



BOONE TREE GAVEL DONATED TO ARCHIVES

A famous man, a famous tree, and a famous relic have now joined in the archives through the recent anonymous donation of a gavel made from the beech tree on which legend says Daniel Boone made a carving stating he had “cilled a bar” (killed a bear).

A display documenting the story of Boone, the tree, and the gavel is now viewable in the Reading Room during public hours (Monday-Friday from 8-11 a.m. and 1-3 p.m.).

According to the legend, Boone killed the bear near the tree in the 1760s on a hillside in what is now the Boones Creek community of Washington County. Boone (1734-1820) passed through Washington County at various times in the 18th century as a long hunter and explorer. The story is told of how on one occasion he had to hide under a waterfall to escape native warriors. Boone was present at Sycamore Shoals in March 1775, when the settlers purchased the lands on which they were living from the Cherokee. At this same session, Richard Henderson purchased the lands that became Kentucky. He hired Boone to blaze the Wilderness Road there, which thousands of settlers used to move west.

The beech tree with the famous carving became a notable tourist site in the 19th and early 20th centuries. In 1897, officials from the Tennessee Centennial Exhibition wanted to cut the tree down and take to Nashville for display. Local residents raised such resistance that the idea was eventually dropped. The tree finally fell in a severe storm in May 1916. Some years later, the Daughters of the American Revolution, John Sevier Chapter purchased the surviving tree wood. From this wood, they had various souvenirs made, such as tables, sconces, stools, candleholders, and gavels. Since the gavel we have on display is numbered 472, it is possible that as many as 500 gavels were made. The chapter gifted notable individuals with these gavels over the years, including Fess Parker, who portrayed Daniel Boone in the 1960s television series.

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