

COLONEL JAMES BURD—DEFENDER OF THE
FRONTIER.

By IRMA A. WATTS.

Into the making of this New World, was brought the sturdiness of the German, the adventurousness of the English, the brawn of the Scot, and the volatile spirit of the Irish. But preeminent in the development of Dauphin County, Pa., were the Scotch, the English and the intrepid Scotch-Irish.

Well known are the achievements of the "Fighting Parson" Elder, but not so well known are the deeds performed by another Scotchman—James Burd.

At Middletown, a short distance in from the entrance to the cemetery is a flat marble stone, with a D.A.R. marker at its head. On the slab is this simple inscription:

" Col. James Burd
Born at Ormiston
Scotland
March 10th, 1726
Died at Tinian
Oct. 5th, 1793
Aged 67 years 6
months
and 25 days."

Beside it, is a similar stone which marks the grave of his wife:

" Sarah Burd
Born February
22d, 1731
Died at Tinian
Sept. 17, 1784
Age 53 years
6 months
and 25 days."

The life stories of the early men, who made our country, read like romances, and the story of James Burd is no exception. He was the youngest of four sons of Edward Burd, of Ormiston, Scotland, which is about ten miles from Edinburgh, and being a younger son, he was forced to come to the new country to seek his fortune, arriving in 1748-49. He drifted to Lancaster in an effort to find employment, and there met and fell in love with Sarah Shippen, the daughter of Edward Shippen, the aristocratic Prothonotary of Lancaster County. She was the sister of Edward Shippen, who later became Chief Justice, whose daughter "Peggy" married Benedict Arnold.

Mr. Shippen did not look with favor upon James Burd's suit, for very little was known about him, and naturally Edward Shippen expected a daughter of his to make a more brilliant marriage. But so ardent was Burd's wooing and so earnest his pleading, that he proved the adage: "Where there's a will, there's a way," and Sarah Shippen eloped with him. Parental forgiveness followed, and Mr. Burd was made a factor at Shippensburg, where Edward Shippen had extensive interests, having laid out the town in 1749.

An interesting event in connection with Shippensburg, was the unveiling of a marker on June sixth, of this year, by the Pennsylvania Historical Commission, commemorating the town, and Edward Shippen, its founder.

Sarah Shippen's faith in Mr. Burd's perseverance was not misplaced, as he rose to be an outstanding figure in the colony, and whatever there had been of disapproval at their marriage, was obliterated subsequently, and Edward Shippen himself took pride in his son-in-law's achievements.

In April 1755, Governor Morris commissioned George Croghan, William Buchanan, James Burd, John Armstrong and Adam Hoopes to lay out a road

from Harris's Ferry to the Ohio. When the work of construction was under way, Burd was left in sole charge for the greater portion of the time, as the manifold interests of the others kept them away. He accomplished the work with great success, and it gave him a reputation as a judicious and able engineer. The projected road ran from McDowell's Mill in Franklin County, to within eighteen miles of the Three Forks of the Youghiogeny.

According to Frederic A. Godcharles in his "Daily Stories of Pennsylvania"

" * * * This road which afterward received the name of Braddock's Road, passed beyond McDowell's Mill, around Parnell's and Jordan's Knobs, into Path Valley, into Cowan's Gap, past Burnt Cabins and Sugar Cabins to Sideling Hill. From the latter point the road extended to the Crossing of the Juniata, then to Raystown (now Bedford) and it then went over the Alleghenies to the Great Crossing, three miles from Turkey's Foot * * *

* * * Much of the money required for the work was supplied by Joseph Armstrong and Samuel Smith, members of the Assembly from Cumberland County, from their private purse, for the Legislature held its purse strings with a tight grip. * * *

From road engineer James Burd progressed to the Colonial Army, and we find from his Journal that he was most zealous in the protection of the frontier during the French and Indian War. He got over that wild primeval country as few of us do in this day of easy transportation.

In February 1756, he was appointed to select the site for the mythical Fort Pomphret Castle, the location of which has never been fully established.

In March of the same year he was at Fort Granville, and the following July was made a major and was stationed at Fort Augusta (Sunbury). It was while at Fort Augusta that he suggested uniforming the troops in green hunting shirts for their better concealment, thus in his day he knew the value of camouflage. However we find a letter from his brother-in-law which announced that the Colonial Frontier uniform was to

be green and red. No doubt he was subsequently outfitted in this picturesque, colorful costume.

In 1756-57 Major Burd finished Fort Morris, at Shippensburg, which had been started in 1755.

He was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel January, 1758, being next in rank to Lieut. Col. John Armstrong, of Cumberland County.

After this advancement we read in his Journal an account of his inspection of the various forts from the Susquehanna to the Delaware. He set out on his journey February 16, 1758, visiting Fort Hunter first, going thence to Fort Swettarrow (Swatara), Fort Henry, and the various other forts along the way. The entry under the date of Saturday (February), twenty-fifth, while inspecting Fort William, gives us this interesting account:

“ * * * Here I found a target erected; I ordered the company to shoot at the same; set them the example myself by wheeling round and firing by the word of command. I shot a bullet into the centre of their mark, the size of a dollar—distance one hundred yards. Some of them shot tolerably bad. Most of their arms are very bad * * * ”

This account shows he could do exactly what he required of his men.

It is amazing when we read these old documents to realize what our forebears had to endure and how ill equipped they were. The forts were under-manned, poorly supplied, often lacking even powder, as well as blankets and oftentimes the men had difficulty in getting any pay. Burd with great skill re-apportioned the men, adding some to this fort, taking others away from that; divided the supplies to the best advantage to all, as far as they would reach.

When Gen. Forbes set out on his expedition to capture Fort Du Quesne, Col. Burd commanding his Pennsylvania Regiment, was with Bouquet's Force, and he was in advance of Bouquet himself in reaching Loyalhanna.

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He erected a stockade and fortified the camp. After the disastrous defeat of Maj. Grant in his uncalled for attack on Fort Du Quesne, when the French and their Indian allies pursued the fleeing English as far as the camp at Loyal Hanna, attacking the latter Oct. 12, 1758, it was James Burd who was in command of the troops that turned the French back.

Burd modestly reported the affair by letter to Col. Bouquet at Stoney Creek on the Laurel Hill, as follows:

“ * * * But we had the pleasure to do that honour to his Majesty’s arms, to keep the camp at Loyal Hannon * * * ”

Col. Burd was recognized as the hero of this engagement, for we find a letter from Col. Bouquet to Col. Burd, dated October 15, 1758, in which he said:

that “General Forbes had fired a feu de joie for your affair * * * ”

Edward Shippen showed his pride in his son-in-law’s achievement in a letter to Burd November 6, 1758, in which he proudly stated:

“ * * * An account was just arrived * * * of your being attacked by a very large party of French & Indians from Fort Du Quesne & that you killed two or three hundred and taken as many as prisoners & beat off the rest. This now, you may be sure, gave us great cause of rejoicing, as it did the people of Philada. * * * I make no doubt you have slain a considerable number of the enemy, and I don’t care a farthing whether I ever know the quantity, nor do I care whether you have killed more than a half dozen of them; it is enough for me to be convinced that you have driven off the enemy, & have bravely maintained the Post you were sent to sustain * * * & tho you don’t pretend to equal skill with an experienced officer, yet I think you may lay claim to some share of Bravery, as you have so well defended your post, & I make no question but y’r General will pronounce you a good & faithful servant & will entrust you another time * * * ”

In the fall of 1759

“ * * * He was sent out with two hundred men by order of Col. Bouquet * * * to complete the road which had been opened by Braddock, to the Monongahela at or near the mouth of the Redstone, and there erect a fort * * * The great object of Col. Burd’s expedition was to facilitate communications with this important fort from Maryland and Virginia, using the river * * * ”

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Redstone is what is now Brownsville.

The town of Pittsburgh began with the occupation of Du Quesne, rechristened Fort Pitt, by the English in 1758. Col. Burd early mentions the name—Pittsburg. It is found in his Journals under date of July 21, 1760, and he reported as follows:

“Today numbered the Houses at Pittsburg, and made a return of the number of people—men, women & children—that do not belong to the Army:

Number of houses	146
Number of unfinished houses	19
Number of hutts	36
Total	201
Number of men	88
Number of women	29
Number of male children	14
Number of female children	18
Total	149”

So he added census taker to the numerous rôles he performed, and this is probably the first census of Pittsburgh.

September 25, 1762, in the “Papers of the Governors” Pennsylvania Archives, Series 4, we find this commission, signed by the “Hon. James Hamilton, Esquire, Lieutenant-Governor and Commander-in-Chief of the Province of Pennsylvania and counties of New Castle, Kent and Sussex on the Delaware:

“ * * * You and Josiah Davenport, to receive all such prisoners as shall be brought to Fort Pitt, in consequence of the solemn engagement made by Beaver and the Indians with him at the late treaty at Lancaster. * * *

So once more he went westward.

On July second, 1763, the Governor commissioned him with Thomas McKee to go to the Wyoming settlements and drive out the Connecticut settlers who had persisted in encroaching on Pennsylvania soil, and the land belonging to the Six Nations. He was advised to read the proclamation of the Governor to them, to

use all his persuasion to have them depart, but there was to be no blood shed. He was further instructed to burn all buildings after they left them, and if possible to bring the ring-leaders to Lancaster:

“ * * * For this end I have armed you with a special commission constituting you magistrates of the counties of Northampton, Berks and Lancaster, but I imagine the lands where they are settling must be in Northampton * * * ”

Later in the year the following commission was also given to him:

“ * * * By these presents do constitute and appoint you, the said Col. James Burd to be commissioner on the part of the Province of Pennsylvania, with full power to act in concert with a commissioner to be appointed by the Governor and Company of Connecticut in the due and faithful Execution of His Majesty's Royal pleasure concerning the inhabitants of the said settlement. . . .
October 20, 1763 James Hamilton.”

Thus to him was given the exceptional honor of representing the Province of Pennsylvania in one of her territorial disputes.

A further honor came to him in 1765, when he was commissioned, on August 19th, a Deputy Prothonotary of Lancaster County, by John Penn, Lieutenant Governor of Pennsylvania. He was also commissioned a Justice of the Peace at two different times.

On August 4, 1766 Col. Burd acquired title to two tracts of land situate in Paxtang Township, then Lancaster County (now Dauphin). One tract contained 262 acres and the other 242 acres. They were purchased from John Bare, High Sheriff, as the property of William Clinton, and Col. Burd paid 900 pounds for them, according to the records in the Office of the Recorder of Deeds, Lancaster, Pa.

So on the ridge midway between Highspire, now, and Middletown, he built his home which he called “Tinian.” It was built of limestone and is still standing, although it has been remodeled and enlarged. It recently acquired a coat of yellow paint and the build-

ings are outstanding against the lovely green background. In this house were entertained nearly all of the celebrities who came to this region during the period of his activity. The selection of this site for a home in itself shows what ability and judgment the man possessed, for the view is most exquisite, and looking down the river the scene is like a fairy landscape, with Hill Island dominating the picture, while the silver ribbon of the river brings out the picturesque dark beauty of the peaks and knolls of the York County hills, and close at hand are the fertile lowlands at one time the show farms of the community, for in subsequent years Col. James Young owned the land that had once been Burd's. Here during the Spanish-American War was located Camp Meade, whence our soldiers were sent out to fight the foreign enemy, so even the land that knew the tread of the old Frontier Defender, helped in later years to take its part for the training of our soldiers for defending the larger Border.

The Burds had seven children:

1. SARAH, who married Jasper Yeates.
2. EDWARD, who married his cousin, Sarah Shippen, and later became Prothonotary of the Supreme Court, and who served with distinction during the Revolution.
3. MARY, married Peter Grubb, of the Hopewell Furnaces, Lancaster County.
4. JANE, married George Patterson of Mexico, Penna.
5. MARGARET, who married Jacob Hubley, Lancaster.
6. JAMES, who married Elizabeth Baker.
7. JOSEPH, who first married Catharine Cochran, and secondly Harriet Bailey.

Col. James Burd served the Province of Pennsylvania faithfully and well, but after all this devotion and loyalty his closing years were filled with bitterness and disappointment.

When the Revolution came, the Shippens, who for many years had held many important offices under the Province, were questioned as to their loyalty, and the doubt even extended so far as to include their connec-

tions. So while Col. James Burd was recruiting two companies to go to the front, he was suspected of not being in entire sympathy with the Patriot Cause.

This feeling was still unsettled when the time came to appoint the ranking officers of the Pennsylvania Line in 1776, and as a result Mifflin was made Brigadier, and Anthony Wayne was appointed Senior Colonel, setting aside both Col. John Armstrong of the Provincial Forces, and Col. Burd who was next to him in rank and experience. Both Armstrong and Burd were deeply hurt at this injustice but Col. Armstrong after much letter-writing consented to enter the service. Col. Burd, however, still smarting under the unfairness, received an additional blow, when the companies he had enlisted refused to march in the severe weather of December 1776. Coupled with his wounded pride this so embittered Burd that he resigned and retired to his farm, and the name of Burd dying out, has become only a glorious memory.