

This Day in History... June 16, 1774

First Kentucky Settlement

On June 16, 1774, James Harrod led 31 men in the founding of the first permanent settlement in Kentucky. Over time the settlement was named Fort Harrod, Harrodstown, and finally Harrodsburg, in his honor.

Born in Pennsylvania, Harrod was a frontiersman, experienced in shooting, hunting, trapping, and fishing. He fought in the French and Indian War and Pontiac's Rebellion, but also had friendly interactions with Native Americans, trading with them and learning a little of their language. In his travels to present-day Illinois, Kentucky, and Tennessee, he met Daniel Boone.

In 1774, Lord Dunmore tasked Harrod with leading an expedition to survey land the British crown had promised to soldiers that served in the French and Indian War. On May 25, Harrod led 31 men from Fort Redstone, Pennsylvania down the Monongahela and Ohio Rivers. They reached present-day Mercer County, Kentucky and on June 16, 1774, established the first pioneer settlement in Kentucky. They named it Harrod's Town, centered around Fort Harrod. Fort Harrod was located approximately 250 miles from the nearest English settlement.

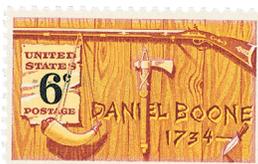
Their settlement, however, was brief. Harrod and his men were called back to join in Lord Dunmore's War, though they didn't arrive in time to participate in the only major battle. Harrod and his settlers returned to their fort on March 8, 1775, to settle there permanently. Within just a few months the town grew too large for the original fort and new buildings were constructed. Soon the people of Harrodstown joined with those at Boonesborough to establish some of the first official laws in the area. In 1776, Harrodstown was made the seat of Kentucky County. The first doctor in Kentucky established a practice in Fort Harrod in 1776, and in 1777, Kentucky's first court opened there.

Harrod went on to serve in the Virginia House of Delegates and as a trustee for the settlement. He also served in the militia, reaching the rank of colonel in 1779. He eventually amassed significant wealth and owned over 20,000 acres across Kentucky. However, he also began seeking solitude in the wilderness. In 1792, he disappeared while hunting for beaver with two other men. It's been suggested he was killed by Native Americans or a member of his party, or may have decided to leave his family.

In 1785, the town was formally established by the Virginia General Assembly as Harrodsburg. It was incorporated by the Kentucky General Assembly in 1836. In 1927, the fort was reconstructed as the centerpiece of Old Fort Harrod State Park. And in 1936, President Franklin Roosevelt dedicated a monument in the town honoring it as the "first permanent settlement west of the Appalachians."



This stamp was issued for the 200th anniversary of the settlement.



Boone attempted a settlement in Kentucky in 1773 but was prevented by conflicts with Native Americans.



Kentucky became the 15th state on June 1, 1792.

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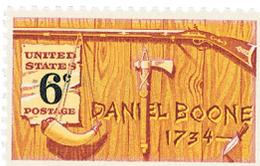
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