



The Historical
Society of
Pennsylvania

Am .09

James Kenny
Journal

1758-1763

1 box, 0.1 lin. feet

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Related Collections at Christian Frederick Post Diary, Collection 519.

HSP: Christian Frederick Post Diary, Am .12605.

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Abstract

James Kenny was a frontier trader who resided at Kennett Square, in Chester County, Pennsylvania. Descended from a Quaker family, he had two brothers: Charles, who accompanied him on his travels, and John.

Kenny's journal describes two assignments he carried out from 1758 to 1763, during the French and Indian War. The first, initiated by the Commissioners for Indian Affairs, was from 1758 to 1761. Kenny was overseer of an expedition to carry provisions to the Pennsylvania and Ohio tribes. The second, which chronicles his stewardship of a trading store established at Pittsburgh by the Commissioners, was from 1761 to 1763. Rich details of frontier life are provided, as are references to Kenny's customers, many of whom were Indians.

Background note

James Kenny was a frontier trader of Quaker descent who resided in Kennett Square, in Chester County, Pennsylvania. He had two brothers, John and Charles. Kenny was acquainted with Israel Pemberton and Joseph Morris, who were two of the Commissioners for Indian Affairs of the Province. At their invitation, Kenny made two trips to western Pennsylvania between 1758 and 1763. Kenny's brother Charles accompanied him on his second journey with a stop at Tuscarora, where they owned land.

On his first trip made between 1758 and 1761, Kenny traveled through western Pennsylvania, overseeing the coordination of provisions sent in wagons to the Pennsylvania and Ohio tribes. His courage and good judgment were constantly called upon in dangerous and demanding situations, such as estimating the depth of a swollen stream as a miscalculation might cause the loss of supplies or a wagon. Kenny's second assignment, from 1761 to 1763, was managing a provisions store, established at Pittsburgh by the Commissioners for Indian Affairs. Kenny's daily interaction with Indian traders and others during this period of the French and Indian War offered him a unique advantage of viewing Indians' and soldiers' comings and goings; hearing gossip and intrigues, learning of battles and skirmishes occurring all around him.

Scope & content

The journal covers the period 1758 through 1763 and details Kenny's experiences on two expeditions. The first was via York, Frederick, Cumberland, and Braddock's Road to Pittsburgh, to carry provisions to the Pennsylvania and Ohio tribes. Israel Pemberton, a fellow Quaker and one of the Commissioners for Indian Affairs, had invited Kenny to oversee the operation. Details of the arduous journeys, as well as incidents of the French and Indian War, such as skirmishes, intrigues, scalplings, and Indian alliances with British and French, are mentioned. Kenny's second assignment was as steward of a trading store that had been established at Pittsburgh by the Commissioners. One of the Commissioners, Joseph Morris, invited Kenny to take the assignment.

His first tour, which he titled, "James Kenny's Journal to Ye Westward 1758-59," was fraught with difficulties and obstacles including illness and transportation mishaps. In one incident, Kenny was proceeding with the supply wagons to a river crossing at Anderson's Ferry when one of the wagoners drove over thin ice. The wagon plunged into the river. They managed to haul a cask of lead of about one hundredweight off the bottom and transferred the goods to sleighs. During that same time, the packhorses ran off and could not be found. Another mishap in February was somewhat more amusing: Kenny had arrived at his rented house at Cumberland, but could not settle in until the soldiers had dragged out two drunken women. The soldiers also built a fire in the fireplace that was so large it almost went out of control. Kenny rationalized that the inferno was useful in cleaning soot out of the chimney. By the beginning of April, all but two of the missing horses had returned.

Arriving in Pittsburgh, Kenny learned that his traveling companion, Samuel Lightfoot, who had traveled ahead of him, had contracted measles. Lightfoot later died. Supplies of provisions were low, and they feared that they might have to eat the horses and dogs. Kenny lamented, "We do not expect ye command to come with provisions under two days, if they should be attacked and overcome it seems that no less than a miracle can save our lives." Six soldiers were killed on their way to Ligonier, and their bodies eaten by wolves. Kenny wrote that he was anxious to receive twenty thousand wampum from his employer as payment for his services but George Croghan, who had seen the wampum before Kenny, removed ten thousand of it, telling Kenny that he would give him furs instead, and that Kenny's employer had authorized the arrangement. Kenny did not believe him.

While he described in great detail his journey's travails, Kenny also wrote about other subjects such as visiting an iron mine at Fort Littleton, walking through "ye finest Chestnut Woods" at Stolney Creek, as well as traveling for several days with the renowned botanist John Bartram, discovering new plants: "Bartram found a sort of sunflower or else a new plant that he had not see[n] ye like before, having stalks 5 or 6 foot high." Kenny recalled fishing in the Monongahela River and reeling in a catfish weighing nine pounds, and hearing stories of young alligators, from twelve to nearly six feet, being spotted in the river. A May 2 entry related the interment of Delaware George, "This day Delaware George was interred over ye Allegheny River; a file of soldiers attended who fired three rounds over his grave. George Croghan and many white people

attended ye burial, in yet night ye Indians shot off guns many times to ward off evil spirits.”

Kenny’s journal includes details of some of his beliefs and philosophies. At the lodging of Thomas Urys, Kenny was involved in a discussion about religion. Urys declared that Quakers had no religion, but was somewhat vague when Kenny asked him to define what he judged to be religion. Urys stated he held with predestination. Kenny told him that if the thing was predestination, then “all our works avail’d nothing.” Kenny mused that while he would allow Urys to go to heaven his way, Urys would not allow Kenny to go his way.

Kenny was fair-minded in his judgment of the Indians. In a June 2 entry he wrote, “Several people that’s much addicted to S[c]heaming have come to our House at times I have reprovd often, & shuned their Company & I think they take notice that I can sit with ye Indians & some that they look upon meaner then themselves, but I say I would rather converse with a Good Beggar than a Wicked Great Man.” Kenny’s good friend, Frederick Post, Moravian minister to the Indians, met with some skepticism when he visited the Tuscaroras on April 9. He told the Indians that the Holy Spirit had sent him to live among them and to instruct them in Christian principles. The Indians said he was welcome to live with them but they didn’t need the Christian principles. In May, relations with Post worsened and the Indians were speaking against him. They limited the amount of Post’s land to half an acre.

At the end of his tour of duty, Kenny was ill at the end of his tour. On October 29 he wrote, “We set off thinking to reach home. But before I come to Buffington’s Tavern, I got very chilly and coldish like, where I got some milk & water to drink, but was taken very sick & vomiting & shivery w. cold.” He reached home on November 8th. The final entry of his first journey was brief, “My mother joyful to see me.”

The second assignment was Kenny’s stewardship of a supply store in Pittsburgh during the years 1761 to 1763, initiated by Joseph Morris on behalf of the Commissioners of Indian Affairs. His journal details visits by Indian customers such as Jammy Willson. Willson’s wife was a white woman who wanted to return with her son to her family. Kenny’s journal notes: “On finding she inclined to return to her own People, he brought her & ye boy with ye Amount of his Estate to our Store & told ye Woman notwithstanding, He loved her, as she want’d to leave him, would let her go, so he divided his substance equally with her, giving half ye remaindr to ye Boy & set them both free & went with ye Woman home giving her a Horse to Ride; an instance of more self denial than many men of great Christian professions shews their poor Negroes.”

The journal also describes the culture and customs of local Indians. Kenny wrote about a practice of the Shawana Indians, who protected themselves from “monsters” lurking in the Ohio River by rubbing a foul-smelling root called Black Angilico on their skin. Kenny observed that the monsters were probably alligators.

The conflict between whites and Indians began escalating and there were several reports of Indian attacks near Presque Isle. The number of soldiers was increased and an order

went out forbidding the sale of powder or lead to Indians. Colonel Collon Bouquet issued orders for all to bear arms. Kenny, citing his Quaker beliefs, wrote a letter to the colonel asking to be excused from service. "I cannot do without the abuse of my Conscience & Principles," he declared. The colonel replied that he hadn't meant Kenny, and that he was exempt from serving.

Tribes switched allegiances as the fortunes of war changed. On February 21, Frederick Post came from "Cyahaga" and informed Kenny that the Delaware Indians had accepted the war belt and tomahawk that came from the Six Nations the previous summer and had held war dances and sung of bringing in more white prisoners. By contrast, in May he wrote that the Delaware Nation planned to live entirely on dried meat and drink a bitter drink, "which is a purge of all they got of white peoples ways and nature." By the end of Kenny's narrative, when he had left the operation of the store at Pittsburgh, most Indians still distrusted the white men and believed they should be driven from the Indians' lands.

Some Indians remained friends. Kenny wrote of one man named Tortles Heart, from Shenangoe, who warned the settlers of an impending attack. Tortles Heart, with others of his tribe, had visited Kenny's store to purchase a good deal of powder and lead. They were nervous and wanted to buy even greater quantities of the materials, but then hastily left the store. Tortles Heart did not leave with the rest of the Indians but went to Alex McKee's house and asked when he planned to go down in the country. Alex said in about ten days. Tortles Heart told him he should leave that day, or at the latest in four days, and that if he didn't, Tortles Heart would not expect to see him alive.

Hearing the alarming news, Kenny decided that he should leave the store and proceeded to settle up with the agent. The agent was disagreeable and skeptical, and tried to persuade Kenny to stay on to see if the Indians really would attack. Kenny decided against it and went to the commander, got a pass, and left. He traveled with his friend Frederick Post, over the Monongahela, worked his way down to Philadelphia, stopping at Harpers Ferry, Fredericktown, and York, and then to Kennett Square to his mother's home.

Separation Report

None.

Related Materials

Christian Frederick Post Diary, Am .12605.
Christian Frederick Post Journal, Am .127

Bibliography

- Jordan, John W., ed. "James Kenny's 'Journal to ye Westward,' 1758-1759." *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 1913 (37) 1-47, 152-201.
- Jordan, John W., ed. "Journal of James Kenny, 1761-1763." *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 1913 (37) 395-449.

Subjects

Frontier and pioneer life – Pennsylvania – Pittsburgh – 18th century
Indians of North America – Pennsylvania – 18th century
Indians, Treatment of – Pennsylvania – 18th century
Pennsylvania – Description and travel – 18th century
Quakers – Pennsylvania – 18th century
Trading posts – Pennsylvania – Pittsburgh – 18th century
Travelers – 18th century
United States – History – French and Indian War, 1755-1763

Bartram, John, 1734-1777
Croghan, George, d. 1782
Kenny Family
Kenny, James
Lightfoot, Samuel, d. 1758
Pemberton, Israel, 1715-1779
Post, Christian Frederick, 1710?-1785

Administrative Information

Restrictions

The collection is open for research.

Acquisition information

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Processing note

James Kenny kept this journal as one volume, consisting of four different parts that were sewn together. In order to appropriately preserve the journal, the volume was disbound and the four parts were conserved (and re sewn) separately.

This collection was formerly known as Collection 339.

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