

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Documentary Editing: Journal of the Association
for Documentary Editing (1979-2011)


Documentary Editing, Association for

12-1998

Touring Colonial America: Review of Edward Kimber, *Itinerant Observation in America*, ed. Kevin J. Hayes.

Darin E. Fields
Wilkes University

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/docedit>

 Part of the [Digital Humanities Commons](#), [Other Arts and Humanities Commons](#), [Reading and Language Commons](#), and the [Technical and Professional Writing Commons](#)

Fields, Darin E., "Touring Colonial America: Review of Edward Kimber, *Itinerant Observation in America*, ed. Kevin J. Hayes." (1998).
Documentary Editing: Journal of the Association for Documentary Editing (1979-2011). 578.
<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/docedit/578>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Documentary Editing, Association for at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Documentary Editing: Journal of the Association for Documentary Editing (1979-2011)* by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

Touring Colonial America

DARIN E. FIELDS

Edward Kimber, *Itinerant Observation in America*, ed. Kevin J. Hayes. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1998.

Traveling to the colonies in 1742 at age twenty-three, young Edward Kimber embarked on what was no doubt the adventure of his life. Son of Isaac Kimber, editor of the *London Magazine* from 1732 to 1755, Edward had grown up around the publishing industry and was keenly aware of the public appetite for reading material. Like nearly all literate travelers of his day, but perhaps more aware than many that his travels in the colonies would furnish material for later publication, Kimber dutifully kept a journal record of his observations and experiences. His American adventure yielded literary fruit from 1743 until 1746 in both prose and poetry, and two of his later novels incorporated American motifs and references.

Itinerant Observations in America was the longest and most important product of Kimber's American experiences. Kevin J. Hayes's edition of this work provides the complete text of the *Observations* as it appeared in the *London Magazine* and publishes fourteen poems written by Kimber while in America that appeared in the *London Magazine* from 1743 through 1744. Hayes reprints Kimber's editorial notes and provides additional and extensive annotations of historical, geographical, and literary references in the text. In his introduction, Hayes discusses the biographical and historical context for Kimber's work, analyzes Kimber's composition and revision of the *Observations*, attributes five works to Kimber not previously assigned to him, traces Kimber's recognition and literary reputation, and offers a brief assessment of the literary merits of the *Observations*.

DARIN E. FIELDS is assistant professor of English at Wilkes University, where he teaches Early American and 18th-Century British Literature. He is currently completing a critical annotated edition of William Byrd's *History of the Dividing Line Between Virginia and North Carolina*.

Kimber's precise reasons for coming to America are unclear. As Hayes details, Kimber's writings suggest his intention was to join the army and fight against the Spanish. But that was clearly not his only intention. He had planned an overland tour from New York to Georgia. Prevented from making that tour by an early November snow, Kimber endured a harrowing sea journey from New York to Sinepuxent, Maryland, which he describes in the *Observations*. From there he traveled overland through Maryland to Yorktown, Virginia. Taking a sloop from Yorktown he endured yet another disaster (the overturning of his boat) and arrived in Frederica, Georgia, in early January 1742/43. He joined General James Oglethorpe's march to St. Augustine in February and March. Kimber detailed this military expedition in *A Relation, or Journal, of a Late expedition to the Gates of St. Augustine, on Florida . . . In a Letter to the Reverend Mr. Isaac K——r in London*, published anonymously in London in 1744. After serving out a year with Oglethorpe, Kimber traveled north to Savannah and then to Charleston, South Carolina, before departing for England in the third week of April 1744.

Published serially in the *London Magazine* from August 1745 to December 1746, the *Itinerant Observations* relates Kimber's civilian travels in America. Unlike *A Relation*, which used a day-by-day journal format to detail his military adventure, the periodical installments of *Itinerant Observations* abandoned the chronological sequence of his journey and began with a description of Frederica, Georgia, instead of New York. Hayes notes that Kimber may have been catering to his London reader's heightened interest in Georgia, given its strategic importance in Britain's conflict with Spain (22). More tentatively, Hayes suggests that by beginning with his Georgia experiences Kimber might have been invoking the epic convention *in medias res*. Kimber's work is unquestionably conventional in its patterns and details of situation, manners, and

customs so eagerly sought after by the reading public of the day. Kimber's more objective descriptions often blend into more subjective evocations of the picturesque qualities of the American people and landscape. Passing from Maryland into Virginia Kimber writes:

An universal Mirth and Glee reigns in Maryland, amongst all Ranks of People, and at set Times, nothing but Jollity and Feasting goes forward: Musick and Dancing are the everlasting Delights of the Lads and Lasses, and some very odd Customs they have at these Merry-makings: You would think all Care was then thrown aside, and that every Misfortune was buried in Oblivion. In short, my Spirits have been sometimes raised so much, that I have almost forgotten I was of another Clime, and have wish'd myself for ever amongst them. Adieu! happy People! For the Favours I have reaped at your Hands, Gratitude shall ever fill my Breast: I leave you but to return again; once more to partake of your Halcyon Feasts, and hearty jovial Mirth. (56)

During his perilous sea journey from New York to Sinepuxent, Maryland, Kimber's descriptions invoke another literary commonplace of midcentury, the sublime. He writes:

At Night—may never my affrighted Eyes or my amazed and terrified Ears be Witness to the same—what Horrors were we seized with, and how dreadful our Condition!

All black above—below all foamy white,
A horrid darkness, mix'd with dreadful light:
Here long, long hills, roul far and wide away,
There abrupt vales fright back th' intruding day.
The Deluges of Rain mixd with the Waves that continually broke over us, the howling Blasts that rent our Ears—the total Darkness, were nothing to our internal Misery. Delirious Ravings on one Side—expiring Groans on another—and the Calls of Help, which we were unable to give, on another, quite distracted us. (41)

For all its conventionality, Kimber's writing still held the unique lure of its subject matter and its timeliness to Britain's conflict with Spain. In his most evocative descriptions of American landscape he anticipates William Bartram's *Travels* written toward the end of the century.

Echoing Richard Beale Davis, Kevin Hayes notes that Kimber's work is important because it "inaugurates what would become an important genre of American literature during the next cen-

tury, the outsider's observations" (23), thus placing Kimber in a distinguished company of later European travelers to America like Chastellux, Chateaubriand, the Duc de la Rochefoucauld, de Tocqueville, Dickens, and Trollope (24). Equally interesting are Kimber's assertions that his account is the result of a "tour" in America. In his anonymous prefatory letter, no doubt penned by him,¹ Kimber writes that the author of the *Observations* "has made the tour of most Parts of America" (26). A subsequent headnote claims that the account is "an ingenious young Gentleman's Remarks in his late American Tour" (43). Kimber's *Itinerant Observations in America* thus marks the earliest published representation of American travel by an Englishman or European as *touring*. The resulting narrative, as Hayes notes, is premised on a more artistic intention than travel narratives resulting from voyages dedicated to exploration and natural history, or accounts that function more specifically as promotion literature (23). That Kimber fashioned his observations as a tour, and that he left out his military experience, again indicates his sensitivity to popular literary trends. The belletristic indulgence in his descriptions, and his frequent inclusion of poetic passages, indicates a literary aim to please and delight less amenable to a portrayal of martial adventure.

Both published and manuscript accounts of journeys by colonists circulated during the eighteenth century. But many of these accounts resulted from travel taken for other reasons. In 1704/5, Sarah Kemble Knight traveled from Boston to New York, in order to settle the estate of her cousin Caleb Trowbridge, a trip described in her delightful manuscript account *The Private Journal of a Journey from Boston to New York*. William Byrd's manuscript masterpieces, *The History of the Dividing Line* and *The Secret History of the Line*, were the products of an expedition to survey the boundary between Virginia and North Carolina. The first colonial instance of touring comes in 1744, when Dr. Alexander Hamilton, an aristocratic and highly educated Scottish physician who had emigrated to Maryland, embarked on a journey from Annapolis to York, Maine, and back "only for health and recreation." His *Itinerarium*, a manuscript account of the tour, is contemporary with Kimber's but exceeds it in both scope and expression. It has been called "the best single portrait of men and manners, of rural and urban life, of the wide range of society and

scenery in colonial America.”²² Had Kimber been able to follow his overland route from New York to Georgia, much of his journey would have overlapped Hamilton’s.

Travel writing as a literary form represented a mixed bag of tricks. Charles L. Batten comments that a travel book’s “autobiographically determined narrative . . . suggests that it is merely a specialized form of biography” while at the same time it “bears a striking resemblance to descriptive geographies in their treatment of such subjects as the physical appearance, customs, commerce, history, and laws of specific areas.”²³ The form of the narrative becomes a function of which extreme the author chooses to represent. Batten suggests that the travel writer needed to achieve a “golden mean” between these extremes in order to appear both credible and entertaining (63).

Well educated and intellectual, Hamilton most frequently views American people and places with the detached objectivity one would expect from an aristocrat, physician, and scientist. Hamilton was also a consummate wit and suffused his narrative with urbane satire of the people, manners, and strange customs he encountered. Kimber’s work is less scientific, and as a writer he lacks the wit and humor of Hamilton. Yet Kimber’s *Observations* offers many interesting and significant portraits of colonial culture that have been mostly neglected—even by colonial scholars. David Shields has written that “the discovery of the literature of British North America depends upon an understanding of the *mixed print and manuscript culture* that operated in the provinces.”²⁴ Considered with Hamilton’s longer manuscript narrative, Kimber’s work offers an interesting opportunity to examine such intersections of manuscript and print expression.

Hayes’s edition of *Itinerant Observations in America* is a worthwhile contribution to the scholarship on colonial America. By providing a complete and reliable text of the *Observations* with detailed annotations, and by including Kimber’s fourteen poems written in America, Hayes has rescued an important and neglected narrative of colonial America.

Notes

1. Hayes notes that the prefatory letter was written by Kimber himself or by his father, and that the continual references to the *Observations* being part of a larger work were probably a ruse (16).

2. J. A. Leo Lemay, *Men of Letters in Colonial Maryland* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1972), 229.

3. Charles Batten, *Pleasurable Instruction: Form and Convention in Eighteenth-Century Travel Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 31–32.

4. David S. Shields, *Oracles of Empire: Poetry, Politics, and Commerce in British America, 1690–1750* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 6.
