“Always Ready for War”

by Robert Alvin Crum

Growing up in Illinois, I was often told by family that I’m a direct descendant of the explorer and “Father of Kentucky” Daniel Boone and his wife Rebecca Bryan. After moving to North Carolina in 1989 and conducting research on the Boone and Bryan families, I realized that I was walking in the same places as my ancestors. Along with the research and writing that I’ve been doing, I started and continue a series of paintings (which received a grant and, subsequently, an award) under the title “Return to the Land of My Ancestors.” This article is a description about how I was inspired to paint the three foot by four foot oil painting known as “Always Ready for War.”

My research, writing and paintings focus on the North Carolina backcountry from 1748 to 1798, where my Boone and Bryan ancestors lived before either dying or migrating to Kentucky. Morgan Bryan, Sr. (1671 – 1763) and Martha Strode Bryan (1697 - 1762) moved with their family to North Carolina in 1748. Morgan and a partner were land speculators in Virginia owning approximately 100,000 acres. When he moved to North Carolina with his large family, he left his eldest son Joseph Bryan (1719 – 1805) to sell off their lands in Virginia.

In his book Carolina Cradle, Dr. Ramsey also mentions that, “Any description of the early Bryan Settlement would hardly be complete without reference to Squire Boone, father of Daniel, who settled near the Yadkin with his family in 1750.” It appears that Squire Boone and his wife Sarah Morgan Boone knew the Bryans when they all lived in Pennsylvania, so it’s not surprising that the Boones followed the Bryans into the Forks of the Yadkin and the area known as the Bryan Settlements.

During his move into North Carolina, Morgan was joined by not only most of his seven sons and two daughters but also granddaughters. Two of Morgan Bryan’s granddaughters that joined him on this journey in 1748 were Rebecca and Martha Bryan, who lived with him once their father, Joseph Bryan, remarried after their mother’s death. These Bryan sisters later married Daniel and Edward Boone in North Carolina. Morgan’s son, William, also married Daniel Boone’s sister, Mary Boone.

The Bryans and Boones moved into North Carolina at a peaceful time with the hopes of farming, hunting, and even earning a livelihood as land speculators; however, that all quickly changed. Conflict began with the French and Indian
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War in 1755 and continued through the end of the American Revolution. The Boones and Bryans were continuously caught up in these conflicts. The men in these families were involved in the militia and served on both sides of the Revolution with even one Bryan being commissioned by the Royal Governor as a Colonel. Family members not fighting tried to avoid all the wars by either fleeing to Virginia and Maryland or looking for protection by “forting up” at such places as Fort Dobbs and Bethabara in the Moravian Settlements (also known as the Wachovia Tract).

I’ve created and continue to complete smaller watercolors for my series “Return to the Land of My Ancestors.” I completed the watercolor painting “Colonial Gun Cleaning” before painting the oil “Always Ready for War.”

The figure in the painting “Always Ready for War” is a British soldier cleaning his gun. For those that don’t recognize the uniform, he’s a British Regular from the French and Indian War. When I began painting this series of oils, I started something different with my style. I eliminated the detail in the landscape and added text to help tell the stories. The text in this painting reads, “French and Indian War, Cherokee Wars, Lord Dunmore’s War, Regulators (which refers to the Regulators Movement) and Revolution.” This painting is a reminder that from the outset of the French and Indian War in 1754 through the end of the American Revolution in 1783 that North Carolina and surrounding colonies faced ongoing conflict and war. As a result of all the turmoil and what became a civil war in the South during the Revolution, colonists, especially many of the Boones and Bryans, were frequently moving both in and out of the North Carolina colony and to places such as Virginia, Maryland, and, ultimately, into what is present day Kentucky.

Robert Alvin Crum, Author and Artist

Letter to the Editors Column Coming Soon!

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