KENTUCKY VACATIONLAND -- Historical markers tell stories of Kentucky.

Kentucky's history, cast in squares of bronze, is written all over the face of the land. The bronze plaques are historical markers, posted by the side of highways and byways and gracing the fronts of many an old building. For visitors to Kentucky they can be the objects of rewarding treasure hunts.

Though Daniel Boone and the pioneers are popular subjects, more markers are devoted to the Civil War than to any other time in Kentucky's history (a result of the recent Civil War Centennial). Boone rates two markers in Frankfort alone, one recounting events in his life, the other marking where he is buried in the Frankfort Cemetery.

The Civil War wasn't without its lighter moments, according to a marker in Glasgow. On December 24, 1862, a Confederate force under John Hunt Morgan had made camp south of the town, and some of them headed for the nearest bar to celebrate Christmas Eve. The group dismounted at a tavern just as a patrol of Union soldiers rode up with the same idea. Their celebration turned into a gunfight, with slight losses, after which both parties vamoosed. Their skirmish was ever after called "The Christmas Mishap."

Kit Carson, famous scout, hunter and guide, was born in Kentucky on another Christmas Eve. Near Richmond, a marker stands in recognition of his birth, December 24, 1809.

The burial place of Indian Chief Paducah is one of over 50 markers in Paducah and McCracken County. Citizens and service clubs paid for erecting so many of the historical plaques that Paducah calls itself "Kentucky's best-marked city." A folder recently issued for visitors outlines a downtown walking tour, leading from marker to marker. "Taking this tour," the folder says, "is like turning the pages of a town's biography. Each marker is a tidbit of history."
At Murray, a plaque about Nathan Bowman Stubblefield testifies that he successfully demonstrated wireless voice transmission as early as 1892. Kentuckians believe he was the true inventor of radio, and that Marconi, discovering the same principles a little later, must have had a better press agent.

In Shelby County, a freak of ancient geology is remembered with a marker at Jeptha's Knob near Clay Village. The knob is the result of a hidden volcanic crustal force which failed to reach eruptive stage. In plain talk, it swelled up but it didn't burst. Its top elevation is 1,163 feet above sea level.

Although lots of people have searched for diamonds in Russell County, they haven't found them outside a jewelry shop. Their searches are inspired by, but lack the luck of, Henry Burris, who in the summer of 1888 found a stone of brilliant character. A jeweler in Louisville was happy to purchase it, for it was a fine-quality diamond weighing over three-fourths of a carat. A marker near the site of its discovery notes that Burris got only $20, and that no other such gems have been found in the area in the years since. The diamond is now on display at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C.

Headings on many of the markers read like the titles of mysteries. There are "Trail of Tears" markers in Caldwell and Christian counties and a "Death of a Morgan" marker in Marion County. Others ring with romance ("Inspiration Mountain" and "Jefferson's Sister"), and still others ("$5 Bought Paducah" and "Lincoln Acquitted") read like headlines from the newspapers of long ago.

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