

# Survival boiled down to finding salt

**S**alt is one of the mainstays of life. In the pioneer days, when folks were settling in a land-locked state such as Missouri, they had to find salt for their personal use. It was needed for eating, cooking and preserving. Livestock needed salt, and it was sometimes used for trading. With no ocean nearby, how did our Missouri settlers get the salt they needed to survive?

The answer is that those remarkable settlers relied on the American Indians and early explorers like Meriwether Lewis and William Clark to help locate places called salt licks. As the name implies, there were salt springs bubbling up out of the ground. Animals would lick at the ground and the brackish water for the salt they needed. It was possible to boil that salty water until only the granules were left. It was a long and arduous process but necessary for survival.

The most famous salt lick in the Midwest is less than an hour's drive from Columbia. Called the Boone's Lick State Historic Site, this park is built around the salt lick that, in 1805, was made into a salt-manufacturing site by the Boone brothers. Daniel Boone's sons, Nathan and Daniel M. Boone, set up a saltworks to process salt to take back to the St. Louis area, where they lived.

They had huge iron kettles made for the "furnace" that cooked off the water. They employed men to cut trees, saw and split wood, make hollowed-out log barrels, and, eventually, run the operation. Shelters were built over the furnace to protect it from inclement weather, but the workers slept out in the open.

When enough dry salt had been produced, it was shipped to St. Louis by keel boats in hollowed-out log barrels on the Missouri River. The Boone brothers sold the

Nancy Russell  
Let's Talk  
Antiques



saltworks to another set of brothers, the Morrisons, in 1812. They continued the operation until about 1834. The enterprise stood idle until sometime after the Civil War, when it was revamped and opened again for a short time. The only other effort to make use of the salty water bubbling from the ground was an attempt to raise saltwater fish and oysters. This endeavor was a total bust.

You can visit the Boone's Lick Historic Site and see the remains of this unique saltworks. There are informational signs and displays, a shelter house with picnic tables and more. It's easy to walk down the wooden steps to the salt lick and imagine the history that the area has seen. You can even put your finger in the brackish water and taste it.

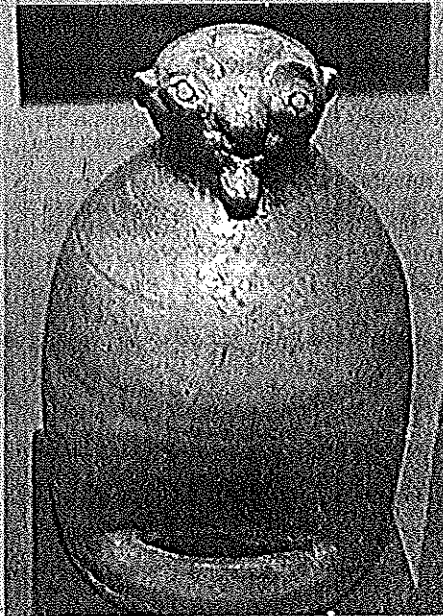
I urge you, if you've never been, to make a day trip to the park. It's located near Franklin, in an area near Boonesboro. You'll find it on Highway 187.

The next time you fill your salt shaker, think of the importance of salt to our ancestors. Then consider the incredible trouble they had to go through to get it. Humbling, to say the least.

**Nancy Russell is a retired antiques dealer with 40 years in the business. If you have an item for "What Is It?" or something about which you would like information, please send a photo and brief description to [n.russell@mac.com](mailto:n.russell@mac.com) or to Antiques, Columbia Daily Tribune, P.O. Box 798, Columbia, Mo., 65205.**

## What Is It?

This handmade clay jug has a special purpose. The head on top is only the whimsy of the potter and doesn't function. The opening at the bottom of the jug is the puzzle. What Is It?



Salty water bubbles up from the ground at Boone's Lick Historic Site near Franklin. In 1805, Daniel Boone's sons had a saltworks here to boil salty water into granular salt.