

Northern Kentucky Views Presents:

How a Washington, Kentucky Horse Theft is Responsible for Cincinnati

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HORSE THIEVERY PLAYED ROLE IN FOUNDING OF CINCINNATI

Taken from Cradle Of The Queen City, Chapter 5, by Harry L. Hale, published by "The Cincinnati Enquirer"

But for an Indian horsetheft at Washington, Ky., in 1786 there would have been no Cincinnati, no budding town on the river front and this story, Cradle of the Queen City, never would have been written.

Benjamin Stites, veteran Revolutionary War Colonel and later a river trader, brought his load of goods, mostly whiskey, down the Ohio River in spring and tied up at the new settlement of Limestone Point, now Maysville. Finding neither business nor money there he took his merchandise by pack-horse to Washington, five miles back of Maysville in Mason County. Washington already was the principal horse market on the frontier, with as many as 200 horses there at one time for sale or trade. Business ought to be better there.

The trader arrived at Washington the morning after a group of Indians from the Ohio side of the river had sneaked into the town and in the darkness had gotten away with some of the horses. Because of Stites' military experience he was chosen to lead the posse in pursuit.

The pursuing party followed the Indians' trail to opposite present Ripley, crossed the river and went on to lose their track somewhere near Oldtown, in the edge of Xenia. Then called "Old Chillicothe", it was the capital of the Shawnee Indian nation. Rather than go farther with so small a force, Stites and his group returned leisurely between the Miami rivers to the Ohio. It was on that journey that he saw and admired the beautiful lower Miami valley and wanted the land for his own.

Knowing that it was government Indian land and that it would require both influence and persuasion to induce the government to sell it, Stites, having neither, hurried to Trenton, N. J., and told his Congressman John Cleves Symmes, all about it. Symmes had both influence and persuasion. He promised Stites that he would see what he could do about getting the land for him but instead, as of December, 1787, bought the land for himself at 66 2/3 cents an acre and on credit. It was September 30, 1794, before he got it paid for and could issue deeds.

Still designated "Symmes' Purchase" the tract extended 21 miles along the Ohio River from the mouth of the Great Miami to the mouth of the Little Miami and about 40 miles inland for "quantity." Symmes bragged that it contained a million acres but actually only 311,682 acres were in it.

As of December 17, 1787, Symmes sold Stites 10,000 acres of it, mostly along the west side of the Little Miami River, for L158 8s 8d, flat price. On 640 acres of it Stites November 18, 1788 laid off Columbia, now a part of the East End, and by January 6, 1793, had his land paid for in full.

The succession of titles to the Cincinnati land is unbroken and extends back for nearly half a thousand years. Stites and Denman got their deeds from Symmes after he had gotten his own, signed by George Washington, September 30, 1794; the United States got its title from Virginia, deed of cession March 1, 1784; Virginia got its title by charter May 23, 1609, from James I, King of England, and England got its title by right of discovery in 1448 by Sebastian Cabot. Deeds and titles since 1802 are on file at the Hamilton County Courthouse - a part of the records not destroyed by fire in the 1884 courthouse riot when that building was burned.