

## **Daniel Boone Comes for a Visit**

In 2003 many of the Vardiman clan (Vardaman, Vardeman, and Vardiman) met in Crab Orchard, Kentucky for a family reunion. My youngest brother, David, had discovered that a cemetery near Crab Orchard containing many of our ancestors from the early nineteenth century was about to be inundated from a reservoir being constructed nearby. The State of Kentucky had agreed to move the cemetery to higher ground, and while doing so, conduct a full archeological survey of the burial plots and our family in the late 1700s and early 1800s.

This unique event prompted our family to delve into the family history and learn facts about our heritage few of us knew. We discovered some amazing things about our family. For example, our first ancestors arrived in Delaware in the early 1700s. They migrated to Virginia and lived next-door to Peter Jefferson, the father of President Thomas Jefferson. Several of our family were also close to Daniel Boone and were in the party that help cut the Cumberland Trail.

After continuing to move westward, the Vardemans settled in south central Kentucky for many years, leaving many of the family buried in the Crab Orchard cemetery. While in Kentucky, one of our ancestors, Jeremiah Vardeman, became a prominent itinerant Baptist preacher. He was responsible for pastoring the Crab Orchard Baptist Church from about 1800 to 1812, helped organize the Kentucky Baptist Convention, and helped start the Baptist Seminary in Louisville. Later, after following Daniel Boone to Missouri, he helped organize the Missouri Baptist Convention and William Jewell College.

There are estimated to be about a thousand Vard(a,e,i)mans living in the U.S. We all seem to be related with most of the Vardamans living in Georgia, Mississippi, and Texas, the Vardemans living mostly in Kentucky and Ohio, and the Vardimans in Missouri and the western US. The three primary spellings of the name seem to have been derived from errors in transmission of military records during the Civil War. The original name was Vardeman.

My brother organized the family reunion in Crab Orchard to last three days. He arranged for several talks by the archeologists who studied our family, distant

relatives to inform us about connections to other family and friends, a dedication of the new cemetery, and a Sunday morning church service at Crab Orchard Baptist Church. Several of the events were extremely interesting.

For example, David showed a picture of himself holding the skull of one of our ancestors, taken during one of the archeological digs. He looked like Hamlet in Shakespeare's play of the same name. The Kentucky State archeologists also shared the facts that one of our ancestors apparently died from a bullet wound and another was "black." We also got to meet a distant relative of the family who was a descendant of Jesse James. So, we have several very interesting sub stories that need to be pursued in the history of our family.

A main event occurred during the second day of the reunion. "Daniel Boone" paid us a visit. The State of Kentucky has professional reenactors who perform on special occasions to give reality to historic characters who played a major role in the history of the State. Daniel Boone showed up at our family reunion wearing his buckskin clothing, carrying his long rifle, and in full character. He shared events about his life in Kentucky and then asked if we had any questions. He talked as if we were all living in the early 1800s. He was well rehearsed and was extremely knowledgeable of life on the frontier.

But, I decided to test his ability to think on his feet. My grandmother Vardiman had told many of us kids a story, apparently passed down through several generations, that the Boone family had borrowed the Vardiman family kettle and had never returned it. So, I chose to put Grandma's story to him and see how he reacted.

After several others in the family finished asking their questions, I said, "Daniel, my grandmother told me several years ago that your family borrowed the Vardiman family cooking kettle, and we never got it back. Do you still have it?"

Without hesitation or nervousness, he replied, "Yes, I borrowed the kettle when I traveled with the Kentucky Regulars to eastern Canada to help fight in the French and Indian war. On the way home, we were ambushed by a tribe of Iroquois Indians and they stole the kettle from us. We couldn't get it back from them, so consequently, I couldn't return it to you. Sorry about that, but, that's the price of war sometimes."

I had no comeback for his fabricated story. I didn't know American history well enough to know if he had placed the French and Indian war in the right era, or if his story had an element of truth in it, or if it was a complete fabrication. He sounded so convincing, that I thought he might have known about the kettle and was truly sorry he hadn't returned it to our family. Boy, was he good!

But, my favorite activity during the reunion was the opportunity to speak in the pulpit of Crab Orchard Baptist Church on Sunday morning. The church building had survived intact since its construction in the 1700s except for a fire that destroyed part of the building. It was an old, red brick building with a tall steeple. The sanctuary held about 150 people in old, wooden pews. The pulpit was original and, as far as I knew, was used by my ancestor, Jeremiah Vardeman, over 200 years before me.

The pastor graciously welcomed the members of the Vard(a,e,i)man clan who stayed through Sunday to attend church. He recognized our family reunion and briefly rehearsed the role Jeremiah Vardeman had played in their church and introduced me as the guest speaker for the morning. The pastor was a very humble man and acted like he was a guest in the Vard(a,e,i)man church, rather than us.

I have spoken from pulpits in several large churches and in ones in which the pastors are highly respected. But, I've often felt intimidated to speak in the pulpit of some churches because I consider myself a scientist and teacher, not a pastor or preacher. I have not been ordained as a minister, yet God has called me to encourage and edify people on the topics of origins and the Genesis Flood.

When I step into a pulpit to speak, I sometimes consider the seriousness of the admonitions to the chief priests in the Old Testament, when they entered the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement. Am I putting myself at risk by speaking to a congregation when I'm clearly unprepared in so many ways. One time when I spoke at the First Baptist Church in Roanoke, Virginia, I stepped into the pulpit and was greeted with the following words carved on the top of the podium, "Today we would hear from God!" Talk about intimidating!

That's about as intimidated as I felt that morning when I spoke from my ancestor's pulpit, two centuries after he had been active in Kentucky. Fortunately, my message for the morning reflected the significance of the Vard(a,e,i)man

reunion and the providence of God. I spoke from the passage in Hebrews 12: 1,2 where the writer describes how we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses, who encourage those of us alive today to run the race that is set before us.

It was evident that the writer of Hebrews was using the symbolism of a large stadium filled with people watching a foot race but, his application was to believers who had already finished their race and were now looking down from heaven and watching those of us who were still alive and running our race here and now on Earth. The impact of this scripture passage is to encourage us, so we don't think we're in our race alone. We're being encouraged by the writer of Hebrews and those watching above to, "... run with endurance the race that is set before us ... ."

After the Vard(a,e,i)man family reunion in 2003, I had a much better appreciation from where my family had come, some of the battles they had been through, and how my life fit into the bigger plan of God. What a blessing to have such a rich family heritage!