

Charting the Colonial Backcountry: Joseph Shippen's Map of the Susquehanna River

In the confusing and complex period after the outbreak of the French and Indian War in 1755, the Susquehanna River acted as an important space that encompassed the competing and overlapping spheres of influence of both the British and the French in Pennsylvania. The confluence of the north and west branches of the river was also the site of the Indian town of Shamokin, where from 1747 through 1755 Moravian missionaries lived alongside Iroquois, Delawares, and Shawnees. Here the Moravians developed warm relations with such influential figures as Shikellamy, the Oneida sachem to the area's Iroquois, as well as with other native peoples who had been displaced from the area around the Chesapeake Bay.

The presence of Moravian missionaries at Shamokin might explain the existence in the Moravian Archives in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, of a four-piece manuscript map of the Susquehanna River drawn by Joseph Shippen around the time the fort system was being built along the river.¹ The map accurately marks the route that Colonel William Clapham and four hundred troops took in July 1756 from Harris's ferry at the mouth of Paxton Creek up the eastern shore of the river to Fort Hunter, Fort Halifax, and Fort Augusta. The map also traces the water route taken by canoes and "bateaux," laden with provisions, as they tried to avoid the dangers of the rapids, falls, and riffles. To this end, Shippen's map details with great precision the numerous river islands and obstacles that such a flotilla had to navigate.

Reproduced here are two details of the map that demonstrate some of its significance to researchers. The first portion charts the main stem of the Susquehanna River from Harris's ferry up to Shipman's property on Barry's Creek. The two routes taken by land and water are clearly delineated (marked with a hash), as are the houses of settlers on both sides of the river and the names of creeks and tributaries.²

¹ The complete map, consisting of four sections, can be found at f.037.10–13, Drawings and Prints, Moravian Archives, Bethlehem, PA.

² An account of Clapham's march can be found in Herbert C. Bell, *The History of Northumberland County, Pennsylvania* (Chicago, 1891), 50–60.

The second segment depicts the positions of villages along the “Long Reach” of the West Branch of the Susquehanna River that had been inhabited up to and during this period by the extended family of the Indian interpreters Madame and Andrew Montour.³ The Shippen map shows the villages at the mouths of the Muncy, Loyalsock (Ostonwakin), Lycoming (Quenischachachque), and Pine Creeks, respectively. In June 1753 Bernhard Grube, a Moravian missionary then residing at Shamokin, travelled up the West Branch to visit the members of the Montour family who were still living there. Of the place where once Madame Montour had lived, he wrote:

as I got to Ostonwakin I relaxed on the spot where earlier the Indian Town had stood, and I refreshed myself with strawberries, and thought a great deal about our dear Disciple and his dear travel company that pitched their tents here ten years ago. It is a pleasant area but now no one lives here any more. Now I could easily bathe in the Ostonwakin, the last time however it was up to my armpits and the current was very strong.⁴

Grube continued to French Margaret’s Town, as it is marked on the Shippen map, and provided the following description:

In the afternoon, around 5 o’clock, I arrived at the first little town on this side of Quenischachachque, where the deceased Madame Montour’s daughter Margaret and her family live. She is a very rich woman, has 30 horses, several cows, and 40 pigs. This year she planted 8 acres of Indian corn.⁵

Although this portion of the map is far less detailed than the representation of the main stem, Shippen accurately marks the existence of two

³ For a detailed account of the Montours, see Jon Parmenter, “Isabel Montour: Cultural Broker on the Frontiers of New York and Pennsylvania,” in *The Human Tradition in Colonial America*, ed. Ian K. Steele and Nancy L. Rhoden (Wilmington, DE, 1999), 141–59. The Moravian missionary John Heckewelder claims that Quenischachachque is also the Lenape name for the West Branch, meaning the “river of long reaches.” See “Notes and Queries,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 11 (1887): 126.

⁴ “Diary by Grube, April 14–July 31, 1753,” ms. 01.32.121.6, Moravian Archives (translation mine). For Count Nicholas von Zinzendorf’s account of his meeting with Andrew Montour at this same place, see William C. Reichel, ed., *Memorials of the Moravian Church*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia, 1870), 95–97; and William C. Reichel, ed., *Count Zinzendorf and the Indians* (1742; repr. Lewisburg, PA, 2007).

⁵ “Diary by Grube.”

villages at the mouth of the Lycoming Creek. The village on the western side of the water, the larger of the two, was Grube's actual destination. He recorded:

On the 6th of June I went to Quenischachachque and as I came into the town an Indian by the name of Thomas Freeman came up to me and said immediately "Welcome Brother! I know who you must be and I want to take you into the Lodge," and so he took me to James David's house where Christian Renatus lodged, who also came out to meet me and was very pleased. Soon several Indians arrived and asked whether this was the Brother about whom they had heard so much and they were very friendly towards me. Then I was treated to bear meat.⁶

Although Grube's account is rich in detail of the area, Shippen's map is not; Shippen did not travel this far along the West Branch himself, but, rather, relied on the reports of scouts who were sent forward up the Susquehanna's branches to look for hostile French Indians.

One other copy of Colonel Clapham's "March to Fort Augusta" can be found in the Pennsylvania State Archives.⁷ The version of Shippen's map contained therein is not as detailed, but the relief drawing of the islands and steep cliffs on the banks of the river is more expertly rendered, which might lead one to believe that this is a later, more polished, version of the map. Why the supposed original of a map that was drawn for primarily colonial military interests should be in the Moravian Archives, however, is unknown. The detail and condition of Shippen's map in the Moravian Archives mark it of paramount interest to researchers focusing on the fascinating confluence not only of the Susquehanna River but also of the native and colonial settlers who lived along its shores in the mid-eighteenth century.

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⁶ Ibid.

⁷ [Map of Col. Clapham's March to Fort Augusta, ca. 1756, by Joseph Shippen], MG11-Map Collection, Map 105, Pennsylvania State Archives, Harrisburg, PA. "Begins at Harris's near Paxton Creek, past Fort Halifax to Fort Augusta. Then up the East Branch of the Susquehanna to Nanticoke Town and Mamuncis[?] Town. Shows the West Branch of the Susquehanna to and past Shonemahone. Original, hand drawn in 3 colors. Laminated, 8 sections."