

**James Hutchinson diary, February
26, 1777 - March 16, 1777
February 26-March 16
Mss.B.H97d.1**

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Summary Information

Repository	American Philosophical Society
Creator	Hutchinson, James, 1752-1793
Title	James Hutchinson diary, February 26, 1777 - March 16, 1777
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Abstract	This incomplete, partially mutilated item forms the conclusion of James Hutchinson's diary, recording a mid-winter Atlantic crossing from Europe to America.

Background note

James Hutchinson (1752-1793, APS 1779). Physician and a surgeon, Surgeon General of Pennsylvania, 1778-1784, born in Makefield Township, Bucks County, Pennsylvania. Hutchinson was the son of Quaker farmer and stonemason Randall Hutchinson and his wife Katherine Milnor. In 1771 at the age of fifteen, Hutchinson was apprenticed to the apothecaries Moses Bartram (1732-1809, APS 1766) and Isaac Bartram (1725-1801, APS 1759). He became the pupil of Philadelphia physician Cadwalader Evans. He served as apothecary of the Pennsylvania Hospital (1773-1775) and earned a bachelor's degree in Medicine from the College of Philadelphia. In 1776 he completed a twelve-month residency in London under John Fothergill at St. Bartholomew's Hospital, preparing for a surgical career. After the outbreak of the American War of Independence, Hutchinson returned home in early 1777 via France, carrying dispatches from Benjamin Franklin to the Continental Congress. He was elected a physician at the Pennsylvania Hospital in May 1777. Hutchinson tended the wounded soldiers from the battle of Germantown and inoculated more than 3,000 soldiers at Valley Forge against smallpox. He was an original member of the Philadelphia Medical Society and a trustee of the University of the State of Pennsylvania after 1779. Hutchinson founded the Philadelphia College of Physicians in 1787. He was elected a member of the American Philosophical Society in 1779, and served as Secretary from 1782-1793.

Although a member of the Society of Friends, the American War of Independence caused Hutchinson to question Quaker pacifist convictions. The twenty-three year old medical student wrote in December 1775, "I have too great an affection for my Country not to feel its distresses." For his efforts caring for Continental troops, Hutchinson was named senior surgeon of the Flying Camp of the Middle Department of the Continental Army on December 1, 1777 and appointed surgeon of the Pennsylvania State Navy in 1778. He was also disowned by the Society of Friends on February 26, 1779 for quasi-military service.

Hutchinson's sense of civic duty advanced in tandem with his professional stature. In 1779 he was reappointed to the staff of the Pennsylvania Hospital, where he specialized in surgery and obstetrics. He was also appointed one of the Port of Philadelphia's quarantine physicians. After establishing the College of Physicians of Philadelphia in 1787, he served first as secretary, then as censor, responsible for maintaining ethical standards and professional conduct among the city's doctors. As a trustee of the University of the State of Pennsylvania, he worked to revive medical education, and taught chemistry and material medica there after 1789. Later he became professor of Chemistry at the University of Pennsylvania, created by the union of the old College of Philadelphia and the University of the State of Pennsylvania. Meanwhile, Hutchinson, motivated by a sense of civic responsibility and revolutionary fervor became increasingly active in politics. In 1780, he served briefly in the Pennsylvania Assembly, although he soon decided that he was not interested in being an elected official. An anti-Federalist, Hutchinson was a strong supporter of Thomas Jefferson (1743-1825, APS 1780) and the founder of the Pennsylvania Democratic Society in 1793. He wrote lampoons and letters for the press, corresponded with other Democrats and kept abreast of Federalist schemes. He also served on a committee that received the French ambassador Edmond Charles Genet, who sought to galvanize American opinion in support of the French revolutionary government and against Great Britain.

Ultimately, Hutchinson's sense for responsibility for his fellow citizens was manifest as Hutchinson moved among his patients during the Yellow Fever epidemic of 1793. He caught the contagion on August 30, and died one week later. His death focused public debate, led by Benjamin Rush on the cause and treatment of Yellow fever.

Hutchinson was twice married, first to Lydia Biddle in 1779 and then to Sydney Howell in 1786. He and Howell had two sons, and a daughter, who died in infancy.

Scope & content

This incomplete, partially mutilated item forms the conclusion of Hutchinson's 1777 diary recording a mid-winter Atlantic crossing from Europe to America, after completing a 12-month medical residency at St. Bartholomew's Hospital in London under Dr. John Fothergill. The very detailed diary entries, covering a scant three weeks, graphically describe circumstances Hutchinson characteristically understates as "a very disagreeable situation." Pinpointing the ship's position on February 26 as Latitude 33° 30', he says the winds blew incessantly in storms from the northwest, forcing the ship southward in an effort to escape an eastward drift. Because of the presence of large quantities of gun powder on board the crew and passengers feared the consequences of a lightning strike. In a February 28th entry he reports that the bread rations had grown scarce with the sailors drawing the larger portion of progressively diminishing reserves over the next several weeks. Meat rations of beef and pork were likewise nearly expended and what remained was "much tainted, very offensive, and full of worms." Hutchinson blames the ship's inadequate provisions to poor leadership, since the captain suffered from poor health and "the care of the ship's stores" fell to an officer ("second in command"), who was "either too lazy, or too ignorant, to make sufficient provision for so precarious a passage." In a March 3rd entry Hutchinson reports an encounter with a Boston schooner, as well as "two other Vessels, one of them a Sloop, that appeared to be outward bound." Despite their sending distress signals, the schooner "fled at first sight, as almost every other Vessel, that we met with." Then, at 9 o'Clock in the morning they saw "a Brig at a considerable distance" that they wished to approach for assistance, since the seas had now calmed. To this end the ship sent out a party in a row boat, consisting of the first mate, one of the best sailors and his fellow surgeon Dr. Williamson. What they discovered was a French brig from Martinique bound for Philadelphia "in almost as bad a situation as ourselves, but able to spare several bottles of spirits and roughly two pounds of cheese." Hutchinson's next entry on March 9th reports more favorable conditions at sea with a breeze from the southwest that filled the upper sails. By 11 o'Clock they saw land, "a most pleasing sight to every Soul on board." Having determined that the land they spotted to be the southern cape of Virginia, they aimed for the Chesapeake Bay. The next day, he says, they approached a schooner with a "Continental Ensign at the Topmast head." Upon identifying themselves as American, sailors from the schooner called the Wasp boarded the ship. Afterward, he says that the ship's captain John Baldwin fed them a sumptuous feast of French Pork and turnips, a Meats Tongue and Potatoes, with Plumb pudding. The remainder of Hutchinson's diary is taken up with a description of his trip back to Philadelphia in the company of Dr. Williamson with the assistance of Captain Baldwin. No Table of Contents available

Administrative Information

Publication Information

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Provenance

Acquisition Information

Received and accessioned, 1900.

Related Materials

Related Material

APS also possesses the [James Hutchinson Papers \(Ms.B.H97p\)](#), which detail this prominent Philadelphian's medical education and life. The collection includes records of Hutchinson's formal education, lectures he either attended or delivered, and his travels throughout London to advance his career. It also contains documents from the American Revolution, which provide interesting commentary on events happening in Philadelphia and how the Revolution affected Quakers.

Indexing Terms

Genre(s)

- Diaries
- Diaries.
- Manuscript Essays
- Travel Narratives and Journals

Subject(s)

- American Revolution

- Americans Abroad
- International Travel
- Religion
- Voyages and travels.

Other Descriptive Information

This diary contains the journal James Hutchinson kept during his trans-Atlantic passage from England to America in 1777. The back of the journal includes an essay defending the attacks on Quakers by revolutionaries. The essay, signed "A Friend to the Liberty of Conscience," appears to have been intended for publication, although it is not clear if it ever was published.

Other Descriptive Information

This item is printed in William Bell Clark, ed., "A fragment of history," *Minute Man: Sons of the Revolution in the State of Illinois*, v. 39-40(1949-1950).