

Archives and Special Collections

Dickinson College

Carlisle, PA

COLLECTION REGISTER

Name: **Armstrong, John (1717-1795)** **MC 2001.4**

Material: Business papers (1755-1783)

Volume: 0.25 linear feet (1 Document Box)

Donation: Gift of Boyd Lee Spahr

Usage: These materials have been donated without restrictions on usage.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

John Armstrong was born in Brookborough Parish, County Fermanagh in Ireland on October 13, 1717. Little is known about his early life in Ireland other than that his father was James Armstrong of Terwinney and his mother Mary Campbell. According to Raymond Bell (class of 1928) his brothers and sisters numbered ten. It is not known exactly when Armstrong came to America, but he was married to his cousin, the twenty-seven-year-old widow Rebecca Armstrong Lyon, probably in New Castle (present Delaware) in 1746. Rebecca was the daughter of Archibald Armstrong, who had emigrated to New Castle from Aghalurcher Parish, only thirteen miles from Armstrong's childhood home. After a year or two in the Marsh Creek area of Lancaster County, during which time their first son, James, was born, the couple moved to Carlisle in the newly formed county of Cumberland. With William Lyon, Armstrong surveyed the site of the community of Carlisle in 1751.

The escalation of the Seven Years' War saw Armstrong commissioned as a captain in the Pennsylvania militia forces (January 1756) and then promoted to lieutenant colonel the following May. In late August of that year, he led a force of 300 men against Kittanning, a stronghold of the Delaware tribe on the Allegheny River. On September 8, 1756, Armstrong's forces were victorious in seizing the town. Although Armstrong was wounded, he received commendations and promptly became known as "the hero of Kittanning." In 1758, Armstrong served the Forbes Expedition as commander of the Pennsylvania militia battalions, and with Colonel Henry Bouquet and Colonel Washington, under John Forbes, took possession of the abandoned Fort DuQuesne that November. He then resumed his career as a surveyor, being reappointed deputy-surveyor to Cumberland County in 1762 and establishing an office in Carlisle. Most of his records were lost in the fire which ravaged his office in 1763 [?].

During the years 1763-64, Armstrong participated in the resistance to the Ottawa Chief Pontiac in the Indian uprising. He also served as a justice of the peace for Cumberland County.

In 1774, Armstrong was appointed to the County's Committee of Correspondence along with young James Wilson, John Montgomery, and other prominent men of Carlisle, who were protesting the injustices of King George and helping to foment the Revolution. On February 29, 1776, Armstrong was the first of the six brigadier generals commissioned by the Continental Congress. He participated in the battle of Charleston, and then as the commander of the Pennsylvania militia forces with rank eventually as Major General, in the battles of the Brandywine, Germantown, and Whitemarsh.

Armstrong was elected to the Continental Congress as a delegate from Pennsylvania for the term 1778 and again for the term 1779. He was a longtime elder in the First Presbyterian Church of Carlisle, and also a board member of the Carlisle Grammar School from its inception in 1773. When Dr. Benjamin Rush first proposed a college for Carlisle, Armstrong at first withheld his support, but he later became one of its prime advocates and served as President pro tem of the Board of Trustees for nine years. During those years he was a strong advocate for Dr. Charles Nisbet.

Armstrong and his wife Rebecca had two sons, James, who became a physician, and John, Jr., who served as Minister to France and Secretary of War. The "Old General" John Armstrong, in failing health for many years, died in Carlisle on March 9, 1795. He is interred in the Old Graveyard.

John Lukens (1720?-1789) served as Surveyor-General of Pennsylvania and Delaware, 1761-1776, and of Pennsylvania, 1781-1789. He was born to Peter and Gaynor Lukens around 1720. He married his cousin Sarah Lukens (b. 1720?) in 1741, and they had seven children, two of whom, Charles and Jesse, would work with their father as deputy-surveyors. Lukens co-founded the Hatsborough Library in 1755. He was appointed Surveyor-General of Pennsylvania in 1761 by Proprietors Thomas and Richard Penn, serving in that post until the Land Office of the Province was forced to close down due to the war. Lukens retired to Lancaster until 1781 when he was elected by the General Assembly to serve again in the position of Surveyor-General in the newly reopened office. He was re-elected after his first five-year term and served in that post until his death in 1789.

COLLECTION DESCRIPTION

The John Armstrong Business Papers are housed in one document box and are divided into three basic categories: Business Materials, Correspondence, and Survey Maps. The papers were donated by Boyd Lee Spahr, Dickinson College Class of 1900 and President of the Board of Trustees for over thirty years. The papers reflect John Armstrong's service as a surveyor in Cumberland County between 1755 and 1783.

The Business Materials section contains miscellaneous documents regarding Armstrong's business as a surveyor. Items in this section include a bond made by Armstrong upon his appointment as deputy-surveyor on April 22, 1762, four lists comprised of names of survey returns conducted by Armstrong between 1762 and 1781, a complaint against a survey conducted by Armstrong, and a land release to George Armstrong (John's brother). These items have been arranged chronologically.

The Correspondence section is comprised mainly of business correspondence sent and received by John Armstrong and John Lukens, who, as Surveyor-General for the Proprietors of Pennsylvania, served as Armstrong's supervisor. Additional letters include numerous complaints to Lukens from Armstrong's clients regarding surveys taken of their lands, and instructions to

Armstrong from Thomas and Richard Penn, the Proprietors. The letters are divided according to those sent and received, and then arranged chronologically.

The Survey Maps section contains survey maps drawn by Armstrong for plots of land, most likely in the Cumberland County. These maps have been arranged chronologically.

COLLECTION INVENTORY

BOX 1 - MC 2001.4

BUSINESS MATERIALS

Armstrong, John

- Folder 01) Four lists comprised of names of survey returns – 1762-1781
Bond made by Armstrong on being named deputy-surveyor of
Cumberland County – April 22, 1762
- Folder 02) Complaints of William Beale and John Fitzgarrel against William
Lyon and John Armstrong – Oct. 3, 1763

Tea, Richard

- Folder 03) Release to George Armstrong for land on Juniata River – Oct. 1, 1763

CORRESPONDENCE

Armstrong, John

Letters Sent

- Folder 04) To John Lukens – Feb. 4, 1762
To John Lukens – June 10, 1762
To William Peters (in response to James Potter) – Sept. 7, 1762
To Jesse Lukens – Feb. 9, 1767
To John Lukens – Mar. 27, 1769
- Folder 05) To John Lukens – Aug. 29, 1770
To John Lukens – June 8, 1772
To John Lukens – Nov. 18, 1772
To John Lukens – Mar. 8, 1783
To John Lukens – June 23, 1783

Letters Received

- Folder 06) From Thomas and Richard Penn – undated

Lukens, John

Letters Sent

- Folder 07) To John Armstrong – Jan. 3, 1763
To John Armstrong – Oct. 3, 1781
To John Armstrong – Feb. 12, 1783

Letters Received

- Folder 08) From James Kyle – June 6, 1763
From John Fitzgerald – June 20, 1764
From Joseph Greenwood – Oct. 22, 1764
From Fra West – Nov. 8, 1764

BOX 1 - MC 2001.4 (cont.)

CORRESPONDENCE (cont.)

Lukens, John (cont.)

Letters Received (cont.)

Folder 09) From Samuel Moorehead – Mar. 17, 1765
From Samuel Finley – Mar. 20, 1765
From John Cunningham – July 17, 1765
From Richard Nicholson – Oct. 30, 1765

SURVEY MAPS

Folder 10)

Sketch of lot between Summer Hills and Blue Mountain in Cumberland County – undated
Sketch and description of Barnaby Barnes' lot on Buffler Creek in Cumberland County – June 14, 1755
Sketch and description of William Beale's lot in Lake township, Cumberland County – Mar. 14, 1764
Sketch of John Armstrong's lot on the Letort Spring near Carlisle, Cumberland County – Nov. 1771

This collection register was prepared by Michele M. Tourney, February 2001.