

Frontier Women Stories:

An early settler, Joshua McQueen recounted, *"Many a buffalo was killed by the whites, and only a little of the rump taken out, or a thigh bone for the marrow...many a man killed a buffalo, just for the sake of saying so."* William Clinkenbeard admitted that he and three other hunters had once killed twenty-four buffalo for their wool alone. From the book "Border Life" by Elizabeth A. Perkins.

The Shawnee and other Native American tribes witness a seemingly never-ending influx of settlers move onto lands they had lived on for generations. These settlers were killing buffalo and harvesting cane indiscriminately, threatening critical food sources. Small pox, yellow fever, and other diseases decimated Native American populations as well. When reading the following personal stories, please remember that not all encounters were violent, and that the following stories reflect personal experiences.

Mary Draper Ingles: Mary was wed to William Ingles when she was seventeen years old. After having two baby boys very quickly, Mary was pregnant again in 1755 when several Shawnee attacked her homestead in Virginia. Along with many household items, the Shawnee took Mary, her sons, and her sister-in-law along with them, into Kentucky. Though Mary was surely scared she quickly adapted to her situation. She pretended that she wasn't upset by being captured! She won great favor with the tribe with her cooking skills and was actually adopted as a daughter of the chief after her sons and sister-in-law were separated from her. Meanwhile, Mary had given birth to and was taking care of a new baby girl! Mary was later included in a group traveling to gather salt from the nearby salt licks. Mary took this opportunity to escape along with a Dutchwoman who had also been captured. Though her baby girl was left behind, this was an opportunity for Mary to be reunited with her husband and her home. The women followed the Ohio River and were constantly plagued by hunger. At one point, the Dutch woman actually went insane and threatened to kill Mary. Mary chose to move on without her as a result. Mary eventually followed the Kanawha River toward her home and was taken home by a man who she had known for years, but because of her experiences, didn't even recognize her! After arriving home, Mary insisted that the family move back east of the Blue Ridge Mountains for fear of being captured again. Though her visit was not pleasant, Mary was an early Kentucky pioneer.

Virginia Sellards Wiley: Jenny Wiley lived in Bland County, VA with her husband Thomas. In 1789 Thomas was away and a band of Indians attacked the Wiley cabin killing Jenny's brother and three of her children. Jenny was taken captive by a Shawnee chief and brought into Kentucky. Her baby was killed a few days later because it slowed the progress of the band. Jenny also gave birth to a premature son on this trip and he was also killed. Mary was tied up with rawhide bands when her captives went on a hunt. She managed to get the rawhide bands wet and escape. She had been held captive for nine months. Jenny reached safety just ahead of her pursuers. In 1800 Jenny and Tom, along with their five children, moved to Johnson County Kentucky where Jenny died in 1831. Jenny Wiley State Park, in Kentucky, is named in her honor.

Rebecca Bryan Boone: Daniel Boone is easily the most well known Kentucky pioneer. However, a very often overlooked person is his wife, Rebecca Bryan Boone. Daniel Boone was a long hunter, meaning that he would journey into Kentucky for long periods of time and hunt and then bring back the furs to trade. This often left Rebecca and the TEN CHILDREN she had between 1757 and 1781 behind. Rebecca was very adept at surviving on her own. When Daniel moved through the Cumberland Gap and into Kentucky in 1773, his family traveled with him. Their belongings were transported on horseback because the Cumberland Gap was not yet wide enough for wagon crossings. Rebecca Boone was the solid foundation the family relied on and was responsible for survival of the family in the westernmost parts of North Carolina and in Kentucky.

Jane Todd Crawford: This woman was thought to be pregnant for quite some time, though in reality she was carrying a 60 pound tumor! She rode 64 miles on horseback from Greensburg to Danville to see Dr. Ephraim McDowell. McDowell warned her that the surgery she needed was not safe and was actually hopeless, but she urged him to operate, despite the unavailability of anesthesia. McDowell proceeded to perform the first successful Ovariectomy in the world. Twenty five days later Crawford had recovered and was on her way home. The year of her surgery was 1809—the same year that Abraham Lincoln, our 16th President was born.

Mrs. Neville: The Neville family lived in Nelson County. 1787 Mr. Neville opened the door to see why the dog was barking when rifle fire from attacking Indians broke his arm and leg. Mrs. Neville barred the door, but the Indians chopped a hole in it. She then proceeded to grab an ax and kill or seriously injure four of the intruders. When she heard sounds on the roof, she realized that the attackers were going to come into the house by chimney. Mrs. Neville tore apart the feather bed and set the feathers on fire. Two half-choked and half-blinded intruders fell to the hearth and Mrs. Neville yet again used her ax to defend herself.