

**Expedition Journals**  
**1804-1806**  
**Mss.917.7.D91**

American Philosophical Society  
2003  
105 South Fifth Street  
Philadelphia, PA, 19106  
215-440-3400  
[manuscripts@amphilsoc.org](mailto:manuscripts@amphilsoc.org)

---

## Table of Contents

---

Summary Information .....	3
Background note .....	5
Scope & content .....	8
Administrative Information .....	9
Related Materials .....	9
Indexing Terms .....	9
Other Finding Aids .....	10
Other Descriptive Information .....	11
Bibliography .....	11
Collection Inventory .....	12
William Dunbar Journals.....	12
Zebulon Pike Journal.....	13

---

## Summary Information

---

<b>Repository</b>	American Philosophical Society
<b>Creator</b>	Dunbar, William, 1749-1810
<b>Creator</b>	Pike, Zebulon Montgomery, 1779-1813
<b>Title</b>	Expedition Journals
<b>Date [inclusive]</b>	1804-1806
<b>Call number</b>	Mss.917.7.D91
<b>Extent</b>	0.1 Linear feet 1 volume
<b>Extent</b>	0.1 linear feet
<b>Location</b>	LH-MV-E-12
<b>Language</b>	English
<b>Abstract</b>	<p>This collection includes three journals bound into one volume: two by Willima Dunbar and one by Zebulon Pike.</p> <p>Both manuscripts by William Dunbar document the expedition up the Red and Ouachita Rivers to the Hot Springs of Arkansas in 1804-1805. The "Journal... to the Mouth of the Red River" (200p.) is the fullest available record of the activities of the expedition from the time of their departure from St. Catharine's Landing on October 16, 1804, until their return to Natchez, Miss., on January 26, 1805. The "Journal of a geometrical survey" includes a record of course and distances as well as a thermometrical log and other brief notes. The two are bound together in a volume with Zebulon Montgomery Pike's journal of a voyage to the source of the Mississippi, 1805-1806.</p>

The Pike journal documents the expedition to explore the geography of the Mississippi River led by Lt. Zebulon Montgomery Pike in 1805-1806, and his attempts to purchase sites from the Dakota Indians for future military posts, and to bring influential chiefs back to St. Louis for talks. Less a literary masterpiece than a straightforward record in terse military prose, the journal provides a day by day account of the journey and the activities of Pike and his small contingent during this early exploration of present day Minnesota. It was printed with variations and omissions in *An Account of Expeditions to the Sources of the Mississippi and through the Western Parts of Louisiana...* (Philadelphia, 1810), and was edited in Donald Jackson, ed., *The Journals of Zebulon Pike: with Letters and Related Documents* (Norman, Okla., 1966).

**Preferred Citation**

Cite as: William Dunbar, "Journal of a Voyage... to the Mouth of the Red River," American Philosophical Society, *or* William Dunbar, "Journal of a Geometrical Survey... to the Hot Springs," American Philosophical Society, *or* Zebulon Montgomery Pike, "Journal of a voyage to the source of the Mississippi in the years 1805 and 1806," American Philosophical Society..

---

## Background note

---

### William Dunbar

A merchant and cotton planter and one of the great scientific observers of the Old Southwest, William Dunbar led the 1804-1805 expedition to explore the southwestern boundaries of the Louisiana Purchase. With his second in command George Hunter, the Dunbar expedition provided some of the earliest records of the flora and fauna of the Ouachita Mountains as well as the first detailed chemical analyses of the Hot Springs of Arkansas.

Born into a noble family near Elgin, Morayshire, Scotland, in 1749, Dunbar had gained a sound education at Glasgow in science and mathematics before emigrating to North America in 1771. From the moment of his arrival, he threw himself into the mercantile community in Philadelphia, transporting a load of goods he had brought with him from London to Fort Pitt as his first effort at entering the Indian trade. He formed a partnership with the well established Philadelphia merchant John Ross (also a Scot) in 1773 and soon removed to a plantation in West Florida near modern day Baton Rouge to carry their enterprise down the Mississippi and into the Caribbean.

Despite the vicissitudes of war, Dunbar and Ross prospered, and in 1792, they established another plantation, the Forest, southeast of the important port city of Natchez in Spanish West Florida. Using the profits from his cultivation and sale of indigo and cotton, Dunbar was able to buy out his partner by the late 1790s.

Despite all his frenetic activity as a merchant and planter, Dunbar became known for his scientific talents. His agricultural activities in particular were viewed as progressive, involving innovations in the form of plows and harrows, the cotton gin, and other aspects of cotton production, and this reputation, combine with his great wealth, earned him a succession of important positions in the Spanish colonial administration. As Surveyor General for West Florida and a member of the boundary commission in 1798, Dunbar was introduced to the surveyor Andrew Ellicott, and through him, to Thomas Jefferson and much of the rest of the small American scientific establishment. During the later 1790s and early 1800s, Dunbar developed an increasing interest in scientific matters, building a remarkably well equipped astronomical observatory at the Forest, conducting investigations into natural history, Indian languages, and paleontology, among an eclectic range of topics. After gaining election to the American Philosophical Society in 1800, Dunbar contributed a dozen articles to the *Transactions* over the course of a decade.

Following the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, Jefferson conceived of organizing not only the expedition of Lewis and Clark, but a parallel expedition to the southern Mississippi Valley to help delineate the still murky southwestern boundaries of the Purchase. As the most prominent scientist in the Old Southwest, and despite being over 50, Dunbar was the logical choice to lead the expedition, and George Hunter, a Scottish chemist and druggist from Philadelphia, was selected as second in command. Although the Dunbar expedition was originally slated to survey the entire region subtended by the Arkansas and Red River watersheds, friction with the Osage Indians and Spanish colonial officials led Jefferson and Dunbar to curtail the scope to a more manageable foray up the Red River to the Ouachita as far as the Hot Springs.

On October 16, 1804, Dunbar, Hunter, and a party of 15 left St. Catharine's Landing for an expedition that lasted just under three months. Although the scale of the enterprise was less dramatic than that of Lewis and Clark, and the results somewhat more modest, Dunbar and Hunter provided some of the earliest natural historical observations on the region and performed the first detailed chemical analyses of the hot springs.

Scientific pursuits occupied much of the last half decade of Dunbar's life. He remained a minor political and cultural force in the Mississippi Territory as a member of the territorial legislature and in other offices until his death on the twelfth anniversary of the Red River expedition, Oct. 16, 1806.

### **Zebulon Pike**

In a relatively brief military career, Zebulon Montgomery Pike rose to the rank of Brigadier General, led two expeditions into the heart of the western wilderness, was a prisoner of war, a spy, the center of an international incident, and a suspected traitor, all before dying an heroic death at the age of 34 during the War of 1812.

Born in Lambertton, New Jersey, during the American Revolution, Pike enjoyed only a scant education before following his father, Maj. Zebulon Pike, into the military. Enlisting as a cadet at the age of 15 while his father was stationed in Cincinnati, Pike served in a succession of forts on the Ohio frontier, Kentucky, and Illinois, rising through the ranks of the Provisional Army on the strength of a record that was distinguished more by ambition than actual achievement. Although lacking the refinement and erudition of a Meriwether Lewis, he was considered a zealous officer and hard-nosed and disciplined leader.

While serving at St. Louis in 1805, Pike gained the attention of Gen. James Wilkinson and through him, received the opportunity for advancement he was seeking. Spurred in part by the expedition of Lewis and Clark, but without the backing (or knowledge) of the President, the perpetually self-interested Wilkinson selected Lt. Pike to lead a reconnaissance northward to locate the source of the Mississippi River and to collect geographic information about the region. In many ways, the expedition could not have been more poorly planned. Bereft of any semblance of appropriate training for conducting a scientific expedition, Pike set off without even an interpreter or surgeon in his party and with only a limited idea of what he was to accomplish. On August 9, 1805, Pike led 20 soldiers out of St. Louis, ascending the Mississippi as far as the Little Falls in present day Minnesota, where they set in for the winter. Taking a small contingent with him, Pike then headed overland by sled to present day Lake Leech, which he decided (in error) was the source of the Mississippi. After negotiating with the Dakota to purchase 155,000 acres for a military reservation and drawing up a minor treaty with them, he returned to St. Louis, arriving at the end of April 1806.

Not surprisingly, the expedition returned little useful information. None of the Indians with whom Pike parlayed could be convinced to visit St. Louis and the treaty he signed was never actually ratified by Congress. Perhaps the most useful outcome was his simple presence in a region in which British influence was gaining, making the implicit statement that America was finally exerting its territorial claims.

Regardless of the merits of the Mississippi expedition, the scheming Wilkinson immediately convinced Pike to lead a second, more ambitious expedition, to scout the headwaters of the Arkansas and Red Rivers and enter Spanish territory as far west as present day New Mexico. Once again, Wilkinson operated without Jefferson's approval on motives that remain unclear. Whether Wilkinson intended, as some believed, a conspiracy to separate the western territories from the union or, as others insist, to

investigate Spanish territory for the good of the nation, Pike followed orders without question, though he was probably aware that his mission was tantamount to spying. In July 1806, Pike crossed Missouri and Kansas, by late November reaching (but not ascending) the peak that was later named after him in the front range of the Colorado Rockies. The party surveyed the headwaters of the Arkansas River and headed southward, deeper into Spanish territory. Having crossed the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, his party dwindling in number from the hardships of the voyage, a disheveled Pike was taken prisoner by Spanish forces in February 1807. He was released in the early summer and after returning to the east, successfully cleared himself of suspicion for his involvement with the duplicitous Wilkinson. Resuming his military career, Pike enjoyed a succession of promotions culminating in his appointment to Brigadier during the early stages of the War of 1812. He was killed in action leading his troops in the capture of York, Ontario in 1813.

## Scope & content

---

### **William Dunbar Journals**

Both manuscripts by William Dunbar document the expedition up the Red and Ouachita Rivers to the Hot Springs of Arkansas in 1804-1805. The "Journal... to the Mouth of the Red River" (200p.) is the fullest available record of the activities of the expedition from the time of their departure from St. Catharine's Landing on October 16, 1804, until their return to Natchez, Miss., on January 26, 1805. The "Journal of a geometrical survey" includes a record of course and distances as well as a thermometrical log and other brief notes.

Dunbar's journals are counterparts to those of George Hunter (call no. B H912).

### **Zebulon Pike Journal**

The Pike journal documents the expedition to explore the geography of the Mississippi River led by Lt. Zebulon Montgomery Pike in 1805-1806, and his attempts to purchase sites from the Dakota Indians for future military posts, and to bring influential chiefs back to St. Louis for talks. Less a literary masterpiece than a straightforward record in terse military prose, the journal provides a day by day account of the journey and the activities of Pike and his small contingent during this early exploration of present day Minnesota.

The journal was printed with variations and omissions in *An Account of Expeditions to the Sources of the Mississippi and through the Western Parts of Louisiana...* (Philadelphia, 1810), and was edited in Donald Jackson, ed., *The Journals of Zebulon Pike: with Letters and Related Documents* (Norman, Okla., 1966).



## Administrative Information

---

### Publication Information

American Philosophical Society 2003

## Provenance

---

### Acquisition Information

Gift of Daniel Parker, Adjutant General Military District, for the War Department, through Dr. James Cutbush, July 18, 1817.

### Processing Information

Recatalogued by rsc, 2003.

## Related Materials

---

### Related Material

The APS has copies of George Hunter's [Journals for the expedition to the Hot Springs](#), (Mss.B.H912) as well as a contemporary copy of Hunter's [Journal up the Red and Washita Rivers with William Dunbar](#) (Mss.917.6.Ex7).

The bulk of Dunbar's papers are housed in the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, Miss. Additional papers, including his journal of the expedition to the Hot Springs, are housed in the special collections department of the Ouachita Baptist University library.

The APS houses a small collection of papers of [Zebulon Montgomery Pike](#) (Mss.B.P63), consisting of transcripts, photostats, maps, photos, and some original manuscripts collected by W. Eugene Hollon for his biography of Pike, *The Lost Pathfinder* (1949).

## Indexing Terms

---

Genre(s)

- Journals (notebooks)
- Meteorological Data
- Sketchbooks
- Travel Narratives and Journals

### **Geographic Name(s)**

- Arkansas--Description and travel
- Louisiana Purchase--Discovery and exploration
- Louisiana--Description and travel
- Minnesota--Description and travel
- Mississippi River--Description and travel
- Ouachita Mountains Region (Ark. And Okla.)--Discovery and exploration

### **Personal Name(s)**

- Hunter, George, 1755-1824

### **Subject(s)**

- Caddo Indians
- Chickasaw Indians
- Chippewa Indians
- Dakota Indians
- Exploration
- Exploration.
- Hot springs--Arkansas
- Meteorology--Louisiana
- Native America
- Natural history--Louisiana
- Ojibwa Indians
- Osage Indians
- Trade
- Travel

### **Other Finding Aids**

---

The journals are also indexed in the online [Daythal Kendall Guide to Native American Collections at the American Philosophical Society](#) (Freeman and Smith 57, 470, 144, and 2524).

## Other Descriptive Information

---

The William Dunbar expedition journal contains a variety of information on his travel through what would become Arkansas. His writing is lucid and detailed. Dunbar noted meteorological observations and a variety of flora and fauna the expedition encountered, sometimes drawing comparisons to what other naturalists had observed, such as William Bartram in East Florida. He also described encounters with settlers and comments on the geopolitical history of the region. Finally, he chronicles the customs of Native Americans in the area, which are often based on not personal interactions. Notably, George Hunter, the second in command on the expedition, did tend to note interactions with Native peoples. His journal is also held at the APS.

The geometric survey is an example of federally sponsored surveys done to spur American expansion and development. The survey lists various latitudinal calculations made over the course of a day and some observations made at that location.

## Bibliography

---

## Collection Inventory

---

### William Dunbar Journals

---

**Dunbar, William, 1749-1810** 1804 Oct. 16-1805 Jan. 26 200p.

"Journal of a voyage commencing at St. Catherines landing, on the East bank of the Mississippi, proceeding downwards to the mouth of the Red river, and from thence ascending that river, the Black river and the Washita river, as high as the Hot-Springs in the proximity of the last mentioned river"

---

**Dunbar, William, 1749-1810** 1804 Oct. 18-1805 Jan. 17 64p.

"Journal of a Geometrical survey commencing at St. Catherines landing, on the East shore of the Mississippi descending to the mouth of the red river, and from thence ascending that river, the black river and river of the Washita as high as the Hot Springs in the proximity of the last mentioned river"

---

**Zebulon Pike Journal**

---

**Zebulon Pike Journal**

---

**Pike, Zebulon Montgomery, 1779-1813**    1805 August 9-1806 April    149 pages.  
Journal of a voyage to the source of the    30  
Mississippi in the years 1805 and 1806

Bound with Dunbar, Journal of a Voyage and Journal of a Geometrical Survey. This manuscript is apparently a copy made for Pike from his original, and submitted to the War Department. The several printed versions of this journal stem from a different copy of the original. The APS manuscript has both niceties and barbarities of style wholly inconsistent with the editor's comments on the manuscript from which the printed editions were prepared. It is possible that this revision was used by the unknown author of the 1807 abstract.

---