

Local News

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Marker mystery - Boone historical monument not seen since 1978

By James Brooks
Press Staff Writer
jbrooks@johnsoncitypress.com

A Daniel Boone trail marker, believed to have been erected by Joseph Hampton Rich in 1929, has been missing ever since the Old Science Hill High School in downtown Johnson City was torn down in 1978.

A persistent myth has it that the arrowhead-shaped monument was rescued by an unidentified person who saw it lying on the ground. The story goes that this person took it home and stored it in the basement for the day when it could be re-erected.

The Daughters of the American Revolution say that time has come, and they'd like to have it back. The late Tom Hodge wrote an article about the missing monument in the Johnson City Press on Sept. 29, 2000, according to local historian and former librarian Mildred Kozsuch. She said it was also shown in Ray Stahl's "Photographic History of Johnson City," and in the 1930 Science Hill yearbook.

Rich erected approximately 135 of the monuments beginning in North Carolina in 1913, casting the plaques using metal from the battleship USS Maine.

Virginia author Everett G. Marshall listed all the known Daniel Boone monuments, including this one in his book, "This Man Daniel Boone, Historical Report on the Boone Trail."

An old post card also showed the monument.

Daniel Boone was an 18th century hunter and settler who passed through Tennessee and later promoted the lands over the mountains to settlers. His Wilderness Trail opened up the area, although most of the earliest settlers followed Squire Dan'l to Boonesboro, Ky.

His passage through East Tennessee is recorded as a hunting camp near the site where William Bean later became the state's first white settler, a beech tree where he carved "D. Boone cilled a bar on this

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tree” in the Boones Creek community, and a waterfall on Boones Creek where he once hid from the Indians.

His restless spirit eventually moved him to continue settling further west. He lived to a ripe old age and died in Missouri, although he lost his son in the early Indian fighting near the Cumberland Gap.

Boone and Davy Crockett have become icons of the resourceful American frontiersman wearing fringed deerskin clothing and carrying Kentucky long rifles.

In Washington County his passage is commemorated by a stone monument in the Austin Springs community that was erected by the DAR, a second arrowhead monument at the Washington County Courthouse in Jonesborough that is similar to the missing Science Hill monument, and by the state Historical Commission marker 1A27 across from Boones Creek Middle School.

Emily McClellan is a former DAR Regent who attended the original Science Hill and remembers the monument placed where the Munsey Memorial Christian Life Center is now located.

“It was on the grass on the way up to Science Hill, and somebody wanted to save it,” she said. “It should be put back near where it was.”

She said the moving of the Massengill monument and a historic log cabin to Winged Deer Park were deemed necessary, but feels the Boone Trail monument should be returned to its actual location marking Boone’s hunting trail. “You destroy the historical value somewhat if it is moved, especially since it marks the trail,” she said.

Science Hill High School was torn down to make room for the Johnson City Public Library, that was since also torn down when cracks began to appear in the building. “There was shale under the site, and they knew about it,” McClellan said. “That’s why they built Science Hill on the hill.”

Mary Hensley is the current DAR regent who is spearheading the movement to have the monument restored. “It disappeared during the library construction,” she said. “Someone saw it on the ground and took it home to put in his basement. I don’t know whether it was the entire monument or just the plaque.”

Frank Tannewitz said he actually saw the monument lying broken in the parking lot behind the school when they were tearing it down. “I’ve always felt it went to the dump,” he said. “There is a good possibility that the plaque was rescued, however.”

After more than 25 years of searching for the missing monument, the DAR may have to have a new plaque and monument cast if it hopes to see Boone once again commemorated in downtown Johnson City.