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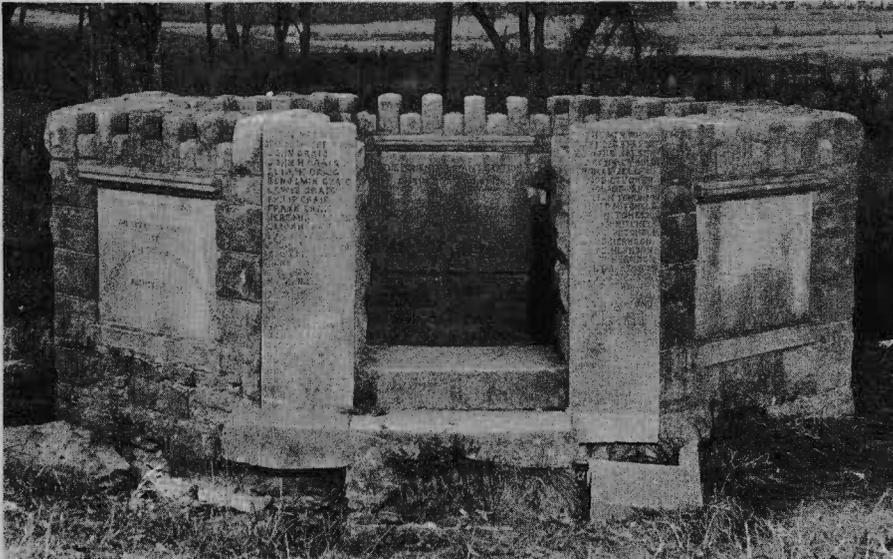
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THE SIEGE OF BRYAN STATION, KENTUCKY

By Stella Love-Robinson

Bryan Station Chapter, Lexington, Kentucky



Photograph by Herald-Leader

The Historic Spring at Bryan Station, Marked by Bryan Station Chapter, Lexington, Kentucky.

THE PERIOD between the close of the Revolutionary War, 1781, and the War of 1812 was a very trying one for the pioneers.

Great Britain watched them thread their way through the Cumberland Gap, build their forts and homes, then waged war against them with the objective of extermination. Again and again England sent British officers flying the British flag, demanding surrender in the name of King George the Third. The British crown was not willing to accept defeat without much stubborn resistance and trickery, and the Canadian Rangers and the painted savages continued to wage the War of the Revolution on Kentucky soil.

This was true of Bryan Station, about 5 miles northeast of Lexington. It had been settled in 1779 by four brothers and their families—William, Morgan, James, and Joseph Bryan, from North Carolina. The oldest, William, married a sister of Col. Daniel Boone, whose wife Rebecca was a sister of the Bryan

brothers. Several other families increased the size of the settlement. By 1781–82 this small fort near Lexington had a stockade of some 40 cabins built in a parallelogram 150 by 600 feet, and though well constructed it was on a high hill that made it vulnerable for the savages, who could see the place for miles around; therefore it was the target for many arrows.

No Water Supply

When the pioneers built Bryan Station, they failed to consider that there was no spring within the walls of the fort, and water would be a necessity if an attack should continue long. So on August 16, 1782, when those inside the safety of the enclosure saw hostile Indian spies near, particularly in the weeds and bushes surrounding the spring, the settlers knew that the situation was serious and that it was imperative to prepare for a siege at once. Two of the bravest men mounted their horses and rushed to Fort Lexington for aid. Now, as never before,

did these brave people long for water without the danger entailed in going for it. However, it was not a time for wishing but for doing, and that immediately. Then occurred one of the most courageous episodes in American history!

Women's Work

Fetching water was always women's work—a fact that the Indians knew. If the men went for it now, spies would suspect that they had been discovered. The attack might then begin at once, which would be fatal to the garrison. The situation was explained to the women, and the decision was theirs alone. One by one they volunteered to go for water. This statement also included children 4 or 5 years old. Jemima Johnson is reported to have been the first to leave. She took her little daughter, Betsy, by the hand, and, with a large bucket on her arm, started for the spring. One by one, the other women and girls followed, emboldened by their leader's example, until all the women marched to the spring with their moggins and jiggins, laughing and talking unconcernedly. On their return, however, they walked faster and faster, and fairly rushed into the safety of the fort.

Their brave experience lasted only a few minutes, but in that time the women saw and recognized, close to the spring, and peering at them through the bushes, two men who dressed as Indians but who were not—men feared and despised far more than many red men. These were two English brothers, Simon and James Girty. Simon Girty¹ was especially despicable and was known to all the settlers as the "white renegade"—a man hated by all of the border peo-

¹ Simon Girty was also the "villain" in *The Valiant Defense of Fort Henry*, by Barbara Ray Janowski, in the DAR Magazine for February, 1962 (p. 139).

ple of that day. When he was a boy, his father had been killed by the Indians, and he himself had been adopted by them. He had grown up a savage and chose to remain one. He had all the cunning cruelty of his foster brothers, and by his knowledge of English he became a power among them in their schemes to torture the Americans.

The Siege Begins

Scarcely were the women safe within the fort when the Indians made a rush, but they were repulsed with heavy loss. Then Simon Girty attempted a trick; climbing upon a stump and crowing like a cock, he boasted of the multitude of his warriors, demanding surrender in the name of his Majesty King George, and said he expected reinforcements and cannon with which he would blow the stockade to pieces. Closing, he called, as a farewell threat: "I am Simon Girty, and you all know me". Thereupon, Aaron Reynolds, one of the young men in the fortifications, answered Girty in a bold bantering spirit that won the admiration of his associates. "Yes, we all know you, Simon Girty. I have a trifling dog named *Simon Girty* because he looks so much like you. Bring on your artillery", he shouted, "if you have any, and be damned to you if you or any of your naked rascals get into this place, we will thrash you out again with switches, for we would not use guns on such as you."

Help From Lexington Fort

Just at this time the soldiers from Lexington Fort arrived; the Indians, the British, and the Tories fled hastily; and Bryan Station was saved. However, before leaving permanently, they did a great deal of damage to the crops in the field and killed hundreds of cattle, sheep, and hogs. On the following morning they took their final and definite departure, after five of their number were slain and several wounded. Four of the settlers were killed and three injured.

Restoration of Historic Bryan Station Spring

After the War of 1812, when the settlers no longer needed the protection of the stockade, it was torn down. The Bryan Station spring, too, was not used as much as formerly by

the people for drinking purposes; therefore, from disuse, the water was filled with sand, mud, and gravel and in a badly neglected condition. Some patriotic citizens of Lexington felt that the spring, once so important historically, should be restored to its former usefulness and that a fitting marker should be placed thereon showing what occurred at this spot.

A memorial now encloses the historic spring at Bryan Station; on a stone tablet attached to the monument, these words are engraved:

In Honor of

The Women of Bryan Station who, on the 16th of August 1782, faced a savage host in ambush, and with heroic courage and a sublime self-sacrifice

that will remain forever illustrious obtained from this Spring the water that made possible the successful defense of that station

Organization of Bryan Station Chapter

National records show that the Bryan Station Chapter was organized

February 4, 1897, with 23 charter members. A charter was granted June 15, 1897, and on June 5, 1957, the 60th anniversary was celebrated with impressive religious services and a picnic lunch at the old Cane Ridge Meeting House, near Paris, Kentucky, established in 1791.

Several of the original Bryan Station charter members were direct descendants of the patriots who participated in defense of the fort during the siege of August 16, 1782. Therefore, it was quite appropriate that this new chapter of Fayette County, Lexington, Kentucky, should have been named for the old fortification and called Bryan Station Chapter. As of January 1962, this organization had 141 members.

The original Cane Ridge Meeting House was made of logs, and its interior is virtually the same now as when it was built in 1791. There has been no change in the extremely high pulpit, the very narrow pews, and the cramped balconies. However, a few years ago, to preserve the ancient landmark, the exterior of the building was covered with stone.



Women Going for Water During the Siege of Bryan Station.