

A DOCUMENT ON MICHAEL STONER

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While examining the records of Wayne County, Kentucky, the writer found a most interesting document, the will of Michael Stoner. The document, in itself, is not of great importance for it gives no detailed description as to how his estate was to be divided, solely stating that after his just debts had been paid the remainder of his property was to be divided equally among his children. Since the will is the will of the Michael Stoner who was with Daniel Boone in 1774 and one of the early settlers of Boonesborough, the document becomes of some importance to local history and local pride.

Relatively little is known about the Michael Stoner who accompanied Daniel Boone to Kentucky in 1774. Michael Stoner, whose original name is said to have been George Michael Holsteiner,¹ was born in 1748 on the Schuykill River near what is now Philadelphia.² He first visited Kentucky in 1767 when he drifted down the Ohio River from Pittsburg, proceeded to the Illinois country and then went as far south as the site of Nashville.³ In 1774 Stoner was selected to accompany Boone on his trip to Kentucky to warn explorers and surveyors of approaching Indian troubles. Boone and his companion were to proceed to Kentucky, go down the Kentucky River, then to the Falls of the Ohio and return to the Valley of Virginia by way of Gasper's Lick on the Cumberland.⁴ Stoner was selected as Boone's companion since, "He had hunted on Cumberland River, and was familiar with wood-craft."⁵

During the early settlement of Kentucky, Michael Stoner was prominent. He came to Boonesborough from Carolina with Boone in 1775⁶ and became hunter and guide for the settlement.⁷ Between June 17, 1775, and the attack on Boonesborough on April 24, 1777, Stoner explored to the northward and selected and established, in 1776, his own claim and cabin on the South Fork of

¹ R. S. Cotterill, "Kentucky in 1774," *Historical Quarterly of the Filson Club*, 1:27-28, but no source is given; Ann Walker Burns, *Daniel Boone's Predecessor in Kentucky, Authentic History* (Frankfort, Ky., 1930(?), p. 101, document No. 17CC191 of the Draper Collection of the Wisconsin State Historical Society is reproduced in which Nathaniel Hart calls Stoner "a Dutchman". Archibald Henderson, *The Conquest of the Old Southwest* (New York, 1920), p. 121 calls Stoner "a German."

² Bess L. Hawthorne, "Rev. Andrew Tribble, Pioneer," *Register of the Kentucky State Historical Society*, XXIV:188-189.

³ R. G. Thwaites and Louise Kellogg, *Documentary History of Lord Dunmore's War, 1774* (Madison, 1905), p. 51, note 88; Richard Collins, *History of Kentucky*, revised by Lewis Collins (Covington, Ky., 1882) II:417.

⁴ Thwaites and Kellogg, *op. cit.*, p. 81. Letter of Col. William Christian to Col. William Preston, July 12, 1774. Boone and Stoner had been gone two weeks at this writing. Gasper's Lick is near the site of Nashville, Tennessee.

⁵ W. H. Bogart, *Life of Daniel Boone* (New York, 1856), p. 105; Thwaites and Kellogg, *op. cit.*, pp. 50-51. Letter of Capt. William Russell to Col. William Preston, June 26, 1774. "I have engaged to start immediately on the occasion, two of the best Hands I could think of Dan'l Boone, and Mich'l Stoner, . . ."

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 51, note 88; Ann Walker Burns, *op. cit.*, p. 101. Document No. 17CC191 of the Draper MSS.

⁷ Collins, *op. cit.*, II:501; G. Ranck, *Boonesborough* (Louisville, 1901), pp. 172, 177.

the Licking River or on a branch of the South Fork.⁸ Stoner, in 1777, returned to Boonesborough in time to take part in its sturdy defense during which he was wounded.⁹

It is after the defeat of the Indians at Boonesborough that we first learn of a Michael Stoner in Wayne County. During a land dispute from 1801 to 1805 the testimony of certain witnesses, as shown by their recorded depositions, show a Michael Stoner to have been in Wayne County in 1779 and again in October 1793. Nathaniel Buckhannon in his testimony stated that during his first visit to Wayne County in 1779 a Michael Stoner visited Buckhannon and his party at that time in the Great Meadow.¹⁰ The testimony of Charles Smith, taken on August 28, 1805, states that he, with William Henderson, Robert Todd and Michael Stoner, made a military survey in Price's Meadow in October 1793.¹¹ Stoner had been called as witness, his testimony having been taken in 1801. His deposition reveals nothing for he was uncertain as to when he first visited the place, only recalling that it was a considerable time ago.¹²

A Michael Stoner seems also to have taken some part in the opening of Tennessee. In 1780 he is said to have discovered Stoner's Lick and Creek in north central Tennessee.¹³ This may have been a return to his discovery of 1767.

The Wayne County Michael Stoner appears again at the turn of the century. By 1799 he seems to have settled down as a ferryman at the crossing of the road, from Somerset toward what was later to be Monticello, and the Cumberland River probably near present day Waitsboro.¹⁴ Then in 1804 a Michael Stoner, stated in the deed as of Wayne County, bought land in Pulaski County from Joseph Stevens.¹⁵

There can be little doubt that the will recorded in Wayne County is the will of the Stoner who operated Stoner's Ferry and who purchased the land in 1804. It is in the realm of possibility that it is the same Stoner who was with the surveying party in Price's Meadow in 1793. It is also possible that the will is that of the Michael Stoner who visited Nathaniel Buckhannon and his party in the Great Meadow in 1799. It so happens that in those years when a Michael Stoner appears to have been in Wayne County, exact knowledge of the Michael Stoner who was with Boone in 1774 and who was one of those sturdy

⁸ Thwaites and Kellogg, *op. cit.*, p. 51, note 88; Z. F. Smith, *History of Kentucky* (Louisville, 1886), p. 74; Bogart, *op. cit.*, p. 106; Collins, *op. cit.*, II:71.

⁹ Thwaites and Kellogg, *op. cit.*, p. 51, note 88; Ranck, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

¹⁰ Deposition of Nathaniel Buckhannon, Wayne County *Deed Book*, A, pp. 213-217. The Great Meadow is now Meadow Valley.

¹¹ Deposition of Charles Smith, *ibid.*, A, p. 209.

¹² Deposition of Michael Stoner, Oct. 10, 1801, *ibid.*, A, pp. 204-206.

¹³ J. G. M. Ramsay, *Annals of Tennessee* (Philadelphia, 1860), p. 450.

¹⁴ Court Order of the Pulaski County Court. In 1799 locates a road toward Monticello in this manner, from Stoner's Ferry to Isaac West's, to Joseph Hinds to William Beard's and then to John Francis'. Isaac West's place was about one mile south of Mill Springs and is the present Metcalfe farm. William Beard's land was located at and near present day Monticello for William and John Beard sold to the justices of the peace of the new Wayne County the original site of Monticello. Wayne County. *Deed Book*, A, pp. 19-21. The road order is in Pulaski County *Court Order Book*, 1, p. 14.

¹⁵ Pulaski County *Deed Book*, 1, p. 155, deed recorded in April, 1804.

defenders of Boonesborough in 1777 is lacking. It seems possible, therefore, that the Michael Stoners are the same and that the friend of Daniel Boone, finding the lands of southern Kentucky pleasing to his tastes, settled in Pulaski County in the late 1790's and became a citizen of Wayne County when that county was established in 1801.*

Miss Hawthorne in her article on Rev. Tribble says Frances Tribble married a Michael Stoner who died in Wayne County near Monticello on September 3, 1814, and that he had been a close friend and companion of Daniel Boone. This short note of Miss Hawthorne seems to fix the identity of the will here presented as that of the Michael Stoner who was with Boone and one of Kentucky's early pioneers.¹⁶

MICHAEL STONER WILL¹⁷

"The noncupative will of Michael Stoner, deceased made at his own house in the time of his last illness, to wit, on the 31st day of August, 1814, the said decedent did at the time and place aforesaid, call upon James Bramlett and Millay Bramlett to take notice that the following was his will. First, he directed that his negro man Joe should be sold for the payment of his debts. 2nd, he directed that the whole of his property both real and personal should be kept and remain in the possession of the family until his youngest child come of age or choose a guardian at which time he directed that his land be sold and the proceeds thereof, as well as the whole of his estate be equally divided among his children. The above noncupative will committed to record the 19th day of Sept, 1814.

(Signed) JAMES BRAMLETT

MILLAY BRUMMETT [sic]

COMMONWEALTH OF KENTUCKY, COUNTY OF WAYNE

"I, William Simpson, Clerk of the County Court for the County aforesaid do certify that the foregoing last will and testament of Michael Stoner, Deceased, which appears from the records of the Wayne County Court to have been proven at the November Court 1814 in open Court by the oath of James Bramlett and Charles Ditrell and admitted to record, has been duly recorded in my office agreeable to an order of said County Court, made pursuant to an act entitled, an act to authorize certain records of the Wayne County Court to be transcribed, given under my hand, this 17th day of June [1815].

(Signed) WILLIAM SIMPSON, Clerk"

*See affidavit of Michael Stoner, p. 130, Reg. Ky. Hist. Soc., Apr., 1933, Vol. 31, No. 95 (Editor's Note).

¹⁶ Bess L. Hawthorne, "Rev. Tribble," *op. cit.*, XXIV:188-189.

¹⁷ Wayne County Will Book, A, p. 11.