JOHN BARTRAM'S JOURNEY TO PITTSBURGH
IN THE FALL OF 1761

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Among the journals of the long trips made by John Bartram and sent to his friend Peter Collinson is the one of his journey of 1761 to Pittsburgh. As is the case with the account of the trip to the Carolinas made the year previous, all traces of the Pittsburgh Journal have disappeared; not even small scraps, as is the case of some others, could be found buried in the Bartram Papers preserved in the Manuscript Department of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania; although the indications are that he wrote more than one copy.

Fortunately by tying the small amount of information regarding the trip gleaned from some of the letters with a section of the Journal of James Kenny, a fair account of at least a part of this journey can be assembled.

The Journal of James Kenny, in two small note books, is owned by the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, and the second section, that of 1761-1763, was published in its Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography, Vol. 37, 1913.

James Kenny, a Friend, resided in Kennett Square, Pa. He had charge of the Trading Store at Fort Pitt, having been chosen by the Commissioners on Indian Affairs for that purpose; and he had been a friend of Bartram for some time previous. The visit to Fort Pitt may have been made at Kenny's suggestion. Kenny accompanied Bartram for ten days, September 14th-23rd, when the latter left Fort Pitt on his way farther South.

One is able to collect the following from Bartram's correspondence with Peter Collinson and from a letter written by him to his son William, then at Ashland on the River Cape Fear, N. C.

Bartram wrote Collinson, May 22, 1761: 1

"I have a great mind to go next fall to Pittsburgh, in hopes to find some curious plants there." And on May 10, 1762, "I am glad my Journal to Carolina is acceptable I wish my remarks on ye Ohio may be so

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1 The references BP1 and BP3 refer to the volumes of Bartram Papers at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.
too I have roughly wrote my Journal to Pittsburgh but I should write it over again before I send it but when I can get time to do it I cant say nor how to send it safe it is larger then that to carolina:"

Collinson wrote June 11, 1761, "By thy Description Pittsburgh must be a Delightful Situation both for Health, Convenience and Trade.... When the country grows populous and Wood Scarce & Dear Coal may be of Infinite Service to Supply that Defeciency. What shall we saye to the Strata abounding with fossel Sea Shells, Petrifactions &c? Very probably as thou conceives the Sea flowed higher or Once Over-flowed all.... The Want of Fish in the Ohio may be thou Observes from its great distance from Sea...."

In the letter to his son William, November 5, 1761, John Bartram gave quite a little information about the trip. He wrote in part:

"My dear son Billy
I am safe returned in very good health from Pittsburgh God Almighty be praised: haveing been down y* Ohio below Bever Creek & up y* Monongahela to above redstone Creek then to fort Cumberland thence to y* warm springs in virginia near great Cape Capon & potomack* then to y* great cave near y* south mountain haveing crawled over many deep wrinkles in y* face of our antient mother earth haveing not observed one tree or shrub but what I have growing on my own land except A vine Aromatick which is very curious I found allso some very pretty plants"

On January 6, 1763, he wrote to Collinson, "I am glad thee received my rough Journal by Mr Talor... I did not see any wild animal in All that Journey except 2 or 3 deer onely one tame bear at the fort: nor so much as A wolf or fox to be seen or heard altho I lay six nights in y* woods on ye banks of y* Ohio & Monongahela & was two nights very late on y* Alegany mountains" Collinson asked for and was sent a peculiar turtle in the fall of 1762 that Bartram had found on the Ohio.

3 BP1:51

4 Redstone Creek is on the east side of the Monongahela River some thirty miles south of Pittsburgh. "Fort Cumberland" is now Cumberland, Maryland. Warm Springs are now Berkeley Springs, W. Va. "Near Great Cacapon and Potomac" may be the Shenandoah Mountains and would be about the dividing line between Virginia and West Virginia.

5 BP1:59.
James Kenny’s Journal supplies considerable information regarding about ten days of the journey, that down the Ohio and Monongahela Rivers. As copied from the original it is as follows:

“About ye 14th Inst (9th month 14th 1761) Jn Bartram ye botanist & member of ye Royal Society came here, which I was glad to see & well receiv’d by Collo1 Bouquet & ye officers.

“16th About this time Jn Bartram Cap1 Gordon & me went over ye Monongahela looking for Curiosities in Plants & having shewn Bartram a Vine, that I looked at as rare, we pull’d of its fruit, being long like Cucumbers which he recons a great rarety or new Genus, if it proves not to be Aristolchia; not being ever found in these parts before; also a fine violet in Blossom which is a rare thing in ye fall &c. Bartram being desirous that he & I should go out by ourselves, we another Day, going to ye Saw Mill & up ye Run from thence ye South of ye Monongahela Mountain in order to go to ye french Lime Kiln & ye Coal Mine which lay on a Branch of ye sd Run but we, keeping ye Main Run it lead us some Miles ye wrong Sough & coming on Rain, we set by Gess a Course ye highest through ye woods & came right opposite to ye fort having observed some Curiosities.

“18. Having propos’d to go down ye Ohio to ye Oyle Spring & desirous of my company we set off this Day in company with Cap1 Bryen of ye Provincials being also bread a friend & four of his men to work ye Battoe also Hugh McSwain for an Interpreter ye Colonel having furnisht us with a tent & provisions also Liquor planty, I took ye Courses of ye River as we went, by a Good Pocket Compass having several Islands & to ye mouth of Beaver Creekwill be very near North West Course, many Crooks we first put a Shore in a long Island (Neville Island?) below Shirtees Island (Brunot’s Island?) got some plums &c. Jn Bartram found a sort of Sun flower or else a New Plant that he had not seen ye Like before, having Stalks 5 or 6 feet High & Square & hollow bearing allways two long small leaves together opposite surrounding ye Stem like through stem ye Blossoms were fell, next we went a Shoar at ye Logstown there being no inhabitants now, but above 100 Acres I suppose Clear’d Land being on ye North Side ye River & very thin Soyle, ye Agesent Hills but poor. Some of ye men like to have poysont’d themselves here Eating ye Indigo Peas whilst walking out ye woods.

“Prosee’d down Beaver Creek about 8 or 10 miles from ye Logstown & 30 miles from Pittsburgh where only lives Gray Eyes or Sir Wm Jonson so call’d one of ye Heads of ye Delawares, but he was gone to ye
treaty now held at Detroite, some Women & Children being at home. He has a good Shingl'd House & several Stables & Cow houses under one Roof Built by ye General’s rd’rs. We Pitch’d our Tent near ye House & made us a fire when Wm Turnum & another Ind’n man about dusk came in from Hunting; they sat with us some time & we gave each some bread & a Dram turnum talks English well & being observing ye Stars he could shew us ye North Star & ye great Bear & Says ye Indians knows them & ye Plannets by Particular Names, very well & observes their Motions, but could not inform us of ye Oyle Springs.

“19 Set off early this morning down ye River, being very foggy, ye River seems here to make a Right Angle ye Course from ye Mouth of Beaver Creek seems near South West, with some Islands & seems not much wider than at Pittsburgh but 7 or 8 foot Deep in places kept down ye River until 11 o’Clock having judg’d we went near 20 miles below Beaver Creek, being told ye Oyle Spring was at ye Little Beaver Creek about 8 Miles from ye former or same side of ye River but no such Creek could we find in this Distance, so we put a Shoar on ye Point on an Island ye River appearing to turn more Northward round ye Point of a Hill, just in sight here we Dined. View’d ye Island, many pieces of Stone Coal lying amongst ye small Stones washed down withe ye River, so we went no further down having ye wind fair hoist’d Sail & Row’d along shore up again put a Shoar on ye South side, at mouth of ye Creek where was very rich Bottoms. Bartram ye Cap & I often walk’d along Shore, & in ye evening being got very near ye mouth of ye Creek we left this morning, walking along a Path on high Land above ye River came to a Town (abo’t a Mile below Gray Eyes) where was near to 20 well made (but small) Stone Chimneys & several frame Buildings, some of which had no Shingles or Clabords on, ye Houses were mostly Burn’d or destroy’d that belong’d to ye Stone Chimneys there was like one or two Chappies with Immages of faces cut on ye Posts, but marks of Tomhocks astruck in ye sd’ faces & one nose cut off.

“I am informed since that this town was where ye french had intised ye Shawnes to come & steele, to be more handy to go to War against ye English &c, we walk’d up ye mouth of Beaver Creek, but ye men were tyred put a Shoar & Incamp’d a little lower, so we return’d to them & stay’d there all night McSwain going to Gray Eyes & on his return told us he eat some Good Butter which Gray Eyes had made while he was there.

“9 mo 20 Set off this morning & came to Logstown but went a
shoar on ye South side of ye River opposite to where ye town was very Rich Land & we judg'd about 100 Acres Clear'd growing high Weeds & Briers, here they us'd to Plant Corn search'd ye ajesent Woods for ye Horse Chestnut Trees, but could not find them, ye Children at Beaver Creek having strings of them about their necks, they grow on an Island below Shirtees, but we did not land on it to see them, lay this night by ye River side on long Coarse Grass.

"21 Came up ye next day to Pittsburgh & walking along ye River side found Pieces of Putrifid Stuff made into Stone but ye Shapes of Shells in places in other places ye shapes & bulk of Hickory Nuts with ye fair Husks on, opening in four Points & quarters in ye top of ye Nutt. Jn° Bartram calls them Shells but I call them nuts &c. Walk'd this evening out about Grant's hill & view'd some of Men's Bones that lies there yet.

"23 Jn° Bartram set off to redstone Creek up ye Monongahela on his way to see ye Warm Springs in Virginia & it rain'd two days.

"12th mo 28th Receiv'd a Letter from John Bartram to send him seeds of ye Sweet Vine."

It may be that Kenny was confused about Bartram's statement regarding the nuts, since nuts were received from Colonel Bouquet. Collinson writing April 1, 1762 says, "I really believe my honest friend John is a great Wag, and has sent several hard stony Seeds, something shaped like an Acorn, to puzzle us; for there is no Name on them. I have a vast collection of Seeds but nothing like them. I do laugh at Gordon, for he guesses them to be a Species of Hickory. Perhaps I may be laughed at in turn."

William Darlington (Memorials of Bartram and Marshall, page 333) quotes from a draft of one of Bartram's letters; unfortunately this draft is not among the Bartram Papers. "The hard nuts I sent were given me at Pittsburgh by Col. Bouquet. He called them Hickory Nuts. He had them from the country of the Illinois. Their kernal was very sweet. I am afraid they won't sprout being a year old."

If Bartram had not been so modest and had been less conscious of his lack of education, he would have done more with his journals than send them to England for his friend Collinson to read. Luck enters largely in the records we do have of the pioneer work of John Bartram.