

Who the heck was Spier Spencer?

Many counties in Indiana are named for war heroes and Spencer County is no exception.

While he died before there was officially an Indiana, Spier Spencer lives on as the namesake of a county in Kentucky as well as the town of Spencer, Indiana, the seat of Owen County, and of course Spencer County, Indiana.

Born in 1770 in Virginia, Spencer moved to Kentucky with his parents. He married Elizabeth Polk, daughter of the noted Indian fighter Capt. Charles Polk, in Bardstown, Kentucky on January 18, 1793, after which Spencer and his wife moved to Vincennes. In 1809 Spencer was appointed by Governor William Henry Harrison as the first sheriff of Harrison County, Indiana. He moved his family to Corydon and served in that office until his death on November 7, 1811.

Spencer and his wife ran "The Green Leaf Tavern," in their large log home on Oak Street. Governor William Henry Harrison and Lieutenant Governor Ratliff Boon stayed there when they came on official business, as did delegates to the 1816 Indiana Constitution Convention.

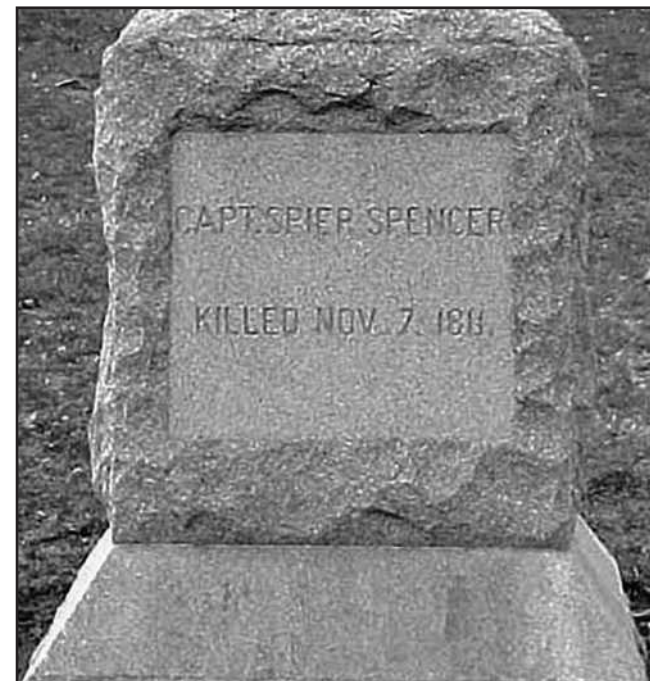
When tensions grew high between the settlers and the Native Americans, Spencer organized the Harrison County

Militia known as the "Yellow Jackets" because of the color of their uniforms, for a campaign against them.

The Battle of Tippecanoe on November 7, 1811, ended with Captain Spencer being seriously wounded during the battle. He was shot in the head and both thighs. He was killed instantly by another shot while he was being carried off the field. Spencer's horse and sword were brought back from the battle and were returned to his widow.

Captain Spencer's bravery and the heroics of his men were lauded by General Harrison. The following account of the battle of Tippecanoe is taken from the official dispatch sent by Harrison to the secretary of war on November 18, eleven days after the battle: "...Spencer was wounded in the head. He exhorted his men to fight valiantly. He was shot through both thighs and fell; still continuing to encourage them, he was raised up, and received a ball through his body, which put an immediate end to his existence..."

Spencer's widow continued operating The Green Leaf Tavern. When she married William Boone, she changed the name to the "Billy Boone Tavern". However, the marriage was short lived and she divorced Boone in 1829.



Richland couple counts illustrious personages in their family histories

(Continued from page 12)

- Captain in the "Snow Campaign" to subdue upcountry Loyalist forces, 1775.
- Lt. Colonel, SC 6th Regiment, 1776.
- Battle of Sullivan's Island, June 28, 1776.
- Williamson's Campaign against Cherokees, Fall of 1776.
- Georgia Campaign against the British (Fraser) raid from St Augustine.
- Colonel of the SC 6th Regiment, Continental Line, 1778.
- Resigned commission as Commander of the SC 6th Regiment, Continental Line, 1778.
- After the Fall of Charleston to Clinton, 1780, while SC lay prostrate, Thomas Sumter formed the first militia to renew the struggle.
- Repulsed in attack on Tumbull's camp at Rocky Mount, July 30, 1780.

- Defeated British at Hanging Rock, August 6, 1780, destroying Prince of Wales Regiment.
 - Defeated in surprise night attack by Tarleton at Fishing Creek, August 18, 1780.
 - Commissioned Brigadier General By Gov. John Rutledge, October 6, 1780.
 - Won Battle at Fish Darn Ford, November 9, 1780 and captured Wemyss, British Commander.
 - Defeated Tarleton at Blackstock's, November 20, 1780. Wounded in back and chest.
- General Thomas Sumter served his country under four presidents. He died June 1, 1832 at his home in Statesburg, SC and was the last surviving General of the American Revolution.

Meanwhile, Tom's wife Vicki counts among her illustrious ancestors none other than Francis Scott Key, the man who wrote the

"Star Spangled Banner".

Francis Scott Key (August 1, 1779 – January 11, 1843) was an American lawyer, author, and poet from Frederick, Maryland, best known as the author of the poem "Defence of Fort M'Henry", which was set to a popular British tune and eventually became the American national anthem "The Star-Spangled Banner".

In 1814 Key observed the British bombardment of Fort McHenry in Baltimore during the War of 1812. He was inspired upon seeing an American flag flying over the fort at dawn: his poem was published within a week with the suggested tune of the popular song "To Anacreon in Heaven". The song, with Key's lyrics became known as "The Star-Spangled Banner" and slowly gained in popularity as an unofficial anthem, finally achieving official

status as the national anthem more than a century later in 1931.

Key was a lawyer in Maryland and Washington, D.C. for four decades and he worked on important cases, including the Burr conspiracy trial. He also argued numerous times before the Supreme Court. He was nominated for District Attorney for the District of Columbia by President Andrew Jackson, where he served from 1833 to 1841.

The tale stretching from both these men to their Spencer County descendants would fill volumes.

The moral of this story?

One never knows how deep their roots might go and how often their ancestors might be entwined with history.

It never hurts to do a little digging and find out from whence you came.

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