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## Journey to Kentucky in 1775

Diary of James Nourse, Describing His Trip from Virginia to Kentucky  
One Hundred and Fifty Years Ago, When Harrodstown and  
Boonesboro Were the Only Kentucky Settlements. Nourse  
Rode from Piedmont, Virginia, to Pittsburgh, and Then  
Went Down the Ohio and Up the Kentucky River in  
a Flat-Boat, Walking Ten Miles Further to  
Harrodstwon, Now Harrodsburg

**J**AMES NOURSE, for fifteen years a London woolen draper, sailed with his family for Virginia on March 16, 1769. Having arrived at Hampton, Virginia, on May 10, he resided there a year and then settled with his family at Piedmont, a plantation he had purchased near Charleston, Virginia, now Berkeley County, West Virginia.

He was the head of a company which made the trip from Virginia to "Kentuke" to take up lands. Mr. Nourse kept a journal, the opening part of which is missing. But in its place we have the following letter to his wife:



"Easter Day, 5 Mile Beyond Fort Cumberland, 1775.

"My dear Love—Having met a gentleman bound for Winchester, I catch the opportunity of letting you know I am well ... dined yesterday at Old Town ... Mr. Taylor is a very obliging, kind fellow-traveler. My dear love, trust with confidence that I shall see you about harvest. My heart rises and my eyes run over, when I think of the joy of meeting my love again. Adieu, the support of the Almighty be with you all.

From your most affectionate husband,

James Nourse"



By April 21<sup>st</sup>, at the latest, his party was stopping with a Mr. Gist in Berkeley County, Virginia, not many miles from home. At this point his diary begins in the middle of a sentence as follows:

... the timber lofty, yet the country not so desirable, being more hilly; very disagreeable riding, especially in wett weather, the side of the hills being dangerously slippy, and ride which way you will you are continually mounting or descending—got my linen washed and Miss Gist altered my hunting shirt. The inhabitants so distressed this spring that they are going over the mountain continually with pack horses for flour. Mr. Taylor gave 20° p hundred P:C for flour at Gregg's ordinary and 9° pll for bacon—Saturday 22d Tom not being at Gist's, when I got back from Crawford's. Taylor's and Johnston's Servants neglected to drive up my horses with theirs and this morning they were not to be found—persuaded on Lyons and Clifton to hunt them to no purpose, neither this day nor Sunday the 23<sup>rd</sup>. Monday 24<sup>th</sup> rode to the great meadows 12 miles. Lynch's [?] could hear nothing of them—went over the large meadows behind Fossett's [?] beautifull, but the high land bad—offered 4 dollars reward—returned to Gist's in the evening, Johnston came back from Rice's. Tuesday 25—did little else but mend my tent, Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> went to the Yongheany, workt a little at the Canoes, paid 4 dollars on account of them and returned at night with Johnston and A. Taylor; missed our way, being very dark—Thursday 27<sup>th</sup>, prepared for moving our things tomorrow in a waggon. Tom Ruby acquainted me he was afraid to go. Some acquaintance he had in that neighborhood had told him it was dangerous; however after a little talking to him resolved to proceed—Friday 28<sup>th</sup>, Sett off with the wagon. Tom under pretense of killing a turkey joined us not till night. A very disagreeable day I had of it, walkt all the way and what was worse Johnston's horses not drawing well was obliged at every bad place which was very often to put my shoulders to the wheel, however by dark we arrived at Simpson's, overseer for Geo.

Washington at Washington's bottom where he is building a large grist mill, tis a valuable bottom and said to contain 1800 acres, but the expence he at there, seems not to be proportioned to profit that can possibly arrive in that part of the country for some years—Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> April—embarked on board our Canoes about 2 miles from Simpson's; joined there Mr. Creswell an Englishman—George Rice—Taylor's with Beal and Harrison two that were only going a few miles below Fort Pitt—the River so low and shallow at places, that a dozen times a day all hands were obliged to jump overboard and lead the canoes. Once our Canoe Struck upon a Rock in the Midst of the River, and Edw. Taylor was in much danger. About an hour before sunset, encamped at the mouth of Sweetly's creek having gained about 15 miles—of 2 old fowls that were in the Canoe on died, the other made soup of, very hungry, eat fat bacon and bread very heartily, pitched my tent, lodged with me Mr. Creswell and Tom—Slept well—Sunday Apr. 30<sup>th</sup>—breakfasted upon Bacon Soup thickened with Crumbs of Bread. Rained hard. Shaved &c—kept my tent up not being likely to move forward, read and walked and lay at the same camp—May the 1<sup>st</sup> Monday—embarked again, again obliged to wade several times, dined at little Sweetly creek—past on to the mouth where it loses its name by joining Mohongahala constituting a fine river, nor obliged to wade any more—had we taken water at Redstone Fort upon this river we should have entirely avoided it and the land carriage much the same—put in on acct of a storm—Rice shot a turkey, past a man that had just caught a Sturgeon, judged to weigh 30 lb—encamped 7 mile short of for Pitt, tried our fish lines but without success, one of my larger hooks snapped off, supposed by a Catfish, Tom having fixt the line to a Stump instead of bending bow—Rained very hard before we pitched our tents. Supped and Tuesday May the 22<sup>nd</sup> breakfasted on turkey and soup. The trees began to look green—shaved and changed entirely—coming down the river had put my flannell waist coat under my shirt on acct. of being so often wett ... the wind blowing right ahead made the water very rough, at Fort Pitt by 12 o'clock. Lord Dunmore had the assurance to attempt the Changing its name to Fort Dunmore—He in some measure repaired it, rebuild'g the points of the Angles, which with a handsome brick house &c. had been destroyed by orders from Lord Hillsborough tis said whilst secretary of state of America—about 2 o'clock embarked again and as soon as we past the junction of the river got into smooth water—the river here is about 1/4 mile wide, passed by McGee's (the Indian agents) plantation, came also to another where tis said he keeps a squaw and has Children by her, past several beautiful bottoms some on one side some on the other—came to Montcure Islands on the bottom opposite on the east shore encamped, where we parted with Rob't Beale and Benj. Harrison who had lands a few

miles back from this, here Tom went a fishing at some distance from us and Canoe coming down seeing his fire halloed to him, on which he run for it, supposing them Indians, however before he got to us the people had joined us, being fellow travellers bound for Kentuke. Wednesday May 3, the men that joined us last night set off before us, we having some leaks to stop but we passed them and 3 More canoes bound also for Kentuke, at Gibson's which is opposite to Logstown 18 mile below Pitsburg, a little below it on the west side is the appearance of a French settlement, came to Beaver Creek, eat our dinner on board and let the Canoes float—came to a plantation on east bank, went on shore, ground our axes, baked bread and by an hour after sunset went on board, lashed our Canoes together, 2 & 2 keeping watch found in the morning we had floated about 20 miles. Tuesday May 4<sup>th</sup> soon after day rained very hard at the two creeks, cleared up, rowed to Wheeling, a tolerable good Stockade on a high situation called Fort Fincastle met there a Capt. Clarke from Caroline county who joined us, went on board a little before sunset and floated to Grave Creek, lay there till day light. Friday May 5. The gentlemen went to the Indian grave. It appears to them to be an artificial mount about 100 feet high and 1/4 mile round. Came to a plantation that Capt Clark claims but is disputed. Tom and I cooked, G. Rice helping me, a small fish the two the liquor being made into soup, dined 9 of us the most delicate meal I had made, sauce melted butter with walnut pickle, past Capitaine Creek and 4 mile below Fish creek, being obliged by the weather to stop, we came not to the Strait Reach till dusk or we should there have had a view 17 or 18 miles down the river floated all night—

Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> May. In the morning a violent storm of rain and not being dressed got thoro wett, Blankets cloaths &c, rowed about 8 miles and just below Muddy Creek was an empty house of Capt. Cressop's, here we made a large fire dried ourselves and the weather continuing uncertain, resolved to pass the night here, being also joined by the other Canoes, it holding up some went a hunting, others a fishing but to no purpose except one lad that catched on cat, which with two he had taken in the morning and some bacon made a good supper but had no sauce—Sunday May the 7<sup>th</sup> I alone shaved and shirted, embarked in good time past two Islands and on the 3<sup>rd</sup> went on shore where on the right hand side of the island is a large tree which a foot from the ground measured 51 foot circumference about breast high 8 ft less it forks about 20 foot high and its forks larger than most trees—from thence we came to little Muskingum then great Muskingum Creeks an handsome river—came to some Rocks on the east side where we dined upon the cold fried fish and bacon. Johnston near an hour taking lattitude, in the mean time the dogs eat his dinner. I believe an accident undesigned by any tho' when

happened on account of the man's Selfish behavior nobody seemed to feel for him—the young fellow that had been before successful a fishing at the mouth of a small creek caught a cat about 12 lbs.—found Dr. Briscoe's servants fishing on the bank side, delivered the 2 letters, the sons gone for Berkley. Stopped at little Kanaway, while Johnston viewed a piece of land on the south side, very ordinary, overtook a man in a canoe solus bound for the Nachez. From little Kanaway past several Islands the bottom opposite little hocking. Col. Washington's, by dusk arrived at Fort Gower on the west side of Ohio at the mouth of Hock hocking a ruined stockade a well covered log house where we cooked and supped ... and floated 16 miles Monday 8<sup>th</sup> May. At sunrise unlashd rowed about 8 miles, stoped by thunder and rain, went on shore, held up, proceeded to some rocks, dined, but obliged to put in before night by bad weather, about 12 miles above the great Kanaway. Tuesday May 9<sup>th</sup> arrived early at Fort Blair on the point at the mouth of the big Kanaway—breakfasted and dined with Capt Russell, Lieut. Shelby, ensigns Robert and Sharp, all very obliging. Capt. Russell much of the gentleman, here we learnt from Capt. Russell who had been up Sandy Creek to Clinch Settlement, for corn for the fort, that he had certain intelligence that the Indians had killed 4 and wounded 2 men upon Kentuke, the company all resolve to continue there rout, myself undetermined, but having come so far loath to return without my errand—Wednesday morning May 10<sup>th</sup> arrived at the mouth of Sandy creek as it is commonly called, though it may be rated amongst rivers, it being navigable for canoes nearly to the settlements upon Clinch river from whence as I observed before Capt. Russell had fecht corn—the Governor's large bateau full which must be at least 200 mile—at a cabin on the lower point of Sandy river we found Charles Smith and 10 others surveying and dividing soldier's rights to lands by lot. Breakfasted upon Capt. Smith upon lean venison. Tom caught two cats on which and the Soup we made an excellent diner. Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> May breakfasted upon coffee and bread and butter, went a fishing, caught none but exchanged a piece of bacon for 2 cats, stewed under Capt. Smith's direction in an iron pot with half a pint water and between each layer butter, pepper and salt putting sticks to keep the fish from the bottom and then put fire over and under the pot, a good dish for those that love seasoned meat. Our hunters went out but killed nothing, brought home some turkey eggs. Fryday, May 12<sup>th</sup>—bacon frays with the turkey eggs for breakfast. Capt. Cressop with 6 men arrived, wrote by Capt. Smith.

[The letter to Mrs. Nourse, sent by Captain Smith, as above stated, also survived and reads in part as follows:



From Our Camp at Smith Point,  
May 10<sup>th</sup>, 1775, at the Mouth of Great Sandy,  
About 40 miles below the Great Kanaway.

My dearest Love—We arrived here this morning and found ten persons, most from our part of the country, among whom is Capt. Smith, who promises to send you this as soon as ever he gets home, but I flatter myself I may possibly be at home near as soon as he, for he talks of calling at some places to make improvements, but whether I shall go down to Kentuke is at present uncertain, we having a report that some Indians have done mischief that way. If it prove true, and I find it dangerous to proceed, shall take the first opportunity to return overland by Staunton. ... Friday ye 28<sup>th</sup>, we set off from Gist's, our things in a waggon, for Washington's bottom that we might be below the falls in the river, but our horses being bad ... we got only to the overseer's (Simpson's), by dark ... Sat. 29<sup>th</sup>; ... went on board the charming Sally, I.N., Ed. Taylor, Nich. Creswell, and Tom Ruby. On board the Molly, Benj. Johnson, Reuben Taylor, George Rice and George, a servant of Mr. Taylor ... May 2d, arrived at Fort Pitt. Saw the fort and Indians in prison, and one fine one dealing in a store (and have set eyes on never a one since); proceeding down the Ohio, encamped opposite an island called Montcures—this night instead of camping, lashed our vessels together and floated down stream all night, 2 always keeping watch (tho' tis not uncommon for people to float down and all go to sleep) and in that manner proceeded when the weather would permit, if wet or windy went ashore and pitched our tents; tell Kitty her tent does very well. I am writing in it now. ... Friday 12<sup>th</sup> ... We are bad fishers and bad hunters, we have had but 6 cat fish (and caught but two of them ourselves), no venison, 2 ducks, and but on turkey; we have lived very well yet, but unless we mend, our hands shall be short of meat. ... I long most ardently to hear of you all. I hope to God, the small-pox keeps clear of you. I am ready to beat myself, that I did not desire you to write by Capt. Shelby, as I hope to be around by his plantation in about three weeks. Adieu, my dear love, Capt. Smith is leaving us. ... Once more Adieu my dear love from

Your most affectionate and faithful Husband,  
JAMES NOURSE.

Mrs. Nourse, Berkeley Church.



Mr. Nourse's journal, interrupted to insert the above letter, goes on from the point of interruption as follows:]

The men that bound in the other canoes for Kentuke set off—as did soon after Cressop. Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> May. Tom finished washing my linen and dyeing my Hunting Shirt, the company being tired of waiting for Lel it

was resolved to set off tomorrow morning—Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> May a rainy day. Monday 15<sup>th</sup> May having loaded our canoes once more embarked rowed till 2 o'clock, eat bacon on board, in the afternoon Rice shot a Soft Shelled turtle, it is flatt and in the water, looks like a turbot, went on shore at night to dress it, found in it 21 full grown eggs and as many lesser ones, made nice soup, meat and soup both very good, floated all night, moonshine, very cool and in the morning, Tuesday 16 May, a great fog and violent dew [?] about 2 o'clock this day came two a gravelly island supposed to be that mark in my list, 14 1/2 below Scioto which we past in the night, went on Shore on the island, a fine bank of Vines running upon the sand, dined upon bacon frays made of the turtle's eggs, the Wind being fair for us, we cut a Mast and hoisted sail—but the wind shifting we were soon obliged to take it down—tis remarked by every body that the wind scarce ever (not one day in seven) blows down the river. The canoes being lashed together at about a foot apart, with a high Mast and large sail bore the strongest gust without being affected, towards the evening Creswell and Rice each shot a turkey, a fine moonshine. Creswell watched for me—May 17<sup>th</sup> shot at a turkey standing on the shore, out of the canoe—two others also shott at it but it walked away very composedly—went on shore on a Stony beach, cooked our turkeys. Tom caught a small Catt, the hunters went out but no success, came to Bracken's creek, said to be 10 miles above little Miamme, the hunters went out, Rice and Taylor killed a very large bull buffaloe, Clark a Buck—the buffalo tho' not very fatt was supposed to have weighed 1000, the buck not fat but fleshy, here we resolved to stay the next day to barbecue and jerk our meat and have had no fresh meat lately and all along upon allowance as to bread, we eat all day long from turkey to beef, from Beef to Venison, fish &c, &c.—Thursday 18<sup>th</sup>, Fryday the 19<sup>th</sup>, got under way by 5 o'clock—came to little Miamme—a pretty river—Caught a Cat, saw a bear crossing the Ohio—rowed hard but was to late to kill it, rowed to the Miamme, went on shore opposite to it, fine land but very hilly—dressed our Victuals—were rather imprudent in having a fire so late on shore, it being quite dark before we quitted it—Saturday May 20<sup>th</sup> passed 3 Creeks, but are very uncertain which was the Bone lick Creek—passed without knowing which—Moored to a stump all night for fear of passing Kentuke. Sunday May 21, half past nine P.M. (having shaved and striped from head to foot) arrived at the mouth of Kentuke river—expected a larger river, not larger than the little Kanawah or but little difference. Set in to raining, rowed up about one mile and encamped, spent the rest of the day in my tent, it continuing raining, staid there all night, had no fire on account of the Indians, but the dogs barked so incessantly (being abundance of

wolves in all these parts) that had any Indians been near, they might have found us by the Dogs.

Monday May 22<sup>nd</sup> Set off about 5 oClock, rowed thro' the rain past a pretty creek about 7 miles upon the north side—another about 2 miles farther on the lower or south side—(believe Greening Creek) that comes from Greening famous buffaloe lick) then 2 mile farther up a considerable creek that looks like a fork of the river (Eagle Creek I since learned) about 20 mile up the river, landed on a high Shore, a young Venison killed, made a fire but it got dark before the cooking was over, the company promising to put out the fire. When twas over I went to sleep in my tent, but was waked by the blaze between 3 and 4 in the Morning and rated them for breach of promise and they engage that the next night they will Cook time enough to have it all out before dark.

Tuesday May 23<sup>d</sup>—came to a rapid about 3 Mile up the river—the first (afterwards there were several of them, at least 12 or 13).

*(To be Continued)*