

# ANN ROBERTSON COCKRILL



*Portrait of Ann Robertson Cockrill by Vija Doks*

*From* **Through a Woman's Voice**  
*By* **Candace Corrigan**

**Essay and curriculum guide**  
*by* **Dr. Carole Bucy**

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**Video of the Ann Robertson Cockrill Ballad**

<https://vimeo.com/481485704>





## Journey of a Voyage

In 1779, a group of long-hunters journeyed over Tennessee mountains, crossing the Cumberland River on Christmas day. At the same time, the other half of their party, including wives and children, departed Fort Patrick Henry in a flotilla of flat boats and rafts, bound for present day Nashville, Tennessee. No one in the river expedition had ever traversed the 985 miles of dangerous waterway before them. One third of their company perished from exposure in the harsh winter or ambush by Cherokee. The survivors finally arrived at Fort Nashboro on April 24, 1780.





*Photograph courtesy of David Wright and Native Sons Productions*

The women who crossed the Appalachian Mountains and came with their families to Tennessee were women of great courage who were able to endure numerous hardships, losses, disease and violence to survive on the frontier. They walked side by side with their husbands as partners and worked together to build the state. Unlike the settlements of Spain and France, English settlements always included women. It was the presence of these women in Tennessee that added the quality of permanence to life.





*18th century re-enactor at Fort Loudon State Historical Park*

When the women arrived on the frontier as pioneers, homes were built, domesticated animals were confined, and crops were planted. Native Americans who lived in Tennessee when the settlers came realized that these settlers had come to Tennessee to live. Violence between the Native Americans and the settlers increased as more settlements were built.



*Cherokee re-enactors*



Some of the earliest settlers in Tennessee were African-American women like Hagar, brought by white men and women as slaves rather than by choice. While all women endured hardships in the earliest settlements, those who were members of slave-owning families, like Charlotte Robertson, did not have to perform the most tedious and dirtiest chores. The earliest European settlers who crossed the mountains to settle in the Holston Valley were almost all Scot-Irish Presbyterians whose families had come to the American colonies as indentured servants. Most of the Tennessee settlers were better educated than those in other frontier areas. The women handed down reading and writing and, in the absence of the men, frequently planted, sowed, and harvested crops. These women were resourceful in meeting medical emergencies as they arose within their families and also served as midwives for each other during childbirth. Large families of ten or more children were common among these pioneers. In the coldest part of the winter 1779



*18th century re-enactors*



*18th Century re-enactor*





*French trader and Cherokee man at 18th century trade fair*

As settlers began to cross the mountain, the native peoples, particularly the Cherokees living in the area, saw the coming of settlers with their families and log cabins as a threat to their independence. Although the Cherokees and other tribes wanted take advantage of the opportunities for trade with the settlers, they realized the threat posed by the migration and settlement. For this reason, from time to time, war erupted between the settlers and the Cherokees. Most of the earliest settlers of Tennessee lived within fortified stations such as Fort Patrick Henry, Fort Watauga, or Fort Nashboro for protection against potential attacks by the Indians.



*Historic Mansker's Station*



Harriette Simpson Arnow provides an excellent description of life in these stations on the frontier in her book *Flowering of the Cumberland*. Women worked together within each station in a variety of tasks that included the spinning of fabric, the smoking of meats, the churning of butter, and the boiling of clothes in order to do the laundry. Tennessee's early farmers kept their farm animals such as calves, pigs, chickens, and horses within the walls of the forts for protection. The earliest families would not leave the safety of their stations to go to church.



*18th century re-enactors*



*Photo used with permission from Sycamore Shoals Historic State Park*





*18th century re-enactor*

### Ann Robertson Johnston Cockrill

Ann Robertson Johnston Cockrill, the sister of James Robertson, was born in Wake County, North Carolina in 1757 and then crossed the Appalachian Mountains to settle in the area of Fort Watauga, near the present site of Elizabethton, Tennessee.





*Smoky Mountains by Anita Stachurski via Pixabay*

Ann Robertson Johnston was a widow with three small daughters, when her brother and sister-in-law, James and Charlotte Robertson decided to leave Watauga and settle in middle Tennessee. Like many of the early women of Tennessee, Ann Robertson had married as a teenager and had given birth to her first child at the age of fifteen. Her husband, a justice of the peace in the Washington district, had been killed in an accident and she had lived with another brother, Charles Robertson, near Johnson City.

Ann decided to make the trip with Charlotte Robertson on the flatboats. Because of her love of children and her ability to teach, she gave instruction to more than 50 children on the boats during the journey. Ann boxes with sand from the banks of the river. She then taught these children letters, spelling, and simple arithmetic using sticks to draw the letters and numbers in the sand. She kept the children occupied during the long journey teaching them to read from their parents' Bibles. "She had a great love for reading and enjoyed singing hymns and religious songs. No doubt a children's choir could be heard as they rounded the bends of the winding river."





*“Drifting Along” used with permission from the artist, David Wright, all rights reserved*

When the flotilla reached the mouth of the Tennessee and Ohio rivers, the flatboats had to be navigated against the river current to reach the mouth of the Cumberland. Because of the spring rains, the river had risen and very fast. Some of the group decided to turn South and go to Natchez, Mississippi. Ann took a man’s place as the pilot of the boat and steered the boat near the bank so that the remaining men might pole the large boat upstream.



Upon her arrival at Fort Nashboro, she met and later married John Cockrill, who had crossed the mountains by foot with her brother, James Robertson. In 1784, she was the only woman among the Cumberland settlers to be awarded a land grant by North Carolina for her services in the preservation of the frontier colony on the Cumberland River and her contribution to the “advance guard of civilization.” She and her husband built a cabin at Cockrill Springs a few miles west of Fort Nashboro at the present-day site of Centennial Park. During her years in the Cumberland Settlements, she saw the city of Nashville grow from a frontier outpost to an important trading center. The Cockrills had eight additional children. She is buried in the Nashville City Cemetery.



*Photo of 18th Century Cabin by Steven L. Markos, used with permission [www.npplan.com](http://www.npplan.com)*



# Tennessee 4th Grade Curriculum Standards

Identify cultural groups who inhabit North America in the 17th century  
( i.e, Puritans, Quakers, Spanish, French)

Identify the routes the explorers of the Americas on a map  
(i.e. Columbus, Balboa, Pizarro, DeSoto)

Interpret a time line that depicts major pre-Civil War events

Identify and use key geographical features on maps.  
( i.e..mountains, rivers, plains, valleys, forests)

Recognize the reasons settlements are founded on major river systems  
( i.e.,transportation, manmade boundaries, food and water sources)

Recognize the river systems that impacted early American history  
( i.e.,Mississippi, Tennessee, Mystic, Charles, Hudson )

Determine the hardships faced by early Tennessee settlers in the late  
1700's(i.e.,security, isolated communities, lack of access to goods, natural  
geography )

Determine the reasons for colonial settlement  
( i.e., religious, economic, individual freedom)

**Reading Standards (Skills – reading a  
timeline, a map, summarizing, compare-  
contrast, main idea, inference, drawing  
conclusions**



*Colonial Powder Horn*



# Tennessee 8th grade Curriculum Standards

Identify cultures that contributed to the development of the United States.  
(i.e., Native American, African, British, Scots, Irish, German)

Recognize America's resources  
(i.e., land, timber, fish, animal pelts, peppers, sweet potatoes, squash, pumpkins, turkeys, peanuts, potatoes, tomatoes, tobacco, cacao and beans)

Identify and use key geographic elements on maps  
(i.e., island, flood plain, swamp, delta, march, harbor, cape, sea level, bay, prairie, desert, oasis, mesa, mountain, valley, glacier, cliff, canyon, plateau)

Use various geographic data from maps and globes to determine longitude, latitude, distance, direction

Recognize how topographical features such as mountains and river systems influenced the settlement and expansion of the United States (i.e., Cumberland Gap, Wilderness Road, Ohio and Tennessee river systems)

Interpret examples which illustrate how cultures adapt to or change the environment (i.e., deforestation, subsistence farming, cash crop, dam and road building)

Read a timeline and order events of the past

Differentiate between a primary and secondary source

Interpret a geographic map of the early United States

Recognize consequences of the westward expansion of the United States

Identify conclusions about historical events using primary and secondary sources.





*“Daniel Boone Leading The Settlers Through The Cumberland Gap”*

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## Objectives :

1. What was life on the frontier in Tennessee like? What did women do? What did children do?
2. How did the settlers travel to the Cumberland settlements in 1779 and 1780?

## Guided Practice – Introduction of skills (Large or Small Activities):

1. Use the Internet to learn about the unique geographical features of the shoals.  
In class or in small groups discuss why the passage of boats through an area with shoals would be difficult.
2. Imagine that you are a parent with three small children on a flat boat.  
Can you create a game to play with your children?
3. Discuss various modes of transportation.  
If you were traveling from Elizabethton, Tennessee to Nashville, what choices would you have?
4. Examine a transcript of Captain John Donelson's diary.  
Make a daily log including dates and weather conditions. Now keep a daily log of your weather conditions.
5. Discuss contagious diseases. Why do parents no longer worry about small pox?
6. Compare and contrast the activities that Anne Roberston Johnston provided her children while traveling with activities a parent might use with their children on a long journey today.



Independent Practice- Activities that develop mastery of the skill taught.

Imagine that Ann Robertson Johnston is your mother and she has informed you that you will be moving to a new place. Make a list of things you would take with you. Imagine you are going on trip today. Make a list of things you would pack. How would you pack them? Compare and contrast your two lists. Make a Venn diagram of your lists.

1. Students will write a letter to a grandparent describing the journey to Nashville.
2. Students will make a salt map of Tennessee showing the route that Ann Robertson Johnston and her children took with the Donelson party to the Salt Lick.
3. Students will draw a timeline of Ann Robertson Cockrill's life.
4. Students will draw a timeline of the history of Tennessee from 1770-1796.
5. Design a gravestone to mark the grave of Ann Robertson Johnston Cockrill.



*"Brown Bess"*



## Journal of a Voyage- Ann Robertson Cockrill

<https://vimeo.com/481485704>

In the coldest part of the winter, 1779  
We took our departure from the Fort at Christmas time  
My brother and his party would meet us overland  
to our final destination on the river Cumberland  
Our journey was a voyage on the winding waterways  
And asking God's permission we set out that bitter day  
With sundry other vessels that answered to the call  
We named our boat "Adventure", the flagship to us all  
With a thousand miles between us we set sail upon that day  
And a danger ever present at each bend along the way  
Icy waters of the current and the damage of the shoals  
Or the war cries of the Indians that could scar your very soul  
Many days and a fair distance we passed in such distress  
We were compelled to leave the lost out in the wilderness  
When captured by the Indians, their tragic cries were clear  
and plainly heard by those on boats bringing up the rear  
One morning proving foggy, we stopped to rest awhile  
The wife of Ephraim Peyton was delivered of a child  
Well, her husband and my brother had proceeded overland  
He was awaiting her arrival on the river Cumberland.



*Smoky Mountain River by Mickey Estes via Pixabay*



*Re-enactors*

The next day that same boat was caught up in a mire  
And Indians on cliffs above shot down a galling fire  
Being perfectly astonished, we feared the men were dead  
As the bullets rained down on them and the boat was pushed ahead  
The women that were left on board saw their only hope  
Started throwing out provisions to lighten up the boat  
In the hurry and confusion and disaster of the day  
The infant was thrown overboard in the haste to get away

Right around the river bend we heard an awful roar  
And the fury of the water we had never seen before  
In the roiling of the whirl I feared we'd break in two  
But Providence was on our side and we came safely through

The remainder of the trip we were hungry and fatigued  
We landed at the settlement very much relieved  
All the bravery a soul can know I came to understand  
On our fateful trip we undertook to the river Cumberland

*Song written by Candace Corrigan*

*Song Source: "Journal of a Voyage",  
by Captain John Donelson  
Three Pioneer Documents,  
Nashville, 1964*

**Musicians:**

**Vocals: Candace Corrigan**  
**Uilleann Pipes: Eoin O'Riabhaigh**  
**Fiddle: Randy Howard**  
**Guitar: Matthew Benjamin**  
**Mandolin: George Pearce**  
**Bass: Chris Enghauser**  
**Rhythm Guitar: Kyle Kennedy**



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