

Boone book sings the triumphs, trials of a man, yes, a big man

By TIMOTHY J. FOX
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In an age of instant gratification, it can be hard to comprehend the trials and triumphs of a man like Daniel Boone.

Over the course of his life, 1734-1820, Boone fathered 10 children. American Indians killed the first two as young men, and nature claimed the life of a third soon after birth.

Boone led the crew that carved the aptly named Wilderness Road through the Cumberland Mountains, opening the land that would become the state of Kentucky and points west to millions of settlers. However, his offer to help widen the route some 20 years later fell on deaf ears.

And although he claimed thousands of acres of land in Kentucky and was granted thousands more along the Missouri River, Boone did not own land enough for a burial plot when he died at his youngest son's home in what is now St. Charles County, Mo.

All of this and more is recounted in historian Michael Lofaro's biography "Daniel Boone: An American Life."

Lofaro joins a long line of historians, propagandists and proselytizers who have tried to tell Boone's story.

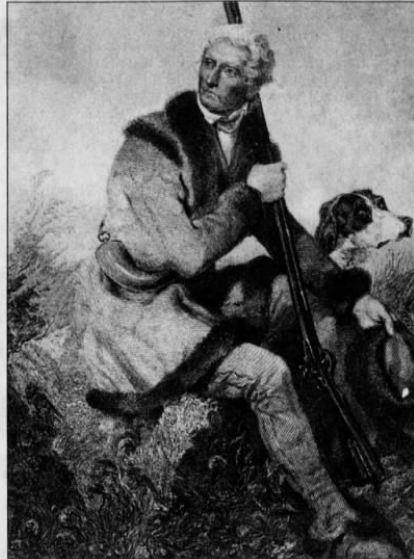
Among contemporary biographers, Lofaro's most obvious competitor is social historian John Mack Faragher. Lofaro himself calls Faragher's "Daniel Boone: The Life and Legend of an American Pioneer" (1992) "the best biography of Boone published to date," and he doesn't seem intent on snatching the title.

Instead, Lofaro uses well-documented primary materials to strip Boone's story to its essence: a tale of blood, violence and survival on the frontier that makes up in impact what it lacks in analysis.

Born in Pennsylvania in 1734, Daniel Boone moved with his family to Virginia and then to North Carolina before he was 18. He first set eyes on the fabled land of "Kentucke" in 1767, and by spring 1775 he and 30 others had widened parts of an old Indian footpath and cleared away enough forest to create the Wilderness Road.

Danger lurked at every step for those brave enough to follow the trailblazer into the wilderness. The Cherokee, Shawnee and other tribes viewed the settlers as encroachers. Raids, ambushes, kidnappings and killings became a way of life — and death — on the frontier.

Lofaro does not shy from describing the atrocities that occurred on both sides of these battles. In 1773, Boone's youngest son, James, was killed with a tomahawk blow to the head after being methodi-



Frontiersman Daniel Boone died in 1820 in St. Charles County.



"Daniel Boone: An American Life"

By Michael A. Lofaro
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land in the vicinity of Femme Osage Creek, now in St. Charles County. In exchange, Daniel Morgan promised to bring settlers — including his now-famous father — to the territory.

The Spanish, excited by the number of people who would follow a hero such as Daniel Boone to the frontier, agreed. They also agreed to bend some of the rules for the Boone clan, such as the requirement that all settlers "embrace Catholicism" and build a home on the property granted to them. Again, none of these arrangements was put in writing.

In 1803, the Louisiana Purchase expanded the United States but put Daniel Boone's Missouri land grant in jeopardy. Because Boone had not followed most of the rules the Spanish held over others, the U.S. Congress withdrew his grant in 1806. The legislators later reversed themselves, giving Boone 10,000 acres, but a Missouri delegate lowered the figure to 1,000. Boone sold all of this land to pay off his Kentucky creditors.

Though landless and in poor health, Boone enjoyed his final years in Missouri. He helped son Nathan build the limestone house that still stands near Defiance, where he died on Sept. 26, 1820.

For St. Louisans, reminders of the Boone legacy include the Boonesfield Village "living history" exhibit at the Nathan Boone home and the collection of Boone material at the Missouri Historical Society. Lofaro's slim, crisply written book will travel easily to these sites, reminding readers that before strip malls, suburbs and tax increment financing there was this man, this legend — this Daniel Boone.

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cally stabbed and having his fingernails and toenails ripped out. The following year, white Americans killed the family of a Cherokee chief, cutting an unborn baby from the body of the chief's slain "sister or sister-in-law" and leaving it "impaled on a stake."

Conditions worsened in 1776. "The American Revolution was mainly an Indian War," Lofaro writes, as the British armed tribesmen and encouraged them to use their new weapons against the settlers. Kentucky had become "one of the first lines of defense in the West."

In 1782 — Kentuckians called it "the year of blood" — an ambush at Blue Licks claimed Boone's second oldest son, Israel. It was "the last major battle of the Revolutionary War" — cold comfort for Daniel Boone, who not only witnessed the incident but would live the rest of his life knowing that it could have been avoided; an overanxious commander had ignored his warnings of ambush.

Despite these violent encounters, Boone greatly admired the Indians throughout his life, even as he claimed their land, killed their game and saw two of his sons die at their hands. This paradox leads Lofaro to view Boone as a "representative man," bor-

rowing Ralph Waldo Emerson's phrase. For Lofaro, Boone is one of those rare figures who neatly embodies Americans' deeply conflicted feelings about nature, native peoples and "civilization."

Two years after Israel Boone's death, John Filson published "Adventures of Daniel Boone" as the appendix to his "The Discovery, Settlement and Present State of Kentucky." Edited and released as a separate volume in 1785, the "Adventures" "made (Boone) a celebrity on both sides of the Atlantic in a year," but even fame could not protect the land he had "claimed" in Kentucky.

As Lofaro explains, though Boone was savvy in the wilderness, the formalities of legal documents eluded him. For the woodsman, the boundaries of a piece of property might be a pile of rocks here, a brook there and a whiskey bottle stuck in a tree up around the bend.

Consequently, lawyers and latecomers successfully claimed much of the land Boone had defended during his Kentucky years. What remained he sold to settle the debts accumulated to finance his hunting and trapping ventures.

In 1797, Boone's son Daniel Morgan Boone asked Spanish Lt. Gov. Zenon Trudeau for

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