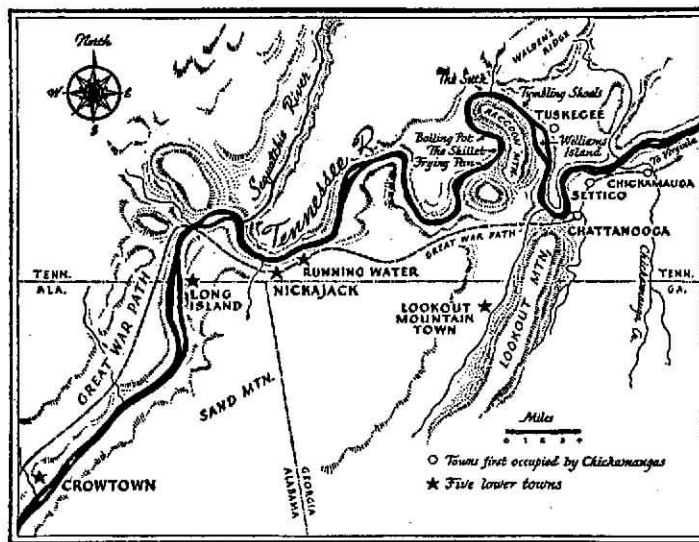


more pacific element of the Cherokees, if possible. A few old chiefs crept out of hiding and came to a parley. They agreed to meet Christian and representatives of Virginia and North Carolina at Long Island for a treaty the following summer. This, the Treaty of 1777, was held, but it was meaningless, since neither Dragging Canoe nor his followers took part in it. Dragging Canoe's faction had withdrawn from the Overhill towns to the region of present-day Chattanooga. With his young warriors the Canoe would carry on the fight.

Now, although the Wataugans must watch the Indian frontier and meet the British foe to the east and south, they still had time for politics and government. Their representatives went to the North Carolina legislature. The state of North Carolina, at last officially awake to its western interests, opened a land office in Washington County at which the settlers could purchase the lands they had already bought from the Cherokees. James Robertson became North Carolina's agent to the Overhill Cherokees, and stayed at Chota, to watch the diminished Overhills and hearken for news of Dragging Canoe.

Like other prominent men, Robertson had private business as well as public responsibility on his mind. Further advance down the Tennessee Valley was not practicable. But the Cumberland country could be reached by way of the Wilderness Road—and perhaps also by the water route, down the Tennessee and up the Cumberland, if luck was kind. Very likely he had discussed such possibilities with John Donelson and Richard Henderson at the Treaty of 1777. Probably his mind dwelled on his prospects while he sat in the townhouse at Chota and smoked with the old chiefs. Maybe, between puffs, he prompted Oconostota or Attakullakulla to tell him more about how the land lay at Muscle Shoals, or how things were at the French Lick, on the Cumberland, from which Cherokees and Chickasaws had driven the Shawnees so long ago.



## CHAPTER XI

### The Voyage of the Good Boat *Adventure*

THE winter of 1779-80 was one of the coldest ever known in the Tennessee country. Snow began to fall in November, and as winter drew on, the great cold deepened. It was a season when the hardest pioneer might have wished himself a bear, to curl inside a hollow tree and suck his paw,

or a Cherokee, to crawl inside a hothouse and stay there. Yet in this winter, forbidding though it was, took place the most famous of all voyages on the Tennessee River, perhaps indeed the most famous voyage in the annals of the pioneers. In the midst of the cold, Colonel John Donelson of Virginia launched his flagship, the *Adventure*, on the Holston River near Fort Patrick Henry, to lead westward a great flotilla of flatboats and pirogues, loaded with men, women, children, and household goods. Their destination was the French Lick, on the Cumberland River, which they would reach after navigating the entire length of the Tennessee and then making the still more difficult passage upstream by way of the Ohio and the Cumberland. An advance party of men, led by James Robertson, had set out for the French Lick during the preceding fall, by the overland route across the Cumberland plateau and through Kentucky. It was their task to build cabins and prepare the place for habitation. The Donelson party constituted the nautical division of a planned migration of considerable size, from the East Tennessee settlements to what would later become the city of Nashville.

We know with some definiteness just who the Donelson party were and what happened to them, because Colonel Donelson wrote a brief account of his exploit. This he entitled *Journal of a Voyage, intended by God's permission, the good boat Adventure, from Fort Patrick Henry, on the Holston river, to the French Salt Springs on the Cumberland river, kept by John Donelson.*

Historians pause reverently when they come to the Donelson journal. Their gift for exegesis and summary goes to pieces, and they content themselves with verbatim quotation and little comment. Leland D. Baldwin, for example, in *The Keelboat Age*, says that the journal "presents a starkly realistic picture of river immigration that no modern pen could hope to equal," and then speaks no more but only quotes.

Certainly the journal is an American classic. No one can read it without feeling that Donelson's prose style, no less than his courage, was fully equal to the occasion. If he really "kept" the journal while his fleet was cruising down the Tennessee, with hostile Indians shooting from the bank, and boulders, eddies, and reefs clutching at him in the stream, then it is a thousand pities that he did not live longer and write more. The colonel had remarkable gifts, at which we of today can only wonder. Yet for all its vivid excellence, the journal tells less than we should like to know, and it indulges in no explanation whatever. It is a bare chronicle, for which a context has to be supplied. That context is to be derived partly from frontier history in general, partly from the story of Richard Henderson's colonizing schemes, and also, to no small extent, from the occurrences of the year preceding Donelson's voyage.

After the Treaty of 1777, the submissive faction of the Cherokees, having rebuilt their devastated towns on the Little Tennessee, maintained a grudging semblance of peace. But Dragging Canoe was far from even a technical peace. With Ostenaco, Willenawah, and other prominent chiefs, and all the war-minded Cherokees that would follow, he retreated deeper into the wilderness and founded new towns in the mountainous country where the Tennessee begins its twisting furrow across the Cumberland ridges. Settico arose again, under its old name, and other names found new sites in the valley where the city of Chattanooga now stands.

Here they were better located than ever for the purposes of war and pillage. They commanded the river, above and near the difficult Narrows. From their mountain fastness they could go out in mischievous bands to harry isolated cabins and "stations," and then could quickly retire into their secure retreat. They were well placed to receive supplies of goods and ammunition from the British agents in Florida. Their numbers were swelled by warriors from the neighboring

Creeks; and they were joined also by renegade whites, some of whom were fugitive Tories, and a mixture of other elements, Indian and Negro. The Tennessee settlers called them "Chickamaugas" to distinguish them from the more pacific part of the Cherokees, and added terms of eloquent abuse—"banditti," "outlaws," "pirates." By the end of 1778, Dragging Canoe commanded a thousand fighting men and was preparing to drive once more against the western settlements.

To forestall this attack, Governor Patrick Henry of Virginia, in co-operation with Governor Caswell of North Carolina and the Tennessee frontiersmen, organized a bold counteroffensive. The commander of the expedition, Colonel Evan Shelby, rendezvoused his Virginians and Tennesseans, probably six hundred men in all, at the home of James Robertson on Holston River. There he assembled a fleet of pirogues and canoes made from the neighboring forests with ax and adz. The plan was to move quickly with the spring tide down the Tennessee River and strike the Chickamauga towns before they were aware of the presence of danger. When this blow had been struck, a part of the troops, under Colonel John Montgomery, would float on down the Tennessee and join George Rogers Clark in fighting the British in the Northwest.

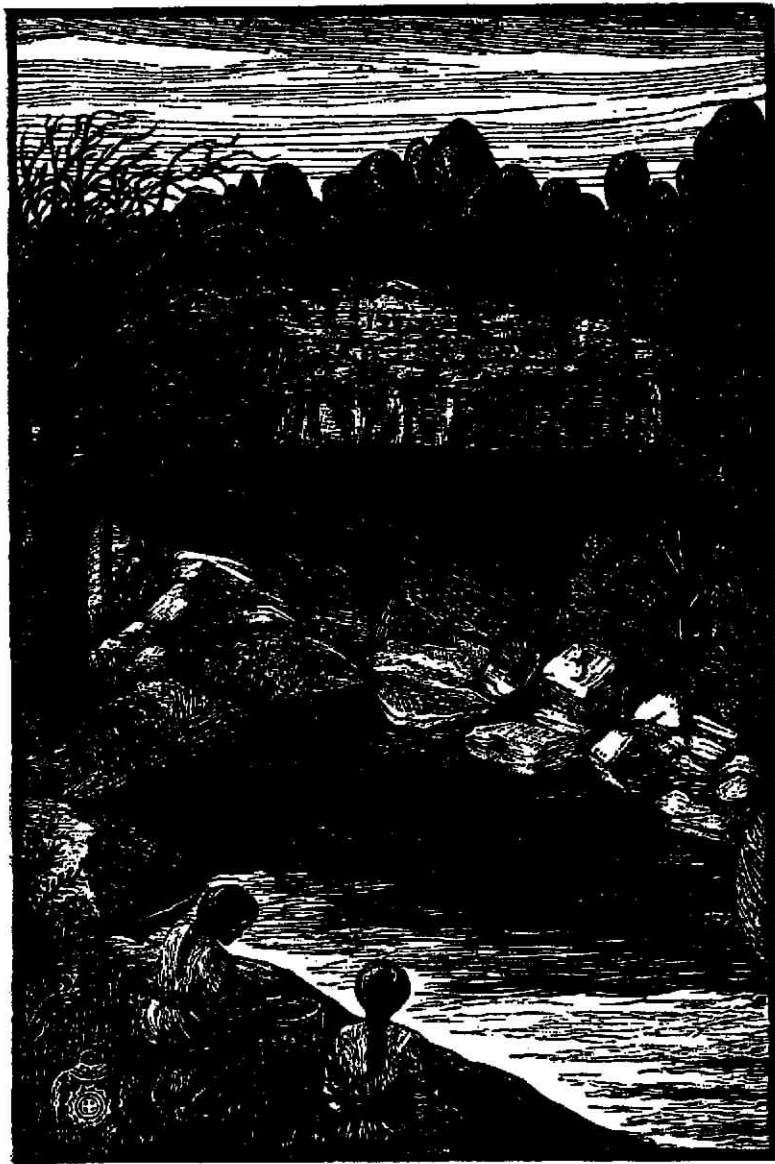
In mid-April, with the river at floodtide, Shelby's men sped to their objective, and found the Chickamaugas unready. There was no fighting. In two weeks' time they overran and devastated eleven of the Chickamauga towns, including the new Settico, which they struck first of all. Montgomery's contingent went on. The others, after crossing the river and destroying their boats, marched back up the west bank of the Tennessee. They brought with them huge quantities of booty: horses, which were especially welcome for the return trip; and ammunition and goods sent by the British for their Indian allies. For the first time in history, a military expedition had used Tennessee water for transport.

Yet Dragging Canoe would not own himself conquered.

Some of the Chickamaugas came back from their mountain hide-outs and reoccupied a few of the burned towns. The majority, at Dragging Canoe's direction, moved still farther down the Tennessee to a more secret and impregnable retreat. The Five Lower Towns, as they were called—although, because of shifts of occupancy, there were really more than five—made full strategic use of the windings of the river. Tuskegee Island town commanded the entrance to the Suck. Dragging Canoe's own town, Running Water, and the nearby town of Nickajack, lay just below the Narrows. Long Island town and Crow town were still farther downstream. For many years after this the pioneers of Tennessee and Kentucky were very painfully aware of the existence of the Five Lower Towns, but it was long before they could discover just how to approach them for an attack.

Colonel John Donelson could hardly have known much about the re-establishment of the Chickamauga towns. He did know, however, that Shelby's onslaught, in the April preceding his own voyage, had weakened the Chickamaugas and that many of the towns had been burned. Therefore, although every moment of those days was a dangerous moment, the month of December, 1779, could reasonably be deemed one of the least dangerous periods. The extreme cold itself was a protection, probably, since war parties were not likely to dare its rigors. And of course the winter was the season for high water and swift movement on the Tennessee.

Besides, Donelson had a schedule to keep. James Robertson had visited the French Lick early in 1779 with a small group, and had marked the place for settlement—doubtless in agreement with the plans of Richard Henderson. Robertson had planted a corn crop, fenced it in, and left three men to guard it while he returned to the Holston country to complete arrangements for the migration. Only the skilled hunters and Indian fighters would make the westward trip over-



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land in the fall, by the untraveled route that Robertson intended to use. The boats of the Donelson fleet would carry the women and children, and whatever household goods could be put on; and they would also offer some degree of shelter and safety. Before leaving East Tennessee, Robertson told Donelson that, if opportunity allowed, he would examine the country between the French Lick and Muscle Shoals. If there was a practicable overland route from Muscle Shoals to the north, he promised to leave some message or sign at the head of the Shoals, in order that the voyagers might disembark there and save themselves the hardships of the long pull all the way around. With such considerations in mind, Donelson gave the order to push off.

Bleak indeed must have been that setting forth. Three days before Christmas it was, and only cold cheer in sight. At Fort Patrick Henry the river was low, and weather was making. On board Donelson's flagship, the *Adventure*, were at least thirty persons—men, women, and children. Among the women was Donelson's fifteen-year-old daughter, Rachel, she who afterward married Andrew Jackson. The other boats, no doubt, were equally crowded, if not with notables, certainly with the ancestors of notables. For the Donelson fleet has the same relation to the history of the old Southwest that the *Mayflower* has to New England: it carried historic persons and the begetters of historic persons. Assuredly they were all most uncomfortable in December, 1779.

The *Adventure* was probably a large flatboat of a type afterward familiarly known as a "broadhorn." She was built at the "Boatyard" (modern Kingsport) of heavy timber, with a hull of squared logs and sides well bulwarked against gunfire. She probably had a roof over a considerable part of the hull, with rude bunks for sleeping quarters, and a stone hearth for the cooking. She was steered by sweeps and propelled by poles when propulsion was regrettably necessary, but was emphatically better adapted to going downstream.

with the current than to inching upstream against it. The other flatboats resembled the *Adventure*, although perhaps not all of them were as large or commodious. The pirogues were of the common dugout type, but some of them may have had a covering. It was an ungainly, nondescript line of flatboats and pirogues that poled away from the bank and into the current that December morning. There were thirty craft in all, and more would join, downriver.

The first day they went only three miles, to the mouth of Reedy Creek. The river was falling, it was snowing, there was already ice on the water. Donelson made camp in the snow. For all the progress the fleet made from December 22 to February 20 they might as well have stayed in Fort Patrick Henry in possibly greater comfort. But once started, they had to go on—or just stop.

On February 27 they pushed off once more. The *Adventure* celebrated this, the real beginning of the voyage, by getting stuck, together with the boats of Mr. Boyd and Mr. Rounsifer, on Poor Valley Shoals. For an afternoon and a night they lay there, and got off at last only by unloading the passengers into the icy water to lighten the heavy boats. A little farther down, Donelson attempted to land on an island, doubtless to build fires and thaw out frozen feet. The *Adventure* was damaged, and Donelson's company lost part of their baggage, but made camp nevertheless, and were re-joined by the whole flotilla, which had got disorganized and scattered.

March came in, rainy and blustery, with hardly a sign of spring as yet. Beyond the dull green of the cane bottoms were the dark cones of cedars on the lower slopes, or pine groves here and there, among the leafless hardwood forests. Gray sedge grass, sprinkled with young trees and growths of brier and bramble, covered the open savannas near the river; and back of it all they could occasionally see, through the streamers of rain, cloud masses resting on the great mountain

ranges that they were leaving behind them. They were floating down the great valley of East Tennessee, and on either side of them were the unchangeable shapes of hill and mountain as we see them today.

On March 2 they passed the mouth of the French Broad River, and now on the Tennessee proper, followed its windings past the high banks on which Knoxville would soon be built. The current was getting tricky. On the point of an island, a little above the Knoxville bluffs, Mr. Henry's boat grounded, and was capsized by the force of the current. The whole fleet stopped to rescue their wrecked companions, snatch floating articles, bale out the boat, and help dry the shivering passengers. Young Reuben Harrison took advantage of this stop to go a-hunting. At night he had not returned. They fired guns to let him know their position, but no answering shot came to their ears. Next day at dawn they shot off signals again, and Donelson fired his swivel and sent out searching parties. But Reuben did not appear to comfort his weeping parents. Donelson left old Mr. Harrison and others to continue the search, and went on. About ten o'clock of that day they saw the young man awaiting them by the water's edge, and Ben Belew took him on board.

On that day, March 4, they passed the mouth of the Little Tennessee. They were definitely in Indian country now, and they began to post sentinels at night. For greater precaution they camped on the north shore, a practice they had begun four days preceding.

The next day they passed the mouth of the Clinch, and were joined by a number of boats under Captain John Blackmore, from Fort Blackmore. It was foggy weather now, especially in the mornings, and it was still rainy. Finding that the fleet was trailing too far behind in the fog, Donelson stopped the *Adventure* until all boats were reassembled. At camp that night Captain Thomas Hutchings' Negro man died. His feet

and legs had been frozen, and apparently the resulting infection killed him.

On March 7 the rain ceased, but the March wind began. Blowing from SSW, it kicked up waves. The rough water did not embarrass the heavier craft, but the pirogues had trouble, tossed as they were by the twisting current and the side-slapping waves. It seemed best to put in at the mouth of South Chickamauga Creek, where one of Dragging Canoe's towns had stood.

A year before, or a year later, Donelson would not have camped there. But Shelby's ravages of the preceding spring had left this uppermost of the Chickamauga towns in ashes. Dry weed stalks stood where the townhouse and the cabins had been. Perhaps the children, glad to be out of their narrow quarters for a spell, ran across the desolate cornhills and maybe found a few early violets. And here Mrs. Ephraim Peyton, whose husband had gone overland with Robertson, gave birth to a child.

It must have been a pleasant campsite, for the next morning they did not cast off at dawn, but waited until ten o'clock. Probably the women got a little washing done, and the men put in some cautious hunting and fishing. To the west and southwest they could now see the massive abutments of the Cumberlands, through which the river would soon take them to the Suck and its dangers, and what foes they knew not.

Almost immediately after casting off, it seemed, the swift current bore them past the first Indian town. It was one of the towns Shelby had destroyed, but the Chickamaugas had come back. As Donelson swung the *Adventure* away from the south shore, Indians began to crowd the bank. They called out "brother" and made signs inviting the voyagers to land.

The colonel's son, Captain John Donelson, and a man named Caffrey begged permission to take a canoe and cross

over to the Indian side. The colonel gave permission. The rest of the fleet, seeing the *Adventure* draw over to the north shore, began to lay up to that shore also. A canoe full of Indians put out from the south shore and met the two young men in midstream. The canoes turned and approached the *Adventure*, with other canoes following. When the leading canoes came close, a half-breed named Archie Coody sprang on board and introduced himself. The young men, he said, must not cross the river. As he talked, other Indians began to climb aboard. They seemed friendly, and Donelson began to distribute presents. But suddenly more canoes, filled with armed Indians, painted red and black, shot out across the river. Coody ordered his own Indians back into their canoes and urged Donelson to move on quickly. He himself, with one Indian companion, remained on board. Donelson blew a horn and swung the *Adventure* into the current. After a hasty embarkation, the other boats followed. They left the red-and-black warriors behind, but they knew they were entering the gantlet of the Chickamauga towns.

Ahead were mountains, jutting close to the river. The most majestic of all was the great promontory, Lookout Mountain, whose slopes came steeply down to the water. Before they reached Lookout Mountain, Coody and his Indian companion took leave. Smiling agreeably, Coody assured Donelson that they had passed all the towns and were now out of danger, except for the perils of the Suck.

It was a deliberate lie. Soon they approached another town, again on the south side, and again the Indians made friendly gestures, and shouted to the voyagers, as they swung toward the north side, that their own side was better for boats. Here, in the shadow of Lookout Mountain, the first shots were fired at them, and the first casualties occurred. A man named Payne was killed from an ambush on Moccasin Bend, as his boat veered too near the north side, which Donelson was assuming to be safer. But the fleet went by so swiftly

that there was no time for the Indians to organize a real attack.

Nevertheless, they were able to pick off the last boat in the line. It belonged to Thomas Stuart, and on board were his family and friends—twenty-eight people. Smallpox had broken out in this group some days before, and by Donelson's orders they always moved last and kept at a distance. The Indians fell upon this straggler and soon killed or captured all the party. The yells of the Indians, the crack of guns, the screams of the women were borne along the gorge to the ears of the voyagers. But the current, now increasingly rapid, prevented any turning back. They could not reach Stuart's boat in time to do any good. An attempt at rescue might endanger the whole expedition. Their only solace was the grim certainty that the smallpox would wreak revenge for them; and tradition says that it did.

As the boats swept toward the entrance to the Suck, they caught glimpses of bands of warriors, going at a dog-trot, single file, along rocky paths that paralleled the river, but presently they rounded the point, entered the ravine of the Suck, and the Indians disappeared from view.

The river now demanded their whole attention. They were in the domain of Untsaiyi, among whose rocks and whirlpools life itself was a gamble. The rains had brought high water, and the eddies and crosscurrents of the narrow gorge sucked and tossed the awkward craft. Men stood at the bow and sides with poles to fend the boats off from rocks and from drifting trees that raced with them on the flood.

The pirogues were more exposed than the flatboats to the fire of the Indians, and they were also tossed more unmercifully by the currents. With these dangers in mind, John Cotton, before they entered the Suck, transferred his family to Robert Cartwright's flatboat and tied his pirogue, still loaded with goods, to the stern of the larger vessel. But the pirogue dashed wildly to and fro, and presently was over-

turned. The cry for help went up. Donelson, finding a calmer stretch of water and seeing Cotton's difficulty, blew his horn for a landing and pulled over to the north shore, where there was some level ground. As Donelson and his men walked toward the scene of the wreck, they heard again the crack of guns and the whistle of bullets. The heights across the river were fringed with warriors, who were firing down upon them. The Indians had taken a short cut across the mountain while the voyagers were fighting the torrents of the Suck, and now had an easy mark. Hastily they retreated to the boats, leaving Cotton and Cartwright to solve their own problems, and pushed off again.

The Indians, lining the bluffs, continued their fire. In the boat of Abel Gower, James Robertson's brother-in-law, some of the men were wounded, among them the steersman. As the boat drifted helpless, broadside to the current, young Nancy Gower seized the rudder and steered until the men-folks got reorganized. When the flurry was over, Mrs. Gower saw that Nancy's skirt was stained with blood. The girl had been shot through the thigh, and had never whimpered.

At this juncture Donelson noted, in a quick glance, that Cotton's boat was safe after all—though his goods were undoubtedly lost; but Jonathan Jennings's boat was missing.

There was no going back. The current bore them on.

We may infer, from Donelson's phrase, that the Indians "lined the bluffs along" and continued to harass the party until they passed Running Water and Nickajack. Nevertheless, they issued from the Narrows without further harm and entered the long, fairly straight stretch of river between Long Island and present-day Gunter'sville. Now they were in the Great Bend of the Tennessee and Donelson knew that they were approaching a section of the river in which he had something more than a romantic interest. He studied the scene, no doubt, with a surveyor's eye. Donelson had plans, which dovetailed with the plans of other men, for opening to

settlement the pleasant country he now saw. How well the land lay! The mountains were less rugged, and they stood farther back from the river. There would be rich fields in this country. The river widened. The current became more gentle and placid. All the rest of that day and throughout that night they floated without stopping, to put as much river as possible between them and the Indians. And so the next day, and the next night until midnight. Only then did Donelson give the signal to land and make camp. Of Jennings's boat he had no further word, other than it had been wrecked on a rock, somewhere in the Suck.

About four o'clock of that morning they were awakened by a long frontiersman's shout, far in the rear. Down the river came the cry, "Help poor Jennings!" It was indeed Jennings, although in a most bedraggled condition. He came in his boat and most of his company were with him, their clothing cut with bullets, eager for food and for the warmth of the fires, which they had seen from up the river, when they began hallooing.

Jennings had a tale to tell. His boat, he said, was not wrecked. It was grounded on a reef. The Indians, discovering his predicament, turned a galling fire upon the boat. Jennings ordered his wife, his nearly grown son, a young man who accompanied them, and his two Negroes to throw the baggage into the river in order to lighten the boat and get it off the reef. While they were thus engaged, he covered their work with his rifle and vigorously returned the fire of the Indians. Instead of carrying out his commands, the young man and one of the Negroes simply jumped out in a panic; the Negro was drowned; young Jennings and the other young man were wounded and captured by the Indians. Mrs. Jennings also got out of the boat to help push it off. When the boat suddenly started, she lost her balance and was nearly drowned. Mrs. Peyton—she who, only one night before this event, was delivered of a child—stood in the water and helped with the unloading and shoving, with no ill effect

to herself. But somehow her newborn infant was killed or drowned in the confusion.

The next day, March 11, Donelson distributed the Jennings family in the other boats. They moved on quietly, quickening their speed by rowing.

The following day, which was Sunday, they heard roosters crowing as they passed another Indian town. They were fired on again. They had run the gantlet, or almost so. But the greatest danger was just ahead—Muscle Shoals.

If Robertson had left a sign, they would disembark here. Donelson landed at the head of the Shoals, on the north bank. While the fleet lay up, he and his best frontiersmen looked for the blazed trees, or the letter stuck in the cleft of a stick that Robertson might have put there.

There was no sign anywhere—not a blazed tree, not a letter, not a cairn of stones. They turned away. Later they were to find out that Robertson had not come to Muscle Shoals at all. He had assumed, because of the great cold, that Donelson would abandon his voyage.

Donelson called a council of war. It was decided that, lacking a sign, they could not with prudence attempt the overland route. They must run the Shoals and go the long way, and they must be quick about starting, if they were to escape the Indians who even now might be following them. As they made this decision, their eyes must have lingered to take in the sweep of the fair country around them: a good valley, with plenty of rich bottom land no doubt, to the north; and on the south a level country, with broken mountains only here and there in the distance.

Cargoes were redistributed to trim the boats. To shoot the rapids safely, their craft must be well balanced. They put off. Before night they were through the Shoals without quite knowing how they had done it. Their salvation was that the river was extremely high. They slid over rocks and reefs with plenty of water to spare. But it was terrifying.



When we approached them [wrote Donelson] they had a dreadful appearance to those who had never seen them before. The water being high made a terrible 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 as much as in a rough sea. But, by the hand of Providence, we are now preserved from this danger also. I know not the length of this wonderful shoals: it had 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.

The point where they "came to," and doubtless baled out their boats, and thanked Providence, must have been above Florence. The next day they made an uneventful run, but on the morning of the second day from Muscle Shoals, they were fired on by Indians. Five men were wounded. The party made camp near the mouth of a creek, but alarmed by the barking of their dogs, they concluded that Indians were creeping near, and hurriedly broke camp. They fell down the river about a mile and made camp on the north shore. Next morning Donelson sent back young John Donelson and Caffrey to reconnoiter the site of the earlier camp and recover utensils abandoned in their retreat. Asleep by one of the dying fires they found a Negro slave. All the commotion of the preceding night had not awakened him.

The scene of this alarm was near the Creek town of Coldwater, which was attacked seven years later by an expedition commanded by James Robertson. Some members of the Donelson party took part in this later expedition. Sitting around the campfires before they crossed the Tennessee to deliver their attack, they recalled earlier perils and retold

the story of their voyage. It was, they said, "one of the most marvellous escapes that had ever been known. . . . The savages were shooting at them from the shores; it was cruel death to land on either shore; they must go forward, trusting in Providence to preserve them."

Donelson made good time on the easy lower reaches of the Tennessee. The lesser shoals and sand bars were covered deep by the high water. In a week they floated 250 miles to the junction of the Tennessee and the Ohio. Very likely (since Donelson records no bad weather) it was a fair March season, with young green beginning to show in the sheltered places, beyond the cane thickets and gaunt white sycamores that fringed the banks. Reaching the mouth of the Tennessee, they landed "on the lower point, immediately on the bank of the Ohio"—that is, at the site, or very near the site, of what would later be Paducah. Here the voyagers pondered their situation, which still had its grim aspects. The heavy boats floated like chips downstream. But to go up the Ohio and then up the Cumberland—that was entirely different.

Our situation [wrote Donelson] is truly disagreeable. The river [the Ohio] 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 out with hunger and fatigue, and know not what distance we have to go, or what time it will take us to reach our destination. The scene is rendered still 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 Illinois—among the rest my son-in-law and daughter. We now part, perhaps, to meet no more, for I am determined to pursue my course, happen what will.

Pursue his course he did, but it took more than a month to pole, shove, tow, and otherwise persuade the clumsy boats up the Ohio to the Cumberland, and up the Cumberland to the French Lick. They moved laboriously, hoisting make-

shift sails when the wind was in the right quarter, and living off buffalo, and wild swan, and "Shawnee salad" (possibly "poke salad"), for they now had no food except what they could obtain from the wilderness around them.

At the very end of March they had the first sign that the journey's end was near, or at least no longer inconceivably remote. They met Richard Henderson, in person, with a party of surveyors. As usual, Henderson was looking after his interests, on the ground itself of his interests: that is, he had been running the line between Virginia and North Carolina. Probably he had a broad smile on his face, and not only because he was meeting Donelson; for the survey had disclosed that the Cumberland settlements did *not* lie on the Virginia side.

Somehow, this meeting does not quite look like pure coincidence.

Henderson gave the voyagers advice and information in great sufficiency. But he had no food to give. Corn, he said, was on the way to the French Lick. He had ordered some sent down from Boonsborough. They went on. At the mouth of Red River, near present-day Clarksville, Moses Renfroe and another group of settlers dropped off. The rest arrived on April 24, 1780, at the French Lick, and climbed the bluffs to the cluster of cabins which was to become a capital city.

In the four months since Christmas, 1779, they had floated a thousand miles. Exactly how many of the voyagers completed the trip, out of the original two hundred or more, we do not know, since Donelson recorded in his journal only the names of heads of families. Out of the company, it appears that at least thirty-three were lost, either through being killed or captured by Indians, or drowned, as the Peyton infant probably was, or frozen, as was the unfortunate Negro. Others—at least nine in all—bore the marks of wounds from Indian bullets. All must have counted themselves lucky to have arrived.

## CHAPTER XII

### John Sevier and the Lost State of Franklin

THE DECADE beginning in 1780 saw the rise of John Sevier, Tennessee's first popular hero. As Colonel Sevier, he was one of the commanders at the famous victory of King's Mountain. He was the first and only governor of the independent state of Franklin, but although Franklin was "lost," Sevier was not. He became the first governor of Tennessee when in 1796 it was admitted as a state, and held the same office five times thereafter. Above all, he was the bane of the Cherokees, and his career was founded largely on his campaigns against them. He is said to have fought thirty-five battles, and from them all emerged scatheless and victorious. Yet he never conquered Dragging Canoe and the Chickamaugas.

To understand this man, one must set aside conventional notions about the frontier. He did not cultivate the broad homespun humor of a Davy Crockett. Rather, he was something of a beau sabreur and may have worn his hunting shirt with a touch of elegance. He was a brave man, but did not have the irascible head-on directness of Andrew Jackson. He was a good politician, but not a speechmaker. A great land-speculator, he was nevertheless ready, like Henderson and Donelson, to risk life as well as fortune. His prestige rested upon military prowess, and he showed a touch of genius in