THE COMMEMORATION OF COLONEL CRAWFORD AND THE VILIFICATION OF SIMON GIRTY: HOW POLITICIANS, HISTORIANS, AND THE PUBLIC MANIPULATE MEMORY

Joshua Catalano

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate College of Bowling Green State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

May 2015

Committee:

Andrew Schocket, Advisor
Rebecca Mancuso
ABSTRACT

Andrew Schocket, Advisor

In 1782, Colonel William Crawford led a force of a few hundred soldiers in a campaign to destroy the Indian forces gathered on the Sandusky Plains in present day Ohio. Crawford was captured by an enemy party following a botched offensive and was taken prisoner. After being tried, Crawford was brutally tortured and then burned alive in retaliation for a previous American campaign that slaughtered nearly one hundred peaceful Indians at the Moravian village of Gnadenhutten. This work analyzes the production, dissemination, and continual reinterpretation of the burning of Crawford until the War of 1812 and argues that the memory of the event impacted local, national, and international relations in addition to the reputations of two of its protagonists, William Crawford and Simon Girty.
For Parker B. Brown
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank both members of my committee, Andrew Schocket and Rebecca Mancuso, for their continuous support, critique, and feedback. Their flexibility and trust allowed me to significantly change the overall direction and composition of this work without sacrificing quality. Ruth Herndon’s encouragement to explore and interrogate the construction and dissemination of historical narratives is evident throughout this work. I am also in debt to Christie Weininger for bringing the story of Colonel Crawford to my attention. Additionally, I would like to thank the staffs at the Bucyrus Public Library, Dorcas Carey Public Library, and the Upper Sandusky Community Library for answering questions, locating sources, and providing advice that only a local knowledge could bring. Lastly, I would like to thank Briana Pocratsky for reading numerous drafts throughout the process. Her critique and advice ensured that this work would be meaningful to a much broader audience.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PREFACE</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memory</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terminology &amp; Spelling</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colonel William Crawford</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simon Girty</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Gnadenhutten Massacre</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Battle of Sandusky</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Trial, Torture, and Execution of Crawford</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER ONE: CRAWFORD’S BURNING INCITES HATRED TOWARD INDIANS.</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Story Spreads</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local American Response</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Printing of the “Narrative”</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Quaker Defense</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Ballad of Colonel Crawford: an Overture</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A New Martyr: the Curious Case of Colonel Crawford</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Missing Voice</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER TWO: OVERCOMING WESTERN LOYALTIES</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western War Cries Go Unanswered</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Show of Force</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER THREE: GIRTY THE WHITE SAVAGE</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PREFACE

The American Revolution has always been at the center of American nationalism. As the event that created one of the most powerful nations in history, this comes as no surprise. Likewise, the hagiography of its most influential figures is also expected. Despite what many Americans may like to believe, the Revolution was not the clean and tidy narrative where good simply triumphed over evil. The traditional story of freedom-loving colonists conquering the evils of monarchy and ushering in an era of democracy, equality, and liberty for all is reductive at best. Its history is much more complex and requires the close examination of more singular aspects of the event. One aspect that has recently come under investigation, thanks to historians such as Colin Calloway, Andrew Cayton, and Peter Silver (among others), is the conflict between Indians and colonists in the frontier regions of the Ohio Country before, during, and after the Revolution.

Like the more traditional aspects of the American Revolution that one might encounter in school curriculum, the history of frontier conflict is also subject to individuals and organizations with political and personal motives who carefully blend fact and myth in order to create a history that serves their specific agenda. Unfortunately, history is often taken at face value and these underlying factors of production are rarely explored outside of academia. People often view history as an accumulation of facts that when viewed from a temporal distance yield a coherent and chronological story. Both historians and the public reinterpret past events differently based upon their own cultural context and ideology. The study of these different and changing interpretations is what historians call historiography. No college history curriculum is complete without a class on historiography; it has even become an area of focused study for many historians. So what is it about historiography that can be so mundane and dry to one individual
and so rich and captivating to another? The answer may lie in the manner that the two individuals think. On the surface, historiography appears to be a very dry “history of history.” Different “schools of thought” are compared to one another and their sources and methodology are critiqued. However, under the surface lies a fascinating story about how people and societies remember. When this functioning and transmission of memory is explored further, it reveals a great deal of insight about people and societies across time. Why did generations of Americans remember Benjamin Franklin but not John Dickenson? Why do we “remember the Alamo” but not the victory at which the famous phrase was uttered? How do we explain the silence of women, blacks, Indians, and other marginalized people? How has the country remembered slavery, immigration, and imperialism? These concepts are anything but dull, and they are essential to the study of historiography if you know what questions to ask. It is somewhat surprising that the study of memory has taken so long to capture the imagination of historians given its proximity to the study of historiography.

One important difference between studying historiography and studying memory is the latter’s focus on production and transmission. Just as interesting as comparing how different groups interpreted history at different times is exploring why. On the surface this seems to be an easy answer: the ideology in which one operated shaped how he/she perceived history. Although a contributing factor, ideology does not entirely explain the shape and scope of historical narratives. There are several factors that significantly alter the content and perspective of such histories. Historian Michel-Rolph Trouillot has identified four moments in historical production that significantly shape the eventual outcome:
This particular work will put Trouillot’s theory into practice and examine the production, dissemination, and reinterpretation of a specific event: the torture and burning of Colonel William Crawford and its contested persistence in social memory over the past two hundred and thirty years.

In 1782, Colonel William Crawford led a force of a few hundred soldiers in a campaign to destroy the Indian forces gathered on the Sandusky Plains in present day Ohio. Unfortunately for Crawford, he was captured by an enemy party following a botched offensive and was taken prisoner. After being tried, Crawford was brutally tortured and then burned alive in retaliation for a previous American campaign that slaughtered nearly one hundred peaceful Indians at the Moravian village of Gnadenhutten. This work examines how the memory of Crawford’s burning impacted local, national, and international relations in addition to the reputations of two of its protagonists, William Crawford and Simon Girty.

Memory

In recent decades, historians began taking seriously the interdisciplinary study of memory, and this new methodology led to an explosion of scholarship across the different subfields of the history discipline. When referring to the idea of historical memory in his study *History and Memory* Geoffrey Cubitt defines memory as “the study of the means by which a conscious sense of the past, as something meaningfully connected to the present, is sustained and

---

developed within human individuals and human cultures.” Further theorization has created within the broader definition of memory several subsets. One subset in this scholarship is the constructed and negotiated nature of social memory or how a society remembers its past. Due to the interdisciplinary nature of memory studies, there is little consensus regarding exact definitions and thus several similar terms have arisen such as social memory, public memory, popular memory, collective memory, folk memory, and cultural memory that each sometimes have multiple definitions. For the purposes of this study, references to social memory will be using Cubitt’s definition that it “covers the process (or processes) through which a knowledge or awareness of past events or conditions is developed and sustained within human societies, and through which, therefore, individuals within those societies are given the sense of a past that extends beyond what they themselves personally remember.” The different processes by which knowledge or an awareness of the past is sustained include narratives, newspapers, books, songs, statues, paintings, parades, celebrations, speeches, schools, road markers, place names, historical societies, community organizations, websites, and museums.

Building upon this understanding of memory, a second major thread in memory scholarship involves how social memory can and has been used as both a political weapon and a meditative device (useful history). In his Mystic Chords of Memory Michael Kammen reminds us that “we arouse and arrange our memories to suit our psychic needs" and that “it is the perception of tradition and the uses of memory, not their mere existence, that ultimately matter [original italics].” This study builds upon the work of previous scholars who have attempted to

---

2 Geoffrey Cubitt, History and Memory, Historical Approaches (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 9.
3 Cubitt, 14-15.
understand how memory has been used, but it differs from this existing scholarship in unique ways. Unlike the works of François Furstenberg, Stephen F. Knott, and Mitch Kachun that focus on the memory of an individual, this work focuses on the memory of a singular event, the death of Colonel Crawford. At times, the memory of Crawford’s burning will significantly impact the remembrance of certain individuals, but it is the master narrative surrounding the event that is the focus of this study. Although some scholars such as Carol Reardon, Thomas A. Desjardin, and Jennifer M. Murray have focused on the memory of large scale conflicts, battles, and events such as the Battle of Gettysburg, this work focuses on a much smaller and less well-known event that makes it easier to not only identify the process that perpetuate its memory but the impact of this sustained awareness throughout history. When attempting to ascertain the effects of the invocation or perpetuation of the memory of a larger historic episode such as the American Revolution, the Civil War, or slavery on society at a particular time, it is very difficult to make anything other than plausible generalizations about the effects. The number of variables or processes by which knowledge/awareness is sustained is simply too large. Hopefully this study will allow us to see how specific memorializing processes of the event both directly impacted identifiable aspects of specific cultures on a micro level and contributed to larger national phenomenon such as racism on the macro level.


Although this work builds upon the solid foundation of studies that focus on celebratory practices, this work does not strictly follow in the vein of early national historians such as David Waldstreicher, Andrew Burstein, Scott Martin, Len Travers, Simon Newman, Sarah Purcell or Adam Criblez who study celebratory practices nor does it mimic the work of more contemporary historians such as John Bodnar or Michael Kammen. Instead, this work combines elements from the aforementioned scholarship in order to analyze a much smaller topic that lacks a sufficient body of a singular type of cultural artifact to examine. Due to the long period of analysis, this study evolves alongside the changing nature of commemorative practices and therefore will utilize different sources to reconstruct how individuals and groups used the memory of Crawford’s burning throughout history.

At times this work does take the form of a study of nationalism, but this is only temporary as a large portion of this study focuses on how the emotive power of the memory of Crawford’s Burning has been used for causes not always considered nationalistic. In many respects, this work more closely aligns with studies of the Holocaust and how its deeply emotive

---

nature has been used by the world to forever vilify Adolf Hitler and the Nazi party. However, Holocaust studies are not an ideal comparison either as the memory of Crawford’s burning lacked the number of survivors and its transmission was not accelerated via advanced technology such as photography, film, and the internet which aid in the creation of “prosthetic memories” for those who did not directly experience the event. Studies of the Holocaust focus more on what Jeffrey K. Olick has called “collected” collective memory or “the aggregated individual memories of members of a group.” Where the Holocaust was abnormal and a personally traumatic experience for millions of people, the burning of Crawford, although traumatic, was not all that unordinary for the frontier culture of the time and it only directly traumatized a few witnesses and their families and friends via extension. So what makes the memory of Crawford’s burning worthy of study? There are numerous cases that mirror the details of Crawford’s death yet few if any of these has had such a significant and lasting impact. Despite the burning of Crawford directly affecting only a few individuals, it did not diminish the overall impact that the memory of the event has had on local, national, and international politics and culture. Even without the mass communicative advantages of modern society, interested parties ensured that the memory of Crawford’s burning was perpetuated by whatever means possible.

While this work uses this singular event of Crawford’s burning as a focal point, it grapples with much larger issues. There are several different themes that run throughout this work: the power of myth and social memory to impact politics and people, specifically American Indians; the contested nature of who should “own” history: historians versus the public; the

---

different ways in which the past can be manipulated for political and personal motives; the
importance of locale and community to history; and martyrdom and the significance of death in
American memory.

Trouillot has noted that “[n]arratives are occasionally evoked as illustrations or, at best,
deciphered as texts, but the process of their production rarely constitutes the object of study.”
This work will take up Trouillot’s suggestion and examine the process of production surrounding
the master narrative of Colonel Crawford’s death. By examining the process of production, the
“power that makes some narratives possible and silences others” can be revealed. Too often
academics see themselves as the creators and authors of history, but, as Trouillot has stated,
“participants in any event may enter into the production of a narrative about that event before the
historian as such reaches the scene.” So was the case with the burning of Colonel Crawford.
Before historians attempted to write the history of the event, the work had already been completed.

Terminology & Spelling

For clarity, some less than ideal terminology will be used throughout this work. The terms
“Indian” and “Native Peoples” will be used instead of Native American(s) for several reasons.
Most significantly, the Indian tribes that are referenced in this work often included populations
from what is now present day Canada and the decedents of these groups prefer other
designations. Secondly, the term “Indian” is more recognizable than other widely used
nomenclature such as First Nations Peoples (Canada). It must also be noted that using the word

---

10 Trouillot, 22.
11 Trouillot, 25.
12 Trouillot, 26.
“Indian” is also a reductive practice that generalizes the cultural differences that existed among different tribes and nations. For this reason, the term “Indian coalition” will be used to describe intertribal alliances that often included membership from upwards of a dozen tribes. Adding to the complexity of distinguishing among dozens of individual tribes that called the Great Lakes region home in the eighteenth-century is the intermixing that occurred by the end of the American Revolution due to warfare, disease, and forced relocation. Tribal names such as Delaware or Miami more accurately describe a location where a plural community of Indians resided rather than a culturally or ethnically homogenous population. Historian Colin Calloway has advocated for understanding these tribal names as addresses. Thus this work will use the terms Indian and European as a way to distinguish between individuals from a European heritage from those with a North American heritage, recognizing that both aforementioned groups were comprised of numerous smaller communities and populations. Finally, for readability, quotes using original eighteenth-century spelling have been rewritten using modern spelling/alphabetical characters (firt becomes first, addreffing becomes addressing, etc.). Other grammar mistakes and misspellings have been retained.
INTRODUCTION

On June 4, 1782 a Russian noblemen, Baron Gustavus Heinrich de Rosenthal, awoke to a heavy fog blanketing the eerily flat Sandusky Plains of the American frontier.\(^{13}\) It had been several years since the noblemen killed a man while dueling in Russia and fled for the newly self-declared United States of America. After crossing the Atlantic via England, Rosenthal met up with the Continental Army at Valley Forge and failed to acquire a Continental commission under a pseudonym.\(^{14}\) Broke and without any prospects, Rosenthal devoted himself to the American cause anyway serving as a surgeon for the American Navy.\(^{15}\) Now, five years later and going by the name of Major John Rose, he found himself hundreds of miles into the wilderness of the Ohio County as a member of the Sandusky Expedition, a campaign against a coalition of Indians supported by their British allies. Serving under the command of Colonel William Crawford, a man recently elected by his peers to lead the campaign, Rose prepared for battle.

Colonel William Crawford

Born in Westmoreland County, Virginia in 1722 to parents Valentine and Honora Grimes Crawford, William stood somewhere between five foot eight and six feet tall.\(^ {16}\) His blue eyes and medium to heavy build made him a “handsome” man who was “prepossessing in his

---


\(^{14}\) Rose, 131.

\(^{15}\) Rose, 132.

\(^{16}\) Allen W. Scholl, The Brothers Crawford: Colonel William, 1722-1782 and Valentine Jr., 1724-1777 (Bowie: Heritage Books, Inc., 1995), 1:261. There is some debate as to whether Crawford’s father was Valentine or William Crawford. It has been speculated that in the family genealogy an entire generation may be missing. Adding to the confusion, the family tree is filled with pairs of brothers named William and Valentine. See Scholl, 1.
Although exact details about his family lineage are debated, it is believed that he was descended from Thomas Crawford of Jordanhill, a sixteenth century military captain who famously led an assault on Dumberton Castle. The second youngest of five full siblings (three sisters and a brother Valentine), Crawford knew little of his father who died sometime around 1725. Soon after the death of his father, Crawford’s mother married his father’s indentured servant, Richard Stephenson, and moved to Frederick County, Virginia. Crawford grew up near Winchester, Virginia with his large blended family before apprenticing as a surveyor with John Vance around 1740. While living with the family of John Vance, Crawford became romantically involved with John Vance’s daughter, Hanna, and the two married circa 1747. The couple had three children, Effie (1748), Sarah (1749), and John (1750). William supported the family as a surveyor and farmer of the land he purchased on a tributary of the Shenandoah River in 1750.

In 1754 both William and his brother Valentine answered the call of Governor Robert Dinwiddie and volunteered to serve Virginia in the escalating conflict with France and its Indian allies. During the French and Indian War (Seven Years War), Crawford fought alongside

---

17 Descriptions of Crawford’s height vary. Mrs. Lydia Cruger described him as being 5’10”, Jacob White estimated his height at 5’8”, and James Anderson claimed that he stood over six feet tall. See: Interview with Lydia Cruger, Draper MS 3S 150; Letter from Jacob White, Draper MS 11E 74; and James Anderson, “Colonel William Crawford,” Ohio Archeological and Historical Quarterly 6 (1898): 2.
19 It is not known how Crawford’s father died or how many children he had. It is believed that Crawford had three older sisters. See Scholl, 49.
20 Scholl, xv, 261.
21 Scholl, 275.
General Edward Braddock and his old friend George Washington at the Battle of the Monongahela, a disastrous British defeat that resulted in approximately nine hundred British casualties while the French and their Indian allies lost fewer than one hundred. After being promoted to lieutenant in 1757, George Washington then made Crawford a captain in 1758. The friendship between Washington and Crawford would continue for the rest of their lives as they became ever closer personally and financially. Crawford made a name for himself as an Indian fighter on the frontier and became well acquainted with the lands west of the Appalachian Mountains. After retiring from service in 1761, Crawford, possibly foreseeing the Proclamation Line of 1763, agreed to sell his land in eastern Virginia and acquired land in what was then Augusta County, Virginia (present-day Fayette County, Pennsylvania). After making some improvements, Crawford moved his family to what is now Fayette County, Pennsylvania in 1766. The family resided in a small cabin on the Youghiogheny River only a few miles from the underdeveloped frontier town of Pittsburgh. It appeared as though Crawford would live out his days as a frontier family man, but destiny had other designs.

The Peace of Paris in 1763 officially ended the French and Indian War and forever changed the history of the North American continent. France relinquished all of its North American colonies and Great Britain gained control of all the lands east of the Mississippi. Despite the cessation of hostilities between the European powers, the continent was anything but peaceful. Absent from the negotiations in Paris were representatives from the numerous Indian tribes whose land was being given away. Viewing themselves as independent peoples whom the British never defeated, many Indian nations resented the treaty’s terms and prepared to defend

---

22 Scholl, 276.
23 Scholl, 38, 276
themselves. Compounding the problems of this tenuous situation was the ignorance and arrogance of British commander-in-chief Jeffery Amherst who refused to continue the tradition of gift giving that the French employed in order to facilitate positive relations with the Indian people.24 This policy would set in motion a series of events that would forever alter the face of the North American continent as a group of Indian tribes started what Native American historian Collin Calloway has termed “The First War of Independence.” Commonly known as Pontiac’s Rebellion, this conflict between the Indians and the British witnessed “more than ever before, Indians and whites,” who “killed people because their victims were, respectively, whites and Indians.”25 As Crawford was preparing to move his family to the Pennsylvania frontier, an Ottawa war chief named Pontiac led several successful raids against British forts before his Indian coalition dissolved. Colonel Crawford would have a front row seat to this unfolding racial drama that would eventually cost him his life and shape the memory of his death for centuries to come.

As Crawford waited for hostilities to calm down before moving into his new home in Pennsylvania, his old friend George Washington found himself in a bit of financial trouble. Following the fall in tobacco prices after the war, Washington looked to other ventures to make money, and he saw an opportunity in western land speculation. In an attempt to prevent the Indians and colonists from tearing each other apart (and costing the government money), the British government enacted the Proclamation of 1763 that forbid British colonists from settling lands west of the Appalachian Mountains.26 Washington, in desperate need of money, leaned on

25 Calloway, Scratch of a Pen, 16.
26 Issued by King George III, the Royal Proclamation of 1763 prohibited colonists from settling lands west of the Appalachian Mountains. The King hoped that this decision would reduce
his friendship with Crawford and asked his friend to “look me out a tract of about fifteen hundred, two thousand, or more acres somewhere in your neighborhood,” requesting that the land be “as contiguous to your own settlement as such a body of good land can be found.” With Crawford already established in the region, Washington spotted a loophole through which he could acquire “some of the most valuable lands in the King's part…notwithstanding the proclamation that restrains it at present, and prohibits the settling of them at all.” Aware that they were circumventing the law, Washington advised Crawford to “keep this whole matter a secret, or trust it only to those in whom you can confide” as “I might be censured for the opinion I have given in respect to the King's proclamation, and then, if the scheme I am now proposing to you were known, it might give the alarm to others.” Washington reminded Crawford that the proclamation was only “a temporary expedient to quiet the minds of the Indians,” and that “it must fall, of course, in a few years, especially when those Indians consent to our occupying the lands.” Washington further assured Crawford that “Colonel Armstrong, an acquaintance of mine, has something to do in the direction of it [the surveyor’s office in Carlisle], and I am persuaded he would readily serve me.” Crawford agreed to Washington’s plan and the two now had even more of a vested interest in the removal of the King’s proclamation.

 frontier hostilities, save the crown money, and force English settlement into the newly acquired French colonies in what is now Canada. Ultimately, this proclamation would upset many wealthy colonial elites who speculated in western lands.

32 Also included in this partnership was William Crawford’s brother Valentine.
several years, they exchanged letters hashing out details. Crawford made several trips to Mount Vernon to visit his friend and business partner and Washington likewise visited Crawford and inspected his investment. The two men waited, somewhat impatiently, and when controversy arose in the middle of the 1770s, both men passionately took up the “patriot” cause as anything but disinterested men. In 1774, Crawford participated in Lord Dunmore’s War serving as a Major as he successfully destroyed two Mingo Villages in what is now Franklin County, Ohio. Quickly shifting allegiances with the winds of opportunity, Crawford would then enlist his services in support of the Revolution.

Even before the Continental Congress declared independence, Crawford joined his longtime friend in the struggle, becoming a lieutenant-colonel of the 5th Virginia Regiment. After receiving several promotions, Crawford crossed the icy Delaware River with Washington and fought in the Battle of Princeton. Following the death of Crawford’s brother from pneumonia in January of 1777, Washington sent Crawford to Pittsburgh to take command of the Thirteenth Virginia Regiment. In 1778 he constructed Fort Crawford several miles above Pittsburgh and served under Brigadier-General Lachlin McIntosh in an expedition against Detroit. Probably fearing for the future of western settlement and his own prosperity, Crawford made a personal appeal to Congress in 1780 for more support on the western frontier, one that essentially went unanswered. Finally, in 1781 Crawford resigned from the army and focused on his other

---

33 At this time the term interested had a negative connotation. Interested civic leaders were not acting purely on the behalf of the citizens but had something to gain from the manner in which they acted. According to this logic, only individuals of substantial means (monetarily and socially) were fit for leadership roles as they did not need to profit from their position; however, as is the case with Washington and Crawford most did profit.
35 Scholl, 282.
responsibilities as a Justice for Youghiogheny County, Virginia among other posts.\textsuperscript{36} If this would have been the final eventful chapter of Crawford’s life, he would have faded into obscurity, and his name would not be commemorated by cities, towns, and counties all across the country. Like the numerous other lower level officers of the Revolution, his name would have been largely forgotten. Unfortunately for Crawford, this was not the end of his military career.

In 1782 Crawford once again came out of retirement for a final expedition against the Indians and their British allies in the Ohio region. The sixty year old colonel found himself in charge of a force of approximately five hundred men. Most of these individuals were residents of either Washington County or Westmoreland County along the disputed Pennsylvania-Virginia border.\textsuperscript{37} Although comprised of mostly frontiersmen, this group had a significant amount of collective military experience from earlier engagements during the Revolution.\textsuperscript{38} Crawford’s objective was to destroy the gathering of Indians at Sandusky in the Ohio frontier. He was somewhat familiar with the land from his previous forays into the region, but he was even better acquainted with one of his opponents. Facing off against Crawford on the foggy morning of June 4, 1782 was a familiar face, Simon Girty.

\textbf{Simon Girty}

Simon Girty was born in 1741 to Simon Girty Sr., an Irish immigrant, and Mary Newton. Simon Girty Sr. made a living as a frontier trader on the Susquehanna River near what is now

\textsuperscript{36} Scholl 283-284.
\textsuperscript{37} Parker B. Brown, “Reconstructing Crawford's Army of 1782,” \textit{Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine} 65, no. 1 (1982): 34. The exact composition of the force has been a mystery for well over two hundred years. By cross-referencing several different sources, Parker Brown has reconstructed much of the expeditionary force. His research has uncovered significant mistakes in the historical record. See Brown, “Reconstructing Crawford's Army of 1782,” 17-36.
\textsuperscript{38} Brown, “Reconstructing Crawford's Army of 1782,” 24.
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.\textsuperscript{39} His four sons, Thomas (b.1739), Simon, James (b.1743), and George (b. 1746) grew up in between the Indian and white worlds that their father occupied.\textsuperscript{40} For their most of their lives, the Girty brothers would continue to oscillate between these different worlds, sometimes by force and sometimes by choice.

Simon’s childhood was anything but typical for his background. Simon grew up in a family that frequently hosted Indian friends and acquaintances. The brothers “were raised in the shadow of the Indian trade.”\textsuperscript{41} Being Irish in a region consisting almost exclusively of German farmers, Simon and his brothers were outcasts among their peers.\textsuperscript{42} Their father’s occupation further isolated the boys from the rest of colonial society as they acquired and independent spirit. Despite being ostracized, the boys enjoyed a relatively comfortable childhood due to their father’s success. Unfortunately, this calm would be short lived as tragedy soon struck the family. Although exact details are unknown, it is likely that sometime around 1750 Simon Girty Sr. had “a difficulty with one Samuel Sanders.”\textsuperscript{43} According to Simon Girty Sr.’s grandson, Girty challenged Sanders to a duel where “both missed.”\textsuperscript{44} The two men then “took their swords” and Sanders “treacherously run [Girty] through with his sword,” killing him.\textsuperscript{45} Sanders was ultimately convicted with the death of Simon Girty Sr., but the troubles were only just beginning.

\textsuperscript{40} Hoffman, 4-5.
\textsuperscript{41} Hoffman, 5.
\textsuperscript{42} For the discontent between German and Irish famers see Peter Silver, \textit{Our Savage Neighbors: How Indian War Transformed Early America} (New York: W.W. Norton, 2008), 3-37.
\textsuperscript{43} Letter from Joseph Munger, Jr. to Lyman Copeland Draper, 1847, in Draper MS 10 E-144.
\textsuperscript{44} Letter from Joseph Munger, Jr. to Lyman Copeland Draper, 1847, in Draper MS 10 E-144.
\textsuperscript{45} Letter from Joseph Munger, Jr. to Lyman Copeland Draper, 1847, in Draper MS 10 E-144.
In 1751, an Indian trader named Thomas McKee and a tavern owner named George Gibson swindled the family out of Girty Sr.’s property by backdating documents.\textsuperscript{46}

The Girtys managed to make ends meet as the boys assisted their mother in farming. In 1753 Mary accepted a marriage proposal from John Turner, and the family moved onto his land in present day Union County, Pennsylvania.\textsuperscript{47} The couple had a son, John Turner, Jr. in 1755 and things started looking up for the family.\textsuperscript{48} Unfortunately, tragedy was never far from the Girty family as frontier events spilled over into the region. The expedition by General Braddock, of which Colonel William Crawford partook, in 1755 caused a major disruption in frontier relations. The frontier conflict between the British, the French, and the different tribal alliances quickly escalated into a world war known in America as the French and Indian War and as the Seven Years War elsewhere. This conflict brought Delaware raiding parties into the Pennsylvania frontier, and Turner sold his land and moved his family to a safer location at Indian Old Town (present day Lewistown, PA).\textsuperscript{49} Still threatened by raiding parties, Turner and his family moved into Fort Granville in search of safety, but this effort was futile. According to a report in the \textit{Pennsylvania Gazette}, the fort “was attacked by 100 French and Indians” and set ablaze in late July of 1756.\textsuperscript{50} The inhabitants were taken prisoner and taken back to “the Delaware Village of Kittanning” where “John Turner was removed from the other prisoners, confronted with accusations, condemned, and then tortured to death in view of all the captives, including his wife and family.”\textsuperscript{51} According to a Girty biographer, Phillip W. Hoffman, Turner

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{46} Hoffman, 8. \\
\textsuperscript{47} Hoffman, 8-9. \\
\textsuperscript{48} Calloway, “Simon Girty,” 41; Hoffman, 9. \\
\textsuperscript{49} Hoffman, 10. \\
\textsuperscript{50} \textit{Pennsylvania Gazette}, August 19, 1756. \\
\textsuperscript{51} \textit{Pennsylvania Gazette}, August 19, 1756.
\end{flushright}
“was tortured with repeated applications of red-hot gun barrels, some of which were pushed completely through parts of his body,” and “this was all done very systematically, so that only pain (and not death) would result.” Simon and his brothers must have looked on in horror as their stepfather was slowly put to a gruesome death. This would not be the last time Simon witnessed such an execution.

The Indian practice of torture and scalping was part of a larger Indian defense strategy. Outnumbered by the ever increasing number of Europeans, the “Indian forms of war depended on the multiplication of panic.” Quite successfully, Indians used a form of psychological warfare to paralyze their enemies and impede western expansion. Terrified colonists frequently decided to not retaliate and instead chose to flee eastward out of fear. Despite being in the midst of war, the colonists often described these Indian raids as massacres and acts of murder. What lay at the crux of the issue were two differing ideological perspectives and their subsequent understandings of war. The colonists were accustomed to the established European protocols of war that forbade the killing of non-combatants (women and children). Their Indian counterparts did not adhere to such a rulebook, and what the Indians considered an act of war, colonists viewed as brutal savage murder. Similarly, colonists and Indians had vastly different understandings of land ownership. The Indians viewed land not as something to own personally but as a region shared among tribal members for survival. In contrast, the colonists perceived land as something owned by individuals to secure both sustenance and independence. With a strong sense of entitlement, many colonists believed that they were committing no wrong in adventuring into the frontier and claiming “unowned” land as their own. When the Indians

52 Hoffman, 13.
53 Silver, 42.
54 Silver, 39-71.
fought to defend their way of life against this intrusion using their methods of warfare, the colonists instead perceived themselves as innocent victims of barbarous savages hell-bent on murder and destruction. Thus young Simon found himself awash in a confusing and dynamic world that was the Pennsylvania frontier of the 1760s and 1770s.

Following the execution of his step-father, Simon was separated from his mother as “a war party of Shawnees took Mary Girty-Turner and her eighteen-month-old son, John, Jr. to Fort Duquesne.” A force under the command of Colonel John Armstrong rescued Thomas Girty a month later but his brothers remained captives and began the process of adoption into their new Indian families. Adoption was a common practice among many Indian tribes including the Iroquois. Captives taken in war often replaced those warriors or other family members lost during conflict. The process of adoption was not a painless ordeal as many of the captives had to endure physical feats of strength and endurance that often included what modern society would call abuse or torture. However, those who were chosen and able to survive this ordeal became full members of Indian society. It was not uncommon then to find white men and women living among tribes who were adopted at a young age and therefore learned little about European language, culture, or religion. Those not chosen for adoption often faced ritual torture and execution. Fortunately for the Girtys, they were among the captives chosen for adoption.

The remaining brothers were soon separated as Simon was given to a party of Western Seneca in upstate New York. Through his adoption, Simon was now part of the powerful

---

55 Hoffman, 13.
57 Hoffman, 18. Within a few years, members of the Western Seneca formed a new tribe called the Mingo. See Silver, 9.
Iroquois League, a confederation of tribes that rivaled their European counterparts. Now a teenager, Simon experienced what it was like to be a part of a community for the first time. This helps explain why Simon felt such an attachment toward Indian life throughout his years. Biographers have noted that Girty’s “blunt honesty, fierce independence, and his predilection for making up his own mind all stemmed from his early years living among the Senecas…as well as his intense loyalty to friends—white, red, old and new.”

Simon “related better to people rather than to property or politics.” In addition to shaping his character, Girty’s time among the Indians allowed him to become fluent in at least nine different Indian languages. It was his skill as an interpreter that would make Girty a valuable asset during the next forty years of frontier fighting. Girty remained with his Indian family through the French and Indian War and Pontiac’s Rebellion before being returned in 1764 as part of a peace settlement. Girty and his brother James, who had also been returned in the same exchange, were reunited with their mother and brothers, Thomas and George. Mary’s captors had released her, and she established herself on an area of land known as Squirrel Hill near the frontier town of Pittsburgh.

Lieutenant Alexander McKee, the son of the same Thomas McKee that swindled the Girty family out of their home a decade earlier, helped negotiate their release and now had big plans for both Simon and James. For the next decade, the new Colonial Indian Department frequently employed Girty as an interpreter on the western frontier. Girty served as an interpreter at the Fort Stanwix Treaty negotiations and was frequently called upon by McKee to deliver important messages and decrees to Indian tribes throughout the region. Girty even escorted his

58 Hoffman, 25.
59 Hoffman, 25.
60 Hoffman, 25.
61 Hoffman, 31.
friend, the Iroquois Chief Guyasuta, to New York to have a discussion with the Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Sir William Johnson, at his newly constructed Johnson Hall. Girty also participated in several business expeditions into the Ohio country where he became familiar with the land and its people. In 1768, Girty and his partners where ambushed by a party of Shawnees while on the Cumberland River forcing Girty to flee for his life. After shooting and killing one of his pursuers, Girty returned to the site of the ambush to find the mutilated bodies of his comrades. Girty managed to make it to safety at Kaskaskia and shared his story. Word of Girty’s heroics and remarkable ability to quickly navigate the frontier wilderness spread and his reputation grew. For most of Girty’s life he occupied what historian Richard White has called the middle ground:

The middle ground is the place in between: in between cultures, peoples, and in between empires and the nonstate world of villages. It is a place where many of the North American subjects and allies of empires lived. It is the area between the historical foreground of European invasion and occupation and the background of Indian defeat and retreat.

Girty simultaneously lived in two worlds, maintaining friends in each world who happened to be bitter enemies of each other. He was one of the “subjects at the periphery” who “guided[ed] the course of empires.” As political and military conflict spread throughout the British colonies in

---

62 Hoffman, 46. Sir William Johnson was well connected and largely succeeded in keeping the powerful Iroquois confederacy neutral or allied with Great Britain during the colonial conflicts.  
63 Kaskaskia was a long inhabited and strategically located Indian village along the Mississippi River that became a place of military contention in the numerous Indian and European conflicts that plagued the 18th century.  
64 Hoffman, 38-40.  
66 White, XI.
North America, Girty would turn out to be an unlikely chess piece in the game of international colonial politics.

In 1771 Girty voted in the newly formed Bedford County’s first election. It is not known who he voted for but McKee and William Crawford both became justices of the peace.\(^{67}\) However, frontier politics were anything but stable and a long simmering dispute between Virginia and Pennsylvania came to a head. In the land dispute over the Pittsburgh region, Simon Girty sided with the Virginians and participated in Lord Dunmore’s War alongside William Crawford where he “was one of the Scouts.”\(^{68}\) It appears that Girty and Crawford were well acquainted with one another for “Simon lived with Crawford” and “many a time he had eaten & drank at Crawford’s & enjoyed his hospitality.”\(^{69}\) Both Girty and Crawford emerged from the war with greater status. The peace was short-lived however as the vibrations of the shot heard round the world reached ears on the frontier.

During the American Revolution, Lieutenant Girty’s services were well sought after. Girty was important enough that Lord Dunmore included him by name on a list of individuals who he believed would side with the crown.\(^{70}\) However, after Lord Dunmore’s downfall, Girty was discharged as Dunmore’s forces were disbanded and McKee quickly brought Girty back into the Indian Department. Girty’s services were also desired by his Indian associates. The Six Nations reasoned that “we cannot well do without a person who understands the Language of the six Nations,” and requested that “Simon Girty should be appointed to interpret any matters we

\(^{67}\) Hoffman, 45.
\(^{68}\) Draper MS 3 S 8.
may have to say to you [future Americans] hereafter."71 In a somewhat surprising move, given his association with the Iroquois and his close association with the fur trade that would suffer from independence, Girty sided with the rebels.72 Perhaps it was his compensation of “five-eighths of a dollar per day” from the Americans as an interpreter to the Six Nations that helped make his decision.73 After a falling out with Indian agent, George Morgan, in 1776 Girty was discharged from his position and enlisted with the Continental Army. Girty helped recruit soldiers and believed that he would be given a captain’s commission but instead he received a lieutenancy as William Crawford’s half-brother, John Stephenson, would become captain.74 After he served as a second lieutenant until August of 1777, both the Seneca and the patriots questioned Girty’s loyalty and he was “thrown into the guardhouse at Fort Pitt” but was ultimately acquitted.75 Sources indicate that “[w]hen Girty had been apprehended & confined at Pittsburgh,” it was Crawford who “interfered” and secured Girty’s release.76 Girty’s true sympathies at the time of accusation cannot be known, but by the spring of 1778 he decided to defect along with a group of individuals that included his former colleagues, Alexander McKee and Mathew Elliot, whom he had served alongside on numerous occasions.77 The loss of Girty, McKee, and Elliot was a significant blow to the patriot cause, and these men were vilified as traitors.

Now working out of Detroit, Girty served as an interpreter and member of the British Indian Department. As historian Colin Calloway notes, “Girty’s polyglot facility made him a valuable addition to the British at a pivotal place and crucial time.” Girty frequently scouted enemy positions, participated in council meetings, and delivered messages across vast distances and language barriers. Girty was also responsible for the ambushing of American parties and co-lead several Indian forces into battle. Despite the harsh and unforgiving nature of his work, Girty was not a monster. On numerous occasions, Girty went out of his way to rescue captured individuals from being executed. In addition to saving his friend Simon Kenton, Girty also rescued a young captive named Henry Baker from being burned at the stake by the Wyandots in the spring of 1781. Later that same year, Girty and Mohawk war chief Joseph Brant came to blows over a disagreement about who should receive credit for a successful ambush on the forces of George Rogers Clark. Girty insulted the war chief, and Brant retaliated by hitting Girty over the head with a sabre. According to exaggerated interviews conducted decades later, Girty’s “brain could be seen beating” in his skull. Evidently, the injury was not immediately serious as Girty resumed his work within a few months; but, he did suffer vision problems later in life. Following Girty’s recovery, Major Arent Schuyler DePeyster, the commanding officer at Detroit, sent Girty to Upper Sandusky to interpret and go to war with the Wyandot tribe. After a mission to Pennsylvania in the spring of 1782 Girty caught wind of a gruesome and disturbing incident that occurred at the Moravian Indian village of Gnadenhutten. What would become known as the Gnadenhutten Massacre was the single most important incident leading up to Crawford’s

---

expedition against the Indians gathered near Sandusky. The decision of whether or not to include the incident in the narrative of Crawford’s expedition has been a controversial point of contention for over two hundred years.

**The Gnadenhutten Massacre**

After being displaced from their eastern homeland, many Delaware Indians (Lenape) settled in the Ohio Country in the villages of Gnadenhutten, Salem, and Schonbrunn. Due to the efforts of David Zeisberger and his fellow missionaries, many of the Delaware Indians converted to Christianity. During the war, these “Moravian” Indians attempted to remain neutral in hopes that they would be able to exist unmolested. Unfortunately, the Moravian towns did not enjoy the protection of the Swiss Alps and neutrality became nearly untenable. Some Moravians sided with the British and others with the Americans. Another group continued to strive for neutrality. Unfortunately, neither the British nor the Americans fully trusted the Moravian Indians, and the British forcibly removed them on a long march back to Detroit. The displaced Delaware Indians were eventually resettled on the plains near Upper Sandusky. With the sudden increase in population, the land could not support this scenario for long, and by the fall of 1781 food was running out. A starving group of Delaware departed for Gnadenhutten in October hoping to harvest some food from the previously planted fields, but they were intercepted by American militiamen and taken prisoner. Starving, many of the remaining Moravian Indians started out a second time for the fields near Gnadenhutten in hopes of surviving the winter. Marching through the snow that blanketed the region in February and March of 1782, the Delaware continuously acquired supplies form their previous settlements.

---

82 Silver, 265-266.
While the neutral Delaware Indians were at Gnadenhutten, a raiding party comprised of Wyandot and Delaware Indians captured and killed several frontier settlers near Fort Pitt. The war party rode through Gnadenhutten and reportedly impaled members of one captive’s family. The captive escaped and informed those at Fort Pitt that the Indians were gathered at Gnadenhutten. Catching word of the Indian’s presence, a group of 150-200 men formed an unsanctioned militia and “set off on Horse back to the Muskingum, in order to destroy Three Indian Settlements of which they seemed to be sure of being the Towns of some Enemy Indians.”

Nearing the village of Gnadenhutten, the men spotted an approaching Indian and “laid themselves flat on the ground, waiting till the Indian was nigh enough, then one of them shot the Indian and broke his arm.” As “three of the Militia ran towards him with Tomahawks,” the wounded man, Joseph Shabosh, “begged for his life,” claiming that he was “the son of a white Christian man.” The aggressors “took no notice of what he said,” and “cut him in pieces with their hatchets.” The unsanctioned militia proceeded to the town and “approached the Indians, most of whom were in their plantations, and surrounded them, almost imperceptibly.” After “[f]eigning a friendly behavior,” the militia “told them to go home, promising to do them no injury.”

---

83 "Relation of what was told by two of his neighbors, living near Delaware River above Easton, who were just returned from the Monaungahela" in William. P. Palmer, ed., *Calendar of Virginia State Papers and Other Manuscripts from January 1, 1782, to December 31, 1784* (Richmond: James E. Goode, 1883), 3: 122.
84 Palmer, 123.
86 Palmer, 123; Loskiel, 177.
87 Loskiel, 177.
88 Loskiel, 177.
believed every word they said,” and informed their guests that they “were Christians and made no resistance.” The militia then ordered them to “prepare themselves for the Journey [to Fort Pitt], and to take all their effects along with them.” The Indians “cheerfully delivered their guns, hatchets and other weapons” and other items that they had hid in the woods to the devious militia who “promised to take good care of them,” and “return every article to its rightful owner” upon arrival at Fort Pitt. While a small detachment of militia went to the nearby village of Salem, the remaining men “suddenly attacked” and “seized and bound” the Indians at Gnadenhutten. The Indians from Salem “met the same fate” as the militia relieved them of all their possessions. The militia then “held a Council, when the Commander of the Militia [Lieutenant Colonel David Williamson] told his men that he would leave it to their choice, either to carry the Indians as Prisoners to Fort Pitt or to kill them.” After some debate, it was “resolved by a majority of votes, to murder them all the very next day.” Next, the mode of execution was debated as “some were for burning them alive, other for taking their scalps.” Ultimately the militia chose the latter course of action and informed the Indians of their decision so “they might prepare themselves in a Christian manner, for they must all die to-morrow.” The militia proceeded to gather the Indians “into two houses.” They filled the one house with “the Brethren and in the other the Sisters and children were confined like sheep ready for slaughter.”

89 Loskiel, 177; Palmer, 123.
90 Palmer, 123.
91 Loskiel, 177.
92 Loskiel, 178.
93 Loskiel, 178.
94 Palmer, 123.
95 Loskiel, 178.
96 Loskiel, 179.
97 Loskiel, 179.
98 Loskiel, 179.
99 Loskiel, 179.
The Indians “sung hymns and psalms all night…and kept on singing as long as there were three alive.” 100 Many of the militia “who were of a different opinion,” and voted for taking the Indians back to Fort Pitt, “wrung their hands, calling God to witness, that they were innocent of the blood of these harmless Christian Indians.” 101 These dissenting few would watch as the next day’s slaughter ensued.

As the sun rose on March 8, 1782, it interrupted what must have been a sleepless and frightful night for the Indians. The militia grew anxious “that the execution had not yet begun” but soon after the Indians professed that “they were all ready to die, having commended their immortal souls to God,” the “carnage commenced.” 102 The militia “fetch'd the Indians two or three at a time with ropes about their necks, and dragged them into the Slaughter Houses.” 103 After “[t]aking up a cooper’s mallet,” a militiamen began “knocking down one after the other, until he had counted fourteen, that he had killed with his own hands.” 104 After expending a great deal of energy, the man “handed the instrument, to one of his fellow murderers” and the killing continued in this systematic fashion. 105 The militia scalped the Indians before “they set those two Houses on fire.” 106 In total, “ninety-six persons magnified the name of the Lord, by patiently meeting a cruel death. Sixty-two were grown persons…and thirty-four children.” 107 The militia departed unaware that “two youths, each between fifteen and sixteen years old” were still breathing. 108 One teenager, after being scalped, managed to escape “into the cellar of that house

100 Palmer, 123.
101 Loskiel, 179.
102 Loskiel, 180.
103 Palmer, 123.
104 Heckewelder, 320.
105 Heckewelder, 320.
106 Palmer, 123.
107 Loskiel, 180.
108 Loskiel, 180.
in which the Sisters were executed.”109 According to this youth, the “blood soon penetrated through the flooring,” and “ran in streams into the cellar.”110 The teenager “remained concealed till night…crept through [to a window] and escaped into a neighboring thicket.”111 The other survivor, a young boy named Thomas, hid among a pile of “bleeding corpses” after the militia “struck him only one blow on the head, took his scalp, and left him.”112 Thomas remained motionless as his brother Abel tried to raise himself up and was killed “outright with two or three blows.”113

As historian Peter Silver relates, this “was no longer an Indian attack but a slaughterhouse. The nakedness, the binding, the being taken by ones and twos—all were deliberately chosen to make the victims’ helplessness more vivid.”114 The killing did not even end when the militia ran out of victims. Upon returning to Fort Pitt, they killed four more imprisoned Indians.115 This unsanctioned attack demonstrated the lawlessness that engulfed the frontier. As Silver notes, it was clear, “who was in real control of the region, and it was not Congress or its army.”116 Although the Pennsylvania Journal reported proudly that the militia “arrived at the town in the night, undiscovered, attacked the Indians in their cabins, and so completely surprised them, that they killed and scalped upwards of ninety (but a few making their escape),” the darker details of the massacre would soon spread.117 The incident filled the Delaware Indians (among other tribes) with rage, and they searched for a means of exacting

109 Loskiel, 181.
110 Loskiel, 181.
111 Loskiel, 181.
112 Loskiel, 181.
113 Loskiel, 181.
114 Silver, 273.
115 Silver, 274.
116 Silver, 274.
117 Re-quoted in Silver, 268.
revenge. What the Delaware did not know was that the men responsible for the massacre “agreed, that 600 men should meet on the 18th of March, to go to Sandusky which is about 100 miles from the Muskingum.” As the spring of 1782 turned into summer, Crawford and Girty found themselves on the eve of a battle that, unbeknownst to them, would forever alter Indian-white relations and their own reputations.

The Battle of Sandusky

As the morning fog of June 4, 1782 dissipated with the afternoon sun, the boom of cannons cracked the ominous silence, and Rose, under the command of Colonel Crawford, faced off against Girty and his Indian friends. Because of the “[s]howers of rain” that fell the day before, Rose and his fellow soldiers discharged their weapons before departing. The American forces moved northwest across the grass fields toward their objective and, upon arriving at a Wyandot town, they found the place deserted as Rose counted “26 Houses burnt and 9 standing.” Suspecting that their enemy was expecting them and might be planning an ambush, Colonel Crawford gathered his officers to discuss strategy. After some disagreement, Crawford decided to press on for a few more miles. After stopping to eat, Crawford gave orders to Rose to “go a head some miles and reconnoiter the Country” and try to “discover the Town or signs of an enemy.” Rose departed with a small detachment and after a few miles he saw “a party of Indians upon my right along the edge of a wood, and a large Body trying with the utmost velocity to gain my Rear.” Rose and his men began a hasty retreat back toward the main body.

---

118 Palmer, 123.
119 Rose, 148.
120 Rose, 148.
121 Rose, 149.
122 Rose, 149.
of their army. By four o’clock, the fighting was widespread and the smell of gunpowder filled the air as muskets discharged. The fighting continued until dark but resumed at dawn the following day. Running low on ammunition and water, the American force was in trouble. Girty rode out “on his gray horse, carrying a white flag and call[ed] for surrender,” but Crawford did not accept.\textsuperscript{123} That night Crawford again convened with his officers, and they decided to retreat under the cover of darkness. Unfortunately, communication and discipline was poor and a group of soldiers departed prematurely. The Indians surprised this force and more fighting ensued.\textsuperscript{124} In the chaos, Colonel Crawford went missing and Simon Girty was informed that the “Big Captain” had been captured.

The Trial, Torture, and Execution of Crawford

Crawford spent the day of June 8\textsuperscript{th} watching as more of his soldiers were gathered together to await their fate. The following day, the Indians separated Crawford from his fellow captives and transported him to Half King’s Town to meet with Simon Girty. Girty informed Crawford that the Delaware Indians blamed him for the massacre at Gnadenhutten and Girty advised him to attempt an escape. Crawford denied any involvement with the slaughter and offered to exchange military intelligence for his freedom, but Girty could only promise that he would do what he could to save him. On June 10, 1782, Crawford and his fellow prisoners began a northward march toward Pipe’s Town. The Indians executed several prisoners along the

\textsuperscript{123} Parker B. Brown, “The Battle of Sandusky: June 4-6, 1782,” \textit{Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine} 65, no. 2 (1982): 140.
\textsuperscript{124} Brown, “The Battle of Sandusky,” 140-143.
way and forced Crawford to run the gauntlet.\textsuperscript{125} Crawford managed to complete this test of endurance and was thereby allowed to live a little while longer.

At Pipe’s Town Crawford’s captors held a council meeting and tried the colonel for his alleged involvement at Gnadenhutten. Crawford explained that he was not responsible for the tragedy and that he “very much favored the Indians at the Salt Licks, of Mahoning.”\textsuperscript{126} Girty attempted to save Crawford’s life and in doing so was threatened himself. Present at the trial was an Indian whose brother was killed at the Moravian Village and he “now insist[ed] that Crawford must die,” unless Girty offered up “his own life in Crawford’s stead.”\textsuperscript{127} Crawford was sentenced to be burned to death.\textsuperscript{128}

On June 11, the Indian captors shepherded Crawford and Dr. Knight to a ceremonial grove of oak trees outside of town were several hundred Indians gathered to watch the execution. While the Indians erected the pole and gathered the necessary items for the ceremony, Crawford “talked much God all the time looking up.”\textsuperscript{129} Crawford hands were bound and the Indians tied him to a pole with enough rope to “walk round the pole once or twice and return the same way.”\textsuperscript{130} Girty made another attempt to save Crawford, but Captain Pipe threatened Girty’s own

\textsuperscript{125} Parker B. Brown, “The Historical Accuracy of the Captivity Narrative of Doctor John Knight,” \textit{The Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine} 70, no. 1 (1987): 61. The gauntlet was a much older Iroquoian practice in which captives were forced to run between two parallel lines of individuals who would bludgeon the prisoner with sticks, fists, or other objects.

\textsuperscript{126} Draper MS, 4 S 112.

\textsuperscript{127} Draper MS, 4 S 112.

\textsuperscript{128} Brown, “Accuracy of the Knight Narrative,” 61.


\textsuperscript{130} Hugh Henry Brackenridge, \textit{Narratives of a Late Expedition Against the Indians with an Account of the Barbarous Execution of Colonel Crawford...} (Philadelphia: Francis Bailey, 1783), 11.
life if he tried to intervene. Captain Pipe then made a lengthy speech, and an Indian proceeded to cut off Crawford’s ears. Similarly to how Girty’s stepfather was tortured, the Indians shot powder charges into Crawford’s body. A few yards from the pole, was a fire “made of small hickory poles” and when the poles were “burnt quite through in the middle” several Indians “by turns,” picked up the burning poles and applied them “to [Crawford’s] naked body, already burnt black with the powder.” In a final attempt to save Crawford’s life, Girty arranged for British traders to visit, but this was to no avail. Crawford implored for Simon Girty to shoot him, but Girty replies “that he dare not” or else face his own repercussions. Being threatened by angry Indians and not wanting to watch the torture of his old friend, Girty left the scene. Following Girty’s departure, the Indians proceeded to scalp Crawford while he was still alive and poured burning embers onto his head and back. After the Indians could no longer prod Crawford into motion with their poles, he was incinerated in the fire.

131 Brown, “Accuracy of the Knight Narrative,” 62.
132 Narratives of a Late Expedition, 11.
133 Brown, “Accuracy of the Knight Narrative,” 62.
134 Brown, “Accuracy of the Knight Narrative,” 62.
CHAPTER ONE: CRAWFORD’S BURNING INCITES HATRED TOWARD INDIANS

While the capture, torture, and burning of Colonel William Crawford was not a significant event in terms of grand military strategy, as it resulted in the death of only a few soldiers, it forever changed the frontier relations between Indians and whites. As news of Crawford’s gruesome death made its way back east, it ignited a burning hatred of Indians in the hearts of many Americans. Whether a jacktar far removed from the frontier or George Washington himself, it was nearly impossible to avoid an emotional response to the news. In addition to fomenting anti-Indian sentiment, the burning of Crawford also seared into the minds of many Americans the belief that Simon Girty was the most despicable, evil, and dangerous white savage traitor on earth. Benedict Arnold may have been a traitor to the American cause, but Girty was a race traitor, and his memory was messily and undeservingly entangled with that of Crawford’s burning. Even long after Anthony Wayne’s victory at Fallen Timbers effectively ended the war over the Ohio region, the memory of Crawford’s burning continued to serve as a political weapon to drum up support for or against specific causes. Like a restless spirit, the memory of Crawford lingered on in American culture and continued to haunt the reputation of Simon Girty, serve as proof of Indian savagery, and impact local, national, and international politics.

The Story Spreads

Immediately following the Indian coalition’s defeat of Crawford’s expeditionary force, messages were simultaneously sent northward to the Indians’ British allies in Detroit and
eastward back to the Americans at Fort Pitt. General Irvine, the commander at Fort Pitt, first received news of the failed expedition at Fort Pitt via two letters both dated June 13, 1782. Colonel David Williamson penned one of these letters and Lieutenant Rose, the clandestine Russian nobleman, composed the other letter. The content of these letters indicated that the fate of Colonel Crawford was not yet known. As if an afterthought, Williamson added a postscript to his letter that read, “Colonel Crawford, our commandant, we can give no account of since the night of the retreat.” Likewise, Rose confirmed that, “Colonel Crawford has not been heard of since the night of the 5th instant, and I fear is among the killed.” It was not until early July that the American forces received the horrific details of Crawford’s last hours.

On July 4, 1782 a group of hunters brought a famished and injured individual to Fort McIntosh. As turns out, the man was John Knight, the captured surgeon from Crawford’s expedition, and he had a disturbing story to tell. Brought to Fort Pitt on July 5, Knight relayed his story, and an updated account of events raced eastward. It appears that the arrival of Knight interrupted Irvine while he was composing a letter to William Moore, President of the Pennsylvania Supreme Executive Council. In this letter Irvine abruptly interrupts his discussion of taxes, land, and politics to relay the disconcerting news that Colonel Crawford had been

---

136 By the end of the Revolution, the traditional Indian tribes had become so intermixed that historian Colin Calloway has advocated for understanding the tribal names as addresses. The term coalition will be used to describe an intertribal alliance that often but not always included Delawares, Shawnees, Miamis, Ottawas, Chippewas, Kickapoos, Wyandots, Potawatamies, Mohawks, Creeks, Iroquois, and others. In the primary literature this coalition is often referred to as the Wyandots mostly because of their location near Upper Sandusky. See Colin G. Calloway, *The American Revolution in Indian Country: Crisis and Diversity in Native American Communities*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), xvi; 1-25.
139 Brown, “Accuracy of the Knight Narrative,” 53.
“burned to death in a most shocking manner.” Elaborating on the details, Irvine added that Crawford was “over four hours in burning” and that the execution was in retaliation for the Moravian affair. A few days later, another survivor, John Slover, arrived at the fort bringing more details and confirming Knight’s story. On July 11, Irvine wrote to General George Washington, a friend of Crawford, informing him that not only was Crawford “burned and tortured in every manner they could invent,” but Crawford’s son-in-law, William Harrison, had been “quartered and burned.” Troubled by the death of his friend but ever cognizant of the larger situation, Washington “lament[ed] the failure of the expedition,” and was “particularly affected with the disastrous fate of Colonel Crawford.” Adding that “no other then the extremist tortures that could be inflicted by savages, I think, could have been expected by those who were unhappy enough to fall into their hands; especially under the present exasperation of their minds, for the treatment given their Moravian friends.” The news had reached the highest in command and was about to reach the public.

On the same day that Knight appeared at Fort McIntosh (July 4), the Pennsylvania Packet reported that Crawford’s expedition had been defeated and that Crawford was missing. It would not be until July 23 that details of Crawford’s horrific death were published in the local

---

140 Letter from Irvine to Moore, July 6, 1782, in Washington-Irvine Correspondence, 247-250. The Moravian Affair refers to the slaughter of nearly one hundred Indians by American forces at the Moravian village of Gnadenhütten. Interestingly, Knight relayed the reason for the incident as revenge for Gnadenhutten (Moravian Affair). When his narrative is formally published, its editor will leave out this detail and start a misrepresentation that is still being fought over today.

141 Letter from Irvine to Moore, July 6, 1782, in Washington-Irvine Correspondence, 247-250.

142 Letter from Irvine to Washington, July 11, 1782, in Washington-Irvine Correspondence, 126-128. Irvine also mentions the presence of Simon Girty noting that Girty did not respond to Crawford’s request to shoot him.

143 Letter from Washington to Irvine, August 6, 1782, in Washington-Irvine Correspondence, 129-132.

144 Letter from Washington to Irvine, August 6, 1782, in Washington-Irvine Correspondence, 129-132.
newspapers back east. Filled with optimism following Cornwallis’ surrender the previous fall, Americans were shocked by the paper’s reprinting of a letter from Fort Pitt. The July 6 letter relayed the news that “Delaware Indians burnt the Col. with the most excruciating pain,” by tying him to a pole, cutting his ears off, and shooting charges of powder into his body before finally scalping him alive and throwing burning embers upon his back. The letter concluded with a story of how Dr. Knight passed by the location and saw “some of the Col.’s bones in the ashes.” Hearing the details of the event for the first time, eastern citizens were likely taken aback as they wrestled with their feelings of shock, sorrow, and anger.

The news of Crawford’s death did not only spread eastward to American cities. While the news of Crawford’s capture was still on its way to Fort Pitt, it had already reached British officials in Detroit. On June 11, 1782 British Captain William Caldwell reported to Major DePeyster in Detroit that, “amongst the prisoners [is] Colonel Crawford.” By June 18, DePeyster had learned of Crawford’s execution and relayed this information to Thomas Brown, Superintendent of Indian Affairs. DePeyster made it known that “every means had been tried by an Indian officer present, to save [Crawford’s] life.” Intuitively, the British recognized how Crawford’s death would impact relations on the frontier. In a letter to Sir Guy Carleton, Sir Frederick Haldiman, the Governor of Quebec, expressed concern that his “letter will arrive time enough to prevent further mischief, though I am very fearful it will not stop here. This act of

---

148 Letter from DePeyster to Thomas Brown, June 18, 1782, in *Washington-Irvine Correspondence*, 372.
cruelty [the torture and burning of Crawford] is to be more regretted, as it awakens in the Indians that barbarity to prisoners which the unwearied efforts of his majesty’s ministers had totally extinguished.”¹⁴⁹ British fears were confirmed as scouts reported seeing “the most formidable army that has yet come into their [Indians’] Country and from their [the American forces’] appearance must intend more than attacking their Villages.”¹⁵⁰

Local American Response

Just as the British officials had predicted, the news of Crawford’s death accelerated the already growing support for revenge against the Indians in the Ohio Country who continually captured white frontier settlers. Even before knowledge of Crawford’s death reached Fort Pitt, the local population was pressuring Irvine to respond with some sort of counter measure. In a letter to General Benjamin Lincoln, Irvine expressed the local desire for revenge, adding that the local inhabitants “cannot, nor will not, rest under any plan on the defensive, however well executed.”¹⁵¹ According to Irvine, the local population “think[s] their only safety depends on the total destruction of all the Indian settlements within two hundred miles; this, it is true, they are taught by dear-bought experience.”¹⁵² Irvine “declined giving [the locals] an immediate, direct answer,” and “informed them that [his] going depends on circumstances.”¹⁵³ Following the arrival of Knight and the news of Crawford’s death, Irvine could not repress the local passions for long. His correspondence captures the mood near Fort Pitt on July 6, a day after Knight’s

¹⁴⁹ Letter from Haldiman to Sir Guy Carleton, July 28, 1782, in Washington-Irvine Correspondence, 373.
¹⁵¹ Letter from Irvine to Lincoln, July 1, 1782, in Washington-Irvine Correspondence, 174-176.
¹⁵² Letter from Irvine to Lincoln, July 1, 1782, in Washington-Irvine Correspondence, 174-176.
¹⁵³ Letter from Irvine to Lincoln, July 1, 1782, in Washington-Irvine Correspondence, 174-176.
arrival. In a letter Irvine described the local population as “anxious to make another trial” and reported that they wished him to “take command of them.” ¹⁵⁴ The local inhabitants even offered to “raise volunteers, provisions and horses, by subscription, at their own expense, without making any charge against the public.”¹⁵⁵ Another letter further conveyed the local sentiment that “retaliation should take place,” as it appealed to Washington himself for support. ¹⁵⁶ In attempt to sway the general’s decision, Irvine noted that the Indians made a promise that “not a single soul should in [the] future escape torture.”¹⁵⁷ Although Washington did not hastily direct an order to strike against the Indians, he gave Irvine his blessing and “wishes for [the proposed campaign’s] success,” and forwarded the letters he had received from Irvine, Colonel Gibson, and others to Congress.¹⁵⁸ With the support of Washington, Irvine ramped up preparations for the impending campaign.

Irvine and George Rogers Clark, a very successful American commander from the Kentucky region, quickly coordinated a two pronged attack to take place in the fall of 1782, but the mission was doomed to failure. Just a few days after Clark’s army departed from the mouth of the Licking River toward its target, Irvine received orders to cease operations as the United States and Great Britain had agreed to a preliminary peace. Clark did not receive his orders to

¹⁵⁴ Letter from Irvine to Moore, July 6, 1782, in Washington-Irvine Correspondence, 247- 250.
¹⁵⁵ Letter from Irvine to Moore, July 6, 1782, in Washington-Irvine Correspondence, 247- 250.
¹⁵⁶ Letter from Irvine to Washington, July 11, 1782, in Washington-Irvine Correspondence, 126-128.
¹⁵⁷ Letter from Irvine to Washington, July 11, 1782, in Washington-Irvine Correspondence, 126-128.
¹⁵⁸ Letter from Washington to Irvine, August 6, 1782, in Washington-Irvine Correspondence, 129-132.
cease in time, and his forces proceeded toward Chillicothe where they engaged in some light skirmishes, burned several villages, and destroyed numerous crops.\textsuperscript{159}

Although the first expedition, motivated by revenge, was stymied by international politics, the memory of Crawford’s burning would forever change the Indian-American relations. As animosity toward the Indians swelled on the frontier, it would soon become a national sentiment with the publication of “Knight’s Narrative” in 1783.\textsuperscript{160} With the united Indian coalition now weakened by the loss of their British allies, Americans poured over the Ohio River thus violating the previously established boundary for settlement. An estimated 80,000 non-Indians entered Shawnee country between 1775 and 1790.\textsuperscript{161} The influx of this self-entitled invasive population who believed that they had the sole right to the land ensured continual conflict for years to come, and subsequently, the memory of Crawford’s burning would live on to serve new purposes.

The Printing of the “Narrative”

As newspapers published details of Crawford’s death taken from letters arriving back east, Hugh Henry Brackenridge was at Fort Pitt and in the process of writing the most impactful account of the events, one that would be continuously reprinted for nearly a century. Long before he helped establish what would become the \textit{Pittsburgh Post-Gazette} (1786) and the University of

\textsuperscript{159} Hoffman, 187-188.
\textsuperscript{160} The original title of the work is the \textit{Narratives of a Late Expedition Against the Indians with an Account of the Barbarous Execution of Colonel Crawford}... but it will frequently be referred to by its more common names: “Narrative of Dr. Knight” or “Knight’s Narrative.”
Pittsburgh (1787), Brackenridge was a young Scottish immigrant growing up on the Pennsylvania frontier not far from the home of the Girty’s. Born in 1748, Brackenridge grew up amidst the decades of frontier hostilities and his biographer, Claude Milton Newlin, has suggested that “Hugh’s lifelong hatred of the Indians” arose from the “months of terror that followed General Braddock’s defeat in 1755.”

Despite having to live in fear of Indian attack, Brackenridge’s childhood could have been much worse, for when Brackenridge was busy attending school the recently captured Simon Girty was forced to watch his stepfather be burned alive. Upon coming of age, Brackenridge became an army Chaplain for George Washington and gained notoriety for his fiery and detailed speeches that vilified the enemy. Following a brief career as a schoolmaster in Maryland, he started publishing *The United States Magazine* in 1779. Brackenridge designed this short lived periodical to drum up support for the war and filled it with patriotic poems, satires, news, commentaries, and other bricolage of a patriotic tone. An experienced poet and satirist, Brackenridge was a devout patriot and had a long history of commemorating war heroes. Even before the Revolution began he wrote *The Rising Glory of America*, a poem that prophesied the future of a great and powerful nation. In 1776 and 1777 he wrote two theatrical pieces, *The Battle of Bunker Hill* and *The Death of General Montgomery at the Siege of Quebec* and followed them up in 1779 with a eulogy to fallen soldiers. Brackenridge was keenly aware of how words affected people, especially the impact that

---


163 Newlin, 4. It is unlikely that Girty and Brackenridge ever met despite being in close proximity to one another both geographically and temporally several times. Girty departed Pittsburgh for the British lines just a few years before Brackenridge’s arrival in the town.

164 Brown, “Accuracy of the Knight Narrative,” 1.

descriptions of mangled and bloodied bodies left upon the human imagination. In a speech given to Washington’s men at Morristown, Brackenridge demonstrates how he viewed his role in the war claiming that “there are two ways in which a man may contribute to the defense of his country: by tongue to speak, or by the hand to act. To rouse with words and animate with the voice is the province of the orator.” After passing the bar in 1780, Brackenridge evaluated his prospects and decided to head west to a small village of a few hundred residents called Pittsburgh. Coincidentally, three weeks after Knight’s arrival at Fort Pitt, the experienced Brackenridge was there, and he sat down with the recovering surgeon to compose what would become his next patriotic piece: *Narratives of a Late Expedition Against the Indians with an Account of the Barbarous Execution of Colonel Crawford*...  

By tying up his fortunes with that of the trans-Appalachian frontier, Brackenridge stood to profit both financially and culturally from the region’s growth and expansion. Hence, Brackenridge became an outspoken supporter of war with the Indians and a cunning demagogue. The most obvious example of Brackenridge’s efforts to manipulate public opinion in favor of hostilities is the narrative about Knight’s experience. According to Parker B. Brown, a modern expert on the Sandusky Campaign, Brackenridge “transform[ed] the recollections into a piece of virulent anti-Indian, anti-British propaganda calculated to arouse public attention and patriotism.” In a detailed examination of the narrative’s veracity, Brown concluded that Brackenridge purposefully “accented every gruesome aspect of Crawford’s ordeal” and “ignored important Indian motivations and circumstances [leaving out the massacre of the Moravian Indians], omitted significant recollections [ignoring the Indian trial held for Crawford], and

---

167 Brown, “Accuracy of the Knight Narrative,” 53.
168 Brown, “Accuracy of the Knight Narrative,” 54.
unjustly besmirched the character of Simon Girty, the British agent [Girty attempted to save Crawford].” These altered and omitted details had a lasting impact, and they would become part of a heated debate two hundred years later in the 1990s. This was not the first time that Brackenridge altered facts and took literary liberties when composing a work. In The Death of General Montgomery at the Siege of Quebec Brackenridge refused to acknowledge the fact that the British gave Montgomery a respectful military burial and instead portrayed the British as bloodthirsty cannibals advocating for the roasting of American soldiers. In both cases Brackenridge’s intentions were clear. In a letter sent to publisher Francis Bailey, he asserted his belief that “the publication of [the two narratives] may answer a good end, in showing America what have been the sufferings of some of her citizens in the hands of the Indian allies of Britain.” In his introduction to the narrative published in the Freeman’s Journal, Brackenridge referred to “the animals vulgarly called Indians” and expressed his belief that the Indians were unworthy of possessing lands and making treaties.

A note from Bailey in the preface of his publication demonstrates how the memory of Crawford was immediately seen as a political weapon for promoting anti-Indian ideology. Bailey explains that he withheld publishing the narratives for several months because there was “reason to hope that there would be an end to [the Indians’] barbarities.” It was not until the Indians

169 Brown, “Accuracy of the Knight Narrative,” 55.
170 Silver, 237.
172 Re-quoted in Newlin, The Life and Writings of Hugh Henry Brackenridge, 60. It is worth noting that Brackenridge relied on previous relationships in order to get the narrative published. Francis Bailey had previously published several other works for Brackenridge and Phillip Freneau, the editor of the Freeman’s Journal, was a longtime friend from school. Bailey printed both the pamphlet and the periodical. For more on Brackenridge’s anti-Indian beliefs see Silver, 282-285.
173 Brackenridge, Narratives of a Late Expedition, 3.
“continue[d] their murders on our frontier,” did Bailey believe it necessary to “hold up to view what they had heretofore done,” in hopes that the publications “may be serviceable to induce our government to take some effectual steps to chastise and suppress them.”  

Bailey blatantly acknowledged his intentions explaining that “from hence, they will see that the nature of an Indian is fierce and cruel, and that an extirpation of them would be useful to the world, and honorable to those who can effect it.”

In his appendix, Brackenridge furthered the proposition of Indian extirpation.

The tortures which they exercise on the bodies of their prisoners, justify extermination… I do not know…that even reforming from these practices, they ought not to live: These nations are so degenerate from the life of man, so devoid of every sentiment of generosity, so prone to every vicious excess of passion, so faithless, and so incapable of all civilization, that it is dangerous to the good order of the world that they should exist in it.

Bailey and Brackenridge both realized how the memory of the Crawford’s burning could further their own personal political agendas and hatred.

In addition to publishing a pamphlet containing the narratives, Brackenridge’s longtime publisher also printed “The Narrative of the Perils and Sufferings of Dr. Knight and John Slover,” in the Freeman’s Journal as a serial from April 30 to May 28, 1783. The language Brackenridge used in his edited account highlights his motivations and explains why Bailey saw its utility as ideological propaganda. Brackenridge did not hold back and included as much graphic detail as possible. After describing how the Indians shot “not less than seventy” powder charges into Crawford’s naked body, cut off his ears, stabbed him with “burning pieces of wood,” poured “burning coals and hot embers” onto him, and allowed “nothing but coals of fire

---

174 Brackenridge, Narratives of a Late Expedition, 3.
175 Brackenridge, Narratives of a Late Expedition, 3.
176 Brackenridge, Narratives of a Late Expedition, 36-38.
and hot ashes” for him to walk upon, Brackenridge described how Crawford “bore his torments with the most manly fortitude” and “besought the Almighty to have mercy on his soul.”\(^\text{177}\)

Brackenridge concluded this scene by retelling how the Indians “scalped him” alive and “repeatedly threw the scalp” in the face of Knight until Crawford finally expired in the fire.\(^\text{178}\)

For good measure, Brackenridge drove home his opinion of the Indians by making reference to “an old squaw (whose appearance every way answered the ideas people entertain of the devil).”\(^\text{179}\)

Brackenridge glorified Crawford and demonized the Indians with haunting and lucid language. In order to ensure that his audience did not side with the Indians in seeing Crawford’s execution as justified in light of the massacre at Gnadenhutten, Brackenridge added an appendix to his work that disconnected the two events.

It has been said, that the putting to death of the Moravian Indians has been the cause of the cruelties practiced on the prisoners taken at Sandusky. But though this has been made an excuse by the refugees amongst the savages, and by the British, yet it must be well known, that it has been the custom of the savages at all times…At the same time, though I would strike away this excuse which is urged for the savages, I am far from approving the Moravian slaughter…I am disposed to believe, that the greater part of the men put to death were warriors…but the putting to death the women and children, who sang hymns at their execution, must be considered an unjustifiable inexcusable homicide.\(^\text{180}\)

Once the two events were separated, Brackenridge could use the burning of Crawford as justification for Indian genocide.

In a blatant display of furthering his own political agenda to acquire lands in the Ohio Country, Brackenridge justified the taking of the Indians’ lands by attacking their claims. In a

\(^{177}\) Excerpt from “The Narrative of Dr. Knight” as found in Archibald Loudon, *A Selection, of some of the Most Interesting Narratives, of Outrages, Committed by Indians in their Wars, with the White People* (Carlisle: 1808), 1-15. Reprint Harrisburg Publishing Company, 1888.
\(^{178}\) Ibid.
\(^{179}\) Ibid.
lengthy expose, Brackenridge mocked how a “wild Indian with his skin painted red, and a feather through his nose,” and another “with his ears cut in ringlets, or his nose slit like a swine,” could found a claim based on “occupancy.”\textsuperscript{181} He concluded that “[c]laims founded on the first discovery of soil are futile,” especially “[w]hen gold, jewels manufactures, or any work of men’s hand is lost.”\textsuperscript{182} Brackenridge “would as soon admit a right in the buffaloe to grant lands, as in Killbuck, the Big Cat, the Big Dog, or any of the ragged wretches that are called chiefs and sachems.”\textsuperscript{183} Brackenridge had an agenda to carry forward, and the memory of Crawford’s burning was the vehicle.

Politicians recognized the evocative memory of Crawford’s death as a pandora’s box that when opened might be uncontrollable. It was only when the editor, Francis Bailey (among others), determined that promoting hatred toward Indians made good political sense that he opened the lid. Brackenridge’s and Bailey’s propaganda proved to be very effective. Historian Peter Silver notes that “the most striking things about Brackenridge’s and Bailey’s statements was how confidently the language of exterminatory anti-Indianism that they promoted seemed to be springing forth, all of a piece and with little criticism from other public writers.”\textsuperscript{184} However, an early skirmish in the war over the memory of Crawford’s death did occur in 1784.

**A Quaker Defense**

After the printing of Brackenridge’s pamphlet, Anthony Benezet, a Philadelphia Quaker famous for his opposition to the slave trade, came to the defense of the Indians in his work *Some

\textsuperscript{181} Brackenridge, *Narratives of a Late Expedition*, 32.  
\textsuperscript{182} Brackenridge, *Narratives of a Late Expedition*, 34.  
\textsuperscript{183} Brackenridge, *Narratives of a Late Expedition*, 35.  
\textsuperscript{184} Peter Silver, 285.
Observations on the Situation, Disposition, and Character of the Indian Natives.... Benezet objected to Brackenridge’s decision to downplay the importance of Gnadenhutten and vilify the Indians for their actions against Crawford. Contextualizing Crawford’s death, Benezet did not excuse the Indians’ behavior but explained that “the cruelty exercised on the Col. and the death of the prisoners taken at Sandusky, was, in a great measure, owing to the murder of peaceable Moravian Indians, at which they expressed much displeasure.” Viewing the struggle as a racial struggle between groups with different skin color, Benezet wanted to hold white people accountable for their actions at Gnadenhutten and “obviate some mistakes which have been embraced, respecting the Natives of this land.” Recognizing that Indian policy was a controversial issue, Benezet prefaced his work by stating that “the motives which induced the writer to engage in this publication are superior to party views,” and come from “an appreciation of duty and universal good-will to mankind.” As Silver notes, Benezet’s “narrative put it beyond question that the Moravians had died...martyrs to Christian nonresistance,” and “were not naturally cruel.” In the same way that Brackenridge used the disturbing nature of Crawford’s death to incite the hatred of Indians, Benezet hoped to use the shocking and barbarous nature of the massacre at Gnadenhutten to force whites to confront their own prejudices.

After describing the peaceful nature of the Moravian Indians at length, Benezet detailed how “160 men got together, and swimming their horses over the Ohio, came suddenly upon the chief Moravian town” where the Indians had recently returned in order to harvest the corn.

186 Benezet, iii.
187 Benezet, iv.
188 Silver, 294-295.
necessary to survive the winter. Benezet described how “the first person who appeared,” was “shot and wounded” by the whites before they “killed and scalped him.” After the Indians were “violently seized and bound,” Benezet uses the same technique as Brackenridge and includes a description of the events from two of the survivors, both young “boys.” The first boy “lay in the heap of the dead, in a house, and was scalped.” After “recovering his senses,” he managed to escape. The second boy “hid himself under the floor” and “saw the blood of the slain running in a stream.” After forcing the Indians to disclose where they had hidden their “effects,” they were killed and their bodies were burned along with their houses. To drive home his message, Benezet followed up his description of events with how the Pennsylvania Gazette cleaned up the story before presenting it to the public as a great triumph.

Unfortunately for Benezet and the Indians he tried to exculpate, he died the same year of the work, and his message failed to have its desired effect. Perhaps if Benezet had lived longer to promote his message and had access to more of the gruesome details of the Moravian Massacre that were later revealed, his work would have been more impactful. The hegemony of Brackenridge’s version of the story reigned supreme. Silver suggests that one reason Benezet’s work failed to sway public opinion was that “color prejudice could not give a very good account of how or why animosity had risen to the level shown at Gnadenhutten.” Instead of viewing the issue along racial lines many people viewed “treacherousness, a culture of revenge, a desire

---

189 Benezet, 28.
190 Benezet, 28.
191 Benezet, 28.
192 Benezet, 28.
193 Benezet, 28.
194 Benezet, 28-29.
195 Benezet, 29.
196 Silver, 295.
to mutilate bodies, [and] a fearful aptitude for fighting,” as the reasons for the extirpation of Indians, not race.\textsuperscript{197} Although there is truth to Silver’s theory, especially among individuals living along the coast, it is more likely that Benezet’s association with the Quakers doomed his intentions from the start. The Quakers were well known for their sympathy toward Indians and at times despised for it. By the time of Benezet’s writing, Quakers had been under public assault for the better part of two decades. Benezet recognized the underlying racial dimension of the situation that his audience either failed to acknowledge or simply ignored. Either way, Benezet’s work did little to sway the opinion of society or to complicate the master narrative being written about Crawford’s death. Although many individuals may have sympathized with Benezet on moral grounds, he stood little chance of persuading interested people of pursing the higher road (or agreeing with a Quaker). As it turns out, the fight to properly contextualize the burning of Crawford that motivated Benezet would continue for centuries and in some respects is still being fought.

**The Ballad of Colonel Crawford: an Overture**

Brackenridge’s *Narratives of a Late Expedition* was not the only means by which people used the memory of Crawford’s burning to elicit support for anti-Indian ideologies. Benezet was also battling the influence of other works. A ballad soon appeared on broadsides called “A Song, Called CRAWFORD’S DEFEAT BY THE INDIANS, On the Fourth Day of June 1782.” The ballad likely originated on the frontier (due to certain details that were not included in accounts sent east) and only later spread eastward.\textsuperscript{198} Although the author of the original song and the

\textsuperscript{197} Silver, 295.
exact date of its creation are unknown, it is likely that the song was written shortly after the incident. Several different claims have been made as to who the author might be, but given Brackenridge’s background writing poetry, his presence at Pittsburgh, and his personal desire to see warfare on the frontier, it would not be surprising if evidence eventually surfaced linking him to the ballad’s authorship.\(^{199}\) The text of the song is reminiscent of Brackenridge’s editing of Knight’s narrative and the language was purposefully chosen by its author for its ability to incite hatred and patriotism. After describing how the “young Diabolians” captured “brave Colonel Crawford” and his men, the poem explains how “in the fire their bodies did fry.”\(^{200}\) The poem concludes by describing both the bravery of Crawford and the savagery of his capturers:

Their Scalps off their heads while alive they did tear,  
Their bodies with irons red hot they did sear;  
They bravely expir’d without ever a groan,  
That might melt a heart that was harder than stone.

After our brave heroes were burnt at the stake,  
Brave Knight and brave Slover they made their escape;  
With kind Heaven’s assistance they brought us the news,  
So none need the truth of these tidings refuse.

So from East unto West let it be understood,  
Let every one rise to revenge Crawford’s blood;  
And likewise the blood of those men and renown,  
That were taken and burnt at the Sandusky towns.\(^{201}\)

\(^{199}\) For theories regarding the authorship of the ballad see Brown, “‘Crawford’s Defeat’: A Ballad,” 316. My own hypothesis that Brackenridge had a hand in the ballad’s authorship is based on a comparison with his earlier work. See Newlin, *The Life and Writings of Hugh Henry Brackenridge*.

\(^{200}\) Excerpt from a broadside reprinted in Brown, “‘Crawford’s Defeat’: A Ballad,” 312-315. Brown estimates it to be a reprint from around 1791.

\(^{201}\) Excerpt from a broadside reprinted in Brown, “‘Crawford’s Defeat’: A Ballad,” 312-315. Brown estimates it to be a reprint from around 1791. The full text can be found in Appendix B.
Just as Brackenridge intended the narrative to function, the ballad also vilified Indians, advocated for revenge, and trumpeted patriotism. The memory of Crawford’s burning was now being transmitted in several different media and reaching an ever larger audience.

With a newfound feeling of invincibility following the surrender of the British forces, many more Americans were eager to cross the former Proclamation Line of 1763. Cash strapped land speculators sought to make a profit by selling lands.\textsuperscript{202} The government needed to fulfill its promises of land made to officers and others who served during the Revolution. Finally, thousands of everyday citizens also sought to make a new life in the Ohio Country. Whether a result of overcrowding, the lack of familial inheritance, changing economic conditions, or the desire for adventure, many Americans embraced westward migration without fully understanding what they were getting themselves into.\textsuperscript{203} By reading the narrative and hearing the ballad, many of these adventurous (perhaps greedy) Americans were further indoctrinated to harbor anti-Indian tendencies. But the story of “Knight’s Narrative” and “Crawford’s Defeat” do not end here. The ballad and narrative were so successful at creating anti-Indian sentiment following Crawford’s burning that some individuals attempted to use the memory of Crawford’s burning for other causes during the early republic.

\textbf{A New Martyr: the Curious Case of Colonel Crawford}

\textsuperscript{202} For the motivations of land speculators see Woody Holton, \textit{Forced Founders: Indians, Debtors, Slaves, and the Making of the American Revolution in Virginia} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 3-38. For the impact of the Proclamation Line of 1763 see Calloway, \textit{The Scratch of a Pen}.

The use of the memory of Crawford’s burning, especially against Indians, is unique for the time period. During the Revolution, supporters of the war frequently glorified the sacrifice of fallen patriots. According to historian Sarah Purcell, the public memory of military figures was used to “validate the politics of the Revolution and create American national identity.”204 The death of Joseph Warren at the Battle of Bunker Hill in June of 1775 provided the colonists their first martyr in the cause of liberty. Warren was quickly adored as a selfless defender of liberty, and his name appeared in songs, broadsides, poems, almanacs, and various other forms of commemorative bricolage with the intention of promoting patriotism. Even funerals were turned into public performances as the entire Continental Congress adjourned to attend the funeral of Richard Montgomery.205 Congress understood the power of memory and “the main focus of wartime commemoration was praise for great republican heroes like Warren, who were seen to have sacrificed themselves for the cause of liberty.”206

Warren was not alone in this new pantheon of American heroes as he was quickly joined by Richard Montgomery, Hugh Mercer, Baron de Kalb, Henry Laurens, David Wooster, and many others. Living officers were also commemorated, but the significance of death should not be overlooked. As Purcell explains, “martyrs and heroes were not created by death itself, but rather by the search for meaning among the community of the living. Martyrdom was important because in order for death to become the ultimate patriotic duty Americans had to be reassured that their sacrifices would be remembered.”207 Although this understanding of how martyrdom

204 Purcell, Sealed with Blood, 13.
205 Purcell, 28.
206 Purcell, 13.
207 Purcell, 19.
functioned explains the commemoration of Warren, Montgomery, and other officers, the memory of Colonel Crawford functioned a bit differently.

Unlike most of the early commemorations that people used to instill “a sentimentalized picture of violence” that “helped to build the ideas of consensus around American heroism,” the memory of Crawford was not occluded by “layers of cultural convention” which “masked the horror of war.” Nor did the gatekeepers of his memory shy away from the “fierce vendettas pursued against Native Americans” that were absent from the commemorations examined by Purcell. The memory of Crawford actually depended upon its brutality. The memory of Crawford was intended to elicit emotions of revenge much more than patriotism. The horrific and disturbing nature of his death was what made his memory valuable. As James Paxton notes, “frontier inhabitants manipulated highly charged images of mangled bodies for political purposes precisely because they admitted no counterargument.” The result was the creation of “a community of suffering in which members increasingly identified themselves as white.” The Indian was being Othered, making it easier for the frontiersmen to justify slaughter. The local inhabitants who pressured Irvine to organize a counter strike were not thinking about republican virtue and patriotism. The frontiersmen’s motive was much simpler: vengeance and land.

208 Purcell, 15.
209 Purcell, 17.
211 Paxton, 180. For more on the literary use of gruesome Indian-colonists encounters see Silver, Our Savage Neighbors, 82-85. Silver classifies this literary sub-genre as the “anti-Indian sublime” (83).
Unlike the memory of generals who died in traditional battles against the British, the memory of Crawford’s burning would be of little political value to the war effort which, by 1782, was in its final stage. Crawford’s memory could contribute little to this existing dialog; but, what Crawford’s memory did offer those along the eastern seaboard was a political weapon that when deployed, could significantly sway opinion regarding Indian policy. Brackenridge and others recognized this fact, and those in favor of a continued war on the frontier wanted the story, with all of its gruesome details, to be sung in every tavern, discussed at every dinner, and posted in every town.

A Missing Voice

Absent from the literature, songs, and newspaper reports about the burning of Crawford was the perspective of the Indians. Benezet attempted to include the viewpoint of the Indians, but he spoke for them and the Indians did not have the opportunity to speak for themselves. The absence of an Indian voice is not surprising given the political circumstances of the time and the lack of friendly communication between the Indians and the Americans. Unfortunately, the work of Brackenridge and others to paint the Indians as savage heathens unworthy of the lands they occupied prevented their perspective from being included for hundreds of years and, to an extent, it is still being fought over today. As historian Colin Calloway notes, “the truism that history is written by the victors is not so true when indigenous people are the winners.” As discussed

---


earlier, historians are not always the first individuals at the scene of narrative creation: “[m]ost often, someone else has already entered the scene and set the cycle of silence.”214 Here let us recall how Trouillot perceives silences in the historical record to occur:

Silences enter the process of historical production at four crucial moments: the moment of fact creation (the making of sources); the moment of fact assembly (the making of archives); the moment of fact retrieval (the making of narratives); and the moment of retrospective significance (the making of history in the final instance).215

In the case of the burning of Colonel Crawford, the silence of the Indian voice is a combination of all of these factors. Very few sources of “fact creation” written from the perspective of the Indians have survived, and none of these sources made it into the “archive” that Brackenridge used at the “moment of fact retrieval” when he created his narrative.

Fortunately, Brackenridge’s archive (the accounts of John Slover and Dr. Knight) is not the only collection of sources. An alternative set of sources with their own archive has survived in the form of the Draper Manuscripts. In the middle of the nineteenth-century, Lyman Copeland Draper (1815-1891) toured the United States and Canada and conducted interviews with hundreds of individuals about the old frontier. The late 19th century historian Consul W. Butterfield, who would compose the authoritative text on the Sandusky Expedition, had limited access to Draper’s collection of papers at the Wisconsin Historical Society and his narrative reflected that situation. In the twentieth-century, microfilm technology and the publishing of several research guides allowed the 491 volumes of Draper’s manuscripts to reach a much wider audience; this accessibility has significantly changed the narrative regarding Girty and his Indian

214 Trouillot, 26.
215 Trouillot, 26.
Thus the final stage of “retrospective significance” is still being completed as historians and the public continue to reinterpret and rewrite the narrative of Crawford’s burning. Although an Indian voice is missing, it may not be lost forever. Recent studies have taken up the challenge of restoring the perspective of Indians by utilizing manuscript collections gathered after most the frontier histories were already written. These collections frequently include both a Indian and British perspective. 

The memory of Crawford’s burning played a significant role in spreading anti-Indian ideology. Early printers and politicians utilized Brackenridge’s narrative, the numerous newspaper accounts, and the ballad to promote their own agendas. Although some individuals such as Benezet tried to provide a more complete narrative of the events, his words fell upon deaf ears. The memory of Crawford’s burning would continue to play a role in anti-Indian ideology, but it was not the only way individuals used the event in the 1780s and 1790s. The memory of Crawford’s burning would insight a vengeful fervor among frontiersmen in the 1780s that would be difficult to suppress and threatened to rip the young nation apart. Perceptive individuals seeking to keep the nation whole, recognized a less obvious purpose for the memory of Crawford’s burning, as a mechanism for unification.

---

216 The first microfilm edition was created in 1949 and a second was created in the 1970s. According the Wisconsin Historical Society website, over ninety libraries have a complete microfilm copy of the manuscripts and still others have hard copies. See http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Content.aspx?dsNav=N:4294963828-4294963805&dsRecordDetails=R:CS4103.

217 For a reexamination of St. Clair’s Defeat with the perspective of Indians see Calloway, The Victory with No Name.
CHAPTER TWO: OVERCOMING WESTERN LOYALTIES

Crawford became a frontier martyr who not only sacrificed himself for American independence but also for the future of trans-Appalachian settlement. Crawford was firstly an Indian-fighter and secondly a Revolutionary patriot. Living on the frontier in western Pennsylvania, Crawford, through his rank, was both a symbol of American government and a fellow frontiersmen with whom the local population could more easily identify (despite his wealth and prestige). Immediately following his death, the memory of Crawford’s burning incited a vengeful spirit among the American frontiersmen against their Indian neighbors. This swelling of emotion would contribute to the continual conflicts throughout the 1780s between Indians and white settlers against the wishes of the national government. The memory of Crawford’s burning contributed to a growing disconnect between the two sides of the Appalachian Mountains. Interestingly, or perhaps intelligently, his memory would then be used to bridge this divide in the 1790s. The significance of the memory of Crawford’s burning becomes all the more important when one considers how close the trans-Appalachian west actually came to separating from the newly formed United States.

The population of the Ohio region in the 1780s consisted almost entirely of squatters and their disgruntled Indian counterparts who resisted this intrusion. According to François Furstenberg, it was not until the finality of the War of 1812 that “the region's fate as part of the expanding United States [was] settled once and for all.” Furstenberg identified three challenges that the nation had to overcome in order to secure U.S. sovereignty west of the Appalachian Mountains: “the geography of North America, and of the Appalachian Mountains in

particular; Native American Resistance and the ambiguous loyalties of western colonists.”\textsuperscript{219} The memory of Crawford’s burning helped resolve these issues.

**Western War Cries Go Unanswered**

The Appalachian Mountains created not only a physical barrier between the east and west, but it was also a cultural obstacle. Settlements along the Ohio River were more closely connected economically with the Caribbean (via the Mississippi) than New York, Boston, or even Philadelphia.\textsuperscript{220} This schism occurred long before the Revolution during the sequential hostilities of the French and Indian War, Pontiac’s Rebellion, and the Paxton Rebellion that “pitted backcountry settlers against eastern elites and institutions.”\textsuperscript{221} Considering the connections that many frontiersmen still maintained with the European powers, “there were many good reasons to suspect that western settlers might break away from the United States to make a separate peace with Spain or Great Britain.”\textsuperscript{222} In 1784 future President George Washington remarked that when it came to the western states they rested “upon a pivot,” and “the touch of a feather would turn them either way.”\textsuperscript{223} Washington saw that “the flanks and rear of the United States [were] possessed by other powers, and formidable ones, too.”\textsuperscript{224} Summing up the situation with the western frontiersmen, he asked rhetorically, “what ties, let me ask,

---

\textsuperscript{219} Furstenberg, “Trans-Appalachian Frontier,” 659.
\textsuperscript{220} Furstenberg, “Trans-Appalachian Frontier,” 661-662.
\textsuperscript{221} Calloway, *Scratch of the Pen*, 79.
\textsuperscript{222} Furstenberg, “Trans-Appalachian Frontier,” 663.
\textsuperscript{223} Letter from George Washington to Benjamin Harrison, 1784, re-quoted in Calloway, *The Victory With No Name*, 18.
\textsuperscript{224} Letter from George Washington to Benjamin Harrison, 1784, re-quoted in Calloway, *The Victory With No Name*, 18.
should we have upon these people?” The tinsel strength of the few cultural and economic threads that held the east and west together would be tested early and often.

At the conclusion of the Revolutionary War, many politicians were more responsive to the concerns of citizens in the east at the expense of those in the west. This neglect was not entirely by choice. The struggling young government simply did not have the means to fund continued warfare on the American frontier. Joseph Reed summed up the situation in 1780 explaining that “the amazing Slowness in Collecting publick Taxes hangs like a Millstone round the Neck of all our publick Operations…the Frontiers exclaim with Anguish, & we are now reduced to the painful Necessity of listening to Distress we cannot relieve & Claims we cannot satisfy.” Reed promised to “supply them with Ammunition, Provisions, & such like Assistance” that was “so necessary in an Indian War” that required “a Spirit of Hostility & Enterprize” to “carry our young Men to their [Indian] Towns.” The little support that could be mustered included the expedition Crawford conducted. By 1784, Congress switched tactics and started a policy of negotiation with the Indians, as congressional representatives met with tribal representatives from the Chippewa, Delaware, Ottawa, and Wyandot tribes. This meeting resulted in the Treaty of Fort McIntosh that defined the boundary line between Indian lands and the United States, arranged for the exchange of prisoners, and outlined the terms by which violations would be handled. The same frontier settlers that pressured Irvine to mount a strike against the Indians in revenge for the burning of Crawford were not pleased after hearing the

225 Letter from George Washington to Benjamin Harrison, 1784, re-quoted in Calloway, The Victory With No Name, 18.
227 ibid.
terms of the treaty. These frontiersmen especially objected to Article V which stated that “[i]f any citizen of the United States, or other person not being an Indian, shall attempt to settle on any of the lands allotted to the Wiandot and Delaware nations in this treaty…such person shall forfeit the protection of the United States, and the Indians may punish him as they please.”

The individuals who faced the greatest threat from Indian hostilities were now being told that their government, for which many of them fought to establish, was not going to protect them if they crossed into Indian Territory.

As Henry Knox stated, the newly formed government did not want to engage in a costly conflict “for an object which may be obtained by a treaty.” Washington concurred explaining that purchasing Indian lands “is the cheapest, as well as the least distressing way of dealing with [Indians]” as “none who is acquainted with the nature of an Indian warfare…will hesitate to acknowledge.” Following the publication of Knight’s Narrative (and the likely circulation of the ballad) in the spring of 1783, tensions ran high and anti-Indian sentiment pervaded. Benezet’s pamphlet did little to sway opinion. The frontier settlements, led by those in and surrounding Fort Pitt, wanted revenge. However, politicians were reluctant to fan the fires of violence that were sweeping the Sandusky Plains. Calls for war made by frontier settlers went inadequately addressed and many frontier settlers felt as though the new government(s) was not valuing their concerns. Dissatisfied with the governmental response to Indian hostilities, many westerners became disillusioned and posed a rebellious threat of their own. As discussed in Chapter One, many frontiersmen harboring anti-Indian sentiment, either personally acquired through

---

230 Henry Knox re-quoted in Cayton, 36.
231 Letter from George Washington to James Duane, 1783, quoted in Calloway, The Victory With No Name, 25.
experience or “prosthetically” acquired via unsettling propaganda, were frequently taking matters into their own hands. The frontier was anything but peaceful. By the middle of the 1780s, many eastern politicians feared that the individuals in the Ohio Country might decide that an alliance with Britain or Spain may be more pragmatic than an association with the bumbling American republic. At the very best, the squatters of the Ohio Country proved to be a very difficult group to control.

In an attempt to establish their policy of acquiring lands via peaceful treaty, Congress passed the Ordinance of 1784 that attempted to shape the development and settlement of the region in a way favorable to such designs. Not trusting the frontier population to govern themselves, this law ensured that a permanent government could not be established until Congress determined that the territory had reached the necessary twenty thousand residents. Until that number was reached, the region was to be ruled not by the local inhabitants but by Congress. Accordingly, the settlers did not actually have legal titles to the land and were instead considered squatters. This did not sit well with the local inhabitants and Congress found it nearly impossible to impose their authority upon the squatters who either resisted removal or simply resettled the region after being forcibly removed. The government did not have the physical (military) resources to remove the squatters, nor the ability to persuade them ideologically to their position.

---

232 According to Landsberg, prosthetic memory is only possible because of advancements in technology that allow people to witness images and “experience” events that the mind would not produce on its own. However, the one medium of nineteenth-century memory transmission that comes close to achieving a similar effect is written texts that describe in detail extremely graphic events. See Landsberg, Prosthetic Memory.

233 Cayton, 1-11.
Both the frontier settlers and the land speculators back east wanted to acquire Indian land but they disagreed over the approach. Under the Articles of Confederation, the federal government lacked the ability to tax its citizens in order to fund military action to acquire the western lands. In a twist of irony, the main source of possible government revenue lay in the selling of western lands that required such a show of military force to obtain. As it were, the Congress and its land speculating supporters were stuck in the doldrums forced to watch their treasure sail away into the hands of foreign powers. Fortunately for these interested men, a revolutionary breeze kicked up, and as the young nation struggled for survival, state representatives in Philadelphia created a new system of government that would be more conducive to funding western expansion. Following the ratification of the Constitution of 1787 many easterners had big plans for the Ohio County both as a valuable public asset for the repayment of debt and as a private financial venture from which to profit.\(^\text{234}\) The problem lay in how to congeal both the expanding frontier population with that of the east into a unified nation. Local loyalties ran deep and were not easily overcome.

On a smaller scale, the memory of Crawford’s burning would help serve as the bridge that connected the trans-Appalachian population with their fellow Americans back east. By dying as an American officer, Crawford secured a connection between the west and east, via his Revolutionary service. Unlike other western military heroes such as George Rogers Clark, who seriously considered western separation, Crawford’s loyalties were sealed with his death. He would forever be an *American* martyr who was also a frontiersman. Through the memory of Crawford, many frontiersman maintained a faint connection with their fellow citizens back east, thus helping to prevent the young nation from splitting at the Appalachian seam. On a larger

\(^{234}\) Cayton, 14.
scale, the memory of Crawford’s burning served as a way of increasing support for the new
government’s plan to bring the Ohio Country into the nation.

**A Show of Force**

After the inauguration of Crawford’s lifelong friend into the office of President, Congress
developed a new plan. The placating of the Ohio Country would be achieved through a
demonstration of military power against a common enemy, Indians. It is here that the memory of
Crawford’s burning would play a role in trying to overcome western loyalties. Even before
Washington took office, a federalist paper was already reminding its readers of the brutal nature
of frontier life. *The New Haven Gazette, and Connecticut Magazine* was “a tireless advocate for
the adoption of a strong federal constitution and the stabilization of financial structures.”

Its primary publisher, Josiah Meigs, graduated from Yale with fellow classmates Noah Webster and
Joe Barlow, and he featured their work in his magazine. In support of Meigs’ political agenda,
the periodical “summoned to its pages logic, satire, and pure passion to support its
convictions.” On August 21, 1788, Meigs published in *The New-Haven Gazette, and The
Connecticut Magazine* a work of “pure passion” when he featured as the lead story the *Narrative
of John Knight* as written by Hugh Brackenridge. Meigs took the story directly from the
*Freeman’s Journal* and even included Brackenridge’s original statement to the publisher that
“this narrative you will please to publish in your useful paper, or in any other way you may judge
proper,” as “I conceive the publication of this may answer a good end in showing America, what

---

236 Richardson, 243.
237 Richardson, 238-339.
have been the sufferings of some of her citizens by the hands of the Indian allies of Britain.”

In case anyone had forgotten about the burning of Colonel Crawford, the federalists wanted to help them recall, with all the graphic detail of Brackenridge’s prose, how the Indians “shot powder into the colonel's body,” “cut off his ears,” and “scalped him” before burning him alive. Shortly after the reprinting of Knight’s Narrative, the United States started making preparations for a new campaign against the Indians in the Ohio Country. Although the memory of Crawford’s burning was not the main motivator for resuming war, many viewed the memory of his burning as a powerful political tool to gain widespread support for their cause.

Understanding the impact that this story had upon an audience, individuals would continue to use the memory of Crawford’s burning to maintain support for the war following the Indians’ defeat of two military forces in the Ohio Country.

In the late fall of 1790, a force under the command of General Josiah Harmar set out to destroy Miami villages near the Maumee River. Personally, Harmar wanted to “impress upon the minds of the Indians as much as possible the majesty of the United States,” but this was not to be the case as the Indians in the region easily defeated his forces. The following year, General Arthur St. Clair led the first American army in a campaign to destroy a collection of Indian villages in what is now northwestern Ohio. The Indians were ready for St. Clair as they coordinated one of the most unified Indian coalitions in history. With warriors from over a dozen different tribes and support from the British Indian agents in the region, including Simon Girty,

---

240 Re-quoted in Calloway, The Victory with No Name, 64.
the Indian coalition cut St. Clair’s force to pieces. Casuality estimates vary, but the Indians killed approximately 630 men while losing fewer than 60 warriors. Unprepared and underestimating the capabilities of his opponent, St. Clair, or more accurately the Indian coalition he faced, embarrassed the United States government.

Instead of demonstrating the power of the American military and reassuring the allegiance of frontier settlers, the defeat only made people question the competency of the government and its Indian policy. Some opponents argued along legal lines noting that the government had just as much of a right to march into Indian territory as “Great Britain would have to march a body of troops though the centre of the United States.” Others argued against the policy because of the vested interests of those in power who stood to gain from defeating the Indians. Another segment was concerned about this defeat being used as justification for “augmenting the standing army,” something that many early Americans feared as a threat to their liberty. With opinion split over the proper course of action to take regarding the Indians, a broadside appeared that once again drew upon the evocative nature of the memory of Crawford’s burning.

Following the defeat of St. Clair, an unknown printer created a broadside that featured a song about the failed American campaign. The printer, possibly attempting to duplicate the popularity of the ballad describing Crawford’s death, printed “St. Clair’s defeat: a new song” on

---

241 This Indian victory is another example of how history is often written by the winners. The battle was never even given a name and was simply referred to as St. Clair’s defeat or the Battle on the Wabash. See Calloway, The Victory with No Name.
242 Estimates vary but a safe approximation is given. See Calloway, The Victory with No Name, 127-128.
243 Re-quoted in Calloway, The Victory with No Name, 133.
244 Re-quoted in Calloway, 133.
the same broadside as “A Song, called Crawford's defeat by the Indians, on the fourth day of June, 1782.” According to the American Antiquarian Society, where the only known copy of the broadside resides, the work was produced shortly after the defeat in late 1791 or early 1792. A decade after the burning of Crawford the social memory of the event was strong, and it remained a useful political tool.

Amidst the debate over the proper Indian policy to pursue, Washington made a decision, and gave orders to General “Mad” Anthony Wayne to form an army and crush the Indian resistance. The administration was hoping that a decisive victory would open up western lands, pacify the disgruntled western settlers, and reassure potential land purchasers of their safety. Support for Wayne’s campaign grew, and Wayne rewarded Washington when he achieved a decisive victory at the Battle of Fallen Timbers in August of 1794. Individuals continued to use the memory of Crawford’s burning to support the acquisition of Indian lands, but this show of military force failed to have the unifying effect that Washington had desired. Unfortunately for the Washington administration Wayne’s victory did not pacify the western settlers who were still questioning federal authority.

Although the memory of Crawford’s burning could assist in drumming up anti-Indian support, it could not resolve the ideological differences regarding the government’s authority to impose an excise tax on whiskey. The memory of Crawford’s burning had no connection to this ideological divide, and therefore nobody attempted to use it politically. While Wayne made his way through the Ohio wilderness to engage the Indians, frontiersmen back in Pittsburgh made their way through the streets to engage tax inspector John Neville at his home. Fighting broke out, and state governors pieced together an army of militiamen that Washington would personally lead across the Appalachians to crush the insurrection. Fortunately for the
government, the situation was diffused, but it did little to rectify the underlying issues. The Whiskey Rebellion demonstrated the deep division that existed between east and west, one that could not easily be overcome.²⁴⁵

Before the memory of Crawford’s burning would temporarily disappear from the written historical record it had one last resurgence during the early national period. Within a few year span, Brackenridge’s narrative was reprinted in Andover, MA (1799) and Leominster, MA (1799?), and a county in western Pennsylvania was named after Crawford (1800).²⁴⁶ It does not appear that there was any political motivation for the reprinting of the narrative, and due to the popularity of captivity narratives, the motivation behind this reprinting may have been purely monetary. No surviving documents have been found discussing why Pennsylvania decided to name a county after Crawford. William Crawford never set foot in the county which now bears his name. Perhaps this naming was the result of the popularity of the captivity narratives at the time. If there was no direct political reason for naming the county after Crawford it appears that there must of have been something in the air that reminded politicians of the Revolution, for Pennsylvania added a Butler County and Warren County the same year.²⁴⁷ The naming of Crawford and Butler counties may have been an attempt to further unite east and west by commemorating local heroes alongside that of a national hero in Joseph Warren. Both Crawford and Richard Butler lived in western Pennsylvania, fought in the Revolution, and died fighting Indians in Ohio. Their names would serve as a reminder to the frontiersmen of the historical

²⁴⁵ For the division between eastern politicians and the western frontier see Slaughter, The Whiskey Rebellion.
²⁴⁷ Named after Richard Butler and Joseph Warren respectively.
connection between themselves and the United States of America for war with Great Britain was never far away.

The memory of Crawford’s burning may not have been able to congeal a divided young nation, but politicians and other interested parties sure hoped that it could. Before the putrid scent of Crawford’s burning flesh dissipated, the memory of his burning contributed to the growing disconnect between western frontiersmen and eastern elites. As frontiersmen cried out for revenge they were quieted by their eastern counterparts who directed them to wait patiently and seek peaceful negotiation. As federally unsanctioned hostilities continued on the frontier, the young nation watched as its western settlements inched ever closer to forming an alliance with a foreign power. With the ratification of the constitution and the adoption of a new federal Indian policy, the memory of Crawford’s burning was once again put to use as a means of drumming up support for war with the Indians. Although the extent to which the memory of Crawford’s burning succeeded in this endeavor is difficult to gage, individuals must have viewed it as a powerful and persuasive message. As General “Mad” Anthony Wayne declared victory over his Indian opponents at the Battle of Fallen Timbers, the increasingly propagandistic presses in the United States claimed their first frontier victim, Simon Girty.
CHAPTER THREE: GIRTY THE WHITE SAVAGE

The burning of Colonel William Crawford forever ensured that his name would live on in social memory. Had Crawford escaped from his captors and returned to Pennsylvania, he probably would never have been the subject of so many commemorations and memorials. Up until his death, Crawford was a historical footnote, just another nominal Revolutionary officer with a remarkably ordinary career. It was the memory of his burning that ensured that his name would not be forgotten. However, Crawford was not the only individual whose reputation and remembrance would be forever changed on that fateful summer day. The reputation of Crawford’s fellow frontiersmen and former colleague, Simon Girty, would be forever altered as he was undeservingly vilified for Crawford’s death. Americans portrayed Girty as a race traitor and his memory spliced into two alternate versions that persist to the present day. In Canada, Girty would be remembered as a dedicated and skilled member of the Indian Department. In America, the name Girty would become infamous and synonymous with savage.

In a short article about the frontier myth of Simon Girty, historian Daniel P. Barr credits Brackenridge as “[t]he man most responsible for the inception of the Girty myth,” but he does not support his indictment with any evidence. This chapter will fill in the blanks and verify that the villainous characteristics often ascribed to Girty resulted from Brackenridge’s narrative. Barr also draws extensively upon the appendix to Brackenridge’s edited narrative; but, instead of focusing on the racial undertones throughout the piece, he instead reads Brackenridge’s words as a condemnation of frontier society, which it was. According to Barr “[w]hat truly troubled Brackenridge…was the prevalence of violence and alcoholism among frontier communities.”

Accordingly, Brackenridge’s “vision of Girty, a clear illustration of what the corrupting influence of an unchecked frontier could harvest, in the white race, grew directly from his fear of the torture of Crawford,” and “[b]y refusing Crawford’s pleas for mercy, Girty became far worse in the eyes of Brackenridge than a mere loyalist turncoat—he had degenerated into a vile rebel against humanity and a traitor to his race.”

This chapter will explore the racial aspect mentioned but not elaborated upon by Barr and place Brackenridge’s words in the context in which they were written. In the nineteenth-century Girty would be known as “the scourge of the infant settlements in the West, the terror of women, and the bugaboo of children,” who “burst into a loud laugh” upon Crawford’s request to shoot him. But before the legend of Simon Girty could terrify generations of Americans, it first had to be born.

**Girty’s Reputation before the Burning**

Up until his defection during the American Revolution, Simon Girty enjoyed the reputation of being a skilled interpreter and frontier guide for both the King and American people. As someone who could speak multiple Indian languages, his services were well sought after, and he was a well-known member of the young Pittsburgh community. As late as January of 1776, the Colony of Virginia employed Girty as a guide on a tour through the Ohio Country, but by the end of the Revolution Americans viewed Girty as terrifying frontier menace. By tracing the language used to describe Girty, it can roughly be determined when the negative opinion of him arose.

---

249 Barr.
251 Hoffman, 78.
The language used to describe Girty following his defection indicates that his fellow frontiersmen had, at worst, a neutral opinion about his character. In a letter to Colonel Crawford, General Edward Hand, the commander of Fort Pitt, remarked that “[y]ou will no doubt be surprised to hear that Mr. McKee, Matthew Elliot, Simon Girty…eloped on Saturday night,” and referred to these men as simply “runaways.” In another letter from Major Jasper Ewing, all three men were mentioned, but McKee and Elliot were singled out while nothing more was said of Simon Girty. Ewing predicted that “McKee’s Conduct on this Occasion is of so infamous a Nature, that it will forever render him odious…as he was reputed to be a Gentn. Of the Strictest Honour and Probity, no body had the least Idea of his being Capable of acting in so base a manner.” Other letters followed a similar pattern. After elaborating on McKee and Elliot, Colonel George Morgan noted only that “Girty has served as Interpreter of the Six Nation Tongue at all the public Treaties here & I apprehend will influence his Brother who is now on a Message from the Commissioners to the Shawnese to join him.” Thus it can safely be said that Girty’s reputation as a “savage” in the minds of Americans occurred later than 1778. Girty’s actions also attest to him not being a “savage” for in the fall of 1778 Girty saved another soon to be famous frontiersmen, Simon Kenton, from being burned to death.

Before the Siege of Fort Laurens in early 1779, Girty’s reputation still appeared to be that of a political traitor. Although Colonel Gibson remarked that he hoped to prevent “Mr. Girty” from “taking my scalp,” he did not refer to Girty as a savage and the practice of taking scalps

253 Letter from Jasper Ewing to Japer Yeates, March 30, 1778 in Thwaites, 253.
254 Letter from George Morgan to the President of Congress, March 31, 1778, in Thwaites, 254-255.
255 Hoffman, 112-113.
would have been a fear regardless. Likewise, when David Zeisberger warned Colonel Gibson of Girty’s plan to ambush Fort Laurens, he merely noted that “among the latter [group of warriors] is Simon Girty.” There was no connection between race or savagery concerning Simon Girty. Following the Siege of Fort Laurens Girty’s reputation as an enemy grew substantially as indicated by a May 1779 letter from Captain Bird (British) who stated that “the Rebels offered 800 Dollars for Girty’s Scalp.” Bird elaborated further, explaining that Girty “I assure you, is one of the most useful disinterested friends in the Departm[ent] [that this] Government has.” In 1780 Girty served as the messenger between American Captain Isaac Ruddle and British Captain Bird following the American defeat at Ruddle’s Station. Even though Girty was not in command, it is possible that he gained even more notoriety by presenting the surrender terms because in December of 1780 Broadhead was offering “twenty Bucks for any of the Girtys.” Although an active part of the British-Indian campaigns, Girty was not acting in a way that would be considered savage, and in 1781 Girty was still saving white prisoners. This time it was a man named Henry Baker.

Although Girty’s notoriety grew continuously until Crawford’s death, there was still no language painting him as a race traitor or even as a savage. Even if Girty was locally feared in the Ohio region, his national reputation was still that of a political defector by the time of Brackenridge’s narrative. The primary sources that predate Brackenridge’s edited narrative

---

256 Re-quoted in Hoffman, 120.
257 Re-quoted in Hoffman, 120.
260 Hoffman, 143-145.
261 Letter from Daniel Brodhead to William Penn, December 2, 1780 in Kellogg, 299.
262 Hoffman, 151.
simply do not accuse Girty of being a savage or a race traitor. Although he was no stranger to the tavern or warfare, Girty was not the “white savage” that he would soon be considered. Instead of being the perpetrator of savage acts, Girty was a former victim of the savage brutality that was colonial-Indian relations during the eighteenth-century. A witness to the torture and burning of his stepfather, Girty knew all too well the horrific nature of this Indian practice and the psychological scarring that it leaves upon family and friends. Throughout his life Girty saved numerous individuals from having to endure this fate and even attempted to save Colonel Crawford. Had Girty departed for England after his defection, or even enlisted as a private in the British Army, he would not be the villainous subject of myriad novels, movies, and other texts. But Girty did remain on the frontier and worked alongside America’s Indian opposition under the direction of the British. His mere presence at the burning of Crawford was all that was needed to turn Girty into a scapegoat for all that was wrong with frontier society.

**Brackenridge Paints a Villain**

In the narrative that Brackenridge edited, Girty is placed at the scene of Crawford’s death. Although Girty was present at the burning of Colonel Crawford, the evidence regarding what role he played in the event differs greatly from the story that Brackenridge disseminated. Brackenridge wanted to build support for a war against the Indians and demonstrate for those back east the necessity of increasing the American military presence on the frontier. In order to accomplish his goal, Brackenridge used his editorial power to carefully shape the message that he wanted to deliver.

---

263 Heckewelder, 334.
Perhaps in an attempt to make his later description more appalling, Brackenridge acknowledged that Girty “promised to do everything in his power” to save Crawford, but “the Indians were very much enraged against the prisoners.”264 However, Brackenridge’s version of events soon paints a very different picture two pages later when “[i]n the midst of these extreme tortures [Crawford] called to Simon Girty and begged of him to shoot him,” but Girty responded that “he had no gun, at the same time turning about to an Indian who was behind him,” and “laughed heartily, and by all his gestures seemed delighted at the horrid scene.”265 It is believed that the man who Crawford called out to near the end of his torture was not Simon Girty, who had already left the scene, but James Girty, his brother.266 According to information collected in the nineteenth-century by historian Lyman Copeland Draper, a “Mrs. McCormick [who] was present when Col. Crawford was burnt,” recalled that “Crawford wanted Girty to save him, Girty offered the Indians all the property he had there, about $3000 worth, but they refused it, unless he would take Crawford’s place. When Crawford wanted Girty to shoot him, Girty said he dare not, [and] seeing the Indians with a small knife sawing his ears partly off, Girty unable to witness such torturing of his old friend rode off.”267 Other sources agree that the Indians “called [Girty] names and threatened him and [he] was obliged to leave them and Col. Crawford to his fate.”268 Sources indicate that James Girty was present and there is no evidence of him leaving the

264 Brackenridge, 9. Brackenridge decides not to elaborate on why the Indians were so enraged against the prisoners, the massacre at Gnadenhutten.
265 Brackenridge, 11-12.
266 Brown, “Accuracy of the Knight Narrative,” 62. Crawford may have asked Simon Girty to shoot him before the torture began. See Brown, “Accuracy of the Knight Narrative,” 59. Sources indicate that Girty departed the scene after the Indians cut off Crawford’s ear and threatened his own life for trying to interfere. See Draper MS 10 E 146-147; Draper MS 17 S 191-192.
267 Draper MS 17 S 191-192.
268 Draper MS 10 E 146-147.
It was James, if anyone at all, who laughed at Crawford’s request, not Simon. Likewise, it was James not Simon whom Knight claimed “came up to me and bade me prepare for death,” adding that “I need not expect to escape death, but should suffer it in all its extremities.”

Because early descriptions of the event from Dr. Knight that made it into letters and newspapers back east also singled out Simon Girty, it appears that Knight mistook James for his brother, and it was not Brackenridge who chose Simon as the scapegoat.

Many of the primary sources disagree on specific details about Girty’s involvement, but only Knight’s narrative, as edited by Brackenridge, portrays Girty as the villain. Oral tradition passed down from Girty to his daughter Sarah asserts that “Girty often said, that he did everything he could possibly [do] to save Crawford from the stake…offering for his ransom all the property he was possessed of in the world—his negro—horse, saddle, wampum, & even his wife, but all to no purpose.” According to Sarah, Crawford called out to Girty after “his ears [were] cut off with a dull knife,” requesting that he “shoot him” but Girty responded that “it was Indian custom that no one could interfere with a prisoner condemned to death, without himself being shot down on the spot for attempting to thwart the decision of the nation.” Accordingly, “Crawford could only be saved on the condition that Girty would take his place, & suffer his punishment.” Other sources concur stating that “if Crawford had been his own father he could not have saved him, as the Indians,” accused Crawford of being “one of the leaders of the

---

269 Draper MS 11 CC 267.
270 Brackenridge, Narratives of a Late Expedition, 12.
272 Note from an interview with Sarah Girty Munger (daughter of Simon Girty, 1864, Draper MS 20 S 201.
273 (1864) Draper MS 20 S 201.
274 Draper MS 20 S 201. Sarah also mentions that Girty refused to ask “a young Wyandott by his side to shoot him” for fear of repercussions.
expedition that killed and made war on squaws." Draper MS 3 S 80. Elizabeth Turner McCormick, a white prisoner, recalled that “[t]he day before Crawford was burned Girty told him if he could, in any way, manage to get lose that night that he, Girty, would leave his negro man at a given place with a horse on which for Crawford to escape. But Crawford seemed unwilling to make an attempt.” Draper MS 17 S 191-192. According to Draper’s notes, “Mrs. McCormick repeatedly said, that all the prisoners—she among them—were made to witness the burning of Col. Crawford—they said he deserved it, as he was in wholesale murder of the Moravian Indians” and “Girty really did everything that a mortal man would do to save Crawford.” Draper MS 17 S 204-205. Others depict a similar scene:

[Girty] used all the means in his power to affect the release of Col. Crawford, offered to purchase him, offered his horse, money, and his rifle…if they would release him, and on the following day when Col. Crawford was at the stake he tried again to buy him, offered Old Pipe the Indian Chief 300£ in Gold 3 negrows [sic], wampum, and other property—the chief asked him if he would take his friend’s place, [if] he prized his life so high, if he would, they would release him on no other condition. Girty could [illegible] no more after the chief had cut Col. Crawford’s ears [that were now] dangling on each side [and] he said he did not wish to live and asked Girty to tell his attendant to shoot him. Girty said in answer that he dare not, -- they [illegible] him called him names and threatened him and was obliged to leave them and Col. Crawford to his fate. Draper MS 10 E 146-147.

Even though Knight honestly mistook James Girty for his brother Simon, Brackenridge went out of his way to paint Simon Girty as not only a political traitor but a race traitor. The Girty that emerged from Brackenridge’s interpretation was not the Girty who “shed tears while witnessing Crawford’s agonies at the stake” and “ever after always spoke of Crawford in the tenderest terms.” Draper MS 17 S 204-205.
**Political Traitors vs. Race Traitors**

In a strange twist, the same racial argument that Benezet unsuccessfully used in defense of the Indians would be successfully utilized in the vilification of Simon Girty. With the discovery of the North American continent, Europeans attempted to explain the differences between themselves and the Native Peoples as an effect of living in dissimilar climates. For centuries, many Europeans believed that through the correct amount of sun exposure, diet, etc. Indians could become European or “civilized.” Some Europeans even feared that the opposite could be true if they lived among the Indians in the new world for too long. It must be noted that ideas of race in the eighteenth century were plural and dynamic. As historian Alden T. Vaughan explains, “[i]n the case of Africans—but not Indians—color prejudice combined with cultural and religious prejudice to place blacks in a tragically inferior status.” It was “not until the middle of the eighteenth century” that “most Anglo-Americans view[ed] Indians as significantly different in color from themselves, and not until the nineteenth century did red become the universal accepted color label for American Indians.” By the time of the Revolution, most Americans generally acknowledged that the Indians were darker than Europeans, but they still regarded Indians as superior to blacks. Racial distinctions predicated upon color were not sufficient without other cultural factors including religion. In fact, some European colonists were still uncomfortable using the term “white” to describe themselves as late as the 1770s; when they

---

282 Vaughan, 918.
283 Vaughan, 948.
did use the term, they often used ethnic or religious qualifiers to distinguish among themselves.\textsuperscript{284}

However, the decades of fighting against Indian enemies from the 1750s through the Revolution helped bring together a bitterly divided population of different European backgrounds who started to see “whiteness” as a shared characteristic that distinguished them from Indians. This may have been even truer for those who lived on the frontier. A 1780 letter from American Captain Daniel Brodhead seeking the assistance of the Delaware Indians makes reference to skin color distinctions stating that “I do not tell you to strike people of your own Colour that you are at peace with.”\textsuperscript{285} At the time of Crawford’s burning, the Americans had a blended understanding of race as something that was innate but not entirely permanent. The idea of race as it would be understood in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century was still being developed at the time of Crawford’s execution; however, Brackenridge wanted to make sure that his audience viewed Girty using a binary conception of race in terms of distinguishing between Indians and whites. The two groups were mutually exclusive. In case his audience was unsure of the binary’s existence, Brackenridge justified its existence with his “observations with regard to the animals, vulgarly called Indians.”\textsuperscript{286} After “[h]aving an opportunity to know something of the character of this race of men, from the deeds they perpetrate daily around me,” Brackenridge reasoned that he should “say something on the subject.”\textsuperscript{287} According to Brackenridge, the Indians “have shapes of men and may be of the human species, but certainly in their present state they approach nearer the character of Devils.”\textsuperscript{288} In order to defend against the counterargument that Indians could

\textsuperscript{284} Silver, 115-117; Vaughan, 932.
\textsuperscript{285} Letter from David Brodhead to Wingenund, December 2, 1780 in Kellogg, 298.
\textsuperscript{286} Brackenridge, \textit{Narratives of a Late Expedition}, 32.
\textsuperscript{287} Brackenridge, \textit{Narratives of a Late Expedition}, 32.
\textsuperscript{288} Brackenridge, \textit{Narratives of a Late Expedition}, 36.
become “useful member[s] of society,” Brackenridge recalled that “[t]here have been instances of several of these creatures that have been taken young from the woods, and put to public schools in America” but he did “not know one who has even by these means been rendered a useful member of society” as “they retain the temper of their race.”  

Brackenridge even tried to dispel the idea of Indian allies being anything but savages. Brackenridge took great care to demonstrate through the story of John Montour that the Indians and whites were two distinct races regardless of political allegiance:

I knew of one of these [Indians], a certain John Montour, who had been educated at one of the northern seminaries, taught Greek and Latin, and in the war dignified by Congress with a commission of captain. No Greater savage ever exiled. He had murdered several of his own people, and being obliged to avoid the resentment of their relations, had fled from one place to another and at last joined our arms at Fort Pitt. I saw this man with the bloody scalp of an Indian in his hand, which he had just taken off, having tomhawked the creature, though submitting and praying for his life.”

Choosing sides in these frontier conflicts was not a matter of political opinion but a racial decision. Hence, when Girty decided to join his Indian friends during the Revolution, he was more than a political traitor; he was a race traitor. Girty did not exercise his liberty, he abandoned his race. This distinction becomes even more apparent when Girty is viewed in comparison to his two fellow defectors, Matthew Elliot and Alexander McKee.

Despite both Elliot’s and McKee’s continual service to the British government during and after the Revolution, they would never be as closely associated with being Indian as Simon Girty. In most respects, Girty did more fully assimilate himself within Indian culture and at times he was the only “white” individual permitted to attend Indian council meetings (Elliot and McKee were excluded). In a letter to President George Washington, Secretary of War Henry

---

Knox explained that “no other white person was admitted [to the council meeting] but Simon Girty, whom they consider as one of themselves.”\textsuperscript{291} It is because of Girty’s race defection not his political defection that he became so vilified. Likewise, Girty’s brothers, who also chose to live among Indians, were also vilified as race traitors.

In order to Other the Indians or make them appear less human, Brackenridge employed a common literary trope. Throughout his diatribe, Brackenridge equated the Indians with “animals” and “creatures” in an attempt to dehumanize them and make their extermination more justifiable. Historian David Brion Davis has noted that beastilization is “the ultimate weapon for excluding humans from empathy, equal fellowship, and the Golden Rule.”\textsuperscript{292} When a group of people stop being people and become animals, it makes cruelty easier to justify. Within a few short pages added to the end of the narrative, Brackenridge proposed a racial distinction between Indians and whites, refuted the claim that Indians could become civilized, elevated race loyalty above political loyalty, and advocated for the “extermination” of the Indian race because they were so “degenerate from the life of man, so devoid of every sentiment of generosity, so prone to every vicious excess of passion, so faithless, and so incapable of all civilization, that it [was] dangerous to the good order of the world that they should exist in it.”\textsuperscript{293} If Brackenridge did not paint Girty as a race traitor himself, he collected the dyes, brushes, and easel and left a rough sketch upon the canvas for the next artist to complete. The race traitor persona that Americans gave Girty helped to create a Simon Girty that existed entirely in the minds of frightened individuals.

\textsuperscript{291} Letter from Henry Knox to George Washington, December 6, 1792, re-quoted in Hoffman, 244.
\textsuperscript{293} Brackenridge, \textit{Narratives of a Late Expedition}, 36-38.
individuals. As the real Simon Girty was occupied doing one task, the legend of Simon Girty was simultaneously roaming the frontier and committing atrocities on his behalf.

**The Legend of Simon Girty**

Even during his lifetime, Girty was often accused of lurking in the forest just outside of American camps or participating in battles at which he was not present. The legend of Simon Girty spread quickly across the frontier, and it was probably aided by the ballad about Crawford’s defeat. In a region without a printing press and a highly illiterate population, the most effective means of transmitting stories was via story or song. Mirroring their Indian neighbors, frontiersmen often transmitted details of significant events and people orally. Although not as effective in disseminating information quantitatively, song is often more effective qualitatively in transmitting information that individuals will retain. The melody and lyrics gracefully weave into people’s minds a strong and lasting memory. Song is an excellent way of perpetuating something in social memory as it is likely to be passed on from generation to generation even after the relevance of the song’s content has faded. Thus, children today still sing about Yankee Doodle who “struck a feather in his hat and called him macaroni” without ever asking the meaning of the song, nonetheless the references to “doodle,” “dandee,” or “macaroni.” A similar scenario occurred when people sang about how Crawford was “Burn’d at a stake by most cruel Girtee:”

---


295 “Doodle” was a derogative term similar to “simpleton.” “Macaroni” was a pejorative term similar to “fop.” It is derived from the Macaroni wig, an eccentric fashion that young Englishmen adopted in order to mimic fancy foreign fashions. The song itself poked fun at the American militia fighting alongside the British during the French and Indian War. For a detailed
Like young Diabolians they this act did pursue,
And Girtee the head of this infernal crew,
This insinuator was a stander by,
While they in the fire their bodies did fry. 296

Long after those who personally knew Girty passed away, his name would be associated with the
gory details of Crawford’s death. The memory of Crawford’s burning as maintained in
“Crawford’s Defeat” marred Girty’s reputation on the frontier for generations to come. The oral
history of Girty was popular. In the preface to his 1846 work, Simon Girty, The Outlaw, U.J.
Jones described how he became inspired to write the novel after hearing “two gentlemen
wrapped in buffalo skins” point out a gorge in a mountain named “‘Girty’s Notch’” and retell
“some of the prominent incidents in the life of Girty.” 297 Likewise, in his 1873 history of the
Sandusky Expedition, Consul Willshire Butterfield remarked upon the popularity of “Crawford’s
Defeat” that “it was long after a favorite song upon the frontier—sung to various tunes. Its
echoes are remembered to have been heard even at a late date, and as far west as the valley of the
Sandusky.” 298 Thus the race traitor persona presented by Brackenridge and aided by the ballad
ensured future children would ever doubt the monstrous nature of Simon Girty.

In some cases, Girty’s reputation actually preceded him and sometimes acted in place of
him. Girty was “credited by the Americans of leading the enemy forces at the Battle of
Sandusky, for being responsible for Crawford’s death, and now for the disastrous defeat of the

history of the song see Stuart Murray, America's Song: The Story of ‘Yankee
Doodle’ (Bennington, Vermont.: Images from the Past, 1999).
296 “Crawford’s Defeat by the Indians, On the Fourth Day of June, 1782,” in Brown,
“‘Crawford’s Defeat’: A Ballad,” 314.
297 U.J. Jones, Simon Girty, the Outlaw: An Historical Romance (Philadelphia: G.B. Zeiber &
Co., 1846), 2.
298 Consul Willshire Butterfield, An Historical Account of the Expedition Against Sandusky
under Col. William Crawford in 1782 (Cincinnati: Robert Clarke & Co., 1873), 76.
Kentuckians at Blue Licks” for he “had become a monster” in the eyes of Americans. Authors also retroactively vilified Girty on numerous occasions. Many of the accounts that describe Girty’s defection during the Revolution describe him as being a savage race traitor, but this was simply not the opinion of people at the time. Despite being an extremely complex character, these subsequent narratives rewrote Girty’s early history and reduced him to a simple and evil character. Writing in 1828, John Heckewelder recast Girty’s defection in language that was not at all used at the time. Heckewelder described Girty as “a depraved wretch, who formerly had been employed as an Indian interpreter.” Heckewelder recalled that “the elopement of McKee, Elliot, Girty, and others, from the latter place to the Indian country, for the purpose of instigating the Indians to murder, as was generally expected,” caused a great stir as “the gloomy countenances of all men, women and children, that we passed, bespoke fear—nay, some families even spoke of leaving their farms and moving off.” Heckewelder anachronistically described Girty’s character using an infamous reputation that did not yet exist. Heckewelder was not the only author to retroactively vilify the young Girty. In 1854 James Taylor shared his view of the Girtys:

[B]oth brothers had been seduced by the British emissaries, and known to border tradition as renegades. This is hardly just. They should not be regarded otherwise than as Indians of their respective tribes. Such had been their training—their education. They were white savages—nothing else—and the active partizans of Great Britain for the rest of the century.

In 1870, Edmund de Schweinitz referred to Girty as “an inveterate drunkard, a blustering ruffian, seduced by British gold to forsake the Americans” who “was now espousing the royal cause with

---

299 Hoffman, 185.
300 Heckewelder, 170.
301 Heckewelder, 174-175.
all the baseness of his character.” Likewise, in 1886 The Magazine of American History explained that “[a]ll the Indian in Girty impelled him to side with the dusky companions of his forest life” and after being “approached with specious arguments and seductive promises by Elliot and McKee…the untaught creature, with the face of a white man and the heart of an Indian, with no feeling of loyalty to any flag either English or American, threw in his lot with the savages and their allies.” Of course none of these ad hominem attacks at all applied to Girty at the time of his defection and only partially decades later; they were a result of the legend of Simon Girty that prevented objective observation of his life. Here too the influence of Brackenridge can be detected as Girty is portrayed as a race traitor with no allegiance to “any flag either English or American.”

Girty was also credited for atrocities he did not commit years after the Revolution ended. As Hoffman explains, Girty’s “absence from the Ohio Country did not preclude him from being blamed for playing a bloody role in murderous Indian raids that were taking place on the frontier.” In 1824 Joseph Doddridge’s Notes on the Settlement and Indian Wars, includes a description of the murder of a “young and beautiful” daughter by the “savages” who “stealthily advanced and…buried a tomahawk in her head.” After describing the events, Girty is somehow connected to them as “[t]his information was subsequently communicated by the notorious Simon Girty, who was one of the party which committed the murder.”

---

305 Hoffman, 221.
306 Re-quoted in Hoffman, 221.
307 Re-quoted in Hoffman, 221.
Girty was also retroactively credited with the killing of Colonel David Rogers. In 1779 American Colonel David Rogers was returning to Fort Pitt following a successful expedition when his party ran into a group of Indian warriors near the mouth of the Licking River. In the fighting that ensued, Rogers was seriously injured and could not escape. A Sargent John Knotts apparently stayed by Rogers’ side until his own life was threatened. Knotts covered his dying commander with brush and Roger’s body was never found. Without any supporting evidence, a Jacob Drennon claimed that Girty personally told him that he actually killed Col. David Rogers. According to Drennon, “Girty said he then took as fair aim at Rogers as he ever did in his life at a deer.” No one can know for sure whether Drennon’s story is true or not. More than likely, this story contained more myth than truth. In America, the legend of Simon Girty had a life of its own; but, it was only one nation’s portrayal of the man. Across the theoretical line that separates the United Stated from Canada, a very different opinion of Simon Girty arose.

The Beginning of a Dual Canadian/American Memory

From the moment that messages regarding Crawford’s fate raced northward to British lines at Fort Detroit and eastward toward American lines at Fort Pitt, the memory of Simon Girty spliced into two distinct interpretations that largely persist today. The memory of Crawford’s burning from the Indian/British perspective would portray Girty as a humane and respectable agent of the Crown; meanwhile, the American perspective, aided by Brackenridge, portrayed Girty as the race traitor mentioned above. This American memory of Girty would only increase in its negativity as time progressed so much so that a twenty-first century observer would have a

---

308 Hoffman, 221.
309 Draper MS 12 CC, 237-238.
difficult time believing that the Canadian and American descriptions of Simon Girty were in fact about the same man.

Following the execution of Crawford, Girty participated in the Battle of Blue Licks where he and his Indian allies successfully defeated the American forces. Despite being only being employed as an interpreter, Girty’s reputation often overshadowed those of his white superiors, William Caldwell, Alexander McKee, and Matthew Elliot. Girty continued to serve as an interpreter following the Revolution. In 1784 Girty married Catherine Malott and had five children (one died as an infant). Living near Detroit, Girty continued to play a central role in frontier politics. Girty participated alongside his Wyandot friends in the defeat of St. Clair in 1791 and received three captured cannon as a reward for his service. Although supporting his Indian friends spiritually at the Battle of Fallen Timbers, Girty and his fellow British agents watched the fighting from afar being careful not to provoke another war. After the fall of Fort Detroit in 1796, Girty left the United States for Canada. Girty’s health deteriorated as he suffered from a broken ankle, poor eyesight, weight gain, and the side effects of heavy drinking. Catherine soon separated from Girty. This decision may have been facilitated by Girty’s drinking and/or physical abuse. Because of his poor health, Girty did not play any significant role the War of 1812 but British officials did inquire as to the usefulness of his services determining that “S. Girty is incapable of doing anything.” In 1815, Girty made it onto the Indian Department of Upper Canada’s pension list. Girty, now blind, lived off of this pension for the final two years of his life. A shell of the former frontier renegade that struck fear into the hearts of white settlers, Girty died on February 18, 1818 and was buried with full military honors. When Girty died, his

---

fellow subjects of the British Crown viewed him as a respectable loyalist who had devoted his life to his country.

In the Canadian memory of the burning of Colonel Crawford, Girty was not a depicted as heartless demon who laughed amidst Crawford’s agony. Reports that made their way back to Detroit spoke highly of Simon Girty. British Captain Bird felt strongly about Girty’s ability and importance claiming that he was “one of the most useful disinterested friends in the Departm[ent] [that this] Government has.”313 The accounts of the white captives taken north to Detroit portrayed Girty as a sympathetic character who “shed tears while witnessing Crawford’s agonies at the stake” and “ever after always spoke of Crawford in the tenderest terms.”314 By the time these testimonies were recorded by Draper in the middle of the nineteenth-century, the Girty legend had taken on a life of its own, and disabusing the master narrative would not be an easy task.

There are several reasons for this dual memory, and they reveal some interesting insights when viewed in light of one another. As mentioned earlier, the reports that made it back to the subsequent belligerents in the war differed greatly in their description of Girty’s role in Crawford’s burning. Secondly, the American legend that arose surrounding Simon Girty only served to reinforce a negative perception of him. Every subsequent deed Girty, or his legend, committed struck a blow to his reputation. Individuals even retroactively blamed and criticized Girty for his “savage” actions while he was still a loyal citizen of British North America and later America. A wildcard in the early formation of the memory of Girty following the burning

314 Draper MS 17 S 204-205; Brown, “Accuracy of the Knight Narrative,” 58.
of Crawford is the lack of newspapers in what would become Canada. Even if stories of Girty’s
 cruelty made their way to the British colonists, the necessary logistical apparatus for
disseminating and promulgating such a view did not exist. Opinions of Girty could only be
transmitted via letter and word of mouth, and it is unlikely that British colonists would besmirch
the reputation of someone risking his life to defeat the Americans who recently attempted to
invade their homeland. Today in Canada Girty is commemorated with several monuments, and
his reputation is closely guarded. When his name is mentioned, the denotation “U.E.” is placed
after it, celebrating Girty as a loyalist of the United Empire.
CONCLUSION

Politicians, citizens, and authors used the memory of Colonel Crawford during the early national period for numerous reasons. Hugh Brackenridge used the memory of Crawford’s burning as a political weapon to raise public support for and justify expeditions against different Indian coalitions. The disturbing story crafted by Brackenridge painted a dark picture of frontier life by reminding eastern readers of the violence common in the western region. Despite the best efforts of Anthony Benezet, Brackenridge’s version of events became the master narrative and forever changed Indian/white relations. The memory of Crawford’s burning continued to play a role in anti-Indian ideology, but it was not the only way individuals used the event in the 1780s and 1790s. Perceptive individuals seeking to keep the nation whole recognized a less obvious purpose for the memory of Crawford’s burning as a mechanism for unification. Although it was never highly successful, the memory of Crawford’s burning assisted in bringing a divided young nation together.

Brackenridge’s narrative also helped create the legend of Simon Girty. Even when Girty was hundreds of miles away from the scene of an incident his reputation placed him there on numerous occasions. Girty was incorrectly held responsible for Crawford’s death, and Brackenridge used this opportunity to advocate for a binary understanding of Indian/white relations, thus painting Girty as not only a political traitor but as a race traitor. As citizens read and sang the story of Crawford’s burning the event persisted in social memory. In the end, the memory of Crawford’s burning would have a long-lasting impact on Crawford’s and Girty’s reputations. Crawford became a feted patriot who exercised his manly fortitude and courage in defense of women and children; meanwhile, Girty became a feared renegade who at any moment could emerge from the brush, ambush, and scalp you alive. Though, this understanding of Girty
was uniquely American. During the early national period, the different interpretations of the burning of Crawford caused the memory of Girty to splice into two separate modes of thought. In America, Girty was a despicable race traitor who laughed at Crawford’s agony, but in what would become Canada, Girty was a loyalist who wept as he watched his old friend’s torture and execution.

The memory of Crawford’s burning continues to be an area of contention among historians and members of the public. In the 1990s, the dedication of a second monument and the creation of a state historical marker commemorating the death of Crawford sparked a heated public debate. At issue was the wording of whether or not to contextualize the event by including details of the Gnadenhutten Massacre. One side of the debate argued that the inclusion of the massacre tarnished the reputation of Crawford and diminished the importance of his sacrifice; meanwhile, other individuals argued that omitting the massacre only painted the Indians as barbarous savages who killed Crawford without motive. Ultimately, Gnadenhutten was not mentioned on either the monument or the state historical marker. After two hundred years, the same arguments that Brackenridge and Benezet articulated and debated are still influencing how people remember the burning of Colonel Crawford.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources and Collections


Brackenridge, Hugh Henry. Narratives of a Late Expedition Against the Indians with an Account of the Barbarous Execution of Colonel Crawford... Philadelphia: Francis Bailey, 1783.


Draper Manuscript Collection.

Gallagher, William D. “Girty, the Renegade.” The Hesperian: or Western Monthly Magazine 1, no. 5 (1838): 343-349.


*Pennsylvania Gazette.*

*Pennsylvania Journal and Weekly Advertiser.*


*Virginia Magazine of History and Biography.*

**Secondary Sources**


Bodnar, John E. *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the*


Cayton, Andrew R L. *The Frontier Republic: Ideology and Politics in the Ohio Country, 1780-


Hoffman, Phillip W. *Simon Girty Turncoat Hero: the Most Hated Man On the Early American


