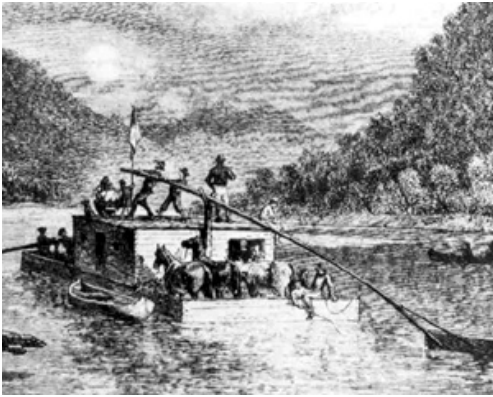


# The Donelson Expedition



John Blakemore, my 5<sup>th</sup> great grandfather, was an instrumental player in the settlement of Tennessee. In December of 1779, when a large expedition was being prepared to establish a settlement west of the Appalachian Mountains, he was chosen to lead a flotilla down the Clinch River with plans to meet up with the rest of the river party (led by John Donelson) where the Clinch fed into the Tennessee River. Together they would make the remaining 900 mile trip to the Cumberland River, past the Muscle Shores and to their final destination: the bluffs of the French Salt Springs (later renamed as Nashville).

Their flotilla of scows, flatboats, and dugout canoes consisted of approximately 200 souls, mostly women and children. There were approximately 50 men with them but the more experienced frontiersmen had preceded them, traveling by land through the Cumberland Gap. It was thought that the overland journey would be the more perilous. The opposite proved to be true.

The flotilla was beset by life threatening dangers nearly from the start. It was one of the cruelest winters in history; one of the boats had to be quarantined during the journey due to an outbreak of smallpox. The boat carrying the diseased passengers had to trail behind at some distance which left them vulnerable to Indian attack to which they eventually succumbed.

All in all, four months later, when the settlers finally arrived at French Lick, reuniting with the men who traveled overland, 33 of their party had been killed or captured. Ramsey, in his Annals of Tennessee says, "The distance traveled on this inland voyage [and] the extreme danger in every respect marks the expedition as one of the greatest achievements in the settlement of our western country."

*Michael Ondrasik and Home Video Studio specialize in the preservation of family memories through the digitalization of film, videotapes, audio recordings, photos, negatives, and slides. For more information, call 352-735-8550 or visit our [website](#).*