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Vignettes

Sons Of The American Revolution

Calloway County, Kentucky

Brown C. Tucker

The Charter Banquet for the Captain James Campen Chapter, Kentucky Society, Sons of the American Revolution, was held Saturday, November 15, 1969, at the Southside Restaurant in Murray. The scheduled principal speaker for the event was then State Senator Carroll Hubbard of Mayfield. Due to unavoidable circumstances, he was absent, but sent the Honorable Richard Weisenberger, who presented Carroll's speech entitled "Only Americans Are On Guard Tonight."

Local officers installed by State President Charles F. Hinds were Brown C. Tucker, President; Dr. Ralph Slow, Vice President; John Nance, Secretary-Treasurer; Douglas Tucker, Historian; and Manning Stewart, Sergeant-at-Arms.

A total of thirty-two men and women was on hand for the program. Among Murray residents present were Dr. Harvey Elder of Murray State University, who gave the Invocation and Benediction, and Mrs. Doris Nance, representative of the local chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution.

Out of town guests were Mr. Robert Short, National Vice President, Sons of the American Revolution, and his wife; Mr. Donald Jackson, State Vice President, Kentucky Society, SAR, and his wife; four members of the Bowling Green Chapter, SAR; and four interested and potential members and their wives from Paducah.

Current members who have served as Chapter President in addition to the writer are Dr. Ralph Slow, Maurice Humphrey, and John Nance.

Here are excerpts from colonial records concerning James Campen, showing why his name was chosen to be used by the Calloway County Chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution.

"Born, North Carolina; Military record lists James Campen as private; commissioned Ensign in Continental Line, North Carolina, December 11, 1776; commissioned First Lieutenant, December 21, 1777; assigned to 2nd North Carolina Battalion, Continental Line, November 10, 1778, under Capt. Fenner; marched against Charles Town [state unspecified]; captured; escaped; recaptured; attacked British soldier with hands; released as prisoner May 12, 1780, wounded; entitled to command North Carolina Line November 10, 1782; promoted to Captain, February 18, 1784; entitled to remain on duty until the end, dated May 11, 1784."

While serving as First Lieutenant, James Campen led a number of marches on important missions. According to a member of the family now living in North Carolina, James led two hundred men in the attack on Charles Town. A family legend concerning his foray with a British soldier with his hands varies somewhat from the above, as it says that he "attacked a British officer in the face with hands ripping away portions of uniform."

According to records of the Society of the Cincinnati, composed of commissioned officers of the Continental Line, and in which membership is handed down through the oldest son of the oldest son, First Lieutenant James Campen was admitted as an original member, October 23, 1783. He died after 1835 and is buried at his home, Crabtree, near Swanquarter, Hyde County, North Carolina.

Joseph Campen, a first cousin to James Campen, also served in the Continental Army. His son Jesse married Jane Whitus in North Carolina and reached Calloway County prior to 1840. They settled in the Elm Grove community, later moving to Coldwater, Calloway County. Jesse and Jane reared six girls, all of whom married and raised average sized families. The Campen name has disappeared from this area, but descendants now living in West Kentucky are numbered in the thousands. Jesse and Jane were dead by 1860, and are buried at Goshen Churchyard Cemetery, Stella, Calloway County, Kentucky. Three of the local SAR Chapter members are descendants of Jesse and Joseph Campen.

Legends of the Jackson Purchase

Janie Bodkin

Extreme Western Kentucky — what is presently Carlisle, Ballard, and Hickman Counties — was in early times a primitive, heavily wooded area along the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers. In the nineteen twenties it had many small, one-owner sawmills, because some of the finest hardwood in the state was found here. Corn was the basic crop, mostly dropped by hand in the hilly sections, and a method called "checking" was used. This planting in squares enabled the farmer to plow his crop from all directions. The corn sheller was as then unheard of; the word "combine" meant nothing to those who tilled the soil with mule teams; tomatoes were a side crop that brought in extra cash during the fall season; canning factories were scattered about over the country and tomatoes were delivered there by the grower for the staggering sum of forty cents per bushel; field hands earned ten cents per bushel for picking. Imagine if you can in these days of fabulous prices and wages what these figures meant.

Each vicinity had its legend and history often repeated by those who liked to talk of the past. One legend that may have borne some truth was that concerning a lead mine somewhere in the river hills bordering the Mississippi River. It was said a resident of the area, riding his horse one day down a steep hill after a week's rain was astonished when the animal skidded all the way to the bottom of the hill and its shod feet left a streak of some greasy dark mineral-like substance in their wake. On examining it, the rider found it to be a streak of lead. He hastily carved out a piece with a hatchet he carried on his saddle and painstakingly covered up the bare exposed lead. He planned to return and get more for bullets, as he and others of the time made their own ammunition and molded it in bullet molds. He carried it home, melted it, and found it to be high quality lead. For years he returned time after time to the deposit and brought out more lead for bullets, and even sold ammunition made from it, but would never disclose its location to anyone, not even members of his own family. Consequently, when he died, the secret location of the lead deposit died with him. He has relatives living today in Carlisle County, but they have never known exactly where the lead is. However, it is a well known fact that it did exist somewhere in the hills known as the Putney's Bend area.

Some people think this vein of lead was closely related to the silver mine reported on the George Rogers Clark surveys made in the vicinity of Fort Jefferson. This was prior to the building of the Fort, which stood on the hills above the valley where an Indian massacre wiped out an entire settlement of pioneers, and where today the Westvaco wood and pulp mill stands in southern Ballard County. A silver mine is mentioned in the Clark land grants and is supposed to exist somewhere in this immediate region of the old fort.

Another well-told legend has it that many years ago a flat boat went down river to New Orleans where its cargo was sold. As flat boats had to move with the current they could not return up-river, so this boat was sold too. The crewmen bought horses and made the return journey. Nearing Putney's Bend, they were surrounded by Indians. Legend has it that a kettle containing the gold from their New Orleans sales was buried somewhere near the Mississippi in that region. Only one of the crew escaped the Indians, but returning to the area later with others he could not find where the kettle was buried. Many years later, a giant beech tree was uprooted by the wind, exposing the rim of a rusty kettle. The finder swore the kettle was empty, but in months to come he was able to purchase and maintain a ferry across the river, something that caused speculation among those who knew of the incident. Innocent or guilty, this ferryman has long since gone to his reward and the truth probably will never be known.