

**A SHORT BIOGRAPHY OF JOHN
LEETH, WITH AN ACCOUNT OF
HIS LIFE AMONG THE INDIANS;
REPRINTED FROM THE ORIGINAL
EDITION OF 1831**

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A short biography of John Leeth, with an account of his life among the Indians; reprinted from the original edition of 1831 by Reuben Gold Thwaites

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REUBEN GOLD THWAITES

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NARRATIVES OF CAPTIVITIES

A SHORT BIOGRAPHY OF JOHN LEETH
WITH AN ACCOUNT OF HIS LIFE
AMONG THE INDIANS

REPRINTED FROM THE ORIGINAL EDITION OF 1811
WITH INTRODUCTION BY

REUBEN GOLD THWAITES

Editor of "The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents," "Chronicles of
Border Warfare," "Wisconsin Historical Collections,"
Hennepin's "New Discovery," etc., etc.



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CONTENTS

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION, <i>Reuben Gold Thwaites</i>	7
<hr/>	
<i>Facsimile of original title-page</i>	21
PREFACE, <i>Ezra C. Jeffries</i>	23
BIOGRAPHY OF JOHN LEBETH, <i>Ezra C. Jeffries</i>	25
<hr/>	
INDEX (<i>new</i>)	69

INTRODUCTION

THE narrative of Indian captivity and fur-trading here reprinted is one of the often-quoted sources of Middle West history. It is commendable enterprise upon the part of the publishers, in this era of awakened interest in our historical beginnings, to give the little book a new lease of life. Originally published in 1831, at Lancaster, Ohio, it had by the close of the War of Secession become a much-sought rarity. In 1883 it was reprinted in excellent form by the Robert Clarke Co., of Cincinnati, with Introduction and Notes by Consul Willshire Butterfield. That painstaking editor gave evidence in his annotations of a wealth of special knowledge concerning the topography and history of Ohio; but unfortunately there were only a hundred and forty-three copies in his edition, and the stock soon became exhausted. In the preparation of this Introduction, Butterfield's store of illustrative material has been especially useful. The present reprint has been made directly from the original.

Although the story is related in the first person singular, the author, as stated both on the title-page and in the Preface, was Ewel Jeffries — just as John Filson was the author of Boone's so-called autobiography. The information was furnished by Leeth, but the language is clearly that of the interviewer. To Jeffries alone, no doubt, are ascribable the amusing specimens of stilted phrasology to be found in the dialogues and pious reflections. It is quite evident that the speech of the rough old fur-trader himself was far removed from such grandiloquence.

The hero was in his seventy-seventh year when his recollections were reduced to writing by Mr. Jeffries. His memory was unusually accurate for a man in his humble walk of life, not accustomed to keeping records. There are in the narrative but few errors of chronology or other fact, and possibly some of these are attributable to lack of knowledge on the part of the interviewer. Many of the geographical and historical references are vague, and require elucidation for the modern reader. The story is on the whole an accurate, matter-of-fact recital of the often thrilling personal experiences of a typical trader and hunter in the then Indian country of Pennsylvania and Ohio — his numerous expeditions, his intimate relations with the savages, his captivity and life in their

camp, chiefly during the stirring period between 1774 and 1790. The name Leeth is evidently the interviewer's phonetic misspelling of Leith; for when the Scotch city of Leith is mentioned, it also is given as "Leeth." But the narrative having become something of a classic under the name as spelled by Jeffries, it would, from a bibliographical point of view, be inadvisable now to attempt any change therein.

John Leeth's father was a native of Leith, Scotland; his mother, of Virginia — pious folk, but like most American pioneers of that day, poor in purse. He himself was born on the Pedee River, in South Carolina, March 15, 1755. The father died before John's birth, and the widow passed away when their child was five years old. The charge of an uncle, the lad was early apprenticed to a tailor, who moved with him to Charleston, whence after two years he ran away. Wandering to Little York, Pennsylvania, he bound himself to a farmer whom he served for the full term of four years, after which, in his eighteenth year, he hired out to a Pittsburg fur-trader, which adventurous occupation he followed for nearly twenty eventful years.

He was first sent (1773) to the site of the present Lancaster, Ohio, where, fifty-eight years later, his narrative was published; it was then the seat of the Delaware village of Standing