

Introduction – Approaching Albany

Swedish/Finish naturalist Peter Kalm sailed up the Hudson River from New York City to document and collect samples of seeds and plants that might grow well in the cold Scandinavian climate.

[Images]

A northerly wind and Atlantic tides assisted a humble yacht bound for Albany as sturgeon leapt from the salty waters of the Hudson Estuary. The boat was northbound from New York City, heading past the villages and cultivated fields of Manhattan's Upper bay and into the densely forested and sparsely settled Hudson highlands. Albany was the last major settlement along the navigable waterway and the boat would continue no further.

Aboard the yacht was thirty-three year old Professor Peter Kalm. Kalm was an apostle of Carl Linnaeus, the father of modern taxonomy, sent by the Swedish Royal Academy of Sciences on a mission "to make observations and collect seeds and plants, which would improve Swedish husbandry, gardening, manufacturers, arts and sciences." An expedition to the northern reaches of New York and Canada was decided upon because they are partly under the same latitude as Sweden, and Linnaeus believed that plants found here would hold up well during the cold Scandinavian winters.

Kalm was not the first to undertake such a journey. Through the 1740s, Linnaeus made several expeditions through Sweden to classify plants and animals. As the documented knowledge of the natural world expanded, he sought to record and collect specimens from around the world. Christopher Tarnstrom, a 43-year-old pastor, was the first of Linnaeus' apostles to travel to a foreign land. He had joined the Swedish East India Company on a ship bound for China in 1746, but died of tropical fever later that year. Kalm's mission would be no less dangerous.

Albany was little more than an outpost on the northern frontier of the British colonies of North America. Above the colony were a few scattered settlements that stood in the borderlands between British and French colonies in North America. Kalm was bound for New France and would need to cross more than 60-miles of wilderness before reaching the French outpost at Crown Point. This was a no-man's-land that stood between the British and French colonies in North America.

The British and French colonists, and their Indian allies, had been at war on and off for the better part of a century. King George's War, the last of four conflicts collectively known as the Wilderness Wars, had come to an end just 10 months earlier, and it took time for word to reach this corner of the earth. Kalm would not only have to battle the rugged landscape, weather and disease, but also ran the risk of running into bands of Indians who may or may not be aware that the war was over.

Despite all the dangers that Kalm would face on his journey, he was eager to undertake his mission. Upon his arrival, he was immediately struck as being an alien that has "*now come into a new world.*" He excitedly wrote in his journal, "*Whenever I looked to the ground, I everywhere found such plants as I had never seen before. When I saw a tree, I was forced to stop, and ask those who accompanied me how it was called ... I was seized with terror at the thought of ranging so many new and unknown parts of natural history.*" He had spent the winter in and around Philadelphia and New Jersey before he set course for New France.

As the yacht entered the outskirts of Albany, Kalm observed that the land became lower and more cultivated. The river was about a musket-shot (100-150 feet) wide with shallow sandbars that required a skilled driver to navigate. As the palisaded city came within view there were five islands near the mouth of the Normanskill. This was the site of the original Albany settlement and home to the Patroon.

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Quotes and Notes

Preface to Kalm's Journal – Professor Kalm's Travels through North America were originally written in the Swedish language, but soon after translated into German by the two Marray's, both of whom are Swedes, and one a public of Dr. Linnaeus, from which we may conclude that this translation corresponds exactly with the original.

Baron *Sten Charles Bielke*, Vice-President of the Court of Justice in Finland, was the first who made a proposal to the Royal Academy of Sciences at Stockholm, to send an able man to the norther parts of Siberia and Iceland, as places which are partly under the same latitude with Sweden, and to make there such observations and collections of seeds and plants, as would improve the Swedish husbandry, gardening, manufactures, arts and sciences. Dr. Linnaeus found the proposal just, but he thought that a journey through North America would be yet of a more extensive utility, than that through the before-mentioned countries; for the plants of America were then little known, and not scientifically described; and by several trials, it seemed probably that the greatest part of North American plants, would bear very well the Swedish winters; and what was more important, a great many American plants promised to be very useful in husbandry and physic.

Thus far this journey was a mere scheme; but as Captain Triewald, a man well known for his abilities in England, gave his *Observations on the Cultivation of Silk* in a series of Memoirs to the Royal Academy of Sciences, and mentioned therein a kind of mulberry-tree, which was discovered by Dr. Linnaeus, and which bore the rigours of the Swedish climate as well as a fir or pine tree; this circumstance revived the proposal of such a journey in the year 1745. Count Tessin, a nobleman established merit both in the political and learned world, becoming president of the Royal Academy, it was unanimously agreed upon to send Professor Kalm to North America. The expenses were at first a great obstacle; but the Royal Academy wrote to the three universities to assist them in this great and useful undertaking. Aobo sent first her small contribution, Lund had nothing to spare, but Upsala made up the deficiency by a liberal contribution. – Preface to *Travels Into North America* by Peter Kalm; as translated, with preface, by John Reinhold Forster (2nd edition 1772)