

# THE RETURN OF THE PAXTON BOYS AND THE HISTORICAL STATE OF THE PENNSYLVANIA FRONTIER, 1764-1774

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THE events leading to and surrounding the march of the Paxton Boys on Philadelphia in February 1764 are well-known by scholars of early American history. The Paxton Boys were members of that Scots-Irish Presbyterian community which had settled in northern Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, and had suffered at the hands of Indian raiders during the French and Indian War and Pontiac's Uprising. To satisfy their desires for revenge and to show the government in Philadelphia that they would take matters into their own hands if the Indian attacks continued, the Paxton men carried out two bloody forays during December 1763. Some fifty of them, led by Matthew Smith, swept south along the Susquehanna River and struck first at the Indian settlement of Conestoga, killing six of the remnants of the Conestoga tribe. Still not satisfied, a larger number, headed by Smith and Lazarus Stewart, attacked and slaughtered the fourteen survivors of the first raid. The Paxton Boys broke into the Lancaster jail and butchered men, women, and children. Philadelphia governmental leaders were shocked. With the wholehearted approval of the Assembly, Governor John Penn placed a substantial reward on the Paxton leaders' heads and called for their capture and removal to Philadelphia for trial.<sup>1</sup>

Governor Penn did not have to worry about extradition. The

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<sup>1</sup>*Minutes of the Provincial Council of Pennsylvania, Minutes and Proceedings of the Council of Safety, and Minutes of the Supreme Executive Council of Pennsylvania, 1683-1790* (16 vols., Philadelphia and Harrisburg, 1851-1853), IX, 95-96, 107-108, known as *Colonial Records*. The two most recent works of scholarship dealing with the Paxton uprising are Brooke Hindle, "The March of the Paxton Boys," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Sers., III (October 1946), 461-486, and John R. Dunbar, ed., *The Paxton Papers* (The Hague, 1957), 3-51.

Paxton Boys knew that other Christian Indians had found sanctuary in Philadelphia. They sensed that the government was supporting these Indians with funds that might well have been appropriated for frontier defense. The Paxton Boys decided to march on Philadelphia and present their demands in person. Matthew Smith and James Gibson led the irate frontiersmen. As they headed towards Philadelphia, other disaffected backcountry men joined the march. Philadelphians panicked. The whole backcountry seemed bent on repeating the atrocities of the previous December, but this time in the "city of brotherly love." Benjamin Franklin and Joseph Galloway, representing the Quaker party, and Benjamin Chew and Thomas Willing, representing the Proprietary party, intercepted the Paxton Boys at Germantown. The politicians promised governmental relief if the marchers would return home. Smith and Gibson agreed, but before leaving, they prepared a "Declaration" and "Remonstrance" stating frontier grievances in full. Their chief complaint concerned inequality of backcountry representation in the Quaker-dominated assembly. Almost as important was Penn's attempt to try those responsible for the Conestoga and Lancaster murders outside the counties of their residence, a move that would "deprive *British* Subjects of their known Privileges." The remaining grievances concerned the Indian problem and the defenseless state of the frontier. Smith and Gibson vigorously criticized the Quaker-dominated assembly for not voting defense funds. They blamed the "Friends" for the bloody conditions of the frontier.<sup>2</sup>

Unfortunately, Pennsylvania political leaders spent the next few months fighting among themselves rather than facing the issues. The rival parties wasted their energy trying to assess the burden of blame. Only at times of threatened invasion had both political factions worked harmoniously. Now a flurry of pamphlets found the Quakers charging Proprietary leaders with secretly aiding the backcountry in its attacks on peaceful Indians. Proprietary pamphleteers sided with the backcountry in countering Quaker charges. Little substantive legislation resulted.<sup>3</sup>

Here the Paxton story is usually ended. Two types of conclusions have been drawn from the episode. William S. Hanna has argued in his book *Benjamin Franklin and Pennsylvania*

<sup>2</sup> Dunbar, *The Paxton Papers*, 99-110.

<sup>3</sup> The various pamphlets are reprinted by Dunbar.

*Politics* that the Proprietary defense was really a means of contending with Quaker domination of the Assembly. The Penn forces used the debate to form a political alliance between eastern Proprietary interests and Scots-Irish Presbyterians of the west. These two groups, according to Hanna, generally stood together in opposition to Quaker domination of the Assembly for the remainder of the colonial period.<sup>4</sup> The first general conclusion, then, is that an east-west political alliance grew out of the Paxton uprising.

Others have come to much broader conclusions. Brooke Hindle, building upon the writings of Frederick Jackson Turner and Charles H. Lincoln, suggested that the march reflected a growing split, visible in many of the British colonies, between rising democratic forces seeking equal rights and democratic government, symbolized in the Paxton Boys, and the well-to-do old guard, whether Proprietary or Quaker. Hindle did not specifically note a political alliance resulting from the Paxton episode. He summarized his position this way: "The men in power had been forced to take notice of the penniless squatter on the frontier and of the discontented in the East who were ready to second his demands. It became clear that a government operated in the interests of a sectional minority could not be maintained in a land of growing democracy. That government endured a minor shock in the Paxton affair. The next severe shock of revolution was able to use lines already drawn and cracks already made. The march of the Paxton Boys paved the way for internal revolution."<sup>5</sup>

Hindle expressed himself according to the tradition of historians like Charles H. Lincoln and Theodore Thayer who have viewed late colonial Pennsylvania in terms of fundamental splits between east and west along economic, religious, social, and political lines. The democratic backcountry inhabitants, having been unfairly treated for years by the Quaker-dominated Assembly, rose in indignation on the tide of revolution, pushed the tory Quakers aside, and set up one of the most equalitarian forms of govern-

<sup>4</sup> (Stanford, 1964), 21-22, 149-157. Hanna suggests that the backcountry had little use for the Proprietary party in the 1750's. It was hard for settlers to tell whether it was the lack of effort on the Assembly's part or the Governor's that left the frontier defenseless.

<sup>5</sup> "The March of the Paxton Boys," 485-486.

ment that Pennsylvania or any other state or nation had ever known.<sup>6</sup>

Two basic questions, therefore, arise from these sets of conclusions. Did the episode lead to a political alliance between Scots-Irish Presbyterians on the frontier and eastern Proprietary leaders in opposition to the Quaker party? And, did the Presbyterian frontiersmen evince a democratic spirit in their actions after the Paxton uprising which somehow expressed itself in the revolutionary Pennsylvania government? The task of answering both questions is somewhat simplified by the fact that many of the Paxton Boys reappeared in Pennsylvania politics during the late 1760's and early 1770's. Specifically, the Paxton Boys and other backcountry settlers in and around Lancaster County became involved in a major land controversy between Connecticut and Pennsylvania, known as the Wyoming Valley dispute. Their actions in relation to that controversy render a clear picture of how select groups of frontier settlers felt about the government in Philadelphia. The evidence also shows that men of the Paxton stamp rarely were motivated by democratic principles. They had little sense of give-and-take according to rules of fair play or majority rule. Their actions, governed by personal interests, sprang from a desire for protection from a government that was peculiarly unresponsive to their everyday needs. Their subsequent behavior after the march in 1764 makes it difficult to classify them as incipient democrats.

## I

It was the constant threat of Indian outrages that brought the Paxton Boys to the center of the stage in Pennsylvania politics

<sup>6</sup> The traditional interpretation about the democratic role played by the backcountry in the coming of Pennsylvania's revolution dates to Frederick Jackson Turner and his essay, "The Old West," *State Historical Society of Wisconsin Proceedings* (Madison, 1908), 184-233. Charles H. Lincoln, *The Revolutionary Movement in Pennsylvania, 1760-1776* (Philadelphia, 1901), adds another dimension to the traditional interpretation. Lincoln gave form to the concept of "internal revolution" by arguing that the backcountry led the overthrow of the Pennsylvania government in 1776. Theodore Thayer, *Pennsylvania Politics and the Growth of Democracy, 1740-1776* (Harrisburg, 1953), argues that it was the love of democracy that led to the new government. Thayer pinpoints the backcountry Scots-Irish as the group responsible for the supposed democratic upheaval. The conclusions of both Hindle, Dunbar, and Wilbur R. Jacobs, ed., *The Paxton Riots and the Frontier Theory* (Chicago, 1967), also follow this traditional interpretation.

during 1764. And it was the rumored possibility of renewed Indian warfare in late 1767 that forged the chain of events leading to their return. Rumors circulated that the Indians who were settled on the New York and Pennsylvania frontiers intended to retaliate against continued white encroachments onto their lands in violation of the Proclamation of 1763. Governor John Penn had received word from both Sir William Johnson, British northern Indian agent, and General Thomas Gage, the North American commander, that a rupture was imminent unless some effective means could be found to pacify the tribes. Governor Penn took the initiative. In early January 1768 he instructed the Quaker-dominated Assembly about the gravity of the situation and asked for a law which would effectively remove all settlers from lands not yet formally purchased from the Indians.<sup>7</sup> The Assembly met during February, and its primary concern was to find a means to avert warfare. Directly related issues came out during the session, one of which involved the Paxton Boys and their massacres and march on Philadelphia.

Soon after receiving Penn's message, the Assembly resolved itself into a committee-of-the-whole to discuss the matter. During the debate some of the delegates recalled that none of the Paxton Boys had ever been prosecuted. They pointed out that Indians on the Pennsylvania and New York frontiers, especially the Six Nations, had been angered by the atrocity, and that Governor Penn and his Proprietary followers had defended the Scots-Irish frontiersmen in the pamphlet warfare of 1764. The Quaker-controlled committee easily concluded that the murders were "Acts of Barbarity," and represented "one of the Causes of the present Dissatisfaction of the *Indians*."<sup>8</sup> Within days Governor Penn received a message from the Assembly calling for the immediate prosecution of the Paxton leaders.<sup>9</sup> It would appear that the Quakers were out to destroy the budding political alliance between the Scots-Irish frontiersmen and the Proprietary party.

At first Governor Penn found it politically expedient to ignore

<sup>7</sup> Penn to Assembly, January 5, 1768, *Colonial Records*, IX, 407. The letters from Gage and Johnson are mentioned in the Council's minutes; the complete minutes of the second session of the Assembly are in *Pennsylvania Archives*, 9 Series (138 vols., Philadelphia and Harrisburg, 1852-1949), 8th Sers., VII, 6072-6180.

<sup>8</sup> *Pennsylvania Archives*, 8th Sers., VII, 6081-6082.

<sup>9</sup> Message dated January 13, 1768, *Colonial Records*, IX, 408-412.

the Assembly's demands. But another disaster occurred on the frontier which forced Penn's hand. In the middle of January word reached Philadelphia about the killing of ten Indians by a backwoods Pennsylvanian, Frederick Stump. Stump, a Cumberland County German living near Middle Creek, was visited late one afternoon by six drunken Indians. Stump tried to persuade them to leave, but they refused, indicating that they wanted to sleep off the liquor. Fearing for his life, Stump waited until the Indians were asleep before butchering them with an axe. With the help of his manservant Stump dragged their remains to nearby Middle Creek where he cut a hole in the ice and shoved the mutilated corpses under. Obviously frightened and knowing that the bodies might be discovered or that news of the murders might somehow reach local Indians, settled about ten miles up Middle Creek, Stump and his manservant went to the village where they killed the one woman and the three children they found there and burned down the village huts. Still not convinced that they had covered their crimes, the two prepared to flee the country.<sup>10</sup>

Governor Penn understood that the untimely act, which had the overtones of the Paxton murders, had the potential to spark an Indian war. He immediately ordered all backcountry magistrates to pursue and arrest Stump and his manservant and to send them to Philadelphia under armed guard for questioning before a special court of Oyer and Terminer.<sup>11</sup> In calling for the extradition of Stump, Penn was again violating one of the basic rights as stated in the "Remonstrance" of 1764.

It was only a matter of time until Stump and his accomplice were apprehended in the vicinity of Carlisle and slapped in jail. One of the local magistrates, John Armstrong, warned Governor Penn that "an Alarm is raised in the Minds of many, touching their Privileges in this and in any future case, which they alledge would be infringed by this Measure, as they take it for granted, that these Men would not be remanded for Tryal to the County where the Fact was committed, but the whole Process carried through at Philadelphia."<sup>12</sup> Shortly thereafter, a large party, described as armed ruffians, broke into the Carlisle jail and re-

<sup>10</sup> Documents pertaining to the Stump case are in *Pennsylvania Archives*, 4th Sers., III, 347-389.

<sup>11</sup> *Colonial Records*, IX, 414-421.

<sup>12</sup> To John Penn, Carlisle, January 24, 1768, *ibid.*, IX, 444-445.

moved Stump and his manservant to a safe hiding place, before escorting them across the border into Virginia. The "Rioters" made it plain that their action was a protest against the order to send the murderers to Philadelphia. They noted, moreover, that "a number of White Men have been killed by the Indians since the Peace, and the Indians have not been brought to Justice." They remonstrated that the government in Philadelphia, whether presumably of the Quaker or Proprietary faction, never prosecuted Indians for attacks on white settlers, but always seemed willing to prosecute frontiersmen for killing Indians.<sup>13</sup>

Governor Penn learned of Stump's escape on the same day that the Assembly approved the removal bill. The act specified that all settlers who refused to evacuate Indian territory within thirty days of notification would face the death penalty. The removal act was not designed to win frontier support for Proprietary leaders, but Governor Penn signed the bill into law. Both factions thought the bill was necessary for preserving the peace.<sup>14</sup>

Penn had lost Stump, but he had gotten a removal bill. Now the Quaker-controlled Assembly pressed him to go one step farther and renew the proclamations and rewards dealing with the Paxton Boys. Penn told the Assembly that the proclamations were still in effect, and that he would not pursue the matter. He explained that it was solely his prerogative to handle the administration of Pennsylvania's justice; he would not tolerate the Assembly's interference. In February, just before the session ended, two more sets of notes were exchanged, the language becoming more abrasive with each message. The Quakers went so far as to have their speaker-of-the-house, Joseph Galloway, write Sir William Johnson for his opinion. Johnson replied that he considered the Paxton murders a present source of friction, and he recommended the prosecution of the Paxton leaders as one way to ease tensions. Galloway's letter, however, only further angered Penn. He refused to budge and did not renew the proclamations.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> John Armstrong to John Penn, Carlisle, January 29, 1768, *ibid.*, IX, 448-449; see also Armstrong to Penn, Carlisle, February 7, 1768, *ibid.*, IX, 462-463.

<sup>14</sup> James T. Mitchell, et al., eds., *The Statutes at Large of Pennsylvania* (17 vols., Harrisburg, 1896-1915), VII, 152-155.

<sup>15</sup> For the notes, see *Colonial Records*, IX, 430-431, 454-458, 459-461, 476-479; see also note in *Pennsylvania Archives*, 1st Sers., IV, 29; mention of the correspondence between Galloway and Johnson is recorded in the notes.

It could be argued that the Governor was trying to affect or safeguard some sort of political alliance with the Scots-Irish Presbyterians by not pressing charges against one segment of them. Yet Penn did not seem overly concerned about such political ties when he ordered the remission of Stump to Philadelphia, or when he signed into law the removal act with its death penalty. A simpler explanation would be that Penn refused to prosecute the Paxton leaders because the Quaker-controlled Assembly suggested it. Certainly he emphasized that it was his prerogative alone, as the chief representative of the Proprietors, to decide when to demand justice. It is quite likely that Penn was trying to protect himself against what he knew was the continual attempt by the Assembly to assume Proprietary prerogatives. Whatever explanation one holds, it is clear that neither Quaker nor Proprietary party leaders were that worried about political ties with the west in early 1768.

## II

The removal act, the only harmonious piece of legislation to come out of the session, called for a conference to pacify western Indians. The Assembly sent representatives to Fort Pitt in the spring of 1768 at the same time that Sir William Johnson was meeting with the Six Nations of Iroquois at Johnson Hall in New York.<sup>16</sup> The British Ministry, likewise, was aware that some means had to be found to alleviate tensions between white settlers and Indians. The Ministry thus ordered its Indian agents in America, Sir William Johnson and John Stuart, to continue present negotiations in the autumn and to establish a more permanent dividing line than the rather vague line embodied in the Proclamation of 1763. Sir William Johnson carried out his assignment at Fort Stanwix.<sup>17</sup> Agents representing the Penn Proprietary interests were among the Fort Stanwix bargainers. The Six Nations sold them all lands lying between the east and west branches of the Susquehanna River. Governor Penn did not

<sup>16</sup> Minutes of Johnson Hall conference in *Colonial Records*, IX, 496-506; the Fort Pitt conference, attended by George Croghan as chief moderator, also met in March 1768. See *ibid.*, IX, 514-543.

<sup>17</sup> Ray A. Billington, "The Fort Stanwix Treaty of 1768," *New York History*, XXV (April 1944), 182-194; proceedings at Fort Stanwix, September 20-November 5, 1768, *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York* (15 vols., Albany, 1856-1887), VIII, 111-134.



hesitate to begin surveys. Even before the negotiations were finished, he had ordered surveyors into the region. They plotted three Proprietary manors encompassing over thirty thousand acres; two were along the Susquehanna River in the Wyoming Valley. Governor Penn hurried with reason because rumors were daily increasing that the Susquehannah Company of Connecticut was preparing to send Yankees to settle these lands.<sup>18</sup>

The Susquehannah Company had grown out of a combination of speculative and settlement desires in Connecticut during the 1750's. The Company sought title to lands running across northern Pennsylvania based on the sea-to-sea clause contained in the 1662 charter of Connecticut and on a notoriously illicit deed extracted from inebriated Indians at the Albany Conference in 1754. The leaders focused settlement plans on the Wyoming Valley, and the subscribers had obtained permission from the Connecticut Assembly to 1755 to pursue a grant in England. If the Privy Council would issue a patent, then the Assembly would allow the Company to settle the region.<sup>19</sup>

The Susquehannah enterprise grew slowly over the years, gaining enough strength to send Eliphalet Dyer, a member of the Connecticut Council, to London in 1763. But Dyer traveled at the wrong time. He bumped up against the Ministry's decision to stop friction between whites and Indians by drawing a line beyond which whites would not be allowed to settle. To issue a patent to lands still claimed by the Delaware Indians, under the protection of the Six Nations, would defeat the purpose of the Proclamation policy.<sup>20</sup> Dyer returned to Connecticut emptyhanded. When Company leaders heard, however, that the Fort Stanwix treaty nullified the Delaware claim to the Wyoming Valley (it was because of Penn's purchase), they reactivated settlement plans. Even though the subscribers lacked an official patent, they

<sup>18</sup> John Penn to Thomas Penn, Philadelphia, November 6, 1768, Julian P. Boyd and Robert J. Taylor, eds., *The Susquehannah Company Papers* (8 vols. to date, Wilkes-Barre and Ithaca, 1930-1969), III, 30-32; Edmund Physick to Thomas Penn, Philadelphia, February 4, 1769, *ibid.*, III, 68-72.

<sup>19</sup> See *ibid.*, and Julian P. Boyd, *The Susquehannah Company: Connecticut's Experiment in Expansion* (New Haven, 1935). See also Company petition and Assembly's resolution, *Susquehannah Company Papers*, I, 272-273, 278-280.

<sup>20</sup> Dyer to Jedidiah Elderkin, London, October 18, 1763, *Susquehannah Company Papers*, II, 272-274; Dyer to Elderkin, London, May 25, 1764, *ibid.*, II, 291-293.

prepared to send out an advance party in early 1769 to take de facto control of the lands just surveyed by Penn.<sup>21</sup>

Governor Penn was determined to stop the Susquehanna Company threat. Thus he made a pact with three men—Amos Ogden, an Indian trader settled at Wyoming, John Jennings, sheriff of Northampton County in northeastern Pennsylvania, and Charles Stewart, a land speculator of Irish descent from New Jersey—and agreed to lease to them parts of the manors on the Susquehanna River in return for their pledge to find settlers. Ogden, Jennings, and Stewart were to look for inhabitants who would locate on one-hundred-acre tracts for seven years, paying the nominal rent of one ear of corn per year. The prospective settlers had to agree, in turn, to defend the lands against any Connecticut intrusion.<sup>22</sup>

There was another aspect to Governor Penn's desire to keep the region clear of Yankees. He wanted to use the lands around the manors to reward the loyalty of key Proprietary party followers. Late in January 1769 the Board of Property met at the Governor's mansion in Philadelphia. James Tilghman, land office secretary, suggested that applications be accepted immediately for lands adjacent to the manors to help fill the region before the Yankee migration began.<sup>23</sup> Edmund Physick, the receiver general, and John Lukens, the surveyor general, objected. They raised a question which throws considerable light on the matter of Proprietary attitudes towards the west and of the notion of a political alliance with Scots-Irish settlers. Physick and Lukens queried whether an early opening of the land office would allow backcountry settlers time to come to Philadelphia to select the lands they wanted. The Board of Property decided to keep the land office closed until April. Ostensibly the Penn party was considering backcountry needs, but in early February Tilghman began accepting applications from favored individuals. Some forty-six applications were approved and warrants for survey issued. Tilghman was doling out the best lands to old-time Proprietary supporters, including such figures as Andrew Allen, Edward Biddle, James Burd, Turbott Francis, Samuel Purviance, Jr.,

<sup>21</sup> Extract *New London Gazette*, Windham, November 28, 1768, *ibid.*, III, 37-38; Company meeting, December 28, 1768, *ibid.*, III, 43-45.

<sup>22</sup> John Penn to Charles Stewart, Amos Ogden, and John Jennings, Philadelphia [early 1769], *ibid.*, III, 331-332.

<sup>23</sup> Board of Property minutes, January 25, 1769, *Pennsylvania Archives*, 3rd Sers., I, 251.

and the Shippens. Tilghman also sought to reduce quitrents from a penny to a half-penny per acre a year and to delay full payment of the purchase price, five pounds per hundred acres, until a year after applications were entered. He argued that these provisions would aid rapid settlement. In reality, however, he was assisting Proprietary speculators, including himself, by allowing them to apply for more acres than they could afford at present prices in the hopes of raising the necessary money over the next year.<sup>24</sup> After Tilghman had accepted the forty-six applications, he announced that the land office would open for entries on April 3. Pretending that all lands were still available, Tilghman added this postscript to his notice: "So long a day is fixed to give the Back Inhabitants time to repair to the Office."<sup>25</sup> It is hard to believe that Governor Penn was not familiar with, and more likely, encouraging Tilghman's actions.

A month after Tilghman's maneuvers, Edmund Physick traveled to the backcountry to collect overdue quitrents. He heard many complaints, especially from settlers in and around Lancaster County, about land office favoritism. The inhabitants were upset about the violation of the well-established Proprietary policy of limiting applications to three hundred acres. (Some of the forty-six applications had been approved for as much as five thousand acres.) "They observed these were the Lands they wanted for themselves and Children," Physick wrote to Thomas Penn, chief Proprietor in England, "and if they met with Disappointment there would be no spaces left sufficient for a number of Families to settle together so as to be able to support even a Mill for grinding their Wheat." Compact settlements were thought necessary for protection against Indians, but the forty-six applications were spread out all over the region, so as to tap the best lands. If the inhabitants were unable to settle together, Physick thought that many would move "to Virginia, first converting their Effects into Money and carrying that with them, thereby promot-

<sup>24</sup> Edmund Physick to Thomas Penn, Philadelphia, February 4, 1769, *Susquehanna Company Papers*, III, 68-72; John Lukens to Thomas Penn, Philadelphia, February 21, 1769, *ibid.*, III, 78-79; *ibid.*, III, xv-xvii; William R. Shepherd, *History of Proprietary Government in Pennsylvania* (New York, 1896), 73-76, concluded that little land speculation was allowed by the Penns, and that they sat on the best lands until the people needed them. This was not the case, however, in 1769. Governor Penn was hardly favoring the general populace.

<sup>25</sup> *Susquehanna Company Papers*, III, 80.

ing the present scarcity of Money and impoverishment" on the frontier.<sup>26</sup>

A number of Lancaster inhabitants, including some of the Paxton Boys, went to Philadelphia in late March 1769 to protest land office favoritism. Edmund Physick took them to Governor Penn and presented him with their petition. The petition stated that the people were "not of ability to buy from them [the speculators] at the rate they will sell and pay the Honorable Proprietors [quitrents] again for said Lands." Governor Penn promised relief, but the forty-six preferred applications were allowed to stand.<sup>27</sup>

The same spring of 1769 found John Durkee of Connecticut leading an advanced party of Susquehannah Company settlers to the Wyoming Valley. The Yankees had hardly set foot in the Valley before they were arrested by Sheriff John Jennings and transported to the Easton jail. There the Durkee party prepared to stand trial for trespassing on Proprietary lands. The Susquehannah Company reacted quickly and sent three agents, Eliphalet Dyer, Thomas Dyer, and Jedidiah Elderkin, to Pennsylvania to negotiate for the release of Durkee's party. The two Dyers and Elderkin visited Philadelphia in June and presumably other parts of the province in the summer, in order among other things to encourage Pennsylvania settlers to switch their allegiance to the Susquehannah Company.<sup>28</sup>

The agents could not have come at a better time because the backcountry seethed with discontent. The chief Proprietor, Thomas Penn, had been demanding more efficient collection of quitrents and had been insisting that examples be made of those settlers who refused or could not pay by having magistrates evict them from their lands. At the same time backcountry settlers were complaining about their lack of ability to pay quitrents and other taxes because of the general shortage of currency.<sup>29</sup> Settlers in

<sup>26</sup> Philadelphia, April 1769, *ibid.*, III, 100-106.

<sup>27</sup> Petition, *ibid.*, III, 103 n. Penn did not give any direct relief in relation to the speculation. When the land office opened, however, applications were taken on a lottery basis. Each application was numbered and entered in the order drawn. The procedure did not include the forty-six preferred applications.

<sup>28</sup> Extract *Connecticut Courant*, July 10, 1769, *ibid.*, III, 148-149.

<sup>29</sup> Thomas Penn to Edmund Physick, London, July 12, 1769, *ibid.*, III, 149-150; C. H. Marvin, "A Lancaster Pre-Revolutionary Appeal for Relief from Money Stringency," *Lancaster County Historical Society Proceedings*,

Northampton County were upset because Ogden, Jennings, and Stewart were leasing many tracts in the Proprietary manors to friends in New Jersey. They were threatening retaliation unless they could have equal access to the Wyoming lands.<sup>30</sup> When these grievances are added to an awareness of land office favoritism, the stiff removal law of 1768, the general lack of concern on the part of either political faction with defending the frontier adequately, the seeming care with which white settlers were prosecuted for Indian massacres, as seen in the Stump case, and the violation of what the backcountry saw as its fundamental rights in the attempted extradition of such murderers as Stump to Philadelphia for trial, it is understandable why the average backcountry settler felt little or no political allegiance towards the Proprietary faction. If there were political ties after 1764, they had most certainly come to an end by 1769.

The Paxton men showed their personal discontent by turning to the Susquehannah Company. During the summer of 1769, after the apparent rebuff of their petition to Governor Penn, they presumably made contact with Jedidiah Elderkin while he was traveling through the backcountry. Elderkin convinced them that settlement in the Valley under Company auspices was preferable to putting up with constant abuse from the Pennsylvania government. A hard core of the Paxton Boys still living in Paxton and Hanover townships took Elderkin's advice and petitioned the Company in the fall of 1769 for a six-mile-square township at a reasonable price and without quitrents. They promised that fifty of their number would move immediately to the Valley, obey all Company rules, and help to defend the region against the Penns.<sup>31</sup>

XXXII (January 1928), 3-6; for a list of delinquent taxpayers, see *Pennsylvania Gazette*, January 12, 1769.

<sup>30</sup> Lewis Gordon to Edmund Physick, Easton, August 14, 1769, *Susquehannah Company Papers*, III, 163-165; Lincoln, *Revolutionary Movement Pennsylvania*, 53-76, devotes a chapter to showing why the backcountry, especially along the Susquehanna River, never really had strong ties with Philadelphia. There were simply few trading connections. Settlers shipped their produce down the Susquehanna River to outlets in Maryland. Lincoln argued that without trading ties there could be no strong political connections. For a modernized statement, see James T. Lemon, "Urbanization and the Development of Eighteenth-Century Southeastern Pennsylvania and Adjacent Delaware," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Sers., XXIV (October 1967), 501-542.

<sup>31</sup> Petition of Lazarus Young and others, September 11, 1769, *Susquehannah Company Papers*, III, 176-177. The petition stated that Jedidiah Elderkin

The Company's executive committee approved the petition and sent two agents, Zebulon Butler and Ebenezer Backus, back to Paxton and Hanover townships to complete arrangements. Half, nineteen out of forty-one, of the Paxton men who left for the Valley in February 1770 had participated in some way in the murders and/or march on Philadelphia. They would become part of the fighting force which would win the Wyoming region for Yankee settlers.<sup>32</sup>

Governor John Penn thought that he had seen the last of Yankee intruders when the Durkee Party had been arrested, but now the Company sent out another large group of settlers to join the Paxton men in the Valley. Penn's counterplan developed in a twofold manner. He first sent Dr. Hugh Williamson to Lancaster County to convince other Pennsylvania settlers not to join or aid the Yankee enterprise. Williamson visited both Paxton and Hanover townships where he found some citizens giving open aid and supplies to the Paxton men in Wyoming. Williamson then went to the Valley where he met Amos Ogden whose forces had the Yankees trapped in their fort. Ogden feared, according to Williamson, that it would only be a matter of time until the growing Connecticut forces would overwhelm his men. Williamson's trip was meant as a goodwill tour, and Governor Penn hoped that he would win support for the Proprietary cause, but all Williamson found were inhabitants fed up with the unresponsive government in Philadelphia and men who were now unwilling to support the Proprietary faction in its attempt to hold the Valley.<sup>33</sup>

Penn, secondly, asked General Thomas Gage to lend military support. The Governor knew that Gage had taken part in putting down the New York rent rioters a few years before. He thus wrote Gage that "a number of People of the Colony of Connecticut, assisted, as I am informed, by some of [William] Pendergrasses [Prendergast's] Gang, in riotous and forcible manner, took Possession of a large Body of Land of the River Susquehanna," and

would represent the Paxton men before the Company, indicating that Elderkin had made direct contact with them.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, IV, iv-vi; Executive Committee to Lazarus Young and others, Windham, January 15, 1770, *ibid.*, IV, 5-6; William H. Egle, *History of the Counties of Dauphin and Lebanon in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania: Biographical and Genealogical* (Philadelphia, 1883), 71, lists the Paxton Boys who went to the Wyoming Valley.

<sup>33</sup> Dr. Hugh Williamson to John Penn, Wyoming, March 24, 1770, *Susquehanna Company Papers*, IV, 46-48.

that "They have at length prevailed on a Number of profligate and abandoned People, on our Frontiers (many of whom have been concerned in the late Indian Murders and Disturbances), to aid them in their unlawful Enterprize."<sup>34</sup> Penn appealed to Gage's emotions by mentioning William Prendergast and the New York rent rioters, but despite the Governor's misstatement about the presence of Prendergast at Wyoming and his contention that a league of known colonial malcontents was overrunning Proprietary lands, Gage refused to intervene on the grounds that he was under orders from the Ministry not to interfere in private land disputes.<sup>35</sup> Governor Penn lost on both counts. By the end of May 1770 he knew that he could not get outside military support and that his forces had been beaten by the Yankees in Wyoming, as Ogden had predicted to Williamson.<sup>36</sup>

During the summer and fall of 1770 the Yankees under Lazarus Stewart and Zebulon Butler roamed throughout the region, burning and destroying the houses and personal property of known Proprietary supporters. Orders went out from Philadelphia for Stewart's and Butler's arrest on the charge of treason. Within weeks Penn magistrates captured Stewart and had him on the road to Philadelphia, but he escaped through the timely intervention of friends from Paxton and Hanover townships. Penn's next step was to put a fifty pound reward on Stewart's head, something that he had been unwilling to do in early 1768.<sup>37</sup> He also sent another expedition to the Valley. The contingent routed the Connecticut forces. But in December Lazarus Stewart and the Paxton Boys returned and once again gained control of the Yankee fort. Thus stood matters at the end of 1770.<sup>38</sup>

Now that the magistrates knew where Stewart was, Sheriff John Jennings and his deputy, Nathan Ogden, brother of Amos, moved in. One morning in late January 1771, Deputy Sheriff Nathan Ogden rashly tried to implement Penn's proclamation of the previous October by arresting Stewart. The latter saw no rea-

<sup>34</sup> Philadelphia, April 6, 1770, *ibid.*, IV, 54-55.

<sup>35</sup> Gage to Penn, New York, April 15, 1770, *ibid.*, IV, 55-56.

<sup>36</sup> Deposition of Amos Ogden, May 1770, *Colonial Records*, IX, 674-677; John Penn to Richard Penn, Philadelphia, May 22, 1770, *Susquehannah Company Papers*, IV, 67-68.

<sup>37</sup> *Colonial Records*, IX, 682-687.

<sup>38</sup> *Deposition of Aaron Van Campen*, Philadelphia, January 11, 1771, *Susquehannah Company Papers*, IV, 151-152; *ibid.*, IV, xiv.

son to quibble and shot Ogden dead on the spot.<sup>39</sup> The Paxton Boys quickly retreated from the Valley, and Stewart with six followers sought and received sanctuary through Susquehannah Company officials in Connecticut. Finally in the summer of 1771 Stewart and Zebulon Butler led the third Yankee expedition into the Valley and overwhelmed Amos Ogden's forces. The Connecticut settlers again had gained control of the Valley.<sup>40</sup>

### III

The Paxton Boys, dissatisfied with Proprietary land speculators in particular and ineffective government in general, had turned to the Susquehannah Company and helped to plant nearly two thousand Yankees on Pennsylvania soil by 1774.<sup>41</sup> Such a situation would not have developed if Penn and the Proprietary party had been responsive to their particular desires or to the needs of other frontiersmen in the region. It is hard to conclude, then, that the Proprietary party had developed close political connections with the mass of Scots-Irish Presbyterians in Pennsylvania, especially those in the populous region around Lancaster County. The average backcountry settler looked to the government for land, for defense, and for some equitable administration of justice. But instead, he found the Quaker faction unresponsive to defense needs, and he watched the Proprietary faction show favoritism in land distribution and carry out justice in a manner backcountry citizens considered distorted. If some sort of alliance did emerge in 1764 between the Proprietary faction and Scots-Irish Presbyterians, it apparently did not survive in the years immediately prior to the Revolution.

David Hawke, whose *In the Midst of a Revolution* dealt specifically with the immediate political movement leading to the overthrow of Pennsylvania government in 1776, found a definite

<sup>39</sup> Charles Stewart to John Penn, Wyoming, January 21, 1771, *Pennsylvania Archives*, 1st Series, IV, 383; *Susquehannah Company Papers*, IV, xv.

<sup>40</sup> *Susquehannah Company Papers*, IV, xiv-xxv. Fighting in and around the Wyoming Valley between the Penn claimants and the Connecticut settlers would continue for years.

<sup>41</sup> Census published January 1, 1774, *The Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut, 1636-1775* (15 vols., Hartford, 1850-1890), XIV, 483-492. The Connecticut Assembly agreed that it had a legitimate jurisdictional claim to northern Pennsylvania in May 1771. See *Susquehannah Company Papers*, IV, 215. The Assembly made the Wyoming region the town of Westmoreland and annexed it to Litchfield County in January 1774. See *Public Records Colony of Connecticut*, XIV, 217-220.



political alliance between a certain kind of backcountry settler and the Proprietary party. These were not men of the Paxton Boy type, however, but were more staid gentlemen, like Arthur St. Clair and James Wilson, who had gone west as agents of Penn. They dominated local appointive officers under Penn's control and were the backbone of western Proprietary support. They were hardly radical, rowdy, democratic frontiersmen.<sup>42</sup>

The politically-oriented frontier Proprietary elite discussed by Hawke does seem to have some basis according to the evidence presented heretofore. The material indicates that certain men developed political ties with Penn in return for a variety of perquisites. They collected taxes and surveyed lands in his name; they looked after his Proprietary manors; they drew their county offices from him. And at times they received special favors, as demonstrated in the land office speculation of 1769. But the favored elite was only a handful. Such men did not necessarily have the allegiance or the respect of the mass of settlers. The average frontiersman was left wanting when it came to his needs.

At the same time, there is little evidence to support the contention that Scots-Irish Presbyterians were more equalitarian and democratic in their attitudes and behavior than were other groups in Pennsylvania. Lazarus Stewart hardly showed a sense of fair play when he shot down Nathan Ogden. The Paxton Boys who did go to Wyoming burned homes and robbed those not interested in joining the Susquehannah Company effort. Their method was force, not rational discussion and debate. The settlers who freed Frederick Stump and helped him escape from Pennsylvania, likewise, were not acting within a democratic context. Such men understood force better than democracy. They turned to violence to get what they wanted when the established government did not recognize their basic desires.

In this sense it is hard to draw the conclusion that the extremely democratic and equalitarian Pennsylvania constitution of 1776 found its inspiration in the thought and deeds of Pennsylvania backcountry settlers. That would strip them of their essential frontier character. The return of the Paxton Boys does not reveal incipient democracy or extensive east-west political ties. Something closer to the opposite would be the correct conclusion.

<sup>42</sup> (Philadelphia, 1961), 59-86.