

A Corridor of Fear: Stories along the Susquehanna River, 1754-1768

The many landscapes of pre-revolutionary America can be explored through the stories of the men, women, and families that made their homes in these places. Leading up to the American Revolutionary War, the American colonies and frontier borders were characterized not only by the opportunities associated with unfamiliar territory but also by disease, famine, death, and conflicts with Native Americans. This research project, resulting in a historical-storytelling-map, explores some of these aspects of mid-18th century colonial experience along the main branch of the Susquehanna River in order to provide insight into the experience and mindset of some of the human actors in historical events remembered and debated today.

Penn's "Holy Experiment"
 Arriving in his new colony for the first time in 1682, Quaker proprietor William Penn set into motion his idealistic dream for a place in which European Christians and Native Americans could live and thrive peacefully. He believed that fair negotiations with the Delaware Indians in the area were essential to the governance of this utopian kingdom. In 1682 and again in 1701, Penn signed land and peace treaties with the Delaware Indians and received wampum belts in order to symbolize the working relationship of trust and protection between them. These early interactions between Penn and Native Americans seemed to promise a harmonious landscape in which both groups could live but their peace was a fragile one.

Peaceable Kingdom Forgotten
 Throughout the early 18th century, large groups of English, German, and Scots-Irish immigrants began to dot the landscape of colonial Pennsylvania, and land conflicts with groups of Indians intensified. By the 1750s, immigrants settled, although not purchased, the land along the main stem of the Susquehanna River (modern-day Sunbury to Harrisburg.) In 1754, the French Indian War in Pennsylvania shattered the deceased Penn's dream for a utopian society. With French encouragement, parties of hostile Delaware Indians ravaged settlements along this part of the river. In October 1755, Delaware Indians killed or captured 25 inhabitants of the Penn's Creek area in what is remembered today as the Penn's Creek Massacre and continued to traverse the landscape attacking European settlers (panel 1). These attacks ushered in a period of terror for colonists and friendly Native Americans alike. The Moravian missionary town of Shamokin (modern-day Sunbury) was abandoned. The Scots-Irish inhabitants of Paxton (modern-day Harrisburg) remained; however, fear became a dominating aspect of daily life. This anxiety intensified when Paxton resident John Harris and a group of men traveled up the river to bury the murdered at Penn's Creek and suffered a terrifying mid-night Indian attack, resulting in the deaths of five men (panel 2).

In order to defend this part of the frontier from French and French Indian aggression, Pennsylvania Governor Robert Morris appointed Lieutenant Colonel William Clapham to lead an expedition up the Susquehanna from Paxton to Shamokin and build Fort Augusta at the abandoned town (panel 3). Although the fort was not attacked during the war, its hasty construction and poorly-supplied maintenance illustrates the colonists' vulnerabilities and desires for protection for which the government did not adequately provide. Men along the river believed government intervention could not quell fears and bring peace to the landscape. Fort Augusta was abandoned in 1794.

"Christian White Savages"
 Just as this part of the river had been used as a corridor for Indian travel and aggression and government expedition, it would be soon used as a corridor for colonial aggression and gruesome murder. In December 1763, a group of men from Paxton followed the river down to the Indian town at Conestoga Manor and slaughtered six friendly Conestoga Indians. The remaining 14 Conestoga Indians were removed to Lancaster for protection; however, a week after their first attack, the Paxton boys returned to Lancaster and murdered the 14 defenseless Indians (panel 4). Responses to the massacres in the forms of letters, poems, and artwork ranged from condemnation of the murders of friendly Indians to statements of support and understanding that fear and necessity had driven these good citizens to the unthinkable.

Even after the widespread hostilities of the French Indian War and Pontiac's Rebellion, anxiety and barbarity still characterized the landscape. In January 1768, Middle Creek inhabitant Frederick Stump killed six Indians that arrived at his house and stuffed the bodies into holes in the ice of the Susquehanna. The next day he traveled 14 miles up Middle Creek in order to murder the families of the slain as well (panel 5). Barbarous actions such as these question how lifelong experiences of terror and Indian-colonial aggression affect the mindsets and mentalities of people living along the river in the 18th century. In order to explore these mentalities that manifested into controversial historical events, one must take a deeper look into their stories and personal experiences and memories.

In order to read this map, explore each panel (1-5) in chronological order. Each panel provides geographical information about events that occurred and where people lived and moved on the landscape from 1754 to 1768. They also contain stories of the people who lived through and even played an integral role in some of the historical events remembered during this era that can be found in letters, memoirs, family papers, and diaries. The inclusion of artwork and poetry should be examined as well as the map panels in order to fully delve into the mid-18th century Susquehanna landscape of lust, fear, and barbarity.

Legend

- Streams
- Indian Trails
- Houses
- Towns
- Forts

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Geographical Sources:
 "National Elevation Data," USGS Seamless Data Warehouse, Seamless.usgs.gov, "SRTM Water Body Data," www.jp1.nasa.gov/srtm/, "Indian Paths of Pennsylvania," Paul A.W. Wallace, The Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 1965 "ESRI: U.S. Rivers and Streams," USGS and National Hydrography Dataset, 2004.

1 The Massacres at Kayarondinhigh, 1755

...while le Roy's hired man went out to fetch the cows, he heard the Indians shouting 58 times. Soon after, eight of them came to the house and killed Marie le Roy's father with tomahawks. Her brother defended himself desperately for a time, but was at last overpowered. The Indians did not kill him, but took him prisoner, together with Marie le Roy and a little girl, who was staying with the family. Thereupon they plundered the homestead, and set it on fire.

Into this fire they laid the body of the murdered father, feet foremost, until it was half consumed. The upper half was left lying on the ground, with the two tomahawks, with which they had killed him, sticking in his head...¹⁴

The Delawares had painted their bodies black and their faces both red and black; distinct geometric patterns on their cheeks and circles around their eyes made them look especially foreboding to the colonists...¹⁵

Footnotes:
 Joseph Shippen's "Map of Colonel Clapham's March to Fort Augusta," 1756. ¹⁴Phrase from "A Narrative of the Late Massacres in Lancaster County, ..." by Benjamin Franklin, 1764. ¹⁵Edited from Benjamin West's *A View on the Susquehanna, 1767*, Winterthur Museum, Winterthur, Delaware.
 Panel One: ¹⁶"The Narrative of Marie Le Roy and Barbara Leiminger," in *The Pennsylvania Archives*, Series II, Volume VII, 1890, Page 427. ¹⁷David L. Preston, "Pennsylvanians at War..." Historical Society of Pennsylvania. ¹⁸From George Morgan's *Annals of Harrisburg*, 1906, Page 29.
 Panel Two: ¹⁹From a letter from John Elder to the Secretary of the General Assembly dated November 9, 1755. In *The Pennsylvania Archives*, Series II, Volume VI, 1851, Page 704. ²⁰From a letter from John Harris to Governor Robert Morris dated October 28, 1755. *Annals of Harrisburg*, 1906.
 Panel Three: ²¹A letter from Edward Shippen to his son. In *The Paxton Papers*, edited by John Dunbar, 1957, Page 18. ²²Image of Fort Halifax. From "The Report of the Commission to Locate the Sites of the Frontier Forts of Pennsylvania," 1896. ²³Image of Fort Augusta. From "The Report of the Commission to Locate the Sites of the Frontier Forts of Pennsylvania," 1896.
²⁴From "A Petition to Governor Morris from the Inhabitants Living on the West side of Sassequannah," in *The Pennsylvania Archives*, Series II, Volume VI, 1851, Page 647. ²⁵From a letter from Colonel Clapham to Governor Morris. In *History of Northumberland County, Pennsylvania* by Herbert C. Bell, 1891.
²⁶From a letter from Reverend John Elder to Governor John Penn, December 16, 1763. In *The History and Topography of Dauphin, Cumberland, Franklin, Bedford, Adams, and Perry Counties*, 1846, Page 164.
 Panel Four: ²⁷From Rhoda Barber's "Recollections written in 1830 of life in Lancaster County 1726-1782, and a History of settlement at Wright's Ferry, on Susquehanna River." ²⁸From Rhoda Barber's "Recollections written in 1830 of life in Lancaster County 1726-1782..." ²⁹A narration of the massacre by Mr. Smith, one of the Paxton Boys. From George Morgan's *Annals of Harrisburg*, 1906, Page 54.
 Panel Five: ³⁰From a letter from Captain William Patterson to the Indians at the Great Island. In *The Pennsylvania Archives*, Series II, Volume IX, 1852, Page 454. ³¹A response from Shawana Ben to Captain William Patterson. In *The Pennsylvania Archives*, Series II, Volume IX, 1852, Page 480.
³²Two verses from Anne Domini's popular song published in 1771. ³³A verse from Christopher Gymnast's popular poem "The Paxtoniade" published in 1764. ³⁴Edited from Thomas Sinclair's "Massacre of the Indians of Lancaster by the Paxton boys in 1763," 1841.

October 16th Penn's Massacre occurs

November Moravian Mission at Shamokin is abandoned in fear

October 25th "on my return I with about 40 men, we were attacked by 20 or 30 Indians—killed 4 upon the spot and lost but 3 more, retreating about half a mile through the woods and crossing the Susquehanna, one of whom was shot off a horse riding behind myself. Four or five of our men were drowned crossing the river."

I hope our journey will be of some service to our country, but discovering our enemy, who will be our ruin if not timely prevented.³⁴

Reverend John Elder of the Paxton Presbyterian Church carried a gun into the pulpit every Sunday in fear of Indian attack. About it he said, "What may be the end of these things God only knows, but I really fear that unless vigorous methods are speedily used to prevent it, we in these back Settlements will unavoidably fall a sacrifice & this part of the Province be lost, which may, 'tis true, be recovered out the hands of the enemy, but at the expence of much blood & treasure."³⁵

October 21st Paxton men embark on journey to bury the dead

2 Terror in the Night, 1755

July 6th Arrive at Shamokin

September 23rd Fort Augusta is finished

"[The Augusta Regiment] has undergone in the service incredible fatigues without materials and without thanks...Tis extremely cruel...that men who cheerfully ventured their lives in the most dangerous and fatiguing services of their country, who have numerous families dependent on their Labor...—should some of them receive no pay at all."³¹

July 5th Camped at Gabriel's Mill

July 4th Camped at William's

July 3rd Camped at the mouth of the Mahantango Creek

July 2nd Arrived at Barber's

July 1st Crossed river at Berry's Ford

June 6th Regiment arrives at Armstrong's house and begins construction of Fort Halifax

April 18th 400 men depart Hunter's Fort as a part of the Augusta Regiment

"Savages will soon make inroads through the whole Province, burning, & destroying everything as they go..."³⁶

3 Clapham attempts Control, 1756

...the storm which has been so long gathering has, at length, exploded³⁷

"Pets of the Province," 1763

On the return to Paxton after their massacre at the Conestoga Indian town, Rhoda Barber, the young daughter of Robert Barber remembers the Paxton boys stopping at her house and her brother's discovery: "... five or six men came in, they had guns which they left outside, they were very cold, their coats cover'd with snow and sleet...in the mean time my two brothers ten and twelve years old had been out looking at the strangers horses...my brothers said they had tomahawks tied to their saddles and they were bloody, that they also had Christie's gun (Christie was a little Indian boy about the age of my brothers, they were much attach'd to him, he was their play mate in their sports, made their bows and arrows and was indeed as a brother) while they wondered what it could mean, a messenger came from Hare giving information of the dreadful deed. My father and some others went down to see them buried, shocking indeed was the sight, the dead bodies lay among the rubbish of their burnt cabins like half consumed logs..."³⁸

I was an early settler in Paxton, a member of the congregation of the Rev. Mr. Elder. I was one of the chief actors in the destruction of Conestoga, and in storming the workhouse at Lancaster. I have been stigmatized as a murderer. No man, unless he were living at that time in Paxton, could have an idea of the sufferings and anxieties of the people. For years the Indians had been on the most friendly terms; but some of the traders had been bought by the French; these corrupted the Indians. The savages unexpectedly destroyed our dwellings and murdered the unsuspecting... Our plan was well laid; the scout who traced the Indians was with us; the village was stormed and reduced to ashes. The moment we were perceived an Indian fired at us, and rushed forward, brandishing his tomahawk. Tom cried, "mark him," and he fell pierced by more than one ball—ran up and cried out, "it is the villain who murdered my mother!" The speech roused to vengeance, and Conestoga lay harmless before us. Our worst fears had been realized; these Indians who had been housed and fed as the pets of the Province, were now proved to be our secret foes; necessarily compelled us to do as we did."³⁹

December 27th

December 14th



Now, Sirs, I ween it is but right, That we upon these Cananites, Without delay should Vengeance take, Both for our own, and the K — k's sake [sic]: Destroy them quite frae out the Land; — And for it we have God's Command.⁴¹

—The Paxtoniade, Christopher Gymnast 1764

5 A Moses of his Day? 1768

January 11th Place of Second Murders

January 21st William Blyth's House

January 10th Stump murdered six Indians who arrived at his home

"I will now sit down and Smoak my Pipe. I have taken fast hold of the Chain of Friendship, and when I give it a Pull, if I find my Brothers, the English, have let it go, it will then by Time for me to let go too, and take care of my family. There are four of my Relations Murdered by Stump, and all I desire is, that he may suffer for his wicked action... I desire that the People of Juniata may sit still on their Places... whenever Danger is coming, they shall know it before it comes on them."⁴²

February 27th the body of one of Stump's victims washed ashore in Allen Township, Pennsylvania over 30 miles from Stump's home

...but the merciless wretches not satisfied with their first work and bent thither [Lancaster] and broke open the jail and destroyed them all, old men and women and children...⁴³

A new SONG, in high Vogue in Northampton County, in the Province of Pennsylvania [To the Tune of Bold Sawyer.]

"Then those infernal ravens in the dead of the night, Surprised our cooling turtles and put them all to flight, To pillage went the savage band, And plunder'd what came next to hand, But yet they could not steal the land, From true Paxton boys.

Be not impatient, brothers, we'll make it soon appear, Our hearts are quite undaunted, and strangers unto fear, Depend upon it—before next May, We'll drive these locusts all away, You may once more except fair play, From true Paxton boys."⁴⁰