed talk his men into surrendering. No shots were fired. One of Boone's men—Ansel Goodman—later said:

We were ordered by Colonel Boone to stack our guns and surrender, and we did so. (Quoted in *The Revolution Remembered: Eyewitness Accounts of the War for Independence*, at page 281.)

When the hunting party failed to return to the fort, scouts found tracks in the snow that told the story. All the men had been captured by the Shawnee—without a fight. It was this evidence—the lack of any resistance—that ultimately made the inhabitants of Boonesborough suspicious.

Why—Boone's fellow officers wondered—had the men failed to resist capture? To Captain Richard Callaway and others, the lack of a struggle indicated some kind of treachery. Amidst all the questions that were raised by the fort leaders, Rebecca Boone left Boonesborough. She returned to her family in Carolina.

The Shawnee took the Americans to their camp at Chillicothe. The captives were forced to run the gauntlet. They were extremely upset with the terrible conditions that existed in the camp. They were hungry. They became bitter. They believed they could have defended themselves against the Shawnee.

Many were upset with Daniel Boone—the man who had convinced them to give in.

The captives were well aware that Boone had loyalist relatives. Everyone knew that Rebecca's family had been the most prominent of all the Tory (loyalists) families to migrate to Kentucky. Everyone knew that in 1774 Daniel himself had accepted a captain's commission from the British-appointed governor.

The captives began to wonder: Whose side was Daniel Boone really on?

To make matters worse, once the Shawnee brought their captives to the British settlement at Ft. Detroit, captives heard Boone talk to the British Lt. Governor. Boone was overheard hinting to Lt. Governor Henry Hamilton that the Americans inside Boonesborough were in bad shape and were ready to abandon the American cause.

One of the captives, Andy Johnson, escaped. When he returned to Boonesborough, he confirmed the worst suspicions of the fort's leaders. Johnson reported that Boone was a Tory and had surrendered his men to the British. Johnson also reported something else: Boone had taken an oath of allegiance to the British while Boone and his men were at Detroit.

While the men were held as captives, several were adopted by Shawnee families. While it may seem strange to us, this ritual was very common during the Revolutionary War—and before.

Daniel Boone, who had become very fond of Chief Blackfish, was adopted by Blackfish. Because Boone wore a heavy pack and walked slowly, the Shawnee thought he resembled a turtle. Boone was given the Shawnee name "Sheltowee" which means "Big Turtle."

Knowing that the British and the Shawnee were preparing to attack Boonesborough, Daniel escaped and returned to the fort. There he told the men about the upcoming attack.

In September of 1778, the Shawnee appeared outside the fort. Chief Blackfish called for "Sheltowee," his son. Daniel Boone's actions immediately thereafter convinced some of his fellow officers that he was guilty of treason.

* Shawnee means "southerner" in the Algonquin language.

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Old Fort Detroit

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Daniel Boone - Adopted by Shawnee Chief

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