

Old Mulkey Meetinghouse State Historic Site



A Fateful Appeal

"Now all you who believe as I do follow me out the west door." The words reverberated across the rough-hewn beams of the Mill Creek Baptist Church. It was Saturday morning, November 18, 1809. The congregation of some 200 people had gathered for the last time as one church.

On that fateful day, Baptist minister John Mulkey (1773-1844) was in the center of a religious movement that sought to restore New Testament Christianity principles to their religious practice.

After Mulkey's authoritative plea, a few of the congregation closest to the west door began to rise from their pews. Joseph Gist, a brother to the first white man to set foot in Kentucky, Nathan Breed, Obediah Howard, and William M. Logan crossed the threshold and stood with Mulkey. Others followed until more than 150 stood with their preacher.

The church in which this historic moment took place was to become known as the Old Mulkey Meetinghouse. The controversy that severed the church occurred in what religious historians have labeled the "Great Awakening," a period of religious revivalism that swept the American Colonies during the middle years of the 19th century.

Mill Creek Baptist Church

Although the first records of the church were dated 1798, tradition claims Mill Creek Baptist was established in 1765 (pre-Daniel Boone), thus being the first church located west of the Appalachian Mountains.

Mill Creek Baptist Church located about two miles from present-day Tompkinsville, was established by a small band of pioneer Baptists from North and South Carolina led by Philip Mulkey (1732-1801). These religious pioneers had also established several other churches in the Carolinas and Tennessee. At first, the Mill Creek congregation met in one another's homes. Later, those who organized this church acquired six acres of land and built a log meetinghouse on the banks of Mill Creek, about 200 yards from its present site. The oldest church minutes are dated September 11, 1798. The first preacher mentioned in the 1798 minutes was John Mulkey (1773-1844). Philip Mulkey (1775-1844) was the clerk of this church and was also appointed a deacon on October 15, 1798.

The Mill Creek Church grew rapidly and soon the old building became inadequate for the congregation. In April 1804, a committee of seven men was appointed to make plans for building a new meetinghouse. John Wood, Nathan Breed, James Harlin, Ephriam Ellis, Francis Baxter, Joseph Gist, and Thomas Sullivan were named to the committee. The next month the committee reported that the building was to be "50 feet long, 30 feet wide, shingled with jointed shingles, 5 windows and three doors".

A man named Jiles Thompson or his agents were to build the meetinghouse. This crude log structure, with puncheon floor, peg leg seats, chinked and daubed walls, clapboard shutters, and wooden shingles was built in the shape of a cross with 12 corners.. Many historians believe that the 12 corners represent the 12 apostles, while others believe that they represent the 12 tribes of Israel. The three doors are symbolic of the Godhead.

No provisions were made for heating the church, but a log fire was kept burning in the churchyard, and this served as a warming place for the congregation. It was necessary that the men of the congregation take turns keeping the fire burning and guarding against Indian attacks.

The resourceful women of that day partially solved the heating problem by warming large soapstones and placing them in big bags made from heavy woolen cloth or animal skins which were then fastened to the seats. Members of the congregation stepped into these bags and pulled the material over their knees.

By 1809, a large congregation worshipped there. Soon thereafter, a controversy arose over the teachings of John Mulkey, who, while preaching one day, had taken his text from the 10th Chapter of John and was making a strong plea for predestination, when suddenly he became convinced by his own arguments that the doctrine was false. Of course, this caused great confusion in the Mill Creek Church and led to John Mulkey being tried for heresy several times over the next few months. Failing to gain a majority vote against him, the church decided to "choose sides" which led to the division on that fateful Saturday morning of November 18, 1809. The majority of the group that believed as Mulkey did continued to worship in the church, which after the split became known as "Old Mulkey Meetinghouse." The other congregation went up the Mill Creek a short distance and continued as Mill Creek Baptist Church.

Under the leadership of John Mulkey and his son, John Newton, the Mulkey Church flourished for several years after the schism. Many converts were won to the Restoration movement, as it was called, which was very strong in the upper South. Religious services were held there regularly until about 1856. About that time, older members of the congregation began to die and/or move away. This caused the remnant of the Mulkey group to begin meeting in the local courthouse. When all the original members had departed, those remaining joined the Church of Christ at Tompkinsville.

In the late 1870s, some of the local residents, including John Gee and Frank Pedigo, who had close historical and sentimental ties with the old church, took charge of a renovation movement at the church. Rails were split for the erection of a fence around the old church graveyard, and a new clapboard roof was installed on the old meetinghouse which had stood neglected since the mid-1850s. Following this renovation, the grounds again stood neglected for more than a decade, and at one point a fire swept the area destroying the fence.

W.S. Emmert and Newton M. Ray spearheaded a drive in 1890 to restore the meetinghouse and the cemetery to their position of divinity. After the renovation was completed, weekly religious meetings, community singings and occasional preaching services were held in the Mulkey Meetinghouse but the building fell into disuse and disrepair once again and was abandoned about 1910.

In the summer of 1925, the Honorable Joe H. Eagle, a United State Representative from Houston and a Monroe County native, visited the Old Mulkey Meetinghouse with Preacher Willie Thomas of Tompkinsville. Eagle reported to the local newspaper that, "Will and I found the old Meeting House with the roof off, the doors and windows gone, a sad looking picture of neglect. We decided to try to save it. We knew the people would do it if called it to their attention. So we gave our checks for \$50 each to start the fund, and the good people who felt the same way put the old historic structure in repair."

Once a board of trustees was established, public donations were made to rebuild and restore the building to its original condition. The public responded to the cause and sufficient funds were raised. New sleepers were laid to support the new puncheon floor. Split-log seats with peg-legs were added, just as in the original meetinghouse, and wooden shutters fashioned after the original ones were placed over the windows. Thus, within the framework of the original logs, the structure was restored in every respect to its 1804 form.

It was only fitting that in November 1931, this pioneer structure with its adjoining cemetery was declared one of Kentucky's state parks for perpetuation as an historical site. Today the Meetinghouse has the distinction of being the oldest freestanding log church building in the Commonwealth.

Early Religion in Kentucky

Dissenting religionists like John Mulkey were an important element of the early society of Kentucky. All dissenting sects found the freedom of the newly settled region perfect for professing their religious beliefs.

Of these, the Baptists were the first to brave the Kentucky frontier. As early as 1776, William Hickman, Sr. began traveling among the stations confirming Baptist membership. In 1783, David Rice, a minister of the Presbyterian faith, came to Kentucky and formed three congregations. The Transylvania Presbyterian was formed around 1786 with 12 Presbyterian congregations in the state.

In 1790, the first Methodist Church edifice, a log cabin at Masterson's Station five miles northwest of Lexington, was erected. The first known Catholic emigrants were William Coomes and Dr. Hart, who settled in Harrodsburg in 1775. Ten years later, a colony of Catholics emigrated from Maryland and settled principally on Pottinger's Creek, in the region of Bardstown.

From such beginnings the various church organizations developed until there was scarcely a settlement without its meetinghouse and at least one church.

Perrin's History of Kentucky, published in 1886, gives this description of the early preachers in Kentucky: "The early pioneer preachers were generally illiterate men, lacking in dignity and solemnity, but possessing considerable natural talents, and inspired by indefatigable zeal. They were men who had grown up under the influence of the religious agitation which preceded and accompanied the Revolution. They were repelled by the apathy which followed the success of the dissenters in their conflict with the established church, and sought fresher fields on the frontier. These circumstances brought to Kentucky a set of men who were well calculated 'to turn the world upside down.' Their lax system of morals, crude logic, and vigorous declamation met with great acceptance in a society where spirited action was much better understood than moral physiology; and where religion meant 'belonging' to some church, the earnest opposition to peculiar tenets of other sects, and abstaining from certain violations of the law-and-order sentiment of the community."



Camp meetings were among the most attractive community affairs in many sections of the Kentucky territory. People came from miles around to see the most popular preachers on the frontier. A complete community was organized at the camp meeting with the "tabernacle" as the center. Here, attendants, usually from many different denominations, combined gossiping, horse trading, courting, and frolicking with shouting and "getting religion." Every year, each denomination held a series of these camp meetings, usually on successive days and nights.

These early camp meetings, where there were sometimes more than 20,000 people in attendance, revealed an outpouring of the spirit which was unlike anything the frontier had ever seen.

People came prepared with enough provisions to last several days and on some occasions, even weeks. When not at the meetings, they found shelter in their wagons or in rudely constructed cabins in the woods. The earliest of these religious gatherings occurred in Logan County, at the time of the great revival which originated under the preaching of James McGready, beginning in 1799.

Hannah Boone

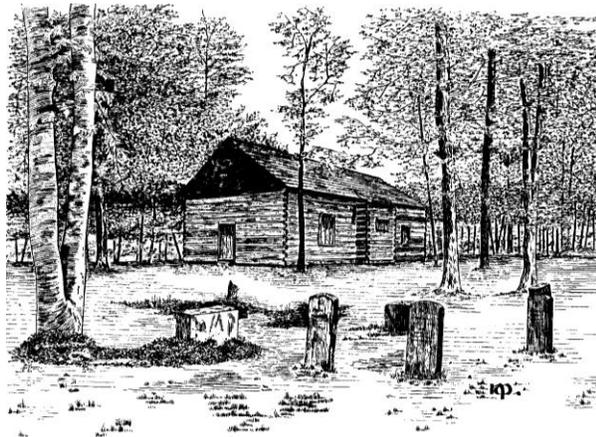
Located near the Old Mulkey Meetinghouse is an old pioneer graveyard containing grave sites of John Newton_Mulkey, Nathan Breed, William and Obediah Howard and their families, General Samuel Wilson,

and several Revolutionary War patriots; but probably the most notable and photographed is that of Hannah Boone, sister of Daniel Boone.

Hannah Boone married John Stewart in 1765. He was a pioneer and scouting companion of Daniel Boone on trips into Kentucky beginning in 1760. She was born in 1746 in Berks County, Pennsylvania, the youngest child of Squire and Sarah Morgan Boone who later settled in Rowan County, North Carolina in 1751. John Stewart accompanied Daniel Boone, John Findley, Squire Boone, Jr., Alexander Neeley, and possibly long hunters Joseph Holden, James Mooney and William Cooley on an excursion in 1769. They crossed the mountains at Cumberland Gap and made their first base camp at Station Camp on the Kentucky River, known as Ah-wah-nee by the Shawnee.

For six months Daniel Boone, John Stewart, and companions hunted and trapped buffalo, elk, deer, bear and wolves. While on a hunt, Stewart and Boone were captured by Shawnee Indians who forced them to lead the party back to their camp. They robbed the camp of all furs, supplies and horses, leaving them with little ammunition. John and Daniel followed the Indians and were able to escape with two horses during the night. Sometime between January and May of 1770, Boone and Stewart were out checking their trap lines and John Stewart never returned to camp. In 1775, during the expedition to cut the Wilderness Road through Kentucky, a skeleton and powder horn with Stewart's initials were found wedged into the hollow of a sycamore tree. He was evidently wounded by Indians and sought refuge in the hollow tree where he possibly bled to death.

Hannah Boone was left to raise four young daughters, Sarah, Mary, Rachel and Elizabeth Stewart. She married Richard Pennington, son of Ephraim Pennington, at the "Forks of the Yadkin" river in North Carolina in 1777. Richard served in the Revolutionary War militia at Enoch Osborn's Fort in Montgomery, now Ashe, County, Virginia. Hannah had four children with Richard - Joshua, Daniel Boone, John Stewart and Abigail Pennington. Enticed by the stories about the land where family members now lived, the



Penningtons traveled by wagon train in 1798 to Kentucky. After spending several months in Fayette County, Kentucky, they chose the land near Mill Creek in Monroe County for their home.

In 1806, when their son Joshua married and moved near Sparta, Tennessee, Hannah and Richard went with them. Richard Pennington died there in 1813, and Hannah moved into the home of her son, Daniel Boone Pennington in Monroe County, Kentucky where she died in 1828 at the age of 82. Tradition holds that Hannah Boone and Richard Pennington were members of John Mulkey's "Old Mulkey" congregation soon after the split from the original Mill Creek Baptist Church.

A gravestone for Squire Boone, Jr. is also located in the park; however, he was buried in Squire Boone Cave in Harrison County, Indiana. The monument is there because he was a brother to Hannah Boone.