

Indian Old Fields, Home Of The Shawnee

By Patsy Woodring - 2001

Indian Old Fields is the site of an Indian village and trading post in Clark County, Kentucky, called Eskippakithiki (Es-kip-pa-ki-thi-ki). The name is Shawnee for "Place of Blue Licks," referring to the salt deposits on Lulbegrud Creek. Mrs. Lucille Goff Clark, great-great-granddaughter of Thomas Goff, early settler in Clark County, says the settlement existed in the days between 1670 and 1754. The "thiki" part in the name meant "place," thus "blue-licks place." The word "Shawnee" in the Indian language meant "Southerner."

Another writer, Bessie Taul Conkwright, explained that in 1724 a band of Shawnee Indians, who lived on the Savannah and Suanee [Suwannee?] rivers, had a quarrel with their neighbors and emigrated to Kentucky, settling near Howard's Creek.

Mrs. Goff Clark wrote that the Shawnees were a branch of the Algonquin Indians of Wisconsin. This group had broken away from its tribe and settled permanently at Eskippakithiki. Within memory of the Indians themselves, not one tribe (except the fighting Shawnees) had dared to settle permanently in Kentucky, since these hunting grounds were considered to be the property of all tribes. However, according to archeological research, there have been many Indian settlements within the borders of Kentucky.

John Goff reported that Indian Old Fields and Big Bone Lick were the only two Indian settlements in Kentucky. In 1922 Bessie Taul Conkwright stated that, in 1750, Indians dwelt in three places in the state. The Chickasaws were in the extreme west, on cliffs of the Mississippi River. A flood destroyed the Shawnee town of Shannoah on the Ohio side of the river at the mouth of the Scioto. It was rebuilt on the Kentucky side, across from the mouth of the Scioto. The other settlement was at Eskippakithiki.

Present-day writer and editor, Bob Smith, has found the remains of many Indian settlements in the Eastern Kentucky mountains. There is evidence of long-term living conditions. He feels strongly that it is clear that Kentucky was home to many Indian peoples, not just a hunting ground, although hunting was excellent in Kentucky for deer, bear, buffalo, elk, and smaller game.

Records kept by the French Jesuit priests indicate that some of the French were driven out of Illinois by "The Five Nations." The Jesuit Relations of 1670 states that some of the French were driven out of Illinois and fled southeast, taking refuge with the Shawnee Indians at Eskippakithiki. The French-Canadian Census of 1736 stated that the Shawnee village of Eskippakithiki numbered between 800 - 1,000 people. This would be about 200 heads of families.

The French claimed what is now Kentucky, at this time, because Central Kentucky rivers drained into the Ohio River. The French said La Salle discovered the Ohio River, so all of its watershed belonged to them.

The English declared that La Salle never touched the Ohio River, only the Wabash in Indiana, and thought it was the Ohio draining into the Mississippi River. But the Shawnees felt that they were under

the jurisdiction of the French. They welcomed both French and English traders, however, trading furs for guns, gunpowder, and trinkets.

The Shawnees welcomed traders, but were inhospitable to white settlers. Two early traders, Mr. Hart and Peter Cartier, came in 1747. The Indians had burned out the trees on the open plain at Eskippakithiki so grass could grow to attract game. They grew corn, tobacco, potatoes, beans, pumpkins, and sunflowers.

The Warriors' Trace was an old Indian trail that ran from the north, crossed the Ohio River at the mouth of the Scioto, and proceeded along the Licking River through what is now Fleming County, Kentucky. The trail ran through Eskippakithiki, with one branch leading down through the Cumberland Gap. The French took this trail to trade in the Carolinas and Georgia.

John Goff, in an old newspaper account, states that the buffalo trail, known as the "Warriors Path," ran from Blue Licks to Indian Old Fields. There it divided, one branch going toward the valley lands of Red River, the other to the Kentucky River and Cumberland Gap.

In 1907 this old path was still plainly discernible in places and could be followed with great accuracy its entire distance. This was the first road in Kentucky.

Eskippakithiki covered approximately 3,500 acres of level, prairie-like land between Lulbegrud and Howard's creeks. All that remains today (at the time the newspaper article was written) is a huge Indian mound. Not far from its base stood a log stockade built in a circle. This was the main trading place.

Wigwams and cabins were scattered from the trading center to two miles north, where the village of Kiddville stands today. The cabins had rounded roofs and reached from Howard's Creek to Lulbegrud Creek. They didn't build too close to the springs, where game came to drink. The animals liked the salty, sulphur water.

John Goff states that the fort at Indian Old Fields was surrounded by a high fence or palisade. In the center was a huge locust post, scarred by fire, where death penalty victims were executed. Goff said that the post was still standing when his father was a boy.

John's great-grandfather was Thomas Goff. His grandfather, Elisha, settled on the meadow land at Eskippakithiki.

In 1907 there was a burial mound of Shawnees at Indian Old Fields, located at the falls of Combs Creek, on what was known as the Donnahue place, owned by A. H. Anderson. Indians were buried by laying them on the ground and covering their bodies with stones and dirt. Upright stones were placed around the body. This gradually became a great heap or mound. Two Indian graves were also located on top of the hill, which stood near the road leading from Kiddville Pike to Hollywood Springs.

Bessie Conkwright wrote in 1922 that on a high bluff overlooking Howard's Creek, near Ironworks Pike, you could see the remains of the old fort in the Goff Mound and circle. The circle is the remains of the old palisades surrounding the town. This enclosed an oblong space measuring 200 yards by 180 yards. Charred, sharp palisades were dug up repeatedly showing that Eskippakithiki was burned down.



Conkwright says the mound is within the circle on the western edge, overlooking the creek. She presumes it was at the entrance to the fort. Years ago (this was written in 1922) the mound was opened by Lucian Beckner. He found a succession of hearths, layers of charcoal, ashes, and bones, one after another. In the center was the charred end of a post. Conkwright says the mound may have accumulated around the stake where victims were burned.

John Finley was another trader who came to Kentucky. In 1752 he set out with four white servants from Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. His trade goods were packed in canoes. They paddled down the Ohio River to the falls, where Louisville is located today, to trade with the Indians, but no Indians showed up to trade.

Kentucky History Marker #1274 in Clark County marks the approximate location of the Shawnee Indian settlement of Eskippakithiki.

Near what is now Boone County, as they returned, they met some Shawnees coming from Illinois, who invited Finley to trade at Eskippakithiki. They said there was a branch of the Ohio River called the "Kaintuckee," which would lead to their village.

The Iroquois Indian traders called this level land, where Eskippakithiki stood, "Ken-ta-ki;" "kenta" meaning "level" and "tuckee" meaning "meadowland." The Iroquois called the Kentucky River by the same name, because it led to this "Kentucky" place, or level plain, where they traded with the Shawnees.

White settlers made their settlements, although they weren't exactly welcome, nearly all along the Kentucky River; except Harrodsburg, which was only five miles from the river. The settlements were spoken of as the Kentucky settlements. Later the state was called Kentucky.

Finley and his men followed the Shawnees up the Kentucky River to Howard's Creek. They carried their goods in from there. He carelessly tossed aside some of the dried English hay in which his goods were packed. Today we call this dried hay "blue grass." Early settlers in Pennsylvania had brought the seed over from England. This was probably the first bluegrass to grow in Kentucky.

Finley built a stockade for his furs and stayed at Eskippakithiki until January 1753. He was building up a good trade when a band of Ottawa Indians descended on a scalping expedition. Three of Finley's servants were taken captive, his furs stolen, and all goods were taken. He and one servant, John Faulkner, were away that day and escaped.

They then headed back to Pennsylvania. When a record was made of the incident, it was stated that Finley had been in "Kentucky," the first time this territory was spoken of as such.

Finley enlisted on the English side in the French and Indian War of 1755. Here he met a young wagoner from the Carolinas named Daniel Boone. Finley's stories intrigued Boone, and Finley promised to take him to Eskippakithiki. It was no longer safe to go by way of the Ohio River, at that time, so in May 1769 Finley led Boone and some other men through Pound Gap (not Cumberland Gap) into "Kentucky." Finley became ill, so Boone built him a shelter and laid food beside him, then pushed on through Powell's Valley, until he found the Red River Trail. This he followed to Pilot Knob (in present-day Powell County).

From there, on June 7, 1769, Daniel Boone looked down at the stretch of level bluegrass fields beyond and felt sure he had found Eskippakithiki. He hurried back to tell Finley, who was so cheered that he went with Boone. They and the other hunters all went to Eskippakithiki together. However, they divided up into groups of two, so as not to attract the attention of the Indians or scare the game. Upon arrival, they found the village had been burned to the ground.

While camped along Lulbegrud Creek, one of the men read to the others from a book he had brought along called Gulliver's Travels. Gulliver escaped from his enemies at Lulbegrud Creek. So far, they had escaped from the Indians and thought it a good name for the creek, where they were camped. They camped there all winter, until the Indians drove them back to their settlements.

Boone helped settle Boonesborough in 1775. Later, when he was living at Limestone (Maysville), he went hunting in what is now West Virginia. There he met Thomas Goff from Hardy County, Virginia. Goff asked Boone to help him locate his land grant from the Revolutionary War. (Boone helped pilot many to find their land grants and is said to have named Pilot Knob in Powell County.)

They stayed at Boonesborough for a while. One day Boone invited Goff to hunt in that paradise for hunters, the former region of Eskippakithiki. When they got to a spring, on what later became Goff land, Goff raised his rifle to aim at a deer that had just come to the spring. Goff was surprised to hear the crack of a rifle from another direction and saw the deer fall.

An Indian rushed from behind some bushes and proceeded down to the spring to bleed his trophy. Fortunately the Indian had not noticed Goff, who felt this was not an opportune time for a hunt. Before you could say Eskippakithiki, Goff and Boone hastily made their way back to Boonesborough.

They returned another time, bringing several other men and Goff's cook (a Negro slave) along. A band of Indians descended upon them. Fortunately they were all on horses. The Indians had never seen a Negro before and were so bewildered they let Goff and Boone escape unnoticed back to Boonesborough.

The Indians pursued the Negro, but he escaped, although lost in the woods for a long time. He eventually made his way back to Virginia, sent word to Goff where he was, and stated that he did not want to live in Kentucky again. Goff gave him his freedom.

Goff wanted to settle in Eskippakithiki. The level land and nearby Pilot Knob charmed him. It was not safe, at this time, because Shawnees were always lurking around, so he bought land and settled on what is now Van Meter Road. Later he bought land and settled in Eskippakithiki. His son, Elisha, inherited the land afterwards.

Early white settlers called the part of the plain cultivated by the Indians "The Indian Old Corn Fields." The region's name was shortened to Indian Old Fields after 1800. The name Indian Old Fields was

changed to Indian Fields when the first post office was established at what was then called Goff's Tollgate. John Goff's father suggested the change, because it was shorter.

Today you can drive down the Kiddville Road and find a sign pointing out Indian Fields. The area is divided into small farms now.

The first house built by white men at Indian Old Fields was a block house erected at Jennings Spring on the Jennings place, owned in 1907 by Colonel A. B. Hampton. The two men who built the house were afterwards captured and beheaded.

Elisha Goff and Leonard Beall joined the ranks of Captain Asa Lewis from Clark County in the War of 1812. In the Battle of Raisin River near Detroit, Beall was captured and sentenced to run the gauntlet. The old Shawnee Chief, Cathecassa (Black Hoof, predecessor of Tecumseh), let him go when he found that Beall was born in Eskippakithiki. He took Beall to his cabin and claimed him as his son. Black Hoof wanted to hear all about the place where he, himself, had been born and lived until middle age.

Beall invited him to visit his home in Kentucky. In the summer of 1816 the aged Cathecassa came walking in barefooted from an Indian reservation in Ohio. He pointed out to the white settlers many places of interest in the former village. He told the settlers that while he was fighting in the French and Indian War he had shot repeatedly at George Washington, but was never able to hit him. He decided that Washington bore a charmed life.

Black Hoof was born in the early 1700s and died in 1831. He fought at Oriskany, was present at Braddock's defeat, and fought "Mad" Anthony Wayne. Notes on his life, taken by an Indian land agent, have been preserved (I don't know where the notes are, but if anyone finds out, please let me know). Conkwright wrote that you could find out more on the Indian Old Fields from the Draper Collection at the University of Wisconsin, but I was not successful in my endeavor.

Among the many very early settlers at Indian Old Fields were Captain Benjamin Combs and his brothers, Cuthbert and Joseph; General Marquis Calmes and son, William; and Ben Berry. They were from Berkeley County, Virginia. They had started out to find the Licking Trail and got lost. After arguing over which route to take, they climbed Pilot Knob to get their bearings. When they looked down on the beautiful level country below, they decided to settle on the Indian Old Fields plain. They took pre-emptions on the land in 1775, and when the first court was held at Boonesborough, they were given deeds to their land.

The amazing Combs brothers were fearless hunters. Captain Ben Combs once took a bear cub up on his horse with him. He held on, even though the mother bear was running right after him.

In 1778 Captain Ben and son, William, were hunting when the Indians, on their way to attack Strode's Station, shot William's horse from under him. Both escaped.

When more white people began to settle in Indian Old Fields country, Captain Ben did not want to live there anymore and moved two miles below Boonesborough, where he established Combs' Ferry.

The World Book Encyclopedia has this to say about the Shawnees:

"The Shawnee Indians lived in the eastern forests of the U. S. and spoke the Algonkian language. They split into many groups with villages in Ohio, West Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Tennessee.

"In the middle of the 1700s, they fought for 40 years against the white settlers in these states and were the most hostile in the area. In 1774 the Shawnees were defeated at the Battle of Point Pleasant, thus ending Lord Dunmore's War.

"After this, many Shawnees moved west of the Mississippi. Those who stayed included Tecumseh and his brother, called the "Shawnee Prophet." The brothers tried to unite all Indians against the whites, but were defeated by William Henry Harrison at the Battle of Tippecanoe in 1811. Then the tribe disbanded."

Another place in World Book states the Shawnees were driven out of Pennsylvania by the Iroquois, after which they split up and wandered for 200 years. They finally reunited in Ohio, under Tecumseh.

Compton's Encyclopedia says the earliest known locality of the Shawnee Indians was Kentucky. Some moved to Georgia before 1681; others to Pennsylvania, Indiana, and Missouri in the 18th century.

Christopher Gist listed Eskippakithiki on his map in 1751.

You must see these two points of interest in Clark County, Kentucky. To find Pilot Knob, exit the Mountain Parkway to Old KY-15 at the Clay City exit. Drive west toward Winchester to the first overpass road going over the parkway (a right turn). This road is marked (dimly) with a history marker. Drive straight to the end of the road, where signs will instruct you where to hike to the top of Pilot Knob.

Drive back to Old KY-15 and continue toward Winchester, until you come to Kiddville Road (another right turn). On this road you will see Indian Fields, the site of Eskippakithiki.

If you desire to read more about Indian Old Fields and Clark County history, continue into Winchester to the public library, a beautiful, modern building. You will find helpful librarians, who will direct you to the history/genealogy room.

Bibliography

1. Bedford, A. Goff, *The Proud Land, History of Kentucky, Vol. II*, Dr. A. Goff Bedford, 4680 Thomas Station Road, Mt. Sterling, KY 40353, 1983.
2. Bedford, A. Goff, *Land of Our Fathers, History of Clark County*, Dr. A. Goff Bedford, 4680 Thomas Station Road, Mt. Sterling, KY 40353, 1958.
3. A folder at Winchester Public Library in the Genealogy/History Room has many articles. Some that were labeled: Clarke, Mrs. Lucille Goff, article; Conkwright, Bessie Taul, Indian Old Field, February 13, 1922; Goff, Rev. John, Early County History, Indian Old Fields, about April 7, 1907; Smith, Bob, Early Adventurers Brought Back Tales From The Border.

Patsy Woodring, P. O. Box 2, Vancleve, KY 41385, shares this story with our readers.

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