

John Donelson

of Virginia and Tennessee

Patriot and
Pioneer

Please note:

Because this is an work in progress and I am adding and correcting as I find new information, I have posted the Donelson clan whom I have collected on Rootsweb rather than providing a CD from which to search. Please go there if you want to search, and you can call me if you have any questions. Hope this helps.

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<http://worldconnect.rootsweb.com/cgi-bin/igm.cgi?db=donelsondesc>

Founders of Nashville



In 1779 our Great x5 Grandfather settled Nashville, TN.
This is his story from his diary.

by
Jean Rawlings Meaney
Rev. 3/5/2003



The Founding of Nashville
A Family Story
for
My cousins and their children
by
Jean-Rawlings Meaney

This should be a movie! It is a tale of Indians and starvation and freezing and murder and it is about one of our ancestors, **Colonel John Donelson**. In fact, he is a double ancestor in a way because two of his daughters are our 4th great grandmothers, **Catherine and Jane**. It is also a tale that lives on in our lives and those of our children because we are descendants of this courageous pioneer.

In 1779 our ggggg grandfather **John Donelson** was close to 60 years old. His wife ggggg grandmother **Rachel Stokely (Stockly)** was 49. (They named one of their sons Stokely and there has been a Stokely in the family ever since.) The War for Independence had begun. Col. Donelson was an Indian Commissioner during the Revolutionary War, a member of the Virginia House of Burgesses, a landowner with eleven children; his son Capt. John Donelson had also fought in the War. His older daughters Mary and **Catherine** were married; our gggg grandmother **Catherine** had 3 children. His other daughters, the youngest Rachel (ten) who would later marry Andrew Jackson and our other gggg grandmother **Jane** who married **Robert Hays** after they had settled in Tennessee, were still living with their parents.

John's father had immigrated from England or Scotland to Virginia around 1700. By

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1779 Virginia had been a British colony for almost two centuries. In one generation **John** had become a wealthy Virginian with a large family. Most people in his position at his age would have sat on their laurels (or backsides) and enjoyed their achievements and their newly-won independence, but he was swept up in the national hunger for vast tracts of land that gripped the nation and drove the pioneers westward. In his case, it was westward to Tennessee, an untamed land filled with dangers. Yet, he brought a party two hundred of his family and friends with him in forty boats in the dead of winter with Indians shooting at them from the banks along the river and they settled the town which would later become Nashville.

The party was split into two sections, one of men led by Capt. James Robertson overland; one of women and children and slaves with about 50 men led by **Col. Donelson** from the Virginia/Tennessee border down the Holston River to the Tennessee through northern Alabama up the Ohio to the bend of the Cumberland, a journey of about 1000 miles (see map).

The following story is in his own words taken directly from his diary (from the book: *Tennessee the Volunteer State 1769—1923: Volume I VOYAGE OF THE DONELSON PARTY*. *Italicized words are my comments. Bolded names are our direct ancestors.*)

“Journal of a Voyage, intended by God’s permission, in the good boat Adventure, from Fort Patrick Henry, on Holston River, to the French Salt Springs on Cumberland River, kept by John Donelson.”

December 22, 1779.—Took our departure from the fort, and fell down the river to the mouth of Reedy Creek, where we were stopped by the fall of water and most excessive hard frost; and after much delay, and many difficulties, we arrived at the mouth of Cloud’s Creek on Sunday evening, the 20th February, 1780, where we lay by until Sunday, the 27th, when we took our departure with sundry other vessels bound for the same voyage, and on the same day struck the Poor-valley-shoal, together with Mr. Boyd and Mr. Rounsifer, on which shoal we lay that afternoon and succeeding night in much distress.

Monday, February 28th, 1780.—In the morning, the water rising, we got off the shoal, after landing thirty persons to lighten our boat. In attempting to land on an island, received some damage, and lost sundry articles, and came to camp on the south shore, where we joined sundry other vessels also bound down.

Tuesday, 29th.—Proceeded down the river and encamped on the north shore, the afternoon and following day proving rainy.

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The party was split into two sections, one led by Capt. James Robertson overland; one led by Col. Donelson from the Virginia/Tennessee border down the Holston River to the Tennessee through northern Alabama, up to the Ohio, and up the Cumberland to its bend, a distance of 2000 miles. (I've included maps so you can see the size of the journey). He brought his children, their spouses and his grandchildren on this perilous voyage in the dead of winter. Only his son William, then unmarried, went with Capt. Robertson.

The following story is in his own words taken directly from his diary (which I found on the Internet from the book: *Tennessee the Volunteer State 1769—1923: Volume 1 VOYAGE OF THE DONELSON PARTY*)
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Wednesday, March 1st.—Proceeded on and encamped on the north shore, nothing happening that day remarkable.

March 2nd.—Rain about half the day; passed the mouth of French Broad River, and about twelve o’clock Mr. Henrys boat, being driven on the point of an island by the force of the current, was sunk, the whole cargo much damaged, and the crew’s lives much endangered, which occasioned the whole fleet to put on shore, and go to their assistance, but with much difficulty baled her out and raised her, in order to take in her cargo again. The same afternoon Reuben Harrison went out a hunting, and did not return that night, though many guns were fired to fetch him in.

Friday, 3rd.—Early in the morning fired a four-pounder for the lost man, sent out sundry persons to search the woods for him, firing many guns that day and the succeeding night, but all without success, to the great grief of his parents and fellow travelers.

Saturday, 4th.—Proceeded on our voyage, leaving old Mr. Harrison, with some other vessels, to make further search for his lost son; about ten o'clock the same day found him a considerable distance down the river, where Mr. Ben Belew took him on board his boat. At three o'clock, three p.m., passed the mouth of Tennessee River, and camped on the south shore, about ten miles below the mouth of Tennessee.

Sunday, 5th.—Cast off and got under way before sunrise; the morning proving very foggy, many of the fleet were much bogged; camped on the north shore, where Captain Hutching's negro man died, being much frosted in his feet and legs, of which he died. (*Capt. Thomas Hutchings was our 4g grandfather, married to Catherine Donelson*)

Tuesday, 7th.—Got under way very early; the day proving very windy, a S. S. W., and the river being wide, occasioned a high sea, insomuch that some of the smaller crafts were in danger, therefore came to the uppermost Chickamauga town, which was then evacuated, where we lay by that afternoon and camped that night. The wife of Ephraim Peyton was here delivered of a child. Mr. Peyton had gone through by land with Captain Robertson.

Wednesday, 8th.—Cast off at ten o'clock, and proceeded down to an Indian village, which was inhabited, on the south side of the river: they invited us to come ashore; called us brothers, and showed other signs of friendship, insomuch that Mr. John Caffrey (*Mary Donelson's husband*) and my son (*John or Stokely???*) then on board, took a canoe which I had in tow, and were crossing over to them, the rest of the fleet having landed on the opposite shore. After they had gone some distance, a half-breed, who had called himself Archy Coody, with several other Indians, jumped into a canoe, met them, and advised them to return to the boat, which they did, together with Coody, and several canoes, which left the shore and followed directly after him. They appeared to be friendly. After distributing some presents among them, with which they seemed much pleased, we observed a number of Indians on the other side embarking in their canoes, armed and painted with red and black. Coody immediately made signs to his companions, ordering them to quit the boat, which they did, himself and another Indian remaining with us and telling us to move off instantly. We had not gone far before we discovered a number of Indians, painted, proceeding down the river as it were to intercept us. Coody, the half-breed, and his companion sailed with us for some time, and telling us that we had passed all the towns, and were out of danger, left us. But we had not gone far until we came in sight of another town, situated likewise on the south side of the river, nearly opposite a small island. Here again they invited us to come on shore, called us brothers, and observing the boats standing off for the opposite channel, told us that "their side of the river was better for boats to pass." And here we must regret the unfortunate death of young Mr. Payne, on board Captain Blackmore's boat, who was mortally wounded by reason of the boat running too near the northern shore, opposite the town where some of the enemy lay concealed; and the more tragical misfortune of poor Stuart, his family and friends, to the

number of twenty-eight persons. This man had embarked with us for the Western country, but his family being diseased with small-pox, it was agreed between him and the company that he should keep some distance in the rear, for fear of the infection spreading; and he was warned each night when the encampment should take place by the sound of a horn. After we had passed this town, the Indians having now collected to a considerable number, observing his helpless situation, singled off from the rest of the fleet, intercepted him, killed and took prisoners the whole crew, to the great grief of the whole company, uncertain how soon they might share the same fate: their cries were distinctly heard by those boats in the rear. We still perceived them marching down the river in considerable bodies, keeping pace with us until the Cumberland Mountain withdrew them from our sight, when we were in hopes we had escaped them. We are now arrived at the place called Whirl, or Suck, where the river is compressed within less than half its common width above, by the Cumberland Mountain, which juts in on both sides. In passing through the upper part of these narrows, at a place described by Coody, which he termed the "boiling pot," a trivial accident had nearly ruined the expedition. One of the company, John Cotton, who was moving down in a large canoe, had attached it to Robert Cartwright's boat, into which he and his family had gone for safety. The canoe was here overturned, and the little cargo lost. The company, pitying his distress, concluded to halt and assist him in recovering his property. They had landed on the northern shore, at a level spot, and were going up to the place, when the Indians, to our astonishment, appeared immediately over us on the opposite cliffs, and commenced firing down upon us, which occasioned a precipitate retreat to the boats. We immediately moved off. The Indians, lining the bluffs along, continued their fire from the heights on our boats below, without doing any other injury than wounding four slightly. Jennings' boat is missing.

We have now passed through the Whirl. The river widens with a placid and gentle current, and all the company appear to be in safety, except the family of Jonathan Jennings, whose boat ran on a large rock projecting out from the northern shore, and partly immersed in water, immediately at the Whirl, where we were compelled to leave them, perhaps to be slaughtered by their merciless enemies. Continued to sail on that day, and floated throughout the following night.

Thursday, 9th.—This morning about four o'clock we were surprised by the cries of "Help poor Jennings," at some distance in the rear. He had discovered us by our fires, and came up in the most wretched condition. He states, that as soon as the Indians had discovered his situation, they turned their whole attention to him, and kept up a most galling fire on his boat. He ordered his wife, a son nearly grown, a young man who accompanied them, and his two negroes, to throw all his goods into the river, to lighten their boat for the purpose of getting her off, himself returning their fire as well as he could, being a good soldier and an excellent marksman. But before they had accomplished their object, his son, the young man and the negro were wounded. Before they left the boat, Mrs. Jennings, however, and the negro woman succeeded in unloading the boat, but chiefly by the exertions of Mrs. Jennings, who got out of the boat and shoved her off but was near falling a victim to her own intrepidity, on account of the boat starting so suddenly as soon as loosened from the rocks. Upon examination he appears to have made a wonderful escape, for his boat is pierced in numberless places by bullets. It is to be remarked that Mrs. Peyton, who was the night before delivered of an infant, which was unfortunately killed in the hurry and confusion consequent upon such a disaster, assisted them, being frequently exposed to wet and cold then and afterwards, and that her health appears to be

good at this time, and I think and hope she will do well. Their clothes were very much cut with bullets, especially Mrs. Jennings'.

Saturday, 11th.—Got under way after having distributed the family of Mrs. Jennings in the other boats. Rowed on quietly that day, and encamped for the night on the northern shore.

Sunday, 12th.—Set out, and after a few hours' sailing we heard the crowing of cocks, and soon came within view of the town: here they fired on us again without doing any injury. After running until about ten o'clock, came in sight of the Muscle Shoals. Halted on the northern shore at the upper end of the shoals, in order to search for the signs Captain James Robertson was to make for us at that place. He set out from Holston in the fall of 1779, and was to proceed by the way of Kentucky to the Big Salt Lick on Cumberland River, with several others in company, was to come across from the Big Salt Lick to the upper end of the shoals, there to make such signs that we might know he had been there, and that it was practicable for us to go across by land. But to our great mortification we can find none, from which we conclude that it would not be prudent to make the attempt; and are determined, knowing ourselves to be in such imminent danger, to pursue our journey down the river. After trimming our boats in the best manner possible, we ran through the shoals before night. When we approached them they had a dreadful appearance to those who had never seen them before. The water being high made a dreadful roaring, which could be heard at some distance among the driftwood heaped frightfully upon the points of the islands, the current running in every possible direction. Here we did not know how soon we should be dashed to pieces, and all our troubles ended at once. Our boats frequently dragged on the bottom, and appeared constantly in danger of striking; they warped much as in a rough sea. But, by the hand of Providence, we are now preserved from the danger also. I do not know the length of this wonderful shoal: it has been represented to me to be twenty-five or thirty miles; if so, we must have descended very rapidly, as indeed we did, for we passed it in about three hours. Came to, and encamped on the northern shore, not far below the shoals, for the night.

Monday, 13th.—Set out early. On this day two boats, approaching too near the shore, were fired on by the Indians; five of the crew were wounded, but not dangerously. Came to camp at night near the mouth of a creek. After kindling fires and preparing for rest, the company were alarmed on account of the incessant barking our dogs kept up; taking it for granted the Indians were attempting to surprise us, we retreated precipitately to the boats, fell down the river about a mile, and encamped on the other shore. In the morning I prevailed on Mr. Coffey and my son to cross below in a canoe, and return to the place; which they did, and found an African negro we had left in the hurry, asleep by one of the fires. The voyagers then returned and collected their utensils which had been left.

Wednesday, 15th.—Got under way, and moved on peaceably on the five following days, when we arrived at the mouth of the Tennessee on Monday the 20th, and landed on the lower point, immediately on the bank of the Ohio. Our situation here is truly disagreeable. The river is very high and the current rapid, our boats not constructed for the purpose of stemming a rapid stream, our provision exhausted, the crews almost worn down with hunger and fatigue, and know not what distance we have to go, or what time it will take us to reach our place of destination. The scene is rendered more melancholy, as several boats will not attempt to ascend the rapid current. Some intend

to descend the Mississippi to Natchez; others are bound for the Illinois—among the rest my son-in-law and daughter (*I believe this was Mary and her husband John Caffrey but it could have been Catherine and Thomas Hutchings. Mary and John Caffrey did settle in Mississippi.*) We now part, perhaps to meet no more, for I am determined to pursue my course, happen what will.

Tuesday, 21st.—Set out, and on this day came to the mouth of a river which I thought was the Cumberland. Some of the company declared it could not be, it was so much smaller than we expected. But I never heard of any river running in between the Cumberland and Tennessee. It appeared to flow with gentle current. We determined, however, to make the trial, pushed up some distance, and encamped for the night.

Saturday, 25th.—Today we were much encouraged; the river grows wider; the current is very gentle; we are now convinced it is the Cumberland. I have derived great assistance from a small square sail which was fixed up on the day we left the mouth of the river; and to prevent any ill effects from sudden flaws of wind, a man was stationed at each of the lower corners of the sheet, with directions to give way whenever it was necessary.

Sunday, 26th.—Got under way early; procured some buffalo meat; though poor, it was palatable.

Monday, 27th.—Set out again; killed a swan, which was very delicious.

Tuesday, 28th.—Set out very early this morning; killed some buffalo.

Wednesday, 29th.—Proceeded up the river; gathered some herbs on the bottoms of the Cumberland, which some of the company called “Shawnee salad.”

Thursday, 30th.—Proceeded on our voyage. This day we killed some more buffalo.

Friday, 31st.—Set out this day, and, after running some distance, met with Col. Richard Henderson, who was running the line between Virginia and North Carolina. At this meeting we were much rejoiced. He gave us every information we wished and further informed us that he had purchased a quantity of corn in Kentucky, to be shipped at the falls of Ohio, for the use of the Cumberland settlement. We are now without bread, and are compelled to hunt the buffalo to preserve life. Worn out with fatigue, our progress at present is slow. Camped at night near the mouth of a little river, at which place, and below there is a handsome bottom of rich land. Here we found a pair of hand millstones, set up for grinding, but appeared not to have been used for a great length of time. Proceeded on quietly until the 12th of April, at which time we came to the mouth of a little river running in on the north side, by Moses Renfroe and his company called “Red River,” up which they intended to settle. Here they took leave of us. We proceeded up Cumberland, nothing happening material until the 23rd, when we reached the first settlement on the north side of the river, one mile and a half below the Big Salt Lick, and called Eaton’s Station, after a man of that name, who, with several other families, came through Kentucky and settled there.

Monday, April 24th.—This day we arrived at our journey's end at the Big Salt Lick, where we have the pleasure of finding Captain Robertson and his company. It is a source of satisfaction to us to be enabled to restore to him and others their families and friends, who were entrusted to our care, and who, some time since, perhaps, despaired of ever meeting again. Though our prospects at present are dreary, we have found a few log cabins which have been built on a cedar bluff above the Lick by Captain Robertson and his company. **“(End of Diary Entries)”**

May 1, 1780 After the settlers arrived, realizing they needed a blueprint for government and orderly land sales, 250 drew up and signed “The Cumberland Compact“, the transAppalachian equivalent of the Mayflower Compact. It was discovered in 1846 in an old trunk . John Donelson’s signature is the fifth on the document. *(See a copy on p. 15 of this story. List of those who came with Donelson and Robertson is attached at the end of this document.)*

But wait, there’s more...

The following continuation of the story came from the book *Tennessee the Volunteer State 1769—1923: Volume 1.*

“Within a few weeks after their arrival Robertson’s party had built three forts or stations; and, by the time when Donelson’s party arrived, April 24, 1780, there were eight stations, viz.: The Fort on the Bluff¹(also called The Bluffs), Freeland’s Station, Asher’s Station, Gasper’s or Mansker’s Station, Eaton’s Station, Bledsoe’s Station, Fort Mission and Stone’s River (also called Donelson’s or Clover Bottom²). *(See map on p. 16.)*

Among the pioneers who settled a plantation and planted a crop in the spring of 1780 was Col. John Donelson, the distinguished commander of the flotilla that had just successfully completed the extraordinary voyage from Fort Patrick Henry to the French Salt Lick. He selected a splendid tract of land on the west bank of Stone’s River, not far from the Hermitage. It contained a broad and beautiful river bottom, to which the rich upland gently descended. Both bottom and upland were covered with cane and timber, except a few open spots in the bottom, which were carpeted with a luxuriant growth of white clover. The place has since been known as Clover Bottom, and was once awarded a premium as the best farm in Tennessee. Here Colonel Donelson erected a half-faced camp for his family and servants, known as Stone’s River, or Donelson’s Station. Having planted his corn in the bottom on the west side of the river, he planted a small patch of cotton on the east side, where the situation and soil seemed better adapted to its growth. *(This was the first cotton crop planted in Tennessee.)*

Colonel Donelson knew the Indians had killed a number of settlers lower down the Cumberland; that

¹Robertson named the infant settlement Nashborough, after Gen. Francis Nash, a North Carolina officer who had been killed in the battle of Germantown, in 1778

² So called because, when the white people first came, it was covered with a thick growth of white clover.

they had broken up Renfroe's Station; but as they had not yet appeared in his neighborhood he hoped to escape their depredations. Soon after the Renfroe massacre, however, Colonel Henderson's negro, Jim, and a young man who had been left in charge of Henderson's half-faced camp near Clover Bottom were killed. Being unprepared to defend his position against an attack from the Indians which now appeared imminent, Donelson abandoned his station and retired with his family to Mansker's Station. His crop, in the meantime, came to maturity without serious injury, either from the floods, the Indians, or the wild beasts.

In November, 1780, he prepared to gather his crop. It was recognized as a dangerous enterprise, on account of the increasing number of Indian depredations committed in the settlement. In addition to his own force, therefore, he engaged a company from the Bluff to assist him, on shares. They were to take their boat at the Bluff and ascend the Cumberland to the mouth of Stone's River, where they would meet the Donelson party, who were to drop down the Cumberland from the mouth of Mansker's Creek. Colonel Donelson's boat was in charge of his son, Capt. John Donelson, and contained a horse, intended for use in hauling corn to the boat, and also in towing the boat up the river when loaded. The boat from the Bluff was commanded by Capt. Abel Gower, who was a leader in the famous voyage to the Cumberland, and father of the heroic girl, Nancy Gower, who was wounded by the Indians at Lookout Mountain. His crew consisted of seven or eight men, black and white. The two parties having reached Clover Bottom, as agreed, they fastened their boats to the bank near the present turnpike bridge and commenced pulling corn, which they conveyed to the boats in bags and baskets, and also on a one-horse "slide," which was the only carriage then known on the Cumberland.

They were thus engaged for several days, and it was observed that on each night, and especially on the last night, their dogs kept up a furious barking, which suggested Indians to them, but they tried to explain the excitement of the dogs on other grounds, and manifested their anxiety only by hastening the completion of their work. Early on the last morning Captain Donelson pushed his boat across to the east side of the river, and commenced gathering cotton. This, he thought, would cause but a short delay, and he expected the other boat to join in the picking and share the cotton with him also. But when Captain Gower's party had finished their breakfast, they launched their boat out into the stream and began its descent. Donelson hailed them from the bank and desired them to come over and help him. Gower replied that it was getting late and as he wished to reach the Bluff before night they would have to move on. Donelson remonstrated, but determined to finish gathering his cotton before he returned.

While they were yet parleying, Captain Gower's boat reached the narrow channel between a small island and the west bank. In the meantime a large party of Chickamaugas had concealed themselves on the west bank opposite this island, and as Captain Gower's boat passed them, they poured a destructive fire down upon him. Four or five of his party were killed at the first fire; the others jumped overboard into the shallow water. A white man and a negro escaped into the woods, and ultimately found their way back to the Bluff. Jack Civil, a free negro, being slightly wounded, surrendered and was carried to the Chickamauga towns, where he was so well satisfied that he remained with them and adopted their life. Among the killed were Capt. Abel Gower and his son, Abel Gower, Jr., and James Randolph Robertson, the eldest son of Col. James Robertson, a youth of much promise. Their boat

drifted safely down the river, and was recovered with the dead still on board, and undisturbed except by the hungry dogs that had escaped the Indian fusillade.

Captain Donelson witnessed the attack from the opposite shore, ran down to his boat and secured his rifle, fired across the river at the Indians, then hastened to join his own party. They had fled into the cane when the firing and yelling of the Indians began, and were collected together with some difficulty. It being necessary for the party to separate to prevent leaving a trail that the Indians might follow, they hastily agreed upon the direction to be taken in order to meet the next day upon the banks of the Cumberland, some miles above the mouth of Stone's River. Robert Cartwright, an elderly gentleman who had come to the Cumberland with Colonel Donelson, was given the horse to ride, without which it would have been difficult for him to make his escape.

At sunset they collected under a large hickory tree that had fallen to the ground, and spent the night concealed in its thick foliage, but were too cold to sleep, as they dared not make a fire. Next morning, after a number of fruitless efforts to construct a raft on which they might cross the river so as to reach Mansker's Station, which was on the north side of the Cumberland, Somerset, Colonel Donelson's body servant, volunteered to swim the river, with the aid of the horse, and ride to the station for assistance. He reached the settlement without accident, and soon returned bringing relief to the distressed harvesters.

This attack by a considerable party of Chickamaugas caused consternation among the settlers. A short time before, Mansker's Station had been alarmed by the depredations of a small band of Creeks. William Neely, an early hunter and companion of Mansker's, had undertaken the manufacture of salt at Neely's Lick, and was assisted by several of the stationers [settlers] from Mansker's. His daughter went with him to care for the domestic affairs of the camp. One day, after a successful hunt, Neely brought in a deer, and, being tired, laid down to rest. His daughter was busy preparing supper for her father and the men who would be in soon from the Lick.

Suddenly she heard the crack of a rifle near the camp; her father raised himself up, groaned and fell back dead. The Indians then seized her and carried her captive to the distant Creek Nation. She remained in captivity several years, but was finally exchanged, and married reputedly in Kentucky.

When the men returned from the Lick to the camp and found the father dead and the daughter missing, they fled to Mansker's Station, under the cover of night, and caused great excitement and distress by their sad tidings. It seemed that death was lurking everywhere, and was ready to embrace the whole settlement. Under these circumstances Mansker's, the last of the outlying stations, was abandoned. Colonel Donelson withdrew with his family to Davis's Station, in Kentucky. Colonel Mansker reluctantly moved to one of the stronger central stations, probably Eaton's. After everyone else had left the station, David Gowen and Patrick Quigley, two young men who, evidently, thought they could take care of themselves, remained another night. Before morning they were killed in their beds, being shot through the port holes.

The Chickasaw invasion that culminated in the attack on Freeland's Station, January 11, 1781, was

followed some three months later by a much more dangerous invasion by the Chickamaugas.”

Long fascinating description of the battle with a successful outcome for the settlers.

“The Battle of the Bluff ended the most formidable invasion ever undertaken against the Cumberland. The settlers were so distressed and disheartened from the fall of 1780 to the beginning of the year 1783, that many of them moved away, and there was constant talk of a general exodus from the country; and it was largely due to the courage and firmness of Colonel Robertson that the Cumberland was not abandoned. But these troubles gradually disappeared as the events of the years 1782 and 1783 unfolded themselves. In the fall of 1782 General Sevier invaded and destroyed the Chickamauga towns, and Dragging Canoe and his followers abandoned their old settlement on Chickamauga Creek, and moved some forty or fifty miles lower down the Tennessee River, where they built the Five Lower Towns. This migration was sufficient to occupy their immediate attention. In the meantime the preliminary treaty of peace between Great Britain and the United States was signed at Paris, November 30, 1782, and caused the British agents to withdraw their active support from the Indians. Moreover, the acknowledgment of American independence reestablished confidence in the settlement, and many of the original immigrants returned, while new adventurers daily added to their strength. The settlers were greatly delighted that Florida, the depot from which Great Britain had supplied the munitions of war to their Indian enemies, was transferred to Spain, the ally of France, and thereafter, in a sense their ally, whose policy they hoped, would be friendly to the United States. In October, 1783, the State of Virginia met the Chickasaws and Chickamaugas on the treaty ground at the French Lick on Cumberland. The Creeks did not attend. In addition to the Chickasaw treaty, already referred to, some sort of treaty was concluded with the Chickamaugas, and the settlers on Cumberland felt that for once they were at peace with their Indian neighbors...

The year 1783 witnessed a rapid growth in the Cumberland settlements, and in the same year they were recognized by the State of North Carolina, and erected into the County of Davidson, of which the Bluff under the name of Nashville, became the capital.”

I could go on with the story as it is very interesting but I don't want to drag it out too much. Suffice it to say that our ancestor John Donelson helped negotiate a treaty with the Indians the land eventually became safer for the settlers. Meanwhile, he had removed his family to Kentucky for safety. John Donelson made a trip back to Virginia in 1785 to take care of some business and was murdered on the trail by parties unknown, whether Indians or robbers. His body was never found. His family had moved back to Nashville at that time. His sons Stokely and Capt. John Donelson are mentioned often as playing an important role in the new state. His daughters Jane and Catherine bore children in Tennessee who were our direct ancestors. Rachel, of course, married Andrew Jackson who became president of the United States. They had no children, but Catherine who had married Thomas Hutchings named her daughter born in Tennessee Rachel Donelson Hutchings (our 3rd great grandmother) after her younger sister. After Col. Donelson's death, Andrew Jackson became a shepherd of the family, going into business partnerships with his sons and looking out for all of their welfare.*

**This Rachel married James Smith Rawlings, the beginnings of our Rawlings family. He died in Rutherford Co., TN in 1820. She died around Jackson, TN after 1830.*

Rachel's son John Hutchings Rawlings married Jane Donelson Hays's granddaughter Sarah Jane Hays and that is how we can trace two lines back to John Donelson.

After I put together this Donelson story together, I found the following in American South, Notable Families.

“Colonel John Donelson II was a man of education and achieved prominence in Virginia. “He was a burgess from Pittsylvania County in assemblies of May 1769, 1769-1771, 1772-1774”. (Virginia Biography. Tyler). Prior to the Declaration of Independence he was made colonel of his regiment of militia. (History of Tennessee. Putnam). He was appointed several times to negotiate treaties with Indian tribes, and in each case was successful. He, with three other men, surveyed the boundary between Georgia and North Carolina, which, at that time, ran west to the Mississippi River. (History of Tennessee. Haywood. History of Kentucky. Butler). One of the most remarkable adventures undertaken in the settlement of the West was the voyage of the company of pioneers with Col. John Donelson as commander, which left the Watauga Settlement, (Dec. 22, 1779), traversed the Holston, Tennessee, Ohio and Cumberland Rivers to French Lick, now Nashville, arriving on April 24, 1780. Nearly two hundred persons made this remarkable voyage on flat boats, dugouts and scows, traversing dangerous rapids and constantly surrounded by hostile Indians. In this company were his family and the families of a number of men who, under James Robertson, had preceded them going overland through the wilderness.

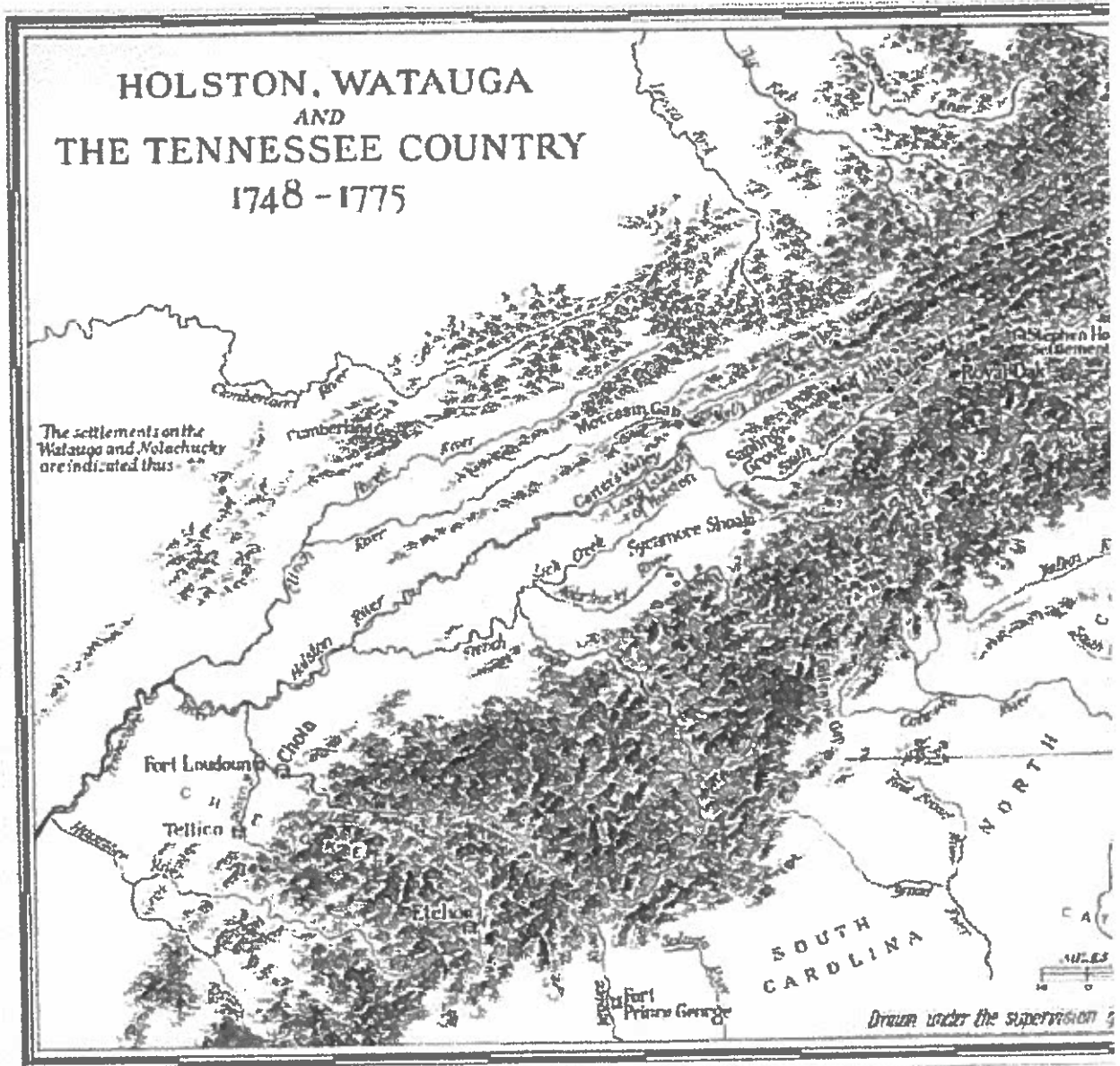
Col. Donelson's journal of the good boat, Adventure, forms an important chapter in all the histories of early Tennessee. Theodore Roosevelt says, in his Winning of the West,

“Robertson's special partner was a man named John Donelson. The latter went by water and took a large party of immigrants, including all the women and children, down the Tennessee, and thence up the Ohio and Cumberland to the Bluff, or French Lick, a distance of more than two thousand miles. Among them were Robertson's entire family and Donelson's daughter, Rachel, the future wife of Andrew Jackson, who missed by so narrow a margin being mistress of the White House. The settlers who came by water passed through much greater peril and hardship (than the party, under Robertson which went overland). By a stroke of good fortune the journal kept by Donelson, the leader of the expedition, has been preserved. As with all the other recorded wanderings and expeditions of these back-Woods adventurers, it must be remembered while this trip was remarkable in itself, it is especially noteworthy because, out of many such, it is the only one of which we have a full account.... Donelson's flotilla, after being joined by a number of other boats, consisted of some thirty craft all told—flat boats, dug-outs, and canoes. There were probably two or three hundred people, perhaps many more, in the company. The chief boat, the flagship of the flotilla, was the Adventure, a great scow, in which there were over thirty men, besides the families of some of them”.

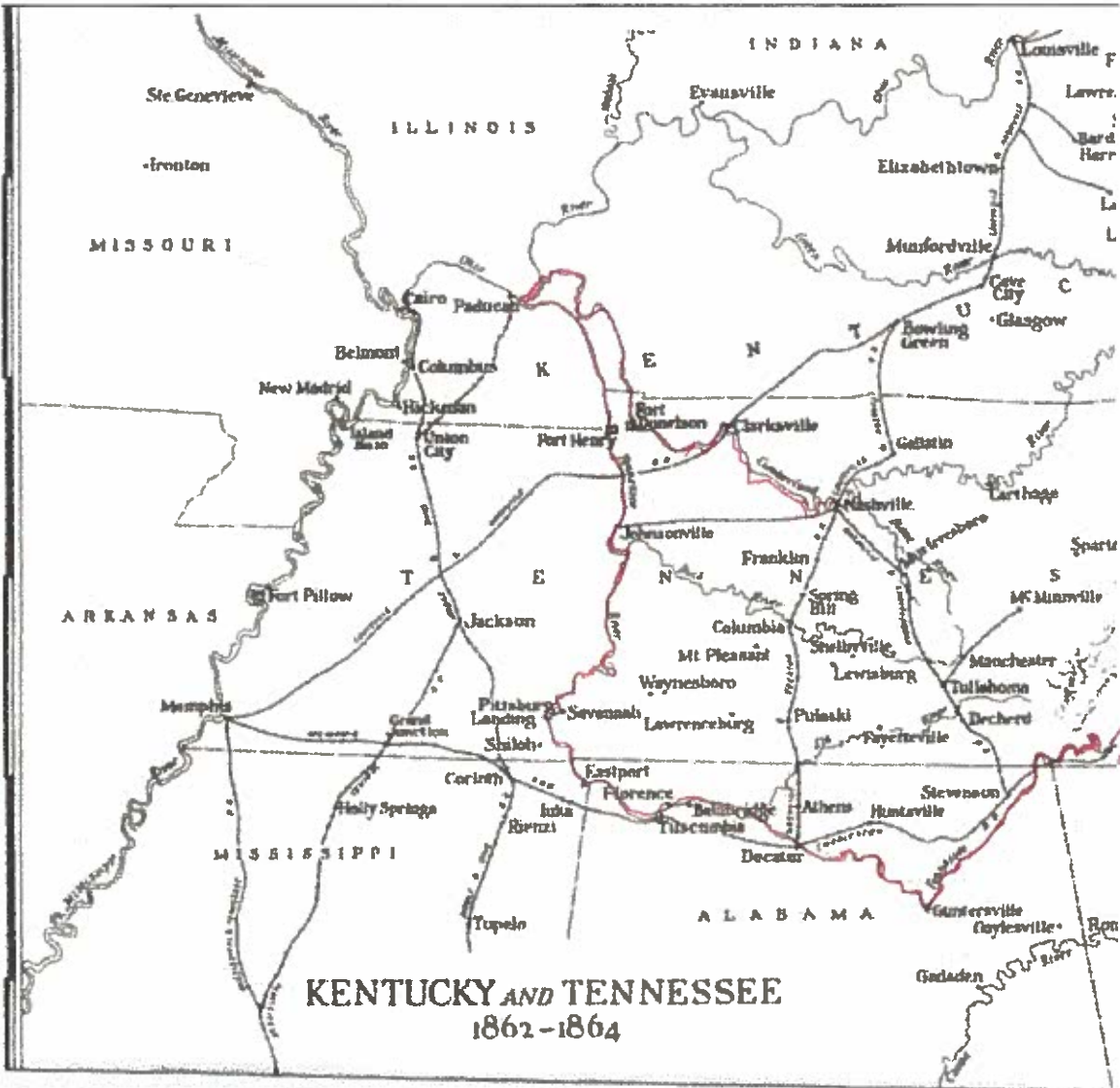
Ramsey, in his Annals of Tennessee, says, "The distance traveled on this inland voyage, by Col. Donelson, the extreme danger in every respect marks the expedition as one of the **greatest achievements in the settlement of our western country**".

The Journey on the **Adventure** begins in December 1779 at Ft. Watauga.

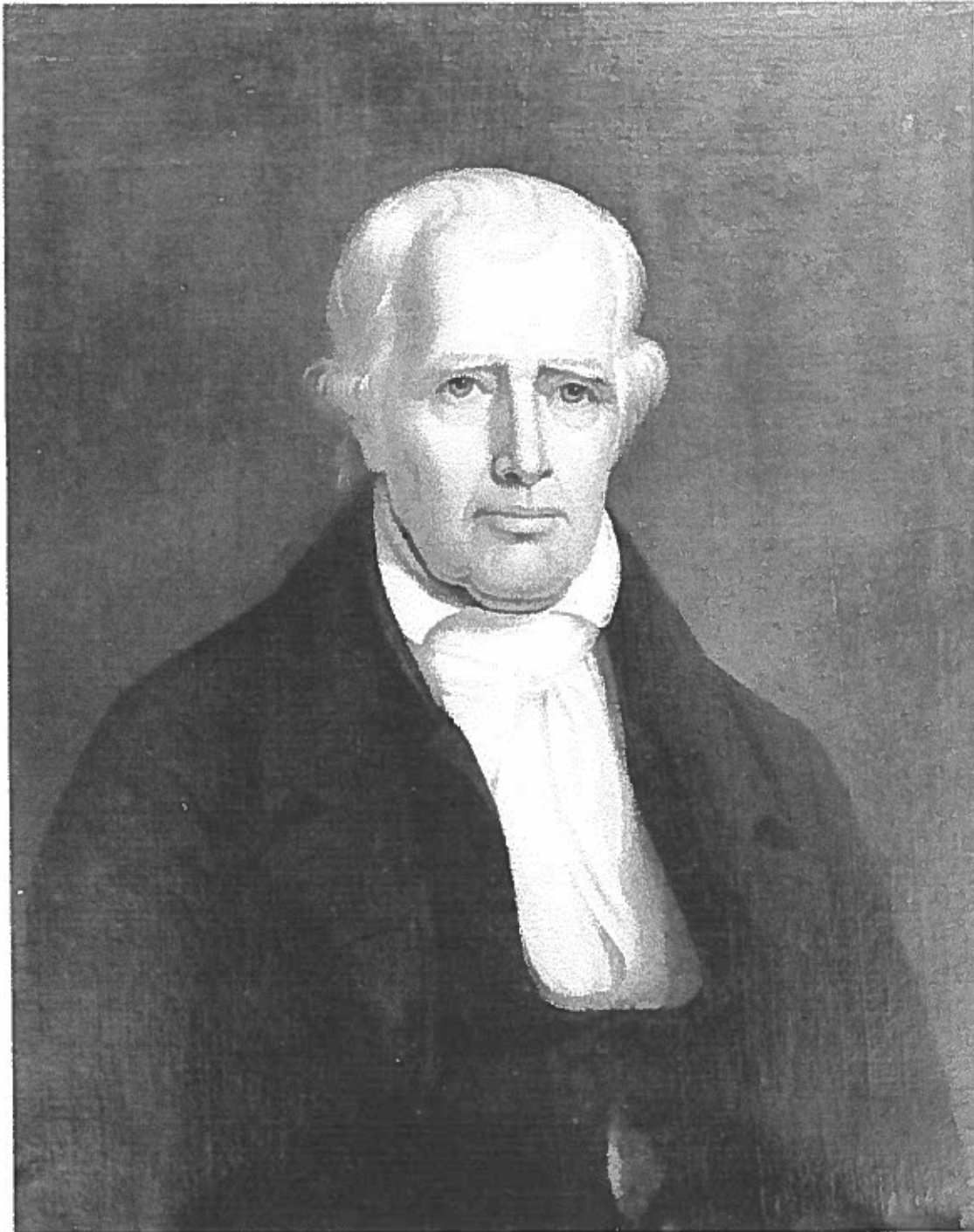
Holston, Watauga, and the Tennessee Country, 1748-71



The trip continued from the Holston River, down the Tennessee River to the Ohio. Up the Ohio to the mouth of the Cumberland River and then up the Cumberland to present day Nashville.



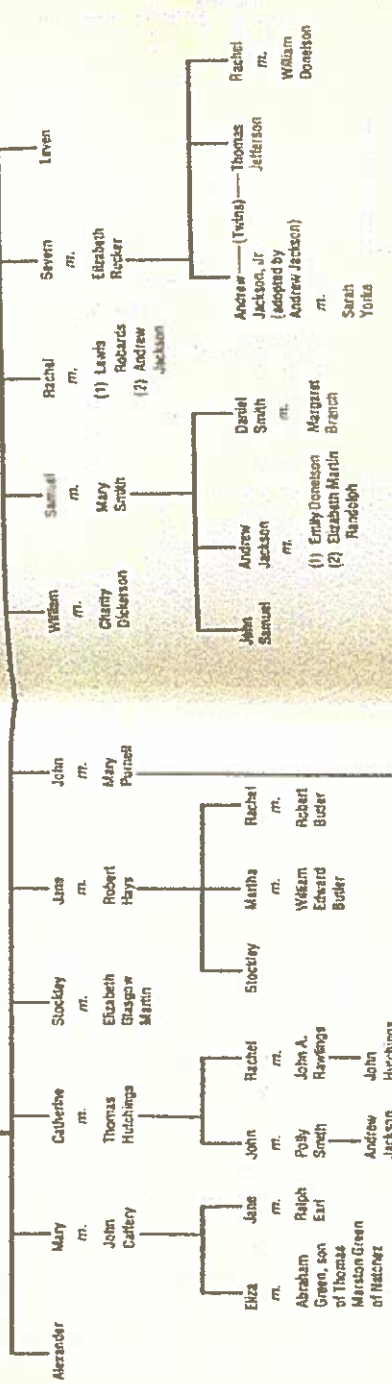
Next page is the page of the Cumberland Compact with signatures. John Donelson's is the fifth signature.



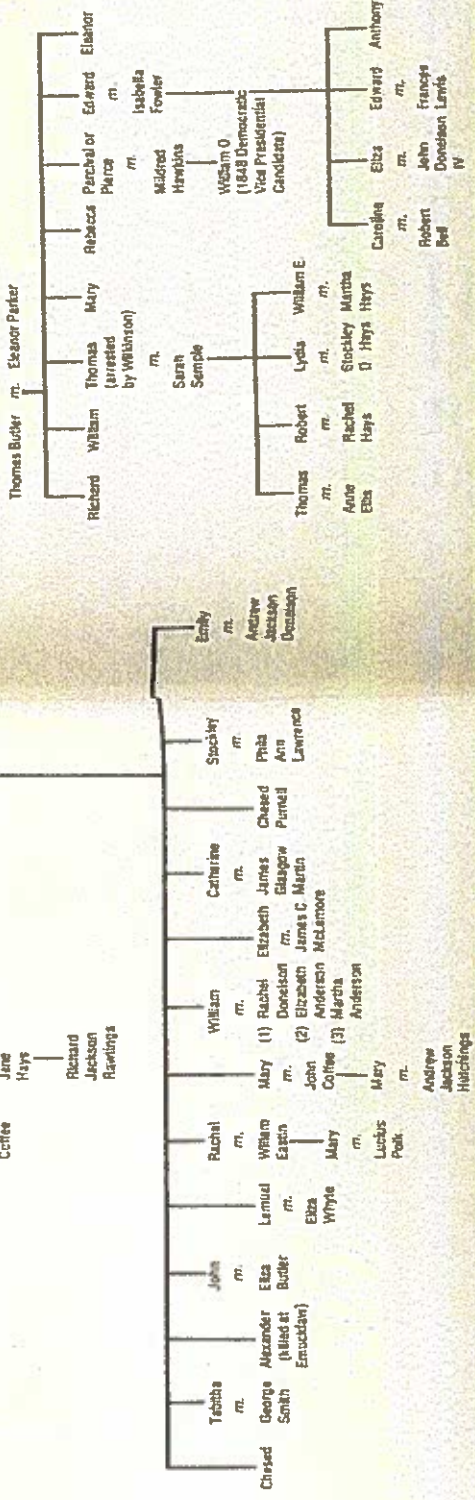
John Donelson's son John Donelson III. 1755-1830. He traveled on the Adventure with his new bride Mary Purnell. Our gggg uncle. Next page shows the Donelson Family Tree.

DONELSON FAMILY

John Donelson (ca. 1718-1785) m. Rachel Stockley (ca. 1730-1801)

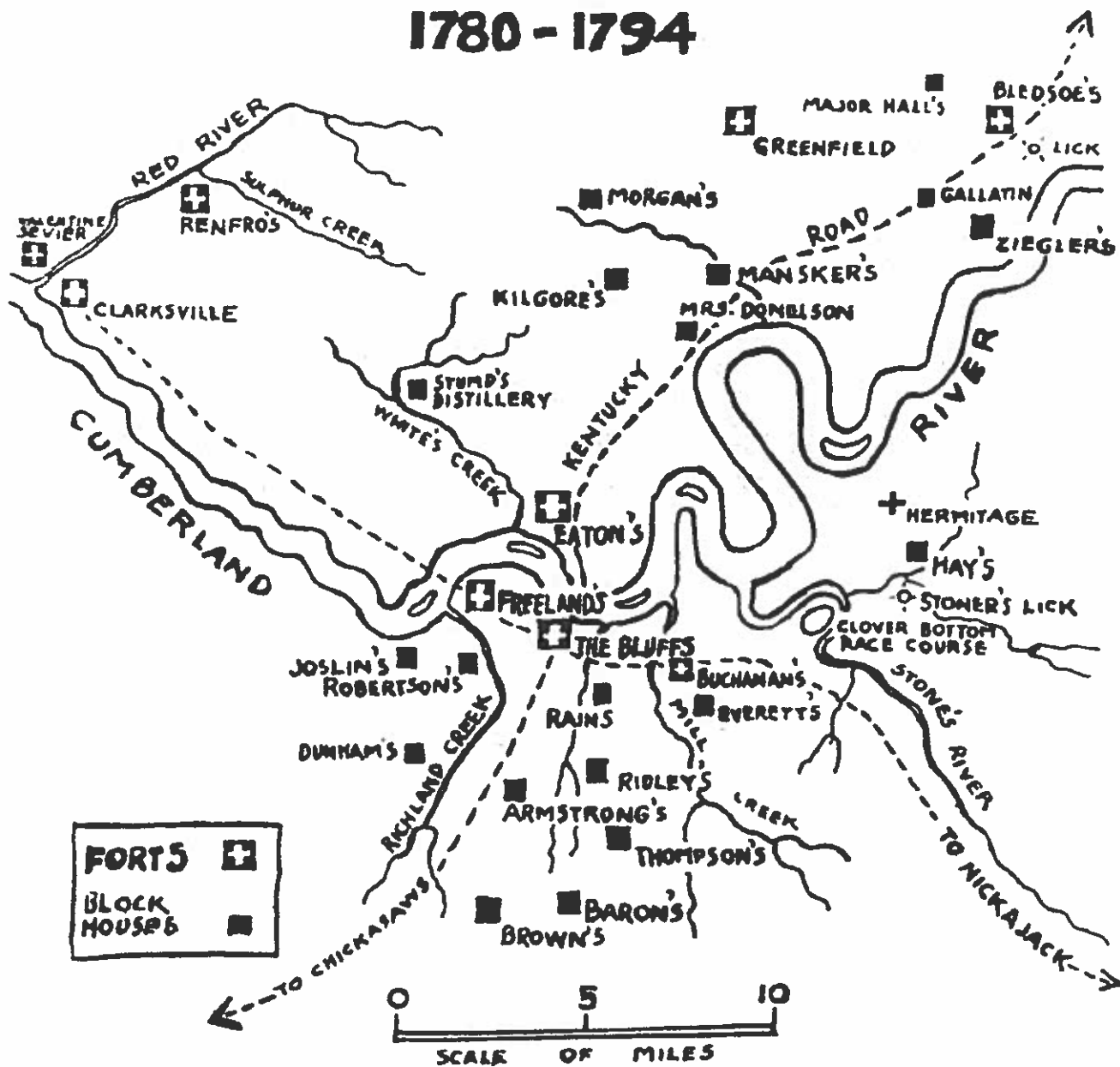


BUTLER FAMILY



After they arrived in the Cumberland, they formed several stations or fortifications.

THE CUMBERLAND SETTLEMENTS 1780 - 1794



JP BROWN

Illustration by J.P. Brown
JAMES SUMMERVILLE, *SOUTHERN EPIC* (GLOUCESTER POINT, VA: HALLMARK PUB. CO., 1996)

Rachel Donelson Jackson (1767-1828) “Aunt Jackson”
Andrew Jackson (1767-1845) “Uncle Jackson”



THE HERMITAGE COLLECTION



THE HERMITAGE COLLECTION

Their Home, the Hermitage, just outside of Nashville in Clover Bottom.



Following is the recorded list of the pioneer / founding families aboard the fleet of 40 boats arriving April 24, 1780, to join General James Robertson's overland party of men, boys, and livestock (which arrived at French Lick on the Cumberland bluffs in December, 1779):

Names listed on the bronze tablet erected by the Watauga Cumberland Settlers Association to commemorate the Landing of the Pioneers, April 24, 1780, Nashville, Tennessee.

John Donelson, Sr.; Rachel Stockley Donelson; Rachel Donelson, Catherine Doneslon Hutchings, Jane Donelson, Mary Donelson Caffrey; John Donelson, Jr. & wife Mary Purnell Donelson; William Donelson; Jacob-Donelson???: Severn Donelson; Leven Donelson; Samuel Donelson; *(two Donelson children not mentioned are the oldest, Alexander, and Stockley—who is Jacob???)*

Abel Gower, Sr. & wife; Abel Gower, Jr.; Nancy Gower; Mr. ____ Stuart; Reuben Harrison; Frank Haynie [also spelled Haney]; Thomas Henry; Capt. John Blackmore [also spelled Blackemore and Blackamore]; Maj. John Cockrill, Jr.

John Gibson; Andrew Lucas; Susan Drake; Frederick Stump; Ann S. Stump; Frederick Stump, Jr.;

M. Rounsever [also spelled Rounsifer and Rounsaval] & family; Ann Robertson Johnson [widow]: 3 daughters;

William Crutchfield & family; Robert Cartwright & family; Jonathan Jennings & family; Francis [also listed as Frank] Armstrong & family; James Johns, Sr. & family; Benjamin Porter & family; Solomon Temple & family; John Montgomery & family; Jesse Maxwell & family; John Caffrey & family; Mary Purnell & family; Haydon Wells; Amos Eaton; Thomas Hutchings; Benjamin Belew; Peter Looney [also spelled Luney]; Hugh Rogan; Daniel Givin; Charlotte Robertson & family (wife of James Robertson)

John White; Solomon White; Sol. Turpin; Joseph Renfroe & family; Moses Renfroe & family; Isaac Neely & family; John Cotton & family; Isaac Lanier & family; Mary Henry & family; James Cain & family; John Boyd & family; Daniel Durham & family.

John Donelson: A Western A Family Story

for

My cousins--Sandy, Tricia, Marty, Joan, Eric, Pat and Jean and their children

by

Jean Rawlings Meaney

36 Planters Wood Dr.

Hilton Head Island, SC 29928

Meaneyplce@aol.com

This should be a movie! It is a tale of wild Indians and starvation and freezing and murder and buffaloes and it is about one of our ancestors, Colonel John Donelson. In fact, he is a double ancestor in a way because two of his daughters are our 4th great grandmothers, Catherine and Jane. It is also a tale that lives on in our lives and those of our children because we are descendants of this courageous pioneer.

In 1779 our ggggg grandfather John Donelson was close to 60 years old. His wife ggggg grandmother Rachel Stockley or Stokely was 49. (Whatever the way it is spelled, there is always a long "O". They named one of their sons Stokely and there has been a Stokely in the family ever since.) The War for Independence was almost over and the thirteen colonies would soon become states. Col. Donelson was an Indian Commissioner during the Revolutionary War, a member of the Virginia House of Burgesses, a landowner with eleven children; his son Capt. John Donelson and son-in-law Col Thomas Hutchings also fought in the War. His older daughters Mary and Catherine were married; our gggg grandmother Catherine had 3 children. His other daughters, the youngest Rachel (twelve) who would later marry Andrew Jackson and our other gggg grandmother Jane who married Robert Hays after they had settled in Tennessee, were still living with their parents.

John's father (also John Donelson) had come from London or Scotland to Snow Hill, MD in 1716. He married Catherine Davis, daughter of one of the first Presbyterian ministers in America, Dr. Samuel Davis. By 1746 John had moved to Virginia and married the 16 year old daughter of an old Virginia family, the Stockleys or Stokelys.

By 1779 Virginia had been a British colony for almost two centuries. In one generation John had become a wealthy Virginian with a large family. He had been a surveyor and founded one of the first ironworks in Virginia and he was close friends with Patrick Henry and George Washington. He was also a Colonel in the Virginia militia. Most people in his position at his age would have sat on their laurels (or backsides) and enjoyed their achievements and their newly-won independence, but he was swept up in the national hunger for vast tracts of land

Family Group Sheet

Husband: JOHN II DONELSON

Born: 1718 in: Somerset Co., MD
 Burial: Aft. 1786 in: Grave Monument at the Hermitage
 Died: April 11, 1786 in: Killed by Indians or robbers on the trail from KY to TN. His two companions buried the body but it was never found?
 Immigration 1: 1781 in: Moved to KY because of Indians attacks. His family moved back to TN in 1785.
 Immigration 2: December 22, 1779 in: On the "Adventure" led a flotilla of more than 300 people down the TN River on Flatboats to found the city of Nashville. And kept a diary of the adventure which still exists.
 Military service 1: 1775 in: Colonel, Commanding officer of the military forces of the county, 27 companies. Assisted in establishing American independence as Colonel in Army
 Military service 2: 1776 in: Col.
 Military service 3: 1776 in: County Lt., Patriot Service; 478163
 Military service 4: May 1780 in: Signed the Cumberland Compact May, 1780
 Military service 5: 1785 in: Went back to Pittsylvania Co. from KY on business
 Occupation 1: Bet. 1769 - 1774 in: VA House of Burgesses
 Occupation 2: Bet. 1760 - 1767 in: Surveyor in Halifax Co. Surveyed the boundary between Georgia and North Carolina, which, at that time, ran west to the Mississippi River
 Occupation 3: Bet. 1767 - 1779 in: Surveyed the boundary line between Halifax and Pittsylvania Co.s Surveyor in Pittsylvania
 Occupation 4: Bet. 1769 - 1785 in: Successfully negotiated several Indian treaties
 Property 1: 1743 in: Settled on Banister River near the mouth of Whitethorn Creek;
 Property 2: 1770 in: Founded the earliest iron works in Pittsylvania Co., "The Bloomery" on Pigg River in southern Piedmont, VA
 Religion 1: 1773 in: Vestryman, Camden Parish as recorded by Bishop Meade, St. Peter's Church, New Kent
 Religion 2: 1752 in: Vestry, Antrim Parish
 Marriage: 1746 in: VA
 Father: JOHN DONELSON
 Mother: CATHERINE DAVIS

Wife: RACHEL STOCKLEY

Born: 1730 in: Accomac Co., VA
 Burial: November 1948 in: DAR Grave Monument at the Hermitage says 1794 but she was alive after 1801, mentioned in AJ letter to Rachel
 Died: Aft. 1801 in: Davidson Co., TN
 Father: ALEXANDER STOCKLEY
 Mother: JANE MATTHEWS

CHILDREN

1 M	Name: Alexander Donelson Born: 1749 Died: 1834 in: Pittsylvania Co., VA
2 F	Name: CATHERINE DONELSON Alias: in: Catherine Elizabeth? Born: 1752 in: Pittsylvania, VA Died: Bet. 1834 - 1835 in: Jackson, Madison Co., TN see Draper Papers Married: July 04, 1772 in: Guilford Co., NC Spouse: THOMAS HUTCHINGS
3 M	Name: Stockley Donelson Born: 1753 Died: Abt. 1804 Married: Abt. 1804 Spouse: Elizabeth Glasgow

Family Group Sheet

4	<p>Name: John III Donelson Born: April 07, 1755 Burial: November 1948 Died: April 22, 1830 Immigration: 1779 Military service 1: 1776 Military service 2: 1787 Married: August 26, 1779 Spouse: Mary Purnell</p>	<p>in: Accomack Co., VA in: Moved to Hermitage Church in: Nov. 1948- 17 graves moved to Hermitage in: Watauga to French Lick on the "Adventure" in: Capt. Rev. War in: 3 taxables in: VA?</p>
5	<p>Name: Mary Donelson Born: 1756 Died: September 18, 1823 Married: October 25, 1775 Spouse: John Caffrey</p>	<p>in: Pittsylvania Co., VA in: Port Gibson, Claiborne Co., MS in: Amherst, VA</p>
6	<p>Name: William Donelson Born: 1756 Died: April 13, 1820 Military service: 1787 Married: August 09, 1796 Spouse: Charity Dickinson</p>	<p>in: 12 taxables in: Davidson Co., TN</p>
7	<p>Name: Samuel Donelson Born: Abt. 1759 Burial: Died: Abt. 1803 Married: June 20, 1796 Spouse: Mary Ann Michie Smith</p>	<p>in: Rock Castle, Family Cemetery in: At Hermitage after exposure followed by pneumonia in: Eloped with the aid of AJ; The Hermitage, Davidson Co., TN</p>
8	<p>Name: Severn Donelson Born: August 1763 Burial: November 1948 Died: October 1818 Married: Spouse: Elizabeth Rucker</p>	<p>in: Moved to Hermitage Church</p>
9	<p>Name: JANE DONELSON Born: 1766 Burial: February 02, 1834 Census: 1830 Died: February 01, 1834 Immigration 1: 1780 Immigration 2: 1822 Will 1: May 08, 1834 Will 2: November 07, 1833 Married: January 27, 1786 Spouse: ROBERT HAYS</p>	<p>in: VA in: Hays vault in Riverside Cemetery, Jackson, Madison Co., TN in: Log home, "Hays Hill", Madison Co., TN in: Age 68, Jackson, Madison Co., TN in: VA to Clover Bottom, TN on a flatboat down the TN River in: Davidson Co., TN to Jackson, Madison Co., TN in: Proven Madison Co. Will Book 1, p.428, Samuel Hays executor in: Executor son Samuel Hays, witnessed by J. H. Rawlings, R.M. Crockett, Saul S. Anderson in: Haysboro on the Cumberland River, Davidson Co., TN</p>
10	<p>Name: Rachel Donelson Born: June 15, 1767 Burial: Aft. 1828 Died: December 22, 1828 Military service: December 1809 Married: March 01, 1785 Spouse: Lewis Robards Married: January 18, 1794 Spouse: Andrew Jackson</p>	<p>in: Halifax, later Pittsylvania Co., VA in: Hermitage Church Graveyard, Davidson Co., TN in: The Hermitage, Nashville, TN in: Andrew Jackson Jr., twin of Thomas Jefferson Donelson, by brother Severn Donaldson in: Davidson Co., TN by Justice of the Peace and brother-in-law Col. Robert Hays</p>
11	<p>Name: Leven Donelson Born: 1769</p>	