



A Frontier Trader's Journal, 1761-63

Journey to the Westward by James Kenny

James Kenny, originally from Chester County, journeyed to Fort Pitt (present-day Pittsburgh) in 1761 to take charge of a trading store established by the Commissioner of Indian Affairs. His two-year diary describes in great detail the activities of local Native Americans with whom he traded, other Europeans he encountered, and the violent backdrop of the French and Indian War.

1761

7^{mo} [July] 20th – Notwithstanding y^e strict orders against selling or giving y^e Indians Strong liquors, they frequently get too much of it amongst y^e Traders & sutlers, some treating them with Punch to draw their custom & I was told by Indian Jn^o that Levy y^e Jew had sold y^e Beaver's son two Ceggs* of Rum today at 20/Gallon & told John to acquaint y^e Indians against me as Jn^o told me, this Jew and Langdale that was Agent here, fought.

8^{mo} [August] 6th – I receiv'd a Letter from Frederick Post dated y^e 27th of last month at Tuscarowas Town, in which he informs me that the Indians are not all willing to deliver up y^e Prisoners* as yet & that he had hard living amongst them any Provisions they have being to dear... he signifies that he was in fear some time ago when y^e Beaver took Six Ceggs Rum there & they were Drunke Six Days; that they talk of going to Phil^a soon to hold a treaty there.

9th – My namesake Indian returned from his Hunt last Night, having brought thirty Skins with him & dealt them with me. This Day, I had once more of some Shawanas* being brought to me by Jn^o Owen, who is desirous to serve y^e Commiss^r.

10th – The Indians that deal at our Store, often want to stay in y^e House at Nights while they remain here, & often want Victuals; they also want to bring there Squas to lie with at Night, which I Object against, letting them know that they shall bring none such to Sleep in our House & having shut two Squas last Night...So many Roberies Committed here at Nights that all Noise tends to keep me from Sleep & y^e fleas together, that I get little sleep.

* Ceggs: kegs.

* Prisoners: Captives taken in attacks, who lived among Native American as part of families.

* Shawanas: Shawnees?

17th – Having sent Sam^l Dean over y^e River with y^e Battoe* for an Indian with a Load of Skins, who came, & as we began to Deal for them Craffod y^e Old Trader came to y^e Store which they effected, by teeling y^e Indian that was about Dealing, that our Stillards* was too light, & having sent for Ormsbey's Stilliards I wey'd* y^e Skins with them & there was about One Pound more by them in about one Hund^r W^t I told y^e what I could & had an Interpreter, yet they took them to Craffod & I am very Suspicious he keeps two Pee's to his Stilliards.*

12^{mo} [December] 8th – The Head Sennica Warrior dealt Seven large Bucksins with me, when many of them Croud'd* in y^e Store being very Thievish (y^e Agent being out) y^e Warrior seem'd not easy pleas'd with his full Pay which he took in Powd^r, so I gave him a Loaf of Bread which was satisfactory to them; one of them bringing a small Skin want'd Brass Wire for it, but could hardly please himself amongst a variety of sorts, telling me to hand more, which I looked upon it as a Stratagem to keep me bussie that y^e others might have opportunity to Steal something.

1762

2^{mo} [February] 4th – Prices of y^e following Goods here Current: Flour in fall 35/p^r ewt now 40 p^r ewt; Loaves Bread 2^{lb} 1/; fresh Beef p^r lb 7^d; Mutton in fall 6^d & 4^d; Veal do; Butter in Casks 1/ & 1^d & 1/2 & fresh Butter 2/ in sum^r & fall to 2/6 p^r lb; Milk in Sum^r 3^d 4^d p^r q^t & now 8^d p^r q^t; plenty Deers Meat & beans @ 2^d p^r lb & Turkeys 1/6 to 2/6; Deers Tallow & Buffeloes 3^d p^r lb; Bears Oyle 4^d; fall Deer Skins 1/6; Sum^r 1/10; Indⁿ Dress'd 3/; Beaver 1 Doller; foxes 2/ & Cats; Otters & Bears, 6/ each; Elks ditto; Racoons 1/6; Fishers 3/

Frederick Post* says that y^e Indians are Voide of Reason, but I find that in many cases they will hear to reason & allow it to be right, many of them will have their Peltry too wet, its like some on purpose & others by accident & to reason with most of them in that case it to make a reasonable allowance in w^t they will grummel* much & be for carrying them to some other Trader, but it's easy to make a reasonable allowance & not tell them of it all will go smooth enough, & scarcely any of them but may be easily Cheat'd, which I doubt they too often meet with.

20th – This day we dealth for y^e whole & receiv'd one White Deer Skins being a Young Buck. Much Trouble we have had wth Armstrong he wanting Liquor & upon

* Battoe: bateau. From the French for boat, any of various small craft, especially a flat-bottomed boat with raked bow and stern and flaring sides

* Stilliard: or "stilyard," a pair of scales for weighing things, often used by traders and assayers

* wey'd: weighed

* Two Pee's to his Stilliards: Kenny implies that the other trader has put two peas, or small weights, on one side of his scale, presumably with the aim of cheating customers.

* Croud'd: crowded.

* Frederick Post: Christian Frederick Post, a Moravian missionary who worked in the area.

* grummel: grumble, complain

getting a little amongst y^e Sutlers* he's more urgent for more knowing we have some.

9^{mo} [September] 17th – Ye Delawars are mightly pleas'd that I have preferr'd their Tongue in learning most of it so that I can converse a little with them; one of them told me in Weighing his Skins, that I must not Chate or it would offend y^e Good Spirit above; I told him I would not & that he should mind y^e Same Rule.

12^{mo} [December] 28th – There came a Canoe Load of Indians & Peltry from White Eyes last night, who all delt them, at our House; y^e House being thong'd* before with Indian customers, and y^e Prisoners, So that we have y^e whole Trade almost that comes to y^e Place notwithstanding Croghan sits at y^e Indⁿ Helm & lives close to his Cossen* Smallman's Store, of which he has y^e Oversight now I suppose. Y^e Allegheny drives wth much Ice & y^e Monongahela is clear.

29th – Had another Canoe wth Skins to Day from Canostoga Will, i.e. Billey Sam & Compy; been very busey all Day. White Eyes & I had several disputes, he has been affronted at y^e Soldiers for not letting him in y^e fort, it being against orders. I told him that themselves i.e. y^e Ind^{ns} were y^e Cause of it, as y^e Mingo^s* had their Messengers abroad urging for War again, throwing reflexions at y^e White people, but I pin'd him so tight that he had nothing to say but Enough & acknowledged it was true.

30th – Finished dealing with our Guests & most all of them are gone; the weather got very warm again, & y^e Snow is much gone. An Indian having 13 Beaver Skins, told me he wanted wampum for them & that he was offered it 10/Cheaper per 1000 than we asked. I told him I would Weigh his Beaver & tell how much we wou'd give, then take them to y^e Other, & see if he gave more, so he Brought 'em back again to us.

1763

1^{mo} [January] 2^d – E. McCollen Says One of his Sons is Indebtd to Levy & Co, & Jn^o Ormsby y^e Sum of 400 pounds. Having Much Peltry* Gathered last Year to Pay them with, Some Mingo Warriors Going down y^e River told them that y^e English & Indians were at War here & at Venango, so he put his peltry into an Empty House & set it on fire; y^e Old Man says he must pay y^e Debt for him if he Gets Pay for his Land.

* Sutlers: settlers

* thong'd: thronged, or overwhelmed by sheer numbers

* Cossen: cousin

* Mingo^s: The Mingo^s were members of the Six Nation tribe, the Seneca. They settled near the Monongahela and Allegheny River Valleys among the Delaware and Shawnee. In 1768 the "castle" of the "White Mingo" was on the Allegheny River a few miles above it's mouth. The Mingo^s later severed their ties with the Six Nations and migrated to Ohio.

* Peltry: pelts, animal skins