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# JOURNALS OF ROBERT ROGERS OF THE RANGERS

*(19)*

**Robert Rogers**

# **Journals of Robert Rogers of the Rangers**

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# INTRODUCTION.

**FRANKLIN B. HOUGH.**

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The Journals of Major Robert Rogers, giving the details of his services as a partizan officer in the French and Indian war of 1755-60, have been very generally regarded as forming a work of unquestionable historical value. The volume does not profess to be in any sense, a general history of the events of that war, nor a connected account of the military operations of a particular frontier; but simply a narrative of what he himself saw and did, with here and there a brief allusion to the doings of others, where they seemed in some way to have had relation to his own. Being evidently written with a view of promoting his own military reputation, as he may have doubtless felt that he deserved, it would be surprising if he had been uniformly as fair in his account of others as of himself, or if his narratives were in all respects such as another, as well acquainted with every fact and circumstance, and without personal motives, would have written. An author in describing his own acts, does not naturally seek to expose his own errors, nor always to conceal those of others; nor can we expect, in scenes and circumstances like those which our author describes, that no jealousies, or rivalries, or disappointments were encountered, that might sometimes influence his conduct, and show themselves in his writings. Such, upon several occasions, will be noticed by the careful reader of his

Journals nor should they be regarded as exceptional, in publications of this class, where the exploits of the written form the principal theme.

The general tenor of the narrative, and details in abundance, are however well verified by independent authorities, and justify the belief that the accounts of services here given, are in the main reliable, and that the work fairly presents the condition of affairs, as they existed, and the events, as they occurred, in the time and manner described.

The incidents in the early life of this partizan soldier, are for the most part lost; but from his own statement, the rude and rugged hardships of a frontier settlement, were of such a character that he could hardly avoid gaining a thorough practical knowledge of the manners, customs and language of the Indians hear whom he was reared, and a general acquaintance with the wild and hardy forest life of the pioneers. He mentions the twelve years that immediately preceded the war in which he served, as full of hardships, and particularly well calculated to qualify him for the arduous duties of the service in which he engaged.

Of the ancestry of this celebrated Ranger we have few details. He was the son of James Rogers' originally from Ireland, or of Irish descent, and one of the first settlers of Dunbarton, now in Merrimack county, New Hampshire, first known as "Starks-Town." The settlement of this town began some years before 1746, but at what time cannot now be ascertained. Robert Rogers was born in Londonderry, N. H., (or Methuen Mass.), in 1727, and was probably fourteen or fifteen years of age, when his father began a settlement in

the wilderness. From his youth, he was inured to the hardships of the frontier, acquiring that character of decision, self-reliance and boldness, which distinguished him in after life. He was six feet in stature, well proportioned, and one of the most athletic men of his time, well known in all the trials of strength and activity among the young men of his vicinity, and for several miles around.

Of his entrance into the military service, at the age of twenty-eight years, and his perilous adventures until the final surrender of the French posts in the West, ample details are given, mostly from his own pen, in the following pages. His name and fame appear to have become familiar throughout the country, and in both armies; and in a military point of view, his services must be regarded as of the first importance to the British cause. The brutal warfare of his day, resulting from a century of murderous invasion and vindictive reprisal, had grafted upon the system every custom that was horrid and barbarous. Each of the nationalities then contending for the mastery of the Continent, had brought to its aid the cunning and cruel Savage; had taught him the use of arms more destructive than his native weapons, and had stimulated his passions by every art and motive, until humanity to the wounded, or mercy to the captive were unknown; and if the prisoner escaped the scalping knife and the stake, he was led off into a captivity often worse than death.

Through scenes of peril and danger which threatened every step, our partizan soldier passed without serious harm; but we can scarcely believe that the attractions of home, or the ease of private life, had many charms for him,

when the war was over, and not an enemy could be found throughout the length and breadth of the Continent, which the winning Government found it necessary to repress.

Nor is there room for doubt, but that amidst the scenes of bloodshed of which he witnessed so much, and took so active a part, the finer sensibilities of humanity were lost in moments when expediency or policy dictated to the contrary; for in the reports made immediately upon his return from a scout, we find it mentioned, that he had scalped the dead within sight of a French garrison, and murdered a prisoner when too badly wounded to march.

Major Rogers married, but at what period is unknown, a Miss Elizabeth Browne, or as some accounts give it, Elizabeth Furness, of Portsmouth. She obtained a divorce, and afterwards married Capt. John Roche, or Roach of Concord.

In the troubled times which preceded and attended the siege of Detroit, by Pontiac, in 1763, Major Rogers was sent with a body of troops to the relief of that garrison, and he assisted in the sortie upon the occasion that Captain Dalyel was killed.

After the surrender of the western posts, Rogers engaged in an expedition against the Cherokees in the south under the orders of General Grant, but no details of this enterprise, have come to our notice: and on leaving the service he was retired upon half pay. His accounts appear to have been embarrassed from want of vouchers, so that it was not until 1763, that he secured a settlement with the Provincial Government of New Hampshire, for services rendered eight years before. The trouble that he encountered in adjusting

these claims, appears to have arisen from a negligent habit in the keeping of accounts, and probably in some degree from the death of persons whose living testimony would have sustained his claims.

Not long after this, Rogers went to England, to present his claims for accounts, and while there, published the work which we now reproduce. The title-page of the original edition shows that it was printed for the author, probably on subscription, and in the same year another work, — with still the promise of a continuation, which, so far as we can ascertain, never appeared.

The other work published by Major Rogers in London in 1765, have the following title:

“A Concise Account of North America; containing a Description of the several British Colonies on that Continent, including the Island of Newfoundland, Cape Breton, &c., as to their Situation, Extent, Climate, Soil, Produce, Rise, Government, Religion, present Boundaries, and the number of Inhabitants supposed to be in each. Also of the Interior, or westerly Parts of the Country, upon the Rivers St. Lawrence, the Mississippi, Christino, and the Great Lakes. To which is subjoined, an Account of the several Nations and Tribes of Indians residing in those Parts, as to their Customs, Manners, Government, numbers, etc. Containing many useful and entertaining Facts, never before treated of. By Major Robert Rogers, London: Printed for the Author, and sold by J. Millan, Bookseller, near Whitehall. MDCCCLXV, 8vo, pp. 264.”

In the first of these publications, the author announced his intentions of publishing an account of his travels into the



Cherokee country and the Southern Indians; of his second tour into the interior country, upon the Great Lakes; and of the Indian wars in America since the year 1760; together with correct plans of all the British posts upon the continent. In the second, of the above noticed publications, he proposed to issue a volume containing maps of the several colonies, and of the interior country of North America, "more correct, and easier to be understood than any yet published." The price of each, was to be an English guinea, but so far as we are informed, nothing further of this nature appeared under his name, relating to American affairs.

Major Rogers, in 1766, was appointed Commandant at Michilimackinac, which after the conquest of Canada had become the most important military and trading post in the interior.

From its fine location, it naturally intercepted the trade of all the country beyond it to the west and northwest, and as there was no Commissary in special charge of the trade, at the time he received his appointment, the office of Commandant was one of great responsibility, as one also of rare opportunity, which he lost no time in turning to his own advantage. In short, we find him incurring expenses without authority, drawing orders upon the Government which went to protest for non-payment, and falling under charges of a design to plunder the Fort he commanded, and then desert to the French in New Orleans.

He was arrested, and brought a prisoner to Montreal, but managed to acquit himself of these charges, and in 1769 again went to England, where he was presented to the King.

Major Rogers remained abroad on this second occasion until the summer of 1775, and from one of his letters, we learn that he was for a time in the Algerine service. He appears to have become attached to the soldier's profession, in which he had had so long an experience, and for which, on outpost duty and occasions requiring prompt decision, courage and endurance, he had shown himself eminently well fitted.

He was now approaching the age of fifty years — a period of life at which the judgment matured by experience operates with clearness, and the physical powers are with many still capable of great achievement. During his six year's absence, his native country had been steadily preparing for the crisis of the Revolution; and although absent, we may well believe, he could not have been indifferent, as to the tendencies of the times, and the probabilities of a conflict, in which military experience would be sought and valued, and ample opportunities afforded for promotion and reward.

As to his preferences at this time, we have no indication. His long association with military men and affairs, might have naturally predisposed him to regard the Royal cause as the one of right, as well as the one of power, and his long separation from family and friends of early life, may have failed to inspire him with the patriotic impulses then filling the country with enthusiasm, and hastening it to organized rebellion.

Under all the circumstances of his case, the fact that he was a retired half pay officer of the British army, that he had for many years taken no interest in American civil affairs,

and perhaps, the knowledge of his transactions at Michilimackinac, appear to have led his countrymen to distrust him, before he had declared his preference, and possibly before he had formed his own opinions.

Under these suspicions, some regarded him as an enemy in disguise, and even serving as a spy, while others looked upon him as a mercenary soldier, ready to accept the highest bid from either party, and with no principles that would deter him from selling out his opportunities, if it could be done with probable success.

At any event, his conduct was not such as to invite confidence, from the time of his first arrival in the country, until his preferences were publicly declared. We find him wandering about the country, without visible employment, or plausible pretext, — associating with suspected persons, and visiting places of doubtful reputation, — arrested time and again on suspicion, and giving his parol under oath, to which he paid no regard, — and finally when confined, escaping to the British lines, and openly accepting a commission as a partizan officer in the Royal cause. It is now known, that long before this decision was openly avowed, he had tendered his service to both parties; and that before he in writing to General Washington said, “I love North America; it is my native country, and that of my family, and I intend to spend the evening of my days in it,” he had pledged the wealth of his talent for inroad and destruction, to the commander-in-chief of the British army, and had been promised His Majesty’s future favor.

His services as a loyalist, were short and inglorious. He was commissioned with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel

Commandant, to raise a partizan corps to be known as the Queen's Rangers; but on the 21st of October, 1776, his party was surprised at Mamoranec, near Long Island Sound, a part were captured, and Rogers himself barely escaped, in the confusion of the encounter. Not long after this, he returned to England, where he died about the year 1800. He is said to have lived a wild, improvident and extravagant life, and to have been the victim of bad habits.

Major Rogers was banished from the State by an Act of the New Hampshire Legislature, in November, 1778, but his estate was not confiscated, as was the case of many others.

His son Arthur Rogers, lived with his mother many years upon the family farm near Concord, and died in Portsmouth, N. H., in 1841, leaving three children of respectable standing, in San Domingo.

Long after the death of Major Rogers, some correspondence passed among those who were seeking to learn, and who were willing to inform, concerning his standing and character in the community where he had lived. We cheerfully present this tribute of friendship, from one whose good opinion might well be prized, as tending to show that the wild and rugged traits in the character of this partizan soldier, were relieved by traces of softer tone; and that among those who had no words of approval for the final course of his military career, his memory still retained the sympathies of a friend.

Concord, July 16, 1842.

Dear Sir: I have made some inquiry respecting Major R. Rogers, and among our oldest inhabitants I find but one

opinion, respecting his character, and that is fully expressed in the note enclosed to me and transmitted herewith to you from Govenor Hill.

Mr. Hill has perhaps a better knowledge of Major Roger's character, as an officer, than any other person here; he has been prompted by reasons which could not have operated on others.

Respectfully, your Obedient Servant,

Robert A. Davis.

Mr. Charles Coffin, N. Y. City.

"Gen. Robert Davis.

My Dear Sir: I have this moment read Mr. Coffin's letter addressed to you, requesting information in relation to the character of the late Maj. Robert Rogers. Having recently had occasion to make inquiries relative to his early history, I find nothing in the region of his birth, that goes at all to discredit him. One of the last of his blood relations in this vicinity who personally remembered him, a lady, died about a year ago. From her mouth, through Mark Burnham, Esq., a native of the same town with Rogers, I derived the information that all the family were proud of his name, and were reluctant to associate it with a reputation that was not entirely unsullied. Maj. Rogers never resided in this State permanently after the commencement of the Revolutionary war. He was in the British service in Canada, after the close of the old French war, partly in a military and partly in a civil capacity. The only child bearing his name was several years under my care as a guardian. This circumstance, among

others, has led me more particularly to mark the character of the celebrated warrior. I consider him to have been one of the most talented men of the country — perhaps the best partizan officer this country ever produced. I believe him to have been the author of that perfect mode of attack and defence which enabled a hundred of the Rangers to do more service than thousands of the British regulars, especially in the winter service of the old war of 1756.

Such safety to troops on fatigue, amid the severest seasons of a sever climate, was never before secured.

Such certainty in the results, either on the advance or retreat, perhaps has never realised by any other force than the Rangers, under the perfect arrangement and discipline invented by Rogers, I consider him to have been as great a man in his peculiar sphere, as Napoleon Bonaparte, and for decision and firmness equal to Andrew Jackson.

Yours truly  
Isaac Hill.”

# THE AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION.

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It would be offering an affront to the public should I pretend to have no private views in publishing the following journals; but they will excuse me if I leave them to conjecture what my particular views are and claim the merit of impartially relating matters of fact without disguise or equivocation. Most of those which relate to myself can at present be attested by living witnesses.

And should the troubles in America be renewed and the savages repeat those scenes of barbarity they so often have acted on the British subjects, which there is great reason to believe will happen, I flatter myself that such as are immediately concerned may reap some advantage from these pages.

Should any one take offense at what they may here meet with, before they venture upon exhibiting a charge, they are desired in favour to themselves to consider that I am in a situation where they cannot attack me to their own advantage; that it is the soldier not the scholar that writes; and that many things here were written not with silence and leisure but in forests, on rocks and mountains, amidst the hurries, disorders, and noise of war, and under that depression of spirits which is the natural consequence of exhausting fatigue. This was my situation when the following journals or accounts were transmitted to the generals and commanders I acted under, which I am not

now at liberty to correct except in some very gross and palpable errors.

It would perhaps gratify the curious to have a particular account of my life preceding the war; but tho' I could easily indulge them herein, without any dishonour to myself, yet I beg they will be content with my relating only such circumstances and occurrences as led me to a knowledge of many parts of the country and tended in some measure to qualify me for the service I have since been employed in. Such in particular was the situation of the place in which I received my early education, a frontier town in the province of New Hampshire, where I could hardly avoid obtaining some knowledge of the manners, customs, and language of the Indians as many of them resided in the neighbourhood and daily convened and dealt with the English.

Between the years 1748 and 1755 my manner of life was such as led me to a general acquaintance both with the British and French settlements in North America and especially with the uncultivated wilderness, the mountains, valleys, rivers, lakes, and several passes that lay between and contiguous to the said settlements. Nor did I content myself with the accounts I received from Indians or the information of hunters but travelled over large tracts of the country myself, which tended not more to gratify my curiosity than to inure me to hardships and, without vanity I may say, to qualify me for the very service I have since been employed in.

About this time the proceedings of the French in America were such as excited the jealousy of the English especially in New York and New England; and as Crown Point was the



place from which for many years the Indians in the French interest had been fitted out against our settlements on the frontiers, a design was formed in the beginning of 1755 to dispossess them of that post; pursuant to which troops were levied in the several provinces of New England, New York, and New Jersey. The general rendezvous was appointed at Albany in the province of New York and the troops put under the command of Major General (since Sir William) Johnson. I had the honour of commanding a company in the troops furnished by the province of New Hampshire, with which I made several excursions, pursuant to special orders from the governor of that province, on the northern and western frontiers with a view to deter the French and their Indians from making inroads upon us that way. In this manner I was employed till the month of July when I received orders to repair to Albany at which place I tarried till August 26th and was then ordered with 100 men to escort the provision wagons from thence to the Carrying Place, then so called, since Fort Edward. Here I waited upon the General to whom I was recommended as a person well acquainted with the haunts and passes of the enemy and the Indian method of fighting, and was by him dispatched with small parties on several tours towards the French posts, and was on one of these up the Hudson River on the 8th of September when Baron Dieskau was made prisoner and the French and Indians under his command defeated at the south end of Lake George.

The 24th of September I received orders from the General to proceed with four men to Crown Point and, if practicable, to bring a prisoner from thence; and with an

account of the manner in which I executed these orders I shall begin my JOURNALS.