

UCLA

American Indian Culture and Research Journal

Title

Nairne's Muskogean Journals: The 1708 Expedition to the Mississippi River. Edited by Alexander Moore.

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/57h8w22c>

Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 12(3)

ISSN

0161-6463

Author

Paredes, J. Anthony

Publication Date

1988-09-01

DOI

10.17953

Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

of the endangered species laws as a result of stealing mature ginseng seeds. He pledges to erect a large Trickster of Liberty statue in exchange for contractual rights to buy wild ginseng. Eternal Flame Browne establishes a "scapehouse" on the grounds of her ancestral baronage as a timely haven to wounded women. Father Mother Browne (he isn't sure which he wants to be—father or mother) establishes the Last Lecture tavern on another parcel of the baronage and there hears confessions. Mime Browne has no palate and so utters unintelligible sounds and silent words. Shortly after Garlic's death, Mime is raped and murdered. Slyboots is the most devious and successful family trickster. He—trickster as entrepreneur—is a graduate of Dartmouth (more academic humor) and soon starts up a microlight airplane factory of Patronia specials, bringing needed cash-flow and economic hope to the reservation. Following the hijinks of such a family, such kinship and individualism does bring an occasional chuckle. But the reader has to work considerably harder at enjoying *Trickster* than Vizenor seems to have done during the writing, a stint the reader envisions as author with tears in his eyes and slap-sore knees.

Anyone who likes watching an author enjoy the process of extravagant authoring and analogizing will, admittedly, find special treats in *Trickster*. Even those favorable readers, those less hidebound to more conservative if not reactionary (out-of-fashion?) ways, are bound to wonder, however, in certain long witty and tricky "adapted" narrative stretches, whether or not they have been tricked right out of consumptions better spent on less condiment and more meat.

Robert Gish
University of Northern Iowa

Nairne's Muskogean Journals: The 1708 Expedition to the Mississippi River. Edited by Alexander Moore. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1988. xi, 92 pages. \$17.50 Paper.

The dust jacket of this slim volume proclaims "this book, printed from a previously unpublished manuscript in the British Library, is the earliest known account in English of Muskogean society." Yet, very nearly one-third of the eighty-nine pages of text, foot-

notes, and illustrations are devoted to the editor's introduction. Another eight pages are occupied by editor Moore's bibliographic essay (which is useful). There are another eight pages of editorial footnotes on Nairne's writings. Finally, there is a page of acknowledgments and Dr. Patricia Galloway's three-page "Forward" (which is excellent, by the way). So, we are left with barely forty pages of Nairne's actual observations on "Muskogean society"—not much of a book. Nonetheless, there is plenty here for ethnohistorians to digest and render intelligible.

Alexander Moore's introduction provides a fascinating account of Thomas Nairne and his times in colonial South Carolina. Nairne was a planter, politician, soldier, and economic adventurer. Nairne went raiding into Florida for slaves in 1702, and he was with Governor James Moore in his devastating 1704 assault on the Apalachees of Florida. In 1715 Nairne and two other South Carolinians were killed in a "Yemassee" town where they had gone attempting to quiet Indian resentment of abusive trade practices by the colonists, thus becoming some of the first casualties of the Yemassee War, which editor Moore in an embarrassing choice of words describes (page 7) as Nairne having been "murdered by Indians." Between these years Nairne was a member of the South Carolina Commons House of Assembly, entangled in political rivalries, imprisoned for treason without benefit of trial, fled to England where he was vindicated, returned to Carolina, and served again in the Commons House.

Under the South Carolina Indian trade act of 1707, aimed at preventing trade abuses against the Indians and for which Nairne had drafted the bill, Nairne served as Indian Agent for eighteen months in 1707–08. From November 1707 to May or June 1708, Nairne and an associate, trader Thomas Welch, travelled from Charlestown to the Mississippi River and returned, commissioned by the Commons House "to undertake a diplomatic mission to the French Indians and, if necessary, to conduct a war of extermination" (page 15) in the Carolinians' on-going struggles with the French from Mobile. Editor Moore presents an excellent schematic, annotated map of Nairne's and Welch's route through present-day South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi. (Unfortunately, the reproductions of Nairne's own map and others from the early eighteenth century included in this book are so small and faint as to be virtually useless.)

It is Captain Nairne's recently discovered "*Journalls*" of the

1707-08 expedition that are the centerpiece of this book. (Actually, the manuscript in the British Library is almost certainly a copy, most likely one made by Nairne's contemporary Richard Beresford.) Also printed here is Nairne's previously known "memorial" to the Earl of Sunderland outlining Nairne's plans for "the British to use the fur, deerskin, and Indian slave trade to take control of thoe whole mid-continent of North America" (page 3). In his journals Nairne makes important observations on the Chickasaw, several of the groups that later would be collectively known as "Creeks," and others. Given his mission, it is understandable that Nairne was most interested and perceptive in matters of native political structure, law, and diplomacy. Even in seemingly more esoteric aspects of native culture Nairne is disarmingly straightforward in the pragmatism of some of his observations, as when, following a discussion of clan loyalties transcending village boundaries, he writes (pages 60-61), "It is the easiest thing in the world, for an English Traveller to procure kindred among the Indians, It's but taking a mistress of such [clan] name, and he has at once relations in each Village, from Charles Town to the Missisipi, and if in travelling he acquaints them with what fameily he incorporated into, those of that name treat, and wait on him as their kinsman."

Anyone familiar with such standard sources as the writings of John R. Swanton will find little of consequence in Nairne's journals that is completely new to southeastern ethnology. Nevertheless, there are many tidbits of ethnographic detail and ethnohistorical nuance to entice the student of southeastern Native American culture and history. Here are a few of my favorites. Nairne's opening line, on the "Talapoosies," seems especially apt in light of recent reconstructions of proto-historic political organization in the Southeast: "The Government of this people such as it is, seems to be the shadow of an Aristocracy . . ." (page 32). Nairne recounts how it was explained to him that a Chickasaw village chief lost the respect of his people because he had abandoned his traditional obligation to dissociate himself from matters of warfare when he discovered that "slave catching was much more profitable" than his civic duties and thus became a warrior himself (page 39). In comparing the Chickasaws and the Ocheses, Nairne reports that the men of the latter are ridiculed by the former for such "Indulgence to the fair sex"

(page 48) as doing a little hoeing or bringing wood to the fire. In April of 1708, Nairne mentions "a young Chicasaw princess who was carrying from the English settlement 2 young catts, to her country as a great rarity" (page 51). In addition to explanation of the matrilineal principle and other aspects of native kinship institutions, Nairne presents a fairly detailed account of ritual, fictive kinship—or in his terms "Friendship"—among the Chickasaw (?), noting that when a man enters into such a relationship with a woman, "any scandalous familiarity would be accounted as equall crime as if it were to his sister" (page 65). And, in closing his journal Nairne commenting on a variant of "Friendships" ritual in the North American southeast declares that the same "seems to have been used by the ancient Jews by what is mentioned in the 1st of Samuel 18:4: Verse" (page 66).

In the "Forward" Galloway praises Nairne for his recognition of "the Indian's uniqueness in the world" and trying to understand their institutions "on their own terms," despite suffering from "the normal dose of ethnocentrism" (page viii). While there is, true enough, a certain non-judgmental quality in Nairne's descriptions and interpretations, that quality seems to emerge more from a soldier-politician's strategic practicality than from a scholar-scientist's neutral objectivity. Nairne certainly was not the "natural relativist" that editor Moore implies he was, for in the end it was by standards and with concepts from his own familiar traditions that he tried to make sense of those he encountered in an alien cultural world: the essence of ethnocentrism. And, late twentieth century anthropologists are still trying to overcome such epistemological ethnocentrism in their quest for a genuine understanding of others.

In Nairne's journals, and especially in his memorial to the Earl, there is an unwavering, steely, unquestioning correctness of purpose in the imperial ambitions of Englishmen (and, one assumes, Frenchmen and Spaniards as well) in eighteenth-century North America that the modern reader can find absolutely chilling. Comparisons with contemporary international contests spring quickly to mind. Though the arena has shifted southward a bit, the prizes sought more complicated, and the means of control over local populaces more subtle, the quest for empire, in fact if not in name, continues today.

At another level, no matter how unbiased Nairne might have

been himself, the comparisons and allusions of his journals convey a sense of utter confidence in the all-encompassing, immutable certainty of the early eighteenth century European's Biblical view of the world (There are still plenty of like mind amongst us today, of course). Even the most critical, iconoclastic twentieth-century reader might, however, almost warm to the childlike faith implicit in such statements on the Indians as "It's probable their Government may not be much unlike to those a little after the Flood" (page 63). Herein, perhaps, lies the greatest value of the journals, for in describing the Chickasaws, the Talapoosies, and the others Nairne held up a mirror to his own tribe, the English. *Nairne's Muskhogean Journals* is as much cultural artifact for the anthropology of eighteenth-century Anglo-Americans as it is documentary source for the ethnohistory of Muskhogean nations.

While we must overlook the editor's historical blindness to the present in asserting that Nairne's ethnological information "outlasted the tribes themselves" (page 7) and forgive him his Anglo-chauvinist gushing that Nairne's expedition "rivalled the far-flung exploits of Spanish *conquistadores* and French *coureurs de bois*" (page 7), we must be grateful to Moore for recognizing the importance of the Nairne manuscript, which he encountered "while researching another topic from another era" (page vii), and making the material available to the scholarly world through this little book.

J. Anthony Paredes
Florida State University

The Adventures and Sufferings of John R. Jewitt, Captive of Maquinna. Annotated and illustrated by Hilary Stewart. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1987. 192 pages, 170 drawings, maps, bibliography, index. \$29.95 Cloth.

In the summer of 1802, Captain John Salter of the American brigantine *Boston* brought his ship to Hull, England to be outfitted to sail to the Northwest Coast of America, where he planned to trade with Indians for sea otter pelts to resell in China. He often spent evenings with a blacksmith friend, whose nineteen year old son John listened attentively to stories of his world travels.