

## ABSTRACT

MEROD, MARJORIE ELEANOR LOUISA. Public Memory, Authenticity, and the Frontier Legacy of Daniel Boone. (Under the direction of Craig Thompson Friend).

The label “authentic” is incredibly powerful to representations of American heritage. Authenticity denotes verifiable (true) fact as well as legitimacy, lending authority to the objects it describes. Individuals’ notions of what constitutes authentic vary, however, given their own conceptualizations of what is real and true. In their interpretations of the eighteenth-century Appalachian frontier, playwright Kermit Hunter, the Daughters of the American Revolution, the Boone Trail Highway and Memorial Association, and the Cumberland Gap National Historical Park sought to create authentic portrayals of the frontier in order to inform the public about America’s pioneer legacy, and each ultimately presented the public with a frontier reflective as much of American myth as of historical fact.

In each case, these propagators of heritage demonstrated that, in the American mind, the frontier myth has become the “authentic” American frontier. In Kermit Hunter’s historical drama, *Horn in the West*, the playwright presented the heroic story of average American pioneers led westward by Daniel Boone during the American Revolution. Hunter stressed the pioneers’ values of family, faith, and success as “authentic.” The Daughters of the American Revolution and the Boone Trail Highway and Memorial Association set out in the 1910s and 1920s to mark the Wilderness Road, the westward route so closely associated to Daniel Boone. The Daughters of the American Revolution stressed the “authenticity” of specific places while the Boone Trail Highway and Memorial Association sought to recapture Boone’s “authentic” pioneering spirit. Cumberland Gap National Historical Park

has more recently begun massive plans to restore a portion of the Wilderness Road and its surrounding landscape to their “authentic” eighteenth-century appearance.

In all cases, however, these propagators of authenticity celebrated the myth of the American frontier—the ideal of courageous, determined, and devoted pioneers who penetrated the virgin wilderness to plant American civilization and democracy in the West.

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Public Memory, Authenticity, and the Frontier Legacy of Daniel Boone

by  
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A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of  
North Carolina State University  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts

Public History

Raleigh, North Carolina

2012

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## INTRODUCTION

*Stand at Cumberland Gap and watch the procession of civilization, marching single file—the buffalo following the trail to the salt springs, the Indian, the fur trader and hunter, the cattle-raiser, the pioneer farmer—and the frontier has passed by.*<sup>1</sup>

In 1893, Frederick Jackson Turner presented his “frontier thesis” to a special meeting of the American Historical Association at the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago. His words embodied the romanticism which Americans had attached to the frontier: the frontier was a line pushed ever westward as pioneers spread civilization into an untamed wilderness which, in turn, had shaped the character of those hardy settlers and ultimately defined the nation itself. Beyond his Rankean approach to evidence and analysis, there was little new in Turner’s vision of the frontier. Throughout the nineteenth century, Americans had envisioned the frontier as a rough-and-tumble world where Manifest Destiny insured that white civilization supplanted inferior Indian peoples. What did make Turner’s frontier thesis unique was that his words solidified the frontier as the most significant analytical factor in the new historical profession. The frontier was the crucible in which the supposedly most important features of American civilization were tested and formed: democracy, individualism, Anglo-Saxon supremacy, market capitalism. Whether they agreed or disagreed with his assessment, historians who followed Turner perpetuated the vision of the frontier as a contributing factor in shaping the United States and American identity.

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<sup>1</sup> Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1996), 12.



The frontier has become so imbedded in national memory that its representations often blur between fact and myth. Under the claim of authenticity, scholarly interpreters of the frontier claim authority and legitimacy by associating themselves with notions of “truth.” Public historians likewise attempt to “authentically” portray the frontier. “Authenticity” is problematic, however, because authenticity is determined not by fact but by cultural acceptance. Stories upheld as American myth may differ from the factual events, but the public tends to accept the mythic as more “authentic” because it legitimizes the myth of westward expansion, the spread of democracy and the triumphant success of determined individuals. America’s powerful commitment to frontier mythology and the myth’s powerful tie to American identity make Turner relevant. More importantly, its powerful place in the American mind makes the frontier a critical meme in public historical interpretations as the foundation for democratic values. In their interpretations of the eighteenth-century Appalachian frontier, playwright Kermit Hunter, the Daughters of the American Revolution, the Boone Trail Highway and Memorial Association, and the Cumberland Gap National Historical Park sought to create authentic portrayals of the frontier in order to inform the public about America’s pioneer legacy, and each ultimately presented the public with a frontier reflective as much of American myth as of historical fact.

In the historical drama *Horn in the West*, Kermit Hunter combined fact with fiction inspiring his audience to empathize with the plight of North Carolina’s colonial frontier settlers, glorifying pioneer bravery and Americans’ tendency to reinvent themselves. Over the decades as the drama became a fixture in the community of Boone, North Carolina, the

play became an authentic historical event itself, further perpetuating tales of mythic American fortitude and persistence that it portrayed.

The mission of the Daughters of the American Revolution and that of Joseph Hampton Rich to mark the Wilderness Road once traveled by Daniel Boone espoused different ideas of authentically representing the famous pioneer's trail. Yet, each memorialized Boone by creating historic spaces in which Americans could connect to Boone's national legacy and perhaps imagine or abstractly experience Boone's presence. The DAR marked the precise location of the Wilderness Road with the assumption that only Boone's immediate companions and their descendants carried on the true legacy of Boone's leadership. Rich, like Kermit Hunter, commemorated Boone's spirit as an authentic representation of the pioneer. For Rich, this translated into placing historic markers in communal centers or in close proximity to Boone's trail, and in many cases establishing markers that symbolized and glorified westward expansion through the image and collective memory of Daniel Boone. Rich's efforts differed from those of the DAR because Rich stressed the importance of creating a connection to Daniel Boone that all European-Americans in a community could claim as their own.

The Cumberland Gap National Historical Park has tackled the monumental challenge of recreating an authentic historic landscape. The park's efforts to restore the setting through which Daniel Boone and hundreds of thousands of American pioneers travelled across the Appalachians reveal how the image of a virgin wilderness carried down through generations still has an ability to inspire and impose an aura of greatness upon a modern landscape,

attributing authenticity to the frontier myth. The Cumberland Gap NHP hopes to capture an authentic American spirit, or at least the source of that spirit.

In all three cases—*Horn of the West*, the Wilderness Road, and Cumberland Gap National Historic Park—myth is composed of both fact and fiction, and quite often exaggeration. Cultural historian Michael Kammen examined the relationship between the quest for authenticity and the tendency to perpetuate histories that favored myth over verifiable fact. Myths “legitimize a version of history that is useful or attractive;” they also “explain aspects of a society’s cosmology or sense of identity.” Myth, therefore, is preferred to fact and has a powerful hold over societies. Still, proponents of American heritage give lip service to “authentic” histories based in “truth.” According to Kammen, the allure of authenticity has more to do with the authority associated with the word than with any clear conceptualization of what “authentic” means. By labeling stories, objects, or places “authentic,” Americans brand their products with a higher level of legitimacy and virtue. But the label of authenticity is never permanent. Historical landscapes, for instance, are modernized and those landscapes thus lose their supposed authenticity.<sup>2</sup>

Authenticity also reinforces notions of shared identity. Historian David Glassberg wrote that a shared community history “is an essential element of our culture, contributing to how we define our sense of identity and direction. It locates us in time, as we learn about our place in a succession of past and future generations, as well as in space, as we learn the story of our locale.” The relationship between authenticity and community identity is evidenced in many ways, including historical dramas. In a guide for writing historical dramas, dramatists

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<sup>2</sup> Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 17-29.

Christian Moe, Scott Parker, and George McCalmon claimed that drama “is an experience shared publicly rather than privately. In many cultures, the enacted drama functions as the symbolic core of the community, representing a way of living peculiar to the specific culture as a whole specific community.” Dramas, like *Horn in the West*, help locals distinguish themselves and their heritage as unique and strengthen their awareness of a common identity.<sup>3</sup>

The groups who sought in the 1910s and 1920s to mark Daniel Boone’s trails also desired to combine the authentic with community-buildings through awareness of shared history. The years between World War I and World War II were characterized by a traditionalist revival during which Americans expressed interest in “purposive myths that could explain and justify how their world had come to be the way it was.” Glassberg added that “images of a ‘common’ history provide a focus for group loyalties, as well as plots to structure our individual memories and a larger context within which to interpret our new experiences.” Collective efforts of the DAR and the Boone Trail Highway and Memorial association remind Americans of the nation’s pioneer legacy and reflect the value of American myth in the early twentieth century.<sup>4</sup>

The story of the American frontier has taken on mythic qualities because tales of pioneer journeys have been used to emphasize courage, dedication, individualism, and resourcefulness among historic Americans, creating an identity based on values encouraged

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<sup>3</sup> Christian H. Moe, Scott J. Parker, and George McCalmon, *Creating Historical Drama: A Guide for Communities, Theatre Groups, and Playwrights*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2005), 8; David Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry: The Uses of Tradition in the Early Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 1.

<sup>4</sup> Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory*, 299.

and cultivated among modern citizens. Myth has the power to inspire certain qualities and national pride, inspiring Americans to recapture an authentic representation of the frontier that is so dear to American heritage. What authenticity means and the “authentic” products that emerge from its pursuit are very different in the cases explored in this thesis. The frontier myth and the feelings that it evokes among the public are as authentic in the public mind as the fact that Daniel Boone lived. The myth of the frontier is so embedded in American culture that myth itself has become authentic.

***HORN IN THE WEST:***  
**CHANGE AND THE PURSUIT OF AUTHENTICITY**

In 1952, the outdoor historical drama *Horn in the West* premiered in the Daniel Boone Amphitheater in Boone, North Carolina. When Kermit Hunter wrote the drama, he was a Ph.D. candidate at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill under the tutelage of Paul Green, the father of outdoor drama. *Horn in the West* was one of the first of Hunter's scripts to hit the stage, and it remains the oldest running of his works today. The success of *Horn in the West* is no doubt due to the careful attention and hard work of the Southern Appalachian Historical Association (SAHA), which originally commissioned and still produces the drama today.

In Boone, *Horn in the West* has stood as a symbol of local heritage for nearly sixty years. The drama places a local frontier Appalachian family against the backdrop of the American Revolution, tying history, myth, and fiction into a tale of struggle and triumph. The drama's 1952 premier program proudly stated, "Horn in the West portrays in a most fitting manner the efforts of these rugged pioneers to secure religious, political and economic freedom." Native Americans and frontiersmen, such as Daniel Boone, make appearances in the play, linking local heritage with frontier lore.<sup>1</sup>

As an outdoor historical drama, *Horn in the West* has two personas. On the one hand, it is an art form—the product of a creator who strove throughout his life to perfect and improve the drama's artistic, dramaturgic, and entertainment quality. On the other hand,

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<sup>1</sup> I. G. Greer, "The Southern Appalachian Historical Association, Inc.," in *The Southern Appalachian Historical Association, INC. Presents, Kermit Hunter's Horn in the West: A Drama of the Southern Appalachian Highlands* (Boone, NC: Southern Appalachian Historical Association, 1952), 17.

*Horn in the West* embodies American frontier heritage and promotes the identity of Boone, North Carolina. In this sense, the drama advertises the town's history to travelers and provides a vision of legacy and pride for the people who inhabit the small Appalachian community. Thus, the drama serves a very different purpose than general theatrical productions. Because of its multifaceted nature, *Horn in the West*'s revisions took on a different focus once the drama had been fully integrated into Boone's local heritage. From its creation in the 1950s, the drama continuously evolved to accommodate changing times. In the 1970s, however, Hunter and others believed that the drama had lost much of its originality and authenticity, and changes to the script aimed to recapture much of what had been lost. Once *Horn in the West* became integral to the town's history and sense of communal identity—a tradition in and of itself—changes to the play were made *only* if they would restore the drama to a *more authentic* form commensurate with the ideas of the original script. Thus, for *Horn in the West*, the “authentic” American frontier is that which embodies a myth of American exceptionalism, heroism, and morality.

The term “historical drama” is a contradiction in itself. Is a historical drama a reenactment of history as the word “historical” implies, or does its designation as a “drama” indicate that it is above all a work of art? One scholar observed that “the very term ‘historical drama’ suggests the nature of this engagement, with the first word qualifying the fictiveness of the second, and the second questioning the reality of the first.” Outdoor historical dramas are much more than mere portrayals of the past: historical dramas use the veneer of history to support much greater endeavors that combine artistic imagination, a sense of local heritage, and a keen eye towards entertainment that engage and inspire audiences. Indeed, these

dramas are much more focused on captivating and conveying timeless morals to their audiences than actually preserving history through factual reenactment.<sup>2</sup>

The lines between myth, fact, and fabrication have been blurred in historical dramas since ancient Greece. In these plays, history becomes a loose justification for creating something that the facts alone cannot support. English philosopher and statesman Francis Bacon stated that “Because the acts or events of true history have not that magnitude which satisfieth the mind of man, poesy feigneth acts and events greater and more heroical . . . because true history representeth actions and events more ordinary, and less interchanged; therefore poesy endueth them with more rareness, and more unexpected and alternative variations.” Dramatists find that embellishing history allows them to reach audiences on a much greater emotional level. Thus, the goal of historical dramatists is to create an emotional connection between the story and the audience. Historical dramatists are not historians intent on educating their audiences about the past; they use history as a tool, not as a goal.<sup>3</sup>

*Horn in the West*, then, is composed of much more than a script of static words. In order to reach the play’s full potential as a living testament to Boone’s heritage, the drama depends on actors’ expressions and intonations, the symphonic melody of music, the physical structures of set and scenery, and the relationship established between the actors and audiences. Each of these components is essential, but the language of the script most effectively articulates the play’s agenda. Inevitably, given the script’s ability to impact the play’s message, tension has characterized the efforts of both Hunter and multiple directors to

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<sup>2</sup> Herbert Lindenberger, *Historical Drama: The Relation of Literature and Reality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), x.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 54; Joyce M. Thierer, *Telling History: A Manual for Performers and Presenters of First-Person Narratives* (New York: AltaMira Press, 2010), 2.



maintain control over the drama's language. Changes that have been made to the script reflect society, the evolution of historical drama, and efforts of the drama's editors to adapt to audiences' needs.

On the first page of *Horn in the West*'s 1963 script, a disclaimer reads: "The characters and events from this play are drawn from actual historical records. Certain modifications have been made in the interest of dramatic unity." The play is primarily a work of history, but it is also embellished. The disclaimer just did not begin to hint at the sheer magnitude of artistic creation found in *Horn in the West*.<sup>4</sup>

Hunter's educational background in Historical Drama heavily influenced the early scripts of *Horn in the West*, and continued an influence as he remained involved with the drama over his lifetime. His mentor, Paul Green, was recognized as the "father of outdoor drama" for his pioneering efforts to analyze and perfect the craft of writing historical dramas, as well as his success at promoting the use of outdoor dramas in local communities. Hunter developed his own distinct ideas about how drama could be presented in the most profoundly effective ways. In 1953, one year after he completed the first script of *Horn in the West*, Hunter published an article entitled "History or Drama?" which revealed some of his beliefs about the craft of writing historical dramas. He argued that historical dramas achieve the highest meaning when created by artists willing to sacrifice actual facts about the past for meaningful ideas. In effect, Hunter advocated imaginative rather than literal interpretations of history, but he did not wish to ignore historical fact altogether, stating on one occasion that the artist "cannot afford to sacrifice art for morality, but by the same token, he must not think

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<sup>4</sup> Kermit Hunter, *Horn in the West*, 1963, Southern Appalachian Historical Association Records, Appalachian State University, Boone, North Carolina.

purely in terms of art, because he needs to keep contact with life and human realities.”

Nevertheless, Hunter advocated a liberal interpretation of history: “The great lesson we have to learn in outdoor drama, either by accident or by painful failure, is that the average audience does not care one whit about the history of the historical facts or the historical perspectives. They come and pay money to see a show, and they expect to be entertained.” Sixteen years of studies convinced him that “the general public, rather than actually ‘knowing what it wants,’ is generally not at all certain what it wishes to see on the stage . . . beyond the mere matter of being entertained.” Historical fact was not the most effective way to engage an audience, because the audience was, for the most part, indifferent to the accuracy of the stories it heard.<sup>5</sup>

Hunter’s goal was to convey powerful ideas and feelings to his audience: “The thing which distinguishes the average substantial outdoor drama, including . . . *Horn in the West* . . . is that they have wide emotional appeal, they have a sense of largeness, and they deal with values and with philosophies which are universal and timeless.” At the vanguard of his field, Hunter believed it necessary to embellish history and even fabricate powerful characters and events in order to achieve his goals. *Horn in the West* testified to his philosophy of drama despite the unobjectionable disclaimer that decorates the script’s first page.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> “Paul Green: Dramatist, Teacher, Humanist, 1894-1981,” The Paul Green Foundation, <http://www.ibiblio.org/paulgreen/> (accessed March 17, 2011); Kermit Hunter to William Winkler, August 11, 1980, Southern Appalachian Historical Association Records; Kermit Hunter, “History or Drama?” *South Atlantic Bulletin* 19, no. 1 (May 1953): 3; “Kermit Hunter: Statement on Writing,” Southern Appalachian Writers Collection, D. H. Ramsey Library Special Collections, University of North Carolina at Asheville.

<sup>6</sup> Kermit Hunter to Robert Randall, September 1, 1971, Southern Appalachian Historical Association Records.

Unsurprisingly, critics committed to ideas of historical authenticity often assaulted Hunter's works for their factual deviations. Hunter realized that there was a limit to how freely he could elaborate when altering the past to suit artistic goals, especially where scripts were concerned. Even though he employed his creative talents to "fool the audience with the appearance of reality—in order to achieve realism," he knew that for much of his audience this was "acceptable . . . in everything but the script itself." Audiences rarely objected to historically inaccurate costumes, colors, musical compositions, and set constructions, but if Hunter too blatantly fictionalized the characters and events, the criticism leveled at his door was substantial.<sup>7</sup>

Hunter rebutted attacks on his scripts with the defense that "the dramatist seeks verisimilitude not of fact but of tone and mood—ultimate truth rather than scientific or situational truth." What he meant by "ultimate truth" involved what he called the "spirit of history," or the general symbolism and meaning of the past that embodied a legacy. His championing of the essence of history over actual fact is abundant in *Horn in the West*, tapping into the power of frontier heroism through the great exploits of Daniel Boone and the struggle of settlers to lay the foundations of an expanding nation. Hunter portrayed "ultimate truth" rather than "scientific truth" because, he claimed, verifiable evidence was limited and incapable of supporting the range of emotions and experiences that he wished to convey.<sup>8</sup>

Since its premier in 1952, *Horn in the West* has gone through a number of major revisions that have significantly altered the script. Kermit Hunter had definite opinions about

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<sup>7</sup> Hunter, "History or Drama?" 3.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 4; "Story of the Show," *Horn in the West Outdoor Drama*, <http://www.horninthewest.com/show.htm> (accessed February 18, 2011).

the purpose of his dramas, investing a tremendous amount of creative energy into his works and steadfastly defending the effectiveness and artistic quality of his creations. As a result, he proved a stubborn participant in the revision of *Horn in the West*, and a staunch opponent to changes made to the script without his knowledge. Yet, it became difficult for Hunter to maintain control over the evolution of the play because he was completely dependent on correspondence from the SAHA for news about the association's plans and decisions. Even though Hunter lived in North Carolina when he first wrote *Horn in the West*, his career as a professor of dramatic arts led him to Virginia and then to Texas where he resided from 1964 until his death in 2001. During those years, ineffective communication between Hunter and the association allowed many directors of *Horn in the West* to rework the drama's language without Hunter's input, creating tension between Hunter and multiple directors who challenged Hunter's artistic claims to the drama.

In 1961, the SAHA board prepared a second major revision of *Horn in the West*. Hunter constantly vented frustrations to association members, bringing his dramatic talents as much to his personal communications as he did to his plays. In one letter he stated, "I have tried, as you know, for a number of years to keep close to the show and work with it, but I am constantly closed out." He defended himself and his professional expertise, claiming that drama "is my profession. I have learned in the past ten years that the most honest and decent thing I can do for any community, especially one which has worked as hard as you have, is to see that they are in the hands of professionals, people who put theatre first."<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, his flattering appeal received no reply from the SAHA, and one month later when the

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<sup>9</sup> Kermit Hunter letter to Herman Wilcax, March 30, 1961, Southern Appalachian Historical Association Records, Appalachian State University, Boone, North Carolina.

situation was no better, Hunter reverted to lambasting the association. He exclaimed that the director, David French, is “getting on my nerves by bluntly refusing to send me that script.”<sup>10</sup>

Lack of communication was not the only thing that frustrated Hunter. He often revealed his need to maintain firm control over script changes. When he did not make the changes himself, he became incensed if not consulted or asked for approval. At one point he wrote, “I don’t mind so much having the Board and the director make a command decision, but I would like to be told why, and given some reason, so I could work the script over again, instead of simply being told in May that the script would be the same as the previous year.” He added, “I have grown tired of people who attempt to rewrite the play from a few years of experience in one small part of the American theatre.”<sup>11</sup>

Only a decade after *Horn in the West*’s premier, Hunter expressed concerns that the constant script changes had destructively weakened the play and its ability to engage the audience effectively. He claimed that “we have hacked and trimmed—and especially the well-meaning directors have hacked and trimmed—until there is a skeleton of a play held together by makeshift lines, faulty transitions, and music that is in need of re-doing.” Unskilled revisions had robbed the play of its greatest and most stimulating aspects. He confronted the SAHA with evidence of its failure to maintain what Hunter saw as the play’s integrity: “I have heard some bad reports on the show. I will quote from a letter which came a week ago: ‘Boone is unbelievable. That director has rewritten every line of your script, in

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<sup>10</sup> Kermit Hunter to Herman Wilcax, March 30, 1961, Southern Appalachian Historical Association Records; Kermit Hunter to Herman Wilcax, April 9, 1961, Southern Appalachian Historical Association Records.

<sup>11</sup> Kermit Hunter letter to Herman Wilcax, March 30, 1961.

order to make it dramaturgically sound,' as he says, he has cut out all of the suspense, most of the drama, and all of the humor."<sup>12</sup>

In this case, the director of the play was knowledgeable about drama, but Hunter objected to his lack of artistic concern for the impact of the play. Hunter wanted to restore what he called "spectacle," namely the eye-catching, swashbuckling, and emotionally provocative features that, he claimed, "the 1952 version covered." To this end, Hunter collaborated with the SAHA to strengthen the entertainment and emotional qualities of *Horn in the West* by revising some of the characters to increase the play's emotional impact on audiences.<sup>13</sup>

The character of Jack Stuart, the grown son of the play's frontier family, for example, became one way to re-infuse *Horn in the West's* script with dramatic effect. Towards the end of the play, Jack honorably departs for war; but prior to his departure he makes a few statements that Gene Wilson, a member of the SAHA, felt compromised the potential impact of Jack's heroism. Wilson suggested that Hunter eliminate Jack's line: "If a man has to die, he'd be better fighting for something important, like freedom." Wilson claimed the change would "increase audience empathy" for Jack: "The minute [Jack] says this line, the audience knows that he is going to be killed, and they lose interest in him. If on the other hand, he and Mary were planning their future life together, this would produce more audience empathy, and make his death more unexpected and, thus, more tragic." Wilson suggested precisely the type of revision on which Hunter wished to capitalize. Hunter intended to heighten audience

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<sup>12</sup> Kermit Hunter letter to Herman Wilcax, April 19, 1961.

<sup>13</sup> Kermit Hunter letter to Herman Wilcax, March 30, 1961; Kermit Hunter letter to Robert Randall, September 1, 1971, Southern Appalachian Historical Association Records.

interest and sympathy for the characters as often as possible in order to create a story that successfully captured and maintained the attention of its viewers. The change to Jack's character made him more tragic. Similar revisions in later years made some characters more admirable and others more antagonistic.<sup>14</sup>

The role of Daniel Boone, the drama's most famous hero, was also the object of revisions. Originally, Hunter situated Daniel Boone as a minor character whose primary purpose was to highlight the connection between the famous frontiersman and the town of Boone. Daniel Boone became slightly more important to the plot in later versions of the play, but Hunter intentionally limited the frontiersman's prominence so that Boone would not overshadow the key figures in the story—North Carolina's common pioneer families.<sup>15</sup>

Still, revisions to Boone's character became necessary. Hunter tailored Boone to the abilities of the actors who played him. Other times, he refocused on or distracted audiences from the potentially overwhelming presence of the famous American hero. Hunter seemed endlessly frustrated by Glenn Causey, the man who played Boone from 1956 to 1996. Hunter never intended for Boone to dominate the story; he was much more interested in emphasizing the multifaceted story of ordinary pioneers and their experiences during the American Revolution. Hunter hoped the audience would realize the daring of the average pioneer through comparison and contrast to Daniel Boone. Nevertheless, Causey's acting often overemphasized Boone's role in the drama. In 1971, Hunter criticized Causey's style to the

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<sup>14</sup> Gene Wilson to Kermit Hunter, September 4, 1963, Southern Appalachian Historical Association Records; Kermit Hunter, *Horn in the West*, 1963, 41; D. Ward Haarbauer to Kermit Hunter, January 20, 1968, Southern Appalachian Historical Association Records.

<sup>15</sup> Raymond Hayes, "A Study of Hero-Building and Myth Making in Three of Kermit Hunter's Outdoor Historical Epic Dramas" (M.A. Thesis, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, 1982), 163.

SAHA: “The reason why Boone seems to occupy so much space and time is that he talks slowly, he shouts at the top of his voice, and he moves around the stage like a ruptured duck.” Furthermore, Causey was less than adequate when it came to performing more complex monologues. In 1981, Hunter removed Causey’s philosophical prose because Hunter claimed the rugged frontiersman would not have spoken in such a way. Of course, if Hunter truly had not wanted Boone spouting philosophy, he would never have put the lines in the script. But because Causey could not give the lines their full affective potential, Hunter reassigned the lines to other characters who could relay them more eloquently. In *Horn in the West*, Daniel Boone was a symbol of the rugged American individual, but it was the other, artfully ordinary characters that Hunter hoped would embody the frontier spirit.<sup>16</sup>

*Horn in the West* has always served both a local and tourist audience, but tourists—who significantly contributed to Boone’s economy—were arguably the most important audience. It was in the SAHA’s and Hunter’s best interests to attract tourists to see *Horn in the West* at the Daniel Boone Theater, because if successfully entertaining these seasonal guests provided free advertising and the greatest prospect for filling the theater in the future. In 1963, with new script revisions almost complete, Hunter wrote, “I feel very strongly that this is a crucial year in the history of *Horn in the West*, in that the tourist industry is on the upswing, the drama on the upswing, and the whole picture one of hope and assurance.” Everything seemed ideally set to attract large audiences with the newly remodeled play. Hunter added, “With a strong and stirring drama for 1963 we should be able to continue this

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 168.



upswing and re-establish this drama as an important institution, building on success after success. It can and should be done.”<sup>17</sup>

In 1963, despite the drama’s specifically local character, the SAHA thought that replacing some of the script’s local references with regional references was appropriate. In a letter to Kermit Hunter, the SAHA wrote “We suggest that you use a little less local color than in last year’s script. Particular reference is made to Howards Knob. Howards Knob, of course, is not generally known outside Watauga County. On the other hand, Grandfather Mountain is. We suggest a reference to Howards Knob not more than once.”<sup>18</sup> The local production committee favored departing from local references in order to create a deeper connection for tourist audiences, thus prioritizing tourism over historical accuracy.

Throughout the decades, script changes were made to reflect a more historically accurate and diverse frontier community. But such changes have never challenged the glory and bravery of white male pioneers. Portrayal of women has changed in response to more critical perspectives about the dramatization of women in relation to men. Scholar Raymond Hayes claimed, “Hunter’s historical dramas usually do not offer opportunities for women to perform in heroic roles” because “men have traditionally performed the major heroic actions in history.” Whether one agrees with the assumption that historical women were not generally heroic, *Horn in the West* used women primarily as wives, love interests, and leaders of the domestic sphere: in other words, as compliments to male characters. However, Hunter and the SAHA often expressed concern about the lack of complexity in female

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<sup>17</sup> Kermit Hunter to Gene Wilson, December 12, 1962, Southern Appalachian Historical Association Records.

<sup>18</sup> R. H. Harmon and Production Committee letter to Kermit Hunter, January 22, 1963, Southern Appalachian Historical Association Records, Appalachian State University, Boone, North Carolina.

characters, which was needed to make the characters realistic and worthy of audience empathy. Thus, editors made a number of alterations to the levels of compassion, obstinacy to men, and hardness of *Horn in the West*'s female characters.<sup>19</sup>

At times, Hunter worried that certain characters had lost the qualities that made them useful to the drama. Jessie Howard, for example, who became "Widow Howard" after the 1956 script revision, degenerated over a number of years into a weak simpering character that chased after men to the point that she detracted from the drama's plot rather than contributing to it. In 1971, Hunter wrote to the SAHA that "Unless [Widow Howard] is given a certain stature and largeness, she develops into an uninteresting person . . . [and at the moment] she is a great deal like the typical characters in old-time melodramas, such as the Negro mammy, the happy drunk, the young lovers, the typical Yankee, the Southern planter, and all of the trite outworn figures that used to be on stage." Hunter was not as concerned with being politically correct as he was with preserving the depth of his characters. His interest in Widow Howard's character and the comparison that he made to racial and ethnic stereotypes also reflected shifting sensibilities in American society as people became increasingly aware of how bias and prejudice permeated American culture.<sup>20</sup>

Yet, despite his seeming sensibility to racial stereotypes, Hunter was unwilling to accommodate racially diverse characters beyond those on the periphery of *Horn in the West*'s plot. In the 1960s, a half-Creek actor joined the cast, the only non-white actor portraying a

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<sup>19</sup> Hayes, "A Study of Hero-Building and Myth Making in Three of Kermit Hunter's Outdoor Historical Epic Dramas," 165.

<sup>20</sup> Kermit Hunter to Robert Randall, September 1, 1971; Hayes, "A Study of Hero-Building and Myth Making in Three of Kermit Hunter's Outdoor Historical Epic Dramas," 166; Kermit Hunter to Robert Randall, September 1, 1971.

Native American role at the time. Even though there were a number of Native American roles in *Horn in the West*, Hunter refused to emphasize them, because the drama was “not supposed to be an Indian play”; it was “about the Revolution.”<sup>21</sup>

In 1968, the executive committee of the SAHA in charge of *Horn in the West* toyed with the idea of adding an African American role to the production. The committee was somewhat hesitant to pursue the idea, but many committee members agreed that introducing an African American to the cast was appropriate given the social changes occurring throughout the United States in the 1960s, a result of the Civil Rights Movement. Still, the committee worried about local response to introducing an African American actor, because they were “anxious to avoid any publicity other than that which comes in the routine way.” In other words, they only sought publicity that reflected the SAHA’s generally non-partisan position in Boone’s local community and tourist industry.<sup>22</sup>

Hunter, notified of the committee’s thoughts, responded to their general request that “it is best to be there first than to have to answer questions later,” suggesting that at some point in the near future, the only bad publicity would arise from *not* having an African American cast member. While receptive to the idea of adding an African American role, Hunter continued that “It will be an easy matter for me to insert a line somewhere about free blacks.” Interestingly, he did not consider the prospect of adding enslaved characters. Furthermore, he specifically stated that the role he would add would be “a non-speaking part for perhaps a man and a woman, of almost any age.” There was no question in the

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<sup>21</sup> Hayes, “A Study of Hero-Building and Myth Making in Three of Kermit Hunter’s Outdoor Historical Epic Dramas,” 165; Kermit Hunter to William Winkler, September 26, 1980, Southern Appalachian Historical Association Records.

<sup>22</sup> Herman Eggers to Kermit Hunter, October 16, 1968, Southern Appalachian Historical Association Records.

playwright's mind of challenging the absence of black characters or reformulating the script to accommodate or acknowledge a multiracial frontier society. African Americans would simply enter the background of *Horn in the West*, and like Native Americans, their roles would not jeopardize the heroic tale of European pioneers which the drama conveyed. The push to strengthen and reinforce an existing American myth of the white man's conquest of the West overshadowed any possibility that *Horn in the West* could present a racially "authentic" image of North Carolina's Revolutionary frontier.<sup>23</sup>

During its first two decades of production, *Horn in the West* was significantly revised several times to improve the drama and accommodate changing times, a changing society, and most importantly, changing audiences. Some of these modifications were superficial; others were grounded fundamentally in the changing values of American society. Kermit Hunter and the SAHA constantly struggled to maintain the drama and increase its public appeal and educational value. Since the 1960s, however, change within the drama became less apparent as *Horn in the West* acquired a reputation as a solid representation of recognized small-town American values and unique local heritage.

While the play itself has changed, the language and emphasis used to promote the drama have remained virtually the same since the 1950s, because this language appeals to local heritage. The town of Boone still seeks to promote its uniqueness in the United States and North Carolina, to portray its triumphant role in westward expansion, and to cement a bond between the play and its community.

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<sup>23</sup> Kermit Hunter to Herman Eggers, September 24, 1968, Southern Appalachian Historical Association Records.

By *Horn in the West*'s twentieth year of production, the drama had become an integral part of Boone's expression and understanding of the community's local identity, allowing the Boone community both to comprehend its place within the nation and to interpret the nation through itself. By providing a distinct heritage linked to the history of American independence and heroism, the story conveyed in *Horn in the West* provided Boone's citizens a reason to feel proud about their community and its deep roots in the American narrative. From roughly 1971 to the present, promotional materials for *Horn in the West* have emphasized the continuity within the drama's narrative even as they acknowledge the play's regular changes. Furthermore, beginning in the 1970s, many of the drama's revisions sought to return the play to its earlier scripts in order to recapture what was perceived as the drama's lost authenticity.

Since its opening in 1952, *Horn in the West* brought Boone's frontier legacy to life in the minds of its modern community, while also making this legacy known to tourists who visited the Appalachian town. Not only has the drama been an economic asset, but it has also become the embodiment of the local community's sense of self. *Horn in the West* serves as a reference for how community and identity relate to region and country. A 2001 article about the town's decision to contribute \$15,000 to the production of *Horn in the West*, which was struggling economically, read: "In the local sense, the Horn's story of High Country settlement during the American Revolution represents a storehouse of information and imagination for those who live in Watauga County. This story of the past continues to inform the region's present and provide it with an all-important sense of place." Another article from

the same year stated that *Horn in the West* “[is] a local entity . . . vital to helping preserve community identity. . . . It is one of the things that makes Boone Boone.”<sup>24</sup>

A particular function of outdoor historical dramas is to increase community awareness of a shared past and heighten communal pride. This goal was central to Kermit Hunter’s vision for writing historical dramas for small communities. He purposefully wrote to reflect community interests, and in turn, the Boone community embraced *Horn in the West*, integrating it into their sense of local identity. Driving through the area in 1971 after a two-year absence, Hunter noted how the continued “dedication and loyal concern” of Boone citizens in the SAHA distinguished *Horn in the West* and its success from Hunter’s other plays, many of which struggled for lack of a supportive community.<sup>25</sup>

Hunter also expressed how he was “continually struck by the great loyalty and devotion which the people of Boone have shown [*Horn in the West*] down the years.” He commended the SAHA’s ability to “pull a town literally by its nose into backing a project which means nothing but hard work and sacrifice.” Continued support of community members in the SAHA was essential to the drama’s ability to benefit the Boone community at large. Hunter believed “If that mountain country keeps developing into a great tourist center and even a greater manufacturing center, it will be due in great part to the fact that the town was alive and kicking, that it was able to keep its summer drama going and able to keep its name before the people of the United States.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> “Town’s Decision on Horn Rightly Rises above Budget Fears,” *Boone Watauga Democrat*, May 4, 2001; “Horn,” *Boone Watauga Democrat*, April 30, 2001.

<sup>25</sup> Hayes, “A Study of Hero-Building and Myth Making in Three of Kermit Hunter’s Outdoor Historical Epic Dramas,” 48; Kermit Hunter to Robert Randall, September 1, 1971.

<sup>26</sup> Kermit Hunter to Robert Randall, September 1, 1971.

*Horn in the West* brought tremendous prestige to Boone since 1952. At various times, the drama was featured in national newspapers and magazines. One columnist wrote that “the Horn vibrantly broadcasts, advertises and flaunts the uniqueness of our region to a vast national and even international audience.” Hunter praised the SAHA for its successful promotion of the drama because “Millions of people know all about Boone because of [*Horn in the West*],” especially given a recent mention in *The New York Times*. The SAHA did its part to raise awareness about the production and thereby distinguish the small community. In 1968, Kermit Hunter, on behalf of the SAHA, sent invited First Lady Ladybird Johnson to Boone and experience its wonderful American heritage; the First Lady’s secretary sent regrets. The association also issued an invitation to President Jimmy Carter in 1977. “*Horn in the West* was one of many ideas that materialized into something Boone and Watauga County can be proud of,” championed the local newspaper; “and it’s the type of attraction that people from near and far will remember. Once they’ve sat in the audience of the performance, they have an indelible impression of Boone and Watauga County that never fails the memory. . . . The Horn has served well to enhance the climate of progress, growth, and entertainment and has been a major factor in the attraction of people to the area.”<sup>27</sup>

SAHA members expanded their publicity nationally in the name of Daniel Boone. They strove to associate themselves with Daniel Boone’s heritage, both through their location in a town named for him and their association with his portrayal in *Horn in the West*.

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<sup>27</sup> “Town’s Decision on Horn Rightly Rises Above Budget Fears,” *Boone Watauga Democrat*, May 4, 2001; Kermit Hunter to Robert Randall, September 1, 1971; White House Social Secretary Bess Abell to Kermit Hunter, May 23, 1968, Southern Appalachian Historical Association Records; Southern Appalachian Historical Association draft to President Carter, 1977, Southern Appalachian Historical Association Records; “Indelible Impression,” *Boone Watauga Democrat*, June 26, 1972.

In 1964, members of the association campaigned to attend the christening of the *U.S.S. Daniel Boone* in Mare Island, California. George Thomas attended as an honored guest and reciprocated by inviting the entire crew of the submarine to attend *Horn in the West*.<sup>28</sup>

The relationship between the community of Boone and its claim to the figure of Daniel Boone has taken a unique form in local heritage as a direct result of *Horn in the West*. As the drama became as a point of pride and a symbol of local identity, local depictions of Daniel Boone began to resemble not Fess Parker, the hero of Disney's *Daniel Boone* TV show, or actual depictions of the historical Daniel Boone, but the actor Glenn Causey who played Daniel Boone for forty years in *Horn in the West*. Despite the frustrations that Causey caused Kermit Hunter, local residents became deeply attached to the image of Boone that Causey created.

*Horn in the West* has become so integral to Boone's local heritage, pride, and identity that community members (beyond those directly invested in the play as cast, crew, and SAHA members) have been known to commit time and efforts to the drama during difficult economic times. Most recently, in June 2004, *Horn in the West* survived and opened for its fifty-second season despite the SAHA's announcement two months earlier that the show would be cancelled. *Horn in the West* faced multiple financial obstacles: Not only had the drama's profits declined in previous years to the point that director Michael Scialabba worried he would not be able to pay the cast and crew, but the Daniel Boone Theater was in dire need of repairs and renovations that the SAHA could not afford. The theater's condition was so abysmal that the association deemed it unsafe

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<sup>28</sup> "Thomas Attends Commissioning of 'USS Daniel Boone,'" *Boone Watauga Democrat*, April 1964.



and decided to cancel *Horn in the West* that season.<sup>29</sup>

Faced with the fact that their local drama, the third oldest running outdoor historical drama in the nation, would not be performed in 2004 and potentially close permanently, the Boone community came together to repair the Daniel Boone Theater and make it fit for use. The town of Boone and the county of Watauga donated a combined \$50,000 for repairs, and local volunteers contributed efforts to repairing metal seats, restoring the restroom to working order, and completing other tasks required for the drama to open. Consequently, *Horn in the West* opened on June 18th, 2004 and did not permanently close its doors as had many other outdoor dramas faced with economic trouble.<sup>30</sup>

The strong tie that *Horn in the West* developed with the Boone community, and the SAHA's efforts to appeal to small-town values such as family and religion, have led some of the drama's promotional efforts to target certain audiences. In anticipation of the grand opening of a newly revised *Horn in the West* in 1981, SAHA engineered a general invitation that appealed specifically to church and camp groups. William Winkler, manager of the association, cleverly worded the letter so that it drew distinct parallels between the story of the drama and the interests of the groups he hoped to attract. He specifically emphasized the humanity of *Horn in the West*'s characters: the play was "about people: their humor, their conflicts, their loves, and their all-consuming desire to win and maintain their freedom." Perhaps more effectively, Winkler described the triumphant plot of the drama, which unfolds during the American Revolution. "Led by a rugged mountain preacher, these people of

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<sup>29</sup> Nirav Vora, "The Play's the Thing," *Business North Carolina* 24, no. 8 (August 2004): 32.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

diverse religious and social backgrounds found unity and strength in the far-away sound of the Horn of Freedom.”<sup>31</sup>

Promotions reflected the political themes of the era. In 1981, in the wake of Ronald Reagan’s election and the emphasis on family values, one advertisement for the play stated that Hunter had “rewritten portions of the script with the intention of providing an even more family-oriented presentation. It blends history and theatre into a delightful and entertaining production suitable for all members of the family.” In 2009, a promotional article for *Horn in the West* paralleled the drama and the country’s recent presidential election, opening with “In January, the American people elected their first African-American president, Barack Obama, who won on a platform based upon freedom and change,” and then relating it to the mission of Boone’s historical drama, quoting *Horn in the West*’s artistic director, Julie Richardson: “Freedom and change—that’s what this show is about. . . . These people wanted change; these people wanted to be free and make a new world. And these are our people; people of these mountains. This summer, we want to remind ourselves that this show is on the same page as what the American people are on.” By comparing the platform of the nation’s new president to the mission of American pioneers, *Horn in the West* supposedly reflected stable and timeless American values.<sup>32</sup>

Many promotional materials for *Horn in the West* stress the continuity of the drama as a representation of historical authenticity. As a result of *Horn in the West*’s long tenure as a

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<sup>31</sup> William R. Winkler to Ministers and Church Group Coordinators Camp Directors, April 1981, Southern Appalachian Historical Association Records.

<sup>32</sup> Sam Calhoun, “Hope for the Horn: Richardson Returns as Artistic Director of ‘Horn in the West,’” *High Country Press*, February 5, 2009; William R. Winkler to Ministers and Church Group Coordinators Camp Directors, April 1981.

fixture in Boone's community, local residents have come to see the play as a living manifestation of the past within the present. Kermit Hunter's and directors' efforts to make the play more "authentic" have translated over time into returning the drama to its early scripts. Even as Hunter improved the script of *Horn in the West* through his revisions, over time, changes made to meet the demands of society translated into returning the play to the way it used to be.

Nostalgia for the original drama emerged in the early 1970s along with a desire to increase *Horn in the West*'s claims to historical authenticity. As Hunter and the SAHA diversified the drama by adding African American actors and complicating the characters, promotions began to strongly emphasize the drama's timeless themes and realistic characterizations. The 1971 brochure cover proudly proclaimed: "They still make 'em like they used to . . . it's all about a thing called freedom." However, in Hunter's view and that of the SAHA, by 1971, *Horn in the West* was in need of a major revision. Promoters had recognized the need for clear and strong messages about the struggle for American freedom, but the script did not effectively convey such themes. Therefore, in 1972, Hunter and the drama's new director, Dick Ayers—both affiliated with Southern Methodist University in Dallas—revised the script, "recapturing the spirit of the westward movement and American Revolution" which had faded into the background over the years.<sup>33</sup>

For over a decade, critics had claimed that the drama had been more focused on excitement and entertainment than historical authenticity. Minor script changes had included

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<sup>33</sup> "Horn in the West Will Have New Look," *Clinton Sampson Independent*, June 1, 1972; "Daniel Boone Portrayed in: Horn in the West, 20th Great Season," <http://www.booneonline.com/v/Horn-in-the-West-Advertisements/album04/aaa.jpg.html> (accessed April 21, 2011); "Changes Strengthen 'Horn' Production," *Gastonia Daily Independent*, June 8, 1972.

more complex and dramatic fighting scenes and spectacular events such as Daniel Boone's bear kill. The 1972 revision did not omit these aspects, but it balanced the spectacular with the "authentic." For instance, the hillbilly dialect of the characters disappeared because, as Hunter decided, Appalachian culture had not developed by the Revolutionary era and so was unrealistic as context for *Horn in the West*. The promotion for the new script, or rather the new script that aimed to recapture something lost, also emphasized authenticity and a rejection of stereotype: Daniel Boone was not "a Fess Parker type . . . [or] a Cecille B. DeMille . . . because there was no such thing at that time." The Stuart family was "not a group of mountaineers . . . but rather a 'special group of very independent refugees who insisted on personal freedom.'" In other words, the story that *Horn in the West* portrayed was not something found on television. It was unique, authentic, and reflective of Boone, North Carolina, the community to which it was so essential.<sup>34</sup>

The 1972 script was only the last in a cycle which had developed over the decades: the script was revised to capture some sense of authenticity, and then the drama gradually drifted from those values until directors or Hunter recognized the need to reassert continuity, values, and character. The 1972 script, however, had adopted only a few aspects of older scripts. Not until 1979, when director Ed Pilkington decided to revise the script again, was the original 1952 script revived. Hunter was less than pleased with this development because he thought the earlier script lacked the professionalization that the drama had acquired through its successive revisions. He wrote a series of letters berating Pilkington for this "mistake"—a gigantic step backwards from the progressive improvement of the play that had

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<sup>34</sup> Jesse Poindexter, "Revised Script, New Director: 'The Horn' Changes After 21 Years," *Journal and Sentinel*, 1972; "Changes Strengthen 'Horn' Production," *Gastonia Daily Independent*, June 8, 1972.

occurred since 1952. Two major problems had plagued the first script: first, the plot was so complex that the production could not be performed in less than three hours, testing the patience of the audience. Second, the characters were so balanced that the major characters were no more interesting than minor ones, and some minor characters were too complex, unnecessarily adding material to the plot. The 1952 script had been Hunter's first attempt at crafting the story of *Horn in the West*, and in the author's mind, the drama had been deliberately and successfully revised to overcome its original flaws. Thus, Hunter chided Pilkington for obliterating the beneficial changes that had been made to the drama: "This script you sent me is so bad that I blush to think I had any part in it. The show will gradually sink [into] oblivion with this horseshit, because it is dull. You say the first half *runs long*—it stinks! If the audience is still in the theatre, I am surprised." Hunter concluded that, even if this script was "dramaturgically correct" or left no gaps in the storyline, "it [was] as dull as moose turds."<sup>35</sup>

Ultimately, Hunter was so disgusted with the regression of the 1979 script that he eagerly embraced an offer to revise the script two years later, justifying his intervention by claiming, "The simple fact is that the mental tastes of the people who come looking for entertainment are different from those of 1951." The script needed to be altered in order to target the evolving interests of the audience, creating a tension between the need to improve

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<sup>35</sup> Hayes, "A Study of Hero-Building and Myth Making in Three of Kermit Hunter's Outdoor Historical Epic Dramas," 160; Kermit Hunter to Ed [Pilkington], June 12, 1979, Southern Appalachian Historical Association Records.

the play and adapt it over time and the desire to recapture an older, seemingly more authentic, script.<sup>36</sup>

Hunter argued for authenticity through revision. By maintaining the richness that had been brought to the script over twenty-seven years of performance and by stripping the script of unnecessary material, Hunter returned characters to the center of the story. Promotion materials in 1981 claimed that the drama “offered less spectacle than similar plays in other places, but it [was] closer to the audience.” Over the decades, as directors sought to connect to audiences, they had drifted from the original storyline and Hunter’s original concepts. Hunter’s revisions in the late 1970s were meant specifically to restore not only the script’s authenticity but the audience relationship that it nurtured.<sup>37</sup>

“Even Boone’s old entertainment standard, *Horn in the West*, must change with the times if it is to survive,” opened a newspaper article in reference to another script revision in 1992. With Pilkington’s retirement at the end of the 1991 season, the SAHA “seized the chance” to once again refocus and redirect the drama. During his twenty-year tenure as director, Pilkington had allowed entertainment to overwhelm history. Despite the fact that the play was indeed entertainment, the SAHA, Hunter, and the general audience wanted more emphasis on history than Pilkington’s productions had allowed. Returning to a 1965 script that, ironically, was one of the scripts viewed as problematic during the 1972 revision, the 1992 revision clarified many historical questions left unanswered by the drama—questions once answered by lines since omitted from the play. Like many before it, the new revisions

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<sup>36</sup> Kermit Hunter to William Winkler, March 26, 1980, Southern Appalachian Historical Association Records.

<sup>37</sup> Bill Kund, “‘Horn in the West:’ Happiness Coupled With Serious Hard Work,” *Boone Mountain Times*, July 27, 1981.

“[gave] some continuity to the story line” and strove to reawaken local interest in the drama and increase tourist audiences. Yet, within a decade, directors were again using the 1956 script of *Horn in the West*. Curtis Smalling, director in 2001, chose not to edit the old script “in order to preserve the integrity of Dr. Hunter’s script.” The drama had become a historic relic, worthy of preservation in itself.<sup>38</sup>

Just as Smalling encountered the problem of unanswered questions in early *Horn in the West* scripts, director Michael Scialabba found it difficult to reconcile historic scripts with his audience’s interests. In 2004, Scialabba reverted to the very first of Kermit Hunter’s *Horn in the West* scripts for “authenticity’s sake,” the 1952 script that Hunter had acerbically berated Ed Pilkington for turning to in 1979. Scialabba wanted to emphasize the struggles of the drama’s ordinary pioneers over the heroism and accomplishments of the exceptional Daniel Boone, just as Hunter had originally intended. Scialabba’s strict use of the original 1952 script, however, proved incredibly unpopular because audiences expected to watch Daniel Boone’s exploits. When the 2005 season arrived, public anger from 2004 was so heightened that suspicious rumors spread that the director planned to completely remove Boone from the script.<sup>39</sup>

Scialabba did not last long, and the drama’s new director, Ian O’Connell, elected to expanding Daniel Boone’s role to accommodate public demand. Use of the 1952 script with minor alterations continued and, perhaps more importantly, was proudly publicized as an

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<sup>38</sup> Mark Goldstein, “Changes Hit ‘Horn in the West,’ Boone’s Outdoor Drama,” *Boone Mountain Times*, February 27, 1992; John O’Dowd, “Drama Tells Story of WNC Pioneers,” *Watauga Democrat*, June 20, 2001.

<sup>39</sup> Vora, “The Play’s the Thing,” 36; Jeff Eason, “Revolution in the Mountains: Horn in the West Returns to Original Script,” *Boone Mountain Times*, June 24, 2004; Frank Ruggiero, “The Horn Will Call to Daniel Once Again,” *Watauga Democrat*, March 23, 2005.

innovative victory for authenticity in the drama's promotional materials. Despite the fact that her predecessors had both used the 1952 script, 2007 director Cherie Elledge-Grapes's harkened "back to the original script as written many years ago" as a "new" development for *Horn in the West*. The next year, director Julie Richardson was praised for "bringing back an older script than today's audiences are used to." Regardless of the fact that all four directors were using the same script, promotional materials referred to each director's choices as new, exciting, respectful of tradition and legacy, and authentic to *Horn in the West* and the era—the 1950s—in which the drama had been born.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Ruggiero, "The Horn Will Call to Daniel Once Again," *Watauga Democrat*, March 23, 2005; Glenn Arnette, "Horn in the West, A North Carolina Experience and Treasure," [travelroads.com](http://travelroads.com), August 1, 2007; Sam Calhoun, "Horn is a Hit Again: Horn in the West Attendance Figures Up 12 Percent As Last Weekend Approaches," *High Country Press*, August 14, 2008.



**THE WILDERNESS ROAD:  
BRANDING THE NATION WITH DANIEL BOONE'S MEMORY**

Historical drama is just one way that Americans have tried to relate to Daniel Boone and the early American frontier. In *Horn in the West*, Kermit Hunter brought Daniel Boone to life as the leader and mentor of a group of frightened yet optimistic pioneers seeking a new life on the western frontier. Though Hunter's fictional settlers remained in northwestern North Carolina, Daniel Boone historically led many pioneers across the Appalachian Mountains into the heart of Kentucky.

In 1927, the Boone Family Association organized a pilgrimage from Asheville, North Carolina to Boonesborough, Kentucky in commemoration of their brave pioneer ancestors who had long ago made the arduous journey through the Appalachians, west along the Wilderness Road, and into Kentucky. Legend held that in 1775 in Boonesborough, under the "protecting boughs" of the elm, Judge Richard Henderson established a legislature for Kentucky with unique "American" characteristics unseen before in the colonies, and the Boone Family Association planned to commemorate this historic event and symbol of expansion by planting an elm where the legendary tree once stood. Assembling in Asheville, the commemorators dedicated the fledgling tree and commenced a journey along Boone's famous Wilderness Road, the trail Boone blazed for Henderson's land company, to Boonesborough where they would plant the elm "that it too, may live to be a shrine of American democracy."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *The Boone Family Association Invites You to Participate in the Boone Wilderness Road Pilgrimage* (Washington, DC: Boone Family Associates, 1927), 1.

The journey of the Boone Family Association was not unusual and, by the 1920s, had become a distinct American ritual. Mark Woods, superintendent of Cumberland Gap National Historical Park that preserves part of this path, wrote that the road “has been known by many names over the years, some associated with royalty, some with tragedy. But no name is more evocative of its role in American history than Wilderness Road. Today’s visitors, like the travelers who journeyed this way 225 years ago, can step back in time and once again share a path with Daniel Boone.” The Wilderness Road that Boone cleared to Kentucky has long been a destination for Americans seeking to memorialize Boone’s life and recapture his frontier spirit. Since the early twentieth century, Americans have tried to unite this forgotten path through the woods with Boone to create an “authentic” physical tie to the legend.<sup>2</sup>

In the first half of the twentieth century, efforts by the Daughters of the American Revolution and of the Boone Trail Highway and Memorial Association to mark Daniel Boone’s footsteps demonstrated two different historic trail-marking methodologies. The DAR used historical markers to preserve a private heritage via connection to the public figure of Daniel Boone. The BTHMA used historical markers to engage communities with their own heritage through commemoration of Boone. Both organizations employed symbolic monuments to create places of historical significance where Americans could touch Boone’s greatness. While the DAR wished to locate the “authentic” Wilderness Road, the BTHMA was more concerned with connecting communities to the memory of Boone’s travels and, thus, commemorating his pioneering spirit rather than his trail.

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<sup>2</sup> Mark Woods, “An Appalachian Tale: Restoring Boone’s Wilderness Road,” *CRM* 25, no. 5 (2002): 22.

“Wilderness Road” evokes images of untamed forest and romantic escapades. Near Kingsport, Tennessee, historically known as Long Island on the Holston, the part of the road traveled by Daniel Boone began, cutting westward through mountains into Kentucky at the Cumberland Gap. From the Gap, the Wilderness Road continued northward into the Bluegrass region. Boone first traveled the trail that had been used by Native Americans and migrating bison in 1769 on his way from North Carolina to Kentucky on a hunting expedition with John Finley. He saw potential in the rich hunting lands of Kentucky, but moving his family into the region proved difficult. In 1775, Judge Richard Henderson of North Carolina commissioned Boone and thirty other men to clear the existing hunting path between the Holston River in Tennessee and the Kentucky River. Boone’s undertaking became a harbinger of Manifest Destiny, a mythic symbol of the frontiersman powerfully carving out the wilderness allowing hundreds of thousands of Americans to expand the nation westward.<sup>3</sup>

From 1775 to 1810, 300,000 pioneers traveled to Kentucky on the Wilderness Road. But the Wilderness Road was not just a venue for pioneer migration into the Midwest, it was also an important commercial route through the southern part of the Appalachian Mountains. Decades later, even after settlers abandoned the road in favor of improved modes of transportation such as steamboats and trains, the Wilderness Road continued to be utilized as

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<sup>3</sup> Jere L. Krakow, “Location of the Wilderness Road at Cumberland Gap National Historical Park” (Washington, DC: United States Department of the Interior: National Park Service, 1987), 26, 27.

an important trade route, particularly for livestock, and communication between the South and the developing West.<sup>4</sup>

People have fixated not only on locating the historic Wilderness Road but also in marking the trail and commemorating Boone's life and connection to the road. Historians committed to recording the past and citizens intent on uniting the past to their civic pride have sought to preserve the memory of Boone's Wilderness Road and establish its historic role as central to the story of America's westward expansion.

In 1886, Thomas Speed published *The Wilderness Road: A Description of the Routes of Travel by which the Pioneers and Early Settlers First Came to Kentucky*. Speed was the first of many historians to methodically piece together the location of the Wilderness Road. His book was prepared through the Filson Club, a historical society founded two years earlier, dedicated to promoting the history of Kentucky. Subsequent authors added to Speed's initial study of the road by expanding on the detailed history of the path and celebrating the bravery of those who traveled it. Even as some historians continued to dig through archives in search of clues about the road's role in history, the character of the road and the heroism of pioneers such as Boone, who braved the wilderness and advanced the westward growth of the nation, increasingly fascinated others. Archer Hulbert and H. Addington Bruce, authors of historical accounts of the Wilderness Road in 1903 and 1910 respectively, tied the narrative of the Wilderness Road to the character of Daniel Boone. Whereas Speed's earlier study was packed with primary source evidence about the road, Hulbert's and Bruce's works

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<sup>4</sup> Harland D. Unrau, "Restoration of Historic Features: Cumberland Gap National Historical Park" (Washington, DC: United States Department of the Interior: National Park Service, 2002), 3; Krakow, "Location of the Wilderness Road at Cumberland Gap National Historical Park," 3.

portrayed the romanticism of the road. For instance, the first chapter of Hulbert's book is called "The Pilgrims of the West," drawing upon well-established American imagery of the pious founders of New England's civilization. Still, other historians focused on the details of the road's past. In 1911, Charles Augustus Hanna expanded on the details of the road around Cumberland Gap and discussed Native American use of the paths that became the Wilderness Road. In that same year, Mary Verhoeff became the first woman to publish through the Filson Club. Her account of the Wilderness Road introduced economic data about tolls and road funding.<sup>5</sup>

The popularity of literature on the Wilderness Road at the beginning of the twentieth century was complemented and encouraged by a growing awareness of the heritage associated with the road in the public mind. The Daughters of the American Revolution undertook the first major twentieth-century effort to commemorate Boone. At roughly the same time, Joseph Hampton Rich, a native of Mocksville, North Carolina, headed the Boone Trail Highway and Memorial Association and embarked on his own separate mission to brand the nation with Boone's memory. Like the historical literature on the Wilderness Road, early popular movements differed over the precise location of Boone's trail. Both the DAR's efforts and those of the BTHMA were meant foremost to ensure that the public would remember Boone's accomplishments and be inspired by his heroic life through symbolic

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<sup>5</sup> Thomas Speed, *The Wilderness Road: A Description of the Routes of Travel by which the Pioneers and Early Settlers First Came to Kentucky*, (Louisville, KY: John Morton and Company, 1886), 1; H. Addington Bruce, *Daniel Boone and the Wilderness Road* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1910); Archer Butler Hulbert, *Boone's Wilderness Road* (Cleveland, OH: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1903); Charles Augustus Hanna, *The Wilderness Trail or the Ventures and Adventures of the Pennsylvania Traders on the Allegheny Path with Some New Annals of the Old West, and the Records of Some Strong Men and Some Bad Ones in two Volumes* (New York: G. J. Putnam's Sons, 1911); Mary Verhoeff, *The Kentucky Mountains Transportation and Commerce, 1750 to 1911: A Study in the Economic History of a Coal Field* (Louisville, KY: John P. Morton and Company, 1911).

markers. Furthermore, these groups were inspired by an image of Boone similar to one painted by Robert Kincaid, a historian of the Wilderness Road and native of the Cumberland Gap region, for whom Daniel Boone was “the friend of Indians, the master of woodcraft, the founder of trails, the builder of roads, the engineer of settlements, the leader of pioneer settlers, to whom the officials of Virginia and North Carolina and the master of vast enterprises turned for superior guidance in the settlement days of Kentucky.”<sup>6</sup> Kincaid painted Boone as not only a rugged frontiersman but also as a leader and example to the nation.

Between 1913 and 1915, DAR chapters from North Carolina, Virginia, Tennessee, and Kentucky placed about forty markers at points associated with the Wilderness Road. The project was headed by the North Carolina DAR under the leadership of Lucy Bramlette Patterson, who was inspired to mark Boone’s trail by both nostalgia for her heritage and her desire to remind Americans of North Carolina’s role in American expansion. She stated at one point that “it seems strange that the Wilderness Road, naturally one of the most beautiful in the world, and historically one of the most interesting, should have been so long ‘unhonored and unsung.’” Her nostalgia stemmed from memories of her grandmother telling stories of Patterson’s great-great-grandfather who was killed near Cumberland Gap while travelling the Wilderness Road with Boone.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Robert Kincaid, “Preserving the Shrine,” Robert Kincaid Papers, CUGA 1887, Series 1, Box 1, Folder 7, National Park Service, Cumberland Gap National Historical Park, Middlesboro, KY.

<sup>7</sup> “Boone’s Trail Now Well Marked: D.A.R. Unveil Monument at Cumberland Gap to Commemorate Honor to Famous Pioneer,” *New York Times*, August 1, 1915; Lucy Bramlette Patterson, *Marking Daniel Boone’s Trail Through North Carolina* (Washington, D.C.: National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution, 1914), 224.

Patterson was also driven to restore the road to the American record. She claimed “not only was the trail through North Carolina lost, but even historians had forgotten North Carolina’s leading part in building this new-world Appian Way.” Since historians were not searching for the road’s remains, she led descendants of America’s revolutionary patriots in an endeavor to research and locate the trail through her home state. Thus, she ensured that prominent women of North Carolina would lead other states in reclaiming an American legacy, just as North Carolina had served as Daniel Boone’s starting point in his 1769 trek through the mountains. According to Patterson this was “eminently fitting.”<sup>8</sup>

Americans’ heritage and civic celebration were integral to the NC DAR’s efforts to mark Boone’s trail. As soon as Patterson attempted to locate Boone’s trail in North Carolina, she realized that she had asked her fellow Daughters to “mark a trail that couldn’t be found.” Thus, the society conducted research by uncovering the heritage of living Americans who knew of the former path. By the 1910s, at least one hundred years had passed since the heyday of Wilderness Road pioneer traffic had crossed through the mountains. However, the road had still been used widely (though altered, improved, and redirected) throughout the nineteenth century. Thus, there was some hope that living memory would reveal the relative whereabouts of the legendary road. The DAR also spoke with Boone’s living descendants and those of other prominent figures in the Wilderness Road’s history, including a descendant of Judge Richard Henderson who possessed papers relevant to Wilderness Road research.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Patterson, *Marking Daniel Boone’s Trail Through North Carolina*, 222.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 223.

Civic celebration was a key component to the DAR's trail marking project, but this was limited and often an exclusive celebration. Because the primary goal of the project was to raise awareness of American pioneer heritage in North Carolina and other states, the unveiling of each monument was presented as a celebration for locals and civic officials alike. In Shallow Ford, North Carolina, guests to the 1914 unveiling of a marker followed the trail, listened to school children sing patriotic songs, and enjoyed a picnic amid the historic landscape now officially authenticated by a DAR marker. In Boone, North Carolina, a monument was unveiled on the grounds of the Watauga County Courthouse, attended by nearly six-hundred guests.<sup>10</sup>

Many of these events were by invitation only, limiting citizen attendance and claim to the heritage preserved by the DAR. Specifically, the DAR was partial to the heritage of its own members who, like Lucy Patterson, had familial connections to Boone and the Wilderness Road. The DAR also sought to preserve a heritage for select individuals, mainly those descended from Boone and his fellow Wilderness Road travelers. In general, however, a marker erected at the site of Fort Boonesborough in Kentucky by the DARs of North Carolina, Virginia, Tennessee, and Kentucky revealed the broader commemoration, specifically the accomplishments of Americans of European descent: "In testimony of the gratitude of posterity for the historic service of cutting for the Transylvania Company. The Transylvania Trail, the first great pathway to the West, March-April 1775 from the Long Island of Holston River Tennessee to Otter Creek Kentucky by that gallant band of Axemen

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<sup>10</sup> Daughters of the American Revolution, *Markers Placed by the North Carolina Daughters of the American Revolution* (Raleigh, NC: Edwards & Broughton Company, 1940), 30; Patterson, *Marking Daniel Boone's Trail Through North Carolina*, 222, 223.



Pioneers and Indian fighters who at the risk and loss of life opened the doors of destiny to the white race in Kentucky and the West.”<sup>11</sup> Thirty men (including Daniel Boone and one “Negro Man”) and two women (Rebecca Boone Hays and a “Negro Woman”) are acknowledged on the marker, but the accomplishment and destiny of the “white race” was at the heart of the DAR’s tributes.

In 1915, DAR members from these same four states collaborated on a monument at the saddle of Cumberland Gap which commemorated not only Boone’s passage through the Gap, but his travels from North Carolina’s Yadkin Valley through each represented state. The monument also symbolized the shared heritage and social prominence of the four state DARs. Local citizens and government officials came to the unveiling in “wagons, in hacks, in buggies, in automobiles, on horseback, and on foot,” a fitting array of transportation that showed just how far society had advanced since Boone’s days. The prominent placement of markers and the incorporation of societal leaders, young generations, and civic officials established Boone’s memory firmly in the minds of North Carolinians and confirmed its importance and relevance to their everyday lives. Still, the DAR’s memorialization of Daniel Boone and the Wilderness Road narrowly focused on elevating the elite heritage of the Wilderness Road’s creators and earliest travelers while celebrating those select individuals’ contributions to the nation.<sup>12</sup>

In 1913, Joseph Hampton Rich, a native of Davie County, North Carolina where Daniel Boone and his parents once lived, embarked on a twenty-five year quest to establish

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<sup>11</sup> Marker, Fort Boonesborough, Kentucky, erected by the Daughters of the American Revolution of North Carolina, Virginia, Tennessee, and Kentucky, Under the Auspices of the Transylvanias of Henderson, Kentucky, 1935.

<sup>12</sup> “Boone’s Trail Now Well Marked,” *New York Times*, August 1, 1915.

Daniel Boone markers across the nation. Rich's inspiration for his project likely stemmed from a childhood spent on land alleged to have been the homestead of Daniel Boone's parents. Even though Rich's interest in memorializing Boone coincided with that of the DAR, he imagined a different purpose for the markers. Where the DAR sought to commemorate a specific heritage directly linked to events and precise locations along the Wilderness Road, Rich wanted to honor Boone in the public sphere by placing markers in prominent civic spaces where they would engage communities. Public access was key to Rich's efforts. While the DAR sought authenticity of place, Rich wanted to establish an authenticity of spirit, a celebration of American individualism. In this sense, Rich shared a vision similar to Kermit Hunter who had argued that the story of *Horn in the West* represented "ultimate truth" involving the "spirit of history"—the general symbolism and meaning of the past that embodied a legacy.<sup>13</sup>

In 1913, Rich founded the Boone Trail Highway and Memorial Association with the initial goal of building "an arterial highway to reclaim the counties of the northwestern part of the state." Rich's vision for the association soon became much broader as he realized the power of uniting the historic wilderness trail with the need for improved highways in North Carolina. Eventually, the Boone Trail Highway and Memorial Association joined the Good Roads Movement in promoting a trans-continental highway dedicated to Daniel Boone who, the project argued, was himself a pioneer of American roads through his legendary blazing of the Wilderness Road. Rich saw this union as a chance to promote what he called "Americanism" or "loyalty and devotion to the nation." Furthermore, he promoted these

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<sup>13</sup> Kermit Hunter, "History or Drama?" *South Atlantic Bulletin* 19, no. 1 (May 1953): 4.

qualities among school-children, campaigning for schools to erect markers which children could care for lessons in civic preservation.<sup>14</sup>

The markers that Rich erected across the United States came in many shapes and forms. The most common resembled arrow heads with mounted bronze plaques inscribed with text and an image of Boone. There were also buffalo and bear shaped markers. Each of these shapes symbolized Boone's frontier lore. The most common marker shapes were arrow heads, reminding Americans of Boone's association with natives. Buffalo markers reflected Boone's relationship with the hunting grounds, while bear markers reflected his prowess through connection to a specific Boone legend of later settlers finding a tree alongside the Watauga River in Tennessee engraved with "D. Boon Cilled a Bar on tree in the Year 1760."

Whereas the DAR had been concerned with marking an actual trail traversed by Daniel Boone, Joseph Hampton Rich was more concerned with combining civic involvement with Boone's heritage while improving rural roadways. As Rich's biographer Everett Marshall noted, Rich was "no historian." Though he had a background in journalism and was talented in public relations, he was more concerned with action, ceremony, and impact than historical accuracy. He also had an interest in using his monuments as educational tools, involving school-children and Boy Scouts in the project by encouraging them to become care-takers of the monuments. Likewise, many monuments were commissioned by and

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<sup>14</sup> Everett Gary Marshall, *Rich Man, Daniel Boone: An Historical Report on the Boone Trail Highway and Memorial Association, chartered by the state of North Carolina in 1913, Joseph Hampton Rich, Managing-Director* (Dugspur, VA: Sugar Tree Enterprises, 2003), 15, 27, 31.

erected outside of schools and other civic institutions as symbols of local patriotism and support for Boone's legacy.<sup>15</sup>

Each of Rich's monuments represented to the State Legislature a public interest in improving North Carolina roads. Furthermore, each individual or organization that commissioned a Boone Trail Highway and Memorial Association marker received membership in the association and a subscription to the association's publication, *The Boone Trail Herald*. The association relied on these commissions for profit and funds for future projects. Thus, Rich's markers represented the spread of local interests in his quest to promote better roadways and American heritage, rather than the actual travels of Daniel Boone. In fact, a large number of Rich's markers were placed in locations where Boone certainly never traveled or where there is no record of him traveling.<sup>16</sup>

Over twenty-five years, Rich and the Boone Trail Highway and Memorial Association placed 358 markers, spanning from Virginia Beach to San Francisco. The San Francisco marker was, according to Rich, placed as a symbol of Boone, the quintessential American pioneer blazing a path ever westward. Even though Boone never lived to see American expansion into California, Rich believed Boone's spirit would have taken him there had he the chance.<sup>17</sup>

Rich's more liberal philosophy of trail marking reflects theories still held today on how best to engage the public in history when the public is more interested in convenient destination travel than meandering through the wilderness in search of an "authentic"

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>16</sup> Terry Harmon, "Daniel Boone Days: Marking Boone's Local Trails," *Boone High Country Press*, August 14, 2008.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

experience. In 2009, Randell Jones, author of *In the Footsteps of Daniel Boone*, stated “As interesting to some as is the physical route that Daniel Boone took in his sojourns through the Carolina Piedmont, a heritage route supported by tourism dollars would be best served by choosing a route that moves people from one documented spot to the next, where there is something to see and where cash registers await.” Both the Daughters of the American Revolution and the Boone Trail Highway and Memorial Association memorialized pioneers’ paths through the wilderness. Intended to remind Americans of the great American frontier, by combining tourism, both efforts epitomized most effectively the relationship between tourism, civic pride, community, and history at the heart of heritage tourism.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Randell Jones, “Following Daniel Boone: Out of the Yadkin Valley,” *Yadkin Valley Historical Association* (August 2009): 3.

## CUMBERLAND GAP NATIONAL PARK: RECONSTRUCTING THE FRONTIER

In Middlesboro, Kentucky, Frederick Jackson Turner's words "stand at Cumberland Gap and watch the procession of civilization, marching single file . . . and the frontier has passed by" have continued to inspire the focus and mission of Cumberland Gap National Historical Park, which considers itself "a monument to Turner's frontier theory." The park identifies the Gap's national significance as "one of the first passageways through the Appalachian Mountains for westward expansion of the country" and the partial route of the Wilderness Road "made famous by pioneers such as Daniel Boone." Today, the park is actively trying to restore the eighteenth-century landscape of Cumberland Gap so that tourists can stand at the Gap, like Frederick Jackson Turner, Daniel Boone, and countless American pioneers, and witness the glory and promise of the frontier. However, in its quest to create an "authentic" eighteenth-century landscape, Cumberland Gap NHP is perpetuating a Western ideology that holds wilderness as sacred and true. Thus, the park's restoration project raises questions about why the wilderness environment of the Gap is considered authentic and why the park would go to such drastic lengths to "restore" this frontier landscape to the Cumberland Gap.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1996), 12; "Interpretive Prospectus, 1971," NHPS Resource Management Record Collection, CUGA 5585, Series 5, Subseries 1, Box 1, Folder 1A, Cumberland Gap National Historical Park, Middlesboro, KY.; "Development Concept Plan and Interpretive Prospectus Meeting, 1989," NHPS Resource Management Record Collection, CUGA 5585, Series 2, Subseries 2, Box 2, Folder 4, Cumberland Gap National Historical Park; Cumberland Gap National Historical Park, "Restoration of the Cumberland Gap and the Wilderness Road Development Concept Plan, Environmental Assessment, Interpretive Plan Draft" (Washington, DC: United States Department of the Interior: National Park Service, 1990), 3.

Cumberland Gap NHP's mission to restore the Gap as closely as possible to its appearance in the late eighteenth century is closely tied to a desire to represent the mythic frontier as an "authentic" setting in American history. The idea pervades this quest that the wilderness truly was virgin, untouched by the corrupting hands of humans; Native Americans did not corrupt the land according to the myth, as they were a part of it, as natural to the ecosystem of the wilderness as were the animals. It was the civilizers, the white traders and trailblazers followed by throngs of other white men and their families who began the alterations to the "natural" habitat of the Cumberland Gap. The very evidence of American improvement thus serves as the antithesis to the origin story the park wishes to convey. If the evidence of progress and development are visible, then the lack of those things cannot be imagined, and modern Americans deserve access to the experience of that environment from which progress emerged so that they can better understand the accomplishments of those quintessential Americans who left all they knew to forge their own way and create a new world.

In the case of Cumberland Gap, the myth of a pure and uncorrupted wilderness represents the authentic inspiration for those pioneers and trailblazers that Frederick Jackson Turner held were literally transformed into Americans by their experience on the frontier. Unlike historical objects that are either authentic (actually what they are said to be) or not authentic (forgeries), Cumberland Gap in its modern state, littered with modern roads and physically altered by modern construction, was deemed not authentic. It was not, according to the park, the gap that pioneers crossed through because it did not evoke, in its modern state, the same feelings and inspiration as that historic gap must have. Thus, the argument

was made to restore the gap to its inspirational authentic frontier state, implying that the authentic eighteenth-century Cumberland Gap, according to the national park, is defined by its ability to convey inspiration and awe to those who traverse it.

Cumberland Gap NHP was established in an Act of Congress on June 11th, 1940 as “a public park for the benefit and inspiration of the people.” At the time the National Park was established, most Americans had never heard of the Cumberland Gap, and those who had knew of it only through the gap’s relation to Daniel Boone. Cumberland Gap was just one part of Boone’s famed Wilderness Road; but it was the key to Boone’s westward passage across the Appalachians.<sup>2</sup>

Boone by no means discovered the gap, although most Americans have never considered nor heard of the animals, American Indians, or Englishmen who traversed the gap before him. Cumberland Gap itself was created by millions of years of wind and water erosion. A stream once flowed where the Gap sits now, but it was redirected to the Cumberland River by an upthrust of the earth’s mantle. Subsequently, a low spot was left between the mountains that was then subject to the forces of wind and water. Animals were the first trailblazers to bridge the gap through Cumberland Mountain. Migrating herds of bison carved a trail over many centuries as they traveled in search of grazing lands and salt licks. The well-trampled path through the gap presented an ideal trail for Native Americans traveling between villages. The “Warriors’ Path” was the most significant Native American trail through the Gap. It stretched from the Ohio River, through the gap, and looped around to

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<sup>2</sup> Cumberland Gap National Historical Park, “Restoration of the Cumberland Gap and the Wilderness Road Development Concept Plan,” 3.



the Eastern side of the Appalachians to the Shenandoah Valley. Branches of the path south of the gap connected Shawnee settlements in the North along the Ohio River to Cherokee and Creek settlements farther south. A newspaper article about the gap hailed its connection to native heritage, stating that “Pontiac used it when he united the American Indian Nations from the Great Lakes to the Gulf. Tecumseh used it when he roused the Native American tribes from Canada to Florida to make a last stand against the spread of the Europeans.”<sup>3</sup>

By the time Gabriel Arthur, who is credited as the first Colonial Englishman to come upon the Gap, laid eyes on it in the 1600s, Cumberland Gap was well established as a transportation route. Dr. Thomas Walker traversed the Gap in the 1750s and named the Gap after the British Duke of Cumberland. In the 1760s, Virginia Judge Richard Henderson commissioned Daniel Boone to determine the productivity of lands in Kentucky, and later, Boone was asked to clear a trail in order to ease access into the rich and fertile lands of Kentucky. This trail was, of course, the Wilderness Road.

Even though Daniel Boone did not discover the gap or the path that led him to it, as the force of his legend suggests, he did “build” the Wilderness Road that allowed tens of thousands of American pioneers to cross the Appalachian Mountains into the west. The road that the bison, the Cherokee, the Shawnee, and Dr. Thomas Walker used was not fit for wagon traffic. Thus, Boone might in fact be credited with paving the way for white

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<sup>3</sup> Jere L. Krakow, “Location of the Wilderness Road at Cumberland Gap National Historical Park” (Washington, DC: United States Department of the Interior: National Park Service, 1987), 13, 30; “Mission 66 for Cumberland Gap National Historical Park” (c.1961), NHPs Resource Management Record Collection, CUGA 5585, Series 2, Subseries 5, Box 5, Folder 7, Cumberland Gap National Historical Park; Harland D. Unrau, “Restoration of Historic Features: Cumberland Gap National Historical Park” (Washington, DC: United States Department of the Interior: National Park Service, 2002), 3; “Cumberland Gap Tunnel,” *The Claiborne Press*, October 23, 1996.

settlement beyond the Appalachians. According to Frederick Jackson Turner's vision of the frontier, Boone was the first civilizer of the Cumberland Gap and the wilderness of Kentucky. Thus, by extension the Gap itself symbolizes the spread of American civilization according to Robert Kincaid, historian and early supporter of Cumberland Gap NHP.<sup>4</sup>

From 1775 to 1810, an estimated 200,000 to 300,000 pioneers traveled through the Cumberland Gap as they migrated westward. Virginia and later Kentucky passed legislation to maintain and improve the road as befitting its essential role in the transport of people, livestock, and commercial goods. However, by the 1830s, the Cumberland Gap had lost its innovative edge. Steamboat travel and canals such as the Chesapeake and Ohio, Erie, and Pennsylvania Mainline provided western routes for travelers and migrants from the North and the East. These new and efficient methods of travel drew people away from the arduous mountain path through the gap. Throughout the nineteenth century, the Wilderness Road was continuously altered and improved as it continued to serve as a major commercial transit route; but its importance during America's great Westward Expansion was slowly forgotten.<sup>5</sup>

During the Civil War, the gap was an important strategic point held by both Union and Confederate armies at different times. Soldiers cleared the mountains of vegetation to improve their visibility, but they also erased for some time the remnants of wilderness that had given Boone's road its name. In 1929, the government built the Dixie Highway (US 25E) from the Great Lakes to Florida, and it had to course through the gap. Ironically, the construction of the Dixie Highway caused Cumberland Gap NHP much grief, even as it

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<sup>4</sup> Robert Kincaid, "Preserving the Shrine," Robert Kincaid Papers, CUGA 1887, Series 1, Box 1, Folder 7, Cumberland Gap National Historical Park.

<sup>5</sup> "Dedication of the Wilderness Road and Cumberland Gap, October 19, 2002," National Park Service, Cumberland Gap National Historical Park.

increased tourist flow through the gap and raised awareness of its historical significance. Commemorative efforts, such as those of Joseph Hampton Rich and the Daughters of the American Revolution, had brought local attention to Cumberland Gap's role in American expansion. The construction of a major US Highway through the gap provided an incentive for more Americans to travel through the area.

As a historic park, Cumberland Gap is rich with a past that can be interpreted through many lenses. The geological significance of Cumberland Gap as the "path of least resistance" through the Appalachian Mountains means, not surprisingly that the gap has played an important role throughout the past; yet, it is the Wilderness Road and the story of Daniel Boone that have continually guided the park's interpretation. Since the creation of Cumberland Gap NHP in the 1940s, the park's mission has aimed primarily to teach visitors about the importance of the gap in America's westward expansion and the struggles of people who traveled through it.

According to Cumberland Gap NHP Historian Martha Wiley, the national park's interpretation started to incorporate a more diverse past in the 1970s and 1980s. At this time, the park shifted some of its attention away from Daniel Boone, the Wilderness Road, geological history, and the Civil War, in order to bring the Gap's industrial and local history to light. An iron furnace, located in the town of Cumberland Gap, Tennessee allows the park to interpret the industrial history of the area. The gap also is home to the remnants of an object lesson road, which was a macadamized road built by the government in an effort to show travelers technological improvements in early twentieth-century road construction. In fitting opposition to industry and technology, the Hensley Settlement brings to light the story

of an early twentieth-century mountain community isolated from industrial progress whose residents retained a lifestyle similar to that of their pioneer ancestors.<sup>6</sup>

Ironically, when it came to the Wilderness Road, the park had very little physical and, more problematically, visual material with which to work. The park's 1971 interpretive prospectus stated a major interpretive impediment that the park had faced since its creation: "Most of the park's interpretive themes are conceptual rather than physical in nature; [and] most of the park's interpretive resources are physical rather than conceptual. Visitors can view the Gap but find it difficult to conceive how the Gap was formed or the difficulty that faced the pioneer moving through it." Thus, even though the Cumberland Gap is considered the most central primary source that the national park has to work with, the Gap and its surrounding landscape have changed dramatically over time distorting the apparent connection between the landscape of the park and the history of America's westward expansion.<sup>7</sup>

Overall, while the park actively strives to balance its interpretation of the Wilderness Road, the Civil War, geological features, industry, and the Hensley Settlement, the Wilderness Road continues to drive the park's interpretive focus today, and overcoming the limitations of this interpretation has become a central priority for the park administration. While critics might perceive that the park interpretation centers on the Wilderness Road at the expense of other historical events, the Wilderness Road and Daniel Boone inspired the formation of Cumberland Gap NHP in the 1940s and have shaped the development of the

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<sup>6</sup> Martha Wiley visit to Cumberland Gap NHP with author, October 5, 2011

<sup>7</sup> "Interpretive Prospectus, 1971"; Cumberland Gap National Historical Park, "Restoration of the Cumberland Gap and the Wilderness Road Development Concept Plan," 3.

park ever since. To this end, the park's desire to tell the story of the Wilderness Road, and its creator Daniel Boone, has come to drive the largest and most ambitious restoration project in the history of the National Park Service.<sup>8</sup>

Today, the park is striving to physically restore the mountain landscape to its eighteenth-century appearance. Cumberland Gap has exceeded the ambitions of groups such as the DAR and the Boone Trail Highway and Memorial Association who simply wished to mark historic paths. In the 1940s, as the plans to designate and open Cumberland Gap NHP were well underway, Robert Kincaid categorized every commemorative effort before the 1940s as "feeble, ineffective, and sometimes fantastic." One commemoration of which Kincaid undoubtedly spoke was the DAR's historic marker placed at the saddle of the gap in 1915. In Kincaid's opinion, no effort had successfully personified the significance of the gap in American history.<sup>9</sup>

Kincaid's hopes would eventually be realized as Cumberland Gap NHP's administration began seriously pursuing plans to restore the Gap to its "authentic" appearance, circa 1790 to 1810. The *Oxford English Dictionary* offers a number of definitions for "restoration" that shed light on the enormity of Cumberland Gap's ambition. Most plainly, restoration is "the process of carrying out alterations and repairs with the idea of restoring a building to something like its original form." However, given the fact that Cumberland Gap is the primary focus of a historical park, the gap itself is often considered a historical object. Thus, another definition, usually applied to art or museum artifacts applies

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<sup>8</sup> "50 Year Old Dream Coming True at Cumberland Gap National Historical Park," US Department of the Interior News Release, August 8, 2002.

<sup>9</sup> Robert Kincaid, "Preserving the Shrine."

to the gap: restoration is “the action, process, or result of restoring something to an unimpaired or perfect condition . . . [or] to its (supposed) original condition.” This definition thus asks in the case of Cumberland Gap, what was the gap’s original or unimpaired state? The answer to park administrators, as clearly shown through statements of park officials, is that the unimpaired gap was what European and American settlers encountered in the eighteenth century.<sup>10</sup>

Here, in the belief that the purest most authentic Cumberland Gap was that which existed before its encounter by European settlers, lies the most powerful driving force of the gap’s place in American expansionist mythology as well as the greatest theoretical weakness in the park’s quest to justify the restoration of Cumberland Gap. While Cumberland Gap’s interpretation is consistently on the cutting edge of museum theories incorporating multicultural views and questioning the assumption that white Americans forged their own westward path, its vision reflects a nostalgia for a past that continues to elevate the importance of European-Americans by suggesting that they were solely responsible for those changes to Cumberland Gap environment, changes that have somehow tarnished the gap’s authenticity. Essentially, the park is distinguishing one period of human and environmental impact from others.

In 1971, the park’s interpretive prospectus proposed a twofold orientation to the American Wilderness. One story told through an introductory film would portray the pioneer’s viewpoint, while a museum exhibit would focus on the wilderness prior to 1750. This exhibit would paint a mosaic of “virgin forests, plants, animals, pristine waterways,

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<sup>10</sup> Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. “Restoration,” <http://www.oed.com> (accessed December 30, 2011).

thunderstorms, wild fires, seasonal changes, animal pathways, Indians going to the hunt and returning with their catch, and finally the impact of the easterner as the first major trail was cut through the land.” It sought to make visitor’s to the park aware of the threats felt by pioneers that “Off the trail lurked the Indian, the outlaw, wild bear, each seeking to protect his territory or looking for an easy prey.” This was the park’s vision of the wilderness that they hoped to restore albeit cosmetically, to Cumberland Gap. It was the land as it theoretically appeared unchanged, until it was somehow altered by the presence of European Americans. Native Americans, then, were only partially integrated into the park’s wilderness perspective focus, included when the park realized the need to include a more substantial story about the Native American presence around the gap before and during the focal period from 1790 to 1810. A number of problems exist with this portrayal of Indians. For instance, the equation of Indians to wild animals reflects an image of native savagery compared to white civilization. Indeed, the prospectus even claimed inspiration from the words of George Robertson that glorified pioneers as “Missionaries in the cause of civilization.”<sup>11</sup>

Notably, the park made major inroads in plans to restore the gap during the 1970s, although ground was not broken in the project until the 1990s. Today, the exhibit in the visitor’s center, designed from 2001 to 2003 in coincidence with the opening of the restored gap, provides a much more dynamic image of natives, their culture, and their use of Indian paths that became Boone’s Wilderness Road. However, the gap frequented by natives prior to its heavy use by European Americans is still portrayed as an unchanging world that had

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<sup>11</sup> George Robertson, quoted in Cumberland Gap National Historical Park, “Interpretive Prospectus, 1971.”

remained relatively the same for thousands of years; once again perpetuating the view that white civilization robbed the gap of its authenticity.

Environmental historian William Cronon argues differently. Cronon noted that the idea of a frontier wilderness is a Western cultural construction that arose out of a bourgeois need to escape the civilization in which he lived and find solace in a world untouched by that civilization. In the wilderness, “tourists could safely enjoy the illusion that they were seeing their nation in its pristine, original state, in the new morning of God’s creation.” At once it is a place not affected by human presence, and yet, it is often lamented as a place where the humans who experienced it were somehow purer than those humans living in modern society. In his 1955 newspaper article, Cabell Phillips advertised the newly opened park’s setting, noting that beyond the area around US 25E “This is about as primitive a country, a mile or so back from the highway, as one will find in the East . . . the main park area consists of wild, untouched mountain land that has changed little since the days of the Shawnees and the pioneers.” Phillips described the “true” Cumberland Gap as “untouched,” and yet he noted the presence of Indians and pioneers. Here, the expression of one American shows the sheer nostalgia for a world perceived as untainted by Western civilization.<sup>12</sup>

In 1987, Jere L. Krakow described the series of events through which European Americans destroyed the gap’s environment beginning in the late eighteenth century: “exploitation became the rule in an unrestricted economic environment” as “a boom-bust psychology led to a trial and error system which created considerable change in the landscape and environment over time.” White settlers and travelers cleared the way for wider, better

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<sup>12</sup> William Cronon, *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* (New York: Norton & Co., 1996), 78, 79; Cabell Phillips, “Cumberland Park,” *New York Times*, September 4, 1955.



roads using the timber to fire industrial furnaces. Competing armies cleared mountain hillsides during the Civil War to create better vantage points, eliminating much of the vegetation at the height of pioneer travel. In the twentieth century, engineers blasted through the rocks to create a bed for highway 25E, and over the years this road too was widened and improved further, altering the gap's landscape from its perceived primal state.<sup>13</sup>

Krakow lists every alteration to the gap's landscape as a negative destruction of the former frontier land, and yet every one of those changes was seen by its contemporaries as an improvement to society. Cronon noted that "if one saw the wild lands of the frontier as freer, truer, and more natural than other, more modern places, then one was also inclined to see the cities and factories of urban-industrial civilization as confining, false, and artificial." Thus, Cumberland Gap NHP's belief that the environment of the gap is most authentically represented by its appearance during the mass westward migration of American pioneers shows how deeply this idea is embedded in American culture: that civilization harms the environment. Based on this premise, the park has chosen to erase the evidence of two hundred years of American use and alteration to the lands around Cumberland Gap in order to restore what the park views as a purer and more sacred portion of the gap's history.<sup>14</sup>

Since the park's opening in the 1950s, administrators argued the necessity of restoring a more "authentic" appearance to the gap. Jere Krakow's study on the location of the Wilderness Road claims that plans to remove highway 25E were motivated both by the desire to restore a historic landscape and as a means to improve a treacherous stretch of road.

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<sup>13</sup> Krakow, "Location of the Wilderness Road at Cumberland Gap National Historical Park," 15.

<sup>14</sup> Cronon, *Uncommon Ground*, 77.

As early as 1956, the director of Cumberland Gap NHP, E. T. Scoyen, voiced the desire for the “restoration of the Gap to approximately its original topography” and the removal of highway 25E “from the scene” preferably through a tunnel. The states of Kentucky and Virginia were also concerned with the danger of the road and were simultaneously making plans to widen the highway through the park. Of course, for the park, simply widening the existing highway threatened the restoration of the gap’s historic landscape. Consequently, Cumberland Gap NHP and the states of Virginia and Kentucky agreed that rerouting 25E through a mountain tunnel would be the best solution. However, the respective states’ refused to fund the construction project , delaying construction of a tunnel for 25E.<sup>15</sup>

In 1973, the Appalachian Regional Commission studied and proposed alternative plans to reroute 25E. Subsequently, the federal government’s Public Law 93-87 approved funds “to finance the cost of reconstruction and relocation of Route 25E through the Cumberland Gap National Historical Park, including construction of a tunnel and the approaches thereto, so as to permit restoration of the Gap and provide adequate traffic capacity.” The government concluded that the National Park Service should undertake the project. Finally in 1978, the Highway Trust Fund allocated money to begin the long process of restoring the gap and relocating Route 25E. One year later, the NPS issued a Master Plan for the project that stated the project’s goal to “relocate US 25E from the historic Gap to a better location and then to re-create a wilderness appearance at the Gap which prevailed

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<sup>15</sup> Krakow, “Location of the Wilderness Road at Cumberland Gap National Historical Park,” 9.

during the heyday of the Wilderness Road.” Ultimately, troubles obtaining full funding meant another decade passed before ground broke on the long awaited project.<sup>16</sup>

The arguments that the park used to justify the arduous and costly restoration of the Gap were based upon decades of discussion. The most prominent justification was that restoring the Gap’s environment as closely as possible to its appearance when Daniel Boone and 300,000 pioneers traveled through it would enhance the visitor experience. The strength in this justification was that it fell thoroughly in line with the park’s long-standing mission to help park visitors understand and relate to Cumberland Gap NHP through their experiences. At the same time, this justification implies that visitors expected or would better appreciate the Cumberland Gap and its historical significance if they could see it in its “virgin” state, prior to the arrival of European Americans.<sup>17</sup>

Since the development of the park’s interpretive agenda in the 1950s, the administration has focused on relating the significance of Cumberland Gap’s history through the visitor’s experience. Even before the park opened in 1955, historian Robert Kincaid conveyed his own familiar experience with the aura of the Gap: “Linger awhile, whisper these phantom legions. Listen to the stories of hardship and suffering, of unconquerable purpose and empirical conquests. Feel the impulses of the frontiersman, sense the might and mastery of the mountains, brood over the drama of the heroic age when men were free to

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<sup>16</sup> Cumberland Gap National Historical Park, “Restoration of the Cumberland Gap and the Wilderness Road Development Concept Plan,” 3; “Tunnel History Timeline,” NHPS Resource Management Record Collection, CUGA 5585, Series 11, Associated Tunnel Records, Box 3, Folder 3, Cumberland Gap National Historical Park.

<sup>17</sup> “Statement for Interpretation—Individual Activity Plans, 1977,” NHPS Resource Management Record Collection, CUGA 5585, Series 5, Subseries 1, Box 1, Folder 3, Cumberland Gap National Historical Park.

explore, to conquer, and to enjoy the fruits of their victories, glimpse the whole perspective of a nation's growth, widening its frontiers, developing its heritages, and building its civilization."<sup>18</sup>

Where Kincaid spoke of the emotions visitors to the gap could feel, journalist Cabell Phillips noted that even for the “more literal minded, traces of that very Wilderness Trail hacked out of the virgin forests by Daniel Boone and a party of soldier-laborers in 1775, are still visible through the underbrush.” The park administration recognized a “potential [in the park] for transmitting significant human values and historical lessons to the visitor,” and so they set a goal to inspire emotions –much like Kincaid’s sentiments—in their guests. However, the park administration perceived the modernized landscape of the park and gap as a hindrance to the visitor’s ability to adequately imagine, feel, and experience the history of the Wilderness Road. According to a park study, the “existing topography, lack of mature vegetation immediately adjacent to some sections of the Wilderness Road, and presence of modern development create a scene that is different from the historical appearance of the gap and Wilderness Road of the 1780-1810 time frame” and the presence of a landscape “that represents as closely as possible.” The 1780-1810 appearance of the gap is “essential to providing the desired visitor experience.” To further illustrate the difficulty that modern structures lent to the imagery of the gap, Cabell Phillips, who once hailed the gap as “One of the most romantic spots in pioneer American history,” described a not-so-romantic scene in which “a railroad and a modern highway pass through, and gaudy souvenir stands and neon-lighted motels” line the road. As was typical of the early criticism of the gap, Phillips

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<sup>18</sup> Kincaid, “Preserving the Shrine.”

actually considered these last features in a favorable light. The modern buildings “attest that there is already flourishing tourist traffic into the area” according to Phillips; and despite “these distractions” “the untamed ruggedness of these Cumberland hills, and the sense of vast, unpeopled loneliness which they convey can be felt.”<sup>19</sup>

The park did not have “an historic resource to interpret” in its view, or at least not one that they deemed adequate. Through the restoration of the gap, the park sought to create a sense of place where visitors could walk in the footsteps of Daniel Boone and through this connection enrich their own understandings of the nation’s history. The staff and administration envisioned the power of the Gap to convey “some conception of the dangers and hardships endured” by pioneers, as well as an understanding of how the Gap was created by natural forces. Most importantly, the park administration hoped that the gap itself would be able to speak for its own role in the epic of American westward expansion and conquest of the trans-Appalachian frontier.<sup>20</sup>

Enhancing the visitor experience has been central to the park throughout its existence. In Mission 66, the park’s 1966 initiative to construct access roads, walking paths, picnic areas, information centers and other features to facilitate the visitor experience, the administration observed that the chance to partake in a “wilderness experience” was one benefit of Cumberland Gap NHP. Mission 66 states that “by taking himself into the outlying areas of the park, [the visitor] can closely approximate the sights and sounds common to the

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<sup>19</sup> Cabell Phillips, “Cumberland Park”; “Master Plan for the Preservation and Use of Cumberland Gap National Historical Park, 1961,” NHPs Resource Management Record Collection, CUGA 5585, Series 2, Subseries 1, Box 1, Folder 9, Cumberland Gap National Historical Park; Cumberland Gap National Historical Park, “Restoration of the Cumberland Gap and the Wilderness Road Development Concept Plan,” 4.

<sup>20</sup> “Development Concept Plan and Interpretive Prospectus Meeting, 1989,” Cumberland Gap National Historical Park; “Master Plan, 1961,” Cumberland Gap National Historical Park.

pioneers who once followed the Wilderness Road.” This plan also realized that “The great challenge ahead [for the park] is to bring the physical setting alive. To breath the spirit of past adventure and human striving into the mountains and valleys, to provide a wilderness experience, and to combine art and nature into a pleasing and provocative whole.” Similarly, five years later, the park stated that Cumberland Gap’s “Interpretation should instill a feeling for the land through which the warrior, the explorer-pioneer and settler passed.”<sup>21</sup>

Once Cumberland Gap NHP’s goal to restore the Gap was put into motion in the late 1970s, these tenuous hopes for the park to convey sensory experiences and historical lessons to the public became more concrete objectives. By 1990, the park’s Development Concept Plan, Environmental Assessment, and Interpretive Prospectus, stated the park’s ideal visitor experience as” being able to pass through the Gap as it appeared during the historic period of 1780-1810.” The park also aimed to convey two conceptual themes in relation to the visitor experience. First, it hoped to make visitors aware that “Cumberland Gap, especially in its connection with Daniel Boone’s career, played a part in the development of powerful symbols and myths about the American frontier and about the ways that Americans of European descent perceived their relationships to nature and the Native American inhabitants of the vast North American continent.”<sup>22</sup> Second, the park hoped visitors would come to understand the essential relationship between Cumberland Gap’s geology and history through their visits to the park.

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<sup>21</sup> “Mission 66,” Cumberland Gap National Historical Park; “Interpretive Prospectus, 1971,” National Park Service, Cumberland Gap National Historical Park.

<sup>22</sup> Cumberland Gap National Historical Park, “Restoration of the Cumberland Gap and the Wilderness Road Development Concept Plan,” 4.

However, if the main objective to restoring the gap to its “authentic” eighteenth-century appearance is to enhance the visitor experience, to what degree will visitors realize an authentic versus a non-authentic landscape? Because the vast majority of visitors to Cumberland Gap are unaware that the landscape and terrain of the gap have been changed over time (by both humans and nature), it could be argued that elevating the visitor experience was not the primary objective of the restoration. For instance, it is understandable that the even grades of a twentieth-century roadbed would still be apparent even after years of forest growth covered the road’s former path. But the park wished to do more than restore a sense of wilderness, which would require obscuring the man-altered terrain of the gap. The park aimed to restore a specific unchanging wilderness fixed in time by means as ambitious as reconstructing the lost contours of the gap. Thus, it seems that restoring the eighteenth-century landscape in order to achieve an utmost degree of “authenticity” was in fact the park’s objective.

To this end, the park settled on a plan for restoration that balanced its own hope to fully restore a historic landscape to the best of its abilities with the goal of heightening visitor experiences. The park considered three different degrees of restoration: The most extreme was “Complete Restoration” which would restore the gap as closely as possible to its 1790-1810 appearance and “obliterate” the remains of other historical features not present from those years, including the Object Lesson Road. Furthermore, this plan would lean toward natural maintenance instead of active park maintenance for walking trails.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> The Object Lesson Road was built in 1908 as a demonstration in new highway technology; *ibid.*, 32.

The second alternative was “Partial Restoration,” which compromised between degrees of restoring historic contours to the land and selectively eliminating historical features not coeval with the 1790-1810 timeframe. In this model, the Object Lesson Road would be partially preserved, and the historic grade of land, as it existed prior to the modern construction of Route 25E would only be restored on the Kentucky side of the Gap.<sup>24</sup>

The least extreme proposal was “Minimal Restoration,” which called for the removal of obvious remnants of US 25E, the basic rehabilitation of a forested ground where the roadbed once existed, and a fill of 43,000 cubic yards of earth (already removed from the tunnel construction) at the saddle (base) of the Gap. However, beyond these basic measures, no other restoration, including that of the Object Lesson Road, would take place.<sup>25</sup>

Ultimately, the park chose to implement the second alternative of “Partial Restoration,” which the administration decided would offer the “most variety for hikers,” while remaining accessible to the handicapped and elderly. This plan called for a “Compromise with history required for safety.” For instance, rather than clear mountain hiking trails, the park constructed features like a three-foot-wide bridge over a creek bed for pedestrian traffic and a cement surface on the creek bed in anticipation of future wagon rides along the Wilderness Road. Thus, while restoration of the gap would still require the reconstruction of terrain and the obliteration of certain historic features not relevant to the 1790-1810 interpretive period, neither of these facts would be carried out in full. In the end, the park did compromise between an ambition for historical purity (in the light of

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 59.



environmental theories of the American wilderness) and the reality of simply facilitating the visitor's experience.<sup>26</sup>

Apart from enhancing the visitor experience through restoration, the park administration also justified gap restoration by arguing that it was in line with the mission of the National Park Service, and furthermore, that the restoration was stated as a purpose of the park in the park's establishing legislation. In actuality and despite their claims to the contrary, the administration at Cumberland Gap NHP stepped beyond the mission of the National Park Service, which according to the 1916 Organic Act that established the NPS, aims "to conserve the scenery and the natural and historical objects and wildlife therein." because Cumberland Gap seeks not to conserve but to reconstruct. The Oxford English Dictionary defines conservation as "the preservation from destructive influences, natural decay, or waste."<sup>27</sup>

Cumberland Gap NHP Superintendent Mark Woods claimed that the park's hopes to build a tunnel were in line with the 1916 Organic Act. This claim is reasonable given that removing the highway would remove a potentially "destructive influence" from the Gap—that is, if the 1790-1810 Gap is considered historic while the Gap that was home to Route 25E, constructed in the early twentieth-century, is not considered historic. Thus, the faults in this justification call into question, what is historic and what is not in the park's opinion (and

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<sup>26</sup> Chris Fordney, "Minding the Gap: The National Park Service Moves Vast Quantities of Earth to Restore Cumberland Gap to What the Settlers Saw," *Landscape Architecture* (June 2002): 36; Cumberland Gap National Historical Park, "Restoration of the Cumberland Gap and the Wilderness Road Development Concept Plan," 85.

<sup>27</sup> US Congress, "National Park Service Organic Act," (39 Stat. 535) August 26, 1916; Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. "Conservation," <http://www.oed.com> (accessed December 30, 2011).

in the public's), as well as to what degree is restoration justified by NPS legislation as opposed to conservation.<sup>28</sup>

One other way in which the park justified the restoration of the Gap involved a road known locally as Massacre Mountain. In fact, this unfortunate nickname refers to none other than the troublesome US 25E. However, US 25E did not always hold such a poor reputation among park supporters. In 1915, *The New York Times* hailed the proposed modern highway through the Cumberland Gap. In an article about the unveiling of the Daughters of the American Revolution's monument to Daniel Boone at the Gap, the *Times* at once invites people to travel the trail of Boone and countless pioneers, while it celebrates the fact that modern highways weave through the area obscuring historic pathways. The article triumphantly speaks for the success of American civilization claiming "the pioneer woodsman followed footpaths that the modern engineer finds impracticable for a national highway."<sup>29</sup>

Ultimately, 25E became the most insurmountable obstruction to the ideal interpretation of Cumberland Gap's historic role in America's westward expansion. Furthermore, to locals and people traveling through the gap, the highway was a deathtrap. The two-lane highway wove through the mountain gap with high-speed traffic. In the winter, it was prone to ice while year-round it was clouded by thick morning fogs that coated the valleys around Cumberland Mountain. These conditions created a treacherous road with an average death toll of six people per year—much higher than the national average. In 1976,

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<sup>28</sup> "50 Year Old Dream Coming True at Cumberland Gap National Historical Park."

<sup>29</sup> "Boone's Trail Now Well Marked: D.A.R Unveil Monument at Cumberland Gap to Commemorate Honor to Famous Pioneer," *New York Times*, August 1, 1915.

Cumberland Gap's Chief of Interpretation, William Cox, stated that "If the Gap is not restored a prime interpretive site will deteriorate and will eventually be lost. The highway throughout the Gap is one of the most dangerous in the nation. In 1968, twice the national average of highway accidents and deaths was recorded on the 3.75 mile segment through the Gap."<sup>30</sup> The dangerous conditions and infamous local reputation of US 25E thus became a prominent argument for the modernization of the road and by extension its relocation most preferably to a tunnel away from the historic Gap and National Park.<sup>31</sup>

Before restoration could begin, plans had to meet NPS requirements for the restoration of a park which state that "A cultural landscape may be restored to an earlier appearance if (1) restoration is essential to public understanding of the cultural association of a park, and (2) sufficient data exists to permit restoration with minimal conjecture." The park, through its extensive justifications had met the first requirement. As for the second requirement, the park commissioned studies of existing evidence to create a plan for the historically accurate restoration of the gap's landscape.<sup>32</sup>

The National Park Service's Denver Service Center conducted an impressively detailed study published in 2002, to determine how and to what extent the eighteenth-century landscape of Cumberland Gap could be restored. The study employed nineteenth-century photographs as well as topographical maps and even a surprisingly accurate painting of the gap from the early 1800s. From these images, the study was able to determine how the land's

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<sup>30</sup> "USDOT Internal Development Study Package Proposal: Justification, October 14, 1976," NHPS Resource Management Record Collection, CUGA 5585, Series 10, Subseries 2, Box 2, Folder 5, Cumberland Gap National Historical Park.

<sup>31</sup> Fordney, "Minding the Gap," 36.

<sup>32</sup> NPS 1988a quoted in Cumberland Gap National Historical Park, "Restoration of the Cumberland Gap and the Wilderness Road Development Concept Plan," 9.

topography had changed since the construction of US 25E. Under the assumption that 25E's construction, rather than severe erosion or other man-made forces had most altered the gap since the interpretive period of 1790-1810, the study posited a plan to fill the terrain and restore the contours of the gap as closely as possible to its 1790-1810 appearance.<sup>33</sup>

The first physical step of the long process to restore the gap was rerouting US 25E through a mountain tunnel. To this end, the Federal Highway Administration partnered with the National Park Service to plan and construct twin vehicular tunnels each 4,600 feet in length. A brochure prepared by the Federal Highway Administration says, "[the tunnels] will bring travel through the 21<sup>st</sup> century, to preserve one of our Nation's most historic routes." This remark fittingly reflects the park's hope to remove remnants of modernity from the gap in order to restore a historic landscape. The \$280 million dollar tunnels took six years to construct and opened in 1996 presenting the vastly altered face of Cumberland Gap.<sup>34</sup>

Once US 25E was rerouted through the tunnel, the older road through the gap closed so that 13,000 tons of asphalt could be carted away from the gap. One reporter claimed that the removal of this road was a "rare victory in the ongoing battle over major highways that traverse national parks." 250,000 cubic meters of earth dug out from the twin mountain tunnels of the new 25E were used to reconstruct the contours of the gap's terrain as it appeared in drawings and photographs from the nineteenth century. At the saddle of the gap, a thirty foot hill, leveled during the original construction of US 25E, was reconstructed. NPS Landscape architect Gail Stahlecker explained that the park chose to reconstruct the contours

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<sup>33</sup> Harland D. Unrau, "Restoration of Historic Features," 4.

<sup>34</sup> "The Cumberland Gap Tunnel: Pioneering a New Route" (Washington, DC: United States Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration, 1993).

of the landscape to transform the trail into a true mountain path that would offer visitors a challenging hike, like the pioneers would have faced, rather than a walk along a level, graded trail.<sup>35</sup>

In addition to restoring the terrain of the Gap, the park is renewing vegetation of the landscape with plant species native to the area. Over time, as the gap has gone through multiple phases of construction and habitation. Many plants native to the area have died or been removed while people have simultaneously introduced “exotic” species such as kudzu. Logging, the clearance of forests during the Civil War, and modern construction had “effectively denuded the Gap of all virgin stands of timber,” by the time Cumberland Gap NHP was established in 1940. Today, Cumberland Gap NHP and the Soil Conservation Service National Plant Material Center are actively reintroducing native plants to the forests surrounding the gap. Some of the species they are planting include Red Maple and Eastern Redbud.<sup>36</sup>

The park’s goal in restoring native plant’s is to enhance the historical accuracy of the gap’s appearance. Park staff and Students from Lincoln Memorial University in Harrogate, Tennessee, have worked to rehabilitate the gap’s vegetation. In one weekend during the spring of 2002, students planted over twenty thousand trees. Ultimately, as visitors wander through Cumberland Gap after the restoration is complete, visitors will look upon a scene that resembles the one Boone and hundreds of thousand American pioneers saw two hundred years ago. However, it will be some time before visitors will be able to enjoy this experience.

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<sup>35</sup> Fordney, “Minding the Gap,” 32-36.

<sup>36</sup> Cumberland Gap National Historical Park, “Restoration of the Cumberland Gap and the Wilderness Road Development Concept Plan,” 20; “Restoration of the Cumberland Gap and the Wilderness Road: Using Native Plants in the Cumberland Gap National Historical Park,” Cumberland Gap National Historical Park.

The former path of Highway 25E left a vast empty trail through the gap that, after ten years, is filled only with grass and brush. According to the park, it will take roughly one hundred years for re-vegetation to restore a sense of wilderness to the gap's landscape.<sup>37</sup>

The park also revised its exhibits in correlation with the new face of the park itself. From 2001 to 2003, Cumberland Gap NHP created a new exhibit for their main visitor's center. The new exhibit improved upon its predecessors in a number of ways, including placing greater emphasis on the experience of Native Americans before and during the gap's use as a route for European-American pioneers. The exhibit also addresses different definitions of land ownership and the reality of Native American dispossession. At the same time, the new exhibit continues to emphasize the "enormity of the experience of migrating west." Though the restoration of the gap will take roughly a century to complete as time is necessary for vegetative restoration, the park administration is well on its way to fulfilling one long-held goal that Cumberland Gap "will become a tribute to the hearty pioneers and the scene of citizen enjoyment of an important segment of the nation's historical and natural inheritance."<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Mark Woods, "An Appalachian Tale: Restoring Boone's Wilderness Road," *CRM* 25, no. 5 (2002): 22.

<sup>38</sup> "Exhibit Planning-CUGA Visitor's Center, 2001-2003," NHPS Resource Management Record Collection, CUGA 5585, Series 5, Subseries 9, Box 1, Folder 5; Cumberland Gap National Historical Park, Middlesboro, KY; "Mission 66," Cumberland Gap National Historical Park..

## CONCLUSION

For Kermit Hunter, the DAR, Joseph Hampton Rich, and the Cumberland Gap NHP, the “authentic” American frontier of Daniel Boone is synonymous with an image of wilderness conquered by courageous, committed, and resourceful white pioneers whose characters define what it is to be “American.” The “authentic” frontier is the very myth that holds that Americans have created their own destiny in the past and can do so again. After the *Challenger* disaster in 1986, President Reagan asked Americans to “think back to the pioneers of an earlier century,” comparing American astronauts to the nation’s western pioneers. John F. Kennedy stated before the Democratic National Convention and an international audience in 1960 that America’s pioneers “were determined to make the new world strong and free—an example to the world.” The mythic imagery of the frontier is useful because it promotes pride and a common identity, and those who have attempted to capture it have done so with the intention of inspiring their fellow citizens by perpetuating a powerful Euro-American myth.<sup>1</sup>

Each quest to represent the “authentic” American frontier aimed above all to capture an “authentic” spirit—the qualities associated with American pioneers valued so highly for expanding the nation and conquering the wilderness. In *Horn in the West* authenticity meant upholding the values of family, bravery, and morality characterized in the play to inspire pride in its audience. Over time, the play’s directors struggled to define what they perceived to be the “authentic” frontier story. Whether this was more fact or fanciful, the “authenticity”

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<sup>1</sup> Ronald Reagan, Speech on the *Challenger* Disaster, January 28, 1986; John F. Kennedy, Democratic National Convention Nomination Acceptance Address, July 15, 1960.

purportedly captured in the drama emphasized a sense of spirit associated with American pioneers. Similarly, forty years earlier, Joseph Hampton Rich had sought to commemorate the spirit of Daniel Boone throughout the nation, suggesting a collective heritage embodied by the life and myth of a single man.

For the DAR, the authentic Wilderness Road was that traveled by their ancestors, and the road itself served as a monument to the society's legacy of leadership. Unlike their contemporary, Rich, the DAR interpreted "authenticity" physically in terms of place. Cumberland Gap National Park, intensely aware of its founding 1916 legislation, sought literally to recreate an "authentic" environment that had once inspired pioneers to move westward, evoking those national qualities associated with the American frontier myth. Whether groups sought to capture a physical or spiritual form of "authenticity," the frontiers they portrayed were one and the same with the American myth that perpetuates a legacy of pioneer spirit.



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