

John Gottlieb Ernestus Heckewelder papers
1800-1847
Mss.B.H35

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Summary Information

Repository	American Philosophical Society
Title	John Gottlieb Ernestus Heckewelder papers
Date [inclusive]	1800-1847
Call number	Mss.B.H35
Extent	0.25 Linear feet 4 Items
Extent	4 photocopied letters.
Location	LH-MV-C-10; LH-SB-Black Case-28 (B H35.4)
Language	English

Background note

John Gottlieb Ernestus Heckewelder (1743-1823) was a missionary of the renewed Unitas Fratrum, or the Moravian Church to the Native American tribes of Ohio. He retired from active missionary service in 1786. In 1792 he was appointed to a U.S. Government commission headed by General Putnam to arrange the Peace Treaty of Vincennes. In 1801 returned to Gnadenh#tten to administer the Indian "estate" on the Muskingum. In 1810, at the request of Caspar Wistar of the American Philosophical Society, Heckewelder recorded his knowledge of Indian life, published as an "Account of the History, Manners, and Customs of the Indian Nations, Who Once Inhabited Pennsylvania and the Neighboring States," that appeared in Transactions of the Historical & Literary Committee of the American Philosophical Society, vol. 1 (1819).

Heckewelder was the son of a Moravian clergyman and native of Moravia, who served the church of the Unitas Fratrum in England. He was born in Bedford, England, and started his education in Moravian schools there, before moving with his parents to Bethlehem, Pennsylvania in 1754. There he finished the last three years of his education at the Moravian Boys' School. Afterward, he was sent to assist in the operation the Economy Farm of the Moravian Brethren at Christian's Spring near Nazareth. He was indentured to a cedar cooper or barrel maker in Bethlehem, although he expressed a strong interest in evangelism and asked that he be allowed to participate in the work of David Zeisberger and Christian Frederick Post, Moravian missionaries to the Indians on the Muskingum River in the Ohio territory. In 1762 he got his chance, when Post asked him to assist with the transfer of several groups of Christian Delawares from the Susquehanna river area to Ohio. Plans for the migration were temporarily suspended by Pontiac's War in 1763, and between 1763-1771 Heckewelder was forced to remain a cooper, only occasionally being dispatched as a messenger to the Indian settlement at Wyalusing, Pennsylvania, as well as other Indian towns along the western Susquehanna.

Heckewelder displayed a remarkable understanding of native American customs and languages, spending hours studying their language, traditions, and legendary history. In 1771 he began regular mission duties for a period of fifteen years, during which he was an assistant to David Zeisberger. He lived among the Moravian Christian Indians, guiding Indian groups from the Susquehanna to the Big Beaver River and beyond to Schoenbrunn and Gnadenh#tten on the Muskingum river in western Pennsylvania. During those years he was constantly on horseback, leading groups of Indians between Bethlehem and Detroit. He served as their "passport" and guide since the notion of Indians as peaceful and God-fearing people was incongruous to many frontier people. Toward the end of the Revolutionary War in 1781, Heckewelder and all of his companions were taken prisoner by a wandering band of Loyalists and Indians, who held them as American spies in Upper Sandusky, Ohio. He was twice summoned to Detroit by the British authorities and arraigned before the English commandant of the post. During his absence from the Ohio territory in 1782, ninety-six Christian Indians at Gnadenh#tten were massacred by white settlers.

In 1780 Heckewelder married Sarah Ohneberg of Nazareth, Pennsylvania. Six years later he retired from active missionary service and moved to Bethlehem, where he continued to be active in church work. However, the new government of the United States soon utilized Heckewelder's expertise with

Indian languages and culture, calling on him as an adviser to the War Department in 1792. Secretary of War Henry Knox asked him to accompany a commission led by General Rufus Putnam to negotiate the Treaty of Vincennes, recognizing American ownership of the Vincennes tract by the Miami Indians. The following year he advised a similar delegation, consisting of General Lincoln, Colonel Pickering and Virginia Governor Beverly Randolph, involved in negotiations with the Iroquois, leading to the Pickering Treaty or the Treaty of Canandaigua. Finally, in 1801 Heckewelder returned to Gnadenhütten, where for nine years he administered the Indian estate on the Muskingum river held in trust for Delaware Indian descendents by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel. By this time most of these Indians had been transferred to Fairfield, Canada through Heckewelder's efforts.

In 1810 Heckewelder and his family returned to Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, where new labors awaited him. Caspar Wistar of the American Philosophical Society, solicited his efforts in recording his knowledge of Indian life. The resulting work, an "Account of the History, Manners, and Customs of the Indian Nations, Who Once Inhabited Pennsylvania and the Neighboring States," appeared in Transactions of the Historical & Literary Committee of the American Philosophical Society, vol. 1 (1819), translated into German and French editions. Heckewelder died in 1823.

Scope & content

This small collection of John Gottlieb Ernestus Heckewelder Papers contains photostatic copies of four letters by Heckewelder and his daughter Johanna Maria [Polly] Heckewelder and a deed to an Indian Estate on the Muskingum river granted to Heckewelder as administrator of the lands held in trust for the Delaware Indian descendents. The earliest document grants to Heckewelder a deed to Indian lands on the Muskingum river in eastern Ohio to administer the lands on behalf of the [Moravian] Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, who holds the land in trust for Delaware Indian descendents. The deed, dated March 28, 1800, was issued in pursuance of an Act of Congress of June 1, 1796. It is signed by President John Adams and Secretary of State Timothy Pickering. Two of the letters in the collection are written in German by John E.G. Heckewelder, one to his daughter Johanna Maria, also called "Polly". The letter dated May 14, 1806 relates the story of an unidentified Shano Indian [from the Detroit area], who has a vision, urging that the witches among his people be burned. At a tribal meeting an Indian named Tetep#ckki is denounced as a witch, and in turn incriminates another man named Josua, who kept poisons for him. They, together with two sisters Kluge and Luckenback were burned. The other two letters, both in English, are Polly Heckewelder's responses to queries from Lyman Copeland Draper of Baltimore. In the April 15, 1847 letter she provides information from her father's papers on several Delaware Indian chiefs about whom Draper had inquired. One chief named King Shingosh is described by Heckewelder as the "greatest Delaware captain" of his day; who during the French and Indian War was such a terror to Pennsylvania frontiersmen, that the governor of Pennsylvania put a price of £200 on his head. She also mentions a certain Captain Pipe, noted for his courage in wars against the English and his strategy to capture Fort Pitt. In another letter to Draper dated September 1, 1848 she says her father's papers make no mention of the murder of the Logan family at Yellow Creek, and that he was not responsible for an article that appeared in the National Gazette, describing the affair. Although she can offer Draper no further assistance, she agrees to lend him a copy of a book entitled *An Enquiry into the causes of the Alienation of the Delaware and Shawnee Indians from the British Interest* by Charles Thomson (London, 1759). No table of contents available The John Heckewelder letter in German to Miss Loskiel dated May 14, 1806 is unlocated 2010.

Administrative Information

Publication Information

American Philosophical Society

Indexing Terms

Genre(s)

- Diaries
- Language Material
- Native American Materials
- Oral History

Subject(s)

- Language and Linguistics
- Native America

Other Descriptive Information

The John Heckewelder Collection consists of an assortment of documents, almost all of which deal with Native Americans. Heckewelder was a Moravian missionary to Delaware Indians in Pennsylvania who was a prominent figure in nineteenth century intellectual circles. The primary focus of the collection is on his attempt to preserve Native American languages, especially those of the Lenni Lenape (Delaware) in Pennsylvania. His correspondence and one publication also chronicle Native American history, customs, and life. Heckewelder also kept a meteorological journal while on his mission to Gnadenhutten, Pennsylvania from 1802-1814, which is part of the collection. Much of the collection comes from Heckewelder's correspondence with the APS and its prominent member and linguist Stephen Du Ponceau.

Summary of Collection: There are many content rich sources in the collection. Heckewelder's "Communications to the Historical and Literary Committee" is a 187-page bound volume of correspondence that includes responses to queries on Indian history, his own observations of Native culture, and records of Native American oral histories as conveyed to Heckewelder ([970.1 H35c](#)). The record provides insight in Native American history, white understanding of Native cultures, and oral

traditions in the early nineteenth century. Among the oral histories Heckewelder records is a contact story, the history of the “emigration” of the Lenni Lenape from the west, and origins stories of other Native groups as related by the Delaware.

The collection also contains his extensive correspondence with Peter Du Ponceau on Indian culture and language ([497.3 H35o](#)). The content of these letters add additional details that were not included in his publications or other writings.

Also of significance are his notes on the names that the Lenni Lenape called areas of the Mid-Atlantic that also contain a list of important Indian leaders ([497.3 H35n](#)). These brief biographical sketches are based on details provided by Indians or Heckewelder’s own interactions with them.

Finally, remaining portions of the Heckewelder Collection contain detailed meteorological data for Gnadenhutten ([551.5 H352](#)) and other language data.

Collection Inventory

Papers

Adams, John, 1735-1826

March 28, 1800

11x14-1/2

B H35.4 Deed issued to John Heckewelder
for grant of land

Photostat of printed D.filled in in ms.S.: John Adams, president and Timothy Pickering, Sec. of State.
1p. and end.

**Heckewelder, John Gottlieb Ernestus,
1743-1823**

May 14, 1806

Letter to [Johanna Maria] Polly
[Heckewelder]

Gnadenhütten, Photostat of A.L.S. 3p. In German. (from original in Darlington Library, University of
Pittsburgh.) Outburst among Shawano Indians against witches.

Heckewelder, Johanna Maria

April 15, 1847

Letter to Lyman C[opeland] Draper,
Baltimore

Photostat of A.L.S. 4p.,add.,end. (from original in Wisconsin historical society.) Concerning certain
Indian chiefs, as noted and discussed in her father's papers

Heckewelder, Johanna Maria

Sept. 1, 1848

Letter to [Lyman Copeland Draper]

Bethlehem, Photostat of A.L.S. 1p. (from original in Wisconsin historical society.) Concerning
information pertaining to an Indian outrage which is lacking in her father's papers. Concerning some
of his books.
