

"In his country's defense"

The driving desire for adventure, wealth, and power lured pioneers to the trails and rivers leading to the rich, fertile land the Indians called "Kain-tuck-ee." The prospect of a new land brought pioneers to the untamed land west of the Blue Ridge Mountains.

One of the first settlers to shape early Kentucky history was a young Virginian named William Whitley. The son of Irish immigrants, Whitley, like many other early Americans, listened to the stories of travelers returning from the frontier; stories of a verdant land, stretching beyond the imagination, and teeming with abundant game. Whitley was intrigued by the tales and tempted by the possibility of a better life.

In 1775, Whitley made his first trip to Kentucky, accompanied by his brother-in-law, George Clark. They found a promising area of Central Kentucky near the Dick's River and Whitley established a station on land between St. Asaph - today known as Stanford - and Crab Orchard.

Whitley then returned to Virginia for his wife Esther, and their two daughters, Elizabeth and Isabella. Whitley describes the arduous journey to Kentucky in the Draper Manuscripts:

"Many times in our travels we had to unpack and at times leave the family to find out away to get on at times my wife would fall, horse and all and at other times, she and her children all in a file tied together for where one went all must go in that situation we were 33 days in the Wilderness in this unkind season of the year, had rain, hail and snow with the disadvantages of large Cane breaks to wade through we then landed at Whitley's Old Station."

Often the terrain was so rough that the horses had to be unpacked and the household goods carried over the mountains. The journey from Virginia to Kentucky lasted 33 days.

During the time when William Whitley returned to Virginia for his family, there were few attacks on Kentucky settlements by the Indians. Consequently, when the Whitleys arrived in Kentucky they followed the practice of "settling out." That is, they established their station, or homestead, away from a fort. Many pioneer families erected cabins near the walls of a fort so they could seek protection within the walls in the event of an Indian attack. However, the Whitleys erected a cabin and planted 10 acres of corn on their station, thus staking their claim on land near Cedar Creek eight miles from St. Asaph's.

During the spring of 1776, the Indians captured Daniel Boone's daughter Jemima and the daughters of another prominent pioneer family, the Callaways. Settlers who were living on isolated stations in Central Kentucky became alarmed and fled to Stanford where Whitley's friend Benjamin Logan was building a fort. However, Whitley did not feel Logan's partially completed station was safe enough for his family. The Whitleys then went to Fort Harrod, where they remained until the spring of 1777.

Travelers to the East often gathered at the Whitley's station to cross the wilderness to Virginia with some degree of safety. The following notice was printed in the "Kentucky Gazette," a Lexington newspaper, on November 1, 1778 and is typical of the period:

"A large company will meet at the Crab-Orchard the 19th of November in order to start early the next day through the wilderness. As it is very dangerous on account of the Indians, it is hoped that each person will go well armed."

Whitley often advised these travelers and sold them supplies for their journey.

The location of Whitley's station on the Wilderness Road probably contributed to Whitley's exploits as an Indian fighter. Pioneers traveling to Kentucky through the Cumberland Gap often stopped to report conflicts with the Indians or to seek help from Whitley and the Kentucky Militia. Whitley or his wife, Esther, then raised a company of militia to pursue the Indians.

Whitley vividly described an incident in which a pioneer woman and her five young children had been taken captive:

“Upon this the whites ascended with Rapidly to save those whom the Brave would do more than my pen can describe But the savages saw them coming before they could be relieved then the savage was this time the savage took to satiate their Voracious and Diabolical and Blood thirsty appetite struck the Eldest son with their Tomahawk nock him don and took his scalp and also nock the youngest child on the head till Fractured his skull.”

The Indians however, were not the only ones to destroy property and take prisoners. In retaliation, Whitley and members of the Kentucky Militia often burned Indian villages, stole horses and livestock, took captives, and destroyed crops:

“General George R. Clark We met at the Mouth of the Licking, about 1,100 men, Volenteers ... We had a six pounder again that Clark had on the other Campaign We went on and came within 3 miles of the Town before we were discovered. We were met by 3 Horse back Indians, which returned. We pursued them to the Towns ... The Warriors had all left the town but one and that one we killed. We took 16 prisoners. We got a heap of plunder and some few Horses we Burnt 3 other towns.”

During the late 1770s and early 1780s, Whitley’s fame as an Indian fighter spread throughout Kentucky. In 1780, the Virginia Assembly divided Kentucky into three counties: Fayette, Jefferson, and Lincoln. In 1783, the county court of Lincoln County sent Whitley’s name to the governor of Virginia, recommending his appointment to the rank of captain in the Kentucky Militia; Whitley readily accepted.

A new outbreak of violence in the spring of 1793 convinced Whitley it was necessary to attack the Indians in their own territory. With the permission of Governor Isaac Shelby, Whitley raised a force of 200 militia and attacked the Chickamauga village of Nickajack near Nashville, Tennessee.

During the 1780s and 1790s, the Whitleys expanded their land holdings, built both their brick home and a racetrack, and held race meetings each autumn with breakfasts after the morning races were completed. Apparently during this period they began to feel secure enough to focus their energies on their farm and their social life.

When Governor Isaac Shelby called for volunteers for the War of 1812, 64-year-old William Whitley enlisted in the Kentucky Mounted Infantry commanded by Col. Richard Johnson. In all his previous experiences as an Indian fighter, Whitley had never been taken prisoner and had been wounded only once when the tip of his nose was shot off by a bullet. He had often remarked to his friends that “the death he craved to die was in his country’s defense.” Perhaps Whitley had a presentiment about the coming battle. It was during one of the most famous battles of the War of 1812, the Battle of the Thames, fought near Detroit on the Thames River, that William Whitley lost his life.

Whitley’s company had been assigned the task of engaging Indians commanded by the famous Shawnee Chief Tecumseh, while the other American troops fought the British forces. In order to draw the Indian’s fire, twenty of Johnson’s men rode out in plain sight toward the Indians who were hidden in a swamp near the river. Whitley was among this group of soldiers. The remaining men were to attack after the Indians had used all their ammunition. Whitley and most of the advance guard were killed. When the Indian chief Tecumseh was killed, the Indians withdrew.

With the death of William Whitley, Kentucky lost one of her most flamboyant pioneer figures. Hostilities with the Indians in Kentucky soon ended and an important era in Kentucky history drew to a close. However, Whitley and his peers left us an important legacy - a frontier spirit, an example of strength, tenacity, and perseverance which lives today and is embodied in the William Whitley House.

“If conditions should make it necessary”

Esther Whitley was the epitome of a pioneer woman. She was everything a frontier woman needed to be - independent, spunky, resourceful, and tough. Like most pioneer women, Esther often had to assume not only the responsibilities of the women of her time, but also the responsibilities of her husband. She was mother of eleven children, farm manager, cook, seamstress, doctor, housekeeper, and when need be, defender of the Whitley station.

Although not much is written about Esther, the few stories which survive reveal important facets of Esther’s character. From the moment the Whitleys began their journey to Kentucky, Esther’s mettle was tested. Esther and her two children were roped together on horseback as they crossed the mountains to Kentucky. They traveled through rain, hail, and snow over precipitous mountain passes, across streams and rivers and through forests where no trail had ever been blazed.

When the Whitleys finally reached Kentucky and established their station, Esther set up housekeeping in a crude cabin. Before a year had passed, Indian attacks forced the Whitleys to pull up stakes and move, first to Logan's Station near Stanford, then on to Fort Harrod in what is today Harrodsburg.

During a siege of Logan's Fort in 1777, the settlers were confined for 13 days. The men in the fort wanted milk and offered to guard the women if they would go outside the fort to milk the cows. Only three women were brave enough to venture outside the gates. Just as they got outside, the Indians fired on them. And, according to the Whitley's daughter Levisa, most of the men and women retreated into the fort. Mrs. Whitley, who had lost her hat when the Indians fired, calmly stopped and picked it up before she returned to the fort. The women also made bullets for the men during this siege and even took up arms when necessary.

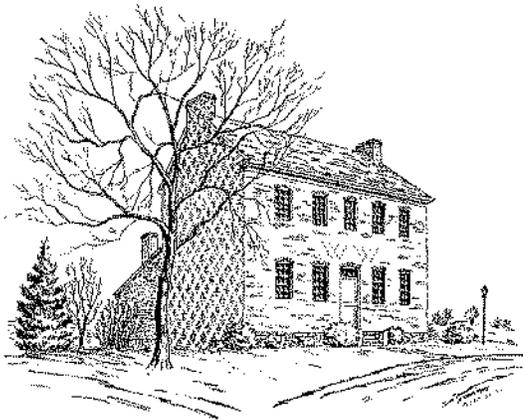
When the Whitleys were finally able to return to their station. Esther again set up housekeeping in a crude cabin. The Whitley's brick home was finally completed in 1794 and Esther was able to establish a permanent household.

Esther's responsibilities extended beyond the confines of her house. When William Whitley was away and a call for help came from other settlers, Esther called up the local militia and had them ready to pursue Indians when her husband returned.

Eventually, Indian attacks became less frequent in Kentucky and relations with the Indians improved. The Indians often visited the Whitley's home, sometimes even spending the night. On one occasion, a group of Cherokees challenged Whitley to a shooting contest. Whitley suggested that Esther shoot against them and Esther won the contest. When the Cherokees asked her how she, a woman, could shoot so well, Esther is said to have replied that she learned in order to kill Indians, and could still do so if conditions should make it necessary.

In her own way, Esther Whitley and other pioneer women like her carved their own niche in Kentucky history. Though their names were not etched as deeply into the pages of history as their male counterparts, their contributions to the taming of frontier Kentucky were equally significant.

Sportsman's Hill



The Whitley estate was known as Sportsman's Hill because of the racetrack Whitley built near his home in 1788. The half-mile track was unique in America at the time because it was laid out in a circular pattern, rather than in one long, straight stretch. Along the east coast, tracks were usually turf. However, Whitley built his track of clay. He declared that races on his track would be run counterclockwise rather than clockwise like British races.

Sportsman's Hill was in its heyday at the end of the 18th century. Race meets were held in the autumn after the harvest season ended. Racing at the Whitleys must have been a popular past-time because in 1788, the Lincoln County Court ordered a committee to "view the most convenient way for a road from the Whitley's Race Path to the Courthouse." Many prominent pioneer Kentuckians including George Rogers Clark, Isaac Shelby,

James Harrod, Benjamin Logan, and Samuel McDowell were reputed to have attended the races at Sportsman's Hill.

The William Whitley House stands today as a monument to pioneer ingenuity and resourcefulness. From the delicate dentil molding and frieze board of the cornice along the roof's edge, to the poplar floors, the William Whitley House is a gem of a house. The combination of its unique architectural features, its commanding position on the hill, and the very fact that it has endured for over 200 years gives the house a character of its own. Although the house has undergone several changes over the years, many of its features furnish clues about the people who built the house.

The brick house was constructed in the Flemish bond pattern, which was more expensive than other methods; however, it gave the walls greater strength. In this type of construction, one brick was laid lengthwise, the next endwise. The lengthwise brick is called a stretcher; the endwise brick a header. Builders used glazed headers to create decorative patterns in combination with the Flemish bond pattern. Usually houses were built with a Flemish bond pattern only on the front wall. In the Whitley House, the Flemish bond pattern is used on all four outside walls. The diamond-like pattern on the side walls of the house is called a diaper, and was created by using glazed header bricks.



The WW initials on the front of the house and EW initials on the back of the house are typical of houses in New Jersey and Virginia which were patterned after buildings in Salem and Gloucester in England. When initials and dates were incorporated in the construction of a house, it was usually indicative of a desire by the builder to establish a family dynasty. Whitley may have gotten ideas for the construction of his house when he traveled to Virginia in 1786.

The bricks used to build the Whitley house were probably made on the building site in a cylindrical kiln. In cylindrical kilns, the “raw” bricks were stacked in a radial fashion, one end facing the center. These ends were exposed to the greatest heat and were often burned to a darker color, sometimes even acquiring a glazed finish.

Inside the house, the walnut and pine fielded paneling, the S-shaped carvings over the fireplace, the crown molding and chair railings throughout the house, and the eagles carved on the footers of the stairs are evidence that Whitley must have been able to find skilled craftsmen to complete the house. The William Whitley House was designed and built by independent, resourceful, courageous people, who, in leaving us this special house, have left us a part of themselves.

“Leg of Bear and Log Cabin Pie”

A great portion of a pioneer housewife’s time was spent cooking and preserving food. The most dominant feature of a pioneer cabin was the fireplace. It provided not only heat, but also a place for the preparation of food. In the well-equipped pioneer kitchen, the fireplace was surrounded by an array of cast-iron tools and utensils used in preparing meals. Bread toasters, long-handled waffle irons, coffee roasters, kettles of all shapes and sizes, and even reflector ovens operated by solar power were used by the ingenious pioneer housewife.

Several cooking methods were popular in pioneer Kentucky: boiling, roasting, baking, and frying. The most common method of cooking was boiling in kettles over an open fire. The pots were hung by pothooks or by trammels from cranes. Suspending kettles from a hook was a handy method of cooking because the pot could be swung out to season or taste the food and to determine whether the meat was “enough.” “Enough” was the pioneer expression for done enough.

Although pioneer homesteads were largely self-sufficient, a few basic provisions were purchased by settlers. Among those were salt, molasses, herbs, and spices. Salt, herbs, and spices were used both to preserve food and to disguise the flavor of food that was rotting.

Salt was used for preserving and flavoring foods. Settlements were often established near a salt lick so pioneers had a readily available source of salt. Molasses was widely used as a sweetener by all but the wealthiest families who could afford sugar.

The keys to the sugar chest were well guarded by the prudent pioneer housewife.

Most Kentucky settlers used cold springs and brooks for short-term storage of food. Ice houses were not common in pioneer Kentucky. Foods such as root crops were preserved for months in cellars. The primary method of keeping meat and fish was salting and drying or pickling in salt brine. Smoking was another common method of preserving food.

After early morning races were completed at the Whitley’s race course, large breakfasts were served. A typical race menu sometimes included:

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| Chicken Soup with Rice | Baked Ohio River Salmon | Bacon, Cabbage, and Beans |
| Barbecued Lamb | Roast Duck and Apple Sauce | Roast Turkey and Cranberry Sauce |
| Roast Beef | Broiled Squirrel | Leg of Bear |
| Baked O’Possum with Sweet Potatoes | Roasting Ears, Hominy | Boiled Potatoes |
| Baked Sweet Potatoes | Stewed Tomatoes | Hot Cake and Corn Dodgers |
| Buttermilk | Plum Pudding, Rum Sauce | Pumpkin Pie, Rum Sauce |
| Log Cabin Pie | Assorted Cakes and Fruit | Vanilla Ice Cream |
| Coffee, Apple Jack, and Claret | Transylvania Bitters | Peaches and Honey |
| Old Bourbon Whiskey | Port and Champagne | |