

A NOTE ON SCALP BOUNTIES IN PENNSYLVANIA

BY HENRY J. YOUNG*

IN THE early historic period of North America, scalping, according to Mooney's account, was confined to the vicinity of the Iroquoian and Muskhogean tribes. Had it not been for the handsome rewards offered for scalps by the white men's governments, the vindictive and gruesome practice might never have spread. It did spread, however, over most of the United States,¹ and for this phenomenon the government of Pennsylvania bears a degree of historical responsibility.

Just where or when a bounty for scalps was first offered, is not clear, but certainly such bounties were being offered in New England during the first half of the eighteenth century.² It is abundantly clear that Pennsylvania's government proclaimed general bounties for Indian scalps on three occasions, in 1756, in 1764, and finally in 1780. Moreover, under at least two of these proclamations, claims were presented and such claims were duly paid from the public treasury.

Whoever started it, by the 1750's most Americans grimly accepted the ethics of scalp buying. We find that in 1753 Father LeLoutre, missionary to the Micmac Indians, advanced 1800 livres silver of Acadia to tribesmen who delivered to him eighteen scalps from the English settlements.³ Three years later, on the opposite side of the long border, we find young George Washington urging upon Governor Dinwiddie the payment to certain Virginia troops of a bonus for having brought in the scalp of one Ensign Douville.

*Dr. Henry J. Young is Senior Archivist, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.

¹ James Mooney, "Scalping," *Handbook of American Indians North of Mexico* (2 vols., Washington, 1910), II, 482-483.

² *A Dictionary of Americanisms on Historical Principles* (Chicago, 1956), p. 1466, s.v. Scalp 2.(2) and (11).

³ L. H. Gipson, *The British Empire before the American Revolution*, V (1942), 195, 203.

Washington expressed the hope that "although it is not an Indian's, they will meet with an adequate reward at least, as the monsieur's is of much more consequence."⁴

As it happened, this Ensign Douville, raiding out of Fort Duquesne, had strict orders to prevent the Indians under his command from inflicting cruelties,⁵ but of course the Virginians could not be expected to know about that. They scalped him, and Washington approved.

It would seem that colonial Americans were not sensitive about the trade in scalps; on occasion they demanded that bounties be offered. The harried frontiersman, desiring security from lurking foes, found emotional satisfaction in the prospect of slaughter and economic hope in the promise of reward. Scalp bounties encouraged private warfare on the border, just as letters of marque encouraged private warfare on the seas, and warfare at private risk was cheap and effective. Scalp bounties always marked a turn toward offensive war, a turn by which the white man gained temporary security.

There were notable disadvantages, however, in the practice of paying bounties. To friendly Indians the traffic in scalps presented a menace, for they were the easiest of all to scalp. Bounties promoted atrocities, too, and the development and acceptance of the system dulled social and ethical sensibilities. Precisely in the age of the scalp bounty, the elimination of the Indian problem came to mean the elimination of the Indian.⁶

In Pennsylvania, at least, it was the frontiersmen who issued the first clear call for a scalp bounty. Just after the devastating Indian raid on Lancaster and Berks counties, in November, 1755, at a public meeting held to plan defense, they demanded such a bounty. Opposed was Conrad Weiser, who feared the effect upon friendly Indians, but reported: "They cried out that so much for an Indian Scalp they would have (be they Friends or Enemies) from the Governor."⁷ On November 27, 1755, the legislature and

⁴ *Writings of Washington*, ed. J. C. Fitzpatrick, I, 302.

⁵ Edward D. Neill, "The Ancestry and Earlier Life of George Washington," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, XVI (1892), 284-285.

⁶ Cf. Roy Harvey Pearce, *The Savages of America: A Study of the Indian and the Idea of Civilization* (Baltimore, 1953), p. 4. On the general failure of the Quakers with the Indians see *ibid.*, pp. 35-39.

⁷ Paul A. W. Wallace, *Conrad Weiser, 1696-1760, Friend of Colonists and Mohawk* (Philadelphia, 1945), p. 414.

the governor appropriated £60,000 for defense, and appointed a commission to determine how the money was to be spent. Early in January, 1756, the commissioners authorized one Captain Wayne, recruiting in Northampton County, to offer to his men a bounty of "forty Pieces of Eight for every Indian they shall kill & scalp."⁸

The governor of Pennsylvania, Robert Hunter Morris, became convinced that the only way to fight Indians was to seek out and destroy their towns. He approved, moreover, a public subscription for a reward for the heads of Shingas and Captain Jacobs, two chiefs of the Delawares, and in consequence a reward of at least 700 pieces of eight was announced in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* of January 1, 1756.⁹ As the subscription was not yet closed, and as Virginia in April increased the offer by a hundred pistoles, the prize amounted to a small fortune, but it is not known whether or not it was ever awarded. Although Governor Morris was less sure of the efficacy of general scalp bounties, he finally accepted the repeated recommendation of the commissioners. On April 14, 1756, he declared war and proclaimed a general bounty for Indian enemy prisoners and for scalps.¹⁰ The Iroquois were expressly excepted as friendly Indians. The schedule allowed \$150 for each male prisoner above the age of twelve years, or \$130 for a corresponding scalp; \$130 for a male prisoner under the age of twelve, or a female prisoner; and \$50 for the scalp of an Indian woman. It should be noted that in this first proclamation, and only in the first one, the rewards were payable to friendly Indians as well as to whites.

This offer seems to have expired within a few months. Teedyuscung, "king" or spokesman for the friendly portion of the Delawares, urged a renewal of bounties the following year, and in September, 1757, Governor Morris called on the legislature to consider the matter, but apparently his suggestion was ignored. Conrad Weiser, being consulted, stood firmly opposed to pay-

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 421.

⁹ Mr. William A. Hunter kindly called my attention to this advertisement (which does not mention scalps) and to its sequel, the erroneous claim of Indian Isaac. See *Colonial Records*, VII, 77; *Pa. Arch.*, II, 612, 621-622; III, 315.

¹⁰ *Pennsylvania Archives*, II, 619, 620, 629; *Colonial Records*, VII, 74-76, 78-79, 92-93.

WHEREAS the DELAWARE and SHAWANSE Tribes of INDIANS, and others in Confederacy with them, have, without the least Provocation, and contrary to their late most solemn Treaties, ungratefully renewed War upon this Province, and, in a most cruel, savage and perfidious Manner, killed and butchered great Numbers of the Inhabitants, burnt and destroyed their Habitations, and laid waste the Country: I HAVE THEREFORE thought fit, by and with the Advice of the Council, to issue this Proclamation; and do hereby declare the said Delaware and Shawanse Indians, and all others, who, in Conjunction with them, have committed Hostilities against His Majesty's Subjects ENEMIES, REBELS and TRAITORS to His Most Sacred MAJESTY. AND I do hereby require all His Majesty's Subjects of this Province, and earnestly invite those of the neighbouring Provinces, to embrace all Opportunities of pursuing, taking, killing and destroying the said Delaware and Shawanse Indians, and all others concerned in committing Hostilities, Incurtions, Murders or Ravages upon this Province. AND WHEREAS the Six United Nations of Indians, viz: the Mohawks, Oneidas, Onondages, Cayugas, Senecas and Tuscaroras, have been, for the most Part, in constant Amity with the Crown of Great-Britain, and are now actually engaged with Sir WELIAM JOHNSON, His Majesty's Superintendent for Indian Affairs, in renewing and firmly establishing the Peace and Friendship subsisting between them and the several Colonies: AND WHEREAS sundry of the Delaware, Nanticoke, and other Indians, professing a Regard and Friendship for all His Majesty's Subjects, have removed within the inhabited Parts of the Country, and put themselves under the Protection of this Government, and now live in the Barracks of this City, under a Guard of His Majesty's regular Troops: I DO HEREFORÉ DECLARE, That the several Tribes of the said Six United Nations, as well as those Indians who are aforesaid living under the Protection of this Government, and all others who shall join or act with us in the Prosecution of this just and necessary War, are expressly excepted and excluded out of this Declaration; and I do hereby strictly forbid any of His Majesty's Subjects within this Province, to do them the least Injury, or give them any Molestation whatsoever, as they will answer the same at their Peril.

AND WHEREAS it is necessary, for the better carrying on offensive Operations against our Indian Enemies, and bringing the unhappy War with them to a speedy Issue, that the greatest Encouragements should be given to all His Majesty's Subjects to exert and use their utmost Endeavours to pursue, attack, take and destroy our said Enemy Indians; I DO HEREFORÉ DECLARE AND PROMISE, That there shall be paid, out of the Monies lately granted for His Majesty's Use, to all and every Person and Persons not in the Pay of this Province, the following several and respective PREMIUMS and BOUNTIES for the PRISONERS and SCALPS of the Enemy Indians, that shall be taken or killed within the Bounds of this Province, as limited by the Royal Charter, or in Pursuit from within the said Bounds; that is to say, For every MALE INDIAN ENEMY, above Ten Years old, who shall be taken Prisoner, and delivered at any Forts garrisoned by the Troops in the Pay of this Province, or at any of the County Towns, to the Keeper of the common Goals there, the Sum of ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTY SPANISH DOLLARS, or PIECES OF EIGHT. For every FEMALE INDIAN ENEMY, of Ten Years old or under, taken Prisoner and delivered as aforesaid, the Sum of ONE HUNDRED AND THIRTY PIECES OF EIGHT. For the SCALP of every MALE INDIAN ENEMY, above the Age of Ten Years, produced as Evidence of their being killed, the Sum of ONE HUNDRED AND THIRTY-FOUR PIECES OF EIGHT. And for the SCALP of every FEMALE INDIAN ENEMY, above the Age of Ten Years, produced as Evidence of their being killed, the Sum of FIFTY PIECES OF EIGHT. AND that there shall be paid to every Officer or Officers, Soldier or Soldiers, as are or shall be in the Pay of this Province, who shall take, bring in, and produce any INDIAN ENEMY PRISONER or SCALP, as aforesaid, ONE HALF of the said several and respective PREMIUMS and BOUNTIES.

ment of scalp money to Indians, "for fear we must then pay for our own Scalps, and those of our Fellow Subjects, as will certainly be the case." He proposed, however, an increase in the reward for live prisoners.¹¹

The proclamation was widely circulated, yet actual claims and payments for scalps proved surprisingly few. Aside from seven or eight scalps brought home from Kittanning by Armstrong's volunteers in September, 1756, during the whole colonial period we know of only eight scalps that the Pennsylvania government actually bought. The only persons recorded as receiving the bounty were Andrew Lycan and Daniel Cressop, for two scalps each; George Lynderman, for one scalp; "Murray and Company," for three scalps; and Colonel John Armstrong, "for sundry Prisoners and Scalps brought from Kittanning." It is indeed possible that the government bought a few other scalps, as the public accounts of the period are in some places vague, but it is impossible that any substantial number was involved.¹² Nor were there many unsatisfied claims; the only one found is that filed by Mrs. Margery Mitchel of Shippensburg. This good lady, who had lost her husband and her son, having made an expensive but fruitless journey to Philadelphia to sell her trophy, pled with the provincial secretary for special consideration of her case: "Yr. Endeavours to this purpose I hope will not only heape Blessings on yr. self, but in a great measure relieve [my] pinching necessity." Possibly because the bounty offer had expired, her claim continued unpaid.¹³

The military effectiveness of a scalp bounty was not to be measured in terms of actual scalps or dead Indians. So much is clear from the testimony of the times. The mere announcement of a bounty brought into play the underlying optimism of the backwoodsman and turned him from frustrating passivity to aggressive activity in an exciting game which held the Indian on the defensive. In July, 1763, the Reverend Thomas Barton, for-

¹¹ *Pa. Arch.*, 4th Series, II, 870-872; *Colonial Records*, VII, 735.

¹² *Pa. Arch.*, II, 639, 641; 8th Series, V, 4360, 4363, 4368, 4370, VII, 5665; William A. Hunter, "Victory at Kittanning," *Pennsylvania History*, XXIII (July, 1956), 392, 393.

¹³ *Pa. Arch.*, III, 308. Indian Isaac may also have claimed unsuccessfully, under a retroactive interpretation of the proclamation (see note 9, *supra*), but conclusive evidence is lacking.

merly a military chaplain, revealed his own moral dilemma and that of his age and country :

The general cry and wish is for what they call a Scalp Act. . . . Vast numbers of Young Fellows who would not chuse to enlist as Soldiers, would be prompted by Revenge, Duty, Ambition & the Prospect of the Reward, to carry Fire & Sword into the Heart of the Indian Country. And indeed, if this Method could be reconcil'd with *Revelation* and the *Humanity* of the English Nation, it is the only one that appears likely to put a final stop to those Barbarians.¹⁴

In eastern Pennsylvania, far from the frontier, the Friends protested against scalp bounties, but protested ineffectively; after all, the lives to be sacrificed in retaining their Peaceable Kingdom were not their own.

When Barton wrote the above words, Pontiac's Rebellion was raging. The British posts at Venango, Le Boeuf and Presque Isle had just been destroyed. In December following, the worry and discontent of the frontiersmen erupted in the vengeful massacre of the Conestoga Indians in Lancaster County. In January, the frontiersmen marched again with intent to kill the Moravian Delawares and Mahicans, who had been hurried to Philadelphia for protection. This time the rioters were persuaded to return peaceably to their homes; it was obvious, however, that concessions to their wishes must be made.

The proclamation of July 7, 1764, renewing the offer of rewards for enemy Indian prisoners and for scalps, was an attempt to end this discontent. The "Six United Nations" (Iroquois) were again excepted as having been "for the most Part, in constant Amity with the Crown of *Great-Britain*." The price offered for scalps of males more than ten years old was \$134, and for those of females above ten, \$50. This tariff remained in effect until December 5, 1764, when the governor proclaimed an end to hostilities.¹⁵ It is not evident, however, that any bounty was ever paid or even

¹⁴ Quoted by Julian P. Boyd in his introduction, "Indian Affairs in Pennsylvania, 1736-1762," to *Indian Treaties Printed by Benjamin Franklin* (Philadelphia, 1938), pp. lxxii-lxxiii.

¹⁵ Charles H. Lincoln, *The Revolutionary Movement in Pennsylvania, 1760-1776* (Philadelphia, 1901), pp. 111-113; *Colonial Records*, IX, 188-192, 234.

claimed under this measure, and the proclamation proved to be a remarkably inexpensive stroke of statesmanship.

During the Revolutionary War the idea of a scalp bounty originated, so far as we can tell, in the autumn of 1777, when, in an action near Kittanning, a scouting party of Westmoreland County militiamen took the scalps of five Indians. On December 6 the county lieutenant, Colonel Archibald Lochry, forwarded these trophies to Thomas Wharton, President of the Supreme Executive Council of Pennsylvania with the recommendation that a reward be given "for the Encouragement of other Partys." But President Wharton was ill—he died soon afterward—and no action was taken at the time. Seventeen months later, however, the Council asked Colonel Lochry to sound out frontier opinion on the subject of a bounty. Lochry reported on May 1, 1779:

I have consulted with a number on this head, who all seem of opinion that a reward for scalps would be of excellent use at this time, and would give spirit and alacrity to our young men, and make it their Interest to be constantly on the scout.¹⁶

President Joseph Reed, of the Council, wrote to General Washington on the same day, but before receiving this report, to say among other things that a revival of scalp bounties had been proposed. "We shall do nothing in it without your advice," Reed wrote, but he added, "I fear we shall be forced into it whether we like it or not."¹⁷ In his reply to this letter Washington completely ignored the question of scalp bounties, and, perhaps for this reason, the proposal was ostensibly laid aside. But Reed remained greatly impressed with the idea. He wrote to Colonel Daniel Brodhead of the Eighth Pennsylvania that summer in a most equivocal vein:

We have sounded Congress & the General about giving a Reward for Scalps, but there is so evident a Reluctance on the Subject, & an Apprehension that it may be improved by our Enemies to a national Reproach, that at present we cannot venture to make any authoritative

¹⁶ *Pa. Arch.*, VI, 69; VII, 362.

¹⁷ William B. Reed, *Life and Correspondence of Joseph Reed* (Philadelphia, 1847), II, 99.



By His EXCELLENCY

Joseph Reed, Esq. *President,*

And the SUPREME EXECUTIVE COUNCIL, of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

A PROCLAMATION.

WHEREAS the Savages in Alliance with the King of *Great-Britain*, have attacked several of the Frontier Counties, and, according to the Custom of barbarous Nations, have cruelly murdered divers of the defenceless Inhabitants of this State: AND WHEREAS it has been found, by Experience, that the most effectual Mode of making War upon and repelling the Savage Tribes has been by Parties, consisting of small Numbers of vigorous, active Volunteers, making sudden irruptions into their Country, and surprising them in their Marches: WHEREFORE, for the Encouragement of those who may be disposed to chastise the Insolence and Cruelty of those Barbarians, and revenge the Loss of their Friends and Relations, WE HAVE thought fit, and do hereby offer a Reward of THREE THOUSAND DOLLARS for every *Indian* Prisoner, or Tory acting in Arms with them, and a Reward of TWO THOUSAND AND FIVE HUNDRED DOLLARS for every *Indian* Scalp, to be paid on an Order of the President or Vice-President in Council, to be granted on Certificate signed by the Lieutenant, or any two Sub-Lieutenants of the County, in Conjunction with any two Freeholders, of the Service performed. Such Reward to be in Lieu of all other Rewards or Emoluments to be claimed from the State.

GIVEN, by Order of the Council, under the Hand of His Excellency JOSEPH REED, Esquire, President, and the Seal of the State, at Philadelphia, this Twenty-second Day of April, in the Year of our Lord One Thousand Seven Hundred and Eighty.

JOSEPH REED, PRESIDENT.

Attest. T. MATLACK, Secretary.

GOD Save the PEOPLE

Courtesy Library Company of Philadelphia

Offers; but as we have great Confidence in your Judgment & Discretion, must leave it to you to act therein as they shall direct.¹⁸

If Brodhead followed the hint, as is very likely, the evidence is not readily found.

When new Indian raids occurred in the spring of 1780, Reed and his Council took action. The plight of Northumberland County was especially serious. Most of its residents had left in the Great Runaway of 1778 and such of the local militia as remained must not be called away from spring planting or they individually would face economic ruin. At the same time, because of difficulties of supply, the militia of other counties could not be sent into this wasted countryside. On April 8, writing to the Reverend Joseph Montgomery, at Sunbury, Reed announced a series of scalp bounties, describing them with delicate euphemism only as "Rewards to those who distinguish themselves." He went on to say:

in short we will do any Thing to create that Spirit which is so necessary in an Indian War, a spirit of Hostility & Enterprize which will carry our young Men to their Towns.—Surprizes, Ambuscades, &c., have been & I fear will be found the only true Weapons to fight the Savages.

He alluded to the Kittanning Expedition of 1756:

One offensive Expedition formerly gave Peace to the Western Frontiers—is not this now practicable. . . . I do not mean Expeditions on a great Scale of military Parade, but secretly concerted, prudently conducted, & adapted to the Nature of the Enemy.¹⁹

On the previous day, however, Reed had written in more explicit terms to Colonel Samuel Hunter, the county lieutenant:

It is our earnest Desire that you would encourage the young Men of the Country to go in small Parties & harass the Enemy. In former Indian Wars it was frequently done & with great Advantage. . . . The Council would

¹⁸ *Pa. Arch.*, VII, 569-570.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, VIII, 170.

& do for this Purpose authorize you to offer the following Premiums for every male Prisoner whether white or Indian if the former is acting with the latter 1500 dollars & 1000 for every Indian Scalp. . . . Last French War Secret Expeditions were set on foot by the Inhabitants which were more effectual than any Sort of defensive Operations. We most earnestly recommend it to you to revive that same Spirit & any Plan concerted with Secrecy & Prudence shall have our Concurrence & Support.²⁰

To Reed's suggestion Colonel Hunter replied that a scalp bounty had already been adopted unofficially in his county; but as a seasoned Indian fighter (which Reed was not) Hunter could not agree that scalping parties were as effective as strong expeditions.²¹ In this opinion, however, Hunter apparently stood alone. On the 11th, the system of bounties announced for Northumberland County was extended to Northampton County.²² On April 22, finally, a schedule was proclaimed for the whole state, allowing \$3,000 Continental for every Indian prisoner, or every Tory prisoner who had acted in arms with the Indians, and \$2,500 Continental for every Indian scalp. At the time, \$2,500 in paper was valued at \$33 1/3 in silver.

On the Pennsylvania frontier the proclamation met with general approval. Colonel Brodhead objected, however, that rewards were offered neither to regulars nor to friendly Indians. And Colonel Hunter reported in June that several scalping parties had returned without success; their only prisoner, a Tuscarora, had embarrassed everybody by turning himself in. Finally, in August, far out on the West Branch, Lieutenant Jacob Creamer's party took two scalps, but apparently the party neglected to claim the bounty.²³ No scalping party of revolutionary Pennsylvania seems to have sold so many prisoners or scalps as had the Kittanning Expedition of 1756. Perhaps the bounty was claimed so infrequently merely because, in frontier warfare, there was rarely accorded that narrow margin of time required to obtain the scalp. Whether a bounty was currently offered or not, in the course

²⁰ *Ibid.*, VIII, 156-157, 167; *Colonial Records*, XII, 311.

²¹ *Pa. Arch.*, VIII, 189.

²² *Ibid.*, VIII, 176; *Colonial Records*, XII, 312.

²³ *Pa. Arch.*, VIII, 283, 284, 301, 568.

of years it evidently became usual for our tough-minded forefathers to scalp the Indians they had killed, when circumstances permitted.

The bounty proclamation of April 22, 1780, remained in effect until it was repealed on March 21, 1783.²⁴ During the three-year period, according to Treasury records, the state acquired only a half dozen scalps. The rewards went to Captain Samuel Brady, who had led a party of five white men and two Delaware Indians in a scalp raid toward Sandusky in the summer of 1780;²⁵ to Captain Henry Shoemaker, to be divided among another party of volunteers; and to Captain Andrew Hood, Captain Alexander Wright, William Minor, and Adam Poe, all of western Pennsylvania.²⁶

Probably most of the scalps turned in and paid for were burned, but the one for which Adam Poe was rewarded was allowed to become a museum piece. In an accession list of his "American Museum," under date of July, 1782, Pierre-Eugène du Simitière of Philadelphia entered:

a Scalp taken from an Indian killed in September, 1781, in Washington County near the Ohio in this State by *Adam Poe*, who fought with two Indians, and at last kill'd them both, it has an ornament a white wampum bead a finger long with a Silver Knob at the end the rest of the hair plaited and tyed with deer skin. Sent me by the President and the Supreme executive Council of this state with a written account of the affair.²⁷

When Du Simitiere's collection was sold in 1785, the scalp itself became lost to history, but the "written account," along with other manuscripts, was purchased immediately by the Library Company of Philadelphia, and in that venerable institution it may be read today.²⁸

Each of Pennsylvania's three scalp bounty proclamations was

²⁴ *Colonial Records*, XIII, 538.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, XII, 632; *Pa. Arch.*, VIII, 301.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 3d Series, V, 149, 301; *Colonial Records*, XIII, 201.

²⁷ Quoted by W. J. Potts, "Du Simitiere, Artist, Antiquary, and Naturalist . . .," *Pa. Mag. Hist. Biog.*, XIII (1889), 369.

²⁸ Historical Records Survey, Pennsylvania, *Descriptive Catalogue of the Du Simitiere Papers in the Library Company of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1940), pp. 120, 135.

printed in broadside, and for each of these printings a unique original survives: at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, the proclamation of 1756; at the New York Public Library, the proclamation of 1764; and at the Library Company of Philadelphia, where it helps to document the prowess of Adam Poe, the final proclamation of 1780.