

**GENEALOGICAL  
NOTES OF THE COLDEN  
FAMILY IN AMERICA**

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Genealogical Notes of the Colden Family in America by Edwin R. Purple

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# The Colden Family

IN

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BY EDWIN R. PURPLE,

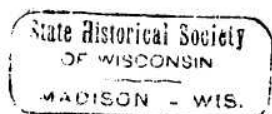
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For *William Manzie, Esq.*

Respectfully

*E. M. Purdie*

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## THE COLDEN FAMILY

IN

AMERICA.

The founder of the Colden family in New York, Lieutenant Governor CADWALLADER COLDEN, was the son of Rev. Alexander Colden, Minister of Dunse, in the Merse Berwickshire, Scotland. All his ancestors to a remote degree were Scotch, but he was born in Ireland, his mother being on a temporary visit there, February 7th, 1687, O. S. He was educated at the University of Edinburgh by his parents with a view to be settled in the Church of Scotland, but after completing his studies there in 1705, his inclinations were adverse to this, and he applied himself to the study of physic. The expense of his education having so far exhausted the limited means of his father, as to render it impossible for him to aid him, in commencing his career as a physician in England or Scotland, young Colden determined to emigrate to America. Another motive he had in coming here was, his mother had a widowed sister in Philadelphia, who had acquired some estate there, and was childless; this fact led him to decide upon making Philadelphia his future home, where he arrived in 1710, took up his abode with his aunt, and commenced the practice of his profession.

In 1715 he returned to Great Britain, where he became acquainted with Dr. Edmund Halley, and other "men of learning at London, in the mathematics," to which his taste chiefly inclined him. In pursuance of the main object, probably, of his visit to his native land, he left London for Scotland, where, on the 11th of November, 1715, at Kelso, he married Alice Christy, the daughter of a clergyman of that place. The next year he returned to Philadelphia with his wife, and resumed the practice of medicine. In 1718 he visited New York, "without thought," he says, "of changing my residence," but calling upon the Governor of the place (Robert Hunter), "as was usual for strangers to do," was received more kindly than he expected, and though he staid but three days in the town, was specially invited several times to the Governor's house. About two weeks after his return to Philadelphia, he received a letter from Gov. Hunter, inviting him to come to New York with his family, accompanied with the offer of an office of profit, which he

accepted, and soon after removed to this city<sup>(1)</sup>. The earliest date we find fixing his residence in New York is October 6th, 1718, on which day, with James Kennedy and James Alexander, he petitions for a grant of land, upon which, a warrant for a patent "for 2,000 acres of land lying in the County of Ulster" was issued to him, April 9th, 1719<sup>(2)</sup>.

On the 18th of February, 1720, Gov. Hunter issued his warrant under the Privy Seal constituting Dr. Colden Surveyor<sup>(3)</sup> of Lands, and his Commission, under Seal of the Province, bears date April 16th, following.

The favorable regard and friendship of Gov. Hunter was continued to Dr. Colden by his successor, William Burnet, who assumed the government of the Province on the 17th of September, 1720, and on the 26th of the next November, recommended him and James Alexander to the Lords of Trade, as his Majesty's Counsellors, to fill the places of Philip Schuyler and Adolphus Philips. In 1722 he was admitted to the Council, and took his seat in that body for the first time on the 30th of May, in that year.

Soon after obtaining his patent for land in Ulster County, he procured another for one thousand acres, adjoining the first, to which he gave the name of "Coldenham," now known, and for many years past, after its first proprietor, as Coldenham, in the town of Montgomery, Orange County. To the subjugation of this land from its desert wildness, to cultivated fields, Dr. Colden early directed his attention. Of the progress he made in this work before removing his family there, and as indicating the date of the first settlement of Coldenham, we extract the following from his *M.S.S. Farm Journal*, now before us. The first entry bears date August 15th, 1727, and reads as follows: "*Journal of my Farm begun 1727. On the 15th of August we sow'd 4½ Bushels Rye upon a summer fallow after Indian Corn. The ground was very mellow. Sow'd under furrow about 3 acres. At the same time sowed some spinage in the Garden.* \* \* \* \* \* *On the 13th of Sept'r we pull'd our Seed hemp. The same day I throw'd small quantities of hop Clover seed behind the house.*"

"*The 20th of Oct'r I put a parcel of Haws into hole in ye ground in ye second trench from the fence behind the house at the end next the cow pen to be sown next fall. About that time I pai'd in the Garden. The Posts & rails of Chestnut made of trees that had been kill'd about 3 or 4 years & the Clapboards or rails of white oak from trees fell'd about ye 10th of this month. The rails of ye 5th & 7th pannels from ye Garden door next ye brook were of red oak rails that had been cut 6 or 7 years.*"

Upon the retirement, April 15th, 1728, of Gov. Burnet, Dr. Colden removed his family, which now consisted of his wife and six young children, from New York to his new home at Coldenham. To this change of residence he was led by a desire to reduce within the means of a limited income, the expenses of a large and increasing family, to

(1) Selections from the Scientific Correspondence of Cadwallader Colden, &c., by Am Gray, M. D., New Haven, 1843, p. 367.

(2) Calendar of New York Colonial MSS., indorsed, Land Papers, &c., 1643-1800, Albany, 1864, pp. 126 and 128.

(3) It has been stated that Dr. Colden was the first Surveyor General of the Province of New York. Augustine Graham held the office for many years prior to his death in 1769, and was succeeded by Allaine Jarratt, in October of that year.



avoid the jealousies and rivalries inseparable from his official position in the provincial Capitol, and to secure, in the seclusion of this—then wilderness abode, that leisure for philosophical study, to which he was so much inclined. It was principally during his residence here—embracing a period of more than thirty years—that he maintained with great regularity a voluminous correspondence with many of the learned men of Europe and America, upon a variety of scientific subjects. Among the most prominent of these, were Linnæus and Gronovius, to the latter of whom, in March, 1743, he transmitted a detailed description of some of the plants about Coldenham. This communication was sent by Gronovius to Linnæus, who had the first part of it published in the Transactions of the Royal Society of Science at Upsal, in 1749, under the title of "*Plantæ Coldenhamiæ, &c.*" This illustrious cultivator of the science of botany, as a recognition of the services of Dr. Colden in that department of learning, named a plant of the *tetrandrous* specie *Coldenia*, thus enrolling his name in the "heraldry of scientific distinction," and clothing it with "botanical honors."

Among other of his principal correspondence was that with Peter Collinson of the Royal Society of London, on Botany and History; Peter Kalm of the Royal Academy of Stockholm, on Natural History; the Earl of Macclesfield on Astronomy and Mathematics; and with Dr. Franklin in this country, on Printing, Electricity, and general subjects connected with Natural Philosophy. These writings bear evidence of the indefatigable industry, as well as the varied acquirements of learning of which Dr. Colden was the possessor. He had, upon becoming a member of the King's Council, relinquished—except in his family and among a few friends—the practice of physic; but his frequent contributions to the medical literature of his times—up to a late period of his life—attest the continued love he bore to the chosen profession of his youth. These articles are distinguished by great care in their preparation, great originality of thought, and close observation of the subjects to which they relate. He was the first to introduce in this country what he termed the "cool management" in cases of Small Pox, in the treatment of which disease he was more than ordinarily successful in his practice at Philadelphia and New York (\*).

During the administration of Gov. Burnet he wrote "The History of the Five Indian Nations," published by Bradford at New York, in 1727,—the earliest and rarest local history of New York written and printed in the Colony.

In 1745 he published at New York a few copies of an essay entitled, "An Explication of the First Causes of Action in Matter; and of the Cause of Gravitation," with design to ascertain the sentiments of the learned on the new principles in Natural Philosophy or Physics advanced therein. This work, without the author's knowledge and against his wishes, was reprinted the following year in London. Meeting a favorable reception, he was encouraged to revise it, and made considerable additions thereto, which he had published in London in 1752, with the title of "The Principles of Action in Matter, the Gravitation of Bodies and the Motion of the Planets explained from those Principles." Appended to this work is a chapter

(\* Colden Manuscript Papers.

written by him in the winter of 1743, entitled "An Introduction to the Doctrine of *Fluxions*, or the *Aritkmetic of Infinites*," &c. (1).

This was the most remarkable of Dr. Colden's scientific works, and perhaps best illustrates in its original conceptions and profundity of thought, the exalted genius of its author. He was engaged many years in its preparation, and after publication in 1752,—with the view of issuing a new edition—spent much time in revising his manuscript of it, adding new arguments—based upon more recent astronomical observations made at the observatory of the Earl of Macclesfield, at Sherborn Castle, and elucidating whatever the criticisms of his learned friends in Europe or this country had pointed out as ambiguous in his theories (2).

It would be difficult to give in a brief sketch like this, an intelligible account of the scope and design of such an elaborate philosophical disquisition as "The Principles of Action in Matter," and the conclusions of the author must suffice. Following exactly whatever had been clearly demonstrated in the theories of Sir Isaac Newton in relation to the apparent mutual attraction of matter, the *cause* of which that philosopher had declared "he knew not," also "that the *cause* of gravitation cannot be material," Dr. Colden concludes with the ardor of a conviction, which deeply impressed him to the day of his death,—and which he believed the world would finally accept as true—that this *cause* is *Light*, and that from the principles of its action as explained by him, the phenomena of the motion of the planets is accounted for.

While at Coldenham he attended with great regularity the meetings of the Council at New York, and the various commissions which that body formed the whole or part of, among which was that of 1740 to settle the boundaries between Massachusetts Bay and Rhode Island, and that of 1743 to adjudicate the rights of the Mobergan Indians, to lands claimed by the Governor and Company of Connecticut, with others of kindred importance.

He was member of the King's Council from 1722 to the close of his life, and after October, 1736, whenever present, presided as eldest councilor, the Speaker of that body. He was Surveyor General from the time of his appointment by Gov. Hunter, till 1762, when he was succeeded by his eldest son Alexander.

On the death of Lieutenant Governor James DeLancey, July 30th, 1760, Dr. Colden, by virtue of his position in the Council, became Acting Governor, and immediately assumed administrative control of the Province. He soon after removed his family to New York City, leaving his third son, Cadwallader, in possession of his estate at Coldenham. On the 20th of March following he was appointed Lieutenant Governor, but his commission did not reach him till the 7th of August, 1761; this position he held up to the time of his death.

The office of Lieutenant Governor required no service, and there was no salary attached to it, except on the death or absence of the Govern-

(1) Colden MSS., and Spark's *Life and Writings of B. Franklin*, vol. 6, p. 95.

(2) Colden MSS.

in-chief, contingencies<sup>(1)</sup>, however, that were of frequent occurrence during the fifteen years that preceded the war of the American Revolution, and which placed Lieut. Gov. Colden at the head of the Government a large portion of that interesting and critical period.

When, by the death of DeLancey, he was called to this higher position of honor—though in his seventy-third year—there was no man in the province whose force and vigor of mind, or familiarity with public affairs, better fitted him for the responsible duty, and it seems at first to have been performed in a manner equally acceptable to his sovereign and the people. But these latter years came laden with sorrows to which hitherto he had been a stranger; he was soon called to mourn the loss of his faithful and devoted wife, whose companionship had formed the chief pleasure of his life, and a few months thereafter he followed to the grave his youngest daughter, Catharine.

Alice Christy, the wife of Gov. Colden, was born (probably at Kelso, the place of her marriage,) January 5th, 1690; the daughter of a Scotch clergyman, she appears to have received in her girlhood such mental culture as well befitted her for the duties of after life, and the social station to which she succeeded by the side of her illustrious husband. At a time when the knowledge of ordinary branches of learning was regarded a singular distinction in woman, she was the capable instructress of her children, and in the first years of her residence at Coldenham—from the frequent absence of her husband on public business—their education devolved almost entirely upon her. In addition to her common household duties, while here, she found time to assist her husband in the care of his accounts, and aided him in copying his papers and correspondence<sup>(2)</sup>. She taught her children habits of "virtue and economy," of which she gave them in her life and character the "brightest example." She died at the Government house, Fort George, New York City, March, 1762.

While saddened by these domestic afflictions, he saw with pain the rise of those political disturbances that finally severed the colonies from the rule of the British crown. From his convictions of duty while the representative of his sovereign's authority, he never wavered, but encountered with courage and firmness the violent spirit that was evoked by those arbitrary acts of Parliament—the prelude of the Revolution—the odium of which was directed alike against the objectionable acts and those charged with their execution. It is not our purpose to detail the events that followed to the close of his life, through all of which however, he displayed an unflinching, consistent loyalty, and devotion

(1) After receiving his commission as Lieutenant Governor, he was Acting Governor until the 6th of October, 1761, when he was superseded by Robert Monckton, the Governor-in-Chief. On the 12th of November, 1761, Gov. Monckton re-delivered the seal of the Province to Lieut. Gov. Colden, and two days after embarked at the head of the army on the expedition to Martinique. On the 25th of June, 1762, Gov. Monckton returned and assumed the government, but on his departure for England, June 28th, 1762, the administration again fell into Colden's hands until the arrival of Sir Henry Moore, on the 13th of November, 1762. Gov. Moore dying on the 15th of September, 1765, Colden again became acting Governor, but was superseded by the Earl of Dunmore, October 28th, 1770. Gov. William Tryon succeeded Dunmore on the 6th of July, 1771, but leaving for England on the 7th of April, 1774, Lieut. Gov. Colden became for the last time the executive head of the Province, until Tryon's return, June 25, 1775.

(2) Colden MSS.