
A Man Apart: Nicholas Cresswell's American Odyssey, 1774–1777

*George M. Curtis III and Harold B. Gill, Jr.**

The American odyssey of Nicholas Cresswell of Derbyshire, England, began with bright promise. On March 1, 1774, just weeks after his twenty-fourth birthday, as the fitting christening and accompaniment for the commencement of his venture, he began a journal. He had come “to a determined resolution to go into America.” He counted on his fortunate place in a Derbyshire gentry family for assurances of financial support as well as useful social and business connections. Cresswell emphasized that this decision was neither superficial nor novel. Since “almost from my infancy” he had thought much about “going to America.” After serious “studying and deliberating,” he decided that no time was “more suitable than the present” for a journey to Virginia, for “I like the situation of that Colony the best.”¹

However well conceived these private plans were, Cresswell could not anticipate the accidents of time and place. Unintentionally, his quest for personal economic independence away from home ran headlong into the onset of the American Revolution. Cresswell's journal, originally intended to serve as an enduring reminder of a successful business venture, instead became a bitter narrative of an outsider trapped in the American march toward independence.

For years after he stopped his note taking, Cresswell's journal lay dormant. Then in 1928 one of his descendants, Samuel Thorneley, published an unannotated version that had softened Cresswell's opinions and actions. During its seventy-five-year lifetime, the printed journal has served as a popular source for historians of the American Revolution. No one has yet told Cresswell's story, however. This is a fate not unlike that of many diaries, published and unpublished. Useful as these intimate sources have been for the commentary that they yield for historians, the stories themselves remain largely untold, and so the narrators have remained invisible.

*George M. Curtis III is senior fellow, Liberty Fund, Inc., Indianapolis, Indiana, and professor of history, Hanover College, Hanover, Indiana. Harold B. Gill, Jr., served for thirty years as a historian for Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Virginia, and is on the editorial board of the *Williamsburg Journal*.

¹Nicholas Cresswell, *The Journal of Nicholas Cresswell, 1774–1777* (New York, 1928), 1–2.

Cresswell's history offers a scintillating window into the complex world of the American Revolution. Furthermore, given the significance of Cresswell's 1775 travels west to present-day Harrodsburg, Kentucky, his journal proves a fitting addition to the literature of the Ohio Valley on the eve of the first American settlement of Indiana. It is the vibrant and multilayered story of a complex and energetic man caught up in powerful events that threatened to overwhelm him and defeat his most cherished hopes and dreams. His view of the times continues to stand in defiance of much of what historians have said about the course of events, for Cresswell, even after all these years, steadfastly fails to fit easily into historical pigeonholes. He was not a Loyalist in the accepted understanding of this word, for he was technically an English visitor, not an American colonist. He most certainly was not an apologist for the British ministry as his actions in the American West clearly attest and his commentary upon the occasion of his departing from America confirms. More important than all of this was his growing affection for certain parts of America, particularly the West. Throughout his three years in America, save for periods of illness or intemperance driven by despair, Cresswell wrote with vividness of the new people, the remarkable country, and the disarray of empire. The journal reveals that he struggled with the challenge of American liberty that these new people and new places presented to him. As much as he yearned to stay, he could not bring himself to accept the Patriot cause. Feisty and argumentative to a fault, he laced his journal with an ironic dismissal of political passion American style. All in all, Cresswell's history was not a story of accomplishment. The journal that he started with such a flourish of confidence in 1774 became a sad and troubled record of failures, one Cresswell venture after another spoiled by what he viewed as an almost tragic American descent into chaos.

Cresswell's original plan possessed the virtues of uncomplicated ambition and candor. Although his decision faced determined opposition from his family and friends, he was "resolved to brave them all and follow my own inclination for once." This was not to be a normal grand tour for the sake of cultural gratification. Instead, Cresswell viewed his American experience as a "voyage," a mission with specific objectives. He was seeking a future where he could "live much better and make greater improvement in America" than he believed was likely if he remained at home. In his opening journal entry, Cresswell made it clear that he would maintain in America the style of life that he had enjoyed in England. He intended to remain "in the farming way as that is the business I have been brought up to." He was confident that he knew the business well, and his initial plan was a straightforward reflection of it. Once his parents granted him their reluctant permission, Cresswell expected that his father would extend sufficient credit to finance his trip. If, after a careful survey of the Virginia country, he believed the conditions suitable, the ven-

turer planned "to return immediately and endeavour to prevail upon my Friends to give me something to begin the world with." Thus armed with development credit, he would start up his Virginia agricultural business.² Unknown to Cresswell, during the month he was preparing to set out for America, Parliament was putting the final touches on the Boston Port Act, the first of five legislative assertions of imperial authority soon to earn the American sobriquet of the Intolerable Acts. Taken as a group, these acts of Parliament would have an impact upon nearly everything Cresswell did, the irony of which would not be entirely lost on him during his darkest hours of disappointment.

Cresswell sailed from Liverpool on Saturday, April 9, 1774, as one of several passengers aboard the *Molly*.³ After thirty-six days with several stretches of foul weather, stormy enough to wreak havoc with the rigging on two different occasions, the ship came abreast of Cape Henry. Cresswell first set foot ashore in America on May 17 at the village of Urbanna, situated on the lower reaches of the Rappahannock River in Virginia. His first destination was Alexandria. It was here that James Kirk lived, a man who had grown up in Cresswell's neighborhood and had entered into mercantile business as well as land investments in Alexandria.⁴ As so many others before him had done, Cresswell sought out someone familiar, a connection that he believed was "absolutely necessary." In Kirk he hoped to find someone whose knowledge of the country would benefit him in his own search.

As soon as he arrived, Cresswell commenced his commentary about American agriculture, the magnet for the Virginian venture in the first place. Initially, what he observed in the tidewater of Virginia and Maryland appeared to sustain the negative views that he had learned while still in England. He arrived believing that the land was "good and the price very low." From this he concluded that agriculture "must be in its infant state," which his first impressions seemed to confirm. The labor-intensive nature of tobacco cultivation drew his notice. Cresswell, not yet two weeks in the colonies, concluded that "agriculture is in a very poor state. In short they know very little about Farming. Tobacco and Indian-corn is all they make and some little wheat." He was just as dismissive of wheat culture. He com-

²*Ibid.*

³*Ibid.*, 10. The sailing of the *Molly* was reported in *Williamson's Liverpool Advertiser, And Mercantile Chronicle*, April 15, 1774.

⁴James Kirk arrived in Virginia sometime before 1762. A prominent merchant in Alexandria, he signed the Fairfax nonimportation association in 1770 and was a member of the Fairfax County committee of safety from 1774 to 1775. He was appointed to the Commission of Peace for Loudoun County in 1777 and was elected mayor of Alexandria in 1785. George Mason, *The Papers of George Mason, 1725-1792*, ed. Robert A. Rutland (3 vols., Chapel Hill, N.C., 1970), I, 1xiii; Loudoun County Order Book G, 1776-1783, 47 (Loudoun County Court House, Leesburg, Virginia); *Virginia Gazette*, August 4, 1774; *Virginia Journal & Alexandria Advertiser*, February 17, 1785.

plained about the planting, the yields, and the reaping, hardly containing his private glee with the prospect of competing with such locals. He did confess to an admiration for the final product, however. Having seen the flour from George Washington's mill, Cresswell confessed that it was "as good flour as I ever saw."⁵

Late in 1774, Cresswell finally found the land that appealed to him. From Kirk's home in Alexandria, Cresswell toured "the back country" of Berkeley and Frederick counties. "I am exceedingly pleased with these two Counties, and am determined to settle in one of them, if ever these times are settled, here is every encouragement." He was not drawn to the tobacco culture of the Tidewater and remarked with some sense of relief that "little tobacco is made" in these counties. The country seemed perfect for livestock and wheat culture. The land "will produce any sort of grain, the average of Wheat is about 12 Bushels to the Acre but it is not half plowed, and manure of any sort is never used." Furthermore, "meadow may be made with little trouble. And the range for stock is unlimited."⁶ These conditions, the journal entry added, were a far cry from home.

Cresswell proceeded without interruption, save one. What came to be known as the American Revolution intruded, incidentally at first, but more and more in time. The first mention that Cresswell entered in his journal was on May 30, 1774. The occasion was a dinner at Colonel Richard Harrison's in Nanjemoy, Maryland. Cresswell's entry was sharp: "Nothing talked of but the Blockade of Boston Harbor the people seem much exasperated at the proceedings of the Ministry and talk as if they were determined to dispute the matter with the Sword." Despite the criticism, Cresswell would return several times to Harrison's, finding him "a very intelligent man." Furthermore, Harrison became a welcome guide for Cresswell, introducing him to the social side of America and taking "a pleasure in communicating the Customs and manner of his countrymen."⁷ Cresswell never did reveal a critical interest in politics. With neither learning nor experience in the art of government, his reactions to the American Revolution represented a perspective contrary to that of the various American founders.

A sea voyage to Barbados and illness had occupied much of Cresswell's time and energy during the fateful summer of 1774.⁸ During the first revolutionary convention held in Williamsburg during August, he was abroad. So it was not until the end of October that he returned to the subject of American resistance. By this time the first Continental Congress had met, and both the Virginia Associa-

⁵Cresswell, *Journal*, 18, 25-27.

⁶*Ibid.*, 50.

⁷*Ibid.*, 19.

⁸*Ibid.*, 29-43. Cresswell sailed from Alexandria on board the schooner *John* on July 21 and returned to Virginia on October 18.

tion and its continental counterpart were deeply engaged in serious political and economic conflict.

During this political, social, and legal maelstrom Cresswell once again took up his quest for Virginia land in the fall of 1774. By the end of October he had settled all of the accounts from his Barbados venture, concluding that he would have to make yet another call upon his father's credit, electing to be debtor to his father rather than to some American. By this time, Cresswell had come to the simple conclusion that "everything here is in the utmost confusion." All financial transactions had become chancy since "Committees are appointed to inspect into the Characters and Conduct of every tradesman to prevent them Selling Tea, or buying British manufactures." Seeing only the consequences of such investigations, Cresswell found committee actions offensive and dangerously destructive. He noted that some merchants had been "Tared [*sic*] and Feathered." Just as frightening, Cresswell noted that others "had their property burned and destroyed by the populace." In a voice that resembled the views of Virginia loyalists, he railed against the destructiveness of people suddenly released from the law. Such behavior suggested that "everything is ripe for Rebellion."⁹ Cresswell saw no virtue in breaking the law to sustain actions both irregular in their origin and unequal in their effects.

As worried as these observations left him, Cresswell concluded that "for my own part, did I not think this affair wou'd be over in the spring I wou'd immediately return home." This became the deciding moment for Cresswell's American voyage. His initial reading of the American Revolution persuaded him to remain. He confided in his journal some of the reasons behind his decision, reasons which reflected a distinctive perspective. He felt that he could not return home empty-handed and be "laughed at by all my friends." More importantly, "if I return now and matters are settled they [his mother and father] will never consent to my leaving England again."¹⁰ He did not at this point, nor would he in the darker days to come, ever second guess his initial resolve for independence from his own family.

This resolve may explain why in October 1774 Cresswell classified the American resistance as a "quarrel." In his view, the American side of the squabble lacked any real substance. "The presbyterian Rascals has had address sufficient to make the other Colony's come into their Scheme." If "Independence" was the objective of the people of Massachusetts, then "salutary and speedy measures" of Parliament would remedy the "hubbub." Until the colonial world returned to normal, however, Cresswell faced immediate financial demands. To wait out the "quarrel," he decided that he must find work. Kirk,

⁹*Ibid.*, 43-44.

¹⁰*Ibid.*

promising support, encouraged him to stay on and to take a "Tour of the back country" in the interim. Cresswell accepted this offer, "determined not to return til I can do it with credit without these Rascals do perswade the Colonies into a Rebellion."¹¹

The English visitor attempted unsuccessfully to find his way through the colonial political culture. Not only did Cresswell express disdain for Whigs, but he decried many of the king's friends as well. Cresswell chose to remain an outsider, and it was not long before he realized that the consequences of this could spell defeat for everything he had originally hoped to accomplish. In trying to forestall the looming disaster, he opted for plans that under any other circumstances would have been considered chimerical. As time went on, Cresswell's journal entries came to acknowledge the central importance of a "quarrel" that had grown into a "Rebellion." Throughout, Cresswell's commentaries continued to reveal a person who remained a man apart, a person who neither endorsed the patriotism of a growing "bulk" of Americans nor became active in the affairs of the Loyalists.

This is not to suggest that Cresswell discontinued his commerce with different people. His journal abounds with references that amount to a who's who of the American Revolution, including major and minor players on both sides. Historically, one of the ongoing mysteries of Cresswell's narrative has been this juxtaposition of adversaries. He was not averse to characterizing, sometimes at considerable length, notables whom he had not met but knew by reputation. Cresswell's journal entries were a mirror of his public behavior. His belligerence, amply fueled by the confidence of his youth, got him into private and public trouble almost immediately. For one who believed that the differences between the Americans and Parliament were best understood as a passing "quarrel," he displayed little knowledge of the underlying causes of the dispute and no patience for what he viewed as truculence on the part of the Americans.

On the contrary, Nicholas Cresswell arrived in America with a chip on his shoulder. Initially he was hypercritical of Tidewater agriculture, and he was quick to characterize American political opposition as beyond the pale. It is not at all surprising that the locals responded in kind. Cresswell's argumentativeness was not confined to private conversation. Rather, he was willing to enter into political disputes at any public tavern, where some local residents may have considered him a guest in their country. The often drunken nature of these sessions promoted misunderstanding and irritation in an already tumultuous political climate. In tones that suggested anything but surprise, Cresswell, in a February 1775 entry, announced that a Maryland Committee of Safety was considering whether "to

¹¹*Ibid.*, 45.

take me up for a Spy.”¹² Given that he had spent but a few weeks visiting Maryland and that February was early for the formation of committees in Maryland and Virginia, Cresswell's behavior was indicative of a person to all appearances hell-bent on public confrontation on the most sensitive political issues.

Cresswell's nonchalant reaction to the investigation of the Maryland Committee of Safety came in part from his knowledge that he would soon be far removed from its reach. In January 1775, not a month after he had first determined to weather the political storm, he decided to go into the American West. On January 6, Kirk informed Cresswell of land interests in “the Illinois country.” An initial business offer came with attractive options. Cresswell could take over one third of Kirk's original share “at the first cost,” or he could acquire 5,000 acres of his choice if he agreed to go to the place and survey it for them, thus presumably firming their claim. His second option was to take a third of the whole claim of Kirk and his partner, William Sidebotham of Bladensburg, Maryland, upon his return from the survey.¹³

Admitting that he was “not much acquainted with the situation of this country,” Cresswell set out to investigate this striking proposition. It had been his immediate good fortune to meet “two Gentlemen” who had lived in the Illinois country for two years. From them he learned that at the conjunction of the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers, “1000 Miles from New Orleans, and 2000 Miles from this place,” the land was “exceeding rich.” Cresswell also reported that this country possessed mineral wealth in copper and lead. One further advantage was that there were “very few inhabitants and those French.” Cresswell accepted the offer on certain conditions. If his benefactors would “use their interest to procure me Surveyors Warrant,” Cresswell believed that such a situation might be “worth some Hundreds a Year, exclusive of the opportunities a surveyor has, of taking up lands for himself.” So the promise of the 5,000 acres suddenly became more than a fallback position. Knowing that he could do “nothing here till times are settled,” Cresswell figured to be back in Virginia in time to return to England in September 1775, by then secured well enough so that he would not be returning home “a Beggar.”¹⁴

Cresswell began his venture at a most inopportune moment. After the 1763 Treaty of Paris that ended the French and Indian War vested in Great Britain all of the French territory in North America, the American West entered into a complex and confusing time of rapid change. Suddenly gone was the triangular competition between

¹²*Ibid.*, 57.

¹³*Ibid.*, 52. For a discussion of land companies see Shaw Livermore, *Early American Land Companies: Their Influence on Corporate Development* (New York, 1968).

¹⁴Cresswell, *Journal*, 53-54.

the French, English, and Americans for western lands and trade. Gone too were the triangular approaches to and negotiations with the American Indians. This vast new domain presented Great Britain with administrative and political challenges that added significantly to the burdens of governing a suddenly newly expanded empire. The cost of the war to acquire it and daunting prospect of governing it led the king and Parliament into new administrative considerations, many of which quickly came to be viewed by Americans as materially restrictive and constitutionally iniquitous. As the economic, political, and constitutional contest between Great Britain and the American colonies deepened during the years following the French and Indian war, the adversaries battled one another in the American West in distinctive ways. The central issue was not commercial regulation or taxation as it was in the East. It was land. Specifically, it was the land west of the mountains where French claims had been quieted and only American Indians stood in possession. It was into this territory that Cresswell planned to venture.

The Illinois Company was a departure from traditional American colonial land companies. This new company, born in the years after the French and Indian War, was a child of growing imperial confusion. It was part of the explosion of land companies after Great Britain secured the West. People formed new corporate combinations rapidly during the postwar years in order to possess these vast and potentially profitable new lands. The Illinois Company and its successor, the Illinois-Wabash Company, were products of plotting on the part of a group of speculative people of different political interests to create an extensive, corporate land base in what was then the far Northwest, the Illinois country. But the means this group used to acquire title to the land were unique, almost revolutionary.

Historically, title to western lands had passed from Indians to the colonial or military representatives of the crown. Following the French and Indian War, the Crown and Parliament sought to bring order to the administration of their new American domain by establishing a royal monopoly in Indian affairs. From the Proclamation of 1763 to the Quebec Act of 1774, Privy Council orders, instructions to royal governors, and parliamentary actions articulated an intention to rationalize and centralize western land purchase and settlement. The constituent elements included such features as the firm establishment of territories reserved for Indians, close supervision of Indian trade, surveys and sales in advance of actual settlement, regularized and centralized control of land grants, and stipulations for royal revenues in the form of quitrents. These policies were intended to be more than a temporary restraining order for settlement. They substantiated an imperial declaration of policy towards all corporate venturers and mercantilists in land, including royal governors, who might harbor large and extralegal ambitions for western lands. These policies, taken all together, spelled out a new mercan-

tilistic design for the American West, similar to the British designs for its commercial empire.

Contrary to the spirit and letter of these western policies, certain American adventurers with their English allies set about to acquire extensive grants by negotiating directly with different Indian tribes, in effect sidestepping the government and the new royal interest. A special few of these new adventurers in the aftermath of the settlement of 1763 were engaged in a most inventive reading of a 1757 legal opinion by Lord Camden and Charles Yorke regarding a petition from the East India Company. Certain American merchants in confidential association with various crown officials determined that they could, as private operators, proceed outside of the official orbit of the Crown without any political or legal restraint, thus becoming speculators in the original sense of the word.¹⁵ This, of course, was in direct violation of law and policy that stated that all transfers must be in the king's name and for the king's purposes, regulations that invited political favor-seeking. But the Illinois Company's guiding partner, William Murray, armed with the power of attorney from the Gratz brothers in Philadelphia, proceeded west nevertheless. In July 1773 he completed negotiations with Indians for the purchase of two tracts of land north of the Ohio River in the Illinois country, one of which was situated at the confluence of the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers. By mid-April 1774, just days before the outbreak of violence in the west, Murray and his partners contacted the governor of Virginia, John Murray, the Earl of Dunmore, who was also Murray's kinsman, and presented him with a petition seeking his official support of their claim.¹⁶

This contact was a brilliant move. Dunmore's previous association with John Connolly and George Croghan, his private and unauthorized investments in western lands, his political aggressiveness that would prompt the Virginia war against the Shawnees later in 1774, and his powerful political and family connections in England all suggested that he stood ready to read and interpret both his instructions and the new parliamentary mandates with what amounted to a distinctive imperial vision. Once Dunmore agreed to forward the Illinois Company petition along with some personal supporting comments the die was cast. It would not be long before other backers, including the governor of Maryland, members of the Carroll family, and several Baltimore merchants, joined this formidable corporation of interests.¹⁷ An added convenience for these adventurers was Vir-

¹⁵Robert A. Williams, Jr., *The American Indian in Western Legal Thought: The Discourses of Conquest* (New York, 1990), 275-80.

¹⁶For the background of Dunmore's War see Jack M. Sosin, "The British Indian Department and Dunmore's War," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, LXXIV (January 1966), 34-50.

¹⁷Thomas Perkins Abernethy, *Western Lands and the American Revolution* (New York, 1959), 122.

ginia's charter claim to jurisdiction over the territory in question. The ironic element in this claim, which the governor knew well, was that imperial policy since 1763 intended to quiet the Virginia charter claim.

Dunmore did not sit long on the Illinois Company's petition. On May 16, he wrote a long defense of the entire enterprise to the Earl of Dartmouth, secretary of state for the American colonies. This letter would earn him the strongest rebuke from the king and serve as a lasting revelation of just how out of step the Crown remained regarding the fate of the American West. Cresswell could not have chosen a more fateful western business enterprise. Dunmore started his letter by acknowledging that the Illinois Company petition was most unusual. It sought recognition for a tract "near this Colony" that was purchased from the Indians, a transaction in violation of statutory and royal precedents firmly in place for over fifteen years yet one for which there could in the governor's view be "no doubt of the validity of their title." Immediately Dunmore attempted to mask this disingenuous remark with the appealing promise that company partners were firm in their intention to "comply with the same rules and regulations with respect to Quitrents that all the other Inhabitants of the Colony are governed by."¹⁸ Thus began a remarkable correspondence. Punctuated by the dissolution of the House of Burgesses and Dunmore's campaign against the Shawnees, the letters between the governor and the secretary of state before the end of 1774 included Dunmore's thoroughgoing analysis of the crisis of the British empire and his recommendations for Crown and Parliament. Dunmore's focus was on allegiance. He believed the home government was losing the loyalty of the Americans in what everyone ought to realize was a battle for the future of the American West and the future course of the British empire. In his lengthy December analysis of the deteriorating American situation, Dunmore outlined the progress of the Revolution in Williamsburg, Virginia, but this appeared only after an extended discussion of the West. His discussion was neither framed in formal legal terms nor was it an economic interpretation. Rather, Dunmore saw the dissolution of the empire reflected in the mounting unwillingness of men to attach themselves to an increasingly distant Crown. He attempted in the strongest terms to disabuse Dartmouth

¹⁸Dunmore to the Earl of Dartmouth, Williamsburg, Va., May 16, 1774, Public Records Office, London, Film Copy (John D. Rockefeller, Jr., Library, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Williamsburg, Va.). Interestingly, Dunmore wrote John Stuart, Indian agent for the Southern Department, on April 5, 1774: "I receive Accounts from the Back Parts of this Colony that notwithstanding the Kings Proclamation and Regulations of this Government a Sett [*sic*] of People are endeavoring to make a Purchase from the Indians of a Considerable Tract of Land to the South and West of our last Established Boundary line, which I think you would do well to prevent by giving Directions to Mr. Cameron to represent the Impropriety of it to the Indians and to use every means in his power to deterr [*sic*] them from entering into any Bargain with our People in such an Irregular Manner." Dunmore to Stuart, April 5, 1774, *ibid*.

and others in England of any residual faith that they might still harbor in the timeworn notions of perpetual allegiance. In short, Virginians, particularly those in the West, valued their individual liberty more than their connections to the Crown and any resulting control of political or economic interest that such traditional mercantilist connections wrought. The bonds of empire were quickly loosening.¹⁹

Dunmore had acquired an American vision of space. He opined that the English would either adopt this new view of reality or suffer the inevitable consequences, namely the loss of its newly acquired territories north of the Ohio. This new vision had obliterated past realities. No longer were the traditional ways of producing and controlling wealth applicable. The government, Dunmore argued, would be unable to restrain Americans from moving into the West. "Nothing (so fond as the Americans are of Migration) can stop the Concourse of People that actually begin to draw towards them [the western lands]." Any Crown or Parliament attempts "would have the direct contrary tendency, by forcing the people to adopt a form of Government of their own." Dunmore proceeded to describe just such a venture where people moved west without permission "in a manner tributary to the Indians," and "to all intents and purposes erected themselves into though an inconsiderable yet a separate state." The precedent was clear and acted as a summons to "all the dissatisfied of every other Government." More important, it set a usable example "of forming Governments distinct from and independent of His Majestys Authority."²⁰

In light of this crisis, Dunmore urged that Crown recognition of the Illinois Company petition would send a powerful signal, at once a remedy for the present disorder and an announcement for future development. Recognition would "preserve the peace and order of the back countries." Actually Dunmore was suggesting something stronger than preserving the peace, for he had the temerity to assert that Crown policy had attracted "all the disorderly and unruly People of the Colonies." Traditional ways of doing business in the American West simply were not working. In his estimation, British directives were the cause of the disarray. So Dunmore advised that the Crown endorse private development of the West, a clear reversal of political policy. Dartmouth, citing the Crown's displeasure with such an audacious recommendation, ordered Dunmore to adhere strictly to established plans and to cease his advisories, particularly when they took on the appearance of having openly contradicted the Crown.²¹ Late in December after his western campaign, Dunmore replied, unconvinced and unrepentant. He reported that he believed it his official duty to report "matters as they really are." He reiterated that the

¹⁹Dunmore to the Earl of Dartmouth, December 24, 1774, *ibid.*

²⁰Dunmore to Dartmouth, May 16, 1774, *ibid.*

²¹Dartmouth to Dunmore, September 8, 1774, *ibid.*

distance from the home government weakened American allegiance. The situation in the West made this reality even more critical. Dunmore believed that it was imperative that the British authorities recognize that the Americans were different. Americans in the West, according to Dunmore, "do not conceive that Government has any right to forbid their taking possession of a vast tract of Country, either uninhabited, or which serves only as a Shelter to a few Scattered Tribes of Indians." If policy makers in Great Britain refused to recognize this powerful reality they would lose the country to an unrestrainable people incited by "their avidity and restlessness." Dunmore believed that this was critical in understanding the connection between the people and this new land. "Wandering about seems engrafted in their nature," he claimed; such people would not be stopped by artificial barriers imposed at some remote place by a state that the Americans viewed as irrelevant at best. Dunmore conveyed with clarity the need to develop a policy of freeing up the marketplace of western land to people who had already asserted a preemptive claim to it. The American Revolution, however, made immaterial these recommendations for the British empire in the West.²²

By the time that Cresswell agreed to join the Illinois Company as surveyor, the political situation in the American colonies generally and in Virginia specifically had become deeply confused. Instead of a peaceable occupation of the West, a new version of the three-sided competition for empire that so recently had engaged the Indians, the English, and the French emerged with the Americans substituting for the vanquished French. Whatever political alliances Dunmore had forged in the Virginia legislature as a result of the 1774 war against the Shawnees evaporated in the heat of Virginia's Revolution. In the process, Virginians with important western interests moved quickly to dissociate themselves from the governor. One manifestation of this development was the new legislature's assertion of exclusive control of Virginia's land claims in the West, thus eliminating critical executive prerogatives as well as giving official recognition to certain land companies and excluding those that had fallen out of political favor. In this way the Illinois Company quickly became a casualty of Virginia's Revolution. In January 1775, Cresswell, resolute in his belief that the dispute between home and colonies was soon to be resolved, did not foresee the legal and political chaos that these now hollow land company pretensions would work in the West.

In addition, people informed Cresswell that this western venture would present him with special risks. He doggedly discounted these practical warnings, deciding precipitously to proceed on his

²²Dunmore to the Earl of Dartmouth, December 24, 1774, *ibid.*

mission. His journal remains troublesomely silent about whether he understood the complexities of what faced him as he turned west. Adding to this uneasy quality was Cresswell's willingness to start out almost single-handed. To start, he had to learn the rudiments of surveying, a craft for which his agricultural background was most helpful. He explained that he found running lines "very easy in the Woods from what it is in enclosed lands." Cresswell soon learned that springtime was best for traveling down the Ohio River, timing that was confirmed early in March by a Mr. Finley, a veteran of the Illinois country, who urged him to wait until the "Latter end of April, then to go down the Ohio River with the Flood." Quick to accept this advice, Cresswell at last turned to the task of finding someone to go with him. Initially he was in some doubt, stating as late as March 1 that "there will be some difficulty in perswadeing any one to go with me in this place."²³

It did prove to be difficult. Cresswell, turning to the most reliable sources he had, took the better part of the month of March and the start of April searching for a suitable guide and companion for his voyage. Friends suggested that Edward Snickers was the best person for finding a suitable guide and supplied Cresswell with a letter of introduction.²⁴ On April 3, he visited the Snickers home but had to content himself with discussing his situation with a relative who recommended George Rice for the job. Cresswell's friend, Gibbs, confirmed this choice, complimenting Rice as "an honest man and a Good hunter." As it would turn out, Gibbs had supplied better than Cresswell could handle, for not only would Rice prove to be an accomplished companion for this western venture, but in time he would also assert his allegiance to the American cause. Their political disagreements would precipitate a terrible rift that would eventually play a central role in ending Cresswell's western project. Initially, however, Cresswell and Rice came to an agreement; Rice accepted an offer of "500 acres" of land, presumably within the grant tract. After a few last-minute purchases and the acquisition of a few more letters of introduction to "several Gentlemen in the neighborhood of Fort Pitt," Cresswell departed from Winchester, Virginia, in the company of his new partner on April 5, 1775.²⁵

²³Cresswell, *Journal*, 55, 58.

²⁴Edward Snickers's home, "Springfield," was in Frederick County. George Washington, *The Diaries of George Washington*, ed. Donald Jackson (6 vols., Charlottesville, Va., 1976–1978), II, 173. In June 1776 he was appointed to the commission of the peace of Frederick County and later was accused of "fraud against the Public." Virginia Council of State, *Journals of the Council of the State of Virginia* (5 vols., Richmond, Va., 1931–1982), I, 46, 428.

²⁵Cresswell, *Journal*, 60, 61. On September 6, 1774, George Rice produced his commission as lieutenant in the Frederick County militia to the county court. Frederick County Order Book 16, 1772–1778, 269 (Frederick County Court House, Winchester, Va.). He was later captain in the 11th Virginia Regiment under the command of Brigadier General Daniel Morgan. Bounty Warrant of Pierce Noland, Library of Virginia.

Following the advice of his local consultants, Cresswell traveled west prepared to trade with the Native Americans, all in the belief that he could “carry out some Silver trinkets and Barter with the Indians for Furs and probably do something more then bear my expenses.” Fortunately for him, the silversmiths in Alexandria were adept in providing him with the “trinkets” according to the advice of one already experienced in this trade. Cresswell believed that he was well prepared to set out for the American West. He was armed with the permission to carry out surveys. He knew that at a minimum he could “take the 5000 Acres for going to view the land at my own expense.” Furthermore, he held out for the right of first refusal of Kirk’s and Sidebotham’s share.²⁶ Unschooled in the history of the western land companies with their troubled legacy of political and cultural unrest and insensitive to the growing political crisis of the American Revolution, Cresswell forged ahead into the wilderness.

The great voyage into the American West took Cresswell into a strange new world that fascinated him, eliciting journal comments different from all that had transpired in his previous American adventure. From the outset, the way and pace of travel were new and demanding on him. The second day out, Rice led Cresswell about thirty miles, “over barren hills and bad ways.” That night the temperature dropped below freezing, and Cresswell marveled at “going to sleep in the open air, no other covering then the Heaven’s and our blankets.”²⁷ The going continued to be rough, revealing a landscape Cresswell often found forbidding and “dismal.” Within a few days, Cresswell was making geographic and cartographic observations, noting specific mountains, the westward flow of rivers, and the destruction caused by a major tornado.

By April 10 the travelers had come upon Great Meadow, and Cresswell began his observations of the battle sites of the 1754 and 1755 Washington and Braddock campaigns. Even though the Appalachian Mountains “piled one on the top of another with some narrow valleys between them,” Cresswell found the land in these valleys “rich and very thinly inhabited.” The road they traveled was “very indifferent,” but even so, “loaded waggon frequently cross it in the summer.” As they proceeded, they found that “every necessary of life is very dear here, provisions in particular.” The cause was clear; the scarcity was “occasioned by the Indian War [Dunmore’s War] last Summer. Grain is not to be got for money.”²⁸ Cresswell came to view the consequences of this war as significant in his voyage. Initially it was a question of provision. Other consequences would appear in time as Cresswell proceeded farther west.

²⁶Cresswell, *Journal*, 58.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 61.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 62-64.

Captain William Douglass, who had accompanied Rice and Cresswell during the first two days before separating on April 6, rejoined them on April 11 and guided Cresswell to the home of John Stephenson.²⁹ Known as “a great Indian warrior,” Stephenson recommended that the company stop in his neighborhood and build the canoes for the journey west, arguing that provisions would be easier to obtain at his place than at Fort Pitt. Rice, who had friends and family in the vicinity, agreed, and Cresswell, seeing how adept Rice was at building canoes, readily accepted “his management.” Rice estimated that the construction begun on April 13 would take two weeks. Stephenson’s home on the Youghiogeney River served as Cresswell’s launching place to the West. Once the journey began, the final party took three days to reach the Monongahela River after which it took less than two days for the final approach to Fort Pitt.³⁰

Instead of remaining at Stephenson’s, Cresswell decided to accompany Douglass to Fort Pitt by land, arriving on the evening of April 16. Earlier that day, he toured the battlefield where General Braddock “was defeated by the French and Indians the 9th of July 1755.” He was impressed by the presence of “great numbers of Bones,” where most of the skulls were either broken or pierced in such a way as to suggest that the injuries were caused by “a Pipe Tommahawk.” Cresswell noted that his guide claimed that the Indians left no Englishmen alive, a chilling vision of a very different kind of warfare for the newcomer. At the very moment he was witnessing these scenes, Americans and the British had fired at one another in anger. In Lexington and Concord a new war had begun that would blast all of Cresswell’s hopes and plans.

The three-day visit to Fort Pitt included meetings with a variety of people for whom Cresswell’s Virginia friends had written letters of introduction. Principal among these people was the commandant, Major John Connolly. Cresswell’s characterization of Connolly suggests that the interview had not proceeded in the manner that Cresswell had wished, for he found the commandant “a haughty imperious man.” Given Connolly’s association with Governor Dunmore in the frontier war of the previous summer, the commandant was a source of information vital to Cresswell as he prepared for his western venture. Connolly’s military and diplomatic intelligence regarding the western Indians was critical for Cresswell and others who traveled with him. Furthermore, Cresswell was on Illinois Company business, and Connolly’s connections with Governor Dunmore made this meeting

²⁹William Douglass (d. 1783) was a resident of Loudoun County and was appointed sheriff of that county in 1777. Loudoun County Will Book C, 1783–1788, 15; Loudoun County Order Book F, 1773–1776, 18; Loudoun County Order Book G, 1776–1783, 218.

³⁰Cresswell, *Journal*, 64–65.

necessary. Despite their less than amicable meeting, the English traveler secured useful information for his assault on the Ohio River.³¹

After a couple of side trips to see Indian traders, Cresswell returned to his canoes, which were in the final stages of completion. During the last days before departure, Cresswell's work pace quickened. He spent many hours completing his final provisioning. Most importantly he negotiated a new agreement with Rice. During Cresswell's absence, Rice had "joined some other people" who were building canoes for a trip of "about 600 miles down the river." To accommodate this new arrangement, Cresswell agreed to wait "at the Kentucky River ten days." This adjustment to the original contract was made in the presence of Douglass. Since leaving Winchester, Douglass had spent more and more time with Cresswell and now proposed a bargain that Cresswell found most appealing. Douglass offered to finance half of all Cresswell's expenses down the Ohio and back for one half of any Cresswell "purchase." Two days later Cresswell agreed, clearly distinguishing in his journal the five-thousand-acre grant that was part of the original Kirk proposition and "anything to do as a surveyor," acknowledging only that he agreed that Douglass could have "one half of any land I may purchase." Adding to his sense of good fortune was Douglass's willingness to grant him a five-year moratorium on interest on the unpaid principal. With a certain smugness, Cresswell concluded that "I have now a prospect of making money without advancing any."³² So situated, he embarked April 28 upon his western voyage.

During the five days that it took to reach Fort Pitt, the company attained its final complement. The newcomers were bound for Kentucky "to take up land." Among them was James Nourse, "an English gentleman," who, like so many others after 1774, was on his way to Kentucky to enter claims for military service in the French and Indian War. He immediately befriended Cresswell with the offer of sharing "one half of his tent," a gesture Cresswell found "very agreeable."³³ On the third day out, the new company was detained by rain and, taking advantage of the opportunity, "settled our accounts concerning vessels and provisions."

From this moment on, Cresswell became part of the new wave seeking land in the new West. Cresswell's journal reports this phenomenon by listing the variety of people going west: American, Irish, English, black, white—in short, all sorts. William Murray and others would champion Cresswell as an ideal agent and participant in

³¹*Ibid.*, 65.

³²*Ibid.*, 67.

³³*Ibid.*, 68. James Nourse kept a journal of the voyage, but the original was lost. A typescript survives in the Durrett Collection at the University of Chicago and was published as James Nourse, "A Journey to Kentucky," *Journal of American History*, XIX (1925), 121-38, 251-60, 351-64.

the opening of new lands. He was just the sort of person Dunmore had in mind for the Illinois Company: a gentleman venturer who could bring order and proper land management to the West. From the beginning, Cresswell acted the part. He set himself apart from most of his traveling companions, save Nourse, who was not intending to settle in Kentucky, and George Rogers Clark, who joined the company for almost three weeks, a man Cresswell found interesting both for his knowledge of Indian medicine and for his good behavior.³⁴

The same could not be said for his relations with Rice, which went steadily downhill. After three weeks on the river, Cresswell was convinced that Rice had no intention of going beyond Kentucky. For this, Cresswell labeled him "a great coward," loose words that bespoke rising anger. In time, anger and confusion dominated much of the company's everyday proceedings. Notices of "great quarreling" began to appear more and more frequently in the journal's narrative. His association with Rice deteriorated to the point that on May 27 Cresswell thought that Rice tried to pick a fight so that violence would nullify their contract. Privately Cresswell vowed "not to give the first affront," a vow shattered two days later when they went toe to toe. Nourse interceded and according to Cresswell prevented what would have been a deadly fight. Nourse scolded both parties, claiming that "neither would have discredited a Billingsgate education." Nourse noted that afterwards Rice "drew in," confirming Cresswell's assessment that the fight "effectually" ended their relationship.³⁵ On such an unfortunate personal note Cresswell's plans for the Illinois Company came to an end.

Once the company reached the Kentucky River and elected to start the arduous ascent towards the landing close to Harrodsburg, unraveling accelerated. The company had floated down the Ohio when it was at flood stage, taking three weeks to reach the Kentucky. It would require fourteen hard days to pull the canoes 125 miles up the Kentucky River. At first a few started to drift away quietly. Then as the company approached its destination, the land seekers decamped more rapidly, a few stealing from the much-reduced company stores as they left. By June 8, those who remained divided up the rest of the stores. Cresswell realized that everyone who remained was interested in Kentucky lands, not in some uncertain venture in the Illinois country.

The loss of Rice not only put an immediate stop to Cresswell's great western land venture, but it also left Cresswell with the prospect of finding a way back. He did not have to wait long. That very same afternoon a company bound for Fort Pitt offered him a place. Cresswell opted to join this "ragged Crewe," much as he despaired of "their

³⁴Cresswell, *Journal*, 69-79.

³⁵Nourse, "Journey to Kentucky," 251.

lookes." Interestingly, Nourse offered Cresswell the chance to go with him. Cresswell declined, for Nourse "intends to go over land." With his inventory of Indian trade goods still intact, Cresswell could not afford such an invitation, as welcome as it was, coming from one who had treated him "with the greatest civility" and whom he had come to respect.³⁶

The return to Fort Pitt, punctuated by Indian scares and bickering among the members of the company, took four long weeks of hard work even though the river was now well past its time of flood. The combination of time, accident, and natural conditions had taken their toll on Cresswell's equipment and his patience. Interestingly, he seemed to thrive physically, never mentioning the sort of complaints that had plagued him earlier in Virginia. Despite the failure of his mission, Cresswell embraced the American West. Once back at Fort Pitt, he whiled away more than a month before he agreed to return to the Ohio country with an Indian trader, all in the presumptive hope of salvaging some of the costs of his voyage. In desperation for a loan to tide him over, he at last turned to John Anderson, a veteran of the Indian trade and the only person in town he had not approached for help. Anderson did more than just offer a loan; he agreed to accompany him into the Indian country, serving as both an interpreter and guide.³⁷

Once west of Fort Pitt, Anderson led Cresswell through the Ohio Indian country, visiting various sites including several Moravian missions. On August 29 while at the native town of Old Hundy, Cresswell took the sister of his Mohawk host as a temporary wife, whom he called Nancy. She would accompany him until he left Fort Pitt for his return to Virginia on October 2. During this second venture into the American West, Cresswell was able to sell all of his goods, receiving furs in exchange, even though in the end he believed that he was a loser upon the whole. Anderson's association was altogether pleasant, a friendship Cresswell hoped to sustain, promising upon his departure to keep up a correspondence. His departure from Nancy was emotional. He added that, despite what "conscientious people might think," a temporary wife was a necessity for facilitating travel and trade in the Indian country.³⁸ During this account of the six-week western trading venture, Cresswell's journal conveyed a keen sense of interest and happiness from all that had happened earlier. If he was concerned about his own financial and political future, the narrative from the Ohio country did not convey it. On the contrary, he seemed reluctant to return east. In 1777, during the final months of his American stay, he would recall this earlier time, wondering seriously whether or not he should take up this life once again,

³⁶Cresswell, *Journal*, 82-83.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 102.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 116, 122.

expressing a certain longing for the places, the people, and the new ways of life he found so affecting during the summer of 1775.

Only much later would Cresswell reveal some of the political reasons why he did not hurry back to Virginia. In March 1775 he had written "to all my friends in England and freely declared my sentiments upon the present Rebellion." Those letters never reached their intended destination. Instead they fell into the hands of the Alexandria Committee of Safety. When Cresswell returned at the end of October of that year, the committee was ready for him. In his estimation the committee was prepared for him to be "Arraign'd, Tryed, and Condemned and the sentence nearly put in execution before I knew anything about it." Until April 1777, when he made good on his second attempt to escape from America, Cresswell spent much of his time and energy fending off the inquisitive Americans. He complained bitterly that he was trapped between the rock of his independence and the hard place of the American Revolution: "I am now in a disagreeable situation. If I enter into any sort of business I must be Obligated to enter into the service of these Rascals and fight against my Friends & Country if called upon. On the other hand I am not permitted to depart the Continent and have nothing if I am fortunate enough to escape the jail. I will live as cheap as I can and hope for better times."³⁹ In this straightforward, albeit anguished, statement of what he considered to be his options, Cresswell rendered a prophetic foreshadowing.

The coming eighteen months became for Cresswell a trial period during which he suffered from forced inactivity; considered heading back to the West; attempted to escape the country through New York; considered alternately joining the American and the British armies; and finally concluded that the American Revolution had become a tragic moment. What he witnessed in the East dashed his earlier hopes for a peaceful settlement between the American colonists and the British authorities. As he learned more about the warfare in New England and the military presence in different American cities, Cresswell concluded that "this cannot be redressing grievances, it is open Rebellion and I am convinced if Great Brittain does not send more men here and subdue them soon they will declare independence."⁴⁰ Upon rendering this conclusion, Cresswell became determined to escape. From October 1775 on, Cresswell's journal became a different narrative, one devoted to the story of his personal ordeal with the American Revolution. During the long months of forced confinement, he turned more and more to questioning the people and events around him, puzzling over the causes and consequences of these troubled times. His distress took a toll on his health. Although free from

³⁹*Ibid.*, 226, 127.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*

sickness when he was in the West, his bouts of illness resumed in Virginia, confining him on several occasions for weeks at a time. Also, and more frightening to him, he began to drink more heavily and more often, sometimes for days on end. During the early months of 1776, the journal went silent for weeks as Cresswell lurched between self-inflicted "merry" inebriation and sickness.

On July 19, 1777, after a series of adventures brought him to New York, Cresswell departed from America safely on board *H.M.S. Edward*. Although relieved to be away from the terrible war, he was saddened by what he saw in "this cursed Rebellion." During the weeks before he left, he took time to review his history in America and to comment on the geographical, political, and economic conditions in various states. This analysis served as a fitting end to an adventure launched with hope and concluded in discord. To the very end he sustained his anger that "the artifices of a few designing Villains" had corrupted "honest, well meaning people" so that they relinquished "the invaluable blessing of Peace, the sweet enjoyment of real and happy Liberty." At the same time Cresswell steadfastly refused to sing the virtues of Great Britain, a tune so common in the voices of many Loyalists. During the months following his western venture, he came to view much of British imperial policy as well as the military commands of such people as William Howe as deeply flawed policies that neither inspired nor deserved allegiance. Looking at both sides, then, Cresswell concluded that in "the short space of three years, the Villainous arts of a few and the obstinacy of the many, on this side of the water added to the complicated blunders, cowardice, and knavery of some of our blind Guides in England has totally ruined this country."⁴¹

Over time, Cresswell came to believe that the American Revolution was a tragic history of legal and social degradation, the ruination of individual liberty. The American people had become "like the Dog in the Fable, [they had] quit the substance for an empty shadow." For vain promises of unattainable freedoms, Americans had submitted themselves to "all the dreadful horrors of war, poverty, and wretchedness." Everything seemed to confirm this view. From his Virginia experience Cresswell saw only a "Country turn'd Topsy Turvy changed from an Earthly Paradise, to a Hell, upon Terra Firma."⁴²

The American world that he had known when he arrived, "this once happy country," was coming apart, including religion. By October 1776 Cresswell lamented that "religion is almost forgot, or most basely neglected." Not only was religion "at a stand," but "the retailers of politicks," particularly the Presbyterian clergy, were active in

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 259.

⁴²*Ibid.*

successfully politicizing the pulpit. Cresswell noted that it was “one of the followers of Whitfield,” a low-ranking officer in the Virginia militia, a “violent persecuting scoundrell, who was the principal culprit in staging a ‘great riot’ in Leesburg between the English prisoners and the ‘Yankeys’ [*sic*].” In the name of “Independence,” Americans insisted upon choosing their leaders “from the most violent part of the people.” These men, “in general very fond of using their usurped authority without mercy,” held the law in contempt and were ready to use force to compel allegiance. The accused faced imprisonment, loss of property, and a threat of death, all without the slightest pretense of due process of the law. Cresswell asserted that this clash between political coercion and the popular will to sustain traditional liberties might serve as the undoing of the American rebellion, for “these unhappy wretches are as much divided as it is possible to be without actually drawing the sword against one another.” The Congress was largely responsible for this discord, for they “under the fallacious pretence of nursing the tender plant, Liberty, which was said to thrive so well in American soil, have actually tore it up by the very root.” This free fall into ruin pained Cresswell, who viewed the physical and moral destruction of America as a sign of the depravity of unchecked human action, a Hobbesian world of ungoverned license mistaken for freedom. Cresswell’s only remaining hope was that Americans would somehow summon the courage to “awake from their delirium and refuse further to submit to the new tyranny.”⁴³

Acknowledging that he knew little of the history and people of New England, Cresswell prided himself in having learned much about the people and places south of New York. These Americans he found to be “the most hospitable people on Earth.” Manners reflected a charitable disposition, manifest in both the education of the young and the social habits of adults. He emphasized that if children possessed “any genius tis not cramped in their infancy, by being overawed by their parents.” This tended to foster individuals who were “good-natured, familiar, and agreeable on the whole.” He noted as well the population explosion and asserted that both immigration and natural increase were twin causes. Cresswell believed that the consequences of growth made America quite different from England. In America, in part because economic prospects were so good and the availability of land was so immediate, people married earlier. Nothing he saw during his stay persuaded him that his first negative impressions of American agriculture were in error. Americans were certainly handy—the men were universal mechanics, carpenters, saddlers, and coopers. Still Americans were very indifferent farmers. In concluding his retrospective, Cresswell prayed for a people and a country that he would never be able to call his own.

⁴³*Ibid.*, 62, 165, 191-92, 261-62, 272.

This is a Paradise on Earth, for women the Epicure's Elysium, and the very Center of Freedom and Hospitality. But in the short space of three Years—Tis become the Theater of War, the Country of Distraction, and the Seat of Slavery, Confusion and Lawless Oppression. May the Almighty of his infinite goodness and mercy Reunite and Reestablish them in their former happy and flourishing situation.⁴⁴

The West was for Cresswell the heartland of this American "Paradise." But political circumstances had prevented his attaining a place there. Living on the frontier for several months had been an exhilarating experience for him. However, Cresswell needed more stability than the West in 1775 could offer, a reality he understood even as he bemoaned his lost opportunity in the land of America's future. The Revolution nullified the best-laid plans of both Dunmore and Cresswell. As they departed from the American scene, their ideas of private development of the West went into eclipse as well, for Americans in the Continental Congress very soon replicated British policy regarding the prohibition of Indian land sales to private companies.

Cresswell's voyage home was uneventful and devoid of the anticipation he expressed during his voyage to America. His impending return was a cause not of delight but the occasion for "such an unusual damp upon my spirits that I am more dead than alive." He confided that rather than hurrying ashore, he "had rather stay on board," a most revealing commentary upon his unfortunate and conflicted history in America. England now appeared diminished. Even the historic artery of commerce, the Thames, had become "a narrow crooked river." The people he saw in London appeared sadly uninformed about the situation in America, half of them appearing to him as "Rebels in their Hearts," a sure sign that Great Britain's cause was in jeopardy. Given all of the debts that he had incurred, he dreaded confronting his father, controller of his credit. Failing at the last minute to secure a commission with Lord Dunmore, Cresswell arrived back at Edale on September 24, 1777. His mother was "overjoyed" to see him; his father, who departed in what struck his son to be intentional haste for a local fair, "remembered to order me to sheare or bind corn tomorrow." So on this minor note his three-year odyssey to America came to a close. At the very end of his journal, he entered a vow to stay on at home at least until "April next, and behave in such a manner as not to give any just offence. I call this waiting the chapter of accidents—something fortunate may happen." The extraordinary journal of Nicholas Cresswell ceased four years later with one final entry for April 21, 1781, announcing his marriage, prompting him to conclude, "my rambling is now at an end!"⁴⁵

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 271; Cresswell Manuscript Journal, IV, 171 (Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Williamsburg, Va.).

⁴⁵Cresswell, *Journal*, 276, 282, 285.