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Samuel Bettle, Jr. Journals

Bettle, Samuel, Jr.

Journals, 1841 July 5-1860 August 10
4 vols., 144 pp. (total)

Quaker
Bettle
meets with
Wis Oneida
1860
P-6

Background note:

Samuel Bettle, Jr., a Quaker minister from Philadelphia, spent several weeks during the summer of 1841 traveling between the isolated Quaker meetings scattered through the counties of central Pennsylvania. An Orthodox Quaker and probably the son of the clerk of the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of the same name, Bettle's mission involved visiting with the families of Friends, inquiring into the state of their meetings, and distributing tracts such as the journals of John Woolman and George Fox. In the wake of the disruptions affecting the Society following the Hicksite schism, Bettle was firm in opposing the "unchristian doctrines of Elias Hicks" and carefully noted those meetings in which separations had occurred or where he found Friends "a little wavering" (vol. 1: 1841 July 27). In one instance, he noted the case of a woman who had broken her arm on the way to attend a Hicksite meeting, and two others there who appeared with their arms in splints (1841 July 28 and August 4). Unfortunately, his sparse commentary makes his opinions on the matter somewhat difficult to interpret.

In 1860, Bettle represented the Society in a mission to Wisconsin to meet with Christianized Indians near Green Bay. The Oneidas, along with a small number of Stockbridge and Menominee Indians, had contacted the Society following a season of crop failure and disease because of the "good will felt by our ancestors to them", and Bettle appears to have been empowered to deliver food and seed and to act as an intermediary between the Indians and the government. Bettle was greeted warmly by the Oneidas, including Jacob Cornelius, head of the Orchard Party, though Daniel Bread, a chief of the First Christians, appears to have remained somewhat reserved (Vol. 3: 1860 June 5). Cornelius and Bread, along with another Christian, Adam Swamp, had been signatories on the Treaty of 1838 that settled the Oneidas near Green Bay and provided them with annuities.

After a general meeting which also included Episcopalian missionaries and David Lewis, a Methodist who ran a school for the Oneidas, Bettle agreed to provide the Oneidas with relief, there followed a careful exchange of sentiments between the Indians and Quakers. As Bettle described it:

The Interpreter announced that all were desired to settle into silence for religious retirement & When a few stood up with the language God is a spirit & with the assurance the God is no

respector of persons but has made of one blood all families & nations of men there was profound silence & earnest attention those from outside having been gathered in. The govt interpreter gave way to a slender young man of much gravity, who in an appropriate manner delivered to the people by [illeg.] what was [illeg.]. The people were reminded that God so loved the world the [sic] He gave his only begotten son &c & all were invited & [illeg.] to repent & obey the gospel we were reminded, that however complexions may differ we & all men were of one blood & that Christ died for all men & that his free grace visited all men for Christ is not only the Atonement for the sins of the whole world but the light of the world & reproves the evil in our hearts & approves & justify [sic] & sanctifies by his Good Spirit..." (3: 1860 June 5)

As much as anything, the obvious Orthodox/Gurneyite influence in this passage -- the emphasis upon the importance of the conversion experience, the doctrine of Atonement, and of the divinity of Christ -- may be a reflection of Bettle's spiritual optimism or the influence of the Methodist clergy, but as Bettle was preparing to depart, one Oneida man expressed his sincere, religiously motivated gratitude, saying that the Quakers "had furnished them not only with bread for their bodies but had taken amongst them the bread of life whereby both souls & body had been refreshed & would be benefitted" (3: 1860 June 6).

Scope and contents:

The Samuel Bettle journals consist of four small leather-bound volumes kept during Bettle's tours as a minister for the Society of Friends during the summers of 1841 and 1860. Two of the volumes (1 and 2) contain extensive and often vivid accounts of his ministering activities and missionary work in central Pennsylvania during July and August, 1841; while a third includes an extensive and detailed account of Bettle's participation in a mission to the Oneida Indian School and reservation near Green Bay, Wisconsin, in May and June, 1860. The fourth journal contains a less extensive account of travel in New York state and New Hampshire later in the summer of 1860.

Bettle's journey through central Pennsylvania came at a particularly difficult time in the history of the Society, following the separation of the Hicksites from the predominantly Orthodox Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. It is tempting to speculate that part of Bettle's mission was to shore up support among the Orthodox Quakers in the center of the state, and perhaps begin to heal over the rifts. His tour was focused on the spiritual lives and needs of Friends and he paid close attention to the state of their meetings, to their marriages, education, and to children and the elderly. Typical of his interests was the story he extracted from a 94-year old Friend, Jesse Harris, of an intense religious experience during the time of the Revolution: "I had not been in the practice of attending religious meeting at the time of the breaking out of the difficulties [sic] with the mother country but about then solemn friend I was experienced a fresh visitation of heaven divine grace & in yeilding [sic] to the requisition of duty I experienced much love & sweetness & there after thought it my duty to attend all such meetings as they can in course [& in them] found such an influx of love life & power as I had never before had any perception of" (vol. 2). Bettle records his attendance at meetings, sometimes with a

summary of his own ministering or that of others, and the journal includes some excellent descriptions of travel through a mountainous and difficult part of the state.

The volume that includes an account of Bettle's mission to the Oneidas in 1860 contains, if anything, an even fuller description of events. Bettle wrote at considerable length of his meetings with representatives of the Oneida, Menominee and Stockbridge Indians, including one religious meeting. The journal provides a rare account of a Quaker minister's spoken message as well as an interesting and valuable account of negotiations between the Oneidas and Friends.

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1860

NOTES

SHN Founded by Charles C. Grafton in Boston.
Bishop Grafton Published CATHOLIC ATLAS 1908.

Look under General Correspondence and
the Diaries. Reel 1, and Reel 3

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