James Logan (1674-1751)

James Logan was born on October 20, 1674, in County Armagh, near Belfast, to Patrick and Isabel Logan. Logan was a very intelligent child who mastered Latin and Greek and started to study Hebrew at age 13. In 1691, he took over his father’s teaching job in Bristol while furthering his own education in the areas of mathematics, astronomy, and other languages. After a few more years of learning and teaching, William Penn sent for Logan to come to America. Logan agreed, despite their differing faiths, to aid Penn in the development of his newly founded colony, which later became the state of Pennsylvania.

On December 3, 1699, Logan arrived on the Philadelphia waterfront with his wife and daughter. In 1701 Penn appointed him Clerk of the Council, Secretary of the Province, Commissioner of Property, and the person responsible for the Indians’ well being. As if this wasn’t enough, Logan was in charge of collecting taxes from the residents, which ultimately made him lose popularity among the townspeople. Logan soon became disappointed with Philadelphia’s monetary problems and political scandals. In 1705, he sought help form the Assembly to draw up new bills, draft laws, and mend the relations with the American Indians. A year later, the contentment Logan once felt was squashed because he could not pass any legislation in the Assembly. He became further disillusioned when the Assembly voted to remove him from his own Council in 1706! Even though that trial never came to a verdict, in 1709 the House ruled that Logan was unfit to hold public office.

After leaving Philadelphia and returning to London in 1710, he began interacting among other scholars and adding to his wealth of knowledge. By this point he had learned Latin, Greek, Hebrew, French, Italian, and had taught himself mathematics. In 1708 he had received a copy of Isaac Newton’s *Principia Mathematica* and had become perhaps the only person in America in his time who could read and understand this book. He also mastered the system of calculus with the help of Charles Haye’s *Treatise of Fluxions*. Logan was mathematically gifted and wholly self-educated in the subject. He was as street smart as book smart, traveling back to Pennsylvania and establishing his own business in the fur trade, which made him very wealthy.

The city of Philadelphia has attributed many things to one of its first politicians. Founded in 1824 at 1300 Locust Street is the Historical Society of Philadelphia (HSP), which stores more than a million books, graphic arts, and manuscripts, including a portrait of Logan and a few of his letters. His home, which he referred to as Stenton, is located on Germantown Avenue and still today remains a tourist site. In 1760, the Loganian Library, which was previously located on 6th Street between Chestnut and Walnut, held the thousands of books he acquired over the years. (Unfortunately, since then fires and other events scattered the books to other parts of the city.) Even today we see Logan’s name: a section of the city, a post office, a school, and Logan’s Circle on the Benjamin Franklin Parkway.

History shows that there were many influential people in Philadelphia at the beginning of the eighteenth century. James Logan was one of them. During his years in Philadelphia he distinguished himself as a businessman, politician, administrator, and scholar who had high religious beliefs. He played a significant role in the formation of Philadelphia because of his intelligence, ethics, and dominance in politics.
Sources:

Internet sites

Written Sources

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