GEORGE CROGHAN AND THE INDIAN UPRISING OF 1747

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Violence and sudden death form an integral part of the American concept of the frontier. That areas are vast and underpopulated does not infer that their inhabitants are less jealous and passionate than crowded city dwellers. On the contrary, those who trod the endless trails often met in fatal encounter. Whether it was rancher pitted against homesteader, or whether it was the red man's struggle against the white man's cancerous inroads on the hunting grounds, the drama had a similar quality—in all cases it was acted out by a relatively tiny cast moving on an immense stage. Many stories of violence and revenge can be told to illustrate transitional phases in the drawn-out death of the frontier. Such a story is that of the Indian uprising of 1747, a bloody and futile effort of a native population to adjust itself to ever-changing pressures imposed on it by rival European nationalities.

The imperial claims of the French and their desire for a western trading monopoly could not rest easy in the face of English activities, for the Pennsylvania traders by the 1740's had grown familiar with the Allegheny hunting grounds and the vast expanses of the Ohio region; they were even audacious enough to extend their trade westward below Lake Erie toward Detroit. In

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this vast territory they had won the esteem of the Indian with whom they bartered successfully for deer skins and furs.

With apparent fearlessness, the traders moved freely through the wilderness, counting on the friendship of the Indians to shield them from the wrath of the French, who viewed their Anglo-Saxon rivals as dangerous trespassers. In the great Ohio Valley, a hunting preserve of incalculable value, the Pennsylvanians encountered Indians of the Delaware and Shawnee tribes, and hunters of the Six Nations. Farther westward they traded with the influential Twightwee Nation and the Wyandot tribe. From these sources a flood of furs poured back to Philadelphia, enriching, at least temporarily, the trader, the merchant, and all others fortunate enough to have an interest in such a promising business.

The names and careers of several wealthy colonial merchants who made fortunes in the fur trade are well known to students of Pennsylvania history. Such men as James Logan and Edward Shippen, who for a time dominated the trade, have left their imprint on our records. On the other hand, only a few of the many hardy woodsmen who transported the merchants' goods into the Indian territory have left a comprehensive record of their deeds, and only one of these traders achieved a career of outstanding significance. This man was George Croghan, "a meer Idol" among his rough colleagues, and undeniably Pennsylvania's foremost Indian trader during the years 1748-1752.

Virtually nothing is known of Croghan's life before 1741 when he left his native Ireland and came to Pennsylvania. Entering the Indian trade, Croghan had gained enough experience by June, 1742, to be trusted with a shipment of goods from Edward Shippen to Peter Tustee, a well-known Allegheny trader who was one of Shippen's active customers. Although Croghan maintained an association with Tustee for many years to come, he soon struck out for himself. By 1744 he was an accredited and licensed trader in his own right, carrying on a respectable business as bills amounting to £700 for goods purchased in Philadelphia that year would indicate.\(^1\)

\(^1\)Shippen Papers, XXVII, 71, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania (HSP).

\(^2\)Pennsylvania Archives, Second Series, II, 619; Cadwalader Collection, HSP.
In the autumn of 1744, Croghan took his trading stock to a distant Seneca village near the mouth of the Cuyahoga River on Lake Erie. Beside that placid stream, then the verdant center of a great hunting country, but now an important industrial life-line twisting like a corkscrew through the city of Cleveland, the Irishman bartered for beaver skins.

The activity of English traders in this area had alarmed the French, whose western headquarters were at Detroit. La Rivière Blanche, as they called the Cuyahoga, had been incorporated into their trading empire in 1742 at the request of Iroquois hunters who had lately settled there. These Indians, “Senecas, Onondagas, and others of the Five Iroquois villages,” promised that if French traders were sent to supply their needs they would drive away the English. In response to their request, Céloron de Blainville, who then commanded at Detroit, sent to the Cuyahoga River some of his habitants who returned prior to June, 1743, with about two hundred packs of peltries. From this time on the French were active traders on the river and seem to have established themselves upstream. Croghan’s small village near the mouth of the Cuyahoga was only one of a number of Iroquois settlements whose inhabitants totaled about six hundred hunters.

The element of competition between French and English remained, for, despite their promises, the Indians did not refuse to deal with the English. At the outset, the Canadians noted that “it would be well to profit by the advantages it [the Cuyahoga River trading area] presents, especially to deprive the English of them.” When they found that these advantages were not denied the Pennsylvania traders, the French authorities urged the Ottawa, Twightwee, and other French tribes to attack the English trading in the vicinity of the Ohio River. Meanwhile, in March, 1744, England

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3 The identification of La Rivière Blanche with the Cuyahoga is basic to an understanding of the trading situation. A summary of the evidence which points to this identification may be found in Charles A. Hanna, The Wilderness Trail (New York, 1911), I, 335; see also Lawrence Henry Gipson, The British Empire Before the American Revolution (New York, 1939), IV, 169-171.


5 Ibid.

6 Beaubhanois to Count de Maurepas, Oct. 8, 1744, ibid., 1105.
 declared war on France, though word of this was not proclaimed in Pennsylvania until June.

Such was the situation when news reached Detroit early in the fall of the arrival on the Cuyahoga of several Englishmen who were described as a militant little group, well supplied with ammunition and "resolved to annihilate the French Traders who were going to that quarter." Against them the Detroit commandant dispatched a picked band of thirty-five Ottawas to plunder and kill them, or take them prisoners. Like similar schemes in later years, the Indian attack never materialized.

The dangers of operating beyond the very fringes of English influence did not discourage Croghan as he traded that winter on the shores of Lake Erie. He had by then clearly demonstrated an unusual capacity to perceive the problems of his new environment and an ability to adapt himself to a totally new set of circumstances. During those seasons which he had spent among the natives, he had learned rapidly. With a thoroughness which later stood him in good stead, he mastered their languages, learned their ceremonials and ways of doing things, came to understand their thought processes, and gained their confidence. Among the frontiersmen of his day Croghan's popularity was marked, but it was equally a factor in his Indian relations and may well have been the reason why his trading efforts with the natives were so successful.

During the winter of 1744-1745, his operations grew to considerable size and indicated plainly that his fortunes were expanding. Although the village on the Cuyahoga remained his headquarters, cargoes of his goods under the care of friends and servants were sold in other places. One of these cargoes he had entrusted to Peter Tustee for trade far down the Ohio; meanwhile, the tentacles of his influence stretched westward toward the Wyandots.

His foreign rivals, unwilling to tolerate such boldness, decided on a definite effort to eliminate him. On or about April 23, 1745, Croghan was preparing to pack his peltries out of the wilderness, the winter trading season having ended, when a Frenchman and a "French" Indian arrived at his village. They had come, they told

7 Beauharnois to Count de Maurepas, Nov. 7, 1744, *ibid.*, 1111.

8 "He understands the Language of the six Nations & of sevl. other of the Indian Nations." Croghan's affidavit, Wyoming Controversy, 71-75, Penn Papers, HSP.
A section taken from Bowles' edition of Lewis Evans' *A General Map of the Middle British Colonies*, 1755. Note the Cayahoga River (lower center), with the French House on it.
the Senecas, to seize the Irishman and all his property and remove him from the trading country. Fortunately for Croghan, the natives protected him and sent his enemies away empty handed.

Taking all the skins his horses could carry, the trader lost no time in setting out for the settlements, and on his way was joined by his friend Tustee who had bad news for him. Only a few days earlier, Tustee, with another English trader and numerous employees, had been plundered by a large band of Shawnee Indians under the leadership of several Frenchmen and the renegade Pennsylvania trader, Peter Chartier. They had taken everything that the Englishmen had, including a canoeload of furs belonging to Croghan. From Tustee’s story it was evident that the Shawnee tribe was on the move to place itself under French control.

The traders came down to Philadelphia where they made depositions about the robbery before Edward Shippen, at that time mayor, and Richard Peters, Secretary of the Provincial Council. Croghan stated that he had lost 48 horseloads of deer skins, 400 pounds of beaver, and 600 pounds of raccoon skins; but though Tustee petitioned the Assembly for relief as he was “entirely ruined” and utterly incapable of paying his debts, Croghan’s resources were sufficient to absorb his personal loss.\(^9\)

To cope with the emergency created by the defection of the Shawnees, Croghan was entrusted with a small present from the government to deliver to those few members of the tribe who still remained in the English interest.\(^10\) Knowledge of Croghan's technique, as it developed in the coming years, suggests that the gift was prompted by his advice that something must be done to secure the Indians’ friendship. The Shawnee present represents an approach to a policy, later vigorously promoted by the trader, to alienate the Ohio Indians from the French through direct dealing with them by the government of Pennsylvania—a policy not hitherto attempted.

Croghan continued in the Indian trade with increasing boldness and success, and expanded his trading ventures throughout the Ohio country. The strategic river fork formed by the uniting of the waters of the Monongahela and Allegheny rivers attracted his


\(^10\) Ibid., 17; Penn Papers, Accounts, I, 66, HSP.
attention. Nearby this future site of Pittsburgh, he built a trading house. It was another prosperous year for him, notable for his appointment by the Iroquois to their directing body, the Onondaga Council.\textsuperscript{11} 

The winter of 1746-1747 found him once more in residence among the Senecas near the mouth of the Cuyahoga on Lake Erie. Business was extraordinarily good, for many Indians who in the past had dealt only with the French now brought their furs to him. This was by no means entirely due to Croghan's own business talents, but was largely caused by the inability of his rivals to send a sufficient trading stock to the Indian country. The scarcity of supplies in the hands of Canadian merchants, a reflection of the efficiency of English naval activity, caused prices to soar. Many Canadians as a result abandoned the Indian trade. Licenses, which had customarily been sold, were now given away to try to maintain some traders in business.\textsuperscript{12} In order to protect what remained of the Lake Erie trade, the officer who commanded at Detroit was again instructed to send Indians to attack the English on the Cuyahoga.\textsuperscript{13} 

Efforts of that sort by 1747 were useless, as the natives normally dependent upon the French had become dissatisfied with the thin trickle of high-priced goods which came to them by way of Montreal. They were in a fit mood to listen to the blandishments of the English. More and more of them turned to the Pennsylvania traders who circled the inland French empire in the Lake Erie region.

The Iroquois among whom Croghan traded had tried to maintain a neutral status, though they clearly favored the Irishman. The time was now at hand for Croghan to extend his influence farther west, and Croghan did not fail to seize the opportunity. The most important Indian settlement between the Cuyahoga and Detroit, on or near Lake Erie, was at Sandusky. Thither, a year or two earlier, a disgruntled Wyandot, Chief Nicolas, had led his people from their village at Detroit. Nicolas had lost sympathy with the French and warmly welcomed English traders. He even

\textsuperscript{11} Croghan's affidavit, Wyoming Controversy, 71-75, Penn Papers, HSP.
\textsuperscript{12} Beauharnois to Count de Maurepas, June 18 and Oct. 28, 1745, O'Callaghan, X, 2, 21.
\textsuperscript{13} Beauharnois to Count de Maurepas, Aug. 28, 1746, ibid., 38.
allowed them to build a blockhouse in his town.\textsuperscript{14} Under their influence and Nicolas’ leadership, Sandusky became a center of resistance to the French and was soon included within the orbit of Croghan’s trading activities.\textsuperscript{15}

In the early spring, before Croghan left the Lake Erie country, five of his French competitors from the Cuyahoga River, accompanied by Indians friendly to them, began their long homeward trek to Detroit, loaded down with furs. Their route led past Sandusky, and unaware of danger they visited that town. Nicolas, enraged at their presence, permitted them to be murdered and confiscated their furs. Blame for the actual killing was laid against both the Sandusky Wyandots and the Senecas from Croghan’s village.\textsuperscript{16}

Taking a firm stand, Nicolas ordered those Indians who had accompanied the French to return to their homes and not to go on to Detroit.\textsuperscript{17} From this bloody start developed the Indian conspiracy which swept the west in 1747, aimed at the destruction of all the French posts. Detroit itself narrowly escaped, while the fort on the Maumee River was partially burned by the Twightwees. Although the French won out, many of their people were killed at distant trading places before peace was restored.

It was a bad summer for the French, even though the conspiracy was discovered in time to save Detroit. The revolt, however, could not be maintained by the Indians, who soon were asking forgiveness of their “fathers.” But those tribes principally concerned, the Sandusky Wyandots and the Twightwees, did not feel they could renew their French alliance. In 1748 Chief Nicolas destroyed Sandusky and led his people eastward toward the Cuyahoga and the Ohio,\textsuperscript{18} while the Twightwees, under their militant leader Old Briton, settled at Pickawillany on the Great Miami. These moves

\textsuperscript{14} Alfred T. Goodman, \textit{Journal of Captain William Trent From Logstown to Pickawillany} (Cincinnati, 1871), 15-16.
\textsuperscript{15} Albert T. Volwiler, \textit{George Croghan and the Westward Movement 1741-1782} (Cleveland, 1926), 35.
\textsuperscript{16} These murders probably took place early in May, 1747, not on June 23, as is often said. Croghan first wrote about them on May 16. \textit{Pennsylvania Archives}, I, 741-742; \textit{Collections of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin}, XVII (1906), 474 (Wisconsin Collections).
\textsuperscript{17} O’Callaghan, X, 138.
\textsuperscript{18} Early in 1748 the French learned that Nicolas and his tribe “had taken the route to the White river,” and again of “the departure of Nicolas and his people for the White river, to seek shelter among the Iroquois there, or among the Mohegans who are near Orange [Albany].” \textit{Ibid.}, 162.
of the two tribes were the chief result of the Indian uprising. They profoundly affected trading conditions in the Lake Erie and Ohio country.

An official French report placed the blame for the outbreak on the Pennsylvania traders who resided on the Cuyahoga. These men were accused of causing "all the ills and agitations of the upper country" and of instigating the natives to commit the Sandusky murders. "This conspiracy," wrote Boisherbert, "is fomented by the English, who, by force of presents and lies, excite the Indians against us, insinuating into their minds that we are not in a condition to furnish them with any supplies; that we have no goods, as they take all our ships, and that Quebec has been already captured. This is their ordinary language."20

Meanwhile, the Seneca warriors who had participated in the murders sought Croghan's advice. What part the Irishman played in the rebellion against the French can never be accurately known, but it is of importance to note that he was recognized by the authorities in Pennsylvania as "the Trader to the Indians seated on Lake Erie."21 Like Croghan, the English who visited Sandusky were known by the French as dependent upon Philadelphia. Moreover, the French felt that the seat of their troubles lay at the Cuyahoga, that it was there the conspiracy was hatched. Since names of other English traders in this area are not recorded, Croghan can almost assume the character of the arch-plotter by default. In 1751, John Patten, a captured English trader, told the French, so their records show, that "Croghan... had at all times persuaded the Indians to destroy the French and had so far prevailed on them, by the presents he had made them, that five French had been killed by said Indians, in the upper part of the country; that self-interest was his sole motive in everything he did, that his views were to engross the whole trade, and to scare the French from dealing with the Indians."22

Whether or not this contemporary testimony can be trusted, it is known that the murderers turned to Croghan. On their behalf he

19 Wisconsin Collections, XVII, 474-477.
20 Boisherbert's report on Indian affairs, November, 1747, O'Callaghan, X, 84.
21 Peters to Weiser, Sept. 26, 1747, Pennsylvania Archives, I, 771.
22 Neville B. Craig, The Olden Time (Cincinnati, 1876), II, 186. Patten later took exception to his testimony. Illinois on the Eve of the Seven Years War, Collections of the Illinois State Historical Library, XXIX (1940), 497.
LETTER FROM INDIANS TO GOVERNOR THOMAS, 1747
Pennsylvania Archives, Provincial Papers, IX, 63; printed in PENNSYLVANIA ARCHIVES, First Series, I, 741-742.

Courtesy Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission
wrote a letter to the governor of Pennsylvania which narrated the dramatic happenings and confided the Indians' hopes that they would soon seize Detroit. This letter, accompanied by the scalp of one of the unfortunate Frenchmen and by a note from Croghan himself, brought the first news to Philadelphia of the distant uprising. The Indians' letter was dated May 16, 1747, while Croghan's was written ten days later after his arrival at his plantation. "I am Just returnd from the Woods, and has brought a Letter, a French Scalp, & some Wompom for ye Governor, from a part of ye Six Nations Ingans, That has there Dwelling on ye Borders of Lake Arey," wrote the trader. "Those Ingans ware always in the French Intrest till now, Butt This Spring, allmost all the Ingans in the Woods, have Declared against ye French." Croghan sincerely hoped they would be provided powder and lead to continue the war and suggested that if there was any message to be sent them it could go by his men who were returning to Lake Erie for another load of skins.\(^2\)

It requires little imagination to surmise that Croghan played an important role in alienating the Indians from the French and promoting their revolt. His business interests required such an upheaval, and the efforts of the French to eliminate him made turnabout seem only fair play. Croghan was to be peculiarly insistent that the government of Pennsylvania help out his Indian friends, and was to state that if this were not done he would not dare return to them. One might infer from this that he had promised them English aid—it would not have been unlike him—and it is more than probable, according to Patten's testimony, that he personally gave them all the ammunition he could afford.\(^2\) At any rate, it is clear that Croghan was well acquainted with the Indian conspiracy before the French knew of it and that the dynamics of the trader's personality would scarcely have allowed him to play a passive role in such an atmosphere of intrigue.\(^2\)

\(^2\) *Pennsylvania Archives, I,* 741-743.

\(^{2a}\) *Ibid.*, 770. In the summer of 1747 Longueuil at Detroit learned that two Englishmen had come to Sandusky with ammunition for Nicolas and his warriors. The French also noted that, during the winter of 1747-1748, Nicolas had been twice visited by "the English of Philadelphia." O'Callaghan, X, 138, 157.

\(^2\) Croghan's participation in the uprising against the French has been generally acknowledged by historians. See Hanna, I, 323; Volwiler, p. 35; Gipson, IV, 178.