

Meigs Journal: Summary of different versions

Chronological Order of Published Return J. Meigs Journals

1. 1776 Original Manuscript Journal written by Meigs. Not Found.
2. "A Journal of Occurrences..." By Major Ret. J. Meigs. Paper wraps. Harvard Library. Ink note 1775 No. 12.
3. London Magazine. Sept , 1776 some nine months after the manuscript journal ends- no other published journal is exactly the same as this one. Sept 9-Jan 1
4. Edinburg Evening Courant. Nov 16 & 18, 1776, eleven months after the manuscript journal ends- slight differences from London Mag. Sept 9- Jan 1.
5. Almon Remembrancer. Dec 1776. Different than the three previous journals . Sept 9-Nov 20.
6. Naval & Military Memoirs, Beatson. 1804. Same as Almon. Sept 9-Nov 20.
7. Mass Historical Society. 1814. Different from any of the previous journals. Sept 9- Jan 1.
8. Bushnell, Crumbs for Antiquarians. 1864. Book. Includes __ journals from ____ . The Meigs journal here is identical to the MHS journal. Sept 9 - Jan 1.
9. Bushnell, Journal Meigs Under Command of Col. Benedict Arnold... . New York, 1864. Same as Crumbs but is a very rare stand alone edition of just the Meigs journal.
10. Quebec Literary & Hist Soc. 1876. Different from any published journal. Nov 19-Dec 30.
11. Winchester, VA. Hist Soc Papers. 1921. Different from any previously published journal. Sept 17- Jan 1
12. Kenneth Roberts, March to Quebec. Book. 1938. Same as MHS and Bushnell journals. Sept 9-Jan 1.
13. Richard Mason, The Quiet Patriot. Book. 2010. Same as Winchester, VA.

One interesting fact that immediately stands out in the above listing is the proximity of the journal published in the London Magazine to January 1, 1776, the date the journal ends. Meigs was captured in the assault on Quebec which took place on the night of December 31st. If he had his journal in his possession, which is likely, the British captors must have confiscated the journal and shipped it home to London on a vessel leaving in the early months of 1776. No doubt the London Magazine would have been very eager to publish a rebel journal that detailed the Arnold expedition to Quebec.

Other than the original 1776 manuscript journal written by Meigs, which has not been located, there are 12 published editions of the Meigs Journal. Of the 12 published journals, there are 6 different versions. Some of the journals have missing entries for certain days that are present in other journals. In some entries in some of the journals, words have been eliminated or added. However, the most obvious difference is that the dates covered in the journals are different. The most common dates are Sept 9 to Jan 1, which is in six different journals (London Mag, Edinburg, MHS, Bushnell (2), Roberts), although some of the entries in those journals differ slightly. The Quebec Hist Soc journal has different dates than any other (Nov 19- Dec 30). Two journals (Almon and Beatson) have dates from Sept 9 to Nov 20. Two journals (Winchester and Mason) run from Sept 17 to Jan 1.

I cannot account for all of the specific reasons for the differences in the journals. I have no idea why some journal entries for a specific date have different wording than the entries in others for that same date. This would be having words present or missing in some that are not present in others. Why these changes might have been made is not evident from the journal entry. It is hard to tell if the different words were added or deleted by the publisher of a specific journal as none of the journals describes what journal it used as its source. It is easier to understand where dates are missing in some journals because the author may have used a journal where some pages at the beginning or end were missing.

Comparing the first published version from the London Magazine with the journal from Almon's and the journal entries from MHS, MHS seems to have more additional words in the entries for similar days that are different than either of the others. For example, the entry for Oct 3 in MHS reads "This day I wrote to Mrs. Meigs, my brother and Ensign Warner. Opposite to Norridgewock, which lies on the east side the river, a river comes in from the westward, called the Sandy River." Almon has nothing for that date and London Mag begins the entry with "I have wrote to Mrs. Meigs ..." then the same wording as MHS except for info about Sandy River. Could whoever wrote the MHS journal have tried to add words to clarify the entry? On Oct 13, MHS has "To this time our men have killed 4 moose, which is excellent meat." London and Almon have "About the time we killed 4 moose, which is excellent meat." Could the transcriber of the MHS journal again have changed the wording to make it clearer?

These changes in some ways are insignificant yet they are different which leads to the question which daily entries did Meigs actually write? Ordinarily, one would consider the first published journal as the most accurate, particularly when it was published within nine months of the actual events. There is no explanation given in the journal published in the London Magazine as to where it came from nor is there an explanation in the Edinburg Evening Courant which published essentially the same journal in November of 1776. The MHS journal forward states that it came from the papers of President of Yale Ezra Stiles. The forward goes on to surmise that it was probably prepared for Stiles by Josiah Meigs, the brother of Return J. Meigs, who was a professor of Mathematics and natural philosophy at Yale during Stiles' tenure. The London journal is described as "An Authentic Journal of Occurrences" while the MHS is described as "A Journal of Occurrences." None of this definitively answers the question as to which journal was actually written by Meigs. I doubt that question will ever be answered.