

The Leroy Incident and Observations

by

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Colonial Powers Confront The Iroquois Confederacy

In the 1600s, as the English started to move in on the French in North America, the French made treaties with the Iroquois. The French sent Jesuits and the English sent missionaries to convert the Iroquois to Christianity, further drawing these Natives away from the old customs. All of this was causing new stresses to the Iroquois Confederacy; at that time a group of five tribes together referred to as the Iroquois, sited primarily in what is now New York State.

Further complicating the situation, in the 1640s the Iroquois started getting guns from some of the Dutch traders. The Dutch authorities discouraged this type of trade and went as far as to make it a capital offence to give guns to the Natives.

The Iroquois were becoming a force to be friendly with by all who were trading goods with them. The Iroquois were trying to stay neutral. Iroquois relations with the French and with the Natives in alliance with the French caused a condition of alternating peace and war as both the French and the Iroquois sought to control the fur trade with the western Natives.

In 1666 the French were at war with the Mohawk (one of the Iroquois tribes) and even invaded, beginning the Jesuit missionary endeavor to all of the five nations. Even with the peace and the missionaries' efforts, the French were unable to control the fur trade to the most Western Native tribes, as the English were making better offers of trade to the Iroquois which the Iroquois managed between the English and Native groups. All the while the Iroquois were trying to stay neutral and stay out of the political bickering and the wars between the French and English.

In the later part of the seventeenth century the French and Indian war was raging. Some of the Iroquois sought refuge from the English and started increasing their alliances with Britain's King William. More raids were made into the Iroquois territory in 1690 and 1696. The year 1697 saw the end of the king's war and the Iroquois could no longer depend on the English to protect them from the French. In 1701 they sought treaties and peace with both sides, and promised to stay neutral in any war between the French and English.

Many land treaties had been made with the French, English and the colonies. And the land west of the Susquehanna River was still in the sole possession of the Iroquois Confederacy. By this time the colonials were really entering the picture and the fierce battles of the American Revolution were just on the horizon. By the mid 1700's the colonies were also vying to make peace and alliances with the now Six Nations of the Iroquois Confederacy. The frontier settlers were also putting great stress on the Iroquois.

Braddock's Campaign

On July 6, 1754 the Albany purchase treaty was signed, the corner of which was one mile north of the mouth of the Karondinhah (Penn's Creek). In 1755 General Edward Braddock's raids into the Western frontier were just beginning. Braddock was, in my opinion, an "Indian Fighter" in that he went to great lengths to kill as many Natives as he and his army could. The Leroy story started with General Braddock's entrance.

History tells us that General Braddock was promoted to Major General in 1754, Commander in Chief of His Majesty's forces in North America. He was a strictly "by the book" tactical fighter. He regarded anyone but the King's Regulars or "Redcoats" with disdain. He was arrogant and ill-tempered, and a stern disciplinarian.

General Braddock's personal objective was to capture Fort Duquesne (near what is now Pittsburgh), which was garrisoned by 600 Canadian Militia and Regulars, as well as about 800 natives, some of which were led by Chief Pontiac.

Braddock's forces included 1400 British regulars and 450 Virginian

Provincials, whose task was to hack a road (more like a path) from Fort Cumberland, Virginia to Fort Duquesne over the Allegheny Mountains.

This march began on June 10th 1755. Through the entire march Braddock had flankers on both sides of the column that stretched out for four miles. It was a very slow pace. At a place called Little Meadows Braddock split his forces leaving the sick, and the heavy wagons behind. With him were 1200 of his best troops. It took until July 7th to get to within 8 miles of Fort Duquesne. Avoiding ambush they crossed the Monongahela River. Braddock must have had great satisfaction and confidence as he viewed his column.

On the other side of this conflict was Captain Hyacinth de Beaujeu. His orders were to intercept Braddock before he could close in on the Fort. Captain de Beaujeu had persuaded some 650 hesitant Natives to join his intercept. (Probably more than half of these deserted before a single shot was fired.) De Beaujeu took the fight to Braddock and the battle was joined some ten miles south of the fort.

Braddock was incensed by the ineffectiveness of his troops. The enemy column had split in two and vanished into the forest on both sides of the English. Then from behind trees, stumps, boles, and hiding places the French and Natives poured terrific firepower into the scarlet-coated English regulars who maintained their traditional solid red column, some 2000 yards long. They were being cut to shreds by the raking fire with literally no one to aim at.

The Regulars fired blindly in the direction of muzzle flashes and puffs of gun smoke that seemed to come from every direction. The cannons were brought up but made no impact on the invisible, scattered enemy. The Virginians led by Captain Thomas Waggener left the columns and proceeded to the forest, fighting in the style of the enemy. Only they gave as much as they took in musket fire.

When some of the redcoats dared to imitate the French and Native style of warfare, they were driven back into the ranks by Braddock and his officers "by the backs of their swords" as cowards. "Stand and fight" were the orders. "We would fight if we could see someone to fight with." The column broke up after only a ten-minute fight; the bloody Regulars retreated in a disorderly fashion, only to run into the infantrymen of the main force. Confusion turned into panic;

infantry, cavalry, artillerymen all turned to run. All the while terror spread among the rest of the forces, who joined the mad dash to the rear as the enemy continued their incessant fire on the retreating English. There is no doubt that Braddock fought bravely. He had four horses shot from beneath him. He was shot in the arm and the chest.

Lieutenant Colonel George Washington, who himself had two horses shot from under him and his cloths torn by four musket balls, was not even scratched. Washington more or less took charge as Braddock fell from his saddle for the last time, coughing blood from his chest wound. Washington tried to salvage an orderly retreat, but this was by now a demoralizing headlong rout. All the while enemy fire continued unabated from the forest. Washington couldn't even rally the men after they had put the Monongahela between them and most of the enemy. Braddock's shattered command did not stop retreating for some 50 miles when they re-entered the camp at the Meadows. Meanwhile Washington evacuated Braddock from the battlefield by litter, and then transferred him to a wagon.

At the Meadows, four days later, Braddock died. He was still muttering to his aide, "who would have thought it possible? We shall better know how to deal with them another time." Sadly he also died cursing his Redcoat Regulars and praising the once despised Virginian Provincial "Blues."

With his defeat by the French and the anger held by some tribes for the atrocities done to them by Braddock, and at French encouragement, some of the Natives re-occupied the old hunting ground west of the Susquehanna. In seeking retribution for the deeds of Braddock's army, these Natives attacked any whites that had settled on what they probably thought was still their land. In giving them the benefit of the doubt, it is quite probable those and perhaps other Natives had not heard of the Albany Purchase treaty. Or they didn't know where the borderline was. Some didn't recognize the legitimacy of the treaty.

As they entered the area we now call Union County, one of these bands found a settler named Jean Jacques Leroy squatting on their land. This man was henceforth killed. His home was burned with his body lying half inside the cabin door. The rest of the story is now evident.

The Leroy Massacre

Most of this story is from the eyewitness of the Leroy and Leininger children, or oral history. There are many references to this case. All have similarities, though there are some discrepancies. I personally have some doubts on some issues. Some of the writings are misleading or incorrectly referenced, and add to the confusion. It will be up to the readers to draw their own conclusion. I will try to set the events as accurately as I can.

An Amish man named Jean Jacques Leroy (his Swiss name), also called John Jacob King (in English), came from Canton Berne, Switzerland in 1752. With him came his wife, his son John James (some reference him as John Jacob) and daughter Anne Marie. Because of fear of the French, he used his Swiss name Leroy. He and his family settled along Lick Run (now known as Sweitzer's Run) in what is now known as Union County, Limestone Township. There seems to be very little reference to the wife.

According to documents the Leroy family were the first to settle in Buffalo Valley. Here they lived a meager existence clearing land, growing grain, and raising a few head of cattle. By 1755 some other homesteaders had settled the area also, the nearest about a half-mile to the east, the Sebastian Leininger family. This family of five lived a similar life style to the Leroy's.

On the morning of October the 16th 1755, while "the hired man was out to fetch the cows. He heard the Indians shooting six times." It was referenced that "while these Indians were undoubtedly incited by the French and encouraged by Braddock's defeat, they at the same time coveted this whole valley as a favorite hunting and fishing country. Because of these reasons they were resolved to drive out all the white settlers."

This band of Natives, either Allegheny, Delaware, or a mixture of braves from different clans, had swept in upon the first squatters they found as the Natives ventured east. Ironically Leroy, being the first inhabitant of this area, was also the first they encountered and killed on this rampage.

Eight of them came to the house and killed Leroy with tomahawks. John fought desperately but was overcome by the Natives. John, Marie and a little girl

who was staying with the family were taken captive. Thereupon the Natives plundered the homestead and set it on fire. Into the fire they laid the body of Leroy, with his feet inside the cabin door. His body half consumed, the upper torso remained with two Tomahawks imbedded in his skull.

After all was done the Natives started a campfire nearby. As they sat there the neighbor, Bastian, rode up on horseback. He had heard the shooting, seen the smoke, and came to see what was going on. He was immediately shot down and scalped.

At this point two braves proceeded to the neighbors Leininger. There they demanded rum. There was no rum to be given. They demanded tobacco, and there filled a pipe and smoked, then announced, "We are Allegheny Indians and your enemies. You must die." They then shot the father and tomahawked the son and captured Barbara and Regina Leininger. Mrs. Leininger was away at a mill and was spared death or capture.

As the story goes on, these natives went on to kill, plunder and capture east of the Leroy homestead. The count of the captives is, one man Peter Lick and his two sons, one woman Hanna Breylinger (wife of Jacob Breylinger) and her two children, Anna Marie and Jacob (John) Leroy, Barbara and Rachel (Regina) Leininger. A total of ten.

Interpretation

At this juncture I will continue with some of my own thoughts. More theory yes, but with good reasoning.

It is referenced that they had killed Leroy with tomahawks. In *The Story of Snyder County* it says he was killed by the spring near his home. Assuming that this is true, they must have dragged his body to the cabin. If the hired hand heard six shots fired, and they still had to kill him with hatchets, then they must have been very poor marksmen. I believe that they had shot Leroy by the spring, and perhaps tomahawked him as well, then carried his body to the cabin, laid him in the doorway and then set the cabin on fire. I doubt that they would have tried to put him into the cabin after it was set on fire, as it seems to read. At some

point they stuck the tomahawks in his head. I assume they did this as a warning to others and to let others know that Indians did this deed.

It says a little girl was staying with the Leroy family, yet there is no other mention of this girl, except the name Marian Wheeler as a captive. I assume the little girl was Marian. However *Union County Heritage*, vol. 15, p.7, names her as Villars, perhaps a misspelling of the name Wheeler, or the other way around.

According to the Snyder County version the prisoner count was ten - one man, five girls, one woman and three boys. John B. Deans wrote for the *Union County Heritage* that the captives were Marie and young Jacob Leroy, Marian Wheeler, Barbara and Regina Leininger, Hanna Breylinger and her two children, and Peter Lick and his sons John and William. A count of eleven.

As for the "hired hand," all the stories agree that he was there and heard the shots, however that is all that's mentioned about him. He had to have told others of the shots or it wouldn't have held true through all the renditions. Now I suggest that he must have saved his own skin and run away from the site. Not that that was a bad thing to do; going back to help would have been very brave, but might have been his last act.

I wondered how he knew that it was Indians who fired the six shots and not perhaps Jean or John Leroy. I pondered this awhile and realized he must have gone back, and gotten close enough to see what was happening, thereby realizing that these were Natives shooting, and he too would be killed if he were caught. I can only imagine the terror and great pain, fear, and agony this man must have had in witnessing all that was happening to his friends.

It is written that a neighbor, Bastian, was shot and scalped at the Leroy home. *Union County Heritage* vol. 15, p.6 lists him as Bostian. I find no other reference to any neighbors with that name. Who he is and where he was from is a mystery.

While the Leroy Massacre was only the beginning of many conflicts to occur in Pennsylvania between the Native population and the settlers, it would become harder for the Natives to live in this area from this point on. The Penn's Creek Massacres were to incite the settlers and the militias that were forming,

leading to more and more incidents that left the Natives with nowhere to go. Most departed to New York, some went south, others went to the West.

Eventually all the Natives were killed or driven out of Pennsylvania. All of their land was taken despite the many treaties and land grants. Even today, they are no longer a part of this Commonwealth. A very proud and peaceful people was destroyed by greed, bigotry, and our inability to live in peace with our Red Brother. Their bones and their stone tools are all that remain. Their land has been transformed from what it once was. We have yet to give anything back to the people who lived here in Harmony and Peace with all.

The Susquehannock were beaten by the Iroquois and assimilated into the Iroquois Confederacy. These people were spread far and wide. Very few Natives today can trace their ancestry back to the Susquehannock. The Delaware and the Lenape today are different tribes. Because of differences they had split into the Western and Eastern Delaware. The Western clans crossed over the Allegany Mountains.

This explains the two different names listed in the Leroy incident. The Delaware became the Alleganys, who eventually ended up in Oklahoma living on a reservation that is not theirs. I feel very sorry for the Delaware who lived in much of eastern Pennsylvania, inhabiting a vast territory - today they have not a single acre of soil in Pennsylvania to call their home.

All of the Native Americans that lived, hunted or traveled through our beautiful region were killed, driven out or died from European diseases such as small pox, German measles, even the common cold. As said not a single acre of land has ever been set aside in this Commonwealth for Native People to call home. Nothing is left of any of them except their bones, tools, and place names. There are native people living in Pennsylvania today, although few and from many different tribes - perhaps better not to say they are all gone. I personally think that this is an injustice. Our founding father William Penn created this Commonwealth so that all people of all races and religions could live together, side by side, in peace with one another.

Sources

This is a substantially shortened version of a longer essay. Readers are welcome to contact me at KMattern@unionco.org for the longer version.

My intent has been to give a somewhat different view of the events that led up to what are historically called the "Penn's Creek Massacres." Some of the information was pulled from *The Iroquois in the American Revolution* by Barbara Greymont, Syracuse University Press, Syracuse, New York 13210; and *North American Indian Wars* by Richard H Dillon, Fact on File, 460 Park Avenue South, New York, N.Y.10016.

The Leroy Massacre information is from many sources:

1. Union County PA. p. 9
2. *Annals of Buffalo Valley*. p.12 and p.74
3. John B. Deans, *Story of Snyder County* p. 225 on p. 226 referred to as John James, Union Co. *Heritage* vol.5 p. 66 .
4. *Story of Snyder County* p. 225
5. Union County Pa. p.193
6. *Union Co. Heritage* Vol.15 p. 6
7. Union County Pa. p. 192
8. Union Co. *Heritage* Vol. 15 p 6
9. *Story of Snyder County* p. 225
10. *Juniata and Susquehanna Valleys in Pennsylvania* p. 60
11. *Union Co. Heritage* Vol. 5 p. 67
12. *Juniata and Susquehanna Valleys in Pennsylvania* p .61
13. *Juniata and Susquehanna Valleys in Pennsylvania* p. 61
14. *Juniata and Susquehanna Valleys in Pennsylvania* p. 61
15. *Juniata and Susquehanna Valleys in Pennsylvania* p. 61
16. *Story of Snyder County* p. 225

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