

Pioneer Accounts by Stephen Stateler of Ohio County, KY

By Jerry Long

History of Kentucky, Vol. 2, by Lewis Collins and his son, Richard H. Collins, Librarian of Congress, Washington, DC, 1874, p666:

OHIO COUNTY

Ohio county was formed in 1798, out of part of Hardin county, the 35th in order of formation, and named after the beautiful river that forms the northern boundary of the state. From its territory has since been taken the entire county of Daviess in 1815, and parts of Butler and Grayson in 1810, Hancock in 1829, and McLean in 1854. It is situated in the west middle portion of the state, on the waters of Green river; is bounded N. by Daviess and Hancock counties, E. by Breckinridge and Grayson, S.E. by Butler, S. W. by Muhlenburg, W. by McLean, and N. W. by Daviess. Besides Green river, the streams are Rough, East fork of Panther, Muddy, White's Fork, Walton's, Barnett's, and Caney creeks.

.....

THE HARTFORD HERALD

Hartford, KY, 23 October 1907, p3:



Mr. John H. McHenry, Jr., had the following account, published in the old Louisville Journal, dated the first of April, 1860, of early times in Ohio County and adjoining region:

Sometime in the year 1856 there died in Ohio county, Kentucky, at his residence, six miles north of Hartford, Mr. Stephen Stateler, aged about 86 years. He was at the time of his death the oldest resident of the county, having first gone there the spring of 1790. He was a man of extraordinary constitution, and the writer of this remembers distinctly to have seen him in the harvest field on the 4th of July previous to his death, handling a scythe with the alertness of a young man. He was from Pennsylvania and of German parentage. His original name was Stradler which, for the sake of euphony, was changed to Stateler.

The following account of his early trials and tribulations will no doubt be read with great interest by those persons who were acquainted with Mr. Stateler or other persons whose names are mentioned in the narrative.

In "Collins' History of Kentucky" there is mention made of several incidents concerning which I have often heard this old gentlemen speak, and from whom, no doubt, that interesting information was obtained.

Some years before his death he gave an account of his adventures to a friend who wrote them out for publication. His statement, for the truth of which it is scarcely necessary to vouch, is as follows:

Mr. Stateler's Account

In the winter of 1789 a gentleman by the name of Kendall, who lived in Virginia, had contracted with a man to furnish him with part of a boat load of buffalo meat, and Kendall was to bring barrels and salt down the Kanawha river and take in the meat at the mouth of the river. I was at the point at which the boat was to start, and, desiring to go down to the mouth of the river, went on board the boat and came down, intending at that time only to the mouth, and, if the buffalo meat had been furnished according to contract, I should not have gone any farther; but, as the meat was not forthcoming, Mr. Kendall was driven to the necessity of proceeding down the river with what load he had, and hired several persons, among others myself, to accompany him, and kill game enough, as we journeyed along, to complete his load. As we were floating down we discovered buffalo signs and several of us left the boat in a large perogue to hunt on shore. We met with but little success, however, and reached Mr. Kendall in a few days at Louisville. It was thought by some that buffalo could be killed below Louisville and Mr. Kendall accordingly concluded to pursue his journey and complete his load with buffalo meat and skins below the falls, if possible; so we launched out on the broad bosom of the Ohio on our way to New Orleans.

On March 17th, 1790, Levi Whitsell, Samuel Davis and myself left the boat a short distance below "Red Banks" – where the city of Henderson now stands – and went on shore on the Indiana side, for the purpose of killing bear and buffalo, expecting the boat to await our return. We started into the forest, which had scarcely ever before been trodden by a white man, but we had not proceeded far when we discovered "blazes," which Whitsell said were Indian signs, and insisted on our returning to the boat. We objected and Whitsell left us. Davis and I in a short time found buffalo, wounded a fine bull, and in pursuing it were led several miles from the river. We were very successful in our hunt and did not return to the river until the evening of the third day. Imagine our horror when we discovered that the boat had left us.

I afterwards learned that Whitsell had returned to the boat the same evening and reported that we had been killed by the Indians. Mr. Kendall waited for us until the next morning and, as we did not return, believed us dead, and proceeded on the journey.

We determined to make a raft of logs and follow the boat as far as Diamond Island, hoping to catch up with them at that point. We commenced early the next morning and, constructing the raft, placed our guns upon it and launched out on our frail, unsteady float into the stream, which, at this time, was very high and turbulent. A few rods below us was a large sawyer, swaying to and fro, and rising up and down in the river. We discussed the probability of coming into contact with this formidable enemy before we shoved out and thought we could avoid it, and used our utmost endeavors to do so. But if we had pulled directly for it with all our might we could not have struck it more directly, or with more disastrous consequences than we did. The force of the current carried us to it, in spite of all our efforts to the contrary.

As soon as we struck the sawyer, seizing my gun, I leaped from the raft upon it, in order to avoid falling into the river. The raft floated around and moved down the river. I called to Davis to land and help me off, but it was impossible for him to do so, and he replied that he “could not to save both our lives.” In a few moments his raft swept around the bend of the river, I watching him with beating heart. He waved his hat to me as he passed out of sight and I never saw him again.

THE HARTFORD HERALD

Hartford, KY, 30 October 1907, p6:

THRILLING ACCOUNT
Of Early Times in Green
River Country.
HARTFORD IN THE LONG AGO
Graphic Naarative of Danger-
ous Travel and Encount-
ers With Indians.
(Continued from last week.)

My condition, then was indeed fearful. There was no human habitation that I knew of within a hundred miles of me and I had no hopes of assistance from any one. Thinking, possibly, some one might be within my hearing, I endeavored to fire off my gun, but the powder was wet and it would not strike. My next effort, of course, was to reach the shore, and at the same time to secure my gun. I was some five or six rods from the bank, but I was afraid I could not reach it with my gun in my hand, so I twisted some twigs and branches of the trees within my reach, through the guard of the gun and around the small of the stock, and having secured it in the best manner that I could, I plunged into the river and swam to the shore. After reaching the shore my next object was to get possession of my gun. To do this I made a raft of such logs as I could get together in the river, lashing them together by grapevines. I then cut me a long vine and tying one end of it to the shore and the other to the raft, I shoved out into the river, holding on to the vine, thinking the current would drift me down to the sawyer, and having discovered my gun, I could

pull back to the shore by the vine, but unfortunately the vine was not quite long enough for the raft to strike the sawyer. I reached forward and caught the branches and pulled, in order to reach my gun, which was within a few feet of my hand, but the current was so strong it sunk my raft, so that I was compelled to let go. Holding on to the vine the current of the river swung myself and the raft slowly to the shore. I could get no more vines to lengthen the one I already had, so I tried the second time to reach my gun in the same way, but with the same success. A third and fourth time did I float around with the hope of reaching it, but I was each time disappointed; still my gun was swinging by the twigs.

By this time it was growing dark and I determined to camp for the night and renew my efforts in the morning to obtain possession of my gun, for it seemed to me that my "stay in life" depended upon the recovery of this faithful companion that hung so tantalizingly before my eyes, and yet not within my reach.

I struck fire and made my camp between two rocks, and here I spent the night – a very small portion of it, however, in sleep. During a portion of the night I was engaged in drying my powder. This I did by holding the horn to the fire until it became warm, and then shaking the powder about until it became cool, and I continued this process until my powder was dry. I then laid down to rest but my sleep was disturbed by desperate visionary attempts to get my gun. One, indeed, I succeeded in reaching it, and my joy was so great that I was awakened and beheld by the moonlight my gun still hanging by the branches of the tree on the sawyer. Slowly and heavily passed the weary hours of that night after the moon had sunk and I could no longer see my gun. Morning came at last and as daylight was stealing through the trees and clearing the mist from the river, I was revolving in my mind the different plans which had suggested themselves during the night for the recovery of my gun; but when it was light enough for me to see the sawyer I almost sank to the ground when the appalling truth flashed across my mind that the twigs and branches with which I had tied my gun had released their hold, and it had fallen off the sawyer and sunk to the bottom of the river!

My situation now was mournfully interesting; I was alone, in that trackless forest, two hundred miles from any human habitation that I knew of, with no weapon except my hunting knife, no clothes other than those I had on, no blanket to cover me, and worse than all these, my gun was gone. I endeavored to ascertain the depth of the liver, thinking I might possibly dive down and recover it, by judging from the steepness of the bank, the locality, etc., I concluded that such an effort would be folly.

I left that place with a sad heart, and turned my steps toward the spot where Davis and I had constructed our raft, for besides being in the destitute condition mentioned above, I had no provisions and no salt, and I was getting hungry and I remembered that we had left some four or five venison hams at the place where the boat had left us, and I returned there intending to furnish myself with four or five days provisions; but "misfortunes never come singly," a maxim, the truth of which was verified in this instance, for when I arrived there I found that the buzzards and wolves had been ahead of me, and had not left me a single mouthful.

It was necessary now for me to commence traveling. I had heard that there was a station on Green River called Vienna (now called Calhoun) some fifteen or twenty miles from the Yellow Banks (Owensboro) and that there was a trace leading from one place to the other. I determined to make my way up the river to the Yellow Banks and thence out to Vienna. I walked steadily all that day and must have traveled forty miles. I stopped to camp out for the night. I was very hungry and had nothing to eat; nor had I eaten anything for more than two days. Although hundreds of deer, wild turkey, squirrels, rabbits, etc., had attracted my attention during the day yet I had no way of

killing any of them. At night, however, when I stopped, I was fortunate enough to kill a skunk, or polecat, as I always call it, with a stone. I skinned and dressed it as nicely as I could, and cooked it over the coals. I made my supper that night off of the polecat, but I assure you I have never since that time had the slightest desire to renew the acquaintances which my stomach then formed with that animal

On the evening of the third day, I arrived at a point a little above the mouth of Green River, and made a raft for the purpose of crossing over to the Kentucky side. At this time, no land could be seen near the mouth of the river, but, by the most desperate exertions, I succeeded in getting my raft across the Ohio, and out into the timber on the Kentucky side, above the mouth of Green River. I worked my way on the raft over several miles through the timber until I reached the land, and then gladly left my raft. A greater portion of the country between the Yellow Banks and the mouth of Green River is low, and most of it was at that time covered with water. Very frequently I came to ravines which it was necessary for me to swim, but I could tell the shallowest places by the tops of cane bushes, projecting above the water. I reached the Yellow Banks in safety and spent a day drying my clothes and watching for a boat. During the day two boats passed down I endeavored by every manner of means in my power to get the boats to take me aboard, but at that time it was dangerous for boats to land, on account of the Indians and I was passed by, without being noticed. They regarded me as a mere decoy to induce them to land, so that the Indians might murder the whole crew, and plunder the boat. This was so frequently done then, that it was very seldom a boat ever landed after leaving the Falls until it had passed into the Mississippi.

The next day I started for Vienna. My breakfast that morning, as well as my supper the night before, consisted of a "possum" which I had caught. I cooked it without salt or pepper. I ate it with great relish. It was much better than the polecat, and I have liked possum ever since that time

I started for Vienna but being cloudy I got bewildered in the woods, and having passed the same buffalo bed three different times, I concluded to take out from the Ohio River until I came to the trace leading from the Falls (Louisville)' to Nashville, for I had heard of such a place as Nashville but had indefinite ideas as to where it was.

The night after I left the Yellow Banks I stayed in the flats of the north branch of Panther creek. I found a hollow tree with barely enough dry ground in front of it for me to build a fire. I slept inside of the tree and my fire blazing in front of the opening made it warm. It was cold and raining out, so I enjoyed a comfortable night's rest in the hollow tree, and left it reluctantly next morning, for I did not know where would be my next resting place, but my spirits were buoyed up at the thought and firm belief that I would, that day, see some habitation or come across some trace of a human being.

I traveled on that day, endeavoring, as well as I could without a compass, to keep a south course. I traveled until late in the afternoon, and was beginning to despair of seeing anything to bid me hope for the better, when suddenly I discovered tracks of cattle in the woods. This comforted me with the hope that I should soon see human faces. In a short time I heard a bell. I left the trace in which I was then traveling and went to find the bell, thinking that the cattle might be at home, but I was disappointed, and I could not make them go in any particular direction, so I left them and returned to the trace. I wandered on through, the water, or flats, until nearly sundown. I was weary, hungry, wet, and cold, and, as I sat resting on a log, I beheld the sun sinking behind the western horizon in all its glorious splendor, and it occurred to me that probably I then saw "my last of suns go down on me." I determined, however, that I would endeavor to reach the "high ground", or at last find as dry a place as I could, to camp that night. I neglected that day my usual

precaution of gathering small pieces of wood, or punk, by which to light a fire at night, and I was fearful that I could not build a fire that evening. I struggled on through the water until I reached the bank of Rough creek, which, by the moonlight, I could see was quite a good-sized stream. Suddenly, to my unbounded joy, I heard the sound of an ax, as if some one was chopping wood on the other side of the creek, and listening, I distinctly heard children's voices at play in the town of Hartford. I had never heard of the place before. I hallooed as loud as I could, but could make no one hear me I waited very impatiently until everything, became quiet, and I made another effort to make myself heard. I succeeded, and someone answered me. It was a Mr. Rhoades who ferried me across the creek in a large trough.

I was as hospitably received as I could have expected under the circumstances. My destitute and ragged condition, my strange garb and appearance, and my almost incredible story made me, as I discovered, an object of suspicion. There were at that time twenty-seven families living in Hartford, and they were extremely cautious whom they admitted into their midst. This was of course a wise and necessary precaution on account of the unfriendly tribes of Indians that infested the whole surrounding country.

I spoke but little, however, of myself, but always told the same story when questioned by any one. I spoke frequently, and deplored the loss of my gun.

(Continued next week)

THE HARTFORD HERALD

Hartford, KY, 6 November 1907, p2:

THRILLING ACCOUNT
Of Early Times in Green
River Country.
HARTFORD IN THE LONG AGO
Graphic Narrative of Danger-
ous Travel and Encount-
ers With Indians.
(Continued from last week.)

I had been at Mr. Rhoades's about a week, when his son asked me to go into the woods with him to hunt the horses, and I readily agreed to do so, but insisted on having a gun. His mother forbade him loaning me the gun and directed him to take the gun away from me. I entreated her to let me have it, and was about to surrender it, when her husband, coming up, interfered, and told me to take I the gun with me.

I merely mention this fact as one of many instances of the doubtful and suspicious relation that I bore to the people of the place. The young man and I went out into the woods. The good old Dutch lady, who had objected to my having the gun, was that day the victim of serious alarms

concerning the safety of her son, and was greatly relieved in the evening when we returned home safe and loaded with wild game. Her suspicions against me were completely dissipated next morning when she discovered me reading a Dutch almanac, and said to me, "Is it possible that you can read Dutch?"

I told her that my parents were Dutch, and that I understood the language. This clever old lady afterwards treated me with marked kindness and respect, which amply repaid me for any injury I sustained from her unjust suspicions.

Barnett's station was situated about two miles north of Hartford, and the people of both places were continually harassed by slight depredations from the Indians. It had been rumored that the Indians meditated an attack upon the station, and in April, 1790, they did assail Barnett's station and killed two children of John Anderson and wounded Mrs. Anderson severely. She came very near being killed. A large, powerful Indian had hold of her, and was attempting to scalp her with a sword, when John Miller came to her rescue, and when within a few steps raised his rifle and snapped it at the Indian, who dropped his sword and fled, but took with him the scalp of Mrs. Anderson. This lady afterward recovered and lived 10 or 12 years afterwards.

The Indians in this foray captured and carried off with them Hannah Barnett, a daughter of Col. Joseph Barnett, then a lovely young girl of about 10 years of age. They conveyed her across the Ohio River into Indiana territory. She was ransomed from the Indians by her brother-in-law, Mr. Robert Baird, who bargained with a trader to have her brought in to a post opposite Louisville, and she was accordingly rescued in the month of October following.

In August of the same year, I had the good fortune to recover my gun, which did under the following circumstances: A company of about 15 persons, myself among the number, had been raised in Hartford and Vienna to pursue some Indians. We traced them to "Robertson's Lick" (since called Highland Lick), and abandoned the pursuit. We were about to return, when I prevailed on two of the company, Dudley Miller and Moses Springton, to accompany me to see if I could find it. We reached the river opposite and near to the spot where I had lost it. Miller stood guard whilst Springton and I swam across the Ohio.

In a short time I found the place where I camped, and upon examination I was satisfied that the tree to which I had tied my gun, was now distant about 20 or 30 yards from the water. In searching down stream a short distance from this tree, Springton raised the gun up before him and cried "Here she is." It took a great deal of scouring and cleaning to get the rust off, but that same old gun killed many a deer afterwards. Upon my return to Hartford, I exhibited my gun with more heartfelt satisfaction than can well be imagined at this day.

Many persons about Hartford never had believed the account of my adventures as I had detailed them, but when I appeared with my gun, found as it had been by Springton, at the 'very' spot I had so often described, and bearing evident marks of the truth of my assertion, I was at once acquitted of all suspicions in the minds of the most incredulous; and now for upwards of half a century have I lived near this same town of Hartford and endeavored to maintain the same character for truth and honesty, which the appearance of my gun at that time enabled me to attain.

In the same month, August, 1790, the Indians attacked three men who were hunting near the mouth of Green River. The men were camping out when they were attacked. Two of the men, McIlmurray and Faith, were killed; the third, Martin Vannada, was taken prisoner. Taking their prisoner with them, they crossed the Ohio River and traveled several days toward the North. They came upon what the Indians considered the signs and tracks of white men, and in order not to be impeded by their prisoner, they determined to leave him. I have frequently heard Vannada relate that terrible adventure.

The Indians determined to leave him but at the same time to secure him so that he could not escape before their return. They spread down a blanket at the foot of a tree. With a thong of raw hides they pinioned his hands behind, him to the tree, and another they tied around his neck and around the tree, wrapping it and twisting it securely both before and behind, fastening his head back close to the tree, also lashing his feet together, and in this secure position they left him.

Vanada immediately commenced his efforts to extricate himself. In the course of an hour he felt the knot which bound his hands behind the tree to loosen. Drawing his feet up, he untied the thong which bound them, but now his task seemed only begun. He could not reach around the tree to where the knot was, and it was so securely tied and twisted between his neck and the tree that he could not slip it, and as he moved around himself, the knots would also move so as to be exactly on the other side of the tree from him and always out of his reach; nor could he slip his head through, and in no possible way could he get to use his teeth upon it. Vannada used to say that he felt his teeth "on edge", so great was his desire to get a good gnaw at that rope; he had no knife to cut it with. He then sincerely regretted that he had made any attempt to rescue himself, believing that when the Indians returned and discovered it they would murder him.

In this dilemma it occurred to him that his vest had metal buttons on it. He pulled one of them off, and with his teeth broke it in two. With the rough edge of this piece of button he succeeded finally in fretting, rather than cutting the cord, which bound his neck. He finally released himself and was once more free. But in such a condition!

He was in a wild wilderness hundreds of miles from any human habitation that he knew of, with no clothes save his pants, vest, shirt and moccasins, nothing to eat, no gun, no ammunition, no knife, not even a flint to strike fire with. He had his choice between certain death when the Indians returned, and his chances for life in the wilderness. He chose the latter alternative, and started with the determination to reach his friends at Hartford or die on the way.

No human being ever suffered more than did Vannada before he reached Hartford, which he did on the evening of the ninth day after his escape. During this time he subsisted entirely upon berries, roots, nuts, worms, snails and such things as he could find in the woods.

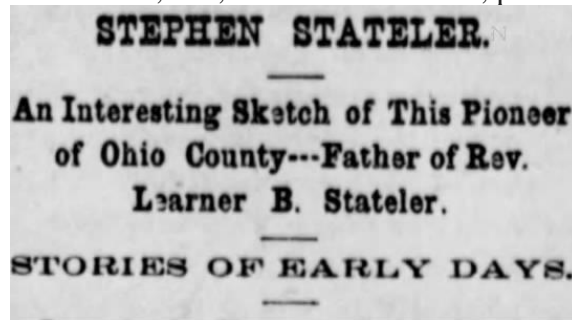
For the last day or two he several times despaired of ever reaching his destination, and two or three times laid himself down to die. He was almost famished, and his intimate friends scarcely recognized him. He said that he would stop to rest, or rather forced by the gnawing of his ravenous appetite, would stop to look at a squirrel or a deer and imagine in what way it was best to cook them, and think of times past when he had more than he could eat. He spent whole days in picturing to himself visions of fine dinners, nice delicacies, &c., to eat.

He could think of nothing else, and when on the ninth day he staggered into Hartford, he first asked for something to eat. He was treated very kindly by the people there, and his appetite was relieved by small and repeated supplies of soup and gruel at first, and afterwards by meat and bread. It was more than a week before he was allowed to pursue his journey toward home, where he found his distressed family and friends mourning his loss, as they had heard of his capture and of the death of his companions, and they had given up all hopes of ever seeing him again. Vannada, however, lived many years afterward, and was an intimate acquaintance and friend of mine.

.....

THE HARTFORD HERALD

Harford, KY, 18 November 1891, p1:



I saw in the HERALD of October 28th an account taken from the daily Courier-Journal, of Rev. Learner B. Stateler's return to Kentucky after a missionary work of sixty years among the Indians on our western frontier. The account brings vivid to my, memory, when a boy, at Hartford, the venerable Stephen Stateler, an old pioneer and Indian fighter, and after the establishment of a civil government, said to have been the first sheriff of Ohio county. My father was a native of the State of Connecticut, but had lived some years on the Island of Nantucket, Mass., had been personally acquainted with some of the relatives of Generals Putnam and Warren, of Revolutionary fame and could tell many incidents connected with the war of Independence, and could tell many interesting stories of such bold mariners as the Starbucks, Cornstalks, Bunkers, Finchs, Ives, Russells, Coffins, etc., as bold sailors as ever furrowed the seas.

Stephen Stateler seldom, if over, failed to call and see my father when he visited Hartford. The old gentleman was fond of hearing my father tell the wild exploits of the early settlers of Connecticut and Massachusetts on the land and in the whaling seas, and in return told my father his many hardships and Indian encounters in the early settling of the county, at and around, Hartford, during which he killed two Indians. Mr. Stateler gave a very exact description of how he killed these Indians. He said that he had crossed the Ohio river and on his return he swam the Ohio river at the Yellow Banks, (Owensboro,) floating his gun on a rotten log. On his way to the Fort (Hartford) he stopped to rest and partake of some dried venison which he had carried with him. While resting, he observed some moss moving behind a fallen tree; taking deliberate aim with his rifle, he fired and shot an Indian through the brain. From what I learned of him, this was near the now town of Masonville, Daviess county. Mr. Stateler reached the Fort the next day without further adventure and without firing a shot since he killed the Indian. The other Indian he killed while on a scout in Muddy flats, Muddy Creek bottoms. In telling how he killed this Indian, Mr. Stateler placed his thumb on his left breast and said: "I shot the Indian here," and placing his right thumb under his arm and as near the back of the right lung as he could reach, said: "the ball came out here," Mr. Stateler told about killing three Indians at my father's shop in Hartford during the summer of 1855. Mr. Stateler traveled on horseback and carried in his hand a short bamboo walking cane with a silver head on it no larger than a small sewing thimble. The joints in this cane were only about one inch long and I have been told since that this kind of a cane is known. as the Missionary cane, and in such a one was the Chinese sugar cane seed (sorghum) first brought to the United States by an American missionary minister to China, who before sailing for home, removed the small head off his cane and filling the first joint with sugar cane seed, placed the head and its rivet back on the cane so that it was overlooked by the Chinese custom house officials. On arriving at Washington the minister presented the seed to the, department of agriculture with the result of the common sorghum throughout the land. During one of Mr. Stateler's visit, at our shop, my father asked him to leave his cane, and his boy, meaning me, would varnish it. Mr. Stateler handed me

the cane and walked out of the shop. The weather was then pleasant and he returned in a few days, and I handed him his cane, of which he was much pleased at its improvement and invited me to visit him at his home and eat apples with him which, to please the old gentleman, I promised to do, and not satisfied yet he turned to my father and gave him a long history of the cane and its former owner, which possibly may have been the Rev. Learner B. Stateler, spoken of in the HERALD of October . Mr. Stateler said that his son was at that time a missionary preacher among the Western Indians and for his success as a minister to the (I understood him to say) ,Choctaw Indians the Conference (I think called it) presented him this cane as a mark of esteem and, that his son gave or sent it to him, and as it was now too short for a walking cane he took it with him to urge his horse along. I have often listened to the thrilling and heroic deeds of the early settlers of Ohio county as related by this aged pioneer settler, and which, if all written, would enroll our county in the brightest pages of the history of our great Commonwealth.

I was not at Hartford when Mr. Stateler died, but was told he died at his home a few miles North of Hartford about the winter of 1855 or 1856, and that he passed away as gently as the setting sun in a western sky and like the hour glass, whose sands of life had fled. If, in gratitude to one of our boldest settlers and bravest Indian fighters, Ohio county contemplates the erection of a monument to mark their last resting place and to cherish and reverence their dauntless valor, I know of no other name more meritorious than that of the brave old Stephen Sateler.

Edwin Forbes

[See also articles in the Hartford Herald, Hartford, KY, 7 October 1891 p1 (“Reminiscences – Of Early Life in Kentucky – The First Days of Hartford and the Peril of the Pioneer”, by Rev. L. B. Stateler) and 28 October 1891 p3 (“Bringing His Sheaves – From A Savage People the Rev. Learner Stateler Returns Home”).]

THE HARTFORD HERALD

Hartford, KY, 2 December 1891, p1:

STEPHEN STATELER.
—
**Biography and Adventures of This Old
Pioneer---Early Days in
Hartford.**
—

Editors Herald: This is in answer to a Mrs. Miller, of Owensboro, who addressed me a letter in my distant home in Montana, some time since, requesting me to furnish her the date of my father, Stephen Stateler's, arrival in this country. I felt at a loss to answer her inquiries, so was not prompt to answer her letter. She said it was her purpose to write an account of his early life, and his history in this country. There are a few items of his early history that will be interesting to read, and I will give them as best I can from memory.

My father was born on the Monongahela river. My grandfather having in the early settlement of that country, erected a fort on the above river, at the mouth of Dunkard's creek, thought to be in the State of Virginia, but when Mason and Dixon's line was run, it fell in the State of Pennsylvania. My father's grandfather came from Germany, hence he was of German descent instead of being of Dutch descent.

A number of my father's kindred were killed in that country by the Indians during the war. I have no means of knowing my father's age, for the records were lost and I have heard him say he did not know his own age. This much I have heard him say, that during the Revolutionary war he was large enough to be sent to mill, and could hear the cannon in the distance.

Sometime between the years 1780 and '85 in company with several others, he started from his home on a trading boat for New Orleans. They passed where Cincinnati now stands, at which place there was a military fort, called Fort Hamilton, and Louisville, then called the Falls of the Ohio, where there were a few cabins at that time, from where they continued down the river, and not far from Evansville they landed on the Indiana side. My father and two others were sent out for the purpose of killing a supply of meat, as game was very plentiful. They saw some old marks on some trees, and one of the men took fright and slipped off, ran back to the boat and said they had seen Indian signs and reported that he heard the report of a number of guns, and had no doubt that the other two men were killed. The boat at once cut cable and floated away and left these two alone in the woods in an Indian country.

They at once set about making a raft of dry logs, bound together with grapevines in order to pursue the boat. Just below where they put the raft in, there was a fallen tree that reached out in the river. My father told the other man if they put the raft in above the tree it would strike the end of it and sink them, but he insisted on putting it in, and they got in and started out. And accordingly, when they started, it struck the log and began to sink. My father caught up his gun, jumped on the timber and that gave the raft a turn, and it went out in the river with the other man still on. Father called to him to come in to shore and help him out, but he went on and left him alone to perish.

There were limbs hanging from the trees out over the log on which my father stood, so he fastened his gun to limbs. He must have perished there, but as he knew how to swim, he reached the shore, for the water was twenty feet deep, as he afterward ascertained. He saved his shot-pouch and butcher-knife, by which he had the means of making a fire, which he did, and dried his clothes and rested until morning. As soon as it was daylight, he looked for his gun, but it was gone. He supposed that floating timbers passed and tore it off. He then started and followed the stream down until he reached a point called Big Pigeon, where Evansville now stands. He could not cross that stream, so he thought the best thing to do was to make a raft and cross over to the Kentucky side, which he did, and landed at the mouth of Green river. He then went up the Ohio river as far as where Owensboro now stands. There he waited two or three days, hoping to get some boat to take him on board. Though a number of them passed, and he hailed them, none of them would come to his relief, fearing a decoy from the Indians. He had heard of a falls on Green river, called Vienna, and thought he would try and find that place. The whole country then was a vast cane brake and elk and other game were in abundance, but he had no means of killing anything. Though he was starving to death, he traveled on for a number of days, having no road and not knowing the right course. He made his way to Hartford instead of Vienna, and I think, about the tenth day he arrived at the bank of Rough creek, about sun down. He could hear the children at play, so he called and was answered. After a while a man called Rhoads came down to the bank of the river and talked to him.

My father informed him that he was a lone man that had been lost from a boat on the Ohio river and was nearly starved to death. Mr. Rhoads told him that the Indians had been there the night before and had stolen their canoe and that they were very careful about strangers, fearing they might be decoyed into the camp of the Indians. My father assured him he was alone, that he need have no fears, and asked him to come over after him. Mr. Rhoads told him there was a trough

in a gulch, about a quarter of a mile below where the present bridge now is, but a tree had fallen across the mouth and had shut it in, but if he would wait he would go and get an axe and cut the tree away and bring him over; so he told him he would wait. He accordingly cut the log away, went over and brought my father to the Hartford side and took him to his home and took care of him. He was so near starved that Mr. Rhoads would only give him a mouthful to eat at a time, and just kept him along for a few days that way until he thought it safe to let him have what he wanted to eat. During his long fast, he ate the berries off the rosebushes, chased an o'possum, killed it, and having his powder horn and flint, he made a fire and roasted the meat and so was able to subsist on that.

Mr. Rhoads' wife, who spoke the German language, scolded her husband very much for bringing that renegade in there; she told him he would stay a little while and then would slip off and bring the Indians in on them, but he told her he didn't think so, that they should show kindness to a stranger, which they did not fail to do. After some days, my father saw an almanac hanging there and took it down and was looking at it. Mrs. Rhoads asked him if he understood that; he told her that when a boy he had been sent to a German school and understood the language. She seemed very much mortified that he had understood her when she had been talking about him being a spy. After she had recruited, he told them to give him a gun and he would go out and kill them some meat. They were, however, very careful, counted out a few balls to him and sent one of the men out with him to see that he didn't run away. Finding however, that he did not try to run away, they trusted him to go out alone and kill game.

The Indians made a raid after he had been there some time, killed some children and captured one little girl, knocked down a woman and scalped her. As well as I remember, the little girl was a daughter of Gen. Barnett, who was the father of the late Colonel Robert Barnett, who resided near No Creek.

A call was made for volunteers to pursue the Indians and my father was one that made a respond to the call. They started in pursuit, the father of the little girl being in command of the company. They had not gone far on the trail, when they found where the Indians had stopped and taken off the little girl's shoes and stockings; they supposed the Indians had put moccasins on her, so she could travel.

They circled around until they turned in the direction of the Ohio river. The General told them they intended to take the child to their town beyond the Ohio river, and that they might possibly overtake them before they reached the river, but unless they killed the Indians at the first fire they would kill the child, that it was better to let them take her on into captivity and risk ransoming her through traders, which was finally done within a year's time. So accordingly they turned back to Hartford.

The people were all kept within the fort, as it was not safe for them to go out to live elsewhere. The only way they could cultivate was to post guards all around their fields and while some watched others cultivated the ground. My father being a good shot and good hunter, he grew in favor with the people and when any Indian depredations called or men to pursue, he was always on hand.

I remember of hearing him tell of many Indian conflicts, the particulars of which I can't repeat. I remember he said the next fall after his arrival he got a company of men to go with him to where he had lost his gun. They went to the river opposite the place, stationed part of the men there and the others swam across the river and hit the very place where the gun was lost. They walked along the bank and there they found the gun. The leaves and vines had hid it. They all returned home and said that confirmed the truth of his statement.

He spent his time in the common labors of the settlement, killing deer and dressing the skin, out of which they made their clothing.

I think he stayed three years. He then secured a horse and joined the travelers, going on the trail eastward and going in force sufficient to protect themselves. Finally he arrived at his home on the Monongahela, to the astonishment and joy of his kindred and friends, who thought he was drowned going down the Ohio river. He didn't stay there long until he returned again to Hartford.

My grandfather, Ignatius Pigman, from Baltimore, Maryland, who had been for years a traveling Methodist preacher, came about that time to this country. My parents became acquainted and were married, I reckon, about 1795 or '96. My father settled on a farm about 4 ½ miles from Hartford. There they resided all their married life and reared their children. There they died and are buried on the same place. I am their youngest child, and all have passed away except my youngest sister and myself.

I have now told from memory the incidents of my father's life. If you carry out your purpose in writing a history or biography of my father, I hope this may be of some assistance to you.

Very respectfully,
L. B. Statler

.....

Ohio County, Kentucky, in the Olden Days

*A series of old newspaper sketches
of fragmentary history*

By

HARRISON D. TAYLOR

Jon P. Morton & Co., Louisville, KY, 1926, pp15-18:

HOW STEPHEN STATLER CAME TO HARTFORD

Among other remarkable men who were connected with the early settlement of Ohio County. was Stephen Statler. He was of Dutch descent and was born and reared in the western portion of Pennsylvania. While quite a young man he was engaged to help run a trading boat to New Orleans. Their plan was to descend the river, stop at favorable locations, hunt and slaughter game, and load their boat with wild meats, skins, furs, and the like. The party consisted of a jolly band of flatboat men who glided along without mishap to a point a short distance below the mouth of Green River, where they landed on the north side of the Ohio, and commenced hunting for game.

Statler and another man rambled far into the woods and shot several deer. They came in at night loaded down with hams. To their great dismay they found that the boat had gone and had left

them to their fate in the wilderness. Probably the dastardly conduct of the captain and his crew was occasioned by having seen fresh moccasin tracks in the canebrakes.

Statler and his friend concealed themselves for the night and next morning set about constructing a raft to cross the river. They embarked and had nearly reached the Kentucky shore when their raft, by the force of the current, was forced upon a snag, or sawyer, from which it was impossible to extricate it except by lightening the load. To keep his gun secure Statler adjusted the priming, shut down the pan, smeared it around and filled the muzzle with beeswax. After throwing to shore the venison hams, he plunged into the water and swam to the bank. He then suspended his gun from the limb of a tree. As soon as Statler got off the raft, it became disentangled from the sawyer, swung around into the strong current, and glided away with its only passenger on board.

Statler followed on and on, walking down along the shore, hoping to see his companion land, but finally gave him up in despair as the current bore him still farther into the middle of the stream and faster down the river and out of sight. After a long and anxious chase, Statler concluded to return and secure his venison and gun. But, alas! He had tarried too long, for when he reached the place, a gang of buzzards had devoured his meat and his gun had disappeared. He had to set out weary and alone to seek some habitation of his fellow-man.

He was entirely ignorant of the geography of the country, but had heard of such a place as Nashville and thought there might be some trace leading from this part of the Ohio River country to that point; so he concluded to follow up its bank. The water being at a high stage, his course was frequently obstructed. He waded, swam, and rafted himself over all these obstructions. When he reached the present site of Owensboro, he saw old signs of civilization and a trace leading off from the river. He concluded this was the Nashville trace and joyously followed it. He had nothing left but his tomahawk and butcher knife and flint and steel. He had lived on roots and bark since crossing the river, and now suffering an attack of rheumatism he was unable to get even them. His fate seemed sealed. While lying on the ground and thinking over his condition, he heard a noise in the leaves, and looking in that direction saw an opossum passing near him. What a joyful sight to him! With a well aimed throw of his tomahawk he killed it. With eager haste he crawled to it and kindled a fire, cooked his prize, and ate it. This, he said, although it had a very strong taste, was most delicious food to a starving man, and even though he could have devoured the whole, he wisely saved a portion for another meal.

The next day he was well enough to resume his journey. While in the flats of Panther Creek, he was overtaken by a tremendous rain and sheltered for the night in the hollow of a large sycamore tree. On the ninth day of his wanderings he reached No Creek, where he saw cattle with bells on. As he knew cows were in the habit of going home in the evening, he followed them, and they led him to the banks of Rough Creek near Hartford. The reader can well imagine the delight he felt at seeing the columns of smoke ascending from the chimney tops and hearing the sound of the woodman's axe and the voices of merry children at play.

But alas! How soon were these flattering hopes of again mingling with his fellow-men overshadowed and almost blasted. The first sound of his voice, as he called for help, produced almost a dead silence in the little town on the other side of the creek. Presently a few individuals, well armed and keeping behind the shelter of the trees and logs, cautiously approached to within speaking distance. They questioned him over and over again, and finally left, apparently convinced that he was a spy or a decoy to lead them into danger. And to all appearances he was left to perish in sight of his own race who were living in plenty. After a considerable delay a large party of men again came to the top of the bluff. After they cautiously stationed themselves behind the most

available shelter from an enemy's ball on the opposite side, Statler, hungry and weary as he was, had again to undergo another catechising

Humanity finally prevailed over caution, and two men, well armed, pushed out from shore and came to his relief. When brought into the town, his worn, haggard condition fully corroborated, in the minds of all sensible and reasonable men, his story, but of that class who can always see several inches farther into a millstone than any of their neighbors, there was one who "knew" there was something wrong about him, she was the good old wife or the man who kindly invited the stranger to his house and administered to his wants. This old lady having been raised by Dutch parents could speak that language quite fluently and warned the family and the neighbors frequently, in that language, of the viper that they were warming to life in their bosoms, but the father and sons were kind to him, and as soon as he had recovered his strength, they took him about with them on their hunting parties

After some days a number of men had to go across the big bend of Green River to see after horses which were running in the cane. The old gentleman offered a horse and gun to Statler and invited him to accompany the boys. At this the old lady became furious, predicting that she would never again see her sons alive, and heaped upon the "vagabond" all the epithets of abuse in her vocabulary—all in Statler's hearing. While she was talking, the party started off. They returned loaded with game, and it was hard to tell whether the old termagant was pleased or displeased. Her sons had come home alive, but she had proved a false prophet, which was very mortifying to her.

The next day was Sunday, and her "vagabond," shaved and smartly improved, took his seat at the breakfast table. After breakfast he took down the old Dutch Bible and read a chapter aloud. It would be impossible to describe the astonishment, mortification, and contrition of the old lady. She stood with tears in her eyes, and exclaimed "Oh, mine Gott! mine Gott? Und you knows all I says about you Vell, I did not know you vas Dutch, but now I knows you is a good, honest man. You does read de Bible so good. You must forgive, me. I see I did not know vat I vas saying." Then a mutual forgiving and reconciliation took place, and they were ever afterwards the best of friends.

Through the summer young Statler joined in a few chases after Indians. One of these chases occurred when his party crossed the Ohio and followed the trail, into the Indian country, where they overtook some of the redskins and exchanged shots with them. As one of the whites [John Miller] raised his gun to his face, a ball from the enemy struck him in the elbow and passed up his arm to his shoulder, shivering the bone as it went. The only remedy applied was a slippery elm bark poultice, and the entire bone came out of the wound in broken pieces. The man recovered, regained the use of his arm, and lived many years.

By fall Statler had become a favorite among the hunters. Several men volunteered to go with him in search of his rifle, which was a valuable possession in those days. Upon arriving at the Ohio River he pointed out the sycamore tree that stood near the place where he had lost his gun, and sure enough, they found it embedded in the sand on the spot under the limb where he had suspended it. And what astonished them more was that after afresh priming it went off at the first trial. This was owing to the careful manner in which it had been closed up with wax.

He was so much charmed with backwoods life that after a three years' stay, he abandoned all ideas of making his native state his home. He visited his old home and after his return married in June, 1797, Miss Rhoda Pigman, daughter of Ignatius Pigman. They settled on a farm where they both lived to a good old age, pious and orderly members of the church.

Stephen Statler was a large, robust man, but never corpulent. He was commissioned by the governor the first sheriff of Ohio County. He never aspired to any other office. He had his rules of

conduct for himself and family, with which he required strict compliance. He was a close observer of men and things, and was seldom at fault in judging the character of others. He was considered the weather prognosticator of the neighborhood, and many of his predictions were remarkably verified. To those he esteemed he was a kind friend and a most agreeable and social companion.

Stephen Statler was born in Pennsylvania in August, 1770. He married Miss Rhoda Pigman on June 18, 1797. She was born on April 25, 1778, and died in December, 1852. He died on June 9, 1856. They were the parents of four daughters and two sons: Mrs. Eliza (Nicholas C.) Taylor, Mrs. Mattie (Captain William) Duke, Mrs. Sallie (Richard) Duke, and Mrs. Susan Lamar (Henry) Stevens and Ignatius Pigman Statler and Reverend Learner Blackman Statler.

[Note: All of this chapter was reprinted from the Hartford Herald, Hartford, KY, 11 July 1877 p1.]

.....

HISTORY OF KENTUCKY:

BY THE LATE LEWIS COLLINS,
Judge of the Mason County Court.

REVISED, ENLARGED FOUR-FOLD, AND BROUGHT DOWN TO THE YEAR 1874,
BY HIS SON,

RICHARD H. COLLINS, A. M., LL. B.

History of Kentucky, Vol. 2, by Lewis Collins and his son, Richard H. Collins, Librarian of Congress, Washington, DC, 1874, Ohio County section, pp666-667; same appeared in Historical Sketches of Kentucky, by Lewis Collins, Maysville, KY & Cincinnati, OH, 1847, pp486-488:

Early Settlement — The immediate vicinity of Hartford was settled at a very early period, and was often the scene of bloody strife and acts of noble daring. Hartford and Barnett's stations were about two miles apart and although never regularly besieged, were frequently harassed by straggling parties of Indians, and number of persons, who imprudently ventured out of sight of the stations, killed or captured. The following facts we derived in 1846 from Stephen Stateler, a pioneer and venerable and esteemed citizen of Ohio co.:

In April, 1790, the Indians waylaid Barnett's station, and killed two of the children of John Anderson. One of the party assaulted Mrs. Anderson with a sword, inflicted several severe wounds upon her person, and while in the act of taking off her scalp, John Miller ran up within about twenty steps, and snapped his rifle at him. The Indian fled, leaving his sword, but succeeded in carrying off the scalp of Mrs. Anderson. She however recovered and lived some ten or twelve years

afterwards. The same party captured and carried off Hannah Barnett, a daughter of Colonel Joseph Barnett, then a girl of about ten years of age. They retained her as a captive until October of the same year, when through the instrumentality of her brother-in-law, Robert Baird, she was recovered and restored to her friends.

In August, of the same year, three men were attacked by a party of Indians, near the mouth of Greene river. John McIlmurray, one of the whites, was killed, a man named Faith was wounded, and Martin Vannada was made a prisoner. The Indians immediately crossed the Ohio river, and, after traveling for some days in the direction of their towns, struck, as they supposed, the trail of some white men. In order to pursue them with the utmost celerity and without impediment, they tied Vannada to a tree. With the view of rendering his escape hopeless, during their absence, they spread a blanket at the root of a tree, and caused him to sit upon it, with his back against the tree. His hands were then pinioned behind him, and fastened to the tree with one rope, while they tied another rope around his neck, and fastened it to the tree above. In this painful position they left him, and commenced the pursuit of their supposed enemies. But no sooner had they departed, than he commenced the work of extricating himself. With much difficulty he succeeded in releasing his hands, but his task appeared then only to have begun. He ascertained that he could not reach round the tree so as to get to the knot; and it was so twisted or tied between his neck and the tree, that it was impossible for him to slip it one way or the other. Without a knife, he made powerful efforts to get the rope between his teeth, that he might gnaw it in two. Failing in this, he almost regretted having made any effort to effect his escape, as, upon the return of the Indians, the forfeit of his life would, in all probability, be the consequence. At this moment he recollected that there were some metal buttons on his waistcoat. Instantly tearing one off, he placed it between his teeth, and, by great efforts, broke it into two pieces. With the rough edge of one of these, he succeeded in fretting rather than cutting the cord in two which bound his neck to the tree, and was once more free. But in what a condition! In a wilderness and an enemy's country, with no clothing save a shirt, waistcoat, breeches and moccasins!—no provisions, no gun, no ammunition, no knife, not even a flint to strike fire with! He did not, however, hesitate or falter, but instantly struck into the trackless forest; in the direction of home,—and, under the direction of a kind Providence, reached Hartford the ninth day after his escape, having subsisted upon such small animals and insects as he could catch and eat raw. He was nearly famished, and greatly emaciated; but having fallen into good hands, he was soon recruited, and returned to his family in fine health.

In the year 1786 or 1787, an incident occurred at a fort on Greene river, which displays the dangers which beset the emigrants of that period, and illustrates the magnanimity of the female character.

About twenty young persons—male and female—of the fort, had united in a flax pulling, in one of the most distant fields. In the course of the forenoon two of their mothers made them a visit, and the younger took along her child, about eighteen months old. When the whole party were near the woods, one of the young women, who had climbed over the fence, was fired upon by several Indians concealed in the bushes, who at the same time raised the usual war-whoop. She was wounded, but retreated, as did the whole party,—some running with her down the lane, which happened to open near that point, and others across the field. They were hotly pursued by the enemy, who continued to yell and fire upon them. The older of the two mothers who had gone out, recollecting in her flight that the younger, a small and feeble woman, was burthened with her child, turned back in the face of the enemy, they firing and yelling hideously, took the child from its almost exhausted mother, and ran with it to the fort, a distance of three hundred yards. During the chase, she was twice shot at with rifles, when the enemy were so near that the powder burned her,

and one arrow passed through her sleeve; but she escaped uninjured. The young woman who was wounded almost reached the place of safety, when she sunk, and her pursuer, who had the hardihood to attempt to scalp her, was killed by a bullet from the fort.

.....

Stephen Stateler is listed as Stephen Strader in the 1794-1797 tax lists of Hardin County, KY. He married Rhoda Pigman, 10 June 1797 in Hardin County, KY. Stephen Stateler is listed in the first tax list of Ohio County, KY in 1799. He appears as a household head in the 1810, 1830, 1840 and 1850 Federal censuses of Ohio County, KY.

Hardin County, KY Marriage Records:

Know all men by These presents that We Stephen Strader
and Robert Barnett are held and firmly bound unto
his Excellency James Cassard Esq and his Successors
in the penal sum of fifty ^{pounds} lawful money of
Kentucky the which payment will and truly
to be made we bind ourselves our heirs
executors and assigns our hands and Seals this tenth
day of June 1797

The Condition of the above obligation is such
that if there should be no legal cause to obstruct
~~them~~ to a marriage between the above Stephen
Strader and Miss Rhoda Pigman daughter
of Ignatius Pigman then this obligation to
be void else to remain in full force and virtue
as witness our hands the day and year above
written

Stephen Strader
Robert Barnett

Sir

You are at full liberty from me to
 grant Licenses to Mr Steven Stradler and
 my Daughter: & this shall be your justification
 in so doing, that you have acted as the Law
 directs. from

Mr Robert Barnett

Yours Obedt
 Ignatius Pignum

June - 10 - 1797

Ohio County, KY 1810 Federal Census:

(do)	Stephen Statler	1	1	1	2	4	2	1	1	2	3
(do)	Susannah Pignum	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	1	1	1

Stephen Statler - 1 male 0-10, 1 male 16-26, 1 male 26-45
 4 females 0-10, 1 female 26-45
 3 slaves

Ohio County, KY 1850 Federal Census:

460	464	Stephen Statler	81	M	Re	3011	Conynhama
		Rhoda	72	F			Maryland
		Elixa Taylor	52	F			Kentucky
		Susan	21	F			
		Mary Pignum	16	F			Maryland
465	468	Ignatius Statler	44	M		1070	Kentucky
		Levy	45	F			"
		Ann	14	F			"
		Charlotte	14	F			"
		Wm. Moore	11	M			"
		Smith	8	F			"
		Virgil	3	M			"
		Lucy	1	F			"



Gravestones of Stephen Stateler and wife, Rhoda Pigman, in the McDowell Cemetery (Stateler family graveyard) near Horton in Ohio County, KY. Directions to cemetery - Go north of Hartford on Highway 69 about three miles. Turn right on the Hamlin Chapel Road, go about two & one-half miles. Cemetery is on a hill on the left side of the road.

.....