

Donelson Journal

Historical Note:

This journal documents the 1779-1780 river voyage of Col. John Donelson and others, including women, children, and African Americans. The travelers were seeking to establish the first permanent settlement to the west of the Appalachians – 200 miles further west than previous settlements. On December 22, 1779, Col. John Donelson's group departed on the boat *Adventure* from Fort Patrick Henry on the Holston River. After many harrowing adventures and considerable suffering, they arrived at French Lick, which is now Nashville, Tennessee. Donelson's crew included many family members of the men who took a different route west with James Robertson. This group joined Donelson's flotilla at the mouth of the Clinch River, and was led by Capt. John Blackmore. Upon arriving at the French Lick and joining Robertson's group, a fortified station was constructed next to the Cumberland River. The successful completion of this voyage in April 1780 culminated in the founding of the settlement of Nashborough (later Nashville).

The document purports to be a firsthand account of this journey, but the authenticity of the item has recently been called into question. Although the diary prominently displays the words, "the original" on the front, it is possible that the author of the journal is not John Donelson himself, but rather, his son, John Donelson, Jr. A detailed investigation of this possibility can be found in: Paul Clements, "Tennessee Notes: An Analysis of 'The Original' Donelson Journal and Associated Accounts of the Donelson Party Voyage." *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 64, no. 4 (Winter 2005): 338-349.