

Michael Goodnight Killed By Indians Near Harrodsburg

The following article was published in The Harrodsburg Herald, Harrodsburg, Ky., Thursday, 18 January 1973:

The surnames Gulknecht (high German form) and Gudknecht (low German form), eventually Americanized into "Goodknight", originated in Germany. Knecht in German means servant; or, in medieval days when knighthood was on the wane, it meant a foot soldier as contrasted with the mounted knight.

In 1707 an exodus from Germany, particularly from the southern German States, began after the war of the Spanish Sussession had devastated the Palatinate. By October 1709, thirteen thousand destitute German emigrants congregated in London. Many of them became settlers in English colonies in America. Later, William Penn, invited oppressed Germans still in the homeland to come to his new colony. Thus, a tremendous immigration began, and by 1775, there were 225,000 Germans in the Colonies.

The brothers, Hans Michael and George Goodnight, were two of these "Palatines", as they came to be called. In 1752, John Michael Goodnight (his English name) came to America, landing in Pennsylvania. His brother, George, came to America two years later in 1754. The brothers, Michael and George, later moved to Virginia, then to North Carolina, and finally in the summer of 1777 or 1778 to pioneer Kentucky. Both Michael and George Goodnight met the same sad misfortune in Kentucky. In 1780 at Ruddell's Station, George Goodnight was killed by Indians and his family taken into captivity. In 1781, near Harrodsburg; Michael Goodnight was killed by Indians.

This sketch contains the true story of John Michael Goodnight and his descendants which can be verified with documentation. It also encompasses many of the legends, folk-lore, and traditions, however, some of which are at variance with factual recorded history.

After Michael Goodnight's first wife died, he was married a second time to Mary Landers on February 19, 1762, probably in Virginia. Soon after the marriage, they removed to North Carolina where Michael became a land owner. Later, Michael sold his North Carolina lands and came to Kentucky in 1777 or 1778. Before the Virginia Land Commissioners, Michael Goodnight claimed a settlement of 400 acres of land in Kentucky by right of "actual settlement in February 1779". The actual settlement in February 1779 indicated that he made some kind of improvement on his 400 acres - probably a cabin. The land was located at the mouth of Doctor's Fork of Chaplin, near Perryville, in the present county of Boyle. It is assumed that Michael lived first at Harlan's Station, which was close to his 400 acres.

The family version of the removal to Kentucky and the killing of Michael Goodnight by Indians is told in this manner: "After locating and building a cabin at Harlan's Station in what later became Mercer County, Michael Goodnight returned to North Carolina and then set out again to Kentucky in July, 1781, with his family and household effects. They were a party of a caravan composed of other pioneer families, who were guarded by thirty armed men. No serious mishap befell the emigrant train until it arrived within half a day's journey of Harlan's Station, where a camp was pitched for the night. All was secure but at midnight, the fearful cry of the savage was heard, followed by gun shots, screams and confusion. Michael Goodnight was killed in the first onslaught and his son, John, was severely wounded, but he succeeded in making his escape. Mrs. Goodnight was expecting another child at the time; she fled into the dark forest. Many of the emigrants were massacred, but a few escaped to the station where the alarm was given. A party was made up to search for Mrs. Goodnight and she was found two days later in the woods lying prostrate upon the ground in a semi-unconscious state, her face covered with a blanket. She was taken to Harlan's Station, where four months later, January 1, 1782, a son, Isaac Goodnight, was born. A curious circumstance, preserved in the family traditions, is that from his birth until the day of his death Isaac could never go to sleep without covering his face."

A family letter written in 1883 gives this account: "Michael and his son, John, went back after some of their goods which they had to pack on horses for want of roads. The Indians came upon them at their camp fire, killing the father. They shot the son, the arrow entered one side and came out at the other. Surprising in that condition he made his way to the horses, and next day went to the white settlement."

Michael Goodnight was described by a great-grandson, having heard from his uncles, that Michael was "energetic, industrious, economical and prosperous, with the greatest contempt for a shiftless person. He was buried in the forest where he fell, within half-day's journey of Harlan's Station."

The long cherished belief in the family that Isaac was the first white male child born in Kentucky was, of course, false. Michael was not killed until 1781, and Isaac was a posthumously born child, born January 1, 1782. It is a proven fact that the first white child was born in 1776. Isaac, however, believed all of his life that he had that distinction.

Another well-beloved statement in the family was that Michael Goodnight was ninety-one years old at the time of his death and the father of twenty-four children, fourteen by his first wife and ten by the last. It seems very unlikely that a man in his late eighties would migrate into a region of such danger. There is no reliable information to substantiate the number of children born to Michael Goodnight. Nine children born to Michael Goodnight and Mary Landers, however, can be identified. Of the fourteen children alleged to have been born of the first marriage, only one - a son, Christian Goodnight, of North Carolina - can be identified. Michael Goodnight's estate was not settled finally until March 26, 1788, when his widow, as administratrix, signed the final accounts as Mary Flannagan, having married ___ Flannagan prior

to March 1788. The children remained with their mother on the family homestead, near the present town of Perryville, until each of the daughters married and the sons left to make homes of their own. Mary Goodnight Flannagan (Michael's widow), John Goodnight, Henry Goodnight, and Abraham Goodnight are each listed on the early tax lists of Mercer County.

The known children of Michael Goodnight were:

1. Christian Goodnight was a son of Michael by his first wife. On March 25, 1794, thirteen years after Michael's death, Christian and Caterinah his wife, of Mecklenburg County, North Carolina deeded to Jacob Goodnight his interest in 167 acres, part of Michael Goodnight's survey in Mercer on Chaplin Fork. The deed was recorded in Mercer County.
2. Margaret Goodnight, the daughter of Michael and Mary (Landers) Goodnight, was the eldest child and was born in North Carolina. She married Henry Pope on June 24, 1782 in Lincoln County, Kentucky.
3. Elizabeth Goodnight, the second daughter of Michael and Mary (Landers) Goodnight, was married to Patrick Doran on January 29, 1783 in Lincoln County, Kentucky.
4. John Goodnight, born May 1, 1765 in North Carolina, was the eldest son of Michael and Mary (Landers) Goodnight. He married Ruth Davis on December 25, 1786 in Mercer County, Kentucky. She was the daughter of Edward and Mary Davis of Mercer County. They remained for the rest of their lives upon a farm which embraced a portion of Michael's original survey, between Harrodsburg and Perryville. In 1794, he bought, from his brother, Abraham, and the guardians of George Silver Tooth's orphans, 207 ½ acres. In 1798, he bought, from David Hart, 119 acres and 44 acres "adjoining former holdings" from Philip Board in 1806. John Goodnight died in 1841 and Ruth, his wife, died in 1850. Their "old home still (1935) stands on the bank of the creek and, nearby Edward Goodnight, married Dolly Dye; Michael Goodnight II married Comfort McCormack; Mary Goodnight; John Goodnight Jr., married Lucinda Atkins; Sarah Elizabeth Goodnight, married Joseph Atkins; Elizabeth Goodnight, married Skippy Allan Dye; Rachel Goodnight, married Richard Nicholas; Davis Goodnight; Nancy Goodnight, married William Duncan, Jacob Goodnight, married first to Susan Hankla and secondly to Nannie Williams of Harrodsburg.
5. Jacob Goodnight, son of Michael and Mary (Landers) Goodnight, was born in North Carolina about the year 1767. He was probably not over 14 years of age when his father was killed. Presumably, he remained with his mother until after his marriage. He married Elizabeth Hoover on March 15, 1792. He lived near Stanford in Lincoln County, Kentucky where he owned land on Hanging Fork. In 1796 Jacob and Elizabeth Goodnight sold their Mercer County lands to Charles Hart and, after this date, evidently made Lincoln County their permanent home. All of their children were born and reared

there, and Jacob and Elizabeth died there. He died February 19, 1843, and Elizabeth, his wife, had preceded him in death by 23 years. Their children were: John Goodnight; Polly Goodnight, married __ McMurry; Sally Goodnight, married Harney; Isaac Goodnight; Peggy Goodnight, married __ Porch; Henry Goodnight; Elizabeth Goodnight, married __ Billingsby; Thomas Goodnight.

6. Henry Goodnight was the third son of Michael and Mary (Landers) Goodnight. He was married to Elizabeth __. Henry received 147 acres of Michael's land and is taxed in Mercer County in the years 1794, 1795, and 1796. One source indicates that this family lived in Tennessee on Duck Fork.
7. Abraham Goodnight was born in North Carolina in 1776. He married Mary Hanna on January 23, 1794 in Lincoln County, Kentucky. He bought land near Simpsonville in Shelby County on February 10, 1806, where he remained. He was one of the trustees of the town of Simpsonville when it was established in 1816. Abraham and Mary (Hanna) Goodnight's children were: Alexander Goodnight; James Goodnight; Jacob Goodnight, born 1796, married Mary Bivens in 1828 and died in June 1851. They were the greatgrandparents of Mr. David Beall of Mercer County, Kentucky; Michael Goodnight; Catherine Goodnight, married John Davenport in Shelby County, Kentucky in 1823. A former resident of Mercer County - Mrs. Clara Lee Shewmaker Rhodes of Pampa, Texas - descends from this line; Abraham Goodnight Jr., married Nancy Davenport, daughter of William and Elizabeth (McAfee) Davenport of Mercer County, and was living in Mercer County in 1850; Landers Goodnight; and William Goodnight.
8. Rachel Goodnight, the daughter of Michael and Mary (Landers) Goodnight, was born in North Carolina. She married Jacob Young on December 11, 1792 in Mercer County. The consent for this marriage was given by the bride's mother, Mary Flannagan, who gave the bride's age as "over 21 years".
9. Sarah Goodnight, the daughter of Michael and Mary (Landers) Goodnight, was born in North Carolina. She married Peter Boucher on May 26, 1795 in Mercer County, Kentucky. Her age was certified by her brother Abraham as being over 21 years. The facts that the bride's mother did not give the consent or certification of her age and that her name disappears from the tax lists after 1795 suggest that Mary (Landers) Goodnight Flannagan died in the year 1795.
10. Isaac Goodnight, the posthumously born son of Michael and Mary (Landers) Goodnight, was born January 1, 1782 at Harlan's Station, a few miles southwest of Harrodsburg. He married Elizabeth McMurry in 1805 in Mercer County. He moved soon after his marriage to Allen County, in southern Kentucky, where he spent the remainder of his life. He was married four times, and was the father of fifteen children. Many of his descendants still

reside near Smith's Grove, Kentucky. Happily believing that he was the first white child born in Kentucky, Isaac Goodnight died in 1869.

This clipping was taken from the Harrodsburg Herald of April 1902: "A dispatch says 'Grandmother' Goodnight, aged 108, and the oldest woman in this section of the State, died at her home near Perryville, the other day. She was never sick until the recent illness which resulted in death. She had 20 children, 75 grandchildren, 25 great-grandchildren and 15 great-great-grandchildren. She had been an inveterate smoker for 85 years and took a 'whiff' at her old cob pipe, which she had used for 30 years, just a few hours prior to her demise." This "Grandmother" Goodnight is thought to have been the wife of one of John Goodnight's sons.

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Additional information by Jerry Long, Owensboro, Ky:

The children of Abraham Goodnight (#7) and Mary Hanna also included a daughter, Elizabeth Goodnight, who married Jonas Davenport and who are the great-great-grandparents of Margaret Coons of Carlo, Cal..

Many researchers believe that Michael Goodnight's wife's maiden name was "Landis". Rachel, daughter of Michael Goodnight & Mary (Landis?), was born in Mecklenburg County, N.C., about 1771. She married Jacob Young, son of John & Ann Jung of Mecklenburg County, N.C., in Mercer County, Ky. on 16 Dec. 1792. Jacob was a Revolutionary War soldier. About 1797 they moved to Shelby County, Ky., where she died 22 Nov. 1828. Her husband died 24 Aug. 1836 at Tampico in Jackson County, Ind. Their children were: Mary Landis, married Solomon Hobbs; John Landis, married Judith Goldsmith; Elizabeth, married Nicholas Hobbs; Michael G., married Emily Hocker & Susan Dawson; Rachel Ann, married Pierson Waskom; Sarah, married Joseph Waskom; Juliet, married Thomas B. Young; William Harrison, married Rebecca Sturgeon, Nancy Sturgeon & Mrs. Rachel Downing; Solomon; Susan W., married John Sturgeon; and Andrew Jackson.

Jacob & Rachel Goodnight Young's son, Solomon Young (1815-1892), married Harriet Louisa Gregg (1818-1909), in Shelby County, Ky. on 9 January 1838. About 1842 Solomon & Harriet left Shelby County, Ky. and moved to Jackson County, Mo. To their marriage nine children were born: Susan Mary, William Andrew, Sarah Ann, Harrison, Elizabeth F., Laura Jane, Martha Ellen, Ada and another child died as an infant. Martha Ellen Young (1852-1947), daughter of Solomon & Harriet Louisa Gregg Young, married John Anderson Truman (1851-1914), and to them three children were born: Harry S., Vivian and Mary Jane. Harry S. Truman was born 8 May 1884 Lamar, Mo., married Elizabeth Virginia Wallace, and died 26 Dec. 1972; he was the 33rd president of the United States.

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