

The Story of Oldtown and Harrodsburg



Harrodsburg

In May of 1774, Captain James Harrod, with about thirty men descended the Monongahela and the Ohio in canoes to the mouth of the Kentucky River.

These settlers built the first log cabin ever erected in Kentucky at the place where Harrodsburg now stands.

Here a town was laid off and called Harrodstown. After four or five cabins had been built, Indian assaults caused them to be deserted until the following spring, when Harrod and many of his former comrades returned.

At that time, they called the place Oldtown and later Harrodsburg, fittingly commemorating the grand pioneer who built not only the first cabin but the first town in our commonwealth. James Harrod was by nature endowed with all the qualities of a great leader; he is described as tall and commanding, energetic and fearless, honest and generous, ignorant yet intelligent.

Inured to difficulties and dangers, familiar with the forest, skillful with his rifle, he was a success as a hunter, but a terror to his foes. He was a real leader of the pioneers. If news came of an Indian massacre, Harrod snatched his gun and ran at the head of the fighters. If he knew of a family left destitute, he shouldered his rifle and ranged the forest in search of the necessary game to supply their needs.

If he heard of a horse being lost, he searched for the horse and returned it to his neighbor. Once when he was closely pursued by some Indians, he plunged into a swollen stream and, holding his rifle above the water with one hand and swimming with the other, reached the distant shore in safety. Two of the redskins followed him across.

When the savages were about midstream, Harrod fired his rifle, killing one and causing the other to cry in pain and abandon the chase. Several hours afterward, when Harrod had reached a point a few miles below where he had crossed the stream, he was astonished to see that same warrior slowly and painfully draw himself upon a pile of driftwood and attempt to apply a rude bandage to his bloody shoulder. Harrod at once knew that this was the same Indian who had hotly pursued him and that the wound was from his own rifle shot. Most men at such a time would have relentlessly shot their adversary.

Such a thought never entered the mind of James Harrod. He at once resolved to assist his disabled foe. Cautiously he stole to one of the trees on the bank a few yards from where the Indian sat, and, laying aside rifle, tomahawk, and knife, he stepped suddenly in view, with arms extended to

show he was unarmed and meant no harm.

The startled Indian was about to plunge again into the water, but realized that the white man was unarmed and permitted his former enemy to approach, while watching him as a wounded wild animal would, ready at any moment to seek refuge in the rushing waters.

Harrod found the Indian weak from loss of blood and gently assisted him to the shore where he tore off a bandage from his own clothing and dressed the wound. Afterwards, he carried him on his back several miles to a cave, where he nursed him until he was able to rejoin his tribe.