

1.11 Runaway pipers.

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Recently a CD-ROM for reference libraries was put on the market, titled *Performing Arts in Colonial America*¹. Its aim was to include any section of a pre-1783 newspaper that mentioned musicians, actors, or dancers. I searched on “bagpipers” or “bagpipes” or “pipers” and got back different items, including articles copied in America from newspapers in Ireland describing events with bagpipes, advertisements from musical instrument dealers, and some poetic doggerel. The most interesting were these ads for runaway pipers.

New York Gazette, September 8-15, 1729.

Ran away from Michael Kearny of Perth-Amboy, a Servant Man, aged about Twenty-one years, his Name is Edward Byrn, an Irish Man and of middle stature: he has been lately sickly, and of a pale Countenance, fair Complementation and black Ey'd, his Head was shaved about six Weeks ago, He carried with him a Pea-Jacket lined with Blew, three good Shirts, a pair of new Trousers. He has stole from his said Master a handsom Fowling-Piece, a Powder-Flask and about three Pounds in Money. He plays on the Bag-pipes, and has a pair of pretty little Bag-pipes with him, but lest they may discover him, perhaps he may drop them by the Way. Whoever shall Take up and Secure this said Edward Byrn, and give notice to his said Master in Amboy, or to Mr. Jeremiah Tothel in New York, so that he may be had again, shall have Three Pounds Reward, and all Reasonable Charges.

There is likewise Run away, in convoy with the said Edw. Byrn, a Servant Boy of Alexander Mackaowell, named Malaky Hues, a thick squat well set lad, and an arch crafty Rogue. Whoever secure the said Servant Boy, and give Notice (as above) so that his Master may have him again, shall have Forty Shillings Reward, and all reasonable Charges. We hear that said Servants are gone towards Connecticut.

I have not seen any bagpipes dropped by the way in Connecticut, but my eyes are peeled. The ad mentioned the pipes because the fellow might be spotted when he tries to use it to earn a living. A similar pattern came out when I put in “banjo” or “banjer” - then I got ads for runaway slaves who played the banjo.

This is the earliest mention I know of, of bagpipes in America. The fact that Edward Byrn is Irish and plays “pretty little” pipes is intriguing—perhaps they were a forerunner of our instrument.

Pennsylvania Gazette (Philadelphia), June 9, 1748.

Deserted from his Majesty's service the following persons, viz. Patrick Bush, born in Ireland, about 27 years of age, was lately servant to William Moore Esq. George Sawyer, born in England, by trade a taylor, about 25 years of age, a thin spare man, and used to work at Burdowntown, New Jersey; Thomas Murray, born in Ireland, by trade a weaver, plays on the bagpipes; Edward Smith, born in Ireland, about 37 years of age. The above deserters were lately taken by Spaniards in their passage to the

¹ *Performing Arts in Colonial American Newspapers 1690-1783*. (Computer file) 1996. New York : University Music Editions.

garrison at Cape Breton, and were ashore below Newcastle. Whoever takes up said deserters or either of them, and brings them to John Huston, in Philadelphia, or secures them in any of his Majesty's goals, so that they may be had again, shall have Forty Shillings Reward for each, and reasonable charges, paid by JOHN HUSTON.

This ad was missed by the coders for Performing Arts in America, but it came up on another CD-ROM that gave the full texts of articles in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*. This was the newspaper printed by Benjamin Franklin, although by 1748 he had gone on to other matters. One of his projects was to organize Philadelphians to defend against Spanish privateers, the kind that captured Thomas Murray. The privateering ships had been very effective seizing British ships and cargo, but they carried more men than was comfortable, for the battle and the boarding. Any captured prisoners would be discharged as quickly as possible. Thomas Murray was put ashore in Newcastle, I assume, the one in New Brunswick. Perhaps his bagpipes went with him through the adventure, but there is no saying what their type was.

Pennsylvania Gazette (Philadelphia), June 15, 1758.

Run away on the First of May last, from the Subscriber, living on Corsica Creek, in Queen Ann's County, Maryland, two Convict Servants, viz. one named John Jackson, about five feet eight inches high, pitted with the Small Pox, middling well set: Had on and took with him, a blue Coat, brown Jacket, and lightish coloured Breeches lined with shamy Leather, but am not certain whether the Clothes are of Cloth or Serge: he likewise had a Pair of Country Cloth Breeches, and an under Jacket, without Sleeves of the same Cloth, two coarse Shirts, and a fine one, several Pair of Stockings, and one or two Pair of Shoes, a dark Wig, Hat and Scotch Bonnet; he is a very bold Fellow and much given to swearing and lying, plays on the Bagpipes, and has a Sett with him; I hear he passes for a broken Pedlar, has Pins, Needles and Ribbons to sell, says he is an Irishman, and calls himself William O'Daniel. The other named Mary Jackson, Wife of the said John, is a lusty Woman, near as high as her Husband; she is of a brown Complexion, full Face and does not want for Impudence. They both discourse like Scotch People, and I understand she has changed her Dress since she left me to a blue Gown and Cloak; They have many Things with them not here mentioned; she is a great Singer, and they both love strong Liquors. They both are so impudent that I make no doubt, was I to meet them in a strange Place, they would deny that They ever were Servants to me, or any one else, or that they had ever Seen me before. Whoever takes up and secures said Servants in any Goal on this Continent, so that their Master may have them again, shall have Three Pounds Reward for both, or Thirty Shillings for either, paid by William Clayton.

English convicts were often shipped to America, and later to Australia after America separated. This husband and wife sound like a great pair to meet at a bar, but I would not invite them to my house for a week, and if they are as impudent as their master says, it is not clear why he wants them back so badly. His description is a bit strange—John Jackson, alias William O'Daniel, talks with a Scottish accent and claims to be Irish. Again, who knows what kind of pipes he was playing.

Virginia Gazette (Williamsburg), March 25, 1775, p.32

Run away from the Subscriber, in Bedford County, last Year, a Servant Man named DANIEL O'CONNOR TERELAGH; he understands playing on the bagpipes well, had on a new German Serge Coat, and took with him a bay Horse about 4 Feet 5 or 6 Inches High. Whoever brings the said Servant to me, near Mr. Ross's Store, in the aforesaid County, shall have £10. Reward, paid by MILES BARROTT.

The following notice is incomplete—the computer index had only those parts that mention bagpipes, and I could not get a hold of the original newspaper.

Maryland Journal, April 22, 1777, p.32

Twenty dollars reward. Winchester, March 29, 1777. Ran away on Thursday, the 27th day of March, inst. from Fredericktown, in Maryland, a servant man, named Bartholomew King, about 22 years of age, 5 feet 4 or 5 inches high, dark brown hair. . . . [5 lines describing clothes] He is fond of liquor, and much addicted to gaming; he can play very well on the bagpipes, straddles as he walks, and is an Irishman. . . . [7 lines on reward terms].

End.