

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 tieing 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 y^e 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, 1761², "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, 1761,³ 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 Pittsbuigh God Almighty be praised: haveing been down y^e Ohio below Bever Creek & up y^e Monongahela to above redstone Creek then to fort Cumberland thence to y^e warm springs in virginia near great Cape Capon & potomack⁴ then to y^e great cave near y^e south mountain haveing crawled over many deep wrinkles in y^e 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,⁵ "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 alltho I lay six nights in y^e woods on ye banks of y^e Ohio & Monongahela & was two nights very late on y^e Alegany mountains" Collinson asked for and was sent a peculiar turtle in the fall of 1762 that Bartram had found on the Ohio.

2 BP3:24.

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 y^e 14th Inst (9th month 14th 1761) Jn^o Bartram y^e botanist & member of y^e Royal Society came here, which I was glad to see & well receiv'd by Collo^l Bouquet & y^e officers.

"16th About this time Jn^o Bartram Cap^t Gordon & me went over y^e 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 rarity 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 y^e fall &c. Bartram being desirous that he & I should go out by ourselves, we another Day, going to y^e Saw Mill & up y^e Run from thence y^e South of y^e Monongahela Mountain in order to go to y^e french Lime Kiln & y^e Coal Mine which lay on a Branch of y^e s^d Run but we, keeping y^e Main Run it lead us some Miles y^e wrong Sough & coming on Rain, we set by Gess a Course y^e nighest through y^e woods & came right opposite to y^e fort having observed some Curiosities.

"18. Having propos'd to go down y^e Ohio to y^e Oyle Spring & desirous of my company we set off this Day in company with Cap^t Bryen of y^e Provincials being also bread a friend & four of his men to work y^e Battoe also Hugh McSwain for an Interpretor ye Colonel having furnish'd us with a tent & provisions also Liquor planty, I took y^e Courses of y^e River as we went, by a Good Pocket Compass having several Islands & to y^e 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^o Bartram found a sort of Sun flower or else a New Plant that he had not seen y^e Like before, having Stalks 5 or 6 feet High & Square & hollow bearing allways two long small leaves together oposite sirrounding y^e Stem like through stem y^e Blossoms were fell, next we went a Shoar at y^e Logstown there being no inhabitants now, but above 100 Acres I suppose Clear'd Land being on y^e North Side y^e River & very thin Soyle, y^e Agesent Hills but poor. Some of y^e men like to have poyson'd themselves here Eating y^e Indigo Peas whilst walking out y^e woods.

"Prose'd down Beaver Creek about 8 or 10 miles from y^e Logstown & 30 miles from Pittsburgh where only lives Gray Eyes or Sir W^m Jonson so call'd one of y^e Heads of y^e Delawares, but he was gone to y^e

treaty now held at Detrouite, some Women & Children being at home He has a good Shingl'd House & several Stables & Cow houses under one Roof Built by y^e General's rd'rs We Pitch'd our Tent near y^e House & made us a fire when W^m 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 y^e Stars he could shew us y^e North Star & y^e great Bear & Says y^e Indians knows them & y^e Plannets by Particular Names, very well & observes their Motions, but could not inform us of y^e Oyle Springs.

"19 Set off early this morning down y^e River, being very foggy, y^e River seems here to make a Right Angle y^e Course from y^e 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 y^e River until 11 o'Clock having judg'd we went near 20 miles below Beaver Creek, being told y^e Oyle Spring was at y^e Little Beaver Creek about 8 Miles from y^e former or same side of y^e River but no such Creek could we find in this Distance, so we put a Shoar on y^e Point on an Island y^e River appearing to turn more Northward round y^e Point of a Hill, just in sight here we Dined. View'd y^e Island, many pieces of Stone Coal lying amongst y^e small Stones washed down withe y^e River, so we went no further down having y^e wind fair hoist'd Sail & Row'd along shore up again put a Shoar on y^e South side, at mouth of y^e Creek where was very rich Bottoms. Bartram y^e Cap^t & I often walk'd along Shore, & in y^e evening being got very near y^e mouth of y^e Creek we left this morning, walking along a Path on high Land above y^e 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, y^e Houses were mostly Burn'd or destroy'd that belong'd to y^e Stone Chimneys there was like one or two Chapples with Immages of faces cut on y^e Posts, but marks of Tom-hocks astruck in y^e s^d faces & one nose cut off.

"I am informed since that this town was where y^e french had intised y^e Shawnes to come & steele, to be more handy to go to War against y^e English &c, we walk'd up y^e mouth of Beaver Creek, but y^e 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 y^e South side of y^e River opposite to where y^e 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 y^e ajesent Woods for y^e Horse Chestnut Trees, but could not find them, y^e 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 y^e River side on long Coarse Grass.

"21 Came up y^e next day to Pittsburgh & walking along y^e River side found Pieces of Putrifid Stuff made into Stone but y^e Shapes of Shells in places in other places y^e shapes & bulk of Hickory Nuts with y^e fair Husks on, opening in four Points & quarters in y^e top of y^e Nutt. Jn^o 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^o Bartram set off to redstone Creek up y^e Monongahela on his way to see y^e Warm Springs in Virginia & it rain'd two days.

"12th mo 28th Receiv'd a Letter from John Bartram to send him seeds of y^e 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, 1762⁶ 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.